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**Hope and Time in
Theology and Religion**



FACULTY OF
**THEOLOGY
AND
RELIGION**

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Each issue divides contributions into two categories: i) those which respond to the special theme of that issue, invited in each edition's Call for Papers; ii) those which come under the general scope of the journal.

As an affiliate of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Oxford, the scope of the journal is defined by the breadth of research undertaken by fellows and postgraduate students of the faculty. As such, articles address questions pertinent to the critical study of theology and religion from a variety of disciplines and methodologies, including (but not limited to): biblical studies, religious ethics, historical and systematic theology, ecclesiastical history, philosophical theology, science and religion, and the study of

religion—including sociological, anthropological, and psychological approaches. The journal also publishes critical book reviews, media reviews, and featured articles.

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Editorial Introduction

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Welcome to this third edition of the *Journal of the Oxford Graduate Theological Society* (JOGTS), on the theme of “Hope and Time in Theology and Religion”.

I am delighted to say that, with the commitment and care of both continuing and new members of the Editorial Board (old and new graduate students at the Faculty of Theology and Religion here in Oxford) JOGTS’s third year has brought with it: an increase in article submissions (many more than anticipated!) from across the UK as well as internationally; three special feature articles; the second series of *JOGTS Shorts* videos; and a growing digital presence, both on our own platform (jogts.com) and on social media. The seeds that were sown in JOGTS’s first two years continue to grow and are reflected in: the hundreds of downloads of articles from previous issues; the many views of both *JOGTS Shorts* series; the quality of papers submitted and accepted this year; and the calibre of our featured authors and interviewees.

In Michaelmas term 2021, the Editorial Board decided on “Hope and Time in Theology and Religion” as a counterpoint to last year’s theme of crisis. The issue explores how religious scholars and theologians engage (or will engage) with questions of hope *in* time and *of* time. It asks what we can learn from scriptural and religious texts regarding time, timelessness, temporality, and eternity. How do creation narratives, myths, and histories function—both symbolically and literally? And how do ideas of hope and time impact those working on more contemporary topics such as gender, ethics, racial and economic justice, and environmental and climate change?

The issue comprises (though not strictly in this order): three special feature pieces, six submissions that address the Hope/Time theme, three general articles, and two book reviews.



Natasha Chawla, “Editorial Introduction,”
JOGTS 3.1 (2022), pp. 5–8

Celia Deane-Drummond—Director of the *Laudato Si'* Research Institute and Senior Research Fellow in theology at Campion Hall, University of Oxford—reflects, through the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, on the intimate relationship between theological hope and a temporal space that includes both the promise of change and unknowing. Hope, she posits, “is in time, not outside time, even when considering hope in eternity”. And just as time has a degenerative element, hope, too, has a shadow side in despair. Both hope and despair are important to recognise “if human communities are to develop resilience in the face of global social and ecological emergencies”.

Hope, time, discipline, and faith in action are some of the themes explored in an engaging, honest, and personal interview with Rowan Williams, Honorary Professor of Contemporary Christian Thought at the University of Cambridge and 104th archbishop of Canterbury (2002–12). It was a great privilege to be able to ask Professor Williams the questions we asked, and we were moved and enriched by his responses. I would like to thank him very much for his time and willingness to speak with us and contribute to this edition of the JOGTS.

The third of our special features is from Ryan Mullins, author of *God and Emotion* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), and host of *The Reluctant Theologian*, a podcast on God, time, and everything in between. His paper, “The Ontology of Time and Hope in the Resurrection”, provides an analysis of eschatological presentism in relation to The Problem of No Afterlife and puts forward certain conditions that are required for the Christian hope for resurrection and an everlasting friendship with God to be realised.

Our submitted articles that address the theme of Hope/Time were rich in content, looking to both ancient and contemporary figures and texts to explore these multifaceted concepts. Be it Douglas LeBlanc’s construct of the pain-patience continuum and the importance of patience as a necessity for bearing pain over time, or William B. Bowes’s analysis of Revelation as a text that gave first century Christian communities a basis for hope in the face of an increasingly hostile socio-political and religious situation, time, in both its temporary and eternal formulations, offers hope in the present moment. Meanwhile, C. M. Howell, Maikki Aakko, and Andrew Karpinski look at hope through the lenses of Eberhard Jüngel, T. S. Eliot, and Hegel respectively. For Jüngel, hope is the manifestation of freedom that lies beyond the limits and boundaries of the actuality of the world. In Eliot’s post-conversion poetry, Aakko finds links between hope and desire, and illustrates that ascetic and apophatic practices are key to helping us traverse the often-problematic terrain of hope in connection to transient desire. Hegel’s conception of eternity and its relation to time is brought into the conversation by Karpinski’s analysis of specific elements, namely Hegelian cataphatic and dialectical deductions and their relevance in contemporary philosophy of religion.

Our three general articles are wide ranging in theme, taking us from mythic sensibility to baptism to pornography. In Andrew Shamel’s “Mythic Sensibility and Mythopoeic Fantasy” the myth is said to structure the perception of the faithful (as per their account of what is true) and, in doing so,

can reveal a more meaningful, magical, and wonder-full world. Justin H. Lam, in “Purification through Baptism”, offers a fresh reading of Romans 6:1-11 and posits that using a ritualistic approach, rather than just a forensic and/or participatory approach, substantiates our understandings of baptism and ritual washing bringing us closer to the Divine through ethical living in the present. Lastly, Khegan M. Delport delineates the “ontological tendencies of the pornographic imagination” and offers both an assessment and a remedy from a metaphysical perspective. Tracing the pornographic to the imbalances of modernity and the miseducation of desire through “digital capitalism and attention economies”, he proposes that an alternative, holistic, and expansive vision of divine pedagogy is required to overcome this contemporary issue.

The two books reviewed—John Lippitt’s *Love’s Forgiveness: Kierkegaard, Resentment, Humility* and Todd LeVasseur and Anna Peterson’s *Religion and the Ecological Crisis: The ‘Lynn White Thesis’ at Fifty*—although different in style and genre, also give us a sense of hope. In the first instance, an appreciation of Kierkegaardian hope can be found in the concept of forgiveness, and in the second, new hope can be found in taking a more interdisciplinary and holistic approach to Lynn White’s thesis about the religious roots of the contemporary ecological crisis.

Over the course of the year, we have also been working on the second series of *JOGTS Shorts*, entitled “God Talk: An Introduction to Theology and Religion”. This series comprised clips taken from seven interviews held with members of the University of Oxford’s Faculty of Theology and Religion. We asked the same seven questions to all seven interviewees, which were then compiled into seven separate episodes, with the aim of bringing some of the fascinating insights and research that takes place in Oxford’s Faculty of Theology and Religion to a wider online audience. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our interviewees: Jessica Frazier (Research Lecturer in the Study of Religion), Alister McGrath (Andreos Idreos Professor of Science and Religion), Diarmaid MacCulloch (Emeritus Professor of the History of the Church), Katherine Southwood (Associate Professor in Old Testament), Anthony Reddie (Director of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture), Hindy Najman (Oriental and Laing Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture), and Anna Sapir Abulafia (Professor of the Study of the Abrahamic Religions) for their wonderful insights and for generously contributing to the project. A special thanks to Reverend Dr William Lamb of the University Church for providing a beautiful setting, the Old Library, where many of these interviews took place. And to Amelia Nicholson for her tireless efforts producing both *Shorts* series.

Indeed, all of this has been made possible with the contribution, support, and encouragement of many. First, the JOGTS Editorial Board who have given their time and commitment generously to plan, ideate, review, copyedit, record, video-edit, and manage social media. Second, because of the large number of submissions received, we had to seek the help of extra peer-reviewers. In the interest of keeping the review process anonymous, they will not be named here, but a huge thank you to all of them for giving their time and expertise so generously. Throughout this process, the

Advisory Board had been especially enthusiastic and encouraging, giving suggestions and advice whenever requested and supporting our application for funding for the next three years. Thank you to all of them and a special thank you to the faculty's Graduate Studies Coordinator, Dr Sarah Apetrei for her continuous support on all matters journal related.

All that remains is to offer hearty welcome and congratulations to the incoming JOGTS Editor, Dallas Callaway, and Reviews Editor, Thomas Topel, and wish them and all the Editorial Board every success in 2022-2023, the fourth year of the JOGTS!

Hope in Time

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Summer ends now; now, barbarous in beauty, the stooks rise
Around; up above, what wind-walks! what lovely behaviour
Of silk-sack clouds! has wilder, wilful-wavier
Meal-drift moulded ever and melted across skies?

I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes,
Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour;
And éyes, héart, what looks, what lips yet gave you a
Rapturous love's greeting of realer, of rounder replies?

And the azurous hung hills are his world-wielding shoulder
Majestic-as a stallion stalwart, very-violet-sweet!-
These things, these things were here and but the beholder
Wanting; which two when they once meet,
The heart réars wings bold and bolder
And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him off under his feet.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Hurrahing in Harvest* ¹

¹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'Hurrahing in Harvest' in Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems and Prose*, ed. G.H. Gardner (London: Penguin, 1953), 31.



Gerard Manley Hopkins: Time, Creation and Being.

Gerard Manley Hopkins used poetry, illustrated by *Hurrahing in Harvest*, to point to the inexplicable, profound and even disturbing experience lying between mortal time and God's Being. Theological hope also, I suggest, sits in that temporal space of promise of change yet unknowing. At the outset of the poem the time of now in summer and autumn illustrates two moments within temporal flow, a break, yet also paradoxically chromatic flow, picking out a moment within a world that is changing.

Hopkins experiences the natural landscape in a fragmentary way as pointing not just to finite creation, but also to God's Being, akin to a rapturous love, yet a majestic stallion. The violent image of barbarity as summer ends, 'barbarous in beauty' amounts to an awkward integration of what is observed with Being, rather than a splintering off from it. This is important theologically, since theological hope cannot, I argue, be rendered gnostic in tone, but needs to be embedded in and grounded in time and in the natural world around us, finding God's presence in its midst. It has, therefore, acute ecological relevance.

According to literary scholar Margaret Morlier, Hopkins' violent imagery was not simply resonant with Darwinian images of nature red in tooth and claw.² And her argument makes clear that Hopkins, importantly, resisted a conception of time that was becoming popular in the Victorian period which argued that human spiritual progress was inevitable within the constantly returning cycles of the natural world. Instead, following Henry Liddon, who was his spiritual advisor, "He was never comfortable with any accumulated knowledge that is supposed to improve or change human identity. Any improvement in humanity as a species is attributed to God, whose grandeur accumulates in time (*God's Grandeur*)".³

Hopkins therefore believed that the passage of time and accumulation of education does not lead to humanity's progressive advancement, nor can the natural world itself be redemptive. Humanity is proceeding on its course in a repetitive way, as hinted at through the sequential process of summer changing to autumn, rather than necessarily changing for the better. *God's Grandeur* reiterates that human time is repetitive and without change: "Generations have trod, have trod, have trod"⁴. Hope in this poem as in *Hurrahing in the Harvest* is placed in God, so "over the bent/ World broods with warm breasts and with ah! bright wings". Participation in human affairs that

² Manley Hopkins may have been influenced by Charles Darwin's ideas, but he clearly understood the theological tensions arising from such a position. For a discussion of his influence see Jude V. Nixon, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and his Contemporaries: Liddon, Newman, Darwin, and Pater* (New York: Garland: 1994).

³ Margaret Morlier, "Barbarous in Beauty: The Violence of Time in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins" *Victorian Poetry* 1997, 35, no. 2 (1997) 222.

⁴ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *God's Grandeur*, *Poems and Prose*, 27; see also Morlier, "Barbarous in Beauty" 215, 222.

also went beyond “wars”, “wounds”, “tosses” and awareness of “wrecked past purpose” as exemplified in the “Terrible Sonnets” was in dialogue with how time can also be redemptive. He “recognised three dimensions of time: regenerative, changing time; degenerative, changing time; and eternal, permanent divine time”.⁵ He achieved their convergence through understanding the painful human participation in mortal time as a “form of redemptive martyrdom”.⁶

I am beginning this short essay with Hopkins because he raises profound but difficult to articulate questions that are still crucially important for contemporary theological reflection on hope and time, particularly in the current global context of socio-ecological breakdown and collapse. He wrote in a period when Darwinian ideas were starting to take hold, which, when joined with secular ideals of Progress, too readily assumed inevitable and progressive forms of human futures. The perception of hope in such a context was thin, intimately connected with human material progress, and therefore tending to collapse into optimism. Optimism is expecting something to turn out well regardless of reasons, and, as literary critic Terry Eagleton has pointed out, one who hopes in this way is “in danger of buying his hope on the cheap”.⁷ Optimism makes positive assumptions about what might happen. *Optimalism*, on the other hand, is the Leibnizian dogma that we live in the best of all possible worlds.

Current psychological theories of hope tend either to collapse the meaning of hope into optimism or portray it as an adaptive response between resignation and stress, which renders hope a ‘saccharine’ vision of what true hope is about, namely, that which faces up to life’s difficulties and challenges. Evolutionary based theories such as Matt Ridley’s *The Rational Optimist*⁸ offers a technological determinism which assumes a direct link between affluence and human well-being, while Steven Pinker’s *The Better Angels of Our Nature* paints a picture of world history in terms of inevitable human progress.⁹ Breaking the link between hope and a doctrine of human progress without succumbing to pessimism and despair is critically important, as Hopkins was well-aware.

By placing time in relation to Being Hopkins touches on what might be termed the explicitly Christian understanding of *hope against hope*, which had been dismissed by Freudian analysis as a form of delusion. Although contemporary psychologies of hope are less likely to be so dismissive of religious hope by weaving in recognition that hope is not simply optimism, they still fall short of

⁵ Morlier, “Barbarous in Beauty,” 224.

⁶ Morlier, 225.

⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Hope Without Optimism* (London and New York: Yale University Press, 2015), 1.

⁸ Matt Ridley, *The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011).

⁹ Stephen Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Penguin, 2012). For further commentary, see C. Deane-Drummond, *Shadow Sophia: The Evolution of Wisdom Volume II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

understanding the depth that Christian hope articulates. That hope is still framed as helpful fantasy, rather than a hope that is both embedded in this temporal world as well as the next.¹⁰

Hope as Passion and Virtue

Thomas Aquinas teases out in more depth the distinctions between what could be termed secular forms of hope and the explicit Christian virtue of hope. Hope as a passion is inclined towards something good that is both difficult and possible.¹¹ Hope is not about incidentals, such as, “I hope the weather will improve today”. Aquinas argues that hope provides a spur to temporal action in the present. Does certainty in hope lead to complacency or negligence in acting? Aquinas resists that interpretation, since once there is a sense of security hope is no longer difficult. Does the possibility of sorrow prevent action? Aquinas objects to that argument as well because hope leads to a sense of pleasure as it dwells on future good, which stirs up hope and spurs action.

Understanding hope as a passion aligns it with the possibility that such a sentiment could be present in animals other than humans. Although Alan Mittleman dismisses that idea because humans perceive the future in a way that other animals do not¹², this objection was tackled by Aquinas, as well as the objection that animals cannot assess different possibilities of outcome, as, according to the knowledge available at the time, “they have no mind”¹³. Aquinas’ location of hope as passion in the irascible appetite allows him to attribute a form of hope to animals, even though he achieves this through speculation on their mental capacity arising from a divinely endowed Intellect that can foresee the future. Contemporary analysis of animal minds has shown that their levels of cognition are much higher than previously assumed.¹⁴ While sophisticated foresight is likely to be distinctively human, the possibility that certain animals can in some sense anticipate a positive outcome and recognise uncertainty over that outcome is not unreasonable. Insofar as hope is about the unseen

¹⁰ Gabriele Oettingen and Malin Patricia Chromik, “How Hope Influences Goal Directed Behavior”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Hope*, edited by Matthew W. Gallagher and Shane J. Lopez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 69-78

¹¹ Irascible passions are fear, hope, daring and anger and differ from concupiscible passions which are joy, sorrow, love and hatred in that in the former case their object (that may be good or evil) is difficult to obtain or avoid. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars, 50-119, Volume 14*, translated by Laurence Shapcote, edited by John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón (Lander: Aquinas Institute, 2012) 1a 81.2; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Prima Secundae, 1-70*, translated by Laurence Shapcote, edited by John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón, *Volume 15* (Lander: Aquinas Institute, 2012), 1a2ae 23.1.

¹² Alan Mittleman, *Hope in a Democratic Age: Philosophy, Religion and Political Theory* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 25.

¹³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, 40.3

¹⁴ For discussion of these aspects see C. Deane-Drummond, *Theological Ethics Through a Multispecies Lens: Evolution of Wisdom Volume I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 108-9

and related to divine intent, hope is distinctly human, but that does not mean that a form of nascent hope as passion is impossible for beings other than humans.

The more difficult analysis of hope in time is related to hope as virtue, which concerns the perfection of the will, rather than a perfection of an irascible passion. Hope when understood as a theological virtue is both in creaturely bounded time as well as orientated towards eternity. The temptation is to let theological hope collapse into eternity. In this case, as Hopkins' poetry shows, hope is both within creaturely time but orientated towards the infinite good in a way which can only be obtained by divine assistance.¹⁵ Within Christian literature there has been much debate therefore on whether the virtue of hope is restricted to Christian believers or not. An Augustinian hard line here does not seem all that reasonable, quite apart from whether hope as passion could be viewed as at least related to, even if not identical with, religiously orientated forms of hope. The conception of a separate psychological capacity of a will, for example, is not aligned with current theories of human cognition¹⁶. Josef Pieper struggles with the question of how human hoping can be both natural and gifted when he admits that the "emotional-intellectual hope of natural man" also "tends by its very nature to be stamped with the formative standard of virtue so that it may, by reason of this standard, gain a share in this orientation toward good."¹⁷ The intermediary virtue that refines hope as passion is magnanimity, which, as Nicholas Austin has helpfully pointed out, is "an earthly complement to the theological hope that orientates us to the eternal beatitude", and once recognised, means its "intelligibility and appeal as a virtue of moral hope need no longer be in doubt". Magnanimity works towards a "stretching towards great things" of the "*animus*" understood as an active and forceful part of the soul.¹⁸ Given that magnanimity can be both acquired and infused, it also spans what could be termed the dialogical relationship between nature and grace and gives some insight as to how different kinds of hoping intersect.

It is also worth stressing that in Aquinas the virtue of hope is not simply forward facing in a temporal sense, but also includes the present enjoyment of participation in the life of the divine, even if only in a partial sense. It is still, I argue, hope experienced *in time* rather than outside of it in gnostic heavenly bliss. So "we should hope from Him nothing less than Himself, since His goodness, whereby He imparts good things to His creature, is no less than His Essence. Therefore, the proper and principal object of hope is eternal happiness".¹⁹ That hope in the present may be

¹⁵ Michael Lamb, 'Aquinas and the Virtues of Hope: Theological and Democratic', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 44, no 2 (2016) 306.

¹⁶ C. Deane-Drummond, *The Wisdom of Liminal: Evolution and Other Animals in Human Becoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

¹⁷ Pieper, *Faith, Hope and Love*, [1997] (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 100-101.

¹⁸ Nicholas Austin, 'Moral Hope: Aquinas and Cajetan on Magnanimity', *Nova et Vetera* 18, no, 3 (2020) 820-21.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, Qu. 17.2

“veiled”, as in Hebrews 6.19,²⁰ but it acts as a marker through which other secular hopes arise and therefore serves to qualify them. In expressing the virtue of hope the other is regarded as one who is loved as another self, which leads to hoping for another who is loved. Accordingly, “just as it is the same virtue of charity whereby a man loves God, himself and his neighbor, so too it is the same virtue of hope whereby a man hopes for himself and for another”.²¹

The Shadow Side of Hope as Virtue

But, we might ask, who is my neighbour? Although it is well known that Aquinas rejected hope for eternal life for any beings other than humans, our hope in time cannot be shorn from hope in eternity if hope is to have any valence in the contemporary socio-ecological crises. Climate change, the global Covid 19 pandemic, and now the violence of war in Europe alongside threats to global democracy challenge the possibility of hope. For many young people rising eco-anxiety borders on despair, which is the vice situated at the opposite pole of the virtue of hope.

Total dejection is an emotion shared with other social animals in response to loss. Primatologist Jane Lawick-Goodhall, who studied African chimpanzees at the Gombe reserve, found that following maternal death one of the chimpanzees named Merlin showed symptoms that clearly indicated depression. She describes his condition towards the end of his life thus: “Merlin was so thin that every bone showed. His hair was not only dull but there were great patches of it missing on his legs and arms where he had gradually pulled it out during self-grooming. Often he laid out stretched on the ground while the other youngsters played, as though constantly exhausted.”²² While mild depression and anxiety is sometimes accepted as a basis for an advantageous conservation of energy, and cultural factors need to be considered when assessing human states of depression, despair when interpreted theologically goes beyond such biocultural explanations.

Søren Kierkegaard, for example, in his *Sickness Unto Death*, highlights the subliminal aspects of despair, describing it as a kind of spiritual dizziness.²³ Despair is a sickness unto death because it is the existential hopelessness of not being able to die even though death is more appealing than life.²⁴ Thomas Aquinas deals with despair in the second part of *Summa Theologiae* within a broader analysis of hope and following a discussion of fear. He distinguishes the specific contexts in which despair is a sin against hope. So, countering those who argue against the idea that despair is a sin, he insists that “the contrary movement of despair, which is in conformity with the false opinion

²⁰ Aquinas, Qu. 17.2.

²¹ Aquinas, Qu. 17.3

²² Jane Goodhall-Lawick, *In the Shadow of Man* (Boston: Marina Books, [1971] 1988), 225.

²³ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, translated and edited by H.V. Hong and E.A. Hong. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 16.

²⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 18.

about God, is vicious and sinful.”²⁵ His strong sense of the seriousness of despair is related to the fact that it is opposed to one of the theological virtues, namely hope, and therefore against an immutable good rather than a mutable good. Aquinas presumes despair to be in the appetite and is still possible when someone has a measure of faith in God,²⁶ but in this case considers that there is no hope of being forgiven because of a mistaken conception of God that is distorted by that despair. As Aquinas puts it succinctly: “despair consists in a man ceasing to hope for a share of God’s goodness.”²⁷ Despair is dangerous, since “when hope is given up, men rush headlong into sin, and are drawn away from good works”.²⁸ Citing Isidore in the same article, for Aquinas despair amounts to “falling into hell”.²⁹ Despair turns theological hope in on itself through a withdrawal so that it is no longer orientated towards eternity.

Socio-ecological hope

Aquinas gives us a detailed account of what the virtue of hope looks like and how we might come to express this in our relationship with God. He does not, however, ground his discussion in what the virtue of hope means in terms of practical transformative action in the present, even while giving us a framework for the inner tapestry of hope in the human heart in relation to God. Jürgen Moltmann develops the Thomistic distinction between what could be termed secular hope and faith-based “hope against hope”, a type of hoping that can be present even in the midst of change, suffering and death hinted at in Hopkins’ poetry. Hope and Christian faith are companions, both interlacing and interdependent on the other. The difference, however, compared with Aquinas is that for Moltmann hope becomes not just an aspiration towards love of God in charity, but a strong protest against suffering.³⁰

Theological hope, to be true to its name, must witness against the unjust suffering that is becoming part and parcel of the story of our warming and violent world. It is not just the threat of the earth’s ultimate extinction that is at stake, but the wider unfolding of the process of that loss on the most vulnerable human communities. For Moltmann hope “makes us ready to bear the ‘cross

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Secunda Secundae, 1-91*, Volume 17, translated by Laurence Shapcote (Green Bay: Aquinas Institute, 2012), 2a2ae Qu. 20.1.

²⁶ Aquinas, Qu. 20.2.

²⁷ For Aquinas, despair of a hope in God’s glory is theoretically less grievous a sin than hatred of God or disbelief in God’s truth. However, it is more dangerous in as much as hope may be sought in other things, which leads one “headlong into sin...and...away from good works”. Aquinas, Qu 20.3.

²⁸ Aquinas, Qu. 20.3.

²⁹ For further discussion of despair and its relationship to psychological forms of depression and sloth see Deane-Drummond, *Shadow Sophia*.

³⁰ Moltmann, Jürgen. *Theology of Hope*, translated by James W. Leitch [1965]. (London: SCM Press, 1967), 21

of the present”.³¹ This “upside down” aspect of hope is stressed far more in Moltmann compared with Thomas, the greatest risk being that of not allowing the present to be challenged, i.e. recognising the practical radicality of hope.³² Hope for Moltmann, unlike Aquinas, also seems to have an ontological priority over love, so that “believing hope will itself provide inexhaustible resources for the creative, inventive imagination of love”.³³ His concept of *adventus*, Christian hope breaking into the present, which opposes a secular *futurans*, the linear extension of our hopes into the future, is arguably his most original contribution to a theology of hope.³⁴ However, by rendering *adventus* as inevitably opposing *futurans* Moltmann seems to have split apart hope as passion and theological hope, though the focus of his discussion is on hope in relation to time rather than the virtues.³⁵

The theological significance of hope is also teased out in an interesting way in the thought of Karl Rahner. Unlike Moltmann, he takes special care to stress *God* as the object of hope in a way that aligns with Aquinas’ position, such that God “constitutes our absolute future”, but without reducing hope to either faith or love “on the way.”³⁶ Hope as theological virtue becomes possible because of what Rahner terms “divine self-bestowal” through the divine *Logos* and divine *Pneuma*, and correspondingly, a single act of humanity is envisaged in two modalities of faith and love.³⁷ He is critical of scholastic tendencies to replace theological hope with its virtual disappearance on “possession” or “attainment”, even in the next life. Instead of humanity “attaining” something by means of possession, the “unfathomable mystery” instead “must be sustained and endured” rather than attempting to be “comprehended and so controlled and subordinated to the subject”.³⁸ He therefore stresses the distinctive marks of theological hope, which for him “*is a process of constantly eliminating the provisional in order to make room for the radical and pure uncontrollability of God. It is the continuous process of destroying that which appears, in order that the absolute and ultimate truth may be the intelligible as comprehended, and love may be that which is brought about by our love*”.³⁹

Theological hope in this mode does not so much disappear but continues and endures and makes possible love and faith. Rather than seeking to control the future, recognising God as one who is

³¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 31

³² Moltmann, 26-32.

³³ Moltmann, 34.

³⁴ For discussion see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Future of Creation*, translated by Margaret Kohl, (London: SCM Press, 1979), 29-31; 55-58.

³⁵ This scope of this essay does not allow me to discuss Moltmann’s interpretation of time. See his discussion of time in Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 104-139.

³⁶ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations (TI)*, Volume 10, translated by David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973), Part Three, ‘On the Theology of Hope’, p. 245

³⁷ Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 246.

³⁸ Rahner, 249.

³⁹ Rahner, 250. Italics in original.

not to be controlled, liberates humanity from envisaging any fixed or pre-conceived outcomes. Yet, rather like the dialectic between hope as passion and hope as virtue, for Rahner the existential movement of hope works in both directions. So, a Christian must “impress the form of his hope upon the framework of the world”.⁴⁰ This hope in the concrete takes the form of reappraisal and critique, while sitting lightly to anything attainable in this worldly life as if human life were totally dependent on it. In a fascinating way he attributes this transforming aspect of hope in the world as both depending on a greater hope in God, but also making it real. So, “In the power of this greater hope he also possesses the lesser hope, namely the courage to transform the ‘framework of secular life’, as the Council puts it, and the converse too is no less true. In this lesser hope the greater one is made real”.⁴¹ The two modes of hope therefore work together for the transformation of society.

All three theologians I have discussed so far, namely, Aquinas, Moltmann and Rahner give insights into what could be termed the dynamism of an explicitly Christian hope which is orientated towards God and is capable of a radical “hoping against hope” even in the midst of pain and suffering. Hope’s situation at the boundary of impossibility yet possibility is relevant in the current context of climate change, environmental damage and social injustices that are all too much in evidence in our contemporary world.

Hope, following Rahner, is that ability to lose control and acknowledge God in the face of the unknown and unseen in order that the grace of God may become evident. Rahner is important since he reminds his readers that theological hope is not a guarantor. True Christian hope cannot be separated from the virtues of faith and charity, and, like hope, it is a divine gift rather than something that is acquired through learning. *Extending* love and our object of hope to other creatures is not in conflict with our ability to love others, or love God.

Interim Conclusions

I began this essay by referencing the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. He understood, in a prophetic way, that human progress was not inevitable, and that humanity’s relationship with God arises within our temporal, earth-bound, creaturely, vulnerable existence, while stretching somehow beyond it in hope through participating in God’s Being. Nature red in tooth and claw and its application in social Darwinism, becoming popular in the mid-nineteenth century, were not the last word when interpreting Hopkins through the lens of time and hope. By placing humanity in an agrarian context, Hopkins develops the theological concept of “hope against hope” in a specifically ecologically grounded way, while also being fully cognisant of tendencies for violence,

⁴⁰ Rahner, 258.

⁴¹ Rahner, 259.

including the ravages of war. Thomas Aquinas' moral theology helps to tease out a little further the distinctions between hope as one of the irascible passions, a capacity that I argued is also shared in some sense with other animals, and the virtue of theological hope, which is orientated towards participation in God. While Aquinas locates the latter in the will, I resisted the interpretation that the passion of hope should be split off in a radical way from hope as virtue, not least because while theological hope is gift, the temptation towards gnosis is ever present without a recognition of some measure of continuity between different human forms of hoping. Hope is in time, not outside time, even when considering hope in eternity. And just as Hopkins acknowledged degenerative time, so hope has a shadow side in despair. Reflecting on despair, I argued, clarifies the different dimensions of hope, for it shows up the risks of its absence. Despair, as Aquinas was aware, is a type of withdrawal, an inner assumption of disaster that has lost the ability to hope in the possible yet difficult outcome. It is akin to time turned in on itself, rather than reaching and stretching out through dwelling on the eternal God rather than self. Jürgen Moltmann and Karl Rahner assisted in developing the argument for hope to be expressed in present suffering, and in protestation against it. Rahner adds an important dimension of the uncontrollability of God which outlasts even death itself, so hope is permanent feature of human existence in both this world and the next. That uncontrollability is, I suggest, important to recognise if human communities are to develop resilience in the face of global social and ecological emergencies. Recognising as believers that God sets the agenda will prevent presumptive accounts of human futures. Our Christian form of hoping remains rooted in time, even in so far as it participates in the wildness of God's Being and loving.

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Hope and Time in Theology and Religion

An Interview with Lord Williams of Oystermouth, Theologian, Poet, and 104th Archbishop of Canterbury

Rowan Williams

Honorary Professor of Contemporary Christian Thought, University of Cambridge

Abstract

The following is an interview hosted by the *Journal of the Oxford Graduate Theological Society* (JOGTS) with Professor Rowan Williams—The Right Reverend and Right Honourable The Lord Williams of Oystermouth—in February 2022. We discussed the themes of “Hope and Time” in theology and religion in relation to Professor Williams’ extensive scholarship and work within the Church of England. A recording of the original interview is available on the JOGTS YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/yXtdQj7WEH0>

Journal of the Oxford Graduate Theological Society (JOGTS): We are delighted today to be talking to Professor Rowan Williams as a special feature for the forthcoming volume of the Journal, whose theme is “Hope and Time in Theology and Religion.” Professor Williams needs no introduction, and we would need much, much, more time to do any real justice to his considerable academic background, his tremendous work, notable accomplishments, and remarkable honours, so this is just a formality! Professor Williams is a scholar of the highest calibre with degrees in divinity from both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. He recently retired as the 35th Master of Magdalene College and is now Honorary Professor of Contemporary Christian Thought at the University of Cambridge. He was the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury from 2002 to 2012 and in this role worked to strengthen relationships between different communities, tackling many difficult and controversial issues at the time. Professor Williams is a noted theologian, a poet, and a fellow of both the British Academy and the Royal Society of Literature. He has lived a life of utmost hope;



Rowan Williams, “Hope and Time in Theology and Religion: An Interview with Lord Williams of Oystermouth, Theologian, Poet, and 104th Archbishop of Canterbury,” *JOGTS* 3.1 (2022). pp. 21-30

educating, inspiring, and uplifting people from many backgrounds along the way. We cannot think of anyone better to speak about hope and time in theology and religion.

Thank you very much indeed for joining us, Professor Williams.

Professor Rowan Williams (RW): Thank you for the invitation.

JOGTS: The first question is actually three questions. First, how would you describe hope? Second, how would you describe hope's relationship to the temporal and the eternal? And then, third, what is the theological significance of this?

RW: Hope, I suppose, could be defined as a kind of confidence. Not a prediction that everything's going to turn out all right, which is optimism, but a confidence that whatever turns out there is a resource that enables you to stay alive, intelligent, and grounded. So, I begin with that. But, if we're talking about what nourishes hope, we have to ask: What nourishes confidence? And, theologically speaking, of course, we say that the ground for confidence is not in ourselves, what we can achieve, what we can get on top of, or what we can organise. Our confidence lies in the belief (certainly in the Judeo-Christian tradition) that the world exists because God desires that it exists. We exist because God desires that we exist, and God's desire is expressed in faithfulness to the world that God has made and God's faithfulness to us as a human family. We may do all kinds of things to wreck, injure, and frustrate that purpose and desire, but—because it's God's purpose and God's desire—the fact of it doesn't alter. So, that's our ground for hope, and that means that hope in relation to the passage of time is something to do with the fact that we are able both to look forward with confidence, and to look back and say (rather as in the scriptural narratives): “Here and here and here, we see what it might mean for God to be discovered to be faithful, for God to be discovered to be the one who doesn't go away in crisis or disaster.” So, the telling of the story is a very important part of the ground of hope as well.

JOGTS: In what ways can the church, then, situated in this world and in this time, act in the service of hope?

RW: The church doesn't exist, of course, to solve problems. One of the great misunderstandings people have about the church (both inside and outside) is in thinking that the church were a kind of slot machine where you went with your problems and out came answers. Or, even worse, as somebody once put it, that the church exists as an organisation providing perfect answers to questions that nobody's asking. Forget all that, because the church is there to point to precisely that unalterable fact of the divine commitment. And, if I had to define what really grounded the integrity of the church and, for that matter, the integrity of the Jewish people likewise, I would say it's that this community has its rationale in standing as witness to the commitment of God, the God who doesn't go away. So, how does the church express this? Certainly not in terms of anxiously flicking through a catalogue of strategies. It has to strategise. It has to think about priorities

and resources. But its primary job is to say: "This is why we are confident in getting up in the morning." That God remains God. That, for the Christian, the God who has shown the divine consistency in and through the death and resurrection of Jesus is a God who has demonstrated that this God is worth believing in, because this is a God who does not abandon.

So, we tell that story; we tell it in the sacraments of the church. We tell it in the reading of the Bible and the exposition of the Bible. And, of course, we tell it in the lives of human beings. And, I would say that one of the tasks the church always has is to find the narratives of human life that exemplify hope. I once said that we in the church like to tell the stories of the saints, and we think of St. Francis and St. Teresa and all the rest of it. We ought perhaps to have a rather more local view. Every parish ought to have, if you like, a little repertoire of stories it would like to tell—not about St. Francis and St. Teresa, but about "St. Darren" and "St. Gladys" and the local people who have lived out lives of fidelity and trust and confidence and shown us that it can be done. The other thing which I think the church can show is, both locally and globally, that the church is a community that is visibly faithful to the environment in which it lives. Does it show commitment itself to the need and the struggle of those immediately around? That can be the church's willingness to, let's say, advocate on behalf of the Uyghur community in China or it can be the church's willingness to host the food bank in the local church hall. You know, between those poles, there are many varieties of action by which the church can demonstrate that it is dependably there for those who need assurance, who need to know that their humanity is treasured and valued.

JOGTS: What can we learn from scriptural and religious texts regarding time, timelessness, temporality, and eternity?

RW: It's a very large question, thinking about time and eternity, for obvious reasons. But, I'd say, first of all, that the scriptural narrative suggests to us that what we learn of God, we learn as time-taking beings. We grow in time. We move in time. And, even if God really wanted to, God couldn't just tell us everything about the divine nature in one go. We would still have to learn. So that's why it's important that scripture, Hebrew scripture and Christian scripture alike, are stories of learning. Jesus draws around himself disciples and disciples are, literally, learners. It's not that Jesus calls Peter and James and John at the Sea of Galilee and hands over the Nicene Creed to them. They have to spend time with him and, in his life and his death and his resurrection, they learn. So, that's one area where I think the temporality of our lives is extremely important.

When we're living, as I think we are, in a culture that actually doesn't much prize the activity of learning—you know, we like things to be delivered in tidy packages immediately, we like our knowledge to come in an Amazon package, we don't want to spend the time it takes to learn—this is quite a hard thing to suggest, but it's also something which tells us how to value our history. Not uncritically, but nonetheless positively. It tells us that we may expect to move on,

to learn more. It tells us, therefore, that our own immediate doubts and brick walls today may not be the last word, which again is a form of hopefulness. And so, the eternity that Christians believe in is not so much a kind of abstract realm beyond it all as the bare fact of God's unchanging self-committing to what's being made. That's eternity. That's what doesn't alter. That's what other religious traditions have called the unborn; that which doesn't come into being and doesn't fade away, what Buddhists talk about in terms of what you encounter in meditation, an eternal reality which is neither abstract nor just time protracted forever, that simply says: "There is something which is impervious to the changes and uncertainties we live in. There is something which, in respect to us, is utterly to be relied on, and it is love. It is committed love."

So, the doctrine of God's eternity is actually good news. It's not just a speculative philosophical point. It's an aspect of the gospel or, indeed, the Jewish sense of God, because we read in Malachi (v. 3:6): "I the Lord do not change. Therefore you, children of Israel, are not consumed." It's because I don't change, says God, that you don't fall apart.

JOGTS: To follow up on that: what about this idea of eternal heaven and eternal hell? I mean, it sounds beautiful when we say that God is eternal love—that sounds amazing. But then when someone says, "Okay, there's a judgment day and then there's an eternal heaven or an eternal hell," and one imagines being in eternal hell, that sounds terrible.

RW: It's not an easy question to answer but I'd say something like this: In our time-bound lives here and now, we are—we hope—learning something about God, and not something abstract, but something about how we live in such a way that we are in tune with God. We are, in some sense, sharing—what should I say?—the wavelength, the frequency, of divine life. In Christian terms, again, we are sharing the prayer of Christ to the Father, which is the eternal reality of the Holy Trinity. And that's a very ambitious thing to believe and to be confident of. But I think that is the heart of our faith in the Spirit. We share Christ's relation to the eternal source of everything and so we seek to live in such a way that that harmonic relationship remains. Now, heaven, I think, would be that state of affairs in which we were rooted and grounded—consolidated—in that harmonious relation with God the Holy Trinity. And, again, we're not talking about an immeasurable extension of time. We're talking about being in a state where in some sense we know, that, as St. Paul says in Romans (v. 8:31-39), nothing can fracture that relationship, that attunement. So, what, then, do we mean by "hell?" I suppose what I understand by "hell" is what results if I've led a life which constantly puts me out of tune with that unchanging eternal reality—what results if I have made myself so tone deaf that I cannot sing in tune with that melody. Now, I don't know, and nobody can know, whether anybody is so terminally, drastically tone deaf that even in a kind of endless perspective they could never "learn the tune." I'd like to think (and I pray that this is the case) that all of us are in some sense capable of learning that, even though it may

not be rapid and it may not be automatic and easy. But I would hope and pray that, at the end of all things, when the world (the universe) collapses into its final form, that it will be possible for people to still learn to love the God from whom they come. But who knows? I look at my own life, we look at our lives, and think, “I’m capable of getting it so wrong that perhaps *I can* so distort and disable myself that I make myself daily more unable to hear the music.” So, day-by-day, I have to make sure that I’ve got some disciplines that put me back in touch with it.

JOGTS: We will be asking a bit more about this daily discipline a little later on. But for now, the next question is: Does hope, in your understanding, rest on an idea of eternity? And, for those who cannot believe in this, where is hope to be found? Is there any way in which looking beyond time, perhaps to an afterlife, can do more harm than good?

RW: When people express their uncertainty about whether the afterlife is a good or a bad principle to work with, I can understand what they’re saying. I think if talking about an afterlife means either that we think of a deferred happy ending for everybody or a deferred responsibility, or “It’s going to be alright in the end so I needn’t worry about the suffering and the pain now,” or “It’s going to be alright in the end and I have, I will have, plenty of time to sort it out...” I can see that those views of an afterlife are fatuous, really, from a religious point of view. What is so interesting in many religious traditions is the emphasis on finding eternity in the present moment. In this present moment (of decision, relationship, the shaping of my life, the direction, or—to use the word again—attunement, of my life), am I or am I not trying to adjust to something that utterly doesn’t depend on me and doesn’t depend on the passage of time? Eternity in the present moment is what really matters. *Is there a reality that does not alter?* And, if there’s a reality that doesn’t alter, then it’s not unreasonable to think that—on the far side of death—the relationship with that reality is not destroyed. And that’s a sound hope which Christians share. And that’s not about deferring it till an afterlife but about saying that the eternity that I now touch, in my attempt to be open and faithful today, holds me in being beyond time.

Now, if you don’t share that view, where does hope come from? And this is an interesting question, I think, because we’re going into one of those periods, and I think this goes in waves in human history, when we’re much less optimistic about where the human race is going—for perfectly good reasons. We face, above all, the monumental environmental catastrophe that we have brought upon ourselves, and it’s quite difficult to be optimistic about that (however hopeful we might be). We’re also, I think, going into one of those periods when the notion of steady social and political progress looks a bit hollow, as we see tyranny and falsehood and totalitarianism resurgent all over the world when countries that have been democratic dip into a kind of authoritarian darkness again. So, it’s not looking brilliant out there.

What do you then hope for? You can go on hoping in something called “human nature,” but I scratch my head a little bit as to what the content of that really is. You can tell good stories and

share good stories and say, "Well, it doesn't have to be like this," and that's good. But, I think there's still that difficulty as to where the resources are beyond ourselves that we might look to; what I've called the unborn, the unchanging, which says to us: "Even if there's failure today, that failure is not final, because the eternal remains." Quite often you find people who don't have anything like a formal religious belief speaking or acting as if they believed there were resources more than ourselves and more than the present moment. They may not have a name for that, and they may not have a theory for that, but...that's fine. They have touched something and recognized something. I think we, as religious believers, do have words for it. I don't want to rush people into convictions they're not ready for, but I am struck by the way in which there is the sense that there is perhaps more resource in the world around us, and the universe around us, than we can quite compass or understand. That's something a surprising number of people would—I guess—give some adherence to.

JOGTS: So, trying to draw out the resources that human beings *do* have for wrestling with the additional "resource" that is beyond human ken... Can creation narratives, myths, science, and history be integrated into a symbolic rather than a literal formulation? For example, it is said that God created the earth in six days, but contemporary science indicates otherwise. How can we understand religious temporality today in light of current science?

RW: To me, the supposed conflict between science and religion is the ultimate phony war. I think it's a completely false standoff of views. Not because science gives us facts and theology gives us the meanings, but because science itself is a discipline which involves imagination, projection, risky guesswork, metaphor, and all the things that make human language and human thinking exciting. Science is exciting not because it's certain but because it's constantly improvising and renewing itself. I think there's a real alliance between the creative scientific mind, the poetic mind, and the theological mind, and that we ought to see these as coming together. So, I don't think there's any deep conflict there. Even if science predicts, as it does, the heat death of the universe and everything collapsing back into stasis, nonetheless the scientist will still sign the petition for the release of a political prisoner. The scientist will still educate their children. The scientist will still behave as if tomorrow matters because tomorrow there will be human beings and every tomorrow in which there will be human beings is the tomorrow we work for. So, the long-term prediction doesn't erase that short-term sense that I'm answerable today and tomorrow. So, I don't see that there's an impossible, tensional conflict involved here. I see any number of real possibilities for theologians and scientists to talk to one another, not about who's right about the creation story—where again we've fallen into a trap of supposing that a manifestly poetic liturgical text like Genesis is meant to be a kind of photographic record—but about how scientists and theologians understand the nature of knowledge, the nature of speech, the nature of the mind; how we map the world, how we understand our bodiliness. There's so much to talk about there and so much of real creativity, I'd say.

JOGTS: Going back to the concept of hope, have you experienced instances where religion is interacting with science in a hopeful manner?

RW: I've been involved for the last few years in a project based in an Australian university called Beyond Science and Religion, which is drawing scientists and theologians together to try and get beyond the sort of Punch and Judy Show of science on one side with a big stick, and religion on the other holding the baby—this rather futile model—to look at some of these issues around knowledge and the body and so forth. That's been really fascinating and really energizing. And many, many years ago, when I was first teaching theology, I belonged to a little group called The Epiphany Philosophers in Cambridge. This was back in the 1970s and we'd meet once a week to chat. This was a very informal group but, again, it included some theologians, some scientists, some philosophers, especially some of the people who were, interestingly, in on the first stages of developing artificial intelligence and the IT world as we now know it—people who were creating computer languages, that sort of thing. So, a very unusual and rather stretching sort of group to belong to. And, although that faded away with the death of some of the senior members of that group, it had been running for quite a while. We've actually revived it in the last few years. Two or three of us (who as very young scholars were part of that group) rather tentatively put out a call a couple of years ago, saying, "Anybody interested in carrying on these conversations?" And we found that people were.

JOGTS: That's fantastic. Reason for hope!

RW: Reason for hope.

JOGTS: The next question is about your book *Candles in the Dark: Faith, Hope and Love in a Time of Pandemic*. There you offer beautiful meditations and thoughts that uplift the spirits in seemingly unprecedented times. Where does your hope and inspiration come from? You mentioned earlier that you have daily practices that you keep. Where does it all come from?

RW: Well, in a rather boringly old-fashioned way, I say morning and evening prayer. I have a daily practice of silent meditation because I think that is one of the main ways in which we find some sort of attunement and openness to God; where the preoccupations that we usually bring around our success, our impact, our reputation, and our status just have to be parked. If you're sitting in silence, there is absolutely nothing you can do to impress anybody, not even God. And, when you're stuck in a situation where you cannot impress anybody, then there's a little bit of panic, because we love to impress people and we think that's the way to survive. But what if you're just stuck where you really can't do it? Then either you go completely round the bend or you find a way of opening yourself up to what is there. And, to be aware in that moment of your body and your breath and to hold yourself physically still without tension, without furrowing the brow and clenching the fists, but to hold yourself there and say: "I am held by more than myself. I am. I'm a

place where," if you like, "the water and the depths of the well here receives the water falling from the sky above." And, you sit there like the well, waiting for the rain to fall. Those are moments where you are anchored freshly in hope. Not in the sense of, "Oh, now I know what to look forward to tomorrow." But saying, "Now I know that this universe is not a place where I have any right to despair, because it is not abandoned. I am not abandoned. The water in the well is there. The rain still falls." So, those practices of silence, awareness, recognition of where I stand and where I sit, moments where the fuss and fret have to be put away, those are the moments where hope grows. And, if those moments are surrounded in the liturgy of morning and evening prayer, with (going back to stories) the Psalms, the Gospels, *et cetera*, then that sort of fills it out. That builds a little structure around it to say, "Well, I'm doing this because those are the stories that convince and hold me and show me that all this is worth doing day-by-day."

JOGTS: Have you always had these practices?

RW: I suppose since I was 17 or 18? Yes.

JOGTS: And what inspired you to start practicing meditation?

RW: I suppose having some wonderful Christian teachers, wonderful priests who helped me when I was a teenager. I've often said this: I can't believe how lucky I was as a teenager. After all those moments where so many of my friends said, "Well, I asked a minister or a priest about this topic and they told me to go away and not worry my pretty little head about it," I found I was able to go to priests who said, "Yeah, good question. Let's sit down and talk it through." And, I'm just so grateful. Among those priests was one who gave me a book about St. Teresa of Ávila, as well as having a parish priest who in his preparation for confirmation taught us a very simple scheme of daily prayer of reflection and thanksgiving and remembering others and just said, "This is perfectly straightforward. You do it and you grow with it and you grow through it." All of that is where it started, I suppose, and it worked for me. What can I say?

JOGTS: Just to follow up on that... You've done a lot of work. You know nine languages, learnt all on your own, and you were talking earlier about how we want things *now* in an Amazon package. Even if it has not been immediate, you've done so much in not a massive amount of time. How is that possible?

RW: Well, you're asking the wrong person really. I don't know. There's a poem by Hilaire Belloc about the water beetle. It says, "He glides upon the water's face with ease, celerity, and grace. But if you try to make him think of how he did it, he would sink." Well, I sort of understand that. I don't know, I've always been in jobs that have been quite demanding, that have sort of rushed me from one thing and one person to the other. I think that makes it all the more important to try and make sure that you have some practices that allow you to focus on the job you've got to do and the person you're actually with. We all know how awful it is when you're with somebody

who is surreptitiously checking the time and wondering how soon they can get away. And, well, I'm not immune from that, I have to say, but you have to find ways of being present in what you do. Perhaps that helps a bit in getting a bit more done. Rather than, you know, a half hour in which the first ten minutes are spent thinking, "Oh my God, I've got such a lot to do," and the next ten minutes are spent trying to do something, and the next ten minutes are spent thinking, "Okay, I've done that but how on earth am I going to do the next thing?" Somehow, you've got to push those "bits of the sandwich," press them in and say, "Well, let's try and reduce those preliminary and posterior worrying times a little bit."

JOGTS: Do you have any particular ways that you do that?

RW: I wish I knew because, of course, I'm prone as anybody to that temptation. But sometimes the absolutely, elementary, gold-standard things like making a list and crossing things off. I get great satisfaction from making a list and crossing things off. You know, these simple things do help but I suppose, above all, it's trying to get into a state of mind where you say that what comes to you in terms of demand and request is always going to be both a gift and an invitation. This is the person God's given you for this time. This is the task God's given you for this time. Just start by saying, "Thank you," and work with that. I wish I could do it better, but I think I know that's what I ought to be trying to do.

JOGTS: So, our final question: Do you have a piece of scripture or literature to share with us that you personally find particularly hopeful in uncertain or troubling times?

RW: Sometimes when I've been asked, "Have I got a favourite book of the Bible?" (which is a pretty silly question actually, but it does get asked), I think I would go for 2 Corinthians as my book of choice. I think 2 Corinthians is very much the voice of a man who is pressed and confined by all kinds of opposition, uncertainty, undermining, and all the rest of it. All those early chapters with the imagery about having treasure in earthen pots and how we're all being changed into the likeness of Christ from glory to glory, I love those chapters because they're about the basic tension between the earthiness and the fragility of who we are and the glory of what we are privileged to be part of and to be drawn into. So, certainly, that's my scriptural focus. If I had to go for a piece of literature, I would, without hesitation, go to George Herbert's poem, *Love (III)*, "Love bade me welcome. But my soul drew back," which is all about the completely unchanging, completely unreserved welcome that we are given by the holy reality that surrounds us and from which we come.

JOGTS: When you go back to reread the poem, do you find yourself taking away something different, or do you find that you keep returning to something that sticks with you?

RW: I don't know. It's not as if you get new ideas from it every time. There's one very basic idea. It's a very simple poem but I go back to it as I go back to pieces of music. I know them well, I can sing them but, all the same, I like to hear them.

JOGTS: Would you recite the poem for us?

RW: Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, said Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

JOGTS: Beautiful. That's our questions asked. Thank you so much, Professor Williams!

A recording of the original interview is available on the JOGTS YouTube channel:
<https://youtu.be/yXtdQj7WEH0> .

The Pain-Patience Continuum

A Humane Understanding of Our Space-Time Reality

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Abstract

The problem of suffering haunts humanity. For Christians, this problem is addressed in part by the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. However, natural moral virtues, in addition to the theological, can help us cope and hope in the midst of life's trials. The natural virtue of patience is particularly powerful. Humanity lives in a fallen space-time continuum. Therefore space, or material existence, necessitates pain. Time, or duration, necessitates patience. However deplorable the fact may be, pain is natural to human existence and patience is its natural remedy. By practicing the natural virtue of patience, humans can preserve serenity in suffering and even transcend their suffering by aiding others, thereby holding on to the good life.

To demonstrate the reality of this pain-patience continuum, and to show the transcendent power found in natural moral patience, examples of human suffering are needed. This article turns to archetypes of suffering found in the literature of antiquity. Analyzing pagan literature over Christian literature helps to illustrate the natural effects of a space-time existence on the human condition, and thereby human suffering. From storm-tossed Aeneas to storm-tossed Odysseus, from tortured Oedipus to tormented Orestes, the ancients shied not from the reality of pain. Prometheus, Antigone, and Socrates are the archetypes examined herein. Their lives, as shown in brief works of literature, show the necessity of patience, the great benefits of patience, and the great harm that can come from impatience.



Introduction

In 1983, Archie Williams was convicted of raping and stabbing a young woman in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.⁴² At the young age of twenty-two, he went into the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola—one of the toughest prisons in the country—for the start of his eighty-year sentence, no parole. However, thirty-seven years later, at the less young age of fifty-nine, he walked out of prison. Archie Williams had been wrongly convicted. While it took until 2019 for the State of Louisiana to acknowledge Archie's innocence, Archie obviously spent those thirty-seven years knowing that he was innocent. However, he did not despair. Rather, he hoped and prayed and waited for his day of deliverance.

Few of us will ever have our patience tested like Archie Williams, yet how difficult we find it to be patient nonetheless. "Be patient!" mothers and fathers must repeatedly tell their children. "Patience is a virtue!" preachers and teachers must remind us. It is clearly not a favored virtue. This is rather unfortunate when we consider that there are "few virtues for which there is such a continual necessity as patience."⁴³ Firstly, we cannot always have what we want when we want it; we must learn to wait. More significantly, life throws suffering at us that cannot be avoided or conquered, but only endured. Sometimes, these sufferings are incredibly difficult to bear. Josef Pieper considers these pains the ultimate test of man's strength. "[I]n the world as it is constituted," he writes, "it is only in the supreme test, which leaves no other possibility of resistance than endurance, that the inmost and deepest strength of man reveals itself."⁴⁴ That is, when we cannot escape our sufferings, the quality of our virtue is made known by our patience.

We thus see that patience is inextricably connected to pain. Humanity is, of course, no fonder of pain than it is of patience. "[N]ature seems above all to avoid the painful and to aim at the pleasant," writes Aristotle.⁴⁵ This is true to such an extent that we generally view pain as extraneous or intrusive to the good life, rather than as fundamental to life in a fallen world. "If I just didn't have this particular pain, life would be great," we say to ourselves. Or "[i]f I just didn't have so-and-so or such-and-such in my life, I could be happy." However, these pains and so-and-sos and such-and-suches are not mere intrusions into life as we would have it. They are bedrock qualities to life as it exists. Since we cannot escape suffering in this world, the best alternative is to learn how to deal with it. If we want to bear as best as we can the unavoidable pains of life, we must change our mindset. Due to living in a fallen space-time continuum, pain is natural to human existence

⁴² Ryan D'Agostino, "Why Archie Williams Refuses to Let Anger Imprison Him," *Good Housekeeping*, September 23, 2020, <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/a32851494/archie-williams-agt-wrongful-conviction-story/>.

⁴³ Richard F. Clarke, *Patience: Meditations for a Month* (Fitzwilliam: Loreto Publications, 2015), 2.

⁴⁴ Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 130.

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W.D. Ross, in *Great Books of the Western World*, 2nd ed., vol. 8. (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1993), 409.

and patience is its natural remedy. By practicing the natural virtue of patience, we keep hold of the good life, preserving serenity in suffering and even transcending our suffering by aiding others.

A Preliminary Remark

It is not easy to write about so universal yet so personal a topic as suffering. The topic is universal for, as Sophocles notes, “[i]s anyone in all the world safe from unhappiness?”⁴⁶ The topic is personal, for, no matter how little or how much pain people have, they tend to find their portion unjustified at times; different souls have differing capacities. In fact, this is not an uncommon source of conflict between people. A soul tries to share their sorrows with a companion, and they only hear this in reply: “You think that’s bad? Wait till you hear about *my* day.” How does one write about bearing suffering when loads and bearers differ so greatly? This is even harder to do if you imagine your words falling into the hands of true champions of suffering—patients with Lou Gehrig’s disease, parents who have lost a child, men and women wrongly imprisoned for nearly four decades, to name a few. Any words you might have to say suddenly feel inexperienced, cheap, or insensitive. No one wants to be like Job’s friends or Prometheus’ visitors, offering further pain instead of comfort. “It is an easy thing for one whose foot is on the outside of calamity to give advice,” Prometheus remarks to the daughters of Oceanos.⁴⁷ All too true.

C.S. Lewis acknowledged this same concern in his masterful work on the problem of suffering, *The Problem of Pain*:

All arguments in justification of suffering provoke bitter resentment against the author. You would like to know how I behave when I am experiencing pain, not writing books about it. You need not guess, for I will tell you; I am a great coward.... When I think of pain—of anxiety that gnaws like fire and loneliness that spreads out like a desert, and the heartbreaking routine of monotonous misery, or again of dull aches that blacken our whole landscape or sudden nauseating pains that knock a man’s heart out at one blow, or pains that seem intolerable and then are suddenly increased, of infuriating scorpion-stinging pains that startle into maniacal movement a man who seemed half dead with his previous tortures—‘it quite o’ercrows my spirit.’ If I knew any way to escape I would crawl through sewers to find it.⁴⁸

With C.S. Lewis, this writer hereby classifies himself with the cowards. Nonetheless, this coward seeks insight and inspiration, if for no other reason than his own sake. If his words offer any insight

⁴⁶ Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald, in *Great Books of the Western World*, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1993), 157.

⁴⁷ Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, trans. David Grene, in *Great Books of the Western World*, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1993), 43.

⁴⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 104-105.

to anyone else, then God be thanked. If they cause anyone any additional pain, then please forgive the writer's fumbling about for answers.

Recognizing the Pain-Patience Continuum

"How are we to understand the existence of evil in a world created by a God who is omnipotent and perfectly good?" asks Mortimer Adler.⁴⁹ This question is precisely the one that Lewis sets out to answer in *The Problem of Pain*. Even though a somewhat lengthy quote from this work was just given, another excerpt is essential to our discussion, for it captures the essence of much of the book:

[It is impossible] for the matter of the universe at any moment to be distributed so that it is equally convenient and pleasurable to each member of a society. If a man traveling one direction is having a journey downhill, a man going in the opposite direction must be going uphill. If even a pebble lies where I want it to lie, it cannot, except by coincidence, be where you want it to lie. And this is very far from being an evil: on the contrary, it furnishes occasion for all those acts of courtesy, respect, and unselfishness by which love and good humour and modesty express themselves. But it certainly places the way open to a great evil, that of competition and hostility. And if souls are free, they cannot be prevented from dealing with the problem by competition instead of courtesy. And once they have advanced to actual hostility, they can then exploit the fixed nature of matter to hurt one another. The permanent nature of wood which enables us to use it as a beam also enables us to use it for hitting our neighbor on the head.⁵⁰

Lewis is making the point that—in our fallen world—suffering is natural to us because it is natural to an existence that has material beings with free wills living in a material reality. "Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself."⁵¹

In the course of his work, Lewis goes into other reasons for the existence of pain. For example, God uses pain as a tool to shape and move us, for pain "shatters the illusion that what we have, whether good or bad in itself, is our own and is enough for us."⁵² As interesting and valuable as this and his other insights are, we will not examine these other reasons for pain here. Rather than going broader, we want to go deeper in our exploration of the existence of pain. Additionally, the problem of evil itself is not our focus so much as handling it or dealing with it. For better insight

⁴⁹ Mortimer Adler, "Good and Evil," *The Syntopicon*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1993), 471.

⁵⁰ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 23-24.

⁵¹ Lewis, 25.

⁵² Lewis, 94.

into dealing with pain, we want to examine the fundamentals of human nature that make pain unavoidable.

We thus return to the discussion of the nature of our material world. “[T]he chess player's freedom to play chess depends on the rigidity of the squares and the moves,” Lewis analogizes.⁵³ A chess piece would describe its limitations—and therefore its reality—by the countable squares on its board, by the finite moves within that realm, and by the time on the game clock. How do humans, in the far greater game of life, define our natural limitations?

By the space-time continuum. Lewis briefly notes that “space and time” are our “environment,” but he does not elaborate on this point.⁵⁴ We can turn to Mortimer Adler for a comment on this fundamental aspect of material existence: “On the level of our everyday observations, space and time seem to be the obvious, the common, and the connected properties of physical things. We distinguish things from one another by their position in space, as we mark happening by the date of their occurrence. The where and when of a thing is often used to identify it.”⁵⁵

While physicists and science fiction fans are not infrequently aware of the space-time continuum, how much does this nature of our existence affect and direct the worldview of the typical suffering soul crying to heaven in pain? Likewise, does this nature of our reality give enough direction to the work of the theologian looking for an understanding of life's ills? Edward Leen writes:

Inability to comprehend the meaning of the evil, the pain and the cruelty of existence, and a passionate resentment against the irresistible invasion of life by what is at one and the same time felt to be both unreasonable and intolerable, are the enduring causes of man's unhappiness. One can submit to what one understands. One cannot but experience revolt against what does brutal violence to the reason.⁵⁶

The space-time limitations of our existence are fundamental to human suffering. Does this fact sufficiently inform our reasoning, or does a lack of consideration lead instead to what Leen calls *feelings of the unreasonable and intolerable*? It seems that increased meditation on fundamental aspects of living in a fallen material world can aid the reasoning of the suffering soul, perhaps lightening the *experience of revolt* and preserving a sense of the good life. To that end, it is necessary to give more examination to the effects of a space-time existence on the human condition and thereby human suffering.

Returning to our limitations, humans can only be in one place at one moment. In fact, we must be in one place and at one moment. We cannot physically retreat into the past, and we cannot

⁵³ Lewis, 65.

⁵⁴ Lewis, 21.

⁵⁵ Mortimer Adler, “Space,” *The Syntopicon*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1993), 642.

⁵⁶ Edward Leen, *Why the Cross?* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1938), 287-288.

physically leap into the future; neither can we be here and there at the same time. These moments and places of our existence, however, are not separated from each other. Because we have memory, the moments we spend in spaces build up the present state of our existence. “An instantaneous experience is an impossibility, biologically and psychologically,” explains Dewey. “An experience is a product, one might say a by-product, of continuous and cumulative interaction of an organic self with the world.”⁵⁷ This is one reason why suffering is so difficult: Suffering is pain graphed over time. If life’s hard knocks were over in an instant, the need to bear suffering would be needless.

Since we live in a fallen space-time continuum, might we not say that the difficulty of this existence can be described as a pain-patience continuum? Pain is a quality of life because matter or space is a quality; having a fire to roast our food also means having a fire that can burn our skin. Likewise, patience—the bearing of that burning from one moment to the next—is a quality of life because time is a quality; being able to enjoy the taste of our cooked meal means risking enduring the burning of our skin. As space and time are co-qualities for us, so are pain and patience co-qualities. Note, when I say *patience* in the context of *pain-patience continuum*, I mean patience in the negative sense of something we do not want to practice—hence my coupling it with pain as a difficult aspect of life that must be borne as a reality of a fallen space-time continuum. Obviously, patience is a virtue and therefore a moral good, but not all virtues are equally appealing or enticing. For instance, kindness and generosity and honesty all sound rather desirable (unless we are having a particularly bad day), but patience is more like chastity: No one wants to practice either, but they are the only sane solution to their respective problems.

In summary, living in a space-time continuum means enduring pain with patience. That is, once pain is recognized as an inescapable aspect of human life, the need for patience then becomes seen as the unavoidable co-aspect, for “the spatial and temporal always go together.”⁵⁸ We can think of patience, then, or forbearance or endurance, as the bearing of pain across the x-axis. We have to bear our pain over time, which is pain’s true burden. Of course, there is the virtue of patience, distinct from the act of simply forbearing, as was just noted above. To forbear in anger, spite, and resentment is a type of endurance, but it is not the *virtue* of patience. How do we take the necessity of patience and turn it into a virtue, and what benefits are derived from a virtuous approach to suffering? These questions will be examined in the next two sections.

⁵⁷ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee, 2005), 229.

⁵⁸ Dewey, 190.

The Nature of Patience as Virtue

In his series of questions on patience, Aquinas begins by ascertaining “whether patience is virtue.”⁵⁹ One of the objections he recounts is that patience is not a virtue because wicked men are known to “bear many evils patiently” for the sake of worldly or unjust gain. In answer, Aquinas goes on to make the same distinction just noted above. That is, there is a difference between a “hardness” of character that is required for living in a continuum containing time, and the virtue of patience proper. As for the exact distinction between this “hardness” and the virtue of patience, Aquinas agrees with Augustine, who places emphasis on the end goal of the act of endurance. “The patience of man, which is right and laudable and worthy of the name of virtue, is understood to be that by which we tolerate evil things with an even mind, that we may not with a mind uneven desert good things, through which we may arrive at better.”⁶⁰ That is, when we act with real patience, we are striving for something objectively good. Since no crime or sin is an objective good, the virtue of patience is not practiced by us when we persevere for unjust gain or with unjust means.

With that distinction made, we can look closer at the essence and fruit of patience. Note how Augustine emphasizes that patience results in an “even mind” in the midst of suffering, helping us not abandon the good due to a “mind uneven.” As every human being knows, pain can be incredibly difficult to bear, and bearing it over time can cause much disquiet and eventually despair; that is, over time we begin to lose our peace and sometimes our perseverance. We lose our grip on the good life. Patience, meanwhile, holds on to serenity amid suffering. Jumping forward to a modern Christian philosopher, we see that Josef Pieper says the same: “To be patient means to preserve cheerfulness and serenity of mind in spite of injuries that result from the realization of the good.”⁶¹

How, then, do we preserve this cheerfulness and serenity? What is the key to practicing patience? Richard Clark writes, “Patience is the willing endurance of what is painful to us.”⁶² Patience is thus an act of our wills to not rebel against the pain of life that arises despite our attempts at living virtuously, but to accept it. This does not mean that we love pain or that we cannot dislike pain, but it does mean that our hearts and minds bow to the fact and presence of suffering rather than rising up in rebellion against the inevitable.

⁵⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 2nd ed., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (n.p: New Advent, 2017), II-II, q. 136, a. 1. <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.

⁶⁰ Augustine, “On Patience,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, trans. H. Browne (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), par. 2. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1315.htm>.

⁶¹ Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 129.

⁶² Clarke, *Patience: Meditations for a Month*, 1.

While this acceptance of suffering is key to patience, the acceptance can spring from two different motivations. Firstly, we can accept life's pains in love and submission to Our Father. "Patience is the virtue which makes us accept for love of God, generously and peacefully, everything that is displeasing to our nature, without allowing ourselves to be depressed by the sadness which easily comes over us when we meet with disagreeable things," explains Gabriel of Saint Mary Magdalen.⁶³ Clarke agrees, saying that "[t]he virtue of patience consists in the willing endurance for God's sake of all that is painful to nature, of whatever kind it may be."⁶⁴ True Christian patience is therefore intrinsically connected with the theological virtues, and our growth in the theological virtues and our growth in patience seem thereby interconnected. This explains why suffering—as in the case of Job—is often viewed as a test or trial from God.

The second motivation for the acceptance of suffering is not religious at all, but simply practical. Once we recognize the reality of living in a fallen space-time continuum, we realize that pain is unavoidable and that patience is a mandatory companion to pain "if we wish to pass happily through life."⁶⁵ After all, refusing to accept life's ills will only lead to bitterness, resentment, revenge, and despair, and this is obviously not a happy way to live; rather, it is an abandoning of the good life. This is why Clarke can make this incredibly significant point: "Patience is therefore a virtue worth cultivating quite apart from any motives of religion."⁶⁶ It is this natural moral virtue rather than religious patience that interests us more here in this essay. This is not because Christian patience is not superior; because of its connection to the theological virtues, it clearly is. Nonetheless, since there are natural reasons for suffering in fallen space-time, the role of natural patience must not be diminished or ignored. "Although man's final destiny is otherworldly, that destiny is prepared and achieved through the conditions of the present life," explains Leen. "Jesus did not teach men that they had to step out of the stream of existence in order to spiritualise themselves."⁶⁷ We are looking for the insights to be had when standing in the stream of our space-time existence.

Examining the Benefits of the Natural Virtue of Patience

Philosophically, it is clear and natural that patience is a vital virtue for the good life. Nonetheless, it would be both encouraging and enlightening to look at examples of how natural patience does in fact preserve peace amid suffering—and how impatience only increases pain. Also, we can see

⁶³ Gabriel of Saint Mary Magdalen, *Divine Intimacy: Meditations on the Interior Life for Every Day of the Liturgical Year* (n.p.: Baronius Press, 2019), 365.

⁶⁴ Clarke, *Patience: Meditations for a Month*, 1.

⁶⁵ Clarke, 1.

⁶⁶ Clarke, 1.

⁶⁷ Leen, *Why the Cross?*, 201.

how practicing patience helps us to transcend our suffering, which is normally seen as a limitation, and help those around us.

To look for profound examples of patience and impatience in action, we would be wise to turn to literary archetypes of suffering, those characters whose great pain throws light on the importance and value of patience. Job is obviously the great Christian archetype of the suffering soul, but we are looking for natural rather than Christian examples. The Greco-Roman world is full of such cases, for the ancients did not shy away from the problem of evil. In fact, they often seemed preoccupied with it. From storm-tossed Aeneas to storm-tossed Odysseus, from tortured Oedipus to tormented Orestes, the ancients of Western Civilization shied not from the reality of pain. “Count no mortal happy till he has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain,” Sophocles famously wrote, capturing well the Greek view of life and pain.⁶⁸

There are many suffering souls to choose from, many of them with quite complex stories. Rather than one of these epic heroes, we will start with the simple but powerful example of Sophocles’ immortal Antigone. She will serve as an example of imperfect virtue, a soul whose virtuous life would have been improved by patience. We will then look at Aeschylus’ Prometheus, an example of perfect patience personified. Lastly, we will look at the life of Socrates, a real-life example of perfect patience from the ancient world.

The Impatient Virtue of Antigone

That Sophocles’ Antigone possesses tremendous loyalty is undeniable. Firstly, she wanders across Greece with her blind father, “going without shoes, and hungry, beaten by many rains, tired by the sun.”⁶⁹ In short, she is “leading a beggar’s life” to aid her ailing father.⁷⁰ Secondly, Antigone gives her life to honor the gods and save the soul of her brother. More than just loyalty, these acts are all examples of tremendous virtue—the virtue of piety. However, the final days and hours and moments of Antigone’s virtuous life, chronicled in *Antigone*, are incredibly dark. Her very virtue ends up the cause of her demise. “What divine justice have I disobeyed?” she laments. “I stand convicted of impiety, the evidence my pious duty done.”⁷¹ This overwhelming trial breaks her strong spirit: “Unwept, no wedding song, unfriended, now I go the road laid down for me. No longer shall I see this holy light of sun. No friend to bewail my fate.”⁷² What could Antigone have

⁶⁸ Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, trans. David Greene, in *Great Books of the Western World*, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1993), 132.

⁶⁹ Sophocles, 138.

⁷⁰ Sophocles, 144.

⁷¹ Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Elizabeth Wyckoff, in *Great Books of the Western World*, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1993), 169.

⁷² Sophocles, 169.

done differently to avoid such a hopeless end? Namely, how would the virtue of patience have brought her serenity?

Primarily, Antigone would not have been as lonely if she would have been patient. “I go, without a friend,” Antigone mourns at the end.⁷³ While this is true, her impatience is largely responsible for her loneliness. Antigone has a loving sister, Ismene. Ismene initially lacks the strength to support Antigone’s noble plans to bury their brother. Instead of calmly trying to persuade her, Antigone loses control, saying, “if now you wished to act, you wouldn’t please me as a partner.”⁷⁴ When Ismene expresses fear for her sister’s fate, Antigone only rebuffs the affection and care: “For me, don’t borrow trouble. Clear your fate.”⁷⁵ While Antigone has the fortitude to persevere in her intentions to do justice to the gods and her brother, she lacks all patience with her faltering sister. She even goes so far as to tell her sister that she hates her on two occasions.⁷⁶

Considering that patience is an aspect of fortitude, it might seem odd that Antigone possesses the parent virtue but lacks the child. However, Aquinas makes an important distinction between these two virtues:

[F]ortitude is chiefly about fear, which of itself evokes flight which fortitude avoids; while patience is chiefly about sorrow, for a man is said to be patient, not because he does not fly, but because he behaves in a praiseworthy manner by suffering things which hurt him here and now, in such a way as not to be inordinately saddened by them.⁷⁷

Because Antigone possesses fortitude, she does not let fear of suffering and death stop her from practicing justice. However, her lack of patience with her sister leads to bitter sorrow. Clarke writes, “Impatience is one of the most foolish of all faults. It gains nothing for us; it does not relieve our sufferings, but aggravates them. No one enjoys any peace as long as he is yielding to feelings of impatience; he is discontented, miserable, uneasy.”⁷⁸ Indeed, Antigone’s impatience gains her nothing; rather, her soul only grows more desolate.

While impatience not only uproots serenity, it also stops a soul from being a source of grace for others. That is, when we are impatient in our sufferings, we are unable to do good for others. For example, while Antigone is right in being saddened to some degree, her sadness—unchecked—grows into anger. Aquinas notes this possibility, writing, “[p]atience is said to have a perfect work in bearing hardships: for these give rise first to sorrow, which is moderated by patience; secondly,

⁷³ Sophocles, 169

⁷⁴ Sophocles, 160.

⁷⁵ Sophocles, 160.

⁷⁶ Sophocles, 159, 160.

⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 136, a. 4.

⁷⁸ Clarke, *Patience: Meditations for a Month*, 11.

to anger, which is moderated by meekness.”⁷⁹ Because Antigone lacks patience, her soul gives way to anger. She shows no meekness towards her uncle, the king. “[I]f you think my acts are foolishness,” she says to him, “the foolishness may be in a fool’s eye.”⁸⁰ Antigone loses the opportunity of persuading her uncle to virtue through her own virtue. In fact, her angry response has the opposite effect; it helps Creon see her actions as prideful rather than virtuous. “The girl was expert in her insolence when she broke bounds beyond established law. Once she had done it, insolence the second, to boast her doing and to laugh in it.”⁸¹ Creon is certainly blinded by his own pride, but this is something that Antigone must work with by practicing patience and thereby maintaining her calm and innocence. By bringing about a change in Creon, Antigone could have affected the entire kingdom for the better.

Ismene, on the other hand, does take a more patient approach with her uncle, and she is ultimately allowed to live.⁸² Haemon, Antigone’s lover, takes the same patient approach as Ismene, and perhaps he would have been successful in affecting his father had the damage not already been done by Antigone.⁸³ Thus, instead of saving her lover, Antigone only aids in his arrival at despair.

In these senses, Antigone’s pains are wasted. Had she borne them with patience, she could have effected good for many around her. Augustine writes, “[w]herefore the impatient, while they will not suffer ills, effect not a deliverance from ills, but only the suffering of heavier ills.”⁸⁴ As we have seen, these heavier ills can fall not only on us but on those around us as well.

It must be said that none of this criticism of Antigone is intended in a genuinely judgmental fashion. Antigone is a young woman of incredible virtue. With heroic fortitude, she honors the gods and her family through piety, not obeying those who would “over-run the god’s unwritten and unfailing laws,” even when the reward for such virtue is death.⁸⁵ However, her life shows that, through an increase in patience, we can bear our sorrows and demises with less lonely and more peaceful hearts—and we can even bring others to goodness as well.

The Perfect Patience of Prometheus

Crucified to a mountaintop for the sake of humanity, Prometheus is perhaps as close to a Christ-like figure as the Greeks could come. Unlike Antigone, who is but a young woman, Prometheus is

⁷⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 136, a. 2.

⁸⁰ Sophocles, *Antigone*, 164.

⁸¹ Sophocles, 164.

⁸² Sophocles, 165, 168.

⁸³ Sophocles, 167-168.

⁸⁴ Augustine, “On Patience,” par. 2.

⁸⁵ Sophocles, *Antigone*, 164.

a renowned Titan.⁸⁶ Despite the fact that Prometheus aided Zeus and the gods against the other Titans, Zeus turns his back on Prometheus, ordering that Prometheus be lashed to a “desolate crag in the Caucasus” with adamantine chains.⁸⁷ What is the Titan’s crime? Saving humanity from being destroyed by Zeus. Prometheus explains:

As soon as [Zeus] ascended to the throne that was his father’s, straightway he assigned to the several gods their several privileges and portioned out the power, but to the unhappy breed of mankind he gave no heed, intending to blot the race out and create a new. Against these plans none stood save I: I dared. I rescued men from shattering destruction that would have carried them to Hades’ house; and therefore I am tortured on this rock, a bitterness to suffer, and a pain to pitiful eyes. I gave to mortals a precedence over myself in pity.⁸⁸

The story of Prometheus is similarly powerful to Antigone’s. In both cases, the titular characters—though innocent of real crime—are punished for doing good, seemingly serving as ancient examples of the maxim that no good deed goes unpunished. It is hard enough to practice patience when incidental ills befall our pursuit of the good. However, when the pursuit of good itself becomes the cause of the pain, the struggle to practice patience can take on heroic dimensions.

That Prometheus is struggling heroically is clear; being a Titan does not remove the pain. Shortly after being chained and abandoned, he cries: “Oh woe is me! I groan for the present sorrow, I groan for the sorrow to come, I groan questioning when there shall come a time when He shall ordain a limit to my sufferings.”⁸⁹ For a moment, he is tempted to despair. His suffering is enormous, and exactly how long it shall last remains a mystery. Patience, however, wins in his soul. Prometheus calms his heart, saying, “I bear, as lightly as I can, the destiny that fate has given me; for I know well against necessity, against its strength, no one can fight and win.”⁹⁰ Prometheus recognizes that life—fate—gives us pains that are unavoidable. Fighting them is futile. Of course, this patient acceptance of what one cannot change is not to be confused with passivity. In order to have serenity, one must have “willing endurance of what is painful”⁹¹—an active, not passive, frame of mind. Prometheus’ words and calm demeanor show this willing endurance.

What about Prometheus’ final cries of agony? The last lines of the play (though it likely had sequels, now lost) are stark: “O Holy mother mine, O Sky that circling brings the light to all, you see me, how I suffer, how unjustly.”⁹² Do these words display serenity of mind? In his defense, Zeus has just thrown a storm at the mountain, so it would be unrealistic for him to seem serene at that

⁸⁶ Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* (New York: Warner Books, 1999), 71.

⁸⁷ Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 40-41.

⁸⁸ Aeschylus, 43.

⁸⁹ Aeschylus, 41.

⁹⁰ Aeschylus, 41.

⁹¹ Clarke, *Patience: Meditations for a Month*, 1.

⁹² Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 53.

moment. In the words of Lewis, “I am not arguing that pain is not painful. Pain hurts. That is what the word means.”⁹³ Therefore, we cannot confuse serene spirit with continual external shows of happiness. After all, patience is not the same thing as insensitivity to pain, which would arguably take away the virtue of bearing pain. Aristotle is in agreement, writing that “nobility shines through [sufferings] when a man bears with resignation many great misfortunes, not through insensibility to pain but through nobility and greatness of soul.”⁹⁴ In both *Ethics* and *Politics*, Aristotle considers the good life to entail the practice of virtue. Still, he realizes that the material aspect of nature cannot be ignored: “A good man may make the best even of poverty and disease, and the other ills of life; but he can only attain happiness under the opposite conditions.”⁹⁵ Thus, Prometheus’ reactions to pain are hardly blameworthy. They are “human.”

In the case of Antigone, we saw that her impatience stops her from helping her sister, her lover, and her uncle. Aquinas writes, “man is said to possess his soul by patience, in so far as it removes by the root the passions that are evoked by hardships and disturb the soul.”⁹⁶ Antigone’s possession of her virtue, and therefore capacity to do more good, is weakened by her passions.

This is not the case, though, with Prometheus. Through patience, he restrains his passions and retains possession of his magnanimous soul. “Patience keeps man from the danger that his spirit may be broken by grief and lose its greatness,” writes Pieper.⁹⁷ One of the qualities that makes Prometheus great is that he cares for others over himself. Since his spirit is not broken by grief, Prometheus does not lose this aspect of his greatness. Despite immense suffering, he continues to think of others and aid them. Oceanos, a fellow Titan and a friend, comes to console and counsel Prometheus. Oceanos even offers to visit Zeus and attempt to persuade the god to let Prometheus go. However, Prometheus stops him, knowing that it will achieve no good and only endanger his friend. “Him you will not persuade,” Prometheus cautions. “He is not easily won over: look, take care lest coming here to me should hurt you.”⁹⁸ In addition to saving his friend, Prometheus is also able to help a stranger. Io, the maiden cursed into an ox, wanders by Prometheus. Though bearing his own ills, the kindly Titan does what he can to offer Io advice and hope. This kindness is further testimony that his sufferings have not created a bitter, resentful heart. “Because I am unlucky,” he says, “I would not, for that, have everyone unlucky too.”⁹⁹ By the power of his patience, Prometheus transcends his suffering and helps another.

⁹³ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 105.

⁹⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 346.

⁹⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *Great Books of the Western World*, 2nd ed., vol. 8 (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1993), 536.

⁹⁶ Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ* II-II, q. 136. a. 2.

⁹⁷ Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*. 129.

⁹⁸ Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 44.

⁹⁹ Aeschylus, 44.

The Real-life Patience of Socrates

While literary analysis is a time-honored way of exploring the human condition, it is worth examining a historical character along with these fictional figures for additional confirmation of the value of natural patience. Staying with the Greco-Roman world, we turn to the [literary] life and death of Socrates, as recounted by his pupil Plato.

Like Antigone and Prometheus, Socrates suffers on account of doing good. He lives the life of a peripatetic teacher, showing the supposedly great minds of Greece that they lack the wisdom and knowledge that they think they possess:

My hearers always imagine that I myself possess the wisdom which I find wanting in others; but the truth is, O men of Athens, that God only is wise; and in his answer he intends to show that the wisdom of men is worth little or nothing; he is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name by way of illustration, as if he said, He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing. And so I go about the world, obedient to the god, and search and make enquiry into the wisdom of any one, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise; and if he is not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show him that he is not wise; and my occupation quite absorbs me, and I have no time to give either to any public matter of interest or to any concern of my own, but I am in utter poverty by reason of my devotion to the god.¹⁰⁰

Thus, not only does Socrates devote his life to fighting against intellectual pride and falsehood, but he does so at great expense to his own welfare. For his service to the Greek people, he is accused of disbelieving in the gods, corrupting youth, subverting truth, and is ultimately brought to trial in Athens, his own country.

Socrates would seem rather justified in feeling embittered and angry, but then that would rob him of his serenity. While there is much about Socrates' trial that is remarkable, one of the most remarkable aspects is, in fact, his serenity. Rather than being disturbed by his ill treatment, he realizes that "the envy and detraction of the world" have long been and will continue to be sources of destruction.¹⁰¹ That is, his patience helps him keep his suffering in perspective; they do not disturb his soul. Even after he receives the death penalty, Socrates' patience preserves his clarity of vision: "The difficulty, my friends, is not to avoid death, but to avoid unrighteousness."¹⁰² Rather than being filled with regret and confusion, he holds on to his moral convictions in peace. He refuses to trade the good life for one of bitterness.

Just like Prometheus, Socrates' patience allows him to transcend his suffering and help others. At the very close of his trial, Socrates' first thought is his companions: "Friends, who would have

¹⁰⁰ Plato, *Apology*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *Great Books of the Western World*, 2nd ed., vol. 6 (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1993), 23.

¹⁰¹ Plato, 28.

¹⁰² Plato, 39.

acquitted me, I would like also to talk with you about the thing which has come to pass, while the magistrates are busy, and before I go to the place at which I must die.”¹⁰³ Socrates encourages his friends that this path is the right path, and that a good death provides “great reason to hope.”¹⁰⁴ Though Socrates’ death sentence is supposed to be carried out soon, it is ultimately prolonged for nearly a month. This could easily have allowed anxiety and disturbance to creep into his soul, but Socrates patiently awaits his end with complete resignation. His friend Crito finds him sleeping peacefully a few days before his death. “I only wish I were not so sleepless and depressed myself,” Crito laments.¹⁰⁵ Crito is in a frenzy to persuade Socrates to escape prison while he still can; he assures Socrates that the arrangements can easily be made—that guards can be bribed. Most of us would unthinkingly jump at the chance to escape a wrongful death sentence, but Socrates, preserving an even mind by his patience, takes the time to deliberate the proper course of action with Crito. This allows him the freedom to realize that, in his case, running is the “dishonorable way”.¹⁰⁶

The very day of Socrates’ death is no different. The fruit of his patience is an incredibly generous soul. His final day is spent conversing cheerfully with his friends, bringing them wisdom and even laughter.¹⁰⁷ When it comes time to drink the infamous cup of hemlock, there is no change. “Calm yourselves and try to be brave,” he tells his weeping companions.¹⁰⁸ And so passes the “bravest and the wisest and the most upright man”¹⁰⁹—and the most patient, too.

Conclusion

Imagining that he is Aeschylus, Louis Markos writes a letter to modern humanity:

I see that your age is averse to suffering. I don't suppose there has ever been an age that has enjoyed suffering, but yours seems bent on avoiding it at all costs. You have remedies for every ache and pain, whether it be physical, emotional, or spiritual. You insulate yourselves and your children from suffering and applaud yourselves for your ingenuity. Many of you have come to believe that you have a right not to suffer.

But no such right exists.

¹⁰³ Plato, 39.

¹⁰⁴ Plato, 40.

¹⁰⁵ Plato, *Crito*, trans. Hugh Tredennick, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 43b.

¹⁰⁶ Plato, 54c-d.

¹⁰⁷ Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. Hugh Tredennick, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 58e-59a.

¹⁰⁸ Plato, 117e.

¹⁰⁹ Plato, 118.

The world we live in can only flourish through suffering. . . . There are few, if any, goods that come to us except through trial and error and tribulation.¹¹⁰

Instead of viewing suffering as an abnormal human state that gets in the way of life as we would have it, we must view pain—and the necessity of bearing it over time—as fundamental to life as it is. Not only will this bring us peace, but it will also help us help others and bear fruit in this fallen world. The Greco-Roman world clearly realized this, as we have seen in their ancient literature. “Whatever may happen, we master fortune by fully accepting it,” Aeneas advises.¹¹¹

The modern world needs to realize this too. As Markos points out, via the voice of Aeschylus, technology has made modern man feel like suffering can be avoided with the right solution. However, this is a lie. While technology eases certain pains for sure—I am not interested in ridding the world of acetaminophen—it comes with a price. Namely, a lack of realization, acceptance, and practice of a fundamental aspect of reality; the necessity of bearing pain across time. In a world that is becoming more and more instantaneous, patience is becoming a lost concept. One cannot help but wonder if another part of modernity’s problem is a lack of understanding what the good life entails. The good life is not pain free. The good life is pain accepted and pain transcended.

While this essay has focused on the benefits of natural patience, natural patience does have its limits, for the truest and fullest transcendence ultimately means connection with the Divine. That is, we need a Christian patience, an acceptance of suffering that is rooted in love of God.¹¹² Much could be said on that topic—far more than can be done here with any justice. What can be noted here is that natural patience can serve as a medium to carry us in the direction of Christian patience. “Having experienced the worst and risen above it, we realize that there is something in us that transcends the merely physical,” writes Markos. “Ultimately, we stop thinking about ourselves altogether and rest in the arms of something, or someone, larger and wiser.”¹¹³ We see this happen in the life of Socrates. Throughout his trial, his mind and heart are turned away from this world. His hopes are placed in the supernatural. “[B]e of good cheer about death,” he says to his friends, “and know of a certainty, that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. He and his are not neglected by the gods.”¹¹⁴

We also see this supernatural influence in the life of Archie Williams, for he did not survive thirty-seven years unjustly imprisoned on natural patience alone. “Since I can remember in life, my relationship always has been with God,” he says. “Believing in him and trusting in him. I don’t know

¹¹⁰ Louis Markos, “Aeschylus on Suffering,” *The Imaginative Conservative*, March 5, 2019, <https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2019/03/aeschylus-on-suffering-louis-markos.html>.

¹¹¹ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. C. Day Lewis, in *Great Books of the Western World*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1993), 170.

¹¹² Gabriel, *Divine Intimacy*, 365; Clarke, *Patience*, 1.

¹¹³ Markos, “Aeschylus on Suffering.”

¹¹⁴ Plato, *Apology*, 41.

what other peoples' beliefs are, but that's my belief. That's where I get everything from".¹¹⁵ His patience, faith, hope, and charity are beyond inspiring.

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¹¹⁵ D'Agostino, "Why Archie Williams."

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The Book of Revelation as a Breviary of Hope

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Abstract

The New Testament texts collectively bear witness to the apocalyptic and eschatological orientation of the early Christian movement, which saw in the death and resurrection of Jesus the decisive intervention of God in history and the inauguration of a new age. As the capstone of the canon, Revelation is perhaps the clearest example of apocalyptic eschatology, even while it appears to be quite different from other New Testament texts. In this article I offer an analysis of Revelation as a text of hope, written to late first century Christian communities in need of hope as a basis for their beliefs and actions while facing an increasingly ambiguous and threatening social, political, and religious situation. My argument will proceed with an exploration of hope as a concept, noting its multifaceted nature and various definitions, moving to an analysis of the place of hope within Christian theology. The main body of the article is concerned with an exploration of the role of hope within Revelation, beginning with an examination of its language, genre, context, and purpose, and concluding with an examination of its content and narrative flow, noting how these aspects of the text coalesce into a theology of hope. Ultimately, I conclude that Revelation was written for the purpose of creating and sustaining hope in its readers (reading from the perspective of an oppressed minority group) and was intended to be circulated and reread in church communities as a continuous witness to hope in the face of an uncertain future.

Key Words: Hope, Revelation, Apocalypse, Eschatology.



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Introduction

The Book of Revelation is known for many things, not least its strong language, unsettling imagery, and how different it seems to be from the other New Testament texts. When this book comes to mind, the author¹¹⁶ is not typically characterised as primarily conveying a message of hope, and the Greek word for hope (ἐλπίς; *elpis*) does not actually appear in the text. However, in what follows I intend to argue that the instillation of hope in his readers is among the most fundamental reasons why John wrote the book, so much so that the entirety of the text can be characterised by hope and read through the lens of a theology of hope. This would especially have been the case for its audience of Christ-followers whose beliefs would have been influenced by apocalyptic eschatology and the various social and political upheavals of the first-century Roman Empire.¹¹⁷ John's readers would have understood this text as dominated by a hopeful impulse and as defined with faith-filled expectation as its overall meta-framework.

My argument also rests on the assumption that Revelation, despite being something of a genre mosaic that combines various types of writing, is basically a liturgical text that was sent to actual churches and intended to be read repeatedly in worship gatherings (hence the designation as a "breviary").¹¹⁸ Also, rather than being at the margins of the Christian canon, I intend to show that John's eschatology (that is, his understanding of "last things") is in line with the rest of the New Testament and not an unusual variance in the beliefs of the early churches regarding either theology in general or the future in particular. Early Christian theology had a strongly eschatological orientation, as evidenced from the earliest canonical New Testament document (presumably 1

¹¹⁶ Throughout this article I will refer to the author as "John" because this is how he identifies himself (Rev. 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). I make no further assumptions about which John this is, except to say (along with most scholars) that this was his actual name and not intended to be a pseudonym or pseudepigraphal device. The precise identity of who here is "John the Seer" is not important to the basic thesis being argued, but we can at least say that he was a Jewish-Christian prophet. For a thorough explanation of the various positions on authorship, see David Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1997): xlvii-lv.

¹¹⁷ That Revelation is a first-century text is almost unanimously supported in modern interpretation. I will offer a more detailed discussion of its date and context below, but for a concise treatment of dating, see Buist Fanning, *Revelation* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020): 28-33.

¹¹⁸ Helpfully noted by Peter Leithart, *Revelation 1-11* (ITC; London: T&T Clark, 2018): 45; similarly, Ugo Vanni, "Liturgical Dialogue as a Literary Form in the Book of Revelation," *New Testament Studies* 37 (1991): 348-372. The seven churches of Rev. 2:1-3:21 were actual communities in Asia Minor specified by John as addressees, and commentators agree that this text was intended to be circulated among them and read repeatedly in their gatherings. The language of the introductory verses, which unite lector and hearers, suggest this intention. For example, the text initially addresses hearers with a benediction (1:1-3), and a shared proclamation (1:4-7), which the author communicates in a context of worship on a day when early communities gathered (1:10). The second and third chapters combine encouragement and rebuke, which follow liturgical patterns of a call to worship and an exhortation to confession, and the fourth chapter has the author in a heavenly worship setting. Finally, the text ends with a call for hearers to respond (22:6-21). This interactive structure indicates the intention for liturgical participation.

Thessalonians) onward.¹¹⁹ Christian eschatology concerns itself with time (the future, influenced as it is by the past, necessarily bears on the present), and the New Testament as a whole witnesses that the substance of early Christian eschatology was hope.¹²⁰ Thus, hope is fundamental to the early Christian theological landscape, with Revelation as something of a canonical capstone. To argue this more fully, however, it is necessary first to explore how hope itself can be defined.

Hope as a (Variegated) Concept

What is precisely meant by “hope” is perhaps more easily felt emotionally or recognised intuitively than it is defined conceptually. One recent explanation calls it “an ambiguous phenomenon” with “many associations . . . [y]et its core is simple: hope denotes a desire (we hope for something) and it involves a probability (the chances of attainment of the desire have to be something between zero and one).”¹²¹ While hope does involve a desire, it may be better paired with the idea of expectancy more so than probability. Given that hope is generally a subjective idea and probability presumes some level of objectivity in its implication of possibilities, a hopeful person may be better understood as having desire with expectancy, an expectancy carrying some level of substantiation based on *a priori* assumptions.¹²² With this basic understanding, we turn to a more detailed exploration of nuances in the expression of hope.

An Aspectual Geography

Hope necessarily requires a purpose for its exercise; no one can hope without having some reason for hoping. Hope likewise has an effect on the person participating in its exercise which is self-

¹¹⁹ cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11; Mk. 13:24-27; Rom. 8:18-25; 2 Pet. 3:1-13. See Martin Webber and Jacobus Kok, “Early Christian Thinking on Hope,” in *Historical and Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, ed. Steven van den Heuvel (New York: Springer, 2020): 25-46. I refer to “Christian” theology and “early Christianity” for convenience to refer to the views of first-century Christ followers, but I do not intend to suggest that Christian beliefs were monolithic or entirely unified at this point, nor do I dispute that John’s community may represent only one iteration of various “early Christianities” or Jewish-Christian expressions of theology.

¹²⁰ cf. Ac. 26:6-8; 1 Cor. 15:19; Col. 1:5; 1 Thess. 4:13; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Pet. 1:13.

¹²¹ Steven van den Heuvel, “Preface,” in *Perspectives*, v.

¹²² As formulated by Stanley Toussaint, “The Doctrine of the Future and the Concept of Hope,” in *Eschatology: Biblical, Historical and Practical Approaches*, eds. D. Jeffrey Bingham and Glenn Kreider (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016): 54. Avoiding the idea of probability is not meant to indicate that hope cannot be based on what is factual, but only that hope does not absolutely require factuality to be genuine. Rather, an attribute of a genuinely hopeful person is the person’s persistence in hope despite having reasons not to hope, or having the object of hope be basically improbable and transcending the bounds imposed by probability. For a wide-ranging discussion of basic definitions of hope from Aquinas to the modern day, see Nicholas Smith, “From the Concept of Hope to the Principle of Hope,” in Janet Horrigan and Ed Wiltse (eds.), *Hope against Hope: Philosophies, Cultures and Politics of Possibility and Doubt* (Leiden: Brill, 2010): 3-22.

sustaining. It is for this reason that David Elliot can write that “hope changes our perspective on suffering, discouragement, injustice, tragedy, and death. By making clear that our present situation is not permanent . . . hope precludes undue dejection and despair.”¹²³ The prospect of circumstantial change (or in an eschatological framework, ultimate reconciliation) allows for the possibility of finding meaning and motivation regardless of the present situation, whether this is one of suffering, marginalisation, loss, absence, insecurity, or even certain death. Since hope concerns the possible or not-yet-actual, it is a practice in liminality, a “living in the middle.”¹²⁴

Just as eschatology is necessarily linked to time, hope must involve time in that it is experienced within time and anticipates future time.¹²⁵ It does not ignore past time but it is supra-present, in that while exercised in the present, it looks beyond the present and its antecedents in such a way that the present is affected by the not-yet-actual future.¹²⁶ Hope therefore always involves time and implies the transcendence of time-bound experience, and within a text like Revelation, at least four different levels of time interact in the expression of hope: the present within the text-world, the future within the text-world, the present in the reader’s world, and the future within the reader’s world. Hope is most evident in the interaction between the reader’s present and the text-world’s future. In the case of Revelation, I will suggest that John intended the interaction between these two experiences of time to create and sustain hope.

From a philosophical perspective, James K. A. Smith contends that intentionality, constitution, and horizontality are all essential characteristics of hope. Hope is intentional because there is always something to which it is directed, it is constituted in that there is a meaning that allows one to exercise hope, and it is horizontal in that it is forward-focused in its future orientation.¹²⁷ On this threefold characterisation, Smith concludes that any notion of hope implies five constituent elements: one who hopes, an object of hope, the action of hope, a ground for that hope, and the fulfilment of that hope.¹²⁸ These three characteristics and five elements are helpful tools to

¹²³ David Elliot, “Hope in Theology,” in *Perspectives*, 119.

¹²⁴ David Hohne, *The Last Things* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019): 13.

¹²⁵ I define “time” in a basically Aristotelian way, namely as a measurement of change. It is the continuum of existence to which we conform and a construct that acts on us. See Ursula Coope, *Time for Aristotle: Physics IV.10-14* (OAS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. 99-112.

¹²⁶ Ronald Michener, “Post-Kantian to Postmodern Considerations of (Theological) Hope,” in *Perspectives*, 77-78.

¹²⁷ James K. A. Smith, “Determined Hope: A Phenomenology of Christian Expectation,” in *The Future of Hope: Christian Tradition amid Modernity and Postmodernity*, eds. Miroslav Volf and William Katerburg, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004): 206-208. Smith is ultimately indebted to Edmund Husserl’s concepts and vocabulary in this framework. Pamela McCarroll, in *The End of Hope—The Beginning: Narratives of Hope in the Face of Death and Trauma* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), defines hope along similar lines, saying that it is “the experience of opening the horizons of meaning and participation in relationship to time, other human and nonhuman beings, and/or the transcendent” (48).

¹²⁸ Smith, “Determined Hope,” 207-209.

understand the nature of hope, and a supporting framework for approaching what hope means within Revelation as a text.

If this is the nature of hope, its exercise consists of more than an attitude, and therefore it would be wrong to associate hope with the idea of optimism.¹²⁹ Hope is more similar to confidence than to a general positivity and should be understood as more active than passive. If similar to confidence, it is “a confidence that one’s project will prevail . . . [an] active commitment to the desirability and realisability of a certain end.”¹³⁰ Seeing hope as active leads to Terry Eagleton’s suggestion that it has a “performative” aspect, in that the exercise of hope may work to bring about the desired fulfilment thereof, and in that case it “is not simply an anticipation of the future but an active force in its constitution.”¹³¹ Hope is more dispositional than it is experiential, just as there is a difference between showing patience and being patient.¹³² Therefore, it would also be too simple to claim that hope is an emotion.¹³³ Hope may have properties shared with emotions (such as having an intentional object and functioning as a motivation for action), and may also have degrees as emotions do, but these do not make the two properly similar.¹³⁴ “Hope that” may represent a different degree than “hope in,” and certainly if God is the object of one’s hope there is a difference in degree from, say, hoping for health during a bout of sickness.¹³⁵ A higher degree of hope, such as that which I argue John intends to fortify in his readers, would necessarily require faith in God as its object.

Beyond its nature and exercise, I would argue with Pamela McCarroll that hope is a fundamental aspect of human experience and without it survival itself, or at least the actualisation of coherence, is not possible.¹³⁶ It must be nourished throughout one’s life, and can persist even without apparent ground for its existence.¹³⁷ Hope is also most clearly manifested in circumstances of bereavement and/or oppression, so much so that we could argue that “hope is impossible without engagement

¹²⁹ Recently argued by Terry Eagleton, *Hope without Optimism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015). An optimist assumes that things will work out well, but one hoping may do so without necessarily assuming this.

¹³⁰ Eagleton, *Hope*, 41. Anthony Kelly understands hope similarly, writing that “hope in all its registers implies a trustful and confident movement toward the future. It is trustful, for it is relying on something or someone for the help that is needed. There is confidence, too: whatever the evils that threaten, hope anticipates an escape or release into a fuller dimension of life. It is always about a movement forward” (*Eschatology and Hope* [Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006]: 1).

¹³¹ Eagleton, *Hope*, 84. For a similar “active” idea of hope and its phenomenology, see Smith, “Concept,” 11.

¹³² Eagleton, 57. Or, as he also puts it, “someone who is sober only once in his life cannot lay claim to the virtue of temperance.”

¹³³ Probably most famously asserted by David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, 2.3.9.

¹³⁴ J.P. Day, “Hope,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 6.2 (1969): 89-91.

¹³⁵ Day, “Hope,” 94-97.

¹³⁶ McCarroll, *End*, 21.

¹³⁷ McCarroll, 21.

with despair and the negations of life.”¹³⁸ Perhaps the most well-known Christian thinker to view hope from this perspective is Jacques Ellul, who argues that “hope comes alive only in the dreary silence of God, in our loneliness before a closed heaven, in our abandonment.”¹³⁹ Anthony Kelly agrees, arguing that “genuine hope is always ‘against hope’ . . . hope is at home in world of the unpredictable where no human logic or expectation is in control.”¹⁴⁰ In contexts of overwhelming difficulty, then, we can say that hope is manifested as a response of protest and survival, and one that must be nurtured over time.

From an historical perspective, there are some differences between contemporary conceptualisations of hope and ancient ones, whether Jewish or Greco-Roman. In modern parlance, hope has an inherently positive sense, while in Greek this was not always the case.¹⁴¹ The Greek term *ἐλπίς* could carry negative connotations, or denote fear or trepidation, and ancient writers acknowledge that this makes speaking of the future more difficult and ambiguous.¹⁴² Generally, hope for Greco-Roman thinkers did not appear to have a particularly religious or eschatological meaning, and for the most part, “human beings were thought to stand without hope before the hostile forces of guilt and death.”¹⁴³ Earthly or socio-political hopes, however, were important for Greco-Roman thinkers. Nearer to John’s time, Caesar Augustus was widely considered to be fulfilling old hopes and kindling new ones, especially as related to a period of imperial and economic prosperity and peace.¹⁴⁴

Jewish rhetoric of hope, as observed in the Hebrew Scriptures and their Septuagint Greek translation (LXX), generally has YHWH as its object. In the LXX *ἐλπίς* occurs most often in the Psalms and in Isaiah, and often represents one of three Hebrew terms: *תִּקְוָה* (*tiqvā*) connoting expectation; *בִּטְחָן* (*beṭaḥ*) connoting safety, security (or, when used verbally), trust and confidence; or *חֹסֶן* (*hāsā*) connoting taking refuge.¹⁴⁵ Moisés Silva suggests that hope in the Hebrew Scriptures is “a confession of assurance,” and while resembling secular hope, it is broader in content, basis

¹³⁸ McCarroll, 35.

¹³⁹ Jacques Ellul, *Hope in a Time of Abandonment* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972): 177. For Ellul, while hope requires abandonment, it must also be “the opposite of resignation” (183).

¹⁴⁰ Kelly, *Eschatology*, 5.

¹⁴¹ Moisés Silva, “ἐλπίς,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014): 183.

¹⁴² For example, cf. Euripides, *Orestes*, 859; Plato, *Laws*, 644d.

¹⁴³ Silva, “ἐλπίς,” 183. Paul seems to assume as much in 1 Thess. 4:13, when he differentiates Christians from other people by the fact that they have hope in the face of death. An absence of hope beyond death was certainly not absolute, as some Greco-Roman mentions of hope do carry these connotations. For a nuanced discussion, see Rudolf Bultmann, “ἐλπίς, ἐλπίζω, ἀπ-, προελπίζω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964): 521.

¹⁴⁴ Bultmann, “ἐλπίς,” 521.

¹⁴⁵ Silva, “ἐλπίς,” 183; Bultmann, 522. Taking refuge involved a sense of patient waiting and yearning for deliverance.

and effect, since it tends to stretch far beyond personal or individual hopes, but embraces the glorification of YHWH, his sovereign rule over the earth, and the full conversion of Israel and the nations.¹⁴⁶ What sustains hope in the Hebrew Scriptures is God's *ῥῶν* (*hesed*), his covenant faithfulness, leading to a trust in his commitment to his people.¹⁴⁷

Later Second Temple Judaism closer to John's lifetime had a more eschatological focus, even while being characterised by a variety of eschatological expectations. As Israel was increasingly subjugated to imperial powers, eschatological hopes were focused on national restoration, and, among certain Jewish subgroups, on the coming of a royal Messiah figure.¹⁴⁸ On how this differs from Hellenistic ideas, Bultmann notes that

this hope is not a consoling dream of the imagination which causes us to forget our present troubles, nor are we warned of its uncertainty, as in the Greek world. The life of the righteous is grounded in hope. To have hope, to have a future, is a sign that things are well with us. This hope is naturally directed to God. It is naturally referred to most frequently when man is in trouble and hopes that God will deliver and help him. This hope is thus trust.¹⁴⁹

The hope for God's deliverance in the broader future shaped the community's relationship to its own future, which affects the community's interpretation of its past and present.¹⁵⁰ This is a necessary background for a reading of Revelation because John was a Jewish writer who was highly influenced by the Hebrew Scriptures, alluding to more texts with more frequency than any other New Testament writer.¹⁵¹ With these initial observations in place, we will now examine how hope is to be understood from a Christian perspective and its place in early Christian thinking before moving toward a more detailed analysis of its role in Revelation.

Hope in Christian Theology

The idea of hope in the earliest Christian writings is deeply indebted to the Hebrew Scriptures.¹⁵² Specific terminology for hope occurs most in Paul's writings,¹⁵³ but the centrality of hope is so

¹⁴⁶ Silva, 184.

¹⁴⁷ Werner Jeanrond, *Reasons to Hope* (London: T&T Clark, 2020): 6.

¹⁴⁸ Silva, "ἐλπίς," 185. Bultmann, "ἐλπίς," 524. We see this more clearly in light of the Qumran documents, which focused hope on God's salvific intervention in the world. At least for some of the readers of the Qumran texts, the commencement of the Messianic age would lead to the judgment of God's enemies and, through this, the oppressors of the Jewish people. These promises were seen as given communally to the people of Israel, that the future of the people belonged to God.

¹⁴⁹ Bultmann, 522.

¹⁵⁰ For more on how a community's present is shaped by its future hopes, see McCarroll, *End*, 39.

¹⁵¹ G.K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (LNTS; London: T&T Clark, 2015): 60-128.

¹⁵² Bultmann flatly states, "the NT concept of hope is essentially determined by the OT" ("ἐλπίς," 530).

¹⁵³ Specific rhetoric of hope occurs thirty-six times in the Pauline corpus, and nineteen times in verbal form.

fundamental that the Christian message itself is described in 1 Peter 1:3 as rebirth to “a living hope,” and God is described in Romans 15:13 as “the God of hope.” The New Testament rhetoric of hope never carries a sense of ambiguity or fear, but entirely the expectation of good, through the lens of an understanding of what was previously future having become present for believers in Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁴ The hope to which the New Testament witnesses is always focused on God and/or Christ as object, with the Jewish idea of the universal rule of God in the background. Hope looks forward, as will be shown, to the salvific intervention of God as depicted in Revelation. Early Christian hope embraced a threefold foundation of the expectation of God’s faithfulness to his promises, covenant trust in God’s ability to actualise that future, and the patience of waiting in present circumstances.¹⁵⁵ Hope is so important in the New Testament because it was considered to have been substantiated in the divine act of salvation accomplished by Jesus in the past, which then informed the attitude of believers to what God was continuing to accomplish in the present, and also intending to accomplish with finality in the future.

Theologically, to understand the centrality of hope in early Christianity, one must understand early Christian eschatology. Christian hope is fundamentally eschatological because early Christianity itself is thoroughly eschatological.¹⁵⁶ Eschatology concerns last things; it deals with “with what happens at the end of time and beyond time: death and the end of the world, resurrection and new creation, God’s judgment as deliverance into eternal life or, alternatively, deliverance into eternal condemnation. This arrangement proposes and temporal perspective, that future is the horizon of eschatology.”¹⁵⁷ Much if not all Christian theology grew out of eschatological expectation, namely the hope for a consummated future initiated in the advent of Jesus who

¹⁵⁴ Silva, “ἐλπίς,” 186.

¹⁵⁵ Bultmann, “ἐλπίς,” 531.

¹⁵⁶ Karl Barth famously remarked that “if Christianity be not altogether thoroughgoing eschatology, there remains in it no relationship whatever with Christ” (*The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns [6th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933]: 314). More recently, John Phelan asserts that “far from being at the periphery of the faith, it is no exaggeration to say that eschatology is the heart of Christianity” (*Essential Eschatology: Our Present and Future Hope* [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013]: 11). Here I speak of “eschatology” not to indicate that there was only one “Christian eschatology” or eschatological perspective, but I am referring to an eschatological orientation that characterised groups of first-century Christ followers and can be detected in their documents.

¹⁵⁷ Gerhard Sauter, *What Dare We Hope? Reconsidering Eschatology* (Atlanta: Trinity Press, 1999): 2.

preached repentance and the presence of God's kingdom,¹⁵⁸ which was uniquely manifested in him and advanced through his death and resurrection.¹⁵⁹

The most influential work on the relationship between hope and Christian eschatology has come from Jürgen Moltmann.¹⁶⁰ For Moltmann, eschatology itself is hope. As such it

embraces both the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it. From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day. For Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ, and strains after the promises of the universal future of Christ Hence eschatology cannot really be only a part of Christian doctrine. Rather, the eschatological outlook is characteristic of all Christian proclamation, of every Christian existence and of the whole church.¹⁶¹

If the very foundation of a Christian understanding of God is based in hope, Moltmann contends that the future is an essential part of God's nature and theology itself must be "reconstructed in the light of its future goal."¹⁶² Any praxis flowing from this basis entails present action to be informed by an idea of and awareness of the (eschatological) future.¹⁶³

A core aspect of Moltmann's understanding of hope is the Jewish-Christian proclamation of a promise-making and promise-keeping God, whose promises are a key aspect of his self-revelation.¹⁶⁴ A "promise" is defined by Moltmann as "a declaration which announces the coming

¹⁵⁸ In Christopher Rowland's words, the kingdom of God "probably refers to a future age of glory, when the divine will would be revealed in human affairs . . . Jesus is presented as the agent of inauguration of the coming divine kingdom" ("Eschatology," 59). God's kingship of course entails his sovereign lordship and influence over the affairs of creation. For more on the concept of God's kingdom, see Nicholas Perrin, *The Kingdom of God: A Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019).

¹⁵⁹ Sauter, *Hope*, 36.

¹⁶⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967 [1964]). Important evaluations of Moltmann's contributions include M. Douglas Meeks, *Origins of the Theology of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1974); Timothy Harvie, *Jürgen Moltmann's Ethics of Hope: Eschatological Possibilities for Moral Action* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009); Poul , *Leaning into the Future: The Kingdom of God in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann and the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2011)

¹⁶¹ Moltmann, *Hope*, 16.

¹⁶² Moltmann, 16.

¹⁶³ Moltmann, 17.

¹⁶⁴ Moltmann, 102. Promises were so key to Judaism that Moltmann even called Judaism "a religion of expectation." Indeed, many of the Hebrew prophetic texts anticipated a "Day of YHWH" which entailed a future intervention that would bring both justice and deliverance (cf. Isa. 2:12; Am. 5:18; Zeph. 1:7). Various New Testament passages indicate that the early Christians adapted this idea (cf. 1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6; 1 Jn. 4:17).

of a reality that does not yet exist," which leads the recipient(s) to set themselves toward a future fulfilment, focused not on possibilities inherent in the present but on what is possible to the God of the promise.¹⁶⁵ Trusting this promise reinforces the recipients' sense of history, which trends toward fulfilment of the promise. This promise is not yet congruous with present reality, but "stands in contradiction to the reality open to experience now and heretofore," creating "an interval of tension" between reception and fulfilment, which depends on God.¹⁶⁶ On this basis Moltmann can define Christian hope as "nothing else than the expectation of those things which faith has believed to have been truly promised by God."¹⁶⁷

In the context of the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus is the decisive event that forms the basis of eschatological hope, because as a supernatural event it intersects natural history and points forward toward the age to come, or in Moltmann's words, "it discloses an eschatological future."¹⁶⁸ Therefore, the substance of Christian hope for the future is multi-directional in that it looks back to and derives from the specific event of the resurrection, an essentially proleptic event which manifests the future reign of God and transforms present possibilities for action.¹⁶⁹ As a result, much of the New Testament is concerned with the interpretation of the event of the resurrection, its bearing on the present experience of believers, and the overwhelming expectation of final fulfilment in the return (or Parousia) of Jesus, which fully actualises the promise of God's final intervention.¹⁷⁰

Jesus's first followers taught that his basic message of the already-but-not-yet inaugurated kingdom of God (concisely summarised in Mark 1:15) was eschatological. His discipleship efforts were understood as the formation of an "eschatological community, a community of the last and ultimate days."¹⁷¹ This community assumed that they would experience resurrection from death

¹⁶⁵ Moltmann, 103.

¹⁶⁶ Moltmann, 104.

¹⁶⁷ Moltmann, 20. Hope for Moltmann anticipates the revelation of what faith has accepted. On the relation between these concepts he writes that "faith has the priority, but hope the primacy. Without faith's knowledge of Christ, hope becomes a utopia and remains hanging in the air. But without hope, faith falls to pieces."

¹⁶⁸ Moltmann, 181.

¹⁶⁹ In this way "hope acts ... as to bring to the limitations of the present some anticipation of what it ultimately envisions" (Kelly, *Eschatology*, 6).

¹⁷⁰ Moltmann, 228. As Harvie summarizes, "Christian hope is a future that is promised in the past work of God in history which alters the Christian conception of and engagement with the present" (*Moltmann's Ethics*, 14). The idea of Christ's Parousia is an "overwhelming expectation" because it is attested throughout the New Testament (cf. 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Thess. 2:1; Jas. 3:7; 2 Pt. 1:16). As described in 1 Cor 11:26, even the most primitive eucharist tradition looks forward to the Parousia as a celebration "until he comes."

¹⁷¹ Phelan, *Eschatology*, 13.

as Jesus did,¹⁷² and that this would follow an expected future return of Jesus.¹⁷³ The kingdom of God in Christian teaching is an already-but-not-yet reality because Jesus's initial coming is considered an inauguration but not a consummation of it, so that in the person of Jesus the eschatological future arrives in the present, and after Jesus's departure, his community exists in an intermediate, liminal plane.¹⁷⁴ As we will see, Revelation's vision of consummation then illustrates the final end of what was inaugurated in Jesus's initial coming, and it thereby substantiates the hope on which resurrection faith is based.¹⁷⁵

Christian hope is concerned with both the proximate and ultimate, but eschatology shows why ultimate hope gives life to proximate hope.¹⁷⁶ For example, if in his death Jesus is understood both to deliver a person from the power of sin presently and to promise salvation from the consequences of sin ultimately, then the ultimate hope of this salvation gives life to the proximate hope of freedom from the effects of sin.¹⁷⁷ Or, if God is understood as promising liberation from oppression and victory over evil powers, this ultimate hope gives life to the proximate hope of strength to endure. In this way one maintains a tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of God's intervention in establishing his rule.¹⁷⁸ It is from this perspective that we are prepared to interpret Revelation, since, as Adela Yarbro Collins puts it, "it was the tension between John's vision of the kingdom of God and his environment that moved him to write his apocalypse."¹⁷⁹

The Role of Hope in the Book of Revelation

Given the eschatological focus of not only Christian hope but all of Christian theology, we can now understand Revelation and its idea of hope as much nearer to the centre of early Christian

¹⁷² Mark depicts Jesus assuming a future resurrection in Mk. 12:26-27, and Paul describes it as his ultimate aim in Phil. 3:10-11. Later, Tertullian (155-220 CE) writes pointedly that "the hope of Christians is the resurrection of the dead" (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 1).

¹⁷³ For example, Mk. 13:26-27; Mt. 25:31-46.

¹⁷⁴ L.J. van den Brom, "Eschatology and Time: Which Relationship?" in *Christian Hope in Context*, eds. Aadvan von Egmond and Dirk von Keulen (Leiden: Brill, 2001): 151. The eschaton should not be understood as an event "after history," but rather as "beyond history." It eclipses but transcends the historical plane and its attendant experience of time. If time is a measurement of change, the eschaton is then an embodied existence without change.

¹⁷⁵ van den Brom, "Eschatology," 151.

¹⁷⁶ Christiaan Mostert, "Hope as Ultimate and Proximate," in von Egmond and von Keulen, *Christian Hope*, 239.

¹⁷⁷ E.M. Conradie, "Eschatological Dimensions of a 'Theology of Life'," in von Egmond and von Keulen, *Christian Hope*, 170.

¹⁷⁸ Conradie, "Dimensions," 172.

¹⁷⁹ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Louisville: Westminster, 1984): 106.

belief and identity than is often assumed.¹⁸⁰ Even with its arcane imagery and subversive ciphers Revelation has a coherent narrative which employs ideas utilised throughout the rest of the New (and Old) Testament. John depicts God as the Creator enthroned in heaven (1:4), Jesus as the ruler of all earthly authorities (1:5), and Satan as the source of authority for the powers that oppose God and his people (13:4). Situations in the seven churches that comprise John's audience are first addressed and evaluated by Jesus (2:1-3:22). John then has a series of visionary experiences involving seven seals (4:1-8:1), seven trumpets (8:2-11:9), seven signs (12:1-15:2), and seven bowls (15:1-16:21), portending final judgment on the Roman Empire (cast as Babylon) and its representatives, on all God's enemies, and on Satan, all of which engage in war against God and are defeated (17:1-18:24), with God celebrated as just and victorious over evil (19:1-20:15). Finally, the last vision is of a new heaven, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem (21:1-22:5), with a concluding call for the readers to respond (22:6-21).¹⁸¹

In what follows I intend to show that hope is the central message of Revelation and the driving force in its narrative. As Poul Guttesson helpfully summarises,

From the outset it sets the present in the context of the urgency of the future and it moves relentlessly toward the eschatological climax of the descent of the New Jerusalem (21:1—22:5). God is depicted as the coming one (1:4, 8; 4:8) and the book expects the arrival of Christ from the beginning (1:7). Obedience and perseverance are encouraged with the promise of future rewards and evil and disobedience come with a warning of punishment. Revelation 11:15–19 is the most succinct statement of the book's eschatological hope and it will form the basis of this exposition of how Revelation sees the future as a "regime change," the time when the powers that now have usurped the position of authority in the world will be defeated, the time when God will occupy the authoritative centre in the earthly realm that is rightfully his.¹⁸²

John intends to show his communities a vision of God as victorious, as guiding history, and as more powerful than any other force that is asserting itself against his readers. This vision is the ground

¹⁸⁰ Rowland, "Eschatology," 58. Rowland suggests that "to understand the heart of the New Testament is to grapple with the message of hope in the pages of the apocalypse."

¹⁸¹ As Stephen Smalley puts it, "no scholarly consensus exists about the structural analysis of Revelation" (*The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012]: 19). Perhaps the one commonality among all commentators is disagreement over how Revelation is to be outlined. Regardless of how it is structured, it is agreed that the book is a coherent narrative and a literary unity. In terms of the sequence, most commentators argue that the visions are not intended to be linear or chronological, but as simultaneous or recapitulatory (cf. Michael Gilbertson, *God and History in the Book of Revelation: New Testament Studies in Dialogue with Pannenberg and Moltmann* [SNTSMS 124; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005]: 111; Brian Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* [NLT; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013]: 21).

¹⁸² Guttesson, *Leaning*, 123.

of Christian hope.¹⁸³ To lay the groundwork for how John accomplishes this task, which is the presentation of what I would call an *apocalyptic theology of hope*, it will be necessary to elucidate several elements of literary and historical background.

Understanding John's Communicative Medium

Revelation is an eschatological book oriented toward fulfilment, but its precise expression of hope is mediated through its very particular language and genre. Most interpreters agree that while Revelation is broadly associated with a type of ancient writing common to Second Temple Judaism known as apocalyptic literature, it actually is a literary mosaic which bends and intentionally blends apocalyptic, prophetic, and epistolary genres.¹⁸⁴ Identifying genre is important in our exploration of the role of hope because it provides a framework for readers to create meaning from the text.¹⁸⁵ As a letter, Revelation was written to be read in and circulated through church communities.¹⁸⁶ As a prophecy, Revelation purports to bring its readers “a prophetic word of God, enabling them to discern the divine purpose in their situation and respond to their situation in a way appropriate to this purpose.”¹⁸⁷ As an apocalypse, Revelation corresponds to the oft-cited definition provided by John Collins, as it is revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which what John receives is mediated by an otherworldly being, “disclosing a transcendent reality that is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.”¹⁸⁸ To say that John is writing apocalyptic literature is not so much to designate the form of his work as it is to describe a device that he participates in, one which functions to confirm the authority of the text and its contents as divine disclosure.¹⁸⁹

The apocalyptic device that Revelation uses is generally in line with other Jewish apocalypses like 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra, in that it is a political form of resistance literature that is the product of a

¹⁸³ Helpfully stated by N.T. Wright, “Revelation and Christian Hope: Political Implications of the Revelation to John,” in *Revelation and the Politics of Apocalyptic Interpretation*, eds. Richard Hays and Stefan Alkier (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012): 124.

¹⁸⁴ G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013): 37; Gordon Fee, *Revelation: A New Covenant Commentary* (NCCS; Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2013): xii; Craig Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AYBC; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015): 104-112; Grant Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002): 10; Ian Paul, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018): 30; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 2. Revelation identifies itself as an apocalypse (1:1), as a prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18-19), and as a letter directed specifically to churches in Asia Minor (2:1-3:22).

¹⁸⁵ Mitchell Reddish, “The Genre of the Book of Revelation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, ed. Craig Koester (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020): 21.

¹⁸⁶ As an ancient letter writer would, John indicates directions for use (1:3) and intended audience (1:11).

¹⁸⁷ Bauckham, *Theology*, 7.

¹⁸⁸ John Collins, “Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9.

¹⁸⁹ Reddish, “Genre,” 22.

marginalised and oppressed community.¹⁹⁰ The use of visions, symbols and imagery throughout provides readers with a transcendent perspective through their participation in the world of the text, that they might ultimately change their view of themselves and their situation and realign it with a heavenly, eschatological perspective.¹⁹¹ Apocalyptic is itself a particular kind of eschatology, one that highly emphasises the sovereign lordship of God who guides history to its final goal which he will bring about imminently.¹⁹² A common feature of apocalyptic writings is that they assume that the present situation of the writer and/or the audience is characterised by crisis, suffering, injustice, oppression, victimisation, powerlessness, or hopelessness, such that the only hope would be in God's intervention in saving his people and overcoming evil powers.¹⁹³

This being the case, it becomes clearer why hope emerges as central in an apocalyptic framework. As Jacques Ellul puts it, it is not "that there is hope because one has an apocalyptic concept of history, but rather that there is apocalypse because one lives in hope."¹⁹⁴ As an expression of resistance, apocalyptic ideas can transform poetic or violent expressions into symbols of hope to encourage the victimised.¹⁹⁵ An otherwise chaotic series of crises can be reframed in apocalyptic colours into a metanarrative providing direction, purpose, and ultimately hope.¹⁹⁶ If this is what John accomplishes in Revelation, then a reading of the text must begin with an understanding of his purpose in light of his (and his readers') historical context.

Understanding John's Context and Purpose

Determining the context of Revelation (and thus the situation of its readers) depends largely on when it was written.¹⁹⁷ The most common view is that John wrote around 95-96 CE, during the reign of Domitian, with a small minority dating the book around the time of the first Jewish-Roman war (66-73 CE).¹⁹⁸ The earlier date would imply that the book has the imminent destruction of

¹⁹⁰ Robyn Whitaker, "Victim to Victor: The Appeal of Apocalyptic Hope," *Religions* 11 (2020): 1.

¹⁹¹ Beale, *Revelation*, 38.

¹⁹² M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011): 35-37; Bauckham, *Theology*, 8-9.

¹⁹³ Boring, *Revelation*, 42.

¹⁹⁴ Ellul, *Hope*, 208.

¹⁹⁵ Whitaker, "Victim," 1.

¹⁹⁶ Joshua Searle, *The Scarlet Woman and the Red Hand: Evangelical Apocalyptic Belief in the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2014): 129.

¹⁹⁷ As Beale puts it, questions of "dating could alter the interpretation of the book, since the occasion prompting John to write might be different in each case" (*Revelation*, 4).

¹⁹⁸ For the later date, cf. Heinz Giesen, *Die Offenbarung nach Johannes* (Regensburg: Pustet GmbH & Co., 1997): 25; Ben Witherington, *Revelation* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 4-5; Beale, *Revelation*, 4; Osborne, *Revelation*, 8; Fee, *Revelation*, xx; Boring, *Revelation*, 10; Blount, *Revelation*, 8; Paul, *Revelation*, 16. One of the most common arguments for the later date is John's association of Rome with "Babylon," which was frequent in Jewish writings after 70 CE. For the earlier date, cf. Leithart, *Revelation*, 39-40; Smalley, *Revelation*, 3. Still other commentators take a mediating view and assume it was written

Jerusalem in view and Nero's recent persecution of Christians in its background, making it the product of a major crisis.¹⁹⁹ However, the later date involves deciphering the situation of Christians living under the reign of Domitian (and thus a different purpose for John's writing), and this situation is a matter of debate since there is not clear evidence that John's churches were in crisis or that there was significant persecution during this period.²⁰⁰ What is clear can be divided into three observations. First, by Domitian's time, participation in the imperial cult had become more common than in previous decades, and John assumes that his readers were being compelled to participate in it.²⁰¹ Secondly, at least some real (even if sporadic) persecution and oppression was happening, since John mentions some expectation of death (2:10) and that members of his churches had been killed (2:13) and his consistently vicious critique of Rome (which he associates with Satan) makes little sense otherwise.²⁰² Lastly, John writes out of a concern that believers were becoming complacent and compromising with Roman culture, thereby participating in idolatry and failing to recognise the urgency of God's eschatological intervention and the fundamental incompatibility between the ways of Rome and the claims of God.²⁰³ Regardless of the conclusions one reaches about the book's dating or the readers' situation, John's writing indicates his perception that his churches were currently or imminently expecting to face a major crisis, needed to endure prolonged suffering, and needed to be made aware of God's perspective on their situation so that they could be prepared for the future (both proximate and ultimate).

John's purpose in writing becomes clearer in the light of this historical background. His message is directed to communities living in an ambiguous and perilous situation, a minority group living after the deaths of most of the original leaders, trying to figure out both how to be faithful to God and how to understand God as sovereign, just, and victorious while they witness the increasing power

developmentally over a period spanning from Nero to Domitian; cf. John Thomas and Frank Macchia, *Revelation* (THNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016): 19; Francis Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020): 2.

¹⁹⁹ That Nero instigated the first organized persecution of Christians (and thus the first major crisis in the early church) is not disputed; see the records in Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44; Suetonius, *Nero*, 16.2.

²⁰⁰ See the discussions about persecution under Domitian in Boring, *Revelation*, 17.

²⁰¹ Beale, *Revelation*, 5. For internal evidence, see Rev. 13:4-8, 15-16; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4. Ian Paul observes that while emperor worship did exist before him, "Domitian did push the language of the imperial cult further than his persecutors," insisting on being called "lord and god" (*Revelation*, 22). Dio Cassius (*Roman History*, 67.14) indicates that Domitian did have people executed for failing to worship the gods of Rome.

²⁰² Most interpreters assume some presence of violent oppression, even if isolated; cf. Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 25; Beale, *Revelation*, 9-16; Koester, *Revelation*, 72. Even if his Domitian-era churches experienced little persecution, the Neronian persecution would have remained in recent memory. Either way, there is no question that "Revelation advances a thorough-going prophetic critique of Roman power" (Bauckham, *Theology*, 38).

²⁰³ Koester, *Revelation*, 95. John assumes that a truly nonconformist Christianity leads to suffering and persecution, because it would be disloyalty to the idolatrous Roman programme.

and threat of the Roman Empire encroaching upon them. John answers with an interpretation of their present situation in light of the supernatural realm and the eschatological future, one which emphasises the already-but-not-yet victory of God working its way out in his communities' experience even while forces of evil continue to exist and even prosper.²⁰⁴ What I propose is that his principal intention in this effort is *hope*, and the struggle that drives the text to view the present through the lens of Christ's role in the conclusion of history, which has already been inaugurated and will culminate in the full establishment of his kingdom and the destruction of evil empires. The hope underlying the text is not only for consolation but resistance, so that John's readers can stand in hope against opposition on the basis of their trust in God's promise to put an end to all evil.²⁰⁵ John intended his text to empower his readers in hope, actualising Jesus's victory in their own lives, trusting that through faithfulness and endurance they would join in God's reign and their (and God's) enemies would face justice.²⁰⁶ In their gatherings, John's communities were meant to read and re-read this text, entering into its symbolic world, and to shape their belief and behaviour by this hope. In reading the text this way we can concur with Jacques Ellul that "the Apocalypse is the great book of Christian hope."²⁰⁷

Johannine Hope in Narrative Analysis

I will now proceed by examining the place of hope within the main sections of Revelation, separating the text into four narrative divisions which designate key structural and thematic sequences. Revelation has many more subdivisions and is an extremely complex work of literary craftsmanship, but four larger movements within it can be identified. The first is a series of letters to seven churches (chs. 1-3), which follow a pattern of commendation and/or critique related to their present situations, exhortations to repentance and/or endurance, and a final promise. The second is a series of visions of seven seals opened, seven trumpets blown, and seven bowls poured out (chs. 4-16), which represent God's final wrath and judgment on his enemies. The third is an announcement of the fall and defeat of earthly and spiritual evil represented by Babylon/the prostitute (Rome), the beast (the Emperor), and the dragon (Satan), culminating in final judgment (chs. 17-20). The fourth is an ultimate vision of a new heaven and new earth, with a new city of Jerusalem as its centrepiece, where God will be present with his people forever (chs. 21-22). In their own way, all four sections are meant to instil hope in readers and, when viewed together, contribute to the overall message of hope to which the whole text witnesses.

²⁰⁴ Francis Moloney, "The Book of Revelation: Hope in Dark Times," *Religions* 10 (2019): 12.

²⁰⁵ As Gilbertson puts it, John "seeks to persuade and compel readers to a certain Christian praxis, one of resistance and hope" (*God and History*, 140).

²⁰⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, 171.

²⁰⁷ Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977): 56.

1. The Hope of God's Promise in the Letters to the Seven Churches

The early chapters of Revelation set a tone for how the rest is to be read, which is from a place of urgency given the perceived proximity of the events (the chronological nearness of the events is specified in 1:1, 3, and reiterated in 22:6, 10), and specifically of the coming of Jesus (1:7, reiterated at the end in 22:7, 12, 20), all of which is read through the lens of the text's own claims to authority (1:2 claims eyewitness testimony, reiterated in 22:8; 1:3 prescribes blessings for reading and application, reiterated at the end in 22:7; the truth and inalterability of the words are claimed in 22:6, 18-19). The will of Jesus for the churches is taken to be authoritative because he is identified as sovereign over past and future, the first and last, who was, and is, and will be, alpha and omega (1:4, 8, 17, reiterated at the end in 22:13). As previously noted, this emphasis on total lordship is common to apocalyptic texts and provides a foundation on which the readers may set their hope, especially in the face of an uncertain future.

Lest the recipients of Revelation assume that the book's message speaks only to the future, the churches addressed in the seven letters are evaluated based on their present spiritual state. Despite the differences in how each is addressed, the element of hope comes in with the refrain at the end of each letter, which has a specific promise. It is in the context of the promise-fulfilment structure that the readers find hope in the present, that they might be sustained with an understanding of the goal of their endurance, which is to "conquer." To those who overcome and conquer, paradisaic life (2:7), avoidance of judgment and destruction (2:11), supernatural gifts and honours (2:17), authority over nations (2:27), ultimate purification and salvation (3:5), belonging to God and his eschatological order (3:14), and sitting with God on his throne (3:21) are all promised. In John's perspective, what is key to his message of hope is the idea of patient endurance (*ὑπομονή*, *hypomonē*), and for this he is indebted to the Hebrew prophets. As Rudolf Bultmann observes, "the fact that *ἐλπίς* is not found in (Revelation) can cause astonishment only if we fail to see that it is here included in the concept of *ὑπομονή*," noting that "where the Jewish emphasis is strong, the element of waiting for the eschatological future is prominent."²⁰⁸ John's vision addresses the readers' present, reframes it in light of ultimate fulfilment, and thereby instils hope to endure, wait on God's deliverance, and be victorious with him.²⁰⁹

From the context we can assume the churches' situation as fraught with conflict, threats, and ambiguity. Internal challenges included false prophets, false teachers identified as "Nicolaitans," or followers of Balaam, and the threat of a certain prophetic figure John associates with Jezebel.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Bultmann, "ἐλπίς," 532. *ὑπομονή* is frequent early on, appearing five times in chs. 1-3 (1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10).

²⁰⁹ As Rowland writes, "the demands for present obedience are evident in the letters to the churches which introduce the vision of hope and in the concluding admonitions. The promise of a part in the new Jerusalem is linked with present behavior" ("Eschatology," 64).

²¹⁰ Leithart, *Revelation*, 142.

Beyond this, some communities seem to suffer from an “atmospheric malaise,” which has led them to turn from their former commitments or to embrace compromise or ambivalence.²¹¹ Externally, there is pressure from Roman authorities as well as conflict with Jewish communities, as seen from the inflammatory language of 2:9 and 3:9. After addressing these concerns, the hope-focused promises at the end of each message, to the “one who conquers,” look ahead “to the final blessings that will be given at the end of the age” and thus direct the reader toward the unfolding events of the rest of the text as a basis for their present action, which is meant to be oriented toward resistance and endurance.²¹²

2. *The Hope of God's Justice in the Visions of Judgment*

The strong language and vivid intensity of the judgment scenes can distract modern readers from the fact that they are basically an extended commentary on the events attending the Parousia, the central hope of the earliest Christians. John intended to communicate unmistakably that no wrongdoing would escape judgment, and no cry for justice on behalf of the oppressed would be unanswered. It is not simply that earthly and spiritual evil will be judged, but Jesus himself is the judge, and therefore his (likely oppressed) people could have hope for recompense to their enemies along with vindication for themselves. Conradie puts it well, noting that

God's judgment need not be an expression of fear. In fact, it describes the content of Christian hope. The hope of the earth's victims (including its plants and animals) is that present forces of destruction will be exposed and halted by a just verdict. Only then can justice be served. Only then healing can take place. Only then the alienation between humanity and the earth can be put ‘right’ in the presence of God. By contrast, the earth's powerful may well fear judgment History can only be redeemed if it passes through God's judgment.²¹³

Since John writes to communities without power or privilege, images of judgment on the powerful would likely have been received positively. John's first readers would probably have seen very few (if any) of their oppressors get “what they deserve” (16:6b), so their hope for justice would be a trust maintained despite present experience, which may have shown little likelihood of change.²¹⁴ John's readers would never have been able to ensure their own just treatment or that evil would be answered. Only God had the ability to provide assurance of that.

Hope imbues even judgment if the judgment scenes are a means to reframe the readers' situation by contextualising it within God's purpose of “overcoming all opposition to his rule and establishing

²¹¹ Leithart, *Revelation*, 142.

²¹² Koester, *Revelation*, 237.

²¹³ Conradie, “Dimensions,” 179.

²¹⁴ Again, Conradie's assessment is apt, as he writes, “faced with the awareness that injustice and untimely death may have the final word in this life, Christian hope expresses a trust in a God who transcends these dimensions of finitude” (“Dimensions,” 201).

his kingdom in the world.”²¹⁵ John’s initial vision of heaven (4:1-11) shows that realm to be one where God’s sovereign rule is already acknowledged, and the narrative progression moves toward the reality of heaven being similarly actualised on earth. This vision introduces God as enthroned above all other power, but personally involved enough that he has heard the prayers of John’s readers (5:8; 8:3). In John’s view, the ultimate opposition to God and his rule, the quintessential symbol of oppression, violence, and abusive of power, is Rome.²¹⁶ Rome (with its destruction of Jerusalem likely in recent memory) is empowered by Satan, and God’s victory over Satan will mean the judgment and undoing of the empire. This victory is never portrayed as questionable; John’s conviction is that the victory has already been won and is simply being worked out.²¹⁷ If God’s victory is not only expected but already actualised and being worked out, therein lies the foundation for unshakeable hope.

This victory is not only God’s victory, but John’s communities conquer with him (5:5) and will reign with him (5:10), drastically reversing their present experience of powerlessness. The subsequent series of seals, trumpets and bowls are not only images, but highlight particular themes. The seals being broken, and the ensuing calamities amplify the continuing emphasis on God’s control over events, whether related to the rise and fall of kingdoms or the fate of individual lives, as shown through the frequent passive language of events being “permitted” to happen, or certain entities being “given authority” temporarily. As the seals are opened, we see elements of hope in God’s justice for martyrs who have died (6:9-11), the equalising universality of salvation in the presence of all types of people irrespective of differences (7:9-10), and the reminder that in God’s shepherding presence there is shelter, without any pain or need (7:15-17). As the trumpets are blown, the ensuing plagues remind readers of judgment for those who pervert justice and go unpunished (8:6-11:19), with the reminder that the reign of evil is a temporary allowance (13:5), and knowing their end allows believers to endure (14:12). Lastly, the bowls being poured out finalises this judgment, as Rome and all those associated with empire are judged (16:1-21). Since the readers’ situation is likely one where God’s justice seems delayed and evil powers unrestrained, judgment could be the foundation for hopeful endurance.

3. *The Hope of God’s Final Victory over Satan and Evil*

The function of chapters 19-20 is the announcement of God’s victory, with the entire population of the heavenly realm proclaiming with finality the defeat of evil, and permanence of judgment. Those associated with “the beast” (Roman authority) are depicted coming against Jesus in a final battle and are destroyed with little effort and subsequently condemned (19:19-21), while just prior, the faithful are invited to “the marriage supper of the lamb,” where their union with Jesus

²¹⁵ Bauckham, *Theology*, 31.

²¹⁶ Bauckham, 31-35.

²¹⁷ Bauckham, 73.

will be celebrated. The last to be judged and condemned is Satan himself, the source and manifestation of evil (20:10).²¹⁸ Given that throughout the text Satan is cast as the source of evil, his ultimate condemnation is key to the book's message of hope. If only the earthly powers are judged, this is insufficient because that which empowered them has not been eliminated. Ultimately, the final vision of hope which comes in the last chapters, the new reality ushered in after God's victory, must be one without Satan. If God only judged evil but did not ensure its complete incapacitation, John's vision of hope would be incomplete.

Along with Satan's complete defeat is also the destruction of death itself (20:14), so that the vision that follows is one where death (considered an outcome of sin and a curse in Gen. 2:17), is neither present nor possible. The death of death is an idea we also find in other texts, such as 1 Cor. 15:26 which considers death as the "last enemy to be destroyed" by God. The hope of new life in this context is the hope of unending life, without loss, and without the effects of time. This new life comes after God's final judgment, a basic Jewish-Christian conviction²¹⁹ and one that is affected principally by one's present conduct (20:12), providing yet another reminder to John's readers of the importance of their response to the book's message.

4. *The Hope of the Final Renewal and Consummation of Everything*

The last two chapters are the crescendo of hope to which the rest of the preceding chapters point. This ultimate vision is not one of God's people leaving the world for a disembodied ethereal existence, but it is of heaven coming to earth and both being renewed, and God's presence manifested fully within this renewed cosmos as the destiny of the book's believing readers.²²⁰ In the vision of a new heaven and new earth John is borrowing from Isaiah 65:17-18 (and of Isaiah 60-66 broadly), linking his expectation of the coming age with those of the Jewish prophets who expected God's deliverance from foreign powers.²²¹ Most interpreters see this image not as a destruction and recreation of the cosmos but a renewal and transformation of that which already exists.²²² In referring to all things being made "new" (21:5) there is clearly a transformation in mind,

²¹⁸ As Barbara Rossing writes, "The defeat of oppression and evil culminates when Satan himself is tied up and imprisoned in the underworld, completing the expulsion from heaven begun in chapter 12. Satan symbolizes all the forces of evil in the world" ("Revelation," in *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The New Testament*, eds. Margaret Aymer, et al. [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014]: 756).

²¹⁹ The idea of final judgment is pervasive in early Christianity; cf. Mt. 25:31-46; Ac. 24:25; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Jn. 4:17.

²²⁰ Phelan, *Eschatology*, 27; Rowland, "Eschatology," 70.

²²¹ The association of the Parousia with the collapse of the cosmic order and of a final renewal was relatively normative in early eschatology and can be found elsewhere in the New Testament, as in Romans 8:19-21 or Matthew 19:28 and 24:29. It was an expectation found in other Jewish apocalypses, as in 1 Enoch 45:4 and 91:16.

²²² Margaret Adam, *Our Only Hope: More Than We Can Ask or Imagine* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2013): 27; Beale, *Revelation*, 1040.

but this is more about newness of quality rather than a discarding of the old or the presence of something never before existing.²²³ This is an embodied existence, having both continuity and discontinuity with the former, but characterised by completion and fulfilment.²²⁴

For John there is no utopian promise to be found in Roman glory, but his audience is to put their hope in God's renewal and consummation of all things. The finale is therefore not God's victory but what comes after God's victory, which makes the readers' present experience pale in comparison. The created order is not abandoned but rather fully returned to its proper sovereign, whose rule is now falsely supplanted by others and whose presence is not yet fully manifested.²²⁵ The city of God on the new earth is the new Jerusalem, which would have been a powerful image of hope to readers likely recently affected by the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem by Rome, an event which in itself was a symbol of shattered hope. Readers imagining a new Jerusalem while they could see the ruins of the "old" Jerusalem would be an exercise in hope, a desire and expectation for God's intervention in a seemingly impossible manner. The surety of this hope could only rest on God's faithfulness to his promises, and on his lordship over all of history as "the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (22:13).

Conclusion

Our analysis requires that we form a synthesis of John's apocalyptic theology of hope. We observe a continuity with the apocalyptic eschatology that was central to early Christian proclamation, but we see extensive development in John's effort to articulate a message of hope to a particular group of communities in a context of crisis. I consider hope in Revelation to carry five aspects; it is *temporal* (a tension exists between present and future, proximate and ultimate), it is *spatial* (there is a consistent nearness-orientation, the advent of Jesus is close), it is *social* (God's salvation involves communal and ethnic reconciliation, as in 7:9), it is *political* (a dichotomy is presented between the false city of Babylon and the true city of the new Jerusalem, and there is a subversive interplay between true and false authority), and it is *psychological* (the message of hope is consistently presented as true, assured, and authoritative). These coalesce to make Revelation a breviary of hope, that is, a liturgical text to be read in churches for the purpose of instilling hope in a time of insecurity and crisis. Reading Revelation in this way serves to highlight what many

²²³ David Wilkinson, *Christian Eschatology and the Physical Universe* (London: T&T Clark, 2010): 73.

²²⁴ J.H. van Wijk, "A New Heaven and a New Earth: Dogmatic and Ethical Considerations of an Aspect of Eschatology," in van Egmond and van Keulen, *Hope*, 274. An example of discontinuity with the former is the mention of no sea (21:1), which is a case of John borrowing from ancient mythical language, since the sea was associated with evil, chaos and death in both the Hebrew Scriptures and across Ancient Near Eastern thought.

²²⁵ Stephens, "Creation," 269.

modern interpreters overlook, namely that hope is not one element of the message of Revelation but is its primary message. Creating communities characterised by hope is John's goal and purpose in writing this text, which he expected them to read as a liturgy. This participative element of the text also tends to be overlooked in modern scholarship, which tends to focus on the situation that produced the text and not as often on its effect on readers.

The hope of Revelation is the disclosure of God's victorious rule in Jesus (in which his people participate), the actualisation of justice in the defeat and destruction of God's enemies (who are the enemies of his people), and the final consummation of God's redemptive purposes in the renewal of everything. This hope is not for redemption *from* the world, but *of* the world.²²⁶ It is the perfection of fellowship with God and others, and a vision of a counter-reality "hidden in the present and of which hope can discern the signs."²²⁷ John's hope is a subversive practice of resistance in a context where his readers would have seen God's ways rejected, and evil and injustice flourishing. If John's readers understood themselves to be on the precipice of the end of history, with God already in the process of renewing all things in Jesus, they would have the substance of hope where it may have been lost before.

To know the end from the beginning provides the faithful with an interpretive grid on which to map the tumultuous events of their historical epoch. To John's readers, Jesus has been raised from death and presently inhabits a glorified place of authority, but in lieu of this authority being yet unapplied, they live in the precarious liminal state of the already-but-not-yet, in a counterfeit city under a counterfeit king, awaiting another. In this way hope sustains the churches' present practices, since their hope is grounded in Christ and therefore what they now experience is not the final expectation for the people of God, for the earth, and for the future.²²⁸ What lies ahead is a grand reversal, a future where the oppressed are victorious, the powerful are brought low, life comes from death, and a slain lamb rules the nations.

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²²⁶ John McDowell and Scott Kirkland, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018): 59-60.

²²⁷ Ellul, *Apocalypse*, 60.

²²⁸ James Poling, *Rethinking Faith: A Constructive Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011): 111.

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The Image of Hope:

Time, History, and Hope in the Theological Aesthetics of Eberhard Jüngel

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Abstract

This article articulates the contributions of Eberhard Jüngel to the theology of hope movement. While standing in general accord with this movement, Jüngel draws on the realm of aesthetics for the basis of hope, rather than that of reason or politics. Aesthetic events—such as beauty or revelation—interrupt the world and impart freedom by establishing new possibilities for historical existence. Hope becomes practical within the spaces created by these events. Hope becomes certain, however, because the possibilities God communicates to the world are also constitutive of the divine being. The death of Jesus is the condition for possibilities of divine being. The resurrection of Jesus is thereby not just the fulfilment of God's promise, but, as an event, is the ontological basis of God's eschatological character erupting within the ontic conditions of history. In this aesthetic event, God's promise takes place. Jüngel's key contribution, then, to theologies of hope is that aesthetics offers positive content of eschatology.



Introduction

The origins of the “theology of hope” movement can be traced to debates in the journal *Evangelische Theologie* around the year 1960. The question here was how theology—specifically one grounded in a particular concept of revelation—was to understand the essence and meaning of history. A number of theologians accepted a neo-Marxist position of equating revelation with history, so that the outworking of the latter was the concrete content of the former. This provided a rather defined foundation for questions of the place and function of the church in modern society, which was, simply put, to transform the political sphere through revolutionary action until it came to resemble the kingdom of God. Hope thereby received an overtly political hermeneutic.

During much of these early debates, Eberhard Jüngel was occupied with navigating the new political situation of the German Democratic Republic. As Jüngel’s work began to appear within the debates of *Evangelische Theologie* so did a set of claims which serve as harbingers of the development of his position to come: the faith which grounds theological reflection lives in a perpetual tension to the history of the world, and this tension is both established and defined through God’s interruptive presence as this shapes the history of the world.²²⁹ Revelation, then, becomes the hermeneutic of history, and hope lives from its eventful nature, giving the church the aesthetic task of “bringing the object of hope to life.”²³⁰

Despite Jüngel’s critical position in these debates, he stands in remarkable unity with the main aspects of theologies of hope. These include a fundamental commitment that eschatology is the horizon from which Christian theology speaks and by which it thinks based on the promises of God.²³¹ This future situation is also, to some degree, representable by human participation in the

²²⁹ Eberhard Jüngel, “Die Möglichkeit theologischer Anthropologie auf dem Grunde der Analogie. Eine Untersuchung zum Analogieverständnis Karl Barths,” *Evangelische Theologie (EvTh)* 22 (1962): Esp., 542-8. Eberhard Jüngel, “»Theologische Wissenschaft und Glaube« im Blick auf die Armut Jesu,” in *Unterwegs zur Sache: Theologische Erörterungen I* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1972/2000), Esp., 17.

²³⁰ Eberhard Jüngel, “»Meine Theologie«—kurz gefaßt,” in *Wertlose Wahrheit: Zur Identität und Relevanz des christlichen Glaubens. Theologische Erörterungen III* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2003), 12. “...die den Gegenstand der Hoffnung anschaulich machen...”

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Jüngel are my own translations from the German texts.

²³¹ Even among Jüngel’s English interlocutors, his doctrines of eschatology and hope occupy relatively little space when compared to his doctrines of God or justification. For the select engagements with his eschatology, see: Laura-Christin Krannich, “„Erfahrung mit der Erfahrung“. Gottes Wort als Ereignis neuer Wirklichkeit,” in *Die Theologie Eberhard Jüngels: Kontexte, Themen, Perspektiven*, ed. Dirk Evers and Malte Dominik Krüger (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2020); Bruce McCormack, “Participation in God, Yes, Deification, No: Two Modern Protestant Responses to an Ancient Question,” in *Denkwürdiges Geheimnis: Beiträge zur Gotteslehre. Festschrift für Eberhard Jüngel zum 70. Geburtstag.*, ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth, Johannes Fischer, and Hans-Peter Grosshans (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2020); Werner G. Jeanrond, “Love and Death: Christian Eschatology in an Interreligious Context,” in *Indicative of Grace—Imperative of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Eberhard Jüngel in His Eightieth Year*, ed. R. David Nelson

present, often through some engagement with the political realm. Accompanying this participation is a serious commitment to ground eschatological reflections within concrete historical events which challenge history for the sake of new possibilities. These events include, above all else, the death and resurrection of Jesus.²³²

Jüngel's unique contributions to theologies of hope are more apparent when compared to the movement's more recognizable thinkers, such as Jürgen Moltmann. In their similarities, both secure hope in the reconciliatory acts of God in history as understood from a biblical theology. Jüngel's early trinitarian work, especially his call to unify Jesus' death with divine ontology, is even the impetus for Moltmann's initial work in this field.²³³ Moltmann also appropriates the phrase "word-history" (the Israelite tradition of stories and narratives which informs New Testament hermeneutics) from Jüngel to develop his concept of revelation.²³⁴ The differences, however, pertain to the historic and temporal aspects of eschatology. For Moltmann, hope is secured in "contradiction" to historic reality as it is presently experienced—which, above all, contains the reality of death.²³⁵ This includes the promises of God based in the historic work of Christ, which are a deposit for God's eschatological work. The horizon of the future is only known in opposition to the status of the present. In contrast, Jüngel argues that God gave the world a *positive* relationship to the future in his historic presence. Hope is secured in this framework as an ontological possibility of worldly being because of God's transformative work in the historic Jesus. God identifies with Jesus to such a degree that his presence and being are inseparable, which includes his death on the cross. Death, for Jüngel, has positive value as the condition for

(New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014); R. David Nelson, *The Interruptive Word: Eberhard Jüngel on the Sacramental Structure of God's Relation to the World*, ed. John Webster, Ian A. McFarland, and Ivor Davidson, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology, (New York: T&T Clark, 2013); Roland D. Zimany, *Vehicle for God: The Metaphorical Theology of Eberhard Jüngel* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1994); Mark C. Mattes, *The Role of Justification in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017); Graham J. Watts, *Revelation and the Spirit: A Comparative Study of the Relationship between the Doctrine of Revelation and Pneumatology of the Theology of Eberhard Jüngel and Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Cascade, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007).

²³² Cf. M. Douglas Meeks, *Origins of the Theology of Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 1.

²³³ Eberhard Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt. Zur Begründung der Theologie des Gekreuzigten im Streit zwischen Theismus und Atheismus*, 8. Auflage 2010 ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1977), 15n22; Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darell L. Gruder (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2014; repr., 1983), 13n22. All following references to this English translation will appear in brackets following references to the German publication.

²³⁴ Eberhard Jüngel, "Das Gesetz zwischen Adam und Christus. Eine theologische Studie zu Röm 5,12-21," in *Unterwegs zur Sache: Theologische Erörterungen I* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 150; Cf., Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press LTD, 1967), 153.

²³⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 19. Cf., 118f.

eschatological possibilities. The present world is thereby a world of possibilities in so far as God's existence is the dynamic event of new possibilities.

Jüngel articulates his difference with Moltmann perhaps most succinctly in claiming that they are “astonishingly often saying the same thing *materially*, even right down to the wording, but [are] obviously thinking *formally* something completely different.”²³⁶ Still, the formal differences between the two directly impact the most concrete elements of theologies of hope. These include the participatory activity which offers a hermeneutical basis for eschatological reflection. In place of Moltmann's grounding of theology in practical reason, Jüngel draws upon the realm of aesthetics. The relationship between the ontic (i.e., the historically perceptible and experienced world) and ontological (i.e., the elemental structures of being and existence) in Jüngel is conceived in such a way that either dimension plays a constitutive role in the other. In accord with major trends in modern aesthetics, Jüngel argues that there are certain events in which there is no distinction between the way the world appears and the way it is in itself.

Among other things, this means that the perceptible world of historical existence reveals the underlying ontological reality of that existence at certain moments in which the two dimensions collapses into a relation of identity, rather than Moltmann's dialectical contradiction. In terms of theology, God simply *is* as he appears in Christ because his existence is formed by the historical person Jesus. This also implies that the future coming of God to the world is grounded in his historical advent because the history of Jesus is laced within God's own being. For both God and the world, the future is fundamentally linked to the possibilities innate to God's historic presence.

This article focuses on the contributions Jüngel's theological aesthetics offer to theologies of hope, primarily in conversation with Moltmann's earlier work. The core feature here for a discussion of hope is the *positive* content of eschatology, which is accessible due to the identity relationship between the ontic and ontological dimensions of both Godly and worldly being. How this positive content is gathered will be initially addressed by a discussion of perception and the role of freedom in the aesthetic realm. An articulation of how God is present within the world in the life *and* death of Jesus, and how new possibilities of historical existence relate to this presence, will follow. The implications of this relationship for human action in a particular mode of aesthetic expression are discussed in the final section, where Jüngel's theology of hope is clearly distinguished from his contemporaries.

²³⁶ Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 299n65. [220n65].

Aesthetics as a Science

While Jüngel's unique contribution to the theology of hope movement can be traced to his aesthetics, the relation of hope to aesthetics is anything but obvious. Hope, in nearly any sense, is unseen. Even if it can be represented in history in some visual form, it is nevertheless something which reaches out for an unrealized future—often understood as a horizon that is decisively different than the present. The first task of grasping what it means to “bring the object of hope to life” is to gain some understanding on how Jüngel conceives the discipline of theological aesthetics. This can be accomplished by a brief survey of his aesthetic influences.

Historical Source of Jüngel's Aesthetics

As a modern discipline, aesthetics was substantively introduced into pre-Enlightenment philosophy by Alexander Baumgarten as a “science of perception.”²³⁷ The original intention was to bolster up rationalist epistemology in the Leibnizian-Wolffian tradition by accounting for the empirical realm. While modern aesthetics never forfeited its traditional concepts—beauty, sublime, taste, etc.—it took on a much broader role in this context. A clear example of this role is offered by Kant in his later writings on religion. Here, Kant explains that while rational proofs are valid, they require an aesthetic development because “the natural need of all human beings” demands “something that *the sense can hold on to*” or “some confirmation from experience” of the “highest concepts and ground of reason.”²³⁸ As it pertains to perception, aesthetics is what tethers the activity of human reason back to the world of intuitions.

When Jüngel describes the task of a theological aesthetics as “bringing the object of hope to life,” he is very much aligned with this early modern tradition. Aesthetics provides an extra-subjective point of verification of theological claims. While aesthetic experiences do have cognitive value for Jüngel, the overall importance of aesthetics for theology is that it places the meaning of hope outside of the human imagination and into the realm of historical experience. This is most directly presented in Jüngel's doctrine of revelation, which is further discussed below.

In accord with more classical reflections on the aesthetic realm, beauty becomes the center of discussion in modern aesthetics for how perceptions are achieved and rationally processed. Kant famously argues that beauty is a subjective sensation of “pleasure” derived from the innate activity of the mind attempting to synthesize intuitions and concepts in the process of a reflective judgment. Yet, in this rational attempt, the mind fails to find an adequate concept for the intuition

²³⁷ Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, trans. Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), 67.

²³⁸ Immanuel Kant, “Religion Within the Boundaries of Pure Reason,” in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6:109. 142.

of beauty.²³⁹ Following with the larger task of modern aesthetics, this mental “free play” seems to confirm the rationally justified freedom required for morality, in that natural beauty cannot be determinatively placed within our conceptual schemes of causality. Beauty, in a sense, is experienced as freedom from both nature and understanding.²⁴⁰

Even though Kant developed this idea to a certain extent, the relationship between beauty and freedom comes to the fore in the German Idealists, who exert a particularly important influence on Jüngel’s overall theology. Aesthetics is understood in this post-Kantian light as the realm of philosophy which could unite the conflict between the determinacy of a natural realm ruled by causality and the freedom required for human autonomy and morality. Friedrich Schiller, for example, describes the power of aesthetics as:

In the midst of the fearful kingdom of forces, and in the midst of the sacred kingdom of laws, the aesthetic impulse to form is at work, unnoticed, on the building of a third joyous kingdom of play and semblance, in which man is relieved of the shackles of circumstance, and released from all that might be called constraint, alike in the physical and in the moral sphere.²⁴¹

Schiller’s language of “kingdom” is drawn from Kant’s idea of the “kingdom of ends” as a society where autonomous persons are governed purely by reason.²⁴² Schiller develops the subjective “free play” of Kant’s aesthetics into what he terms a “sensuous objective” theory, that essentially re-establishes beauty as a formal property of the objects of intuition.²⁴³ The objective forms of beauty retain a formative impact on human subjectivity, however, in that humanity becomes aware of their own autonomous freedom through aesthetic experiences. Jüngel specifically highlights that the function of Schiller’s aesthetic kingdom is to “impart freedom by the means of freedom” which precedes the “freedom to act.”²⁴⁴ As such, aesthetics takes on a decisively historical role in the

²³⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer, ed. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5:189-90. 75-6.

²⁴⁰ See, Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, vol. 1: The Eighteenth Century (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 429-31.

²⁴¹ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 215.

²⁴² Immanuel Kant, “Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,” in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4:433. 83.

²⁴³ Friedrich Schiller, “letter to Gottfried Körner of 25 January 1793,” in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 146.

²⁴⁴ Jüngel, “»Auch das Schöne muß sterben«—Schönenheit im Lichte der Wahrheit. Theologische Bermerkungen zum ästhetischen Verhältnis,” 385; Cf., Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God. The Doctrine of God*. (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1981), 213f.

becoming of human subjectivity and, consequently, social development.²⁴⁵ Beauty, in effect, becomes a political force itself through its impartation of freedom.²⁴⁶

Martin Heidegger should perhaps be mentioned as a final aesthetic influence on Jüngel, for it is through his later work that Jüngel finds an ontological interpretation of truth in aesthetic happenings.²⁴⁷ Heidegger understands art, in particular, as an interruptive event which allows the ontological structures of being to be exposed within the ontic dimension of historical existence. In his words, the art work “manifests something other” than itself in that it opens up “the Being of beings.”²⁴⁸ In the power of certain interruptive events, ontic presence is, simply, ontological reality. As an event of such quality, art allows the truth of being to become perceptible. Jüngel finds value in Heidegger’s understanding of the relationship between the ontological and ontic dimensions of being, which ultimately forms the basis of his doctrines of divine ontology and revelation. In terms of aesthetics and hope, an ontological account of aesthetics allows a typically non-perceptible concept such as hope to become phenomenologically experienceable. Hope becomes an “image,” in other words, through the interruptive power of God’s presence as aesthetics (i.e., revelation) and ontology fold into each other.

Aesthetics as Perception

Jüngel’s aesthetics are not in strict allegiance to any of these theories, but this overview does articulate how the perception of the aesthetic realm can become a source of human freedom through its interruptive force in relation to them. As we will see, Jüngel distinguishes between beauty and God’s presence in that the latter is uniquely related to God’s being. They are both considered aesthetic events, however, because they expose the limits of historical existence through their appearance and perception. This is a key point, for the eventful nature of being becomes the hermeneutical locus of Jüngel’s overall theology. Through aesthetic events God is both revealed *and* constituted, and humanity is likewise freed from historical-political consequences by being drawn into participation with divine being. Freedom is experienced as

²⁴⁵ See, Kai Hammermeister, *The German Aesthetic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 43-5.

²⁴⁶ Cf., Nicholas Martin, *Nietzsche and Schiller: Untimely Aesthetics*, Oxford Modern Languages and Literature Monographs, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 65ff.

²⁴⁷ The influence of the later-Heidegger is most evident in Jüngel’s work within the New Hermeneutic, which was a school of biblical criticism whose interpretation was based on a constitutive theory of language. See, James M. Robinson, “The German Discussions of the Later Heidegger,” in *Language, Hermeneutic, and History: Theology after Barth and Bultmann* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 1-63; Also, Zimany, *Vehicle for God*, 18-21.

²⁴⁸ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 19; 31.

something that lies beyond these limits. Fundamentally, freedom is the experience of new possibilities that begin with its perception.

Jüngel generally assumes a phenomenologically based relationship between human beings and their world which presupposes an encounter with the things in themselves.²⁴⁹ This means that the perception of beauty is to some degree inseparable from the object of intuition. Yet, beauty is also not reducible to the phenomenological qualities of the object itself. Jüngel speaks of beauty as “shining forth” from the phenomena which is perceived in such a way that it “gathers together” its perceptible qualities. In reference to Heidegger, Jüngel explains that this perception occurs in a “more primordial way” than a simple correspondence between subject and object.²⁵⁰ In its capacity to identify the ontic and ontological dimensions, beauty is an event that encompasses the entire context of its perception.

Most important for a theology of hope, this identity relationship allows for the possibility of truth to become historically manifested. Truth, for Jüngel, is a quality of presence.²⁵¹ Which means that the ontological reality of phenomena is hidden for the typical process of perception. It is not that the phenomena is void of truth, for surely it asserts some degree of presence by being given to perception. But it is present only as a “vague impression” of the elemental features of its being, and thereby requires mediation between its appearance and human understanding.²⁵² In that beauty is an event where the ontic and ontological features of an existence are in an identity relationship, it escapes the contexts of perception in such a way that references them in their totality. Beauty “gathers” the features of existence by both revealing and constituting their limits.

These limits include the temporal features of existence, which beauty negatively reveals by interrupting them. As an ontological feature which comes from beyond these limits, beauty “denies the current context of reality the status of the final and true reality.”²⁵³ Its appearance in the ontic realm, as fleeting as it may be, reveals the fragility of the present context. A world of unmediated truth lies somewhere beyond this world. And beauty is “the pre-appearance [Vorschein] of the coming truth,” a “deposit of truth.”²⁵⁴ In the same way, beauty positively gives the present a “reference to the future” by revealing the possibility of an existence which lives beyond the limitations of the present context.²⁵⁵ As it reveals the edge of reality through its interruption it

²⁴⁹ For a brief explanation of epistemological concepts along a phenomenological logic, see: Eberhard Jüngel, *Paulus und Jesus. Eine Untersuchung zur Präzisierung der Frage nach dem Ursprung der Christologie*, 3. durchgesehene Aufl. ed., Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie, (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1962), 5.

²⁵⁰ Jüngel, “Auch das Schöne,” 388; Cf., Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 33ff.

²⁵¹ Jüngel, 388.

²⁵² Jüngel, 380-1.

²⁵³ Jüngel, 39.

²⁵⁴ Jüngel, 391.

²⁵⁵ Jüngel, 382.

simultaneously establishes a space within which reality may proceed. Theologically, the reference to the future is to a context of being that is immediately in the presence of truth itself, the glory of Jesus Christ.

In the context of the present, humanity perceives beauty as if it was within the ontic manifold of objects. But the experience of beauty falls upon reality in such a way that it simultaneously points beyond it. Thus, alongside this objective “gathering” there is a corresponding anthropological gathering that offers a “wholeness” to the human mode of being. Similar to the modern tradition, this gathering occurs as beauty escapes the “frameworks of perception,” or the various schemas necessary for understanding and knowledge, in such a way that it “represents” the framework from which it escapes. These frameworks include temporal schemas, which implies that aesthetic perceptions “*form, shape, and mould*” elemental features of the human experience of the world. Beauty gives a “new quality to the process of perception” because, in its freedom from rational frameworks, it provides a reference point from which to understand and critique these frameworks. This is essentially a hermeneutical function which allows understanding to grasp positive content of the future reality which lays beyond the boundaries of the present.

Jüngel’s point in the “gathering” effect of aesthetic experiences is that beauty is true insofar as it is free. It is free in its “objective” context in that it cannot be reduced to the various conceptual schemas employed to comprehend historical phenomena. While possibly being a representative of beauty, the work of art in no way *causes* beauty. Beauty is, in a sense, liberated from the causal realm by revealing the limits of causal frameworks. This freedom is communicated to the human person in both that the perception of beauty escapes the schemas of reason and understanding, as well as in that it avoids the demand of practical action. Following Schiller, this specific relation to rational frameworks—as something from which the perception of beauty is free but is only recognized as free in that it refers to the framework from which it claims its freedom—is what communicates freedom to humanity. It is this relationship of being beyond, but in reference to, that defines how the aesthetic realm offers new possibilities for worldly existence. Beauty relates to hope in that it seeks out these possibilities. Understood as such, hope is free from the determinative features of the natural realm, the imposing constraints of rational frameworks, *and* the demands of practical action. Hope is in a very real sense secured by a freedom that lies beyond this world.

However, hope as a sort of ahistorical feature of human existence is too ambiguous to secure the future in and of itself. If only grounded as something outside of history, hope merely “drives the human person beyond themselves; but it does not explain to where.”²⁵⁶ For an undefined future

²⁵⁶ Eberhard Jüngel, “Hoffnung. Bemerkungen zum christlichen Verständnis des Begriffs,” in *Das Christentum. Zweiter Teil, Edith-Stein-Jahrbuch 5*, ed. J. Sánchez de Murillo (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1999), 55.

can easily become a reality far worse than the present. Or it can even not become at all. While Jüngel sees value in hope that is drawn from beauty in general, hope only gains *certainty* of its positive content when it is grounded in God's being and presence.

The Ambiguity of Hope

Jüngel argues that an ambivalence of hope can be produced by two different circumstances, both displayed in various forms of the myth of Pandora.²⁵⁷ The first is in assuming a certain relationship between the different dimensions of history, or the so-called A-series of time divided into past, present, and future.²⁵⁸ In Hesiod's version of the story, the ambiguity of hope is described as a possibility of a future which contains both contents of Pandora's box. As the box is opened, all its evil contents escape into the world. Amongst this chaos, the lid is slammed shut, and hope remains within. Based on the evil that has already left the box, however, Pandora resists freeing hope. It is too risky. For it might turn out that the hope contained within is as evil as the context that now exists outside of the box. In this historical logic, what is perceived in the event of opening Pandora's box is the basis for how the future is to be imagined. In such an understanding, the past rather predictably flows into the future, so what is to be expected is grounded on what has happened. Given that the past is ambiguous at best in terms of good and evil, this ambiguity is compounded in a not-yet realized future.

However, in Babrios's version of the myth, both good and evil escape when the box is opened. While the evil remained within the confines of the world, the good travelled to the gods, who alone possess knowledge of its nature. Here, hope is ambiguous because there is no point of perception, no historical ground of its presence, by which to base a certainty of a brighter future. A general disposition of faith towards the gods remains the last vestige of hope. Hope is transferred to the rather vague will of the divine realm without any concrete guarantee of its future coming to pass.

These two constitutive features of an ambivalent hope are not relegated to ancient myths, but also appear in modern philosophical musings. To the first, according to Jüngel, actuality is given an almost unchallenged primacy in ontological reflections on history and time.²⁵⁹ Typically, this is

²⁵⁷ See, Jüngel, 58-9; Cf., Eberhard Jüngel, "Der Geist der Hoffnung und des Trostes. Zur Begründung des eschatologischen Lehrstücks vom Reich der Freiheit," in *Ganz Werden. Theologische Erörterungen V* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2003), 308.

²⁵⁸ See, J.M.E. McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 10f.

²⁵⁹ Eberhard Jüngel, "Die Welt als Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit. Zum ontologischen Ansatz der Rechtfertigungslehre," in *Unterwegs zur Sache: Theologische Erörterungen I* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2000), 212-3; Cf., Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, "The Shape of Time," in *The Future as*

understood as either that the present is a potentiality developing toward a future reality, or the future is a degradation of some past moment of greatness. Either way, the possibilities for change are entirely governed by the actualities of the world. Hope, then, is limited in its scope by some understanding of worldly being. In his words, “*hope*, as a particular future actuality of the world, is, theologically understood, as the exact opposite of a hope which hopes in God and only in God for the future of the world.”²⁶⁰

To the second, a sort of generalized religious hope is criticized throughout modern thought in one way or another. Kant, for example, argues that without an eschatological “judgement”—that is, a precise sorting of intuitions under concepts which leads to knowledge—religious hope can only function as an “opiate” against the perceived evil of the world.²⁶¹ Karl Marx, of course, famously echoed this sentiment, in claiming that religion remains an opiate in so far as it removes humanity from their historical context.²⁶² And, even within the twentieth century, Ernst Bloch’s novel idea of the “Not-Yet-Conscious” still requires philosophical grounding and political action to disenchant the mythological impossibilities of future existence.²⁶³

Hope therefore seems to lead to an impasse. On the one hand, it is a pure form of hope which lacks certainty. It is hope for hope’s sake, which quickly degrades into hopelessness as only the waning effects of an opiate. The antidote of which is a hope removed from an abstract purity to a specific concreteness in order to become cleared of its ambiguity. It seems, thereby, that some concrete grounding is needed for a hope of certain positive value. Hope, in some sense, needs to become experienceable. On the other hand, when hope is grounded in history, it becomes difficult to discern how the good which hope promises can be guaranteed in the face of the evil experienced within history. The historical world is in the very least a mixture of good and evil, both of which can be extrapolated into the future based on an ontology of actuality.

Jüngel’s aesthetics provides a route beyond this impasse in that it combines both revelation and ontology. Under an aesthetic logic, the interruptive event of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a constitutive feature for both God’s being and historical existence. In terms of God’s being, Jüngel argues that it is an event in which God overcomes his own death through the power of love. In terms of historical existence, this overcoming is imparted to the world through new possibilities of worldly existence and to humanity as a new mode of being human. Hope becomes

God’s Gift: Explorations in Christian Eschatology, ed. David Fergusson and Marcel Sarot, The Society for the Study of Theology. Explorations in Contemporary Theology (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 66-70.

²⁶⁰ Jüngel, “Die Welt als Möglichkeit,” 224.

²⁶¹ Kant, “*Religion Within the Boundaries of Pure Reason*,” 6:78.

²⁶² Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy Of Right’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 131-2.

²⁶³ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, vol. I (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 7ff.

certain in that it is grounded in both God and history. Or, more precisely, hope is grounded in the event in which God identifies as historical, and thereby creates new possibilities for both divine and worldly existence.

God's Being in Coming

As mentioned above, the contribution of Jüngel to theologies of hope is the positive content in theological claims of eschatology grounded in interruptive events within history. Beauty is one such event, but another is God's self-revelation. Regarding the latter, hope is positively substantiated by the possibilities God has created in and through his identification with the dead and resurrected Jesus. It is in "God's identification with the crucified Jesus...understood as [an] eschatological happening" which makes *promise* a feature of divine ontology.²⁶⁴ Against Moltmann's negative relationship between the future and the presence, one of the "negation of the negation," God's positive identity means that Jesus is not merely the appearance of the promise, but he himself is the ontological condition of God's eschatological character.²⁶⁵

God's Being in Becoming

In light of the collapse of the ontic and ontological dimensions of worldly existence that Jüngel draws from Heidegger's aesthetics, there is a similar collapse concerning God's self-revelation and ontology. In the simplest terms, God grounds his own identity in an event of becoming. This event can formally be understood as the unification of the subject and object of divine propositions. But it occurs at the ontological level, rather than at the conceptual or logical levels, and thereby represents an eternally dynamic unification of God's being.²⁶⁶ As an ontological event, the becoming of God takes the form of an eternal process of overcoming an innate self-differentiation. This oscillation between self-differentiation and self-reconciliation means that God's being is continually expanding into new possibilities, which is ontologically communicated to worldly being through the aesthetic event of God's self-revelation. For God's ontic presence, this ontological reality is perceptible in the life of the historical Jesus, particularly as he articulates his divinity as a son to a father. The ontic and ontological dimensions of God's self-differentiation most clearly dissolve in the event of the crucifixion, where the human person Jesus, the very Son of God, hangs to death as he cries out to the Father, who is seemingly absent in his suffering. Concerning the overcoming of this self-differentiation, the ontic-ontological dissolution occurs in the event of the resurrection, where the dead Christ is brought back to life through the power of the Father and the Spirit.

²⁶⁴ Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 480. [350].

²⁶⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 171; Cf., Zimany, *Vehicle for God*, 140-1.

²⁶⁶ Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 498-9. [363-4].

Jüngel understands God as a dynamic relationality that occurs within what traditionally has been called the “persons” of his triune nature. Each person exerts an equally constitutive force on God’s being, yet God cannot be reduced to any single one.²⁶⁷ God’s identity is thereby located in the kind and quality of a relationship that exists in-between the self-differentiation of God’s being. In other words, God’s *identity* is this *relationship*. The mutual imposition of the modes of God’s self-differentiation on his identity can be represented (in formal terms) between the subject and object of theological propositions, where one term only possesses meaning as gained from the other, or (in trinitarian terms) between the Father and Son, where one person can only be referred to as such on the basis of their relationship with the other.²⁶⁸

There is, to some extent, a parallel between Jüngel’s account of God’s self-revelation and Karl Barth’s understanding of God as a transcendental subject.²⁶⁹ Jüngel certainly defends against a charge of “objectifying” God by asserting that God remains the “subject of historical predication.”²⁷⁰ He likewise commandeers Barth’s claim that God is the “subject, object, and predicate” of revelation.²⁷¹ Yet, Jüngel also goes beyond Barth in claiming that the relationship between the subject and object of historical propositions is one of identity, and not merely correspondence.²⁷² This claim of identity in fact makes history constitutive for God’s being, and does present God as, in the least, a perceptible feature of human experience. Per the New Testament formula, Jesus is the “image of God” not merely because he makes present an absent God, but because he *is* God. But the historical events of revelation also only assume their revelatory status based on an event of identification that is grounded in God’s freedom and love.²⁷³ In Jüngel’s words, the crucified Jesus “lives as the Christ from the power of God” who “*had* identified with the poverty” of death.²⁷⁴ God’s identity is an event in which God becomes and through which God establishes his relationship to the world.

²⁶⁷ Jüngel, 508-9n9. [371n9].

²⁶⁸ Jüngel explains this point in terms of a “hermeneutical necessity” of essence and existence. See, *ibid.*, 33-4. [27].

²⁶⁹ See, Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 50-8.

²⁷⁰ Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 432. Cf., Eberhard Jüngel, *God’s Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth: A Paraphrase*, trans. J. Webster (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2001), 63-9.

²⁷¹ Jüngel, *God’s Being is in Becoming*, 28.

²⁷² Cf., Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 116. “God reveals himself as ‘God’ where he shows himself as the same and is thus known as the same. He becomes identifiable where he identifies himself with himself in the historic act of faithfulness.”

²⁷³ Jüngel, *God’s Being is in Becoming*, 78-9; Cf., Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 299. [221]; Cf., Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 117. If “revelation of God means that God confesses to God in historic faithfulness to his promises, then it can hardly be said that the historic complex of particular historic events ‘itself’ reveals God.”

²⁷⁴ Jüngel, “»Theologische Wissenschaft und Glaube« im Blick auf die Armut Jesu,” 29.

The Event of God's Identity

Jüngel's most lucid explication of the event nature of God's identity comes in a trinitarian form:

As God the Son, God is identical with Jesus; as God the Father, God is the ground of this identification; as the Holy spirit, God is the eternal and temporal happenings of this identity....²⁷⁵

The collapse of God's ontological and ontic dimension is on full display here, in that God (i.e. divine relationship) becomes historically present in his entirety within the events of Jesus' life. God does so according to a trinitarian form, in which the three differentiated modes of God's being—the "persons" of the Trinity—perform unique functions in the presentation of God's identity. The Son is the set of historical particularities with which the Father identifies. The Father is the eternal "ground" of this identity in that he represents God's eternal freedom and the power of divine love. And the Spirit represents the sustained relationship between the Father and Son.

Several biblical scenes portray the fullness of God's relationship from a perspective within history. For instance, during Jesus' baptism, the voice of the Father sounds from above, and the Spirit descends as the dove, in which the self-differentiated relationship of God appears in the form of the human Jesus, the voice of the Father, and movement of the Spirit. Or, as mentioned above, in the resurrection, where the Jesus overcomes death in the power of the Spirit who is sent by the Father. What is important aesthetically in these scenes is that God's identity is fully present in that the entire relationality of his being is visually manifested in a single place and time.²⁷⁶ God simply is as he historically appears in these interruptive events. As such, God becomes perceptible in his divinity within the boundaries of the world.

The perceptibility of hope, while being grounded in the revelation of God in the event of resurrection, is tied to a certain aspect of God's being and presence. God's identity is an *ongoing* event in that God's existence is not fixed by any single static set of predicates. As a certain relationship, and not a substance (even a dynamic substance existing as, or moving towards, teleological completion), God's identity is relative to the unique features of his immediate existence. This relativity is what gives God's ontology its *becoming* nature. In his words, the "depth of God's glory" is grounded in "endurance of the contradiction of life and death that is God

²⁷⁵ Eberhard Jüngel, "Das Sein Jesu Christi als Ereignis der Versöhnung Gottes mit einer gottlosen Welt: Die Hingabe des Gekreuzigten," in *Entsprechungen: Gott—Wahrheit—Mensch. Theologische Erörterungen II* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2002), 276.

²⁷⁶ Moltmann criticizes Jüngel's trinitarian theology on this exact point, saying Jüngel "thinks too theologically." Although Moltmann agrees that Jüngel rightly stresses "that 'God was in Christ,' God humbled himself, God himself was on the cross," he also argues that the latter "uses a simple concept of God which is not sufficiently developed in a trinitarian direction." Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 203.

himself.”²⁷⁷ The varying predicates of God include the historical life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but are not strictly limited to them. Per the quote above, the event of God's identification has both “eternal and temporal” modes. This implies, among other things, that while God's being is to some degree constituted by history, God's identity is not entirely contingent on the world. Jüngel argues that God retains his inner depth of love and freedom throughout his various modes of being.²⁷⁸ In that God is a relationship, relational categories such as love and freedom speak directly to the heart of God's divinity. “Eternity” for Jüngel even refers to the dynamic inner-relationality of God's triune existence.²⁷⁹ As such, the somewhat relative nature of God's identity is not purely arbitrary, for it is the outworking of the continuous force of love. In fact, in this conception, the becoming of God possesses an innate positive value because it is the process in which God gives himself new *possibilities* for his existence in and out of his love.

The Creative Power of Love

Jüngel offers a specific definition of divine love as an inherently *creative* power. In his words, love is “full of creative possibilities” that compound with “every act of divine power.”²⁸⁰ Further emphasizing the identity between God and love, the “creative act of God,” performed out of love, is “nothing other than God's *being*, which as such is *creative being*.”²⁸¹ In accordance with the unifying event of God's being and act, the statement “God is love” only has meaning and value for Jüngel if God is actively loving. He actively loves himself as the dynamic and ongoing unification of his essence and existence.²⁸² “Love is essentially an increase in being.”²⁸³ God, in a sense, moves beyond the immediate limits of his identity to new possibilities in and through love. This occurs within the historical world in God's identification with the human Jesus. But it also means that love cannot be a single act, such as a single decision of God to identify with a set of attributes. God is love insofar as he continually expresses love through his acts. Love, as a defining concept of God's relational identity, is ongoing. As an event in which the ontological and ontic dimensions of God's being collapse, his identification with the resurrected Christ is his eternal love playing itself out within history.

²⁷⁷ Eberhard Jüngel, “Die Offenbarung der Verborgenheit Gottes. Ein Beitrag zum evangelischen Verständnis der Verborgenheit des göttlichen Wirkens,” in *Wertlose Wahrheit: Zur Identität und Relevanz des christlichen Glaubens. Theologische Erörterungen III* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2003), 171.

²⁷⁸ Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 299. [220].

²⁷⁹ Jüngel, 521; 5n6. [380; 383n6].

²⁸⁰ Jüngel, 464-5. [339]. Cf., Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 334; Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 118f; Also, Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Zur Theologie des Rechts,” *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 7, no. 1 (1963): 20f.

²⁸¹ Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 303. [223].

²⁸² Jüngel, 508. [371].

²⁸³ Jüngel, 505. [368].

Perhaps a cautionary note is in order here. Jüngel is clear that the events of God's identity and becoming are not understood as a form of process theology. In his words, "The differentiation of God and God," represented historically as the differentiation of the Son and Father, "cannot be understood as an opposite forced on the being of God."²⁸⁴ As an ontological event, God gives himself an identity in overcoming a self-imposed differentiation out of the creative capacity of love and the power of divine freedom.²⁸⁵ Yet, at the same time, Jüngel is ardently post-metaphysical, so the event of God's identification cannot be understood in terms of an absolute substance or teleologically perfected subject becoming represented within a set of predicates. For Jüngel, God's essence is always actively unified with his existence, and his being is always unified with his actions. God only *is* within the varying forms of this identifying event.²⁸⁶

The Coming of God

Jüngel attempts to clarify this rather difficult theological claim by employing a concept from biblical theology that "God's being is in *coming*," or, "God is the one coming to the world."²⁸⁷ In God's identification with the human Jesus, he comes *to the world*. That is, God becomes a fact of historical existence in his humanity as he takes on humanness as part of his identity. His coming is hermeneutically communicated, however, in that he "comes in the Word." As such, faith receives its corresponding mode of God's coming as God "addresses" humanity "out of himself."²⁸⁸ Thus, while God does not cease to be the subject of revelation in this identity, that he remains the "ground" of this identification, he also *comes* to the world, as in, he does not belong wholly to the world. These two aspects of God's coming represent the love and freedom of his relational identity. In love, God comes to the world, giving himself to the world to the point of "allowing himself to be pushed out of the world."²⁸⁹ In freedom, God retains divinity even in his death, and thus remains to be the source of the overcoming of death by eternal life.

Jüngel's intention in employing the concept of God's "coming" is to emphasize the "self-movement" of God's ontology of becoming.²⁹⁰ It is not that God only comes to the world in the sense that he has revealed his eternal nature. But, rather, that God comes to the world because he is eternally a being in coming.

God always comes from God. He is his own absolute origin. As God only comes from himself, however, he also really comes to himself. God comes to God. He is his own goal. But he does not strive for himself as his own goal in order to get away from himself as his

²⁸⁴ Jüngel, 498. [363].

²⁸⁵ See, *ibid.*, 46f. [36f.].

²⁸⁶ Jüngel, 411. [300].

²⁸⁷ Jüngel, 518; 21. [378; 80]; Cf., Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 122, 5.

²⁸⁸ Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 410. [300].

²⁸⁹ Jüngel, 80. [61].

²⁹⁰ Jüngel, 411. [300].

origin. God does not allow himself as his origin to be left behind. He always comes as God from God to God.²⁹¹

This eternal movement of God, Jüngel continues, is the *mysterium trinitatis*, which becomes historical in the event of God's identification with Jesus. The ontic and ontological dimensions of God collapse here as well.

The implications of Jüngel's divine ontology for hope is that the ongoing nature of God's coming gives a temporal schema to God's identity. Jüngel is clear that for that slim portion of history where the human Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected on earth, God possesses a history.²⁹² In these specific historical events, God is subjected to the conditions of historical existence. As Jesus dies on the cross, God experiences historical finitude. As Jesus is brought forth from the tomb, God experiences the possibilities of new life. But, given that the activity of God's coming in love is not limited to God's historical identity, there is also a "historicity" within God's eternal context.²⁹³ There is an inner reaching for the future within God's own being that is communicated to humanity in God's coming to the world. As modes of being, faith corresponds to the fact of God's existence, and hope to the manner in which God exists. "Faith gives the hopeful their certainty. Hope gives the faithful their liveliness."²⁹⁴ Hope, then, is not wishing for God to come again, but a participation in the eternal coming of God which includes the anticipation for the horizon of the future and the end of the world. As discussed below, space for this participation comes through aesthetic events, in so far as Jüngel understands worship to be a work of art. First, it is important to answer a fundamental question of theologies of hope, which is the nature of history in light of the event of God's self-revelation.

History in the Light of God's Coming

The historicity of Jüngel's divine ontology, which is ontically present as God identifies with the historical Jesus, is an important contribution to theologies of hope, for it escapes Moltmann's criticism of concepts of revelation understood as "epiphanies of the eternal present." What Moltmann has in mind here is metaphysically based theologies that understand God as a static being removed from temporality. In Moltmann's words, this conception of revelation "describes the God of Parmenides rather than the God of the exodus and revelation."²⁹⁵ Hope, in this view, becomes *ahistorical*, and faith becomes concerned with escaping history altogether. In lieu of "a cultic presence of the eternal," Moltmann argues for an understanding of revelation "as apocalypse

²⁹¹ Jüngel, 521. [380].

²⁹² Jüngel, 428-9. [313-4].

²⁹³ Jüngel, 475. [347].

²⁹⁴ Jüngel, "Der Geist der Hoffnung und des Trostes," 308.

²⁹⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 84.

of the promised future of truth” which becomes “manifest in the promise” and through which humanity “experiences reality as history in all its possibilities and dangers.”²⁹⁶ It is a view of revelation that operates within the boundaries of history, and thus a revelation subjected to the limitations and finitude of historical existence. Yet, it is also revelation rooted in the “promises of Christ.”²⁹⁷

These promises, to be sure, represent future possibilities. But they are indexed only in their futurity. “The *logos* of the *eschaton* is promise of that which is not yet, and for that reason it *makes* history.”²⁹⁸ Eschatological promises are “not yet” precisely because they stand in *contradiction* with the present, and thereby find their relationship to the “now.” In his words, “the promise...points away from the *appearances* in which it is uttered, into the as yet unrealized future which it announces.”²⁹⁹

This sounds strikingly similar to Jüngel’s understanding of beauty. But it should be recalled that God is not present in interruptions of beauty. God’s self-revelation is distinguished from beauty precisely on the basis of God’s presence, in that the former plays a constitutive role in God’s identity. Since Jesus is *the promise* of God, and not merely the appearance of the promise, he is identical to the glory toward which beauty points. Against a Christology of *kenosis*, God’s glory is on full display in Jüngel’s account.³⁰⁰ This glory appears for much of Jesus’ historical life “hidden *sub contrario* [under its opposite],” but erupts into a full presence in the event of his resurrection from the dead.³⁰¹ This means that, while beauty can offer possibilities to the world through its interruptive presence, Christian hope is certain in that it is based in God’s glory as it appears on the “face of Christ.”³⁰² Through this distinction, two important features of faith derive from God’s historicity and historicality. The first deals with history as an ontological concept; the second with history as an existential feature.

²⁹⁶ Moltmann, 84; 161.

²⁹⁷ Moltmann, 139.

²⁹⁸ Moltmann, 165.

²⁹⁹ Moltmann, 100. Emphasis added; Cf., Meeks, *Origins of the Theology of Hope*, 103ff.

³⁰⁰ Cf., Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 118. “The divine kenosis which begins with the creation of the world reaches its perfected and completed form in the incarnation of the Son.”

For the absence of a doctrine of *kenosis* in Jüngel, see: Piotr Małysz, *Trinity, Freedom and Love: An Engagement with the Theology of Eberhard Jüngel*, ed. John Webster, Ian A. McFarland, and Ivor Davidson, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 89n91.

³⁰¹ Jüngel, “Auch das Schöne,” 394.

³⁰² Eberhard Jüngel, “Die Wahrheit des Christentums,” in *Beziehungsreich. Perspektiven des Glaubens*. (Stuttgart: Radius-Verlag, 2002), 129.

The Concept of History

In terms of history as an ontological concept, new possibilities of worldly existence are created when God comes to the world in the historical Jesus. In Jüngel's words, "As a human being, God entered into the temporality of worldly history—changing the latter in such a way that lays beyond the capacities of history itself."³⁰³ Jüngel is similar to Moltmann here by arguing that a theology of hope is "realistic" in so far as it "takes seriously the possibilities with which all reality is fraught."³⁰⁴ Additionally, both thinkers agree that historical possibilities are not merely a conceptual matter, in that "the theologian is not concerned merely to supply a different *interpretation* of the world, of history and human nature," but to participate in these new possibilities.³⁰⁵

Where the two differ, however, is that Moltmann is adamant that an eschatologically based theology speaks of the world with the future as its sole point of reference. As such, revelation does not have "the character of *logos*-determined illumination of the existing reality of man and the world, but has here constitutively and basically the character of promise."³⁰⁶ The promise is rooted in Christ, but is so in that "it expects something new from him, something that has not yet happened so far."³⁰⁷ It "stands in contradiction" to the present.³⁰⁸ While Moltmann speaks of a "not-yet" that opposes the present, Jüngel argues that, *theologically*, possibility/impossibility is an "incomparably more fundamental distinction" than any relation of the present to the "not-yet" of actuality.³⁰⁹

In other words, Moltmann understands history in terms of "mission," while Jüngel understands it in terms of an ontology of becoming.³¹⁰ Interruptive events, by their nature, expose the limits of the context of the present. According to Jüngel's aesthetics, events achieve this by positing novel possibilities within the ontological framework of historical existence. In all revelatory events, therefore, from creation to the resurrection, "God is to be conceived of as the one who makes the possible be possible and the impossible be impossible."³¹¹ The possibilities of God's becoming, which are created in and through divine love, are imparted to the world in the sense that love is a communicable attribute. The world participates in God's love as passive recipients of its creative force.

³⁰³ Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 411. [301].

³⁰⁴ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 25.

³⁰⁵ Moltmann, 84; Cf., Jüngel, "Die Welt als Möglichkeit," 213.

³⁰⁶ Moltmann, 85.

³⁰⁷ Moltman., 229.

³⁰⁸ Moltmann, 224-5.

³⁰⁹ Jüngel, "Die Welt als Möglichkeit," 222.

³¹⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 325; See, Meeks, *Origins of the Theology of Hope*, 105f.

³¹¹ Jüngel, "Die Welt als Möglichkeit," 222.

Important for hope, worldly existence is subsequently understood in terms of ontological possibilities initiated by God, and not according to a logic of the actuality of being. "Hope, if it is true hope, is invested in the capacities of the God with whom all things are possible."³¹² History is only as certain as interruptive events allow.³¹³ But, in that God's advent is an interruptive event as well as a feature of God's existence, a theological understanding of history finds certainty in God's being.³¹⁴ The eschatological dimension of the world speaks precisely to *this* world that constitutes God's being in his identification with Jesus. God is the author of possibilities "through the creative Word of God."³¹⁵

The Experience of History

In terms of the experience of history, Jüngel argues that the experience of perishing within history is only possible by an established present from which the past and future come and go. The present is the temporal standard for perishing. It is precisely what perishes in the change of time and is what is presented through aesthetic interruptions. The historicity of God's becoming means that God also experiences perishing in his identification with the crucified Jesus, and that he has overcome his own death by identifying with a new set of possibilities for existence. This process is the eternal coming of God. As God comes to the world, the eternal reference point is communicated through his address. "The Word is the *ontological* unification of what is historically separated: present, future and past."³¹⁶ This unification primarily takes place in terms of a spatial presence, in that the believer stands in a certain relationship to God. Faith is being in the presence of God.

The spatial connotation of presence does not obliterate temporal distinctions, but rather gives them a radically new hermeneutical grounding. Typically, humans experience time as indexed by the ego. Temporal schemas are relative to the human perspective from its place as a being in the world. This includes God's eschatological advent, in that the distance from this advent appears to be determined by the index of the ego. However, in faith, the ego is drawn out from itself and into the presence of God. In Jüngel's words: "In so far as humanity is addressed through God from God, there occurs a *total distancing* of the ego from its being-here and being-now and, accordingly, an *entirely new qualification of its presentness*" which Jüngel names an "*eschatological spiritual*

³¹² Bauckham and Hart, "The Shape of Time," 69-70.

³¹³ Jüngel rejects "history" as meaning the "entirety" or "whole" of happenings in the world, in favor of an understanding of history as "contexts" which are established by interruptive events. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 255n5. [189n5].

³¹⁴ Cf., Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 119. "The guarantee of the promise's congruity with reality lies in the credibility and faithfulness of him who gives it."

³¹⁵ Jüngel, "Die Welt als Möglichkeit," 217.

³¹⁶ Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 256. [190]; Cf., Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 103ff.

presence.”³¹⁷ As humanity assumes this new position in the presence of God, time undergoes a critical distinction between a chronological time indexed by the historical place of the ego and a “eventful time” that receives its “measure” from God, and thereby “gets its movement from the end of time.”³¹⁸ In God’s coming to the world, God’s eternal coming becomes the temporal index for the hope that is grounded in faith.

As discussed above, at the cross, God addresses the world as his self-differentiation; in the resurrection, as the reconciliation of this differentiation. The two events are ontologically and hermeneutically reliant on one another for their happening and meaning. Combined as such, the two events are “together to be understood as the specific eschatological happening” of God’s promises.³¹⁹ God’s address subsequently defines the “past” as the mode of worldly being in which death has the final word. It is the mode where there is no *historical* possibility of life beyond death, and thus no concrete grounding for hope. In the resurrection, God defines the “future” as the mode of being in which death has been defeated, and the possibility for eternal life becomes historically concrete.³²⁰ The future is concretely understood as the creative power of God’s love, which brought creation out of nothing and life out of death, becoming ontically present.

As with beauty, the interruptive presence of God establishes the boundaries of the features of worldly existence while pointing toward a future. The resurrection is the historical object of hope because, as God appears in his reconciliation, he addresses the world as a *promise*. The promise is grounded in God’s creative love, in which he overcame the death of his own being, and through which “he addresses himself to us in such a way that he *promises* himself to us.”³²¹ Hope is grounded in the event of the resurrection because in that event the promises of God became perceptibly free from the finality of death *in* his identity with Jesus. The possibility of the defeat of death’s reign, and of eternal life, walked through the streets of Jerusalem. Faith in God’s past work in the historical Jesus grounds hope, which, in turn, “is what opens up the future for Christians.”³²²

Worship as Aesthetic Action

The historical distance between the events of Jesus and the contemporary moment cannot be ignored. Nor can the distance to the future. Jüngel argues that God’s identification with Jesus validates history in general.³²³ Thus, while the object of hope originally became perceptible in God’s

³¹⁷ Jüngel, 235. [174].

³¹⁸ Jüngel, *Paulus und Jesus*, 141; Cf., Nelson, *The Interruptive Word*, 96.

³¹⁹ Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 480. [350].

³²⁰ See, Jüngel, 235n4. [175n4].

³²¹ Jüngel, 236. [175].

³²² Jüngel, 539. [393].

³²³ Jüngel, 256f. [189f.]

radical redirection of the world, there is a need for reiterations of this event in the present. This occurs within the space cleared by the original appearance of hope, but through the participation of those who have stepped into this space by their faith in Jesus.

Christian worship is, for Jüngel, the hermeneutical locus for eschatology, and is considered the most tangible example of the activity of hope. He describes the worship service as a “work of art.”³²⁴ This is because, following Friedrich Schleiermacher, “all art has its essence in the representation, and everything, that wants to be nothing other than representation, is art.”³²⁵ Jüngel typically uses the music of worship as concrete examples of the aesthetic expression of hope. This ranges from the “dancing and singing” of the “actors of the worship festival,” to Johann Sebastian Bach’s High Mass in B Minor.³²⁶ His point is that through aesthetic expression, the hope which is grounded in the faith of the individual person becomes a communal activity. As an aesthetic object, hope shapes the context of the world through its power to reveal limits and impart freedom. This even extends beyond the community of believers to social and political contexts.

In light of the eschatological possibilities of God’s promise, Jüngel is emphatic that there is no further work that could possibly secure future existence. In God’s identification with Jesus, these promises are both established and communicated to the world. The goal of faith and hope is the same as their origin, and the end of the world positively corresponds to its saving moment. Yet, for Jüngel, to be is to act. This was discussed above in terms of the existence of God as love; but it also applies to human being. Jüngel sees an axiomatic correctness in Kant’s anthropological definition of pairing the question “what may I hope?” with the question “what should I do?”³²⁷

Both Moltmann and Jüngel share the conviction that hope is an anthropological mode that participates in eschatological possibilities which were inaugurated in Jesus’ resurrection. The two also agree that theology is, in Jüngel’s words, “at its core political—or not at all.”³²⁸ Yet, their differing views on the material elements of theology, on precisely how theology becomes concrete, has consequences for understanding how this participation should manifest itself in human action.

³²⁴ Eberhard Jüngel, “Der Gottesdienst als Fest der Freiheit. Der theologische Ort des Gottesdienstes nach Friedrich Schleiermacher,” in *Indikative der Gnade—Imperative der Freiheit. Theologische Erörterungen IV* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2003), 346.

³²⁵ F.D.E. Schleiermacher, “Die praktische Theologie nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt, aus Schleiermachers handschriftlichem Nachlasse und nachgeschriebenen Vorlesungen,” in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. J. Frerichs (1850), 71; Quoted in: Jüngel, “Gottesdienst als Fest,” 346.

³²⁶ Jüngel, “Gottesdienst als Fest,” 349; Jüngel, “Hoffnung,” 59-60; Cf., Jüngel, “Auch das Schöne,” 379.

³²⁷ Jüngel, “Hoffnung,” 59.

³²⁸ Eberhard Jüngel, “Zukunft und Hoffnung. Zur politischen Funktion christlicher Theologie,” in *Müssen Christen Sozialisten sein? Zwischen Glaube und Politik*, ed. Wolfgang Teichert (Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1976), 19.

For Moltmann, Christians are called on a mission “to *transform* [the present context of the world] in expectation of a divine transformation.”³²⁹ While “self-redemption” is only possible in God’s work, and thus is not in the power of human labor, we wait for the consummation of salvation in “creative expectation.”³³⁰ This is so, because the “political and social practice” provide the “concrete basis of theology.”³³¹ For, eschatology is only accessible in “a political hermeneutic of the crucified one and a theology of real liberation.”³³²

In contrast, the aesthetic event of God’s self-revelation subsumes the role of practical reason for Jüngel. While Jüngel would agree with Moltmann’s claim that “freedom in the light of hope is the creative passion for the possible,” he would qualify what it means to be *creative*.³³³ He draws upon a distinction Schleiermacher makes between *effective* and *representational* action to explain how the innate impulse of being to act takes on a new practical form in the aesthetic realm. He expounds that “while effective action is aimed at purposes and thus wants to achieve something, representational action is action that does not set any ends for itself and therefore does not want to achieve anything.”³³⁴ In other words, representational action is akin to an expression of being, which acts based on the inertia of its inner ground. For faith, representational action is understood as an overflowing of the love of God upon which the believer finds their being. It is action based “on what it already is by virtue of the redemption accomplished through Jesus of Nazareth.”³³⁵

For hope, however, the representational action corresponds to the possibilities established through God’s interruptive coming. In Jüngel’s words, hope is expressed in the activities “upon which humanity advances to itself and advances its world.” The acts of hope “advance” humanity and their world only in that humanity “recognizes, accepts and processes the *limitedness*” of its being. This involves distinguishing between the “immovable” boundaries and those which are “constantly to be expanded and changed, or, if necessary, narrowed” based on the possibilities which God has communicated to the world in his coming.³³⁶ Recalling the discussion above, the limits of historical existence are exposed and defined by aesthetic interruptions. As a mode of being which acts from already secured possibilities—manifested and exposed through God’s aesthetic presence—hope thereby “brings its object to life” in reproductive action within the aesthetic realm.

³²⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 84; cf., 25.

³³⁰ Moltmann, 335.

³³¹ Meeks, *Origins of the Theology of Hope*, 130.

³³² Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 297; Cf., Jürgen Moltmann, “Toward a Political Hermeneutic of the Gospel,” in *Religion, Revolution, and the Future* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), 97f.

³³³ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 217.

³³⁴ Jüngel, “Gottesdienst als Fest,” 344.

³³⁵ Jüngel, 345.

³³⁶ Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 540. [394].

Representational action finds meaning in the space opened by the possibilities of God's eschatological work in that it is freed from the duty to secure the future by human action. Hope experiences freedom from the once unshakable limits of historical existence—the “end of being, the end of worldly time, and also of one's own time of life”—because God has already overcome these limits within his own being through his identification with the historically crucified and resurrected Jesus. All reproductive acts of the believer work from the freedom given in God's address in their expressions of faith, hope and love.

Conclusion

Perhaps best formulated, the primary distinction between Jüngel and Moltmann is not a question of *if* God acts in the world or that an eschatological hermeneutic should be grounded in this action, but rather in *what way* God does act, and what *meaning* these acts hold. While representational actions do not seek to bring about any external end, they are, as with all actions in Jüngel's view, socially directed.³³⁷ But, the acts of hope also do not attempt to secure freedom through their impact. As with Schiller, freedom is experienced through the aesthetic realm prior to its function in the political sphere. In Jüngel words, “The political relevance of the Christian hope shows itself primarily and fundamentally where it is no way at all a question of what we have to *do*. Before all activity, faith is political in that it takes seriously the person as distinct from his or her deeds.”³³⁸

The aesthetic expression of beauty does not seek to transgress the limits of actuality through its actions. Here, beauty performs the mediatory role of revealing the already overcome limits of actuality by imitating God's eschatological return. Upon which the inaugurated possibilities will be universally revealed by the immediate presence of God's glory. The beauty of hope's aesthetic expression is a “deposit” of the immediate presence of glory.³³⁹

The “image” of hope, then, for Jüngel, is the manifestation of freedom that lies beyond the limits and boundaries of the actuality of the world. It is perceived as it interrupts the world and transforms the entire context of perception in the process. It takes on historicity in its ontic presence, and through its ontology of becoming. As such, it becomes concretely grounded in the activities of the world. Finally, it is re-presented through expressions of hope within the aesthetic realm, for the sake of revealing and shaping socio-political boundaries, and offering the freedom from them at the same time. Although the historic resurrection is a promise for a future of God's

³³⁷ Jüngel, 537. [392].

³³⁸ Jüngel, “Zukunft und Hoffnung. Zur politischen Funktion christlicher Theologie,” 20; Cf., Derek R. Nelson, “The Cautions of Justice: Eberhard Jüngel's Engagement with Politics and State,” in *Indicative of Grace—Imperative of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Eberhard Jüngel in His Eightieth Year*, ed. R. David Nelson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 162-4.

³³⁹ Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 540. [394].

glory, that future was visually embodied in the past, and takes on a tangible reality in the present as beauty points towards the things to come.

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Hope's Hunger

On Ascetism and Apophaticism of Hope in T.S. Eliot's Post-conversion Poetry

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Abstract

In this paper I analyse hope in connection to human desires as a natural passion that can be ordered virtuously and as a theological virtue. In both, hope is primarily threatened by two vices: presumption and despair. The central argument of this paper is that ascetic and apophatic practices can help us navigate the difficult terrain of hope in connection to desire; i.e., that one way to learn virtuous hope is to engage in ascetic practices whereby the desires that motivate hope – and our moral vision which makes visible to us those goods to which hope attaches itself – are purified. Ascetic is here understood not as a complete denial of desire – an absence of all desiring – but as a momentary renunciatory suspension of desire that leads to its purification and reorientation towards the good. This asceticism is connected with apophaticism: a welcoming of noetic darkness through which one enters a state of profound and willed ignorance in relation to God and desired future goods. My claim is that T.S. Eliot's post-conversion poetry – especially 'Ash-Wednesday' – yields many interesting and influential examples of how ascetic practices can form our future-orientated way of being, directing our hunger towards perceived future goods in a virtuous manner. In 'Ash-Wednesday' we discover an account of the individual convert's journey towards spiritual renewal and the difficult death hope must experience during that journey. In the *Four Quartets* asceticism and apophaticism of hope are also present while the focus shifts from the inward world of the individual convert to the individual in the context of the historical communities she is a member of. One of the most interesting features of Eliot's account of asceticism and hope



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is that for him the ascetic struggle is not a straight-forward journey from renunciation to stillness but a constant back-and-forth between moments of devotion and distraction. Indeed, the ascetic struggle for the purification of the desires that motivate hope takes place through the confusion of the fallen world that also pushes upon us the need to re-evaluate our hopes after disappointments and crises. After an analysis of Eliot's post-conversion poetry, I will present some preliminary remarks about how this kind of ascetic-apophatic approach towards hope can help remedy some of its accompanying vices on various levels.

*I find myself
Devouring verses of stranger passion
And exile. The exact words
Are fed into my blank hunger for you.*

Geoffrey Hill, *The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz*

Introduction

We generally think of hope in terms of desire and expectation. Hope, as the OED defines it, is an “expectation of something desired; desire combined with expectation”. As such, hoping is risky business: while it is a natural activity for human beings – we cannot help but exist as future-orientated agents – through hope we also become invested in future goods that are uncertain and difficult to attain, hence making ourselves vulnerable to presumption, disappointment and eventually despair. In addition, as a movement towards an attractive future good, hope is linked with desires: we hope for that which we desire, and we desire that which we perceive as good. It is also this connection with desires that makes hope dangerous: disordered and selfish desires can create a cacophony of hopes and disappointments in a person that hold her back from attaining the inner stillness needed for virtuous living.

One way to characterise the nature of hope as a natural human activity is to speak of it, as Thomas Aquinas does, as a passion. For Aquinas hope as a natural passion is a desire for a future good that is difficult and yet possible to attain (*bonum arduum futurum*).³⁴⁰ As a passion hope functions

³⁴⁰ For Aquinas passions are sensual appetites that generate “inclinations of desire towards those desirable objects immediately perceived through the senses and imagination, or aversions from what is perceived as noxious or unpleasant (I-II 22.3).” Jean Porter, *The Perfection of Desire: Habit, Reason, and Virtue in Aquinas's Summa Theologiae* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2018), 17. As such passions themselves are not virtues but natural inclinations that must be ordered by virtues: human beings are passionate agents who are moved by their passions to pursue what they perceive as good and avoid what they perceive as bad. Virtues – such as prudence, fortitude, justice and courage – integrate these passions around the good.

on various levels, intersecting with virtue in diverse ways.³⁴¹ It is possible, for example, to be distracted by the natural passion of hope – desiring some immediate, perceived good – so that one becomes obsessed with that desired good to a point where one is unable to orientate oneself properly towards some other, objectively greater future good. We can imagine, for example, an academic who hopes for a specific kind of academic success – such as a position of influence in an elite university. There are several moral pitfalls such a hope can fall into. For example, the academic can hope for the desired position of influence for unvirtuous reasons: a disordinate desire for power or fame can be the basis of her motivations. Hope that has its basis in disordinate desires rather than virtuously ordered ones, can easily become obsessive: our academic can eventually become so preoccupied with the singular goal of attaining a position of influence that she is unable to hope for other, even greater goods – such as that of being a good colleague to those with whom she shares the academic enterprise she is engaged with. Her hope, mixed with pride, can then also slip into *presumption*: she can despise her colleagues who might be competing for the same position, thinking that the position is already hers. If it happens that she is not, in fact, offered the position, the disappointment can cause her presumption to swing to the other extreme and turn into *despair*: having thought of her future good primarily in terms of this specific thing, she is unable to imagine a desirable future without it.

While not all of us are academics, most of us can probably think of similar examples of situations where the human tendency to hope for uncertain future goods results in some, smaller or greater, moral loss. I would like to argue, therefore, following Aquinas, that hope is an art: in the same way as a person needs to learn how to order her desires to love all good things in the right order, she will have to learn how to hope well on various levels. Indeed, hope, desire, and love are all interconnected: hope as a passion is a movement of desire towards an arduous future good, so desired because it is loved. A person's passions, desires, and loves, however, are not necessarily virtuously ordered. Rather, they can easily become excessive, disordinate, and obsessive, pushing our hopes towards presumption and finally disappointment and despair.

³⁴¹ For Aquinas, hope threatens to slip towards the vices of presumption and despair since as a natural passion “hope, like the other [passions](#), is subject to a mean and extremes”. (STh. II-II, q. 17, a. 1.) For Aquinas the virtue of theological hope is distinct from the passion of hope as such and is not subject to means and extremes (it is not possible to hope too much in God or trust too much in divine assistance), except in secondary sense “it may have a mean and extremes, as regards those things a man trusts to obtain” – i.e. the specific things one hopes from God – “in so far as he either presumes above his capability [presumption], or despairs of things of which he is capable” (STh. II-II, q. 17, a. 1). Strictly speaking, only theological hope can be a virtue: natural hope is a passion and hence subject to virtue but not a virtue in itself. However, some – such as Nicholas Austin, SJ – have argued that there is indeed a virtue of moral hope in Aquinas as well: magnanimity. See Austin, ‘Moral Hope: Aquinas and Cajetan on Magnanimity’, *Nova et Vetera*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2020), pp. 817-852.

The argument of this paper is that ascetic and apophatic practices can help a person to navigate this difficult terrain of hope in connection to desire and virtue: one way to learn virtuous hope is to engage in ascetic practices whereby the desires that motivate hope – and one's moral vision which makes visible those goods hope attaches itself to – are purified as hope takes on a more apophatic form.³⁴² Ascetic practice as a momentary renunciatory suspension of desire clears our vision, removes distractions, and so helps us to become “devoted, concentrated in purpose”.³⁴³ If hope is a passion then hope, too, must be purified and transformed to become virtuous: hope and its accompanying passions – sorrow, joy, fear – must be “put in order and calmed”.³⁴⁴ In addition to this level of virtuous ordering of passions, ascetism also relates to theological hope: hoping for a God who is beyond any creaturely image, concept or experience – the wholly ineffable, unimaginable God – requires a kind of *via negativa* of hope. Ascetism therefore paves the way towards an apophaticism of theological hope.³⁴⁵ An interesting and influential example of this kind of purification of hope can be found in T.S. Eliot's post-conversion poetry, especially in ‘Ash-Wednesday’. Thus, the main argument of this paper regarding ascetic practices of hope is made via an analysis of Eliot's poetry. In Eliot we find one possible account of the kind of ascetic struggle that those who hope as morally imperfect agents can engage in. In order to locate Eliot's account of hope's ascetism in a broader theological context, I will discuss it's relation to two major theologians' account of hope: Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross. Of these especially the latter was also a significant influence on Eliot and will therefore make an excellent conversation partner for the purposes of this paper.³⁴⁶ Thomas Aquinas's influence on Eliot is more mediated, especially through Dante who was a major source of inspiration for Eliot. In addition, he was also

³⁴² For a discussion of asceticism see Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015), especially the introduction. In this paper I will be mostly following Coakley in how I understand asceticism not as a repression of desire but as a reordering and re-channelling of desire towards its proper end through a momentary renunciatory suspension of it.

³⁴³ ‘Ash-Wednesday’, ll.21.

³⁴⁴ St. John, “Ascent of Mount Carmel” in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, edited and translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rogriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2017), 3.2.2; 3.16.4-5.

³⁴⁵ This emphasis on reordering of desire through ascetic and apophatic practices is mine: for Eliot the matter is somewhat more complex and at times he seems to suggest that the goal is not mere *suspension* of desire – a kind of pause between desire and movement – but its disappearance. The closer he gets to theological and hence apophatic hope, the more Eliot seems to be thinking thinking not simply in terms of desire's denial but its absence: the ideal state for learning theological hope is that of complete stillness where desiring has ceased. On the other hand, his notion of stillness-in-movement seems to suggest an asceticism that is more like renunciatory suspension of desire: desires are still experienced as real but they are momentarily set aside and the movement they motivate comes to a halt, intentional stillness is chosen instead.

³⁴⁶ For the influence of St. John of the Cross on Eliot, see Paul Murray, ‘The Influence of St. John of the Cross’ in *T.S. Eliot and Mysticism* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1991), pp. 88-100.

influenced by Neo-Thomistic philosophy, especially that of Jacques Maritain.³⁴⁷ In this paper, however, I've chosen to go to Aquinas directly since he also offers, as was seen earlier, a rich way of understanding hope as a human passion – that is, an activity that is inherently human but needs to be ordered by the virtues in order to be integrated into a life of human flourishing. His account of hope, therefore, offers an interesting framework against which Eliot's asceticism of hope can be compared.

The Hard Death of Hope: On T.S. Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday*

The conversion of T.S. Eliot into Anglo-Catholicism in 1927 came as a surprise to those who had come admire him as the author *Waste Land* (1922) and as a major voice of Anglophone literary modernism: for some his conversion seemed like a betrayal of his earlier modernist convictions, a turning away from the spiritual waste lands of his early poetry towards religious and metaphysical consolations.³⁴⁸ While the question of continuity in Eliot's poetry is a complex one, a shift in tone and ethos in contrast to his earlier poetry is clear in *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) which is the first of Eliot's poems written after his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism. The theme of the poem itself also suggests that a shift has taken place in Eliot's life and thinking: the poem explores, after all, the realities of conversion and spiritual transformation and the difficult renunciation of old desires that accompany such a transformation. *Ash-Wednesday* is a poem "fundamentally concerned with alternations in state, with the painful processes of becoming, and with the subtle permutations of the changed and the changing self".³⁴⁹

The poem consists of six parts which were originally separate fragments that Eliot edited into one poem – this process of writing and editing shows in the fragmentary nature of the poem itself, as we shall see later.³⁵⁰ The title 'Ash-Wednesday' refers to the beginning of Lent: a season of repentance and conversion preceding the celebration of Passover and eventually Easter. On Ash-Wednesday the priest will tip his fingers into ash, draw a sign of the cross on the foreheads of the faithful and repeat the words: "You are dust and to dust you shall return." These words – and the moment at which they are spoken in the narrative of the first few chapters of Genesis (3.19) – help situate the reader of the poem: we enter the world of the poem at the moment of our exile

³⁴⁷ For a discussion of Dante's influence on Eliot, see for example Massimo Bacigalupo 'Dante' in ed. Jason Harding *T.S. Eliot in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). For Eliot and Neo-Thomistic philosophy, see James Matthew Wilson, "'I bought and praised but did not read Aquinas': T.S. Eliot, Jacques Maritain, and the Ontology of the Sign," in *Yeats Eliot Review* vol. 27, issue 1/2, pp. 12-22.

³⁴⁸ Lyndall Gordon, *The Imperfect Life of T.S. Eliot* (London: Hachette Digital, 2012), chapter 6.

³⁴⁹ Sarah Kennedy, "'Let these words answer': Ash-Wednesday and the Ariel Poems," in ed. Jason Harding, *The New Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 91.

³⁵⁰ Kennedy, 89.

from the Garden. Already with the title, then, the central juxtapositions of the poem are established: exile and return, the Desert and the Garden, death and rebirth.

In addition to the liturgical context, the intertextual context of the poem is also important for its interpretation. The two main sources of influence and inspiration are Dante – especially *Vita Nuova*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* – and St. John of the Cross.³⁵¹ The poem is in many ways modelled after Dante's *Vita Nuova*: here, too, the ambiguous character of 'the Lady' represents both earthly and divine loves, inviting the lover into deeper communion with God through herself. St. John of the Cross's mystical theology, on the other hand, inspires the ascetic theme of renunciation, the upwards movement on 'the ladder of divine love' – "mounting of the saint's stair"³⁵² – towards ever deepening darkness.

The structure of 'Ash-Wednesday' has divided its critics. One could argue that the poem follows the structure of the Mass, each part corresponding to a part of the Mass: Preparation, Offertory, Consecration, Communion, the Gospel, and Thanksgiving.³⁵³ This would be fitting especially in light of the liturgical context in which Eliot situated his poem. However, such a unified structure is not evident to all readers: many have argued that the poem does not have any unifying form but consists of, for example, six loosely related developments on a theme,³⁵⁴ while others have seen in it the structure of Dante's *Purgatorio*,³⁵⁵ the three stairs imagined in the Buddhist Way of Purification written by Buddhaghosa,³⁵⁶ or a pattern of regression and progression depicting the experience of a catechumen who is preparing for baptism.³⁵⁷

While the various attempts to fit 'Ash-Wednesday' into a form such as the ones mentioned above might be illuminating, in my view the poem's structure seems to elude any obvious pattern; it seems to consist, mainly, of loosely connected moments of conversion interrupted by dream-like visions – the 'three dreams that cross' (VI.21) – which are represented by parts II-IV. The distinction between dream and reality, however, is never too clear: the convert's world depicted by the poem is, rather, that of "the dream-crossed twilight between birth and dying" (VI.7), a wavering between renunciation and return. The fragmentary, ethereal structure serves a purpose: as a convert's "journey to no end" (II.40) the poem manifests in its progressions and regressions the complexity, difficulty and ambivalence of spiritual death and rebirth, the wavering between the

³⁵¹ Kennedy, 93.

³⁵² 'A Song of Simeon', line 28.

³⁵³ Audrey T. Rodgers, "T.S. Eliot's 'Purgatorio': The Structure of 'Ash-Wednesday' ", *Comparative Literature Studies* vol. 7, no. 2 (1970), pp. 97-112, 99.

³⁵⁴ For some examples, see Sr. Margaret Patrice Slattery, C.C.V.I., "Structural Unity in Eliot's 'Ash Wednesday' ", *Renascence* vol. 20, no. 3 (1968), pp. 97-112.

³⁵⁵ Rodgers, "T.S. Eliot's 'Purgatorio' ", 97.

³⁵⁶ Eloise Knapp Hay, *T.S. Eliot's Negative Way* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1982), 93.

³⁵⁷ Slattery, *Structural Unity*.

world and God, old life and new. The structure of the poem itself, then, displays the kind of hesitancy and back-and-forth movement inherent in an experience of spiritual growth. I will later argue that this “wavering structure” is also important in terms of what it reveals of Eliot’s understanding of hope’s ascetism, but first it will be useful to go through the poem in the order in which it is presented to us.

The poem begins with a declaration (l.1-3): “Because I do not hope to turn again / Because I do not hope / Because I do not hope to turn.” These lines refer to Guido Cavalcanti’s poem translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti as ‘Ballata Written in Exile at Sarzana’. The poem expresses Cavalcanti’s devotion to his lady when death closes in: “Because I think, not ever to return / Ballad, to Tuscany.” ‘Perch’lo non spero’ could also be translated more literally as ‘Because I do not hope’.³⁵⁸ The very first lines, then, already invoke the theme of exile and loss: we meet the speaker at the moment when he gives up his hope to “drink / There where the trees flower, and springs flow” (l.13-14). There is no going back to the Garden, to the sources of life: the aged eagle can no longer spread its wings to fly.

The Garden, here, seems to assume a kind of double meaning: it points towards the Garden of Eden and hence towards one’s original exile and the need for conversion. On the other hand, it is also the Earthly Paradise that signifies the joys and pleasures of life, including romantic love. This double meaning between the original Garden of Eden and the Earthly Paradise, the Lady as a symbol of divine love and earthly love, remains throughout the poem, instilling it with intentional ambiguity: mundane desires are tangled up with higher ones, and in order to pursue the higher ones with a purity of devotion one must go through a process of transformation whereby earthly attachments are renounced. In order, then, to return to the original Garden from his exile – to go through the necessary death – the speaker must renounce the pleasures of the Earthly Paradise and – most importantly for the purposes of this article – his *hope* for being able to enjoy that Paradise. The first hopes to be ascetically renounced, then, are those for worldly glory and prestige, ‘the infirm glories of the positive hour’ (l.10; l.4-5): “Desiring this man’s gift and that man’s scope / I no longer strive to strive towards such things.”³⁵⁹

While some interpreters see in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ a depiction of a more active conversion, reading the first few lines as a kind of declaration of intent on the part of the speaker, in my view this ascetic renunciation of mundane hopes – the passion of hope, if you wish – and the poem as a whole have a significantly passive tone. The poem does not depict so much a spiritual achievement

³⁵⁸ George Williamson, *A Reader’s Guide to T.S. Eliot* (Bristol: Thames and Hudson, 1967), 169.

³⁵⁹ This is a reference to Shakespeare’s Sonnet 29: “When, in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes / I all alone beweep my outcast state, - - / Wishing me like to one more rich in hope --/Desiring this man’s art and that man’s scope - - / Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising / Haply I think on thee, and then my state / Like to the lark at break of day arising / From sullen earth sings hymns at heaven’s gate.”

as the inability to reach toward any such achievement: the focus is not on the speaker's agency but on the uselessness of his agency and the incapacity of his will (l.34-39). Hence, 'the turning' is not something the speaker *does* but an acknowledgment of what he *cannot* do or achieve both in terms of his more mundane hopes and spiritually. Conversion in Eliot's account is thus, more than anything, *a form of yielding, a type of death*. The disappointment and unattainability of what was hoped for – romantic love, power, prestige, honour – forces the speaker to reckon with the transitoriness, if not worthlessness, of his usual hopes and his inability to reach towards higher hopes. In this sense, ascetism is not so much chosen as it is forced upon the speaker. And so, he must come to terms with the fact that he is spiritually dead, gone. He must enter St. John of the Cross's 'passive night'. Yet, a glimmer of a higher hope remains. The reference (l.4) to Shakespeare's Sonnet 29 suggests that a better hope is still available: the love of 'the Lady' – now representing divine love – to whom the speaker directs his prayers at the end.

Seen through the lenses of Aquinas's account of hope as a passion – as a natural inclination towards perceived arduous future goods that feeds on what is known through the senses – the speaker in Eliot's poem has reached a point where he has become aware of how disorderly his passions are, including his hopes. This revelation is made possible through disappointment that illuminates his hopes – and the vanity that accompanies them. The speaker, however, accepts this painful revelation as spiritually salutary: while the disappointment of his hopes is not (yet) willed by the speaker, through acceptance a way of ascetic purification opens up and even banal disappointments become elevated into a kind of ascetic *via negativa*.

The second part of the poem – the first of the 'three dreams' (VI.21) – continues this theme: addressing the Lady, the speaker recounts how "three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree / In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety / On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained / In the hollow round of my skull" (II.1-4). The three white leopards represent the world, the flesh, and the devil which have now consumed the speaker entirely. As a result, he has become fully aware of his state of spiritual death and so the renunciation of hope as a passion has led him to the next level of hope: the moral hope for spiritual rebirth.³⁶⁰ "And God said / Shall these bones live?" (II.4-5) Evoking the image of the dead bones coming back to life from Ezekiel 48, Eliot is suggesting that rebirth is indeed possible but at the same time this hope remains intentionally ambivalent: the death that such a rebirth requires is very hard, indeed nearly impossible, to achieve.

³⁶⁰ There have been many theories as to what the three white leopards represent and some have even seen them as salutary agents of spiritual rebirth, but Eliot himself seemed to have thought that the three traditional enemies of a Christian pilgrim get closest to the meaning of the image (See the annotations in Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, eds., *The Poems of T.S. Eliot, Volume I: Collected and Uncollected Poems* [London, Faber&Faber, 2018], 741.)

The purification of hope's passion – the renunciation of earthly hopes – is connected with memory: to be purified one must wade through the waters of River Lethe and be baptized in forgetfulness. "And I pray that I may forget / These matters that with myself I too much discuss / Too much explain." (l.27-29) Thus, when in part II the speaker finds himself completely devoured by his unruly passions and desires, he again hopes for forgetfulness (ll.19-21). That is, for the ability to empty his memory of past sins but also – since memory is connected with a continuation of identity through time – for the ability to forget *the person* he was. By forgetting his old self and the hopes he had for that self, he becomes empty and ready to receive the unimaginable new life that God might create – a life so different from the old that it is almost inconceivable. Thus, it can only be hoped for with an apophatic hope. As Eliot put it later in *Little Gidding* (7-10): "This is the use of memory / For liberation – not less of love but expanding / Of love beyond desire, and so liberation / From the future as well as the past."

Here, in the connection Eliot draws between memory and hope, the influence of St. John of the Cross is apparent; he also locates hope in the memory. For St. John memory is to be understood broadly as "what a person has become over time through accumulated acts of knowing and loving". As such memory also conditions any exercise of the will and thus – as "the underlying and unifying self-presence of the soul that is distended across time" – it is the capacity for anticipating the future.³⁶¹ In Eliot as well, the convert of 'Ash-Wednesday' must empty his memory and thereby experience a discontinuation of identity in order to re-emerge as a new self. Since memory sustains one's identity through time, forming a basis for one's hopes regarding the future, a suspension of one's ability to anticipate the future, a death of hope, is also required. The new self requires new hopes.

The key to understanding why such a renunciation of the passion of hope is needed lies in the connection, in Eliot, between hope and desire on the one hand and stillness on another; union with the divine requires a calming of all desires in what St. John called "holy simplicity". Hope's passion must go, because hope like all wanting is a kind of movement that keeps the pilgrim of the poem from sitting still (l.38-39). It is a distraction that keeps him from achieving the kind of singularity of desire necessary for a union with God.³⁶² Hence, we can already see how the training of the passion of hope through ascetic denial reaches towards hope as a theological virtue: the inordinate passions must be "cleared away" so that one can pass through them to God. One has to learn to hope 'for God alone in silence' (Ps. 62.5). The journey towards God, then, as St. John

³⁶¹ Dominic Doyle, 'Changing Hopes: The Theological Virtue of Hope in Thomas Aquinas, John of the Cross, and Karl Rahner', *Irish Theological Quarterly* vol. 77, no. 1 (2011), 26-27.

³⁶² Cf. 'Burnt Norton' (V.25-27): "Desire itself is movement / Not in itself desirable; / Love itself is unmoving - -."

puts it, “does not consist in consolations, delights, and spiritual feelings, but in the living death of the cross”.³⁶³

Paradoxically, then, while the passion of hope must be stilled, hope as a theological virtue keeps Eliot's convert moving. It is the pilgrim virtue that carries him towards God. Yet, at the same time this theological hope, too, must be *still*. This paradoxical movement-in-stillness – “journey to no end” (ll.40) – is made manifest in the ascent-like structure of *Ash-Wednesday*. Eliot seems to be suggesting that we do not yet know, in our usual state, what is it like to actually hope for God, the ineffable and unimaginable One. We might have some approximations, some intuitions and images, but our hoping is yet to be trained through the cold desolation of denial. When spiritual consolations are denied us – when the darkness of God comes upon us (*'East Coker'*, III.13) – we learn, beyond knowing, to truly hope for *God* rather than an idea or an image of him, or a certain kind of experience, or a feeling such as some sense of peace or satisfaction. We learn to persist through disappointment and even despair, entering what St. John called, “the dark night of the spirit”.

Here again, we can hear echoes of St. John in Eliot. For St. John all theological virtues must – if they are to be truly *theological* virtues that unite one with God, the unimaginable One – take on a form of emptiness. This is so because in their natural state human mental faculties – intellect, will, and memory – have as their material creaturely stuff, i.e., what can be seen, felt, thought, imagined. However, for St. John all this creaturely stuff is so different from God that it is, in fact, an impediment to experiencing a union with him. Hence, in one's natural state it is impossible to achieve union with God, caught up as we are in the world of senses. Thus, “[a]ll these sensory means and exercises of the faculties must consequently be left behind and in silence so that God himself may effect divine union in the soul. As a result one has to follow this method of disencumbering, emptying, and depriving the faculties of their natural authority and operation to make room for the inflow and illumination of the supernatural.” In order to achieve union with the ineffable God, our mental faculties must be emptied of all things creaturely through the theological virtues: the darkness of faith empties the intellect, hope vacates memory, and love purifies the will from all objects other than God.³⁶⁴ Here St. John's understanding of theological hope, differs somewhat from that of Aquinas. While Aquinas too thought God to be beyond our natural capacities of understanding, he does think that – through the infused, ‘supernatural’ virtue of faith – the human mind can be elevated to grasp God as its ultimate end. In order to hope for a union with God, then, we first need faith that will reveal God to us as our ultimate end and happiness: a kind of knowing precedes hope. Hope can therefore be said to have a steady, graspable object. “Absolutely speaking, [faith](#) precedes hope. For the object of hope is a

³⁶³ St. John, *Ascent*, 2.7.11.

³⁶⁴ St. John, 3.2.2.

future good, arduous but possible to obtain. In order, therefore, that we may hope, it is necessary for the object of hope to be proposed to us as possible.”³⁶⁵ Aquinas’s understanding of how faith as a kind of supernatural knowing makes the virtue of theological hope possible is not necessarily incompatible with St. John’s – and Eliot’s – emphasis on the apophaticism of theological virtues, but the emphasis is markedly different.³⁶⁶ The journey of Eliot’s pilgrim in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ reflects this tension between a more positive, Thomistic account of faith and hope and the more negative, Carmelite account of the theological virtues: in order to get started on his journey the convert must have faith – some grasp, however inadequate, of God’s reality – and some hope of reaching a union with him. However, as the journey continues, deeper into the darkness, these virtues take on an increasingly apophatic form. Or, as St. John puts it, “in the measure memory becomes dispossessed of things, in that measure it will have hope, and the more hope it has the greater will be its union with God; for in relation to God, the more a soul hopes the more it attains. And it hopes more when, precisely, it is more dispossessed of things.”³⁶⁷

Hence, having thus struggled with ‘the devil of the stairs who wears the deceitful face of hope and despair’ (‘Ash-Wednesday’, III.5-6), in the next dream-sequence the speaker moves upwards in ever deepening renunciation until all hope, even the theological kind, is silenced and “there were no more faces and the stair was dark” (III.9). The stairs are a first explicit reference to St. John’s *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* in Ash-Wednesday, suggesting that the first two parts of the poem were loosely connected with what John called “the night of the senses”: the mortification of appetites, a casting out of “all alien affections and attachments” and ‘a purification of their residue’.³⁶⁸ Although Aquinas did not articulate his understanding of theological hope in equally apophatic terms, for him as well hope as a passion is located in the sensual appetite and hence was orientated through the senses and imagination: hope has as its content what the imagination, informed by the senses that perceive various possible goods in the world, creates. Hope, thus, depends on the human ability to imagine, based on our experience of the world, possible future goods. Hence, for Eliot – inspired by St. John’s intense apophaticism – a purification of the imagination, of senses, is necessary for the purification of hopes, and so the speaker in ‘Ash-

³⁶⁵ STh. II-II, q. 17, a. 7.

³⁶⁶ With love – the third theological virtue – the order of virtues is more complex. In one sense love – which is the means by which we attain union and friendship with God – flows from hope since hope is that which makes us move towards the desired union with God and one cannot attain union with something without first moving towards it. In another way, love also precedes hope since one desires and hopes for that which one already loves in some sense. It is by faith, then, that we understand God as our supreme happiness, and it is hope that believes that it is possible for us to achieve union with God while love is that which makes the union possible, the means by which it is achieved. See, STh. q. 17, a. 8. See also Doyle, *Changing Hopes*, 21.

³⁶⁷ St. John, *Ascent*, 3.7.2.

³⁶⁸ St. John, 1.5.7.

Wednesday' moves forwards through the first night into the emptiness of even theological hope that "lies beyond all - understanding, taste, feeling, and imagining".³⁶⁹

In the darkness of the staircase, the pilgrim of the poem keeps rising, higher, once again momentarily catching sight of the ambiguous blessed face he first renounced in part I. Now "the broadbacked figure drest in blue and green" – the latter, noticeably, being the liturgical colour of hope – becomes "a distraction" that must fade away: "Fading, fading: strength beyond hope and despair / Climbing the third stair." (III.15-21) Darkening of the mental faculties upon which hope feeds – primarily memory and imagination, but also the intellect and the will to the degree that faith, love and hope are all connected – leads into a state of almost ungraspable movement-in-stillness where the speaker's usual future-orientated way of being is momentarily suspended while he continues moving forward, carried by a desire that is beyond hope. This desire beyond hope is a paradoxical, empty desire because it is directed towards a God who is unsayable and unimaginable. In other words, it is *apophatic* hope that is directed towards the non-object who is God, clouded in the darkness of unknowing. This empty hope cannot, however, carry the speaker to the end it points to: reaching the ineffable God beyond all desiring and hoping is impossible for the speaker of the poem. The emphasis on conversion as a passive experience of yielding to an inevitable death aligns with this. Consequently, the upward movement in the staircase ends in a prayer that returns to the passive tone of the earlier poem (III.24-25): "Lord, I am not worthy / but speak the word only." The traveller must yield completely to the passive night of the spirit, waiting to be carried into the impossible healing and rebirth, the ineffable union with God for whom no hope can be articulated.

This dark night affords no words. Thus, the staircase is not followed by a straight-forward depiction of a beatific vision or union with the divine: the pilgrim's journey does not reach a simple ending like that. Rather, the ascent-like structure of poem breaks down and part IV begins with yet another unplaceable, dream-like vision. This time it is a vision of the Garden, echoing with the reminiscences of the Earthly Paradise Dante reaches after climbing Mount Purgatory in the Divine Comedy. The springs from which the speaker could not drink in part I are made fresh again (IV.8), and the birds sing the call to reach back towards the Garden from which we are exiled, "redeem the time / redeem the dream / the token of the word unheard, unspoken" (IV.26-27). The blessed face that was renounced now becomes a symbol of devotion.

The moment of reprieve in the Garden, however, does not last. Quite abruptly part IV ends with "and after this our exile" (IV.29).³⁷⁰ The Earthly Paradise – the moment of union and illumination, purity of devotion, singularity of desire – is a fickle moment, soon lost. And so, unlike in Dante,

³⁶⁹ St. John, 2.4.2.

³⁷⁰ Cf. *Salve Regina*: "Let my cry come unto thee, and after this our exile, show us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

Eliot's pilgrim does not rise to the heavens. We enter, rather, the wild whirling of the unstilled world where we're "torn on the horn between season and season / time and time / between hour and hour, word and word, power and power" (V.22-24). We're no longer "thus devoted, concentrated in purpose" (II.21) but back in the world of distractions, unruly desires, and imperfect devotion. We're once again children at the closed gates of paradise, exiled, pleading for the prayers of the Lady (V.24-26). Hence, despite his wishes, the speaker finds himself once again thrown back to the beginning, turning again, repeating the prayers of the first part (VI.1-3): "Although I do not hope to turn again."

This is where Eliot's ascetic vision is at its richest: there is no simple movement from renunciation to purification, but rather constant "wavering between the profit and the loss / in this brief transit where dreams cross / the dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying" (VI.4-6). The ascetic movement, the renunciation of desire and hope, is complex and imperfect, ever going back-and-forth between loss and gain. There are glimpses of a beatific vision, moments of complete surrender and devotion, but they're always followed by a return to the opaqueness of the fallen world: the apophatic moment cannot be sustained perpetually. Rather, one must always descend back to the sensory world of memory and imagination. Conversion, then, is constant. One must constantly seek "a further union, a deeper communion". Our hopes, too, must be constantly purified and it is precisely in the opaque, fallen world where such a purification takes place. In the end we find 'the desert is in the garden and the garden in the desert' (V.34): the moments of devotion and progress always overlapping with moments of distraction and regression.

Time, Movement and the London Tube: Briefly on *The Four Quartets*

'Ash-Wednesday's' complex vision of ascetic purification gets carried into the *Four Quartets* (1936-1943) a decade later.³⁷¹ In this paper I will not discuss the whole of *Four Quartets* but will simply point to some themes and primarily one image – that of the London Tube – that further illuminate some of the motifs that were present in 'Ash-Wednesday'. In the *Four Quartets* time and history themselves become purifying agents and places where finite and infinite cross, where human beings can approach the difficult, nearly impossible end of all their desiring – God, the eternal in time. As a result, the focus shifts from the inward experience of the individual convert to the relationship between the individual and the communities she is a member of – both cultural and political communities, but also historical: the individual is defined by her relationship to the generations that preceded her and the legacy they left. Time, then, is not simply an individual, inward experience of a single lifetime, an arch that reaches from birth to death. Rather, the individual's experience of

³⁷¹ While the first poem of the series, *Burnt Norton*, was written in 1935 and published in 1936 – that is, before the Second World War – the other three poems were written during the war (*East Coker* in 1940, *The Dry Salvages* in 1941, *Little Gidding* in 1942) and reflect Eliot's experience of the war.

time is also marked by the burden of all the time that has gone before her, the collective past – and tradition – of the communities she identifies with. The purifying fire is no longer “the intense moment / Isolated, with no before and after / But a lifetime of burning in every moment / And not the lifetime of one man only / But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.” (‘East Coker’, V.21-25)

However, time itself does not automatically purify: in order for the friction of time to become spiritually useful, intentional movement inward – a descent “into the world of perpetual solitude” – is required. This, once again, requires an ascetic struggle, “destitution of all property / Desiccation of the world of sense / Evacuation of the world of fancy / Inoperancy of the world of spirit” (‘Burn Norton’, III.29-33). Hence, in part III of ‘Burnt Norton’, the London Tube represents the kind of banal deprivation that does not serve the ascetic struggle towards the Garden and hence is no “darkness to purify the soul / Emptying the sensual with deprivation / Cleansing affection from the temporal” but only “Tumid apathy with no concentration” (III.7-14). The image of the grimy London Tube is contrasted with the realities of spiritual struggle for “internal darkness, deprivation” (III.28). At the same time the London Tube is also an image for the spiritual stillness in the midst of the moving world that is required of the ascetic: the world, like the Tube, moves with all history “on its metalled ways / Of time past and time future” while the passenger sits still (III.36-37). The double-meaning of the image of the London Tube – both as a place of spiritual apathy but also as a place of spiritual renewal – points to the way in which the possibilities of spiritual renewal and apathy, devotion and distraction, coalesce in the fallen world.

The image of the Tube returns in ‘East Coker’ part III where the train stops too long between the stations – the frantic movement of the world-in-time comes to a halt – and conversation fades into silence, “leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about” (21). Again, these prosaic moments in the midst of the busyness of the city life can become places of spiritual purification: the train, standing still in the darkness between the stations, becomes a figure of divine darkness that descends upon the spiritually aware person. In this darkness Eliot returns to the Johannine theme of the apophaticism of theological virtues that was so prevalent in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ (‘East Coker’, III.23-28):

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

In order to learn to hope well for the unimaginable God – to know how to truly hope God from God – we must sit in stillness, in the darkness as when “in the theatre / The lights are extinguished,

for the scene to be changed” (‘East Coker’, III.12-13). Paraphrasing John from *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, the speaker of the poem then says (III.35-39): “In order to arrive there / To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not / You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy. / In order to arrive at what you do not know / You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.”

It is perhaps easy to read these passages in *The Four Quartets* simply as a reiteration of the individual pilgrim’s inward journey towards apophatic hope in ‘Ash-Wednesday’. However, when Eliot’s *Four Quartets* are read in their historical context – the social, political and moral crisis of the Second World War – a broader picture emerges: hopes, private and public, are also purified in the communal, historical context. Crises, both personal and *communal*, break down the usual pattern of continuity we expect between past, present and future. The future that was imagined in the past becomes disconnected from the present, while the present with its crisis forces a new sense of future, perhaps marked with confusion, a feeling of looming threat or even despair. In the breakdown of the usual pattern of expectation and continuity hope must be re-evaluated and rearticulated. When such rearticulation is required, that is, during a time of confusion – when divine providence is hidden, when future is uncertain and the usual stories we tell about ourselves and the world around us are interrupted – *The Four Quartets* offer an invitation to dwell in the ambiguity of history, to embrace the way of ignorance as a way to a future that is yet unimaginable. The confusion of history itself can become a purifying fire. Thus, for Eliot, the perplexing pattern of history, the opaqueness of the fallen world, call for purification of hope through ignorance and even disappointment not just in terms of individual hopes but collective hopes as well.

For Eliot, then, a certain apophaticism of our shared hopes is pushed upon us by the twists and turns of history, the stacking of time upon time in an ever-more-complicated pattern – and that is what makes time and history, for those who are aware, a purifying fire. Hence, for Eliot, even the terrors of the Blitz he encountered while working as an air-raid warden in London can become a figure of the divine, purifying fire. “The only hope, or else despair / Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre – / To be redeemed from fire by fire.” (‘Little Gidding’, IV.5-7). The uncertainty, if not the complete disappearance, of the expected future during a time of crisis can either be a fire that consumes in despair or a purifying fire from which hope emerges resurrected and renewed. This is no theodicy, not an explanation or justification of the terrors of history. Rather, it is a bold invitation to consider this world – with all its perplexity and terror – as a place of spiritual renewal. “We must be still and still moving / Into another intensity / For a further union, a deeper communion / Through the dark cold and empty desolation.” (‘East Coker’, V.33-36)

Ascetism of Hope as a Remedy of Vices

In this article I have argued, with the help of T.S. Eliot, that asceticism and apophaticism can help us to virtuously order the desires that motivate hope. In addition, they help us to navigate the perilous terrain between the vices of presumption and despair that virtuous hope must travel through. Here it should be emphasised that in my meaning asceticism is not to be understood as an end of desire but rather as a momentary renunciatory suspension of desire that aims at its reordering and purification. The emphasis, then, is on the *suspension* rather than absence of desire: ascetic practice is not about reaching a state of non-desiring but about attaining, through momentary renunciation, sufficient distance between desires and the will so that the effective link between wanting and acting can be broken and then *rebuilt*. Another way to put it would be to say that ascetic practice aims at surrendering and subjecting all our desires to the good in order that these desires might be harnessed for human flourishing. In this way, too, asceticism cannot aim at absence of desire since one cannot surrender desires that are non-existent. This also makes clear the connection between asceticism and virtue: virtue orders all passions and desires, indeed the whole person, towards the good in the right order, as Aquinas argued. Ascetism can hence aid us in developing virtue.

Momentary renunciatory suspension of desire leads towards apophaticism: a spiritual practice of embracing noetic darkness, a state of willed ignorance through which one can adopt a non-controlling position in relation to God and the future goods that are hoped for. This paradoxical state of desiring and not desiring Eliot called 'movement in stillness'. In this moment of stillness hopes can be re-formed: it is an apophatic pause that allows for hopes to be articulated in light of the good rather than the cacophony of images and illusions, born of unruly passions and desires, that call from within and without. In this last section, then, I will make some preliminary remarks about how this kind of ascetic practice can help remedy some of the vices that hope is in danger of falling into as a passion and as a theological virtue.

First, the passion of hope. Hope as a passion, as Aquinas argued, is a natural state for human beings: we have the capacity to imagine arduous future goods and we have an inherent hunger towards these perceived future goods that propels forward. In other words, humans are capable of hope. For Eliot, this movement is connected with the 'time-ridden' nature of human existence and can become a hindrance for experiencing the stillness that spiritual life requires. Human beings move constantly in time, orientating themselves in the midst of time's relentless passage towards various imagined futures. "But to apprehend / The point of intersection of the timeless / With time, is an occupation for the saint – / No occupation either, but something given." ('The Dry Salvages', V.17-20) Ascetism, then, as a momentary renunciation of this human hunger for future goods, can lead to a stillness in the midst of time, a quiet in which the noise of the wanting, expectation, and disappointment is made less loud. Caring and not caring, still and still moving, a

new kind of moral vision can open up: goods other than those in one's immediate field of vision, goods one was blinded to earlier – moral and theological – emerge. And so, the training of the passion of hope through ascetic struggle can clear the way for the formation of virtuous hope.

Second, apophaticism of hope calls into question the assumption that hope must always have a steady object. The practice of ascetic suspension and apophatic surrender of expectations, can open the door for the truly *new* life of God to appear – the life that surprises, the life one did not know how to hope for. In the same way as the disciples' hope for God's new future had to go through the cold desolation of the cross in order to be formed into the Easter hope that the resurrection of Christ gave birth to, some hopes might have to be surrendered to God in a moment of apophatic pause so that they can emerge renewed, so that the life of God – unseen, unexpected – can emerge. As St. John and Eliot both make manifest, in waiting for the unimaginable God there might be moments when expectations and wishes must be laid aside, and the pilgrim must enter a state of suspension, not knowing what will be next. Adopting a non-controlling apophatic position thus becomes vitally important. It is this ascetic struggle towards the new and hence yet unknown life that Eliot depicts in 'Ash-Wednesday'. In the end, the dead bones shall indeed live, caught up in the rhythm of God's own life and future.

The practice of ascetic detachment can also help us to navigate the difficult aspect of uncertainty that tempts hope with presumption and despair. Both of these vices attempt to release the tension inherent in hope – that it is always a kind of movement towards something that we do not yet possess, that it is a virtue of privation – by removing uncertainty. The paradoxical notion of movement-in-stillness reaches towards the difficult balance that virtuous hope must learn: having joyful expectation of something that is not absolutely certain. Learning to dwell in that tension between loss and gain is an ascetic practice: waiting and not waiting, yielding to the unpredictability of future and finally to the empty darkness of God, moving forward in hope that is 'beyond hope and despair'.

This also has some relevance to our collective hopes. The public discourse around the question of hope – especially hope at the face of such global, existential threats as the climate change – is often focused on whether we should be able to articulate some kind of achievable, shared hope so as to form a basis of collective action towards a better future. The problem with this is, of course, that such a hope is not always – when facts are considered – well-founded. Thus, there is a legitimate fear that collective hope can become presumption: a dangerous delusion, an illusionary shelter from the reality of the catastrophe that is already happening, a false comfort that lulls us into the deadly sleep of inaction. On the other hand, looking at our collective hopes merely as illusions of the dangerous sort tends towards despair, also undercutting our sense of agency and action. Thus, the problem: how to hope together and well – or virtuously – in the midst of life's confusion and, indeed, terror?

It might be easy to think that apophatic hope that embraces uncertainty and unknowing is not well-suited for articulating a collective vision of the future – a hope that will motivate action in the present. However, Eliot's ascetic spirituality is connected with a deep awareness of historically situated responsibility and his understanding of apophatic hope can therefore also inform our collective hopes; sometimes we perhaps have to sit in darkness together, waiting for the scene to be changed. For Eliot in *Four Quartets* such a collective praxis of apophatic hope does not mean abandoning the responsibility to orientate ourselves towards the future. However, he is suggesting that this responsibility to hope can perhaps sometimes only be realised by welcoming the refining fire of crisis and disappointment, embracing the yet unknown future. The image of darkness in the theatre as the scene is changed – darkness that is a collective experience, shared by all of those in the audience – challenges us to ask whether apophatic hope is a praxis we should appropriate not just individually but collectively as well. The crisis of the Second World War caused an apophatic pause in Eliot's hopes for the future as the usual expectation of continuity between past, present and future was broken down: there was a sudden disconnect between what the imagined future of the past was and the actual future that the present gave allowance to. The expected future of the past no longer suited the present circumstances, and the hope that had belonged to the past had to be reformulated. Currently we are facing a whole of host collective threats that challenge our expectations and hopes about the future: global pandemics, climate crisis, war, food shortages. In many ways especially those in the west who have become used to thinking of their futures as secure, as matching a set of expectations they have – such as continued high standard of living – are perhaps experiencing shared disorientation. Understanding hope as something that can have an apophatic element to it might help us to negotiate this tricky transition from the hope of the past into the hope of a new kind of present. Similarly, an ascetic understanding of hope might aid us in accepting the fact that, given the climate crisis, it is likely that those of us that are wealthier on a global scale might not be able to enjoy their current living standard indefinitely into the future: some hopes for the future will be frustrated, but perhaps there is a possibility that such frustration can be accepted, even welcomed as salutary because it forces a confrontation with some of those disorderly, even selfish desires that might motivate our hopes.

Finally, ascetism of hope functions as an apophatic purification of theological hope, directing it more and more towards the ineffable and unimaginable God. Learning such apophaticism can also put a check on the way in which humans use language about God's future – his providential will, his plans, his promises – to justify a particular type of action or choice. It questions the way in which religious hopes are sometimes used to wield power over others to a destructive degree. Apophaticism of hope could perhaps be one way in which a pause could be inserted into the thinking of those who are very certain that they are 'on the right side of history', if not 'on the side of God'. This does not mean that religious hope for the future can only ever be either completely apophatic or a power grab attempted through rhetoric. It does, however, introduce

the possibility that perhaps we haven't got it all figured out, that we might be more ignorant than we think. As such, apophaticism of hope calls for discernment.

Hopes, then, are purified in the fires of crisis, disappointment and denial that are inherent in human life marked by time – by memory and by the unknowable future we expect and hope for in light of that memory – but Eliot is inviting us to welcome the purifying fires. The failure of the passion of hope to attain what it wants and even the darkening of theological hope can be opportunities to refining both hope and desire. At the same time, Eliot's asceticism and apophaticism should not be read too simplistically: it is precisely Eliot's understanding of the intense difficulty, indeed near impossibility, of reaching the state of stillness-in-movement that makes his ascetic vision of the Christian life so interesting. Yet, while it remains an open question for Eliot and his readers whether it is ever possible to completely reach such a state, the invitation to seek stillness remains real precisely in the midst of life's ambiguities, time's friction and history's confusing pattern; it is a work to be done in the opaque twilight of the fallen world. Perhaps the point is not in the end – or at least not for now – the destination but the journey of ascetic struggle itself, “a lifetime's death in love” (*The Dry Salvages*, V.21). It will hence remain an imperfect endeavour, this “fight to recover what has been lost / And found and lost again and again - - under conditions / That seem unpropitious” (*East Coker*, V.15-17). Thus, for us, “there is only the trying” (*East Coker*, V.18).

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Time and Eternity in Hegel

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Abstract

This paper constitutes an argument for the contemporary relevance of Hegel's conception of eternity and its relation to time for debates in recent philosophy of religion. It is based upon two fundamental observations about Hegel's system. Firstly, that it establishes a priori the meaning of eternal divinity as the modern rendering of the logos, and hence does not make it in any way dependent upon worldly understanding of time. On the contrary, it is a particular Hegelian philosophy of time which emerges out of the logical development of eternity itself. Secondly, it provides for a mediation between eternity and time which allows to answer many objections posed to traditional concepts of timelessness (for example its relation to creation, contingency, etc.). As an introduction to the debate, I offer at the outset a selection of both classical (Boethius, Augustine) and contemporary models of the relation between time and eternity. Next, I elaborate upon Hegel's understanding of eternity as circular becoming through successive determination as presented in the Science of Logic. Here, I argue that Hegel's understanding of the eternal Absolute allows him to circumvent the boundaries of established ideas on eternity's relation to time. I further indicate that the most useful resource allowing to understand Hegel's notion of eternity and temporality can be found in his Philosophy of Nature, which forms a logical development out of the Idea's self-determination (Hegel's account of creation), and which contains his original conception of time as modelled on, though not identical with, the atemporal becoming of the Idea. I end by recapitulating the comparison of Hegel's relation between time and eternity and the models outlined before, arguing throughout that the utility of Hegel's thought in those debates does not necessitate an unreserved acceptance of his entire system.



Introduction

The name G.W.F. Hegel is not frequently invoked in the discussions surrounding the relation between eternity and time in the context of contemporary philosophical theology. Perhaps it is largely owing to a popular understanding of Hegel as a philosopher of purely *historical* development – an understanding which I will indicate is deeply misleading. Hegelian thought, as will be here argued, provides important and unique conceptual tools for conceiving of this relationship, which become increasingly important, especially in the wake of the revival of interest in German idealism in theological circles throughout recent decades.

The context of Hegel's philosophical work is important for understanding his project as an attempt to return to the relevance of eternity for modern thought, which this paper will argue is also legitimate for contemporary debates in philosophy of religion. It is largely a reaction to Kant, who diminished the cosmological role of eternity which it enjoyed before the dawn of modernity, through considering it largely as an unnecessary postulate of pure reason (alongside the traditional concept of God in general).³⁷² Therefore, for Hegel, philosophical theology which intended to be genuine after Kant could not simply return to the Platonic or Aristotelian understanding of time and eternity, upon which much of prior Christian doctrine was built.³⁷³ The wake of modernity in general and Kant's critical philosophy in particular did not allow for eternity to be simply postulated as part of a harmonious whole with nature. Hegel understood this shift in philosophical paradigm, and focussed his project partially on showing how an understanding similar to this Classical one could be logically developed from the state of pure lack of all presuppositions. The way which would lead to this is one of dialectic, wherein a logical category makes itself explicit as actually belonging to a larger, all-encompassing frame of reference. Such a thinking lets us develop a concept of God as the omnipresent Absolute, which is also present in nature as this nature's very universality. This context and method of Hegel's work reveal two crucial ways in which his philosophy might offer a new perspective on the time-eternity distinction.

Firstly, Hegel's idealism might serve to re-orient the time-eternity debate by thinking more 'from above' than 'from below'. One of the core problems of many accounts of the relation of God to time is that they assume a certain view of time, creation, and/or 'coherence', and then think whether a concept of God with certain attributes would be compatible with it. This is again a result of a certain post-Kantian way of thinking, in which what is immediately given is sensuous intuition interpreted through categories.

³⁷² See Alistair Welchman's chapter "Eternity in Kantian and Post-Kantian Thought," in *Eternity: A History*, ed. Yitzhak Melamed, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 183-195.

³⁷³ On Hegel's aim to prevent the 'secularization' of time, see S.F. Baekers, "Die Zeit als Mitte der Philosophie Hegels," *Hegel-Studien*, 30, (1995), 123.

Hegel, on the other hand, develops a conception of God through first inquiring into the very logical presuppositions of any thought itself. He shows that an examination of the way we think (and the way we think about time notwithstanding) is generally based upon the set of eternal basic logical categories, which then by themselves unfold into a certain conception of temporal procession. In other words, Hegel does not assume a category of time and its content based on sensuous intuitions as simply given, as Kant does in his transcendental aesthetic.³⁷⁴ He rather seeks to determine the very *logos* of any thinking based on Kantian categories and intuitions. This *logos*, because it forms the basis of time is, by definition, eternal, and, as Hegel also wishes to show, is divine in the sense of being the content of the idea of an eternal 'God of the philosophers.'³⁷⁵ A conception of God is developed *a priori*, from which a philosophy of time logically flows. In order to demonstrate this, this paper will consider particular Hegel's works in which he demonstrates his logical system proper – the *Science of Logic*, and *The Philosophy of Nature* which comprises the second volume of the *Encyclopaedia of the Logical Sciences*. Other works, most notably the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, were considered by Hegel himself as more 'applied' versions of his work, and a detailed discussion of how time and eternity interact in Hegel's speculative interpretation of the doctrines of Christianity goes beyond the scope of this paper.

Secondly, Hegel goes beyond many standpoints in philosophy of religion, as he pursues a method of dialectical logic. Most contemporary views in philosophy of religion assume that a fixed binary opposition (for example between time and eternity) cannot be incorporated within a broader category which would make the very difference between the two intelligible. Dialectics' distinctiveness from 'regular' logic is primarily that any positivity necessarily must include within itself a negation, which taken at face value might be considered a violation of the law of non-contradiction. However, it enables Hegel to establish a unique conception of eternity which *both* includes all temporality within itself (in the mode of its conceptual universality, in Platonic language, the realm of the Forms), *and* by virtue of this very fact maintains a distinction from time. Though it will be seen that some conceptions of eternity come close to such a unique mediation (most notably the idea of 'eternal duration'), they do not fully do so.

It must be noted that the argument of this paper concerning the utility of Hegelian thinking, is one that is fundamentally dialectical and 'from above', and does not include within itself a justification of the entire Hegelian system. It rather argues that there are specific *elements* of that thinking, concerning Hegelian cataphatic and dialectical deductions, which can provide solutions for

³⁷⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 178ff. Of course, Kant does provide a transcendental exposition of the notion of time, but it is still not fundamentally grounded *a priori* as logically developed from other categories, but necessitates sensible intuition to, as it is, 'prove itself' to exist.

³⁷⁵ See Klaus Hedwig, "Hegel: Time and Eternity," *Dialogue*, vol. 9 (2), (1970), 145.

problems regarding divine eternity's relation to time. Those elements cannot, or at least will not be shown, to provide solutions for *all* problems in philosophy of religion. That said, before moving to Hegel I need to briefly set the scene of some contemporary standpoints in the discussions surrounding time and eternity within philosophy of religion.

Selected Models of the Relation Between Time and Eternity

The following main types of relations between time and eternity are to be considered as a selection of the many available, based on their popularity in recent philosophy of religion and significance for the Hegelian philosophy of time and eternity.

Timelessness. This view holds God to be essentially absolutely distinct from all temporal events and not under the impact of time in any possible way.³⁷⁶ The biblical basis for such a view is possible to be derived, though has been frequently contested and remains arguable.³⁷⁷ However, what is beyond argument is that it has been historically a very popular and influential view to hold in Christianity, particularly in the Patristic period. Such a dualistic vision is usually said to originate in Plato's and more broadly Platonic thought. For Plato, time is distinctively a created category, and only resembles eternity in its nature. Time is the 'eternity' for the world itself – there is no world without time, yet time itself is only confined to the created and transient order, not to the eternal realm of ideality. In other words, time is the '(...) likeness of eternity, a likeness that progresses eternally through the sequence of numbers, while eternity abides in oneness.'³⁷⁸ The precise determination of time, however, was given not against that eternity, but rather inscribed within the temporal order through the movement of heavenly bodies.³⁷⁹

Boethius, a Neoplatonist, modifies Plato's ideas on thinking of God as eternal. 'Eternity is the whole, simultaneous, perfect possession of limitless life (...)' he claims.³⁸⁰ The 'eternal present' within which God dwells is outside of what we perceive as the present moment. God, in Boethius'

³⁷⁶ Paul Helm in *God and Time*, ed. Gregory E. Ganssle, (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 28-61. Cf. Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

³⁷⁷ Christoph Schwöbel concisely sketches the issue of Scripture (taken as a whole) showing God substantially to be outside time, yet also frequently (and metaphorically) picturing divine economy as always acting out within a temporal context. As a further note, Schwöbel's trinitarian framework for providing a description of God as both in and outside time is somewhat of a trinitarian 'application' of the more philosophical ideas developed in this paper. See Christoph Schwöbel, "The Eternity of the Triune God: Preliminary Considerations on the Relationship Between the Trinity and the Time of Creation," *Modern Theology*, 34 (3), (2018). For a broader discussion of the question of the biblical basis, see Alan G. Padgett's *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time*, (London: Macmillan, 1992), 23-37.

³⁷⁸ Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37d.

³⁷⁹ Plato, 38e-39a.

³⁸⁰ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 168.

thought, has presence in which He exists perpetually within the world is also somehow simultaneous to all the linear development of time from absolute past to the absolute future.³⁸¹

Another important contributor to the idea of divine eternity was Augustine. In his case, however, this contribution is ambiguous between concepts of *absolute* divine timelessness over against God's *everlastingness*. In the latter idea, the emphasis is placed not on God's absolute distinctiveness from time (which nevertheless isn't denied), but rather also existing *simultaneously* at all possible times – 'seeing' past, present and future through the same lens. For Augustine, time is a created reality similar to the world itself, following Platonic thought. God does not precede time in time – there was no 'time' in the same fashion before created time.³⁸² God has been doing 'nothing' before creation.³⁸³

Relative Timelessness. This view was proposed in recent philosophy of religion in order to prevent the doctrine of divine eternity from lapsing into some sort of divine temporality (as some strands of process theism insist), but on the other hand to acknowledge the need for some kind of change to occur within God.³⁸⁴ According to proponents of relative timelessness, God creates time (*pace* Augustine and Boethius), but his nature itself is also changing within the framework of a 'divine' type of time. God's change does not depend in any way on the change that occurs within the world, but both can be conceived as the basis for two distinct types of time – the expression of the change within the created order, and the expression of change within God which allows him to 'sustain a dynamic, changing world'.

Timelessness without creation. This view is a response to the problems which ensue both within the theories of absolute timelessness (chiefly to do with relationship with creation and omniscience) as well as relative timelessness (also with reference to divine omniscience as well as change within God). Yet this standpoint also abides to the traditional understanding of these relations within which 'being within time' and 'being outside time' are unreconcilable (but which are reconciled in the framework of Hegel's dialectic).³⁸⁵ Its proponents hold that God has been timeless before creating the world, yet the act of creating also means God's entering into time. In this 'post-creation' temporality, God is of course everlasting and existing simultaneously with every moment of time, yet within the framework of time which He has himself created. However, this view has often been criticized from the Augustinian side, as according to it, it cannot be said that there is in the nature of God any sense of a 'before' or 'after' the creation of the world. These categories

³⁸¹ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, 170. Cf. Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, (London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 112-123.

³⁸² Augustine, *Confessions*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), Book IX, 16.

³⁸³ Augustine, Book IX, 14.

³⁸⁴ Alan G. Padgett in Ganssle (ed.), 92-111. Cf. Alan G. Padgett, *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time*, (London: Macmillan, 1992).

³⁸⁵ William L. Craig in Ganssle (ed.), 129-161, 129 on the contradiction mentioned.

themselves belong to the temporal understanding of them within the created order. God was eternal, hence was outside the very category of 'before' when there was no creation, indeed this eternity has been in itself the cause for time.

Divine temporality. Finally, there is a view which sees God as within time, dynamically acting and reacting to events – hence dispensing with the traditional understanding (which it sees as not having support in the words of the Bible and, sometimes, as a later Greek-Platonic rendering of the Christian and Jewish truths about God, which was then used to the standard Thomistic definition of God as a pure act without unrealized potentiality, i.e. possibility of change).³⁸⁶ Divine temporalists protest against the traditional doctrine of divine immutability, and claim that God himself can and does change both in time and in history (and, in some versions, particularly of kenotic theism, that he can also undergo mental states and emotions).³⁸⁷ God has a past, a present and a future, which he might perhaps know, but which he has not changed into yet. The precise relation of God to time, however, varies amongst divine temporalists, as does the question of whether time and history are realities created and sustained by God, or they are the very measure of change within the divine nature, etc.

Having had a background, cursory view upon some basic philosophical standpoints on the ideas of time and eternity, we can now examine some important elements of Hegel's system in more detail.

Hegel's *Logic* – the Explication of Eternal Divinity

To indicate how Hegel can integrate eternity and transient process (though not yet explicitly temporal) within eternity itself, a cursory explication of three categories from the *Science of Logic* is necessary – Becoming, the True Infinite and the Absolute Idea. Within the Hegelian identification of dynamic conceptuality with active, yet atemporal eternity, the role of the *Logic* is, in a stunning turn of phrase "the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit".³⁸⁸ The *Logic* of Hegel is attempting to furnish a conceptual structure which would replace the conception of God from pure actuality to pure process, that is, atemporal becoming-oneself through (again atemporal) determination.

According to Hegel, we can understand both the relationship between time and eternity, and the nature of the philosophical idea of God itself, because both are inscribed in the nature of being *and* in the nature of our thinking. One of the main aims in Hegel's *Logic* is to provide for an eternal

³⁸⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff in Ganssle (ed.), 187-214.

³⁸⁷ Cf. Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), esp. 46ff.

³⁸⁸ G.W.F Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 29.

foundation of the world (ontology) and of thinking itself (transcendental philosophy and noetics), which would be developed from the state of pure *presuppositionlessness*.³⁸⁹ This is done in response to Kant, whose main object of inquiry was to establish the transcendental principles and conditions of possibility of thought. After Kant, many philosophers and theologians (Hegel being both) sought to establish particular formal principles of what constitutes legitimate source of knowledge, upon which their philosophy or theology could be later elaborated. In theology, this is frequently called ‘prolegomena’, and some of the most important ones are those of Schleiermacher and Barth.³⁹⁰ Hegel’s contribution is, firstly, to show a way how to establish those formal ‘rules’ of being and thought from, as he argues, a state of complete lack of any presuppositions, completely forgetting any judgement on anything which one could have – what he calls “Pure Being”.³⁹¹ The fact that they are elaborated without initially presupposing anything, and in a logical and systematic way is a response to Kant, who never provided a fully self-grounding logical deduction of the categories themselves, but only ultimately presupposed their existence (for example as I have indicated above with the category of time).

Secondly, it is a merging precisely of those conditions with the eternal essence of divinity itself. In this way, Hegel resembles and foreshadows many insights of traditional and contemporary theology which viewed God as the ground of all being and possibility of all thought. These eternal conditions and foundations of thought and being itself are in Hegel neither immanent to the subject (as with Kant’s foundations of knowing), nor to the world. They are eternal and distinct from the world precisely by virtue of their everlastingness and successive (atemporal and then temporal) self-determination – firstly within themselves and then with the world itself. In other words, for Hegel, if we want even to start to think about eternal divinity, which is the very *logos* of the world, we have to initially suspend all our empirical and rational presuppositions and judgements about the world, time, and God. It is to this that Hegel refers just one page before the earlier quote about God:

Any definition with which a science makes an absolute beginning can contain nothing else than the precise and correct expression of what is represented in one’s mind as the *traditionally accepted* subject matter and purpose of the science. That just this subject matter and this purpose are so

³⁸⁹ Put succinctly, there is an important debate in Hegel scholarship on whether his *Logic* is only a transcendental philosophy (examination of the categories with which we think and which we synthesize with sensuous data), or also an ontology (examination of the fundamental principles of being itself). This paper assumes the latter interpretation. See for instance Robert Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) for the former interpretation, and Stephen Houlgate *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic: From Being to Infinity*, (Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006), 137-143 for the latter.

³⁹⁰ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 3-128; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1:1: The Doctrine of the Word of God, (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 1-84.

³⁹¹ And what Stephen Houlgate calls “Radical Self-Criticism”, see *The Opening*, 24-28.

represented is a historical warrant for invoking such or such fact as conceded, or, more precisely, only for pleading that such or such fact should be accepted as conceded.³⁹²

Becoming and determination

Pure Being is, according to Hegel, the first thought of any thought which makes itself absolutely presuppositionless – the first ‘determination’ of that thought precisely through total lack of determination. Pure Being is rather in itself a lack of realizing what its own nature is. Precisely this Pure Being, for Hegel, renders itself to be Nothing. It makes itself explicit to be Nothing because it did not determine itself against anything else. *A thought of total absence manifests itself to be absence of thought*, the ‘being’ of absolute lack of being manifests itself to be Nothing. This Nothing, however, when considered in itself without determination, renders itself explicit again as Pure Being, because it is equally immediate and indeterminate.

Imagine a simple exercise in ontology – we are asked to draw ‘being’ on a piece of paper. What would we draw? Anything which will be drawn would not be ‘being’ itself but rather the being of *something*, a being of a something which is distinguished from the being of something else – being of a drawn cat, let’s say, from a being of a drawn dog. Yet drawing ‘being’ itself is an impossible task, and we are left with, for Hegel, the empty sheet of paper which we started with.

Note that this is the first instance of Hegel protesting against classical theisms’ ‘apophatic’ vision of God as pure, undetermined, inexplicable Being. Philosophy after Kant’s turn towards conditions of knowledge cannot, anymore, assert the being of God and the being of the Idea(s) as the objectively existing grounds of reality. This has to be demonstrated through the method of the dialectic, wherein successive demonstrations proceed alongside revealing that the Whole, which is God, can only be *God as well as its determinations within His own otherness*. God has to be sought in determination through the negative. This means that our knowledge of God has to be not as a totally ‘Other’ being, but rather as determined by other elements of our cognition and thinking. Simply taking for granted God’s being as pure and undetermined results in humans not being able to know the existence of God without necessary support of an experience of faith (which is important for Hegel, yet inferior to speculative knowledge). This is because such a ‘pure’ idea of God can simply be criticized as lacking any substantial content (precisely what Kant has done in the *Critique of Pure Reason*).³⁹³

At this point, what becomes explicit is the Becoming of that Being into Nothing and vice-versa, which will be an important aspect of Hegelian understanding of eternity. This Becoming is the process of that ‘rendering’, or ‘making explicit’, or ‘realizing x to be’ that we have used above. Of course, this rendering explicit of the *logos* itself is different from our becoming self-conscious of

³⁹² Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 28.

³⁹³ Hegel, 60-66;

this development within finite temporality.³⁹⁴ Eternal Being of God is for Hegel Being *as* Becoming, which it makes itself explicit to be – *both* in the eternal structure of ontology itself, *and* in the apprehension of it by finite temporal minds like ours. This Becoming is one describing neither change, nor temporality, nor even movement, but rather is, for Hegel, the eternal model of the ‘dynamic’ which is even more fundamental than the two – the dynamic of *determination*.³⁹⁵ God eternally Becomes himself, i.e. God eternally determines himself (in many different ways, as expressed later in the *Logic*). This neither means that God changes, nor that He is temporal. He is Himself, but his Being proves itself to be all-encompassing within its own Becoming, which (as we will see) is the model for Hegel for any concrete temporality. If God were to be thought simply as totally Other without any positive determination, then for Hegel, after the Kantian critique, we are left with merely a postulate of pure reason and ultimately with nothingness without content.

As I have written above, what is *not* sought in this exposition of the category of Becoming is its justification on philosophical or all the more theological terms, alongside a justification of the entirety of Hegel’s system. Indeed, there have been multiple philosophical and theological critiques of this first step of the *Logic* and the further ones.³⁹⁶ Rather, the aim is to show that the scheme of thinking about eternity as atemporal Becoming can be a legitimate alternative to some other renderings of the time-eternity distinction. Take the seemingly very similar concept of ‘metaphysical time’ of God put forward by some proponents of relative timelessness.³⁹⁷ They operate upon a propositional logic, wherein there can either be a strong dualism between time and eternity, or there can only be one of them (in their case it is time in two different versions – created and divine). Because of that, they cannot espouse Hegel’s solution of positing Becoming of being towards its own negation as the basis for any ontology of change or temporality. Hegel, on the other hand, considers *determination* to be the primary ontological category, placing it as the source for any change, spatiality and temporality. ‘Metaphysical temporalists’ simply reproduce the unresolved dualism of time and eternity by positing two types of time. One is considered through pure duration (which we essentially do not know how to understand), the other through measure of worldly change. For Hegel, however, the monism of eternity, which is becoming, encompasses within itself all temporality, *as well as* eternity simply as the negation of that temporality. In other words, what we will see is that there is for Hegel a ‘higher’ eternity of the Absolute Idea (here already foreshadowed in Becoming) within which particular difference between eternity and temporality can become intelligible. To understand this better, we need to attend to another fundamental Hegelian concept – the True Infinite.

³⁹⁴ See Dieter Henrich, *Hegel Im Kontext*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1971), 82.

³⁹⁵ See Houlgate, *The Opening*, 271-283.

³⁹⁶ See for example Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 92ff.

³⁹⁷ See for example Padgett, *God, Eternity*, especially 125-130.

True Infinite

The True Infinite (*Wahre Unendlichkeit*) is, in the words of Hegel himself, ‘the fundamental concept of philosophy’.³⁹⁸ Even not considering Hegel’s thought as the only right one, we can still maintain that it is the crucial concept to understand his way of thinking in general. In how he presented Becoming as a category expressing the dynamism which occurs between being and nothing vanishing (letting themselves known to be) each other, Hegel already foreshadowed the two core elements of this thought. First is an alternative to simple logical-binary thinking based on the law of non-contradiction, and the second is the dependence of the identity of a thing on its own sphere of negativity – that which it is not. The True Infinite is an elaboration of this way of thinking, in that it expresses the way in which full determination of a thing can be achieved – in other words, it is the scheme of the self-determination of any being, and in particular the realm of eternity as the perfection of being.

Where we have left the *Logic* was the sphere of determinate being – one which is not determined substantially through its simple existence (because that is simply nothing), but rather one which is determined negatively, i.e. through its difference from other beings. But thought quickly realizes that there is an infinite number of – we could add, temporally – finite things, which determine each other. We are stepping on the way of a specific Hegelian cosmological argument for the existence of God. This is the step at which a Hegelian understanding of being is still in the realm of pure temporal immanence. That is, the determination of finite things in that unending chain as infinite in number is still immanent to those finite things. Even if the Universe has a limit, there must still be, for Hegel, some Other against it will determine itself, and all of that is within the infinity of finite immanence without an end, which is also temporal.

The next step of the thinking of the *Logic*, the infinite appears to be not only immanent to finite things, but also to be their Other as a whole, a determination of the *whole* of the realm of finitude. The things which become in their finitude are finite because they are different from the realm of the infinite. And *vice-versa*, the infinite is precisely the *in*-finite because it is a negation of the finite. That is what Hegel calls “altering determination of finite and infinite”.³⁹⁹

However, it is only to the infinite’s detriment. The fact that it is determined to be a *negation* of the finite, *restricts it*, and therefore it remains a contradiction, because it cannot become itself. The infinitude of infinity is restricted by its limit which remains finitude – its other. Were the infinite, taken as a simple negation of the finite, to become and embrace the finite, it would, according to what Hegel calls “understanding” (and we may call non-contradictory, binary, ‘static’ thinking) cease

³⁹⁸ Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences I: Science of Logic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), sec. 95.

³⁹⁹ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 110ff.

to be infinite. The understanding holds the finite and the infinite to be opposites, but that results in a contradiction of a 'finite infinite'.

(...) the infinite remains over against the finite, with the result that there are two determinacies. There are two worlds, one infinite and one finite, and in their connection the infinite is only the *limit* of the finite and thus only a determinate, *itself finite infinite*.⁴⁰⁰

Hegel's solution is similar to what Becoming has been for the Being-Nothing pair. The True Infinite, instead of restricting itself in the total otherness from the finite, determines itself within finitude, and precisely that grants it the status of True Infinite. It turns itself not to be a static 'unity' of the finite and the infinite, somewhat on a 'higher level', but rather the *movement* between the finite and the infinite, each determining itself against each other. True Infinite is what there is as positive, because it encompasses within itself the scheme of double negation. The positive affirmation which is the basis for Being itself (now determined, therefore different than the first presuppositionless Being) is the scheme of Hegel's thinking about God. God is therefore the very dynamism of becoming between his 'there', his total aloofness from the world, and the 'here' the concrete temporal presence. For God, difference, including the differentiation of temporality from eternity within God himself, is not something detrimental or finitizing to the divine nature, an impediment in the realization of its own omnipotence and impassability, but rather is the *enrichment* of his own being.⁴⁰¹

To clarify, let us think about the True Infinite on the example of God's attribute of omnipotence. Now, it is important to remember that again we cannot simply, in the manner of pre-Kantian metaphysics, assert the being of God with a property of omnipotence and then define it accordingly. God has to, so to say, '*prove*' His own nature to the finite doubting mind, because this is a mind which already doubts His existence. How can this be done? Hegel inquires here into the unique Christian phenomenon of the Incarnation and abstracts from it its philosophical content. God's omnipotence means that he can do whatever he wants, and the best way to give testimony to this *is to become its own opposite*, finite humanity. Otherwise, God's infinity would be paradoxically finitized through its inability to become its very opposite. Jesus Christ as a unity of eternal divinity and finite temporality, is for Hegel the supreme religious manifestation of the True Infinite.

The significance of the True Infinite appears when we substitute the words 'finite' and 'infinite' for 'temporality/time' and 'eternity'. For Hegel, there is neither 'atemporal' Being which provides for ontological fulness, as in Neoplatonic philosophy inherited by divine atemporalists (like Paul Helm). Nor is eternity of God lost by being fully immanent in time, as in unqualified divine temporality

⁴⁰⁰ Hegel, 111.

⁴⁰¹ Robert R. Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition and the Death of God: Studies in Hegel and Nietzsche*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 188.

(like for Nicholas Wolterstorff, see above). Rather, Hegelian divine eternity, as we will see later being more concretely applied to problems of nature, is understood through the scheme of conceptual becoming of its own negation. It is not confined within absolute otherness (as in Kierkegaard and especially early Barth), nor just the prevalence of some features of temporality – eternity is *omnipresent* and precisely through this is also *transcendent*. As Hegel claims, thought which rests merely on established dualities turns itself to be essentially dogmatic:

This metaphysics [scholasticism – A.K.] became *dogmatism* because, due to the nature of the finite determinations, it had to assume that of *two opposite assertions* (which is what those sentences were) one had to be *true* while the other was *false*.⁴⁰²

In other words, if we were to confine divine eternity to being ‘out there’ and in total difference from temporality, then we simultaneously, for Hegel, limit divine omnipresence and omnipotence through restricting the very realm in which God ‘can’ operate. On the other hand, our idea of God is one of a God who is fully self-determining, if we claim that there is a new type of eternity. It is an eternity which encompasses within itself both the dimensions of divine eternity proper, and the finite extension of God’s *logos* in the finite and temporal creation.

The Absolute Idea

The Absolute Idea which is the divine concept in its full determination, is such a development upon the prior structure of the True Infinite, that it is being which knows itself and therefore conceptualizes itself as completely determinate.⁴⁰³ What the analysis of the Idea will attempt to show is that what Hegel calls the realm of finite and temporal spirit – humanity – can make itself conscious of eternity through thought,⁴⁰⁴ eternity which, as we have indicated, is both the source of all temporality, omnipresent *in* it and embracing it, and finally is also an eternity which in itself is the dynamic of becoming-other and simultaneously becoming-itself.

The Absolute Idea is the final category of the Logic, and, for Hegel, the actual sole concern of all philosophy, truth itself.⁴⁰⁵ Having maintained the core Hegelian methodological ideas, we have to necessarily arrive at some kind of most universal category within the framework of which all possible determinateness of finite moments (or aspects) can occur. We have already seen in the structure of the True Infinite, and even in a deeper foreshadowing in one of Becoming, that methodologically Hegel’s dialectics always involves a *positing* of a category in its immediacy (Pure Being and finitude), *negating* the category in order to find its determination through otherness (Nothing and the ‘bad’ infinite), and then founding another, more universal category which

⁴⁰² Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, sec. 32.

⁴⁰³ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 752.

⁴⁰⁴ See Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: Volume I: The Concept of Religion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 120 (lecture manuscript).

⁴⁰⁵ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 735.

encompasses itself and its otherness within itself so as to achieve fuller self-determination (Becoming, True Infinite). The Absolute Idea therefore, in a nice turn of phrase, is a 'totality which is never complete'⁴⁰⁶, because there is always in it *both* a pre-determined scheme of all things (the living and becoming universal encompassing everything), *and* space for possible novelty and contingency (what I will investigate in due course).

A useful analogy of the Absolute Idea is any sort of universal, assuming that nominalism is false (which it largely is for Hegel). A universal 'riding a bike' is, for Hegel, the eternal concept (form) of riding a bike. This does not mean, however, that it does not allow for contingent particularizations of various instances of riding a bike, for example me riding it to the local shop *versus* a professional cyclist doing it on Tour de France. If someone found a new way of riding a bike, that would be a new contingency, new moment within the totality of the eternal (and unchanging) idea of riding a bike, which in itself is part of the Absolute Idea. Of course, the Absolute Idea is the top of the hierarchy of universality, because for any 'particular' universality we might find a broader framework. For example, if at some point in the future no one will ride a bike anymore, because there will be new forms of transport available, the universal 'riding a bike' might cease to exist, but even more 'general' universals (like 'moving') still will persist.

Possible objection: Hegel's alleged pantheism

Granted that we only use certain Hegelian categories and elements of his system as thought schemes which enable us to understand the relationship between time and eternity. Isn't it still necessary, however, to accept his alleged 'pantheistic' view of God and creation in order to be able to apply those categories to our thinking? Such an objection does not have validity, because both Hegel's system and Hegel himself in his writings excludes the possibility of an interpretation of his endeavour as Spinozian or pantheistic (and hence also divine-temporalist).⁴⁰⁷ Pantheism is, according to him, precisely the product of what he calls "system of identity," based on static and fixed oppositions.

The proposition, *nothing comes from nothing, nothing is just nothing*, owes its particular importance to its opposition to *becoming* in general and hence also to the creation of the world out of nothing. Those who zealously hold firm to the proposition, nothing is just nothing, are unaware that in so doing they are subscribing to the abstract *pantheism* of the Eleatics and essentially also to that of Spinoza. The philosophical view that accepts as principle that being is only being, nothing only nothing, deserves the name of "system of identity"; this abstract identity is the essence of pantheism.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁶ David G. Carlson, *A Commentary to Hegel's Science of Logic*, (London: Macmillan 2007), 598.

⁴⁰⁷ Divine temporalism is of course not synonymous with pantheism, but, at least in most conceptions of pantheism, the converse is true.

⁴⁰⁸ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 61.

And as Hegel writes in another instance:

The object of religion is the truth, the unity of the subjective and the objective. But in particular religions, the absolute often becomes separated again from the finite, even where the former already goes under the name of spirit; in such cases, spirit is no more than an empty name. (...) It is also possible to conceive of this abstract universal (...). If man equates this universal with nature, his religion is one of pantheism. But pantheism has no content, for God, as a subject, disappears, because the subject no longer has any distinct existence. Another possibility is to conceive of God as united with the world: this applies to the Indian doctrine of incarnation, to the art of the Greeks, and, in a much more refined sense, to the Christian religion, in which the unity of divine and human nature is made manifest in Christ. The Christian incarnation is not presented in an anthropomorphic form unworthy of the deity, but points instead to the true Idea of God.⁴⁰⁹

What Hegel means by saying that in pantheism “God as a subject disappears” is that such a doctrine, analogously to its opposite - maintaining exclusive divine otherness, *finitizes* God through restricting God’s being to a certain pre-defined sphere, namely nature. It is a characteristic of merely finite understanding to operate upon a binary thinking wherein the Absolute is sought within a restricted sphere of either total identity or total otherness. That said, an instrumental usage of Hegelian categories for perhaps not exactly Hegel’s purpose (without being faithful to all aspects of Hegel’s system), which is the argument of this paper, isn’t excluded. They might equally well serve an idea of God which essentially involves self-mediation between total transcendence (in Hegel’s case eternity of conceptual ideality) and total omnipresence (within finite and temporal humanity).

Eternally becoming God is a *personal* being through possessing the fulness of freedom. In Hegel’s words:

The highest and most intense point is the *pure personality* that, solely by virtue of the absolute dialectic which is its nature, equally embraces and holds *everything within itself*, for it makes itself into the supremely free (...).⁴¹⁰

The divine Idea is not (or more precisely *not only*) immanent to nature because that could not be the foundation of its freedom and personality. Freedom, for Hegel, is self-determination.⁴¹¹ God is fully free and omnipotent not because there is in him a *potential* towards any possible determination, but rather because he already possesses and encompasses all possible actual and potential determinations.

⁴⁰⁹ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 106.

⁴¹⁰ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 750.

⁴¹¹ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), sec. 4-10.

An alternative to conceiving of eternity from the perspective of finite temporality

Hegel is therefore one of the most ‘cataphatic’ philosophical theologians, in that, instead of thinking about eternity in apophatic terms as negativity and otherness towards the human experience of temporality, he commences with the understanding of *God* which determines all other conceptions and from which all of them logically flow (including time). Hegel is not absolutizing the dualism of time and eternity itself, not beginning with our sense of time and attempting to ‘fit’ God into it, but rather beginning with God and showing *His* absoluteness through his omnipotence of all-encompassing *becoming* of all things both within and in difference from God. In this way, Hegel seems to be even more Platonic, Boethian and Augustinian than much of contemporary philosophical theology.

This stands in contrast to most contemporary philosophy of religion. For most authors defending particular standpoints listed above, what comes first is a certain vision of time (which we will examine in due course) and a certain set of problems which a postulated mode of God’s relationship with that vision of time has to ‘solve’. In other words, the nature of God’s relation to time becomes a *hypothesis*. Take as an example a book by Paul Helm, a proponent of unqualified divine eternity. Helm proposes his view of eternity as a hypothesis which is defined,⁴¹² and then ‘tested’ against a set of logical problems that might be put forward against its coherence (for example questions pertaining to divine personality, immutability, omniscience, etc.).⁴¹³ Hegel, on the other hand, proposes to suspend *all* possible visions of God, time, eternity, and even ‘coherence’ itself, in order to let the idea of God define *itself* in a manner of a purely presuppositionless logic. As I have indicated above, my point is not about arguing for an adoption of Hegel’s entire system. Rather, it is, among others, a call to reconsider the highest authority in thinking about time and eternity from mere a hypothetico-deductive method of what Hegel calls a “logic of understanding”, into opening new ways non-binary thinking which puts God as supreme universal and beyond many supposedly ‘fixed’ and ‘rational’ distinctions.

The discussion of the *Science of Logic*, even if very abstract, is necessary for theologians to understand both Hegel’s onto-theology, and even more generally *how he thinks*, which is frequently in ways much different than much of contemporary philosophy of religion. However, it is using the very dialectical Logic that we are ready to see further how a conception of God which overcomes the fashionable absoluteness of difference between immanence and transcendence, aids in understanding the relation of time and eternity. Temporality is not only, like in Plato, an image of eternity, but happens *within* God’s eternity itself, as a necessary part of this eternity’s own

⁴¹² Helm, *Eternal God*, 23-40.

⁴¹³ Helm, 56-194.

self-definition as *not*-temporality. And temporality must also include within itself eternity as a determination of what defines it as temporality.

Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* – Explication of Eternity within Finite Temporality

'Transition' from Logic to Nature

The intent behind Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* was not to construct a cosmogony, nor to create an ultimate system to which all posterior discoveries in natural science must conform. Methodologically, it was following a description of the speculative grasping of phenomena in Nature within the all-encompassing (but, as we argued, never closed) system of logical development. *Philosophy of Nature* cannot assert the existence and legitimacy of its object, because that, since Descartes' famous method of doubt, counts as nothing simply obvious, but rather a presupposition.⁴¹⁴ Therefore, Hegel develops *a priori* proofs for the existence and functioning of the world as we observe it empirically by taking the existence of Nature to be logically flowing from the endpoint of the *Logic* as a necessity within the functionality of this very logic.

The last sentences of the *Science of Logic* are very mysterious on the relationship of Logic and Nature in Hegel's system, and must be taken with reference to later remarks on the subject given at the start of the part of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* which deals with Nature. In the *Logic* itself, what is definitely clear is one thing. Its conceptual and abstract dynamic of becoming is inherently circular if it does not determine itself negatively through otherness which, for Hegel is precisely the incarnation of the Idea in the world of Nature (and then of finite Spirit – humanity). The Absolute Idea, as we have seen, has achieved full self-determination through encompassing every possible moment and determination (therefore it is an expression of the divine Being-itself). But if it was this moment of conceptual eternity at which the Idea's (and God's) self-determination would stop, it would necessarily loop back into the simple immediacy of pure being, and the process of divine self-determination would be eternally circular.⁴¹⁵ It is therefore necessary, within the very abstract conditions of divine Idea, to determine itself in created finite (and temporal) being. This does not 'add' anything to the Idea, but rather constitutes a further determination within it. There is no 'transition' between Logic and Nature as two separate things – "(...) there is no transition that takes place; the simple being to which the idea determines itself remains perfectly transparent to

⁴¹⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences, Part II: Philosophy of Nature* [hereafter *Philosophy of Nature*], (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), section 245.

⁴¹⁵ This circularity within the Logic mimics the grand circularity of the whole system – the Logic determining itself in Nature, Nature giving rise to Spirit (humanity), and Spirit in turn, as described in the Phenomenology, ascending back towards the abstractness of the realm of pure Logic, and hence pure divinity. Cf. Martin Wendte, *Gottmenschliche Einheit bei Hegel: Eine logische und theologische Untersuchung*, (Berlin: Walter, 2007), 63.

it: it is the idea that in its determination remains with itself".⁴¹⁶ The Idea therefore, in creation, exhibits the same movement as was perceptible within the *Logic*: the positing of Nature as Other and then uniting itself with it through the restoration of positive, universal, all-encompassing identity.

Put differently, upon creation of finite temporality, it is not the case that there are now two distinct entities: God and a created world in some mysterious sense 'apart' from God. On the contrary, it is rather that God himself, through displaying the act of creation, gains a new dimension in both difference and unity. Otherwise, what would be the 'overarching' framework providing the condition for the very *unlikeness* between God and creation? It certainly, for Hegel, cannot be anything supreme to God himself.

To this problematic we can apply similar considerations as have been furthered above in the discussion of immanence and transcendence within the True Infinite. Some more 'Spinozian' interpreters of Hegel have understood the relation discussed as follows: the logical Idea, within its self-conceiving self-determination, *realizing itself to be* nature from the very outset – which could secure an ontological understanding of the Logic as purely immanent to the world of Nature, with no divine ontological (not merely conceptual) externality over it.⁴¹⁷ Hence, there would be no existence of Idea apart from Nature and a natural conclusion would be pantheism. But apart from the noted problems of positing another 'unsublated' binary of immanence and transcendence, this interpretation does not sit well either with the end of the *Logic* or, all the more, with Hegel's explicit refutation of pantheism we have referred to above.

On the contrary, the Idea 'freely discharges itself'⁴¹⁸ into Nature, because of its inherently personal character as a being free to self-determine itself in externality of the created world. Its necessity becomes its freedom. Although it is right to say that Hegel believed in the necessity of creation, one has to remember that, similarly as within the framework of the paradoxes of omnipotence and relations of God to propositional logic, Hegel too holds that his version of *dialectical* logic is inherent in the very nature of God, not externally imposed upon him. If freedom, as we have noted earlier, is for Hegel simply self-determination, then the divine Idea is perfectly free precisely through encompassing all determinations within all externalities, including Nature. One could here refer to the problem, discussed in philosophy of religion, of the compatibility of divine eternity with the supposedly free decision of God to create the world. If God is in himself beyond time, then there cannot be a change in God in terms of 'making a free decision' to create. God is rather

⁴¹⁶ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 752-753.

⁴¹⁷ This seems to be argued by Stephen Houlgate, *Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 108.

⁴¹⁸ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 753.

free in terms of having everything prefigured within his own *logos* before creation, and then exercising this *logos* in finite contingency.

Question of the eternity of the world

The issue of the eternity of the world, frequently affirmed in many ways by non-Christian Platonism, was the most significant idea against which the doctrine of creation from nothing (*ex nihilo*) was developed in the Christian tradition. In contemporary debates surrounding the time-eternity distinction, this doctrine has had its influence mainly through the matter of the compatibility of God's timelessness and the singular act of creation seeming to result in two particular different 'periods' in God – 'before' and 'after' creation. This of course by itself stands against the doctrine of a God which is atemporal and without change. Augustine's solution, as we have seen, has been to claim that time itself is a created reality, so there can be no 'before' of creation in a temporal, but only causal sense. Many of those who, sometimes for other reasons, do not side with Augustinian atemporalism, reject this interpretation in favour of others. As we have seen, advocates of relative timelessness see creation of time as within the interval of divine 'metaphysical' time of which created time, through creation, is some sort of mirroring. Supporters of 'timelessness without creation' believe that God himself descended to created temporality after its foundation, while divine temporalists posit time as a category to which God himself abides, and therefore do not have to bother much with this problem at all.

Hegel surprisingly rejects the question of the eternity of the world as meaningless within his own system – and this is precisely through the logic of his concept of infinity as well as the 'both-and' mediation within the Idea. To this, he applies the 'cataphatic' thinking that we mentioned before. Divine atemporalists posit eternity as the infinite other to the world, preceding it and then coexisting with it in absolute distinction, in other words, an incomprehensible Other to finite temporality (though it seems that it is not fully other to those philosophers who want to 'fit' God into a particular theory of time). But the result of this approach can only be that this eternity turns out to be its own finitizing.⁴¹⁹ It is a property of dualistic thinking which divides clearly between the finite and the infinite, thereby making the infinite itself finite through delimiting it as the Other of the finite. Creation, as we have seen, remains *both* in otherness *and* in identity with the eternal Idea. In otherness, as it is the external determination of the Idea which it gets into out of its own logical necessity; and in identity, as it is in itself prefigured as this determination *eternally* within the Idea itself. In this sense, creation abides by the grand dialectical logic of 'both-and' mediation prefigured within the True Infinite and made possible within the Absolute Idea. Creation is eternal not in the sense of being everlasting, but because it has been eternally preconceived within the self-determination of God, in the language of some Patristic authors (notably Origen), in the mind

⁴¹⁹ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Volume III: The Consummate Religion*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 26ff (lecture manuscript).

of God. To some challenges posed by contemporary philosophy of religion Hegel answers, then, that there is no division of God into the 'before' or 'after' creation. It is neither temporal nor even causal, if we understand causality through the lens of a dualism between two different substances, not one substance overarching the other *within itself*.

With respect to the temporal aspect, and particular standpoints in the debates on God and time, Hegel would reject all anthropomorphisms of rising 'anticipatory pleasure' of God which purport to explain what he was doing before creation (namely, that he would more and more eagerly anticipate its creation and then finally decide for it when the pleasure would be maximal).⁴²⁰ Following Augustine, there is no time before creation, only the abstract becoming-himself of God, within which (here Hegel perhaps departs from Augustine) creation is already *implicitly* present. Nor is the divine Idea necessarily descending into finite temporality when it commences upon creation, because through its very omnipotence and omnipresence it can remain the Whole present in *both* temporality – as its finite moments; *and* in eternity – as its abstract universality and ideality. In the divine Idea, in self-determination of creation of finite Nature, there *is* change in a sense that God has become the very framework overarching both finitude and infinity, and there simultaneously *is no* change in a sense that this very determination, in its abstract universality, was already prefigured within God as a necessity of his own self.⁴²¹

Following upon our previous example, the perfect concept of 'riding a bike' pre-figures within itself all possible kinds of riding a bike, even those of which perhaps we do not know yet. In that sense, we can say that the universal 'riding a bike' is, as an *abstract* universal already completed, but necessitates *concrete* instantiation in order to be concretely apprehended in finite time.

God, therefore, is eternal as ideality and as universality, alongside even particularity of the world pre-conceived in the form of its concepts (including even the concept of time, which Hegel deems in itself paradoxically eternal), and becomes *both* eternal *and* temporal within finite creation.

But what is best also endures, not only the lifeless, inorganic universal, but the other universal, that which is concrete in itself, the Genus, the Law, the Idea, Spirit. For we must distinguish between what is the whole process and what is only a moment of the process. The universal, as law, also has a process within it, and lives only as a process; but it is not a *part* of the process, is not in process, but contains its two sides, and is itself processless.⁴²²

The relation between eternity and time for Hegel is ontological, not voluntaristic. With that pre-figuration of all particularity in ideality, one also cannot accept the view furthered by some

⁴²⁰ Brian Leftow, "Why Didn't God Create the World Sooner?," *Religious Studies*, vol. 27, (1991), 157-172.

⁴²¹ Cf. Hedwig, *Hegel: Time and Eternity*, 139-153, esp. 146.

⁴²² Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, sec. 258 *zusatz*.

theological interpreters of Hegel, that his God is somehow 'incomplete' within himself.⁴²³ The creation of the world did not 'add' anything to eternal God substantially, it is rather that eternity itself gained a new dimension through temporality. Finally, God is also not *solely* temporal alongside creation, as the divine temporalists argue. That would entail the intrusion of *temporal*, finite change within the *atemporal* 'change' within the Idea as eternal process and becoming. God kenotically descends upon finitude, is subject to worldly circumstances but at the same time dialectically also is all ideality, including the ideality of this very change (as the concept of change, or the concept of time, which are in themselves eternal).

Problem of simultaneity

Before discussing Hegel's conception of time, we have to briefly consider his standpoint on the possible character of eternity as the existence of all possible times simultaneously within God. In this way, there is no absolute irreconcilable difference between eternity and time, as in absolute divine timelessness, but on the other hand eternity and time are not collapsed into each other. According to E. Stump and N. Kretzmann, this is the version which was initially argued for by Boethius, and hence one of the standard interpretations of divine atemporality as eternal duration or temporal simultaneity. Stump and Kretzmann themselves propose an elaboration of such understanding of divine eternity as eternal duration, through the so-called 'ET-Simultaneity'. This model conceives of God for whom *both* his being is eternal *and* all singular temporal events are simultaneous – God can therefore know all possible times and interact with finite creation. The authors offer the following analogy:

Imagine two parallel horizontal lines, the upper one representing eternity and the lower, time; and let presentness be represented by light. Then from a temporal viewpoint the temporal present is represented by a dot of light moving steadily along the lower line, which is in this way lighted successively, while the eternal present is represented by the upper line's being entirely lighted at once. So from a temporal viewpoint the temporal present is ET-simultaneous with the infinite present of an eternal being's life. On the other hand, from the viewpoint of a being existing in the persisting eternal present, each temporal instant is ET-simultaneous with the eternal present, but only insofar as that instant is temporally present, so that from the eternal being's point of view the entire time line is lighted at once. From an eternal viewpoint, every present time is present, co-occurrent with the infinite whole of the eternal present.⁴²⁴

Another, similar standpoint which also resembles the aforementioned Hegelian 'both-and' mediation, is Leftow's concept of eternity. The basis of his account is the so-called 'Zero Thesis', which states that because of God's omnipresence, the 'distance between God and every spatial

⁴²³ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 159.

⁴²⁴ Eleanor Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity, Awareness and Action," *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (3), (1992), 475.

creature is zero.⁴²⁵ Ignoring the quite anthropomorphic account of God in this statement (as if 'distance' was even a dimension for God), Leftow later goes on to conclude that, given the Zero Thesis, all events happen in the process of change which is never relative to God, as God is omnipresent, but rather occur *both* within the dimension of temporality *and* of eternity. "God is eternally present with *t* and with what occurs at *t* in *eternity*", Leftow argues, "what occurs at *t* in eternity is identical with what occurs at *t* in time (...)".⁴²⁶ This idea of eternity is actually a subtly different rendering of simultaneity, with the reservation that things which are temporal also occur within in their changeless version within eternity. To enable this and not fall into contradiction with the logic which Leftow follows (which is a different one than Hegel's), he has to further distinguish between being eternal and being *in* eternity.⁴²⁷ The former would be reserved only for God, while the latter for the eternal aspect of all temporal events. Temporal events have their reference frame within eternity, where both God, God's effects and all things are simultaneous. On the other hand, temporality is 'another time', which is a finite application of those effects of divine activity within time, but still maintaining their basis and their reference in eternity.

Leftow, in this way, comes closer to Hegel than Stump and Kretzmann, yet does not yet arrive at the dialectical understanding of time and eternity which the German philosopher exhibits. Stump and Kretzmann cannot allow for an event to occur both in time and in eternity, while for both Leftow and Hegel such a possibility exists. However, Hegel goes further than Leftow in claiming that God's omnipresence means not simply lack of distance between God and finite things, but rather those finite things being within God himself. Therefore, for Hegel any finite temporal event is not simply *simultaneous* with its analogue in eternity as its basis, but rather itself is another determination of that eternity within time, eternity which has a character more of atemporal conceptuality rather than simultaneity. In using the phrase 'simultaneous' by itself, there is a danger of transposing the language of temporality onto the nature of God - how can something, from our perspective, be 'simultaneous' without time? Hegel does think of eternity as the 'Now, without before or after', but this Now is not simultaneous with all events in a sense that two temporal things are simultaneous with each other (Stump and Kretzmann), nor do finite things have their reference frame within eternity, but rather the Now is the Now of the Idea *within* which all things occur in their temporal manifestations.

Absolute timelessness is distinct from duration; the former is eternity, from which natural time is absent. But in its Notion, time itself is eternal; for time as such—not any particular time, nor Now—is its Notion, and this, like every Notion generally, is eternal, and therefore also absolute Presence. Eternity will not come to be, nor was it, but it is. The difference therefore between

⁴²⁵ Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 222.

⁴²⁶ Leftow, 230.

⁴²⁷ Leftow, 237.

eternity and duration is that the latter is only a relative sublation of time, whereas eternity is infinite, i.e. not relative, duration but duration reflected into self.⁴²⁸

There hence is no difference between God and eternity, for Hegel, which would not be in itself grounded in a larger totality of a 'higher' conceptual eternity itself, and this is the form of 'both-and' mediation taken in its most radical form. Any two different instantiations of riding a bike both always fall within the over-arching framework of the eternally and really existing universal 'riding a bike', otherwise the difference itself, for Hegel, cannot be made. Yet it does not mean that a difference is abolished, only that it is sustained within a larger framework.

Time

Hegel's narrative about temporality is logically consistent with the unfolding of previous categories analysed in the *Logic*. The Idea, in the order of successive self-determinations resembling the movement of the *Logic* itself, first determines itself as pure and content-less *space*. Though similar to the cosmogony of the Genesis narrative, wherein the space and (probably) time are created during the first day, Hegel does not offer an account of creation through a narrative story, but rather, similarly as in the *Logic* and on the foundation of thinking that the *Logic* provides, describes how presuppositionless thought comes to know logically and *a priori* about the nature of particular manifestations of the Idea within the natural world, time in itself included. This is of course, at its core, a reaction to Kant, for whom perception and experience were necessarily grounded within space and time, but simultaneously space and time were also necessary only for those perceptions and intuitions to occur. Hegel's logical derivation of time is more cosmological and less subjective in that sense – time is not a necessity of the subject's intuiting of the phenomenal world, but is rather *what space logically turns itself to be*. Temporality is a self-negation of space, which is necessary for space to determine itself against its own negation, an 'other' of space which is simply a different space in a temporal difference. Time is therefore a negative reality:

It becomes the opposite of what it was. The past, which was, is no longer; and the future, which will be, is not yet. Only the present is; but it immediately ceases to be; and what now is not, comes into being. If we were to use the traditional language of philosophy to apply to this, we would say that in time 'being' becomes 'non-being', while 'nonbeing' becomes 'being'.⁴²⁹

Time is the *becoming* of space, in which the atemporal becoming of the *Logic* manifests itself in the transience of space which includes within itself all finite change. "It is because things are finite", Hegel says, "that they are in time; it is not because they are in time that they perish; (...)".⁴³⁰ Time

⁴²⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, sec. 258 zusatz.

⁴²⁹ John Burbidge, "Concept and Time in Hegel," *Dialogue* 12 (3), 406.

⁴³⁰ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, sec. 258, zusatz.

is therefore not the *condition*, but rather simply a *product* of the fact of change and transience of space, one which is established prior to developing a conception of time.⁴³¹

We can see therefore, that whereas for the philosophers of religion we have discussed earlier, time is a reality which is absolute and immediately given, and the eternal God must in some sense be proven to be compatible with it, Hegel's concept of time as the becoming of space and itself just a moment of the eternal Idea reverses this order of knowing and conceives of time as a derivation of the logical self-becoming of God. As a moment of the divine eternity which encompasses it through being its ideality, transient temporality "has no power over the Notion [Idea], (...) on the contrary, it is the power over time, which is its negativity only *qua* externality. (...) the notion of eternity must not be grasped negatively as an abstraction from time, as it were, outside time, (...) for that would turn eternity into (...) one of the moments of time".⁴³²

A manifestation of this is Hegel's overcoming of the distinction between two particular conceptions of time, famously proposed by J.M.E. McTaggart.⁴³³ An *A-theory* of time (also known as 'process' or 'tensed') privileges the moment of the Now, through which time flows from future to past and hence it itself is 'static'. A *B-theory* ('stasis' or 'tenseless' theory) of time thinks of the 'Now' as an illusion of perceiving consciousness. Rather, time itself is the stretch of past, present and future, without any privileged moment through which it flows. The particular moments and events flow on the 'static' line of time (and presumably also space). Hence the only existent moment of time in the A-theory is the 'Now', while in the B-theory it is all the possible stretch of time.⁴³⁴

Time for Hegel is neither according to the A theory, wherein it would be reduced to the immediacy of the present moment through which space flows. Past and the future, though not having existence by themselves, determine the Now as their negation, rather than being mere illusions. Nor is time simply according to the B theory, as it would then amount, in Hegel's words, to "a receptacle in which everything is placed as in a flowing stream, which sweeps it away and engulfs it".⁴³⁵ Temporality is, as a manifestation of the divine logic in its externality, also abiding to the mediatory 'both-and', a present as a negation of the past and the future, and also the whole span of time from past, through present, to future, as the becoming of space, *relative* to change rather than *constitutive* to it.

⁴³¹ In contrast to Padgett, for instance, for whom time is "the dimension of the possibility of change [my emphasis]", in *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time*, 123.

⁴³² Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, sec. 258, remark.

⁴³³ J.M.E. McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time," in Robin Le Poidevin, Murray MacBeath, *The Philosophy of Time*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 23ff.

⁴³⁴ Gregory Ganssle (ed.), *God & Time*, 13-15.

⁴³⁵ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, sec. 258, *zusatz*.

What is, however, the more precise relationship between the atemporal becoming of the Idea and the becoming of time? Hegel presents us here with a problematic contradiction within the conception of Nature which he advances. On the one hand, Nature abides to the logic of the Idea, because the Idea itself is developed in the *Logic*, as we have seen, on the basis of fundamental ontological categories (being, becoming, infinity, etc). But on the other hand, Nature is the Idea in its *externality* – its difference from the Idea, though inscribed within the Idea itself, is still maintained.⁴³⁶ This means that, though temporal order of Nature is resembling the Idea (but not in a form of Platonic emanation), it has in itself differences from it which, as differences in their *concepts* are prefigured within the Idea, but as *actuality*, allow for contingent causation of finite events.⁴³⁷

In the case of time, this dialectic between necessity and contingency is exhibited in the character of its motion. Whereas atemporal becoming, as discussed in the *Logic*, moves from being to non-being, so then to return to being and that *ad infinitum*, time is for Hegel a category describing the motion of space from non-being of pure potentiality of the future, to being as the immediacy of the present, to non-being of the past again.⁴³⁸ Moreover, whereas God in his atemporal becoming becomes constantly himself *to himself*, that is, the movement within God is profoundly circular, time rather has a linear structure.⁴³⁹ It is modelled upon becoming, but itself is only *intuited* becoming. Becoming's circular movement is applied to reality as its own externality, which results in a linear progression of time. Moreover, it also allows for contingent events, as I have demonstrated. This is because the non-being of the future, though structurally determined by becoming's movement of return from nothing to being, is 'pre-ordained' within the system only in the sense of the system being its *law* (or Idea), whereas the concrete instantiation of that law (like in natural science) is in itself not pre-determined. Hegel's eternal God knows the future, therefore, as it presents itself in its universality, but this universality itself is instantiated in contingent events. In this way atemporal becoming paradoxically both *is* and *is not* the passage of time. This makes this conception different to the ideas of 'metaphysical time' proposed in the theory of relative timelessness; or eternity as either simultaneity (Boethius and later Stump and Kretzmann) or reference frame for temporal events (Leftow).

⁴³⁶ Hegel, sec. 248, remark.

⁴³⁷ One can add that this might also serve as Hegel's solution to the problem of evil, namely that evil is only a wrong contingent actualization of some good eternal universal.

⁴³⁸ Burbidge, *Concept and Time*, 409.

⁴³⁹ Burbidge, 409.

Conclusions

Hegel's thought in general, and thought on time and eternity in particular, is perhaps so difficult to fit neatly into established categories and models precisely because of its intention of building a system within which all possible categories could fit in themselves. The aim of this paper was to argue for Hegel's conception of time and eternity which, firstly, responds to the modern challenge through re-establishing God as the all-encompassing *logos* of the world, and secondly, both contains elements of the outlined theories of eternity and temporality, and at the same time transcends them. The paper also purported to show how particular methods of thinking related to Hegel's philosophy can be helpful to conceive differently of questions related to the time-eternity distinction, without the need to justify his entire system.

As for simple divine atemporality, the main difficulty Hegel sees in such a model is that it defines eternity negatively or apophatically in relation to time. That is not acceptable under the conditions of Kant's critique of metaphysical speculation. Hegel responds through the idea of presuppositionless beginning of thinking, while for the latter he elaborates an idea of absolute, speculative thinking which itself is eternal, and cannot be reached solely through negation, but rather sublation. Another question was one of the relation of an atemporal God to the world. It is logical to assume that an eternal God, if not under any of the possible categories of succession, would not be able to create a world which had some sort of beginning, apart from himself being in some sort of divine temporality. To this question Hegel provides his answer in the relation of becoming to time, which is one of *both* identity *and* difference.

In the case of relative timelessness the 'metaphysical' time in which God dynamically unfolds himself to sustain the world (assuming the truthfulness of the A-theory of time) seems on first glance very similar to Hegel's becoming of the Absolute Idea. However, to foreshadow our later considerations, becoming in Hegel is always becoming *already what the Idea is* – the movement of the *Logic* is inherently circular, if it does not determine itself externally (which is the determination of divine eternity in created temporality). In this way, Hegel not only secures *both* relative and absolute timelessness (they, alongside others, can coincide within the Hegelian system as it does not operate fully upon propositional logic within the law of non-contradiction), but he also presents a theology which does not confine God to 'obey' only one given theory of time.

This paper also argued, against those who would see Hegel as a divine temporalist (or even a 'divine historicist'). Such a view would work on an assumption of Hegel's God as *solely* within time and history, becoming more conscious of itself in time, being reducible to the dynamic and vital self-differentiation and self-sublation of all things in the natural world. A notion of God being solely immanent to temporality is against the very essence of Hegel's system, which, as we have seen, cannot allow for a one-sided, undetermined polarity to sustain itself (in this case immanence against transcendence).

Ultimately, Hegel always works on this fundamental presupposition of the primacy of negative determination and the principle of equating truth with the 'wholeness' of the 'broader view', which for him stems from the very presuppositionlessness of the *Logic*. As this article argued, one does not have to agree with this presuppositionless system in its entirety in order to start thinking differently about time and eternity. Or, start thinking as it has been traditionally thought, but with bearing on the change in the philosophical paradigm at the dawn of the modern age.

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The Ontology of Time and Hope in the Resurrection

A Critical Examination of Eschatological Presentism

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Abstract

In this article I shall briefly describe the Christian hope in resurrection. I will explain that certain conditions must be in place in order for this hope to be realized. These are conditions about the ontology of time and personal identity over time. After articulating these conditions, I will examine a recent proposal called eschatological presentism, and see how it fares with The Problem of No Afterlife.

§1. Hope and the Standard Christian Story

C.S. Lewis' classic *Mere Christianity* works from the premise that there is a basic Christian story. This Christian story is stripped of various bells and whistles that different theological systems will wish to affirm, but contains a core that ought to be able to be agreed upon by all Christian theological systems. After devoting several years to the study of Christian theology, I sometimes find myself at a loss to say what the standard Christian story ought to be. Some theologians will insist that certain obscure medieval doctrines are essential to the story. Others will argue that different aspects of the ecumenical creeds are not only unbiblical, but also unnecessary to the standard Christian story. Basically, Christian theologians disagree on many things. In full awareness of this, I shall hazard an attempt at telling the standard Christian story. It goes something like this:



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There eternally exists a triune God. From all eternity, this God has existed alone. This God freely decided to create a universe for a particular purpose. Part of this purpose includes fulfilling the intent to enter into everlasting friendship with human persons, who are immaterial souls with physical bodies. In order for the friendship to be genuine, God ensured that human persons have rationality and freedom. These human persons rebelled against God, but God had anticipated this, and already had a plan to ensure that His purposes for creation would come to fruition. Part of this plan involved establishing covenants with particular groups of humans, as well as sending prophets to teach the people the ways of the Lord. The most dramatic part of this plan involved one of the divine persons becoming incarnate in human flesh in order to establish solidarity with humanity, as well as redemption. The reality of death might seem to go against God's intent for everlasting friendship, but God has accounted for this by offering an afterlife that comes in two stages. The first stage is called the intermediate state. This is where a soul goes after it undergoes bodily death. The soul resides in the intermediate state until the second stage of the afterlife occurs. The second stage is the general resurrection of the dead in which all human persons are given new bodies, judged by God, and given everlasting life. At that point, sin and death shall be no more for God has completely defeated evil.

Notice that the standard story refers to various Christian doctrines. It contains the basic claims about the doctrines of God, creation, providence, anthropology, soteriology, and eschatology. I have tried to keep the standard story as generic as possible in order to allow different theological systems to add whatever details they would like. Allow me to point out some examples of how one might add to the content of the story, depending on one's own theological beliefs about these different doctrines.

With regards to the doctrines of God and creation, I have stated that the triune God exists from all eternity, and that God creates a universe for a purpose. This eternity could be timeless or temporal, depending on one's theological commitments. This doctrine of the Trinity could be a social model, a Latin model, or even some kind of Arian model. I have also not specified what God's ultimate purpose is for creating the universe. I have merely stated that part of the plan involves entering into everlasting friendship with creatures. God's ultimate plan might be for His own glory, or to increase value, or something else. Again, one can add to the story according to one's own theological proclivities.

Another key component of the standard Christian story involves God's plan for ensuring that the created universe satisfies God's purposes. This refers to the doctrine of providence. I have left the standard Christian story generic enough so that many different models of providence can be added on to it. Some views offer a very meticulous level of providence where God pre-ordains every detail of history, whereas others offer a more general providence where God sets basic goals for creation and guides history accordingly.

A further key factor of the story that can be extended is the final judgment or eschatology. I have merely stated that there is a final judgment and everlasting life. I said nothing about the quality of this everlasting life. If one believes in a doctrine of hell on which the damned suffer eternal conscious torment, one can say that the quality of this everlasting life will not be pleasant for certain individuals. If one affirms universal salvation, one will say that the quality of this everlasting life is going to be pretty great for everyone involved. Again, additions to the standard story can be made according to one's theological system of beliefs.

Thus far I have not explicitly mentioned hope, but I have stated several themes that ought to be sources of hope for Christians. God's goal of everlasting friendship with humans, and His providential plan to achieve that goal is a source of hope for the Christian. Christian believers often say that they look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and a life in perfect harmony with God and creation. That is certainly something to be hopeful about. However, I believe that certain philosophical positions about the nature of time and human nature must be true in order for this hope to be possible.

One will notice that the standard story has certain commitments that might not seem standard. For example, I state that human persons are souls with bodies, and that resurrection occurs after the intermediate state. This is the majority view throughout Church history.⁴⁴⁰ However, there are theologians who deny that human persons are souls with bodies, and who deny the intermediate state. These theologians openly acknowledge that they are arguing against fairly standard Christian claims.⁴⁴¹ In which case, they are not extending the standard story, but rather are amending the standard Christian story. In labelling these as amendments, I am not saying that these theological beliefs are mistaken. Theologians in every generation have made amendments they deemed necessary. There are interesting reasons for making different amendments to the standard story. In the second half of this paper, I will consider one example of such an amendment from James T. Turner. To understand Turner's position and my critiques, I need to first discuss various issues related to time and human nature.

§2. Time and Human Nature

Turner says that there are three theological affirmations within the standard story that most Christians affirm. He states them as follows.

TA1: That bodily resurrection is not a superfluous hope of afterlife.

TA2: There is immediate post-mortem existence in Paradise.

⁴⁴⁰ Farris, "Christianity."

⁴⁴¹ E.g. Turner, *Resurrection of the Dead*.

TA3: There is numerical identity between pre-mortem and post-resurrection human beings.⁴⁴²

In this section, I will argue for some philosophical conditions which need to be true in order for TA1, TA2, and TA3 to obtain. The main issue is a human person's numerical identity over time. In particular, an individual's identity over the stretch of time that spans from death to resurrection. This raises several important questions about philosophical anthropology, personal persistence over time, and temporal ontology.

Philosophical anthropology focuses on the metaphysical question "what is a human person?" For the purposes of this essay, I assume that a person is a center of consciousness that is capable of being self-aware—i.e. a thing with a first-person perspective.⁴⁴³ A *human* person is a person that is appropriately related to a human organism or body. What is that appropriate relationship to a human body? The view that I have stated in the standard Christian story is substance dualism. On substance dualism, a human person is a soul with a body.⁴⁴⁴ A person is identical to an immaterial substance (a mind) that has the capacity to think, feel, and act. The appropriate relationship that one has to a human body that makes one a human person is to be understood in terms of satisfying various conditions for being embodied.⁴⁴⁵

The next two issues to discuss are personal persistence over time and the ontology of time. The questions that focus debates here are, "how do objects persist from one moment to the next?" and, "what moments of time exist?" I will start with the ontology of time.

The two most popular views on the ontology of time are presentism and eternalism. A moment of time is the way things are but could be subsequently otherwise. A moment is *when* events happen or occur. Moments can be either abstract or concrete. This is because there are many possible moments that can be successively ordered into coherent timelines. These possible moments are abstract objects that God can consider actualizing or make concrete if God so chooses. As some theologians understand things, God is able to freely choose to create a presentist ontology of time or an eternalist ontology of time. Say God decides to bring about a timeline with a presentist ontology. What would that look like? Presentism says that only the present moment of time exists as concrete or actual. Past moments are no longer actual, and future moments are not yet actual. On this view, it would be false to say that all moments of time are co-eternal with God in the sense of concrete moments. This is because only the present

⁴⁴² Turner, *Resurrection of the Dead*, 8-9.

⁴⁴³ Lowe, "The Probable Simplicity of Personal Identity," 144.

⁴⁴⁴ For recent defenses of substance dualism, see Swinburne, *Mind, Body, and Free Will*, and Goetz and Taliaferro, *A Brief History of the Soul*.

⁴⁴⁵ For details on the conditions for embodiment see, Mullins, "Physicalist Christology and the Two Sons Worry."

moment of time can co-exist with God. God cannot co-exist with non-existent things. Now imagine that God decides to bring about a timeline with an eternalist ontology of time. What would that look like? Eternalism says that all of the moments of the timeline are concrete/actual and are successively ordered in earlier-than and later-than relations. On this view, one can say that all moments of time are co-eternal with God. In fact, on this view, there is no state of affairs where God exists without the created universe and the entire concrete timeline. As I have explained in *The End of the Timeless God*, the Christian tradition overwhelmingly affirmed a presentist ontology of time. It is only in more recent years that theologians and philosophers have adopted eternalism.⁴⁴⁶

Next, consider the issue of personal persistence over time. The first view is called endurantism, and it has historically been affirmed alongside presentism. Endurantism says that objects persist through time by existing as a whole, or all at once, at whatever times they exist. Numerically one and the same object exists at each time that it exists, and it does not have parts at other times. To illustrate endurantism, consider a woman named Morag at age 2 and Morag at age 25. What makes it the case that the Morag at age 2 is the same person as the Morag at age 25? The endurantist will say that nothing makes them the same person. This is because the endurantist affirms something called the simple theory of personal identity. On the simple view, there are no non-trivial or non-circular conditions for personal identity over time.⁴⁴⁷ This is because personal identity is a primitive notion that is not subject to a deeper analysis.⁴⁴⁸ The numerically one person that is Morag simply is identical to herself. The numerically one person that is Morag simply does persist from one moment to the next. Endurantism and substance dualism have a nice fit with TA3 because TA3 demands numerical identity over time. As I have argued in *The End of the Timeless God*, endurantism has been the traditional view. In fact, it is assumed in arguments for the claim that the timeless God exists as a whole or all at once in a timeless present that lacks a before and after.

That is endurantism, but it is not the only view of personal persistence over time. The other main view is called four-dimensionalism, which is the doctrine of temporal parts.⁴⁴⁹ Four-dimensionalism is typically combined with an eternalist ontology of time. Instead of numerically one object persisting through time, four-dimensionalism says that objects are spread out over time by having different temporal parts located at each time. Four-dimensionalists will often invoke a spatial analogy to help people understand the claim that is being made here. Objects have spatial parts that are extended throughout the three dimensions of space. For instance, my body is currently spread throughout a particular region of space. I have parts at different places in this spatial region.

⁴⁴⁶ Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God*, chapters 4 and 6.

⁴⁴⁷ Noonan, *Personal Identity*, 15.

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. Swinburne, "Personal Identity."

⁴⁴⁹ Rea, "Four-Dimensionalism," 247.

My feet are on the ground, my hands are on my desk, and so on. In a similar way, the four-dimensionalist says that objects have temporal parts that are extended throughout time, or the fourth-dimension.⁴⁵⁰

To complicate matters a bit, four-dimensionalism can come in two different forms: perdurantism and stage theory.⁴⁵¹ My main interest is in stage theory because it is the most popular form today, as it is said to solve various problems that perdurantism cannot.⁴⁵² Each form shares the same underlying story, but differs over what counts as the ordinary object. I start with the underlying story of four-dimensionalism.

The four-dimensionalist says that the entire world is a collection of numerically distinct temporal parts that exist at numerically distinct moments of time. When thinking about how reality hangs together, four-dimensionalists commonly affirm *metaphysical universalism*. Metaphysical universalism is the view that any collection of objects whatsoever can form an object. Yet, four-dimensionalists will say that this is a separate issue from what composes a particular set of temporal parts to form the ordinary objects that we are concerned with like human persons.⁴⁵³

The four-dimensionalism in view here is not interested in just any old temporal part. They are interested in temporal parts that have a first-person perspective. These are called person stages. Person stages, like temporal parts in general, are as fine-grained as instants and possible change, so there are many numerically distinct person stages that exist in the world. When we consider a person like Morag, there are in fact many numerically distinct Morags, each of which exists at a different moment of time. At this point, the four-dimensionalist has a particular question that they wish to answer. What makes a particular collection of Morag person stages the *same* Morag? The four-dimensionalist has a complicated story to tell here in order to answer this question. The four-dimensionalist rejects the simple view of personal identity because they reject the endurantist understanding of numerical identity over time. In other words, they deny that ordinary objects can survive change and persist to a different moment of time.⁴⁵⁴ Hence the *sameness* in view here is not the endurantist's numerical identity.

On four-dimensionalism, there is the numerically distinct temporal part, or person stage, that is Morag at age 2. There is also a numerically distinct person stage that is Morag at age 25. According to stage theory, each person stage is, in fact, a numerically distinct person named Morag.⁴⁵⁵ Hence, what makes the two Morags the same person is not a matter of numerical identity, but rather

⁴⁵⁰ Haslanger, "Persistence Through Time, 318.

⁴⁵¹ Kaiserman, "Stage Theory," 215-216.

⁴⁵² For a deeper discussion see Hawley, *How Things Persist*, and Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism*.

⁴⁵³ Curtis and Robson, *A Critical Introduction to the Metaphysics of Time*, 141.

⁴⁵⁴ Tallant, *Metaphysics*, 168.

⁴⁵⁵ Kaiserman, "Stage Theory," 217.

something that explains their continuity in a way that makes the two Morags temporal counterparts. In this regard, the four-dimensionalist adopts something called a complex view of personal identity over time. On the complex view, there are substantive conditions for personal identity over time.⁴⁵⁶ The complex view says that personal identity can be explained in non-personal or sub-personal terms in order to create some kind of continuity relations between numerically distinct person stages. These continuity relations are sometimes referred to as the gen-identity relation in order to emphasize the fact that this is not numerical identity.⁴⁵⁷ What the complex theorist says is that a person persists over time is nothing more than some other, non-identity facts about a particular collection of person stages. This is generally spelled out in either biological or psychological terms, but sometimes both.⁴⁵⁸ I will focus on psychological continuity.

On the psychological approach, what makes one Morag person stage continuous with her later temporal counterpart is the fact that she is psychologically continuous with the later Morag person stage.⁴⁵⁹ The two numerically distinct person stages share enough of the same psychology (memory, character traits, etc.) to count as the same person.⁴⁶⁰ Not just any kind of psychological continuity will do the trick. There has to be what is called an immanent causal relation that connects the person stages. An immanent causal relation obtains when one person stage causes a temporal counterpart at the next instant in time to have the relevant psychological states.⁴⁶¹ This immanent causal relation rejects any sort of gap in time between distinct person stages in order to secure a tight personal continuity relation. The 2 year old Morag stage is the same person as the 25 year old Morag stage because they are psychologically continuous with one another. Further, there is an immanent causal relation between the different Morag stages. The earlier Morag stage passes on her psychological states to the Morag stage at the next instant. This Morag stage passes on her psychological states to the Morag stage at the instant after that, who in turn passes on her psychological states to the next Morag stage, and so on until we reach the 25 year old Morag stage. Thus, according to the four-dimensionalist, making the Morag temporal counterparts the “same” Morag.

That is the underlying four-dimensionalist story, so one might wonder what the difference is between perdurantism and stage theory. Again, the difference is over what counts as the ordinary object. In the case of Morag, the difference is over which object is properly named Morag. Is the individual stage Morag, or is something else? The stage theorist says that each person stage is a Morag. The numerically different Morags are in the right kind of counterpart relations in order to

⁴⁵⁶ Noonan, *Personal Identity*, 15.

⁴⁵⁷ van Inwagen, “What Do We Refer to When We Say ‘I?’,” 177.

⁴⁵⁸ Gasser and Stefan, “Introduction,” 3.

⁴⁵⁹ Noonan, *Personal Identity*, 10.

⁴⁶⁰ Cf. Wahlberg, “Can I be an Instantaneous Stage and Yet Persist Through Time?”

⁴⁶¹ Hershenov, “Four-Dimensional Animalism,” 211-212.

be the “same” person, where “same” means the complex view articulated above. The perdurantist sees things slightly differently. The perdurantist wants to say that the person stages are somehow fused together by these continuity relations to form a spacetime worm. The spacetime worm is Morag. The spacetime worm gets her properties derivatively from her parts. For example, Morag (the worm) has the property of *being excited about her 25th birthday* in virtue of having a person stage that has this property intrinsically and non-derivatively. Again, stage theory seems to be the most popular view today because it avoids various problems that plague perdurantism. In the next section, I shall offer a few reasons why that is the case related to the problem of temporary intrinsics. Understanding this problem will help one grasp certain criticisms I wish to raise against Turner’s view later.

Before discussing the problem of temporary intrinsics, I want to point out the relevance of this discussion to the topic of the resurrection. As I have elsewhere argued, eternalism and four-dimensionalism do not offer any hope for the resurrection.⁴⁶² This is because four-dimensionalism violates TA3’s demand for numerical identity from death to resurrection. On four-dimensionalism, there is no numerical identity over time. As the four-dimensionalist Eric Steinhart proclaims, “Personal identity is *not* retained in the resurrection. It is *sacrificed*.”⁴⁶³ Unlike Steinhart, I do not see this as a good thing. If I am a person stage located in the year 2022, I have no hope for a future resurrection because I cannot exist at a later time. On eternalism my temporal location is eternally fixed. There are other numerically distinct person stages that are connected to me that might be enjoying the resurrection at their temporal location. I guess that it is a good thing for them, but it offers me no hope for I am stuck at this temporal location. I quite literally have no afterlife to look forward to. Call this The Problem of No Afterlife.

As I understand things, the Christian hope for a resurrection relies on the truth of presentism, endurantism, and substance dualism. If God wishes to create a world in which He can offer everlasting friendship to human persons, then God will need to create a presentist world with enduring souls.

§3. The Problem of Change and the Problem of Temporary Intrinsics

I need to explain why stage theory is the most popular version of four-dimensionalism. Understanding this issue will help readers grasp the problems that I wish to identify for Turner’s account of time and the resurrection in later sections. What is relevant for this section is the relationship between change, persistence over time, and temporal ontology. In particular, there is the Problem of Temporary Intrinsics. The Problem of Temporary Intrinsics starts with a fairly

⁴⁶² Mullins, “Identity Through Time and Personal Salvation.”

⁴⁶³ Steinhart, “The Revision Theory of Resurrection,” 66-67.

obvious assumption. David Lewis states it as this: “persisting things change their intrinsic properties.”⁴⁶⁴ Consider Morag changing from *sitting* to *standing*. These are intrinsic properties of Morag. So far, nothing seems difficult in grasping this. Yet there are more assumptions that help generate the problem. According to Jonathan Tallant, we seem to have three intuitive assumptions about persistence and change. He states these as follows.⁴⁶⁵

A1) An object can survive a change.

A2) A change in an object is understood as the object bearing incompatible properties at different times.

A3) No object can bear incompatible properties: i.e., no object can be F and also not-F.

Notice how this is

related to the Christian hope for resurrection. It seems obvious that Morag can survive a rather boring change from *sitting* to *standing*. But what if Morag cannot survive these general, everyday changes? If Morag cannot survive changes in general, then she has no hope in surviving the dramatic changes that occur from death to resurrection. This calls for a closer examination of these issues.

When endurantism is combined with presentism, one is able to affirm (A1)-(A3) quite easily.⁴⁶⁶ Other positions on the ontology of time and persistence over time tend to reject (A1) or (A2), though there is disagreement here. To understand this issue, one must consider the Problem of Temporary Intrinsics.⁴⁶⁷ The Problem of Temporary Intrinsics focuses on (A3). Say that an eternalist ontology of time is true, and assume endurantism. Morag will be wholly located at multiple moments of time, and thus have multiple intrinsic monadic properties like *sitting* and *standing*, or *being 2 years old* and *being 25 years old*. These are properties that she has simpliciter. That violates (A3) because Morag will have incompatible properties. One potential way to avoid the Problem of Temporary Intrinsics is to deny that these are intrinsic properties, and instead say that they are relational properties. In particular, the property *sitting* is a relation to a particular moment of time.⁴⁶⁸ But this is widely regarded as implausible because *sitting* is intuitively not a relational property, but instead is an intrinsic property.⁴⁶⁹

One popular option to avoid the Problem of Temporary Intrinsics is to deny eternalism and adopt presentism. If one adopts presentism and endurantism, there is an easy solution to these problems. As Tallant explains, “if only present objects exist, then objects endure by simply existing—objects

⁴⁶⁴ Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 203.

⁴⁶⁵ Tallant, *Metaphysics*, 167-168.

⁴⁶⁶ Wasserman, “The Problem of Change,” 50; Ingram, *Thisness Presentism*, 50-51.

⁴⁶⁷ Cameron, *The Moving Spotlight*, 67-68.

⁴⁶⁸ Tallant, *Metaphysics*, 174.

⁴⁶⁹ Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 204; Wasserman, “The Problem of Change,” 53.

do not have non-existent parts. And since times other than the present do not exist, so there is no worry about generating a contradiction."⁴⁷⁰ When one considers Morag, she is not located in the past because the past does not exist. She only has whatever intrinsic properties that she presently has.

The problem is if one tries to combine endurantism with eternalism. Endurant objects exist as a whole at all times at which they exist. If they exist at multiple times, as most would on eternalism, then objects will have multiple incompatible properties. That is incoherent, so most philosophers seek to remove the incoherence by rejecting endurantism in favour of some version of four-dimensionalism. On four-dimensionalism, persons are made up of temporal parts or person stages, the numerically distinct temporal parts are the things that bear the different intrinsic properties, and no part has incompatible properties.⁴⁷¹ Again, four-dimensionalism comes in two forms: perdurance and stage theory.

As stated before, perdurantism faces various problems that push people to adopt stage theory. Before moving forward, I will briefly highlight some common problems for perdurantism. For example, perdurantism tries to affirm (A1) by saying that objects exist by having different temporal parts at different times. This leads one to assert some rather peculiar claims. Consider the object of my door. On perdurantism, you never encounter the entire door. You only ever encounter a temporal part of my door. As Tallant points out, it seems quite odd to say that my door does not exist now, only part of it does.⁴⁷² That is counterintuitive to say the least.

Another major problem for perdurantism is the too many thinkers objection. On perdurantism, the spacetime worm is said to be the person Morag, and not the individual person stages that the worm is composed of. Yet, notice two things. First, the worm gets its properties from the parts. Meaning, the worm Morag only gets her thoughts because of the individual temporal parts that think. Second, what we have is the worm Morag thinking "I am Morag," and the individual temporal parts thinking "I am Morag." The perdurantist wants to say that only the worm is the person, but something seems to be off about this analysis. This is because we have too many thinkers for there to be only one person, and the one person gets all of her thoughts derivatively from other thinkers more fundamental than her. Surely something has gone wrong here. Moreover, the only reason that the worm has a moral status is because the individual temporal parts have a moral status. Which leads to worries about why one should value the worm more than its parts.⁴⁷³

Stage theory is the more popular view today because it is said to avoid all of these problems. Instead of saying that the entire worm is the person, this view says that each individual stage is a

⁴⁷⁰ Tallant, *Metaphysics*, 175-176.

⁴⁷¹ Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 204.

⁴⁷² Tallant, *Metaphysics*, 171.

⁴⁷³ Johnston, "Is Hope for Another Life Rational?," 57.

person. There are not too many thinkers on this view. There is the appropriate number of thinkers at any given time. For each instant, there is a numerically distinct Morag who does the thinking. The different Morags are related by a counterpart relation. To be clear, this view explicitly rejects (A1), which says that objects can survive change.⁴⁷⁴ So that is a cost, but one the stage theorist is willing to accept. However, this has negative consequences for Christian theology since it entails the Problem of No Afterlife. In order to have hope for an afterlife, Morag must be able to survive changes in general, but stage theory has denied that this is possible. If Morag cannot survive changes in general, then she has no hope in surviving the dramatic changes that occur from death to resurrection.

§4. Turner's Amendments: Eschatological Presentism

Thus far, I have been arguing that the standard Christian story needs substance dualism, presentism, and endurantism in order for one to be hopeful in the resurrection of the dead. Amending the story to include four-dimensionalism and eternalism is unacceptable because it encounters the Problem of No Afterlife. At this point in the paper, I wish to offer a closer examination of an alternative set of amendments from Turner.

Turner and I agree that TA1, TA2, and TA3 are part of the standard Christian story. However, Turner argues that certain parts of the standard Christian story are false. In particular, he rejects substance dualism, presentism, endurantism, and the intermediate state. Turner offers a series of interesting arguments against the intermediate state. These rely on interpretations of particular biblical passages, examining the philosophical motivations for substance dualism, and more.⁴⁷⁵ For example, Turner denies the intermediate state because he thinks that it undermines TA1. A disembodied existence in paradise would make the resurrection superfluous according to Turner. He denies that human persons can exist as disembodied souls, in part, because of a commitment to a hylemorphic philosophical anthropology. On hylemorphism, a soul is not a substance, but rather the form of a body. A human person is not an immaterial soul with a body, but instead an informed body. On hylemorphism, if a body and form are separated, the human person ceases to exist.⁴⁷⁶ Personally, I find the idea that the soul is the form of the body difficult to understand. There are various debates today over what that could mean. The correct understanding of hylemorphism is a mystery to me and others who work on philosophical anthropology, so I shall have no more to say about the view.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁴ Tallant, *Metaphysics*, 168.

⁴⁷⁵ Turner, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, 20-73.

⁴⁷⁶ Turner, 139-182.

⁴⁷⁷ Olson, *What Are We*, 172-176.

Given that Turner is committed to TA1, TA2, and TA3, he has admittedly put himself in a bit of a pickle. Consider again Morag and a standard presentist ontology of time. Say that Morag dies at a moment of time t^1 that is earlier than the second coming of Christ and the general resurrection of the dead at a moment of time t^Ω . Further, say that t^Ω is significantly far off in the future and not immediately after t^1 . What happens to Morag between t^1 and t^Ω ? Since t^Ω is not immediately after t^1 , Morag cannot have immediate post-mortem existence in Paradise. That is a problem for anyone wishing to affirm TA2, which says that Morag does have immediate post-mortem existence in Paradise. It might make one wish for the intermediate state again.

As Turner admits, “The Intermediate State is intuitive. It gives an easy account for “where” dead humans are *before* the eschatological bodily resurrection. It gives theologians a way to think about “where” dead humans are *now*. Dead humans are, according to The Intermediate State, in Heaven/Paradise, in the time between death and the eschatological bodily resurrection.”⁴⁷⁸

What shall Turner do? Turner offers a view that he says is “counterintuitive.”⁴⁷⁹ I shall leave it up to readers to make their own judgments as to whether or not Turner’s account is counterintuitive. Turner considers work on a view called compound presentism, and develops something he calls eschatological presentism (EP). On EP, reality as a whole can be cut up into slices that can be successively ordered. For example, slices S1, S2, S3, and so on. Turner does not want to make these slices of reality temporal moments nor hyper-moments because he does not wish to introduce a second temporal dimension into his book of the world.⁴⁸⁰ However, these slices appear to function just like hyper-moments. This is because these slices serve as a *when* certain moments of time exist, and can be successively ordered. They are even described as being subject to temporal becoming.⁴⁸¹ As far as I can tell, Turner is working with a hyper-presentist ontology of time because he describes reality as consisting of only one slice, with past slices no longer existing, and future slices not yet existing.⁴⁸² However, I shall set that aside, and stick to describing EP without hypertime.

What exists at any given slice of reality? It depends. For particular segments of the history of the world, there exists only one moment of time. Yet for another segment of history, for any slice of reality there are two moments of time. These two moments of time are the so-called compound present because they are compounded together to form the present.⁴⁸³ On standard presentism, the present moment is simply a single moment of time. Whatever exists at the present moment exhausts reality. On EP, the present is comprised of two temporal moments that stand in the

⁴⁷⁸ Turner, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, 187.

⁴⁷⁹ Turner, 187.

⁴⁸⁰ Personal correspondence.

⁴⁸¹ Turner, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, 211-212.

⁴⁸² Turner, 212.

⁴⁸³ Turner, 205-206.

relation of *being compoundly present with*. Whatever exists at this compound present exhausts reality.

What are these two present moments on EP? T^{Ω} is the important moment for EP. T^{Ω} is the Parousia, or the second coming of Jesus and the general resurrection of the dead. Any other temporal moments prior to t^{Ω} will be other moments of earthly life on the standard Christian story. I take it that a narrative will help one picture this view.

Imagine a temporal, triune God whose eternal present maps onto the totality of reality. Prior to the existence of the created universe, God existed alone. Call this slice of reality, S1. At the second slice of reality, S2, God creates the universe. What all does God cause to exist at the second slice of reality? At S2, God creates the first moment of time. Call it t^1 . God also creates t^{Ω} , which again includes the second coming of Christ and the general resurrection of the dead. At t^{Ω} , all humans exist with either glorified resurrected bodies, or not so great damned bodies. I know it sounds odd for the second coming of Christ to exist when there has not been a first coming, but bear with me. At S2, these two temporal moments exist: t^1 and t^{Ω} . T^1 and t^{Ω} together make up a compound present. Further, these two moments are on the same timeline. T^1 is an earlier moment than t^{Ω} . After all, the Big Bang happened before the return of Christ, though both exist at S2. As reality moves forward, the compound present also changes. At the third slice of reality, S3, t^1 does not exist because God is no longer sustaining that moment in existence. Yet t^{Ω} does exist along with t^2 . Things do not progress beyond t^{Ω} because the timeline has not yet reached t^{Ω} but is instead only at t^2 . At this slice of reality, God is omnipresent to both t^{Ω} and t^2 because God is causally sustaining both in existence.

Things carry on like this for quite some time. After several billions of years, evolution eventually gives rise to human persons. Let us say that this happens at t^h (the time of humans). At this particular slice of reality, notice that all of humanity exists at t^{Ω} with either resurrected or damned bodies. Yet also notice that at this slice of reality, some of humanity also exists at t^h . What are we to make of this? According to Turner, objects can be ontologically thin or thick. An object is ontologically thin if the object is not spread out over multiple moments of time. An object is ontologically thick if the object is spread out over multiple moments of time.⁴⁸⁴ The people who are spread out across two temporal moments are ontologically thick. Turner calls them “spacetime pill bugs” because they are comprised of two temporal parts.⁴⁸⁵ These temporal parts are not like the standard temporal parts that we saw above with stage theory, perdurantism, and eternalism. These temporal parts are numerically distinct, yet they endure through time. Consider an early human named Adam who exists at this particular slice of reality. At this slice of reality, Adam is ontologically thick because he has a temporal part at t^h and t^{Ω} . These temporal parts are

⁴⁸⁴ Turner, 207.

⁴⁸⁵ Turner, 208.

numerically distinct. At the next slice of reality, t^{h1} and t^{Ω} exist. The temporal part of Adam at t^{Ω} is there doing nothing new because anything new would progress the timeline beyond t^{Ω} . The temporal part of Adam at t^h is the numerically same temporal part that exists at t^{h1} . This temporal part of Adam is an endurant object that persists from birth until death and is numerically distinct from the temporal part of Adam that exists at t^{Ω} .

Fast forward a few years to when Adam dies. Turner says that Adam experiences an immediate resurrection.⁴⁸⁶ How does this take place? Say that at a slice of reality SD, there exist two moments: t^d which is the moment of Adam's death, and t^{Ω} . At the next slice of reality, SD1, there are two moments of time that exist: t^{d1} and t^{Ω} . At SD1, Adam does not exist at t^{d1} , and only exists at t^{Ω} . This is because the temporal part that died ceases to exist. Only the temporal part that exists at t^{Ω} remains. Adam is said to experience an immediate resurrection because Adam does not exist in an intermediate state between t^{d1} and t^{Ω} . Adam simply exists at t^{Ω} .

There is a peculiar oddity about t^{Ω} throughout this series of reality slices. Turner says that t^{Ω} remains stuck or paralyzed in a certain sense. This is because t^{Ω} is simply occurring. It is not ceasing to exist, nor is it followed by subsequent moments of eschatological bliss. Yet Turner makes it clear that this moment is not really paralyzed. The stuckness of t^{Ω} is not eternal.⁴⁸⁷ t^{Ω} is only stuck for a particular stretch of reality slices. Once the timeline catches up to t^{Ω} , then things progress after that. Consider the slice of reality where things catch up with the second coming of Christ and the general resurrection of the dead. Call it S Ω . At S Ω , only t^{Ω} exists. Call S Ω -1 the slice of reality immediately before the general resurrection, and $t^{\Omega-1}$ the moment before the general resurrection. At S Ω -1 two moments of time exist: $t^{\Omega-1}$ and t^{Ω} . At the next slice of reality, only t^{Ω} exists. And at the next slice of reality, S Ω 1, only $t^{\Omega+1}$ exists. After that, at S Ω 2, only $t^{\Omega+2}$ exists, and so on forever after.

What happens to the temporal part of Adam and other humans at t^{Ω} ? They endure onto $t^{\Omega+1}$, and then to $t^{\Omega+2}$, and so on forever after. They are no longer stuck, but are now able to do any number of things with their glorified bodies, or suffer in any number of ways with their damned bodies.

§5. Critical Analysis of Eschatological Presentism

It is not clear to me how eschatological presentism gets around the Problem of No Afterlife. On EP, an enduring human person stage comes into existence, lives, dies, and ceases to exist. This enduring person stage is numerically distinct from the human person stage who exists at t^{Ω} with a resurrected body. That seems to fall victim to No Afterlife. However, according to Turner, these

⁴⁸⁶ Turner, 210.

⁴⁸⁷ Turner, 209.

two temporal parts are united in a particular way that avoids these problems. These two temporal parts each share the numerically same substantial form.⁴⁸⁸ The idea seems to be that if there is numerically one substantial form, personal identity is retained. Further, there are no criteria for the identity of this substantial form. In this way, the hylemorphist can try to affirm the simple view of identity instead of the complex view of gen-identity that we encountered before.⁴⁸⁹

Yet, I don't understand how this could be the case since this substantial form would need to be located at two different times, and would thus encounter the problem of temporary intrinsics discussed earlier. For example, consider a slice of reality in which Adam is being born and Adam is being resurrected. Those are incompatible intrinsic properties, thus numerically one form cannot have them both at one slice of reality. That brings us back to numerically distinct temporal parts with some kind of continuity relation that is short of numerical identity. What seems to be going on here is that the Adam temporal part that lives and dies just ceases to exist. It is only the resurrected temporal part that enjoys resurrection, and this temporal part is numerically distinct from the other temporal part. It is difficult to see how this squares with TA3, the claim that there is numerical identity from death to resurrection.

I also cannot understand how this is consistent with TA2, the claim that there is immediate post-mortem existence. Here is why: when I think of immediate, I think of things being one way at a particular moment, and then being another way at the next subsequent moment. I do not think of immediate as one enduring object ceasing to exist while a numerically distinct, pre-existent object continues to exist. Perhaps, then, Turner is right to say that his account is counterintuitive.

To see how counterintuitive this is, consider again the standard Christian story. God exists all alone, and then creates a universe with a presentist ontology. At the first moment of the universe, there is a Big Bang. That is all. There is no other moment with resurrected bodies floating around in reality. There is simply the Big Bang. Later on, human persons come into existence. These are souls with bodies. These souls are enduring beings who persist with numerical identity over time. When these souls die, they are separated from their bodies and are relocated to the intermediate state while they await the general resurrection of the dead. Later on, God brings about the general resurrection of the dead. Compared to EP, this is a rather simple and straightforward story.

In light of this, I say that EP is not only counterintuitive, but it is also less probable than the standard story. The standard story is more intuitive and less complicated, and thus more likely to be true. EP complicates things considerably, thus lowering the probability of EP obtaining. EP is a very complicated hypothesis that introduces multiple moments of time existing at a single slice of reality,

⁴⁸⁸ Turner, 224.

⁴⁸⁹ Thanks to Turner for pointing this out to me.

ontologically thin and thick objects, spacetime pill bugs, and so on. That is much more complicated than a bog-standard presentism and endurant souls embodied in human flesh.

§6. Puzzles About the Coherence of EP

Not only do I find EP counterintuitive and improbable, and I have my doubts it can avoid the Problem of No Afterlife, but also I have further worries about the coherence of EP. There is a very real sense in which t^Ω is co-present with moments of time that are earlier than t^Ω . That is puzzling to say the least. As mentioned before, t^Ω is when Christ returns. At the slice of reality in which creation begins, Christ is returning at t^Ω , and t^Ω is co-present with the Big Bang. It is puzzling to figure out how t^Ω can properly be called the second coming of Christ when Christ has not yet come the first time around.

This brings me to a related puzzle about two temporal moments being compounded together to form the compound present. It would seem that t^Ω cannot be compounded together with a successive series of other temporal moments without t^Ω itself undergoing change. Yet, this is impossible because a moment cannot itself undergo change since change occurs over a series of moments. A moment is the way things are but could be subsequently otherwise. Yet EP seems to allow that t^Ω can undergo extrinsic or relational changes as it becomes successively co-present with subsequent moments of time. A similar worry can be raised about the contents of t^Ω . The person stages that exist at t^Ω seem to undergo changes across different slices of reality. Yet, this cannot be possible since any change to a person stage at t^Ω would bring about $t^{\Omega+1}$. Here is the main problem. If t^Ω , or the contents of t^Ω , undergo an intrinsic or extrinsic change, then t^Ω will cease to exist because things will be subsequently otherwise. In other words, a change would bring about $t^{\Omega+1}$.

Why should one think that t^Ω or its content undergo change? There are several reasons, but I shall limit myself to two. First, t^Ω itself is constantly changing with regard to its temporal relations to other moments. Second, the denizens of t^Ω also undergo change with regard to their relations to other moments of time and temporal parts. I will take each argument in turn.

It would seem that t^Ω itself undergoes change. On EP, the second slice of reality contains t^1 and t^Ω . At this slice of reality, t^Ω is in the relationship of *being compoundly present with* t^1 . The totality of facts at this slice of reality are represented by tensed propositions that are true simpliciter. For example, the proposition $\langle \text{At } S2, t^\Omega \text{ is compoundly present with } t^1 \rangle$. At the next slice of reality, $S3$, the totality of facts changes because t^1 does not exist, and t^Ω is compoundly present with t^2 . At each subsequent slice of reality, t^Ω stands in a new relation to different moments of time, and tensed propositions about t^Ω change in truth-value accordingly. This is a problem since a moment

of time cannot undergo a change, and yet EP clearly has t^Ω undergoing changes over a successive series of reality slices.

The second problem is that the occupants of t^Ω also undergo a series of successive changes. At S2, the occupants of t^Ω are ontologically thin. Recall that Turner says an object is ontologically thin if the object is not spread out over multiple moments of time. An object is ontologically thick if the object is spread out over multiple moments of time. At various points throughout history, every single human occupant of t^Ω will become ontologically thick when their temporal counterpart is born. At other various points throughout history, every single human occupant of t^Ω will become ontologically thin when their temporal counterpart dies and ceases to exist. Every single human occupant of t^Ω undergoes a change from *being thin* to *being thick*, and a change from *being thick* to *being thin*. Another way to think of this is that every single occupant of t^Ω goes from *not being a spacetime pill bug* to *being a spacetime pill bug*, and then to *not being a spacetime pill bug*. This is a serious problem because any change in an occupant must bring about the next moment of time. And yet EP wishes to say that t^Ω and its occupants remain unchanging over the different successive series of reality slices. This calls into question the coherence of EP.

§7. Problems for Causation and Free Will

There is another puzzle concerning causation and free will. Turner assures us that causation works as normal on EP—there is no retroactive causation. He says that what happens at t^Ω is causally dependent on what happens at earlier times, just as it would be on standard presentism.⁴⁹⁰ For example, Adam's acceptance of God's grace is earlier than Adam's resurrection, and thus causally explains Adam's resurrection at t^Ω .

Yet I struggle to see how this could be true. Consider the second slice of reality, S2. At S2, t^1 and t^Ω exist. The Big Bang and the general resurrection of the dead come to exist at the same slice of reality of God's initial creative act. God causally produces both of these moments at the same slice of reality. How can t^Ω causally depend on what takes place at t^1 ? They both come into existence at the same slice of reality, and what takes place at t^Ω is ontically settled because t^Ω exists. What takes place at t^Ω is also alethically settled, for the truth of propositions about t^Ω supervene on t^Ω . It would also seem that t^Ω is epistemically and providentially settled because God knows what is happening at t^Ω because He has providentially caused t^Ω to exist at S2. Notice that I said providentially *caused*. God's causing t^Ω to exist seems to causally settle t^Ω . If God's causing t^Ω to exist does not causally settle t^Ω , then I do not know what else will. In which case, t^Ω is causally settled.

⁴⁹⁰ Turner, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, 212.

Given the full causal settled state of t^Ω at the second slice of reality, I fail to see how t^Ω could causally depend on any earlier moment that has yet to come into existence. When t^Ω comes into existence, it is too late for any earlier moments of time to causally influence t^Ω . Especially given the fact that almost all of these earlier moments do not yet exist. Long before Adam comes to be born, his eschatological fate is alethically, epistemically, providentially, causally, and ontically settled.⁴⁹¹ How could Adam possibly contribute anything to t^Ω , let alone *freely* contribute anything to t^Ω ?

Conclusion

On my view of the world, the Christian hope for resurrection depends on several metaphysical conditions. Those are substance dualism, presentism, and endurantism. Think of it this way: prior to creation, God is able to consider a wide range of possible universes that He can create. Some of these universes would fulfil God's intent to establish an everlasting friendship with creatures. Other possible universes would not fulfil God's intent to establish everlasting friendship with creatures. Among these possible universes are ones with different ontologies of time, a different metaphysical makeup for human persons, and so on. As I see things, the possible universes with an eschatological presentist ontology of time will not fulfil God's purposes. Instead, God will need to select a presentist universe in order to fulfil His intent to create humans that can enter into everlasting friendship with Him.

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⁴⁹¹ For more on the future being open or settled, see Rhoda, "The Fivefold Openness of the Future."

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Mythic Sensibility and Mythopoeic Fantasy

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Abstract

Myths and mythopoeic fantasy share a 'mythic sensibility' which structures one's perception of the world enabling a kind of miraculous revelation. The term 'mythic sensibility' is adapted from Graham Ward's studies of belief and the imagination. Ward writes that:

myth is a sensibility about being in the world registered in the awakening of the creative imagination and intensifying around objects... It invests these objects with communicative vibrations. It gives them mythic resonance. From these vibrations figures and eventually stories emerge as we *make sense* of them.⁴⁹²

This *making sense* represents a seeing *as*, a dynamic by which the world is not encountered in an unmediated or uninterpreted way, but as always already having undergone a hermeneutic moment.⁴⁹³ Engaging with a text bearing this mythic sensibility gives the mythic text a kind of presence, making sense of the world and the self. In this essay, I argue that this being-present is distinctive of the phenomenology of the mythic and that the mythic sensibility can be described as the sense of an interpretive presence.

⁴⁹² Graham Ward, *Unimaginable: What we Can Imagine and What we Can't* (London, 2018), 167.

⁴⁹³ I would add to Ward's account of the mythic in this sense as not only a making sense, but also a *being made sense of*. There is a sensibility or feeling in the narrative both of encounter and of interpretation: it is an encounter with that which both reveals the world as meaningful and which reveals the self as meaningful. It contains the sense both of knowing and of being known. What is more, the interpretive action of the myth takes on a life of its own: the sense of being known arrives as it were from outside as the myth structures the seeing of the world and the self.



Preliminary remarks

The terms myth and mythopoeic are so varied in their definition and application, in the first part of the essay, I attempt to stake out what is meant in this context by ‘myth’ and by ‘mythopoeic fantasy’ in order better to understand the mythic sensibility they share. This mythic sensibility has two interweaving aspects: *the structuring of perception* and *miraculous revelation*. Mythic sensibility itself is always already interpretive as it structures the perceptions of the ‘mythic subject’ in much the same way that a game structures the judgments and actions of the player.

In the second part, I argue that Johann Huizinga’s analysis of play as employed by Hans-Georg Gadamer helps to understand this hermeneutic structuring of the mythic subject’s judgment and valuing of the world and the self. Beyond revealing the world as meaningful, the mythic sensibility also intimates to the mythic subject a sense of transcendence, perceiving a higher or more real reality than ‘ordinary everydayness’. This is the stock in trade both of the myth classically-understood and the otherworldliness of mythopoeic fiction: in both the world is revealed as more wonderful (or horrible) than previously appreciable.

In the third part, I engage the work of Chris Brawley, who links the effect of mythopoeic fantasy on the reader with the experience of the holy and of Rowan Williams, who describes both sorts of narratives as possessing ‘imaginative structures in and through which people can think and feel’.⁴⁹⁴ Though Brawley and Williams differ in their assessment of the Christian narratives (or myths) to continue to speak to the post-Christendom West, both are insistent on the continuing capacity of mythic and mythopoeic narrative to shape our view and so our understanding of the world. I conclude by suggesting that an understanding of mythic sensibility and its role in fiction and in structuring our perception of the world offers a first step in expanding the language we have to speak about faith and about what counts as theological discourse.

I. Myth and Mythopoeic Fantasy

Myth

In choosing the word myth to describe a kind of discourse or narrative, one opens a lexical Pandora’s box. Once all of the conflicting definitions of myth have escaped, one is left not with only hope but also with confusion. As Sarah Iles Johnston points out, the varied history and usage of the term means that any particular usage ‘must be understood as heuristic’.⁴⁹⁵ That is to say, no

⁴⁹⁴ Rowan Williams, “Master of his universe: the warnings in JRR Tolkien’s novels”, *The New Statesman* 8 August 2018. <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2018/08/master-his-universe-warnings-jrr-tolkien-s-novels>. Accessed 4 September 2018.

⁴⁹⁵ Sarah Iles Johnston, *The Story of Myth*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018, 6. The term can be tracked from its introduction into scholarship in the eighteenth century by Gottlob Heyne (opposing

definition has proven up to the task of exhaustively classifying the array of narrative known as mythic, as each definition is always at the service of a particular project, and so it must be understood as provisional and fitted to a specific task. While *mythos* refers in its original Greek simply to plot or story, it comes in time to bear resonances with lie, fable, and certain kinds of cultural and religious narratives. With this caveat in mind, I approach the mythic in this essay through the work of Mircea Eliade, who among the modern mythologists seems to take most seriously the *interior* qualities of the mythic. That is, he is concerned to explore what it is like to be inside a myth's account of the world, on the myth's own terms. Besides taking myth seriously (rather than try to explain it in terms of another, more basic genre of human expression and experience such as science, psychology, politics), Eliade's account has the additional benefit of offering continuity between archaic and contemporary mythic experience and understanding. For Eliade, the mythic is not something that has been left behind, but rather something that has only changed with time.

For the purposes of this essay, myth is to be understood as a form of story concerned with the meaning to be found in beginnings. Though he is reticent to offer an exhaustive definition, when Eliade does attempt to draw some lines around what he means when he talks about myth, he writes:

...the definition that seems least inadequate because most embracing is this: Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the "beginnings." In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of the Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality—an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a "creation" it relates how something was produced, began to *be*. Myth tells only of that which *really* happened, which manifested itself completely. The actors in myths are Supernatural beings. ... myths disclose their creative activity and reveal the sacredness... of their works. In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred... into the World. It is this sudden breakthrough of the sacred that really *establishes* the World and makes it what it is today.⁴⁹⁶

These origins, then, are not primarily concerned with answering the question *how* as it is posed by the empirical sciences, but rather with the *what* of human experience. It is important to note that the origin in question need not be that of the *whole world*. Myths need not be complete cosmologies, and neither are they 'just so story' aetiologies. Rather, myths, in this sense, by narrating the origin, make available through narrative experience the meaning of the thing so

mythus to *fabula* in distinguishing different kinds of classical stories), through its introduction into English in the nineteenth century by George Eliot in her translation of Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, to the twentieth-century mythologists Campbell, Eliade, and others.

⁴⁹⁶ Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, London, 1963, 5-6.

originated. *Being*, in this mythical sense, is identical with *meaning*, and that meaning is experienced primarily in conducting oneself according to its account: 'Because myth relates the *gesta* of Supernatural Beings and the manifestation of their sacred powers, it becomes the exemplary model for all significant human activities.'⁴⁹⁷ The beginning is the actions of the Supernatural Beings (or, as will be discussed below, the character of any story participating in the meaning-revealing capacities of the mythic), which establish a relationship between the subject and the world. By patterning our lives after the account of a myth's narrative of origin, we are able both to approach the supernatural and to transcend the limited horizons of strictly material reality (whatever that might be) as well as experience the world in truth. Karen Armstrong synthesises Eliade's description into the succinct formula that a myth is the story of 'something that had in some sense happened once but that also happens all the time' and the truth of which is discoverable only by acting upon that story through what she terms a 'program of action.'⁴⁹⁸ What Armstrong refers to as 'once', Eliade calls *in illo tempore*, 'in that time' in which the mythic happened or happens. In Eliade's account of myth, this time outside of time is not merely in the far past. It is what Charles Taylor calls a 'higher time'.⁴⁹⁹ Christian theologians have referred to it as *kairos* (as opposed to everyday *chronos*), God's time, operating in tandem with, parallel to, or over against the *saecula* in which we live day-to-day. Myth for Eliade makes available *illo tempore* through its narration, and so makes available the reality operative in that higher, more real time.⁵⁰⁰

Mythopoeic Fantasy

Like myth, 'mythopoeic fantasy' is a term that is widely used, though often unreflectively and idiosyncratically.⁵⁰¹ Literary theorist Marek Oziwicz defines mythopoeic fantasy as 'a unique

⁴⁹⁷ Eliade, 6.

⁴⁹⁸ Armstrong, *The Case for God*, New York, 2009, xi-xii.

⁴⁹⁹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, MA, 2007, 57. Some theorists, such as Robert Segal, misunderstand Eliade on this point, dwelling on the general 'pastness' *illo tempore*. (*Theorizing About Myth*, 23). Though frequently, even usually, understood as past, this 'higher time' is better understood elsewhere as in the future (the site of God's providence) or even touching the present, available through ritual, narrative, and even geography.

⁵⁰⁰ As will be discussed at the end of this essay, the collapse of the pragmatic world described by secular accounts of the world and the 'magical' world of the mythic is a primary characteristic of mythopoeic fantasy.

⁵⁰¹ "Let's talk about genre": Neil Gaiman and Kazuo Ishiguro in conversation' in *The New Statesman*, 4 June 2005, <https://www.newstatesman.com/2015/05/neil-gaiman-kazuo-ishiguro-interview-literature-genre-machines-can-toil-they-can-t-imagine>. In a broader sense, despite the dictates of genre convention, definition of any kind of 'fantasy' on literary grounds is complicated by the fact that the genre itself is most precisely understood as a marketing tool for booksellers. A book is classified as fantasy if publishers think that doing so is the best way to sell more copies. As Neil Gaiman quipped, 'Genres only start existing when there's enough of them to form a sort of critical mass in a bookshop.'

literary expression of a worldview that assumes the existence of the supernatural.⁵⁰² This definition is unsatisfactory for at least two reasons. First, what counts as 'supernatural' depends strongly upon what one considers 'natural', which is neither obvious nor incontestable. Second, from the perspective of the fiction itself, what is considered 'natural' and 'supernatural' is also often blurred or effaced all together, as will be discussed below. Chris Brawley offers a more useful definition, commendably self-aware in its local application. For Brawley's work on mythopoeic fiction and ecological politics, it is understood as the work of 'authors who are employing fantasy as a subversive mode of literature to revise our perceptions of the natural world; and, the distinguishing feature of these authors is... an inculcation of a certain religious or mystical "feeling" of the numinous in the reader.'⁵⁰³ Brawley's definition is helpful inasmuch as he specifies that the mythopoeic is related in some sense to the power of certain kinds of narrative to re-frame our perceptions and that it works by evocation of an unspecified 'numinous' feeling. I hope to offer more specificity to the experience of the numinous than Brawley is able to in his reliance on Rudolf Otto's *Idea of the Holy*. It would be circular reasoning to define for the purposes of this essay mythopoeic fantasy as that which carries the mythic sensibility under consideration. However, as Oziewicz' and Brawley's definitions suggest, the mythic sensibility of interpretive structure and miraculous revelation is intertwined in the genre. I will thus define mythopoeic fantasy as that concerned with the making and operation of mythic consciousness, whether within the narrative or as the narrative itself. Concerned as they are with myth, such narratives bear the mythic sensibility under consideration in this essay.

The best-known work of mythopoeic fantasy today must be J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, given a new currency and visibility by Peter Jackson's film adaptations. The force with which *The Lord of the Rings* originally struck the public imagination and which it continues to exert on novelists, film makers, game designers, and visual artists testifies both to the potency of Tolkien's creative vision as well to an underlying hunger for the mythopoeic in the public's imagination. The seeming miracle of Tolkien's Middle Earth, a new world whose interior reality, providential resonances and characters' sacrifices confront the reader with all the force of an ancient 'organic' mythic narrative represents the origin not only of a new genre but of a new way of appreciating and approaching the world in which we live. The arrival of Jackson's films in 2001 inaugurated a new era of fantasy film making, bringing audiences not only the Harry Potter films, but also more emotionally and psychologically ambiguous films such as Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* and Dave McKean's *MirrorMask*, all reveling in what Neil Easterbrook calls the 'shamelessly fictive'.⁵⁰⁴ Since the stories

⁵⁰² Marek Oziewicz, *One Earth, One People: The Mythopoeic Fantasy Series of Ursula K. Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander, Madeleine L'Engle, and Orson Scott Card*, Jefferson, NC, 2008, 4.

⁵⁰³ Chris Brawley, *Nature and the Numinous in Mythopoeic Fantasy*, Jefferson, NC, 2014, 9.

⁵⁰⁴ Neil Easterbrook, "The Shamelessly Fictive: Mimesis and Metafantasy" in *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 2012, Vol. 18, No. 1, 199.

and myths of the Old and New Testaments no longer structure the imaginations and hermeneutical vision of many (most?) in post-Christendom Europe and North America, the increased visibility of the shamelessly fictive and the rise of the 'shamelessly mythic' invites consideration. The hollowing out of trust in the institutions of religious life has become a byword, and yet the avowedly theological character of Tolkien's writing⁵⁰⁵ puts into question claims that the public has grown quite apart from the questions and the desires with which they once turned almost universally to the Church. This 'mythic turn' represents a shift in the public's relationship to questions of faith and opens new questions about what makes for religious discourse at all.

With these understandings of myth and mythopoeic fiction in mind, we can begin to examine the phenomenological sensibility shared by myth and the mythopoeic fiction enjoying a contemporary renaissance: a narrative, interpretive presence characterised by *structuring perception* and *miraculous revelation*.

II. Structuring Perception

The mythic sensibility which is shared by proper myths and mythopoeic fiction first entails a structuring of one's interpretation and judgment, in much the same way as a game does. That is to say, as the rules of a game structure the judgments and actions of the players, mythic sensibility structures the understanding and even behaviour of the 'mythic subject'. In the midst of the Second World War, Dutch historian Johan Huizinga undertook the unusual task of producing a study of play, which would prove to offer new insight into the dynamics of this seeing *as*. Our perception of the world is always already mediated by our past experiences, the language(s) we speak, our mental state, and so on. All of these priors determine not only how we react to new circumstances and new stimuli, but also how we perceive any given stimulus or situation: an assemblage of wood is seen *as* a table or an altar or a workbench. A congregation of people is seen as a rock concert or a brawl or an initiation. In *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, Huizinga anatomises the ways in which this 'play-element' structure a great deal of otherwise disparate aspects of human culture. He describes how, when playing a game, the rules of the game structure players' actions. The intentions, goals, rules, and scope of the game dictate what the players want, how they go about trying to achieve it, and the space in which they pursue these aims: 'Inside the play-ground an absolute and peculiar order reigns. Here we come across another, very positive feature of play: it creates order, *is* order. ... Play demands order absolute and supreme. The least

⁵⁰⁵ Tolkien wrote to a Jesuit friend, "*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion,' to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism." (Zaleski, 412).

deviation from it “spoils the game”, robs it of its character and makes it worthless.⁵⁰⁶ Play is also inherently imaginative and creative. Not only are the rules in play fictive, in the sense that they are contingent to the game and not necessary to human existence, but games themselves almost always involve a further imagined component.⁵⁰⁷ Whether it is the importance or value placed on the goal (within the horizons of the game itself, the outcome is of utmost importance and is unrelated to any external reward or profit to be had) or it is an imagined world of faeries and wizards which constitutes the game’s setting, a certain playfulness with the conditions of reality is necessary for the game *as game* to function. Within the boundaries of the game’s order, the world is to be discerned in a certain way.⁵⁰⁸ Certain places are taboo, whether they be beyond the boundary lines painted in the grass or behind the doors of the Holy of Holies. The rules of the game structure our interpretation of the phenomena we encounter.⁵⁰⁹

Hans-Georg Gadamer takes up Huizinga’s theory of play into the development of his hermeneutics. Drawing on Huizinga’s discussion of how games structure behaviour, he observes how the game, in fact, *plays* the players. The game itself takes on the status of a subject: ‘all playing is a being-played. The attraction of a game is the fascination it exerts, consists precisely in the fact that the game masters the players. ... Whoever “tries” is in fact the one who is tried. The real subject of the game... is not the player but instead the game itself.’⁵¹⁰ The subjectivity of the game is of crucial importance in the development of our concept of the mythic sensibility. Gadamer is

⁵⁰⁶ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, New York, 1950, 10. The spoil-sport, in fact, illustrates the game-like, fictive nature of myth as it appears in wider cultural frames. For example, regarding the Houses of Harry Potter, to mock a spellbound fan by telling them how childish it is to identify so deeply with a children’s book or simply to dismiss their affection and affiliation out of hand on the basis of the whole construct being fiction ‘spoils the game’ (and likely would lead to hurt feelings). Similarly, to view the ritual acts of the Christian liturgy outside the ‘rules of the game’ by which they are played is to spoil it. Demanding to slice into the Host in order to find the flesh inside is a violation of the rules and a spoiling of the game. As Huizinga points out, conscientious objectors spoil the game of noble warfare and revolutionaries spoil the game of a changeless social order. However, it is not only the order created by the horizons of the myth that render it game-like.

⁵⁰⁷ Play is vital to the concept of myth in more ways than discussed in this essay. The playfulness with ‘reality’ exhibited both in traditional mythic narratives (the combination and re-combination of species and natural forms, creative and inventive magics, etc.) and in the being-played aspect of being ‘subject’ to a myth.

⁵⁰⁸ In the game of faith, this imagined component is understood not as imagined but as a clarity of sight.

⁵⁰⁹ This hermeneutic structuring runs counter to certain theories of ‘reader response’, such as that of Stanley Fish, in which the interpreter’s situation is the ultimate condition on the meaning encountered in a text/work of art. The interpreter’s situation and interpretive community are important components of the hermeneutic moment, but the structure of the ‘game’ is external to the interpreter in a way not captured by the radical, even solipsistic situated-ness of Fish’s theory. See Paul Noble, ‘Hermeneutics and Post-Modernism: Can we Have a Radical Reader-Response Theory?’ in *Religious Studies* 30.4 & 31.1.

⁵¹⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London, 2004, 106.

primarily concerned with play as it is 'transformed into structure' in the form of a work of art.⁵¹¹ The play so transformed becomes accessible to the viewer through participation via interpretation. The work of art and its interpretation entail the viewer/interpreter's participation in a game structured by the work of art's self-presentation. For instance, appreciation of a stage play requires that the viewer participate according to the rules of the game the play represents: the actors are to be taken for the characters they portray, the set is to be taken for the setting of the story, and the world of the play itself is (usually) to be taken as entirely distinct from the world outside. The game of 'play-watching' is the necessary condition for understanding what the play means and what it is saying, and once one is playing, the 'subjectivity' of the game of play-watching becomes the viewer's interpretive guide through the world of the play. While watching Ralph Feinnes and Sophie Okonedo play the title characters in *Antony and Cleopatra*, I cease seeing Feinnes and Okonedo on stage and instead see the Consul and the Queen: the game of the play structures my sight in such a way that I see them *as* the fictionalised characters in much the same way that as a literate person, I cannot see letters on a page as anything but letters. The game of reading has structured my seeing in this way.

As Huizinga demonstrates, by observing the game-like structures to be found throughout culture, from the competitive 'game' of the capitalist economy to the international 'game' of global politics and even the 'game' of war, the judgment and behaviour-structuring dynamics of the game are a basic part of human interaction with one another and with the world. By structuring our perceptions according to its rules, the game conditions what Merleau-Ponty calls 'operative intentionality', that which is 'apparent in our desires, our evaluations and the landscape we see, ... [rather] than in objective knowledge... [furnishing] the text which our knowledge tries to translate into precise language.'⁵¹² The rules of the game provide the ground both of *what* can be considered and *how* it can be considered. This dynamic is not restricted to the football pitch or the theatre, however. Though play as defined by Huizinga entails an arena apart from 'ordinary' life⁵¹³, he is quick to point out that there is a sense in which the logic of the game extends beyond distinct playgrounds, or that the whole of social life can be considered such a ground.⁵¹⁴

The rules of these games are part of the fabric of our social life and they are embedded in and communicated through culture, most notably in narrative, the cultural form most conforming to human experience.⁵¹⁵ In ancient Greece, for example, the myth of Demeter and Persephone

⁵¹¹ Gadamer, 110.

⁵¹² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, London/New York: 1945/62, xviii.

⁵¹³ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, New York, 1950, 9.

⁵¹⁴ Huizinga, 30-31.

⁵¹⁵ Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience" in *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 39, No. 3, September 1971, pp. 291-311.

shaped the perceptions of both the natural cycles of the seasons as well as salvation from death. The effect of the mythic sensibility on individuals is most famously demonstrated in the Eleusinian Mysteries, a mystery cult centred the myth in which, initiates found their perception of the world radically changed through participation in the rituals of initiation which allowed a deep identification with the narrative.⁵¹⁶ Their understanding of their own lives was changed as they understood themselves to participate in the life-death-resurrection related in the myth. They began to see the world and themselves *as* something other than they were before their participation in and identification with the myth. Having been brought into the myth, they see themselves and the world through the myth, as the myth would have them see. Being in the world according to the rules of the Eleusinian game, devotees see and act along its lines. In another, more contemporary example, having been baptised into the life, death, and resurrection of Christ (itself a myth in this sense), all strangers, and especially all who suffer, are seen and cherished as Christ himself. Having lived for one's life in the sacraments of the Church, any bread and wine become imbued with more profound significance and are seen to be at least potentially holy.

And it is here that I suggest there is a bridge from myth to the mythopoeic. This same perspective-shaping sensibility is part of the mythopoeic in fiction. Having read and been moved by the novel *A Wizard of Earthsea*, all sea-battered islands share something of the quiet power of Gont and Roke. Having recognised something powerfully true in *The Lord of the Rings*, all forests partake something of Fangorn, and the fortunes and burdens of the very small take on new value and meaning. In a more visible example, the very real anxiety experienced by some fans of the *Harry Potter* series over to which of the Hogwarts houses they belong⁵¹⁷, might be construed as an expression of this same effect. Having found themselves compelled by the rather straightforward classifications of the houses, they now see the world in those terms: she is a Ravenclaw, he is a Hufflepuff, that one there is a Muggle. Though these 'shamelessly fictive' stories do not pretend to aspire to structure the perception to the same degree or extent as the Eleusinian Mysteries or the Anamnesis of the Eucharistic Prayer⁵¹⁸, they nonetheless participate in the same phenomenological structuring of the imagination and judgment. For readers captured by the mythic sensibility in these fictions, the world is read differently than it was before, and the works speak the world to them in a way that had previously been unavailable.

⁵¹⁶ Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987, 11.

⁵¹⁷ Cari Romm, "The *Harry Potter* Personality Test", in *The Atlantic*, 22 June 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/06/harry-potter-house-personality-study/396491/>

Though often masked by lashings of irony, the amount of time spent discussing the outcome of such quizzes belies a certain investment in the outcome and the proper assignment of identity.

⁵¹⁸ The part of the prayer consecrating the bread and wine of the Eucharist during which the priest recounts the saving work of God in history, culminating with the Last Supper and the death and Resurrection of Christ, making that history present to the congregation and in the Eucharistic elements.

The idea that myths structure our perception of the world is not new. In his famous study of stories that structure our understanding of the contemporary world, Roland Barthes rightly identifies such stories as *myths*.⁵¹⁹ Barthes continues the strictly pejorative sense of the word, insisting that myth is a kind of deferred or obfuscated kind of speech having ‘the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal.’⁵²⁰ Observing the ideological force of myths such as those perpetrated by advertisers and ‘Ornamental Cookery’ as manifestations of the ideas controlling twentieth-century French citizens (and one could add in an American context the myth of the American Dream), Barthes rejects mythic sensibility *tout court* insisting that all such discourse is fatally ideological. While I depart from Barthes in his strictly negative assessment of the capacity of the mythic to speak in contemporary life, I share his judgment that myths continue to surround us and to pervade our language and our understanding of the world. Barthes correctly identifies the hermeneutic operation of myth, but by insisting on the strictly obfuscatory character of modern myths, he misses the possibility of a transcendent or even revelatory capacity for the mythic sensibility. Gadamer hints at a kind of *presence* in the mythic which speaks in the myth in his assessment of the subjectivity of the game: the game *acts* on the player according to its own sense of right and wrong. Philosopher Aleksei Losev argues that this presence enables the myth to carry the subject across the gap from particularity to the transcendent in what he calls the miraculous. The mythic sensibility of seeing *as* opens in Losev into a mythic phenomenology or mythic consciousness which is operative in the human approach to the world.

III. Miraculous Revelation

From within mythic consciousness, myth offers access to a transcendent sort of knowing. As suggested by Graham Ward’s ‘mythic resonances’ which radiate from prehistoric cave paintings and petroglyphs⁵²¹, the mythic offers access, on its terms, to a way of knowing that is different from the way of knowing described by the scientific method or by dialectical argument. We sometimes speak of this way of knowing as ‘otherworldly’, as it seems to come to us from outside, and it seems to intimate a different plane of being. The ‘perennial philosophy’ of spirits and enchantment could say that it consists of intimations of the spirit world. It is a truism of fantasy literature that, at best, it offers imaginative access to a more wonderful (or at least more enchanted) world, and at worst, it offers escapism, veiling the real world in all its irreducible complexity. The same has been said of the mythic: every criticism of myth that suggests it is

⁵¹⁹ Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, London, 1972.

⁵²⁰ Barthes, 142.

⁵²¹ For an exceptional reflection on this aspect of the mythic, see *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, dir. Werner Herzog, IFC Films, 2011.

obfuscation or disingenuous is an accusation of a kind of escapism. I would suggest, however, that the mythic sensibility, shared by mythopoeic literature (that sort of fantasy most concerned with Eliade's 'account of a creation') and by proper mythology, offers the reader the possibility of seeing the world not only in a new (and otherwise inaccessible) way. Far from frivolous escapism, mythic sensibility in this regard offers what J.R.R. Tolkien calls the 'Escape of the Prisoner' as opposed to the 'Flight of the Deserter'.⁵²² Departure from the sensible world can offer a new and perhaps more accurate perspective.⁵²³ Indeed, phenomenologically, for the mythic subject, the world so-revealed *is* truer. This is the meaning of mythic consciousness and the mythic sensibility itself.

That mythopoeic fiction can participate in this kind of 'higher' understanding is also not a new idea. Not only did Tolkien intimate in his essay 'On Fairy-Stories' that the perspective-shifting potential of the fairy tale can have a revelatory character ('eucatastrophe'),⁵²⁴ Chris Brawley examines mythopoeic fantasy fiction and its participation in the transforming power of the mythic in his *Nature and the Numinous in Mythopoeic Fantasy Literature*. Brawley explores the potential of mythopoeic fantasy to enable readers to shift their perspective on and understanding of the world they inhabit. For Brawley, a myth is primarily a story that has the power to condition or even to alter our perceptions of the world. It operates in a way similar to the perspective-framing and meaning-engendering experience of religious faith, Otto's 'feeling of the numinous'. According to Brawley, the imaginative worlds of Tolkien, Ursula K. Le Guin, and others have superseded the imaginative world described in the Christian Bible, and his aim is to describe how, following the failure of Christianity to prevent ecological catastrophe, the public has sought to 'scratch the itch' of religious 'feeling' in the context of mythopoeic fantasy, and to examine how, in ways analogous to religious myth, it serves the subversive, frame-shifting function once performed by Christian myths and explicitly religious culture. Otto's reliance on emotion, however, limits the capacity of Brawley's schema to take account of the revelatory capacity of the mythic sensibility. Otto's Romantic privileging of the emotions as a source of knowledge does not do justice to the cognitive component of mythic consciousness, its ability to speak the world to what philosopher Aleksei Losev calls the 'mythic subject'.⁵²⁵

In his phenomenological study of myth, Losev argues that from within the experience of being 'subject' to a myth, the myth speaks only what is true. And what is more, as the mythic subject perceives the world in the light of the myth, her life will become informed by it such that when her history or her experience of the world coincides with the ideal form of the myth, it is received phenomenologically as a wonder, Greek *thauma*, or Latin *miraculum*. For this reason, Losev refers

⁵²² J.R.R. Tolkien 'On Fairy-Stories' in *Tree and Leaf*, London, 1975, 56.

⁵²³ This is not to say that Barthes is entirely wrong and that myth cannot be used to obfuscate and lie. It merely means that it need not.

⁵²⁴ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 62ff.

⁵²⁵ Aleksei Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, trans. Vladimir Marchenkov, London, 2003, 5.

to myths as ‘miraculous’.⁵²⁶ Losev gives the example of the supplicant who comes to the temple of Asclepius in ancient Athens for healing. Having offered prayer and slept the night, when healing is received, it is experienced as a miracle, even though no natural laws need have been violated. The physical/material causes are not the question in the miracle. Rather it is the interpretation and meaning of the event.⁵²⁷ More than a feeling of the numinous, the mythic encounter with the world on the terms of the myth’s revelation of it is received by the mythic subject as a miracle, as an opening of the world to a higher or more potent reality, a ‘rightness’ or even a ‘wrongness’ in the case of the inverse experience: the radical disjuncture from the mythic account is experienced as a shattering experience of the void, a meaninglessness mirroring the meaningful revelation of the affirmative miracle. C. S. Lewis describes this experience in terms of how a myth ‘gets under our skin, hits us at a level deeper than our thoughts or even our passions, troubles our oldest certainties till all questions are reopened, and in general shocks us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives.’⁵²⁸ This awakening, seeing the world more truly, what Losev calls a mythic union of person and history, dismissed by positivists as ‘magical thinking’ is the very material of mythopoeic fantasy.

According to the conventions of the fantasy genre, what would be considered the stuff of myth or faith or metaphor or symbol in the ‘primary world’ becomes material and pragmatic in the fantasy or ‘secondary world’. What is transcendent-symbolic in myth is collapsed into the pragmatic-physical. This collapse of the transcendent into the material is especially typical of mythopoeic fantasy. As Sam and Frodo lie in a hollow awaiting night and reflect on their place in the long history of Middle Earth, they find their story is mythically bound up with the tale of the self-offering of Eärendil, who risked everything to journey into the uttermost West on behalf of all of Middle Earth, culminating in his transcending the mortal world with a Silmaril to become a wandering star in the heavens. On finding himself embedded in this ancient story, Sam exclaims, ‘Why, to think of it, we’re in the same tale still! It’s going on. Don’t the great tales never end?’⁵²⁹ It is historically and literally a continuation of that history-myth. The downfall of Sauron is the final historical event in the long history of the Silmarils, and Sam and Frodo’s own journeys into the West complete that history. Likewise, in Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Earthsea* novels, when wizards claim that the language of magic is the language of Segoy, who raised the islands from the sea, who created the world itself, they are not speaking metaphorically or ‘just’ symbolically; they are speaking practically and historically. When he is encountered in *Tehanu*, the Creator is found to be materially and literally present in history in a way that is not typically to be found in real-world

⁵²⁶ Losev, 158.

⁵²⁷ Losev, 157-158.

⁵²⁸ C. S. Lewis, *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, London, 2016, xxii.

⁵²⁹ Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, London, 2005, 712. ‘Tales’ are the word used in Middle Earth in place of ‘myths’, neatly blurring the boundaries between history and fabulation.

history. Through narrative sympathy, readers find themselves not only observing, but imaginatively participating in the mythic *on its terms*. As Losev put it, within the mythic consciousness, the magical is *real*.⁵³⁰ This participation in the myth opens the reader to the revelatory potential of the myth, to see the world as the myth understands it.

This encounter or combination of myth and history is a characteristic of the mythic sensibility as it is found in mythopoeic fantasy. Some theorists of myth note that characters in myths do not typically have much of an inner life: myths deal in the concrete and the experiential, not the psychological and interior. Fantasy's collapse of the symbolic into the pragmatic reflects this aspect of myth and can be folded into a sense of how contemporary literature can bear out the mythic sensibility while still reflecting the expectations of contemporary readers. Historical knowledge in this way blends into mythic or symbolic knowledge. Sam and Frodo know themselves to be part of a greater shape to history and to have a place in the unfolding of that mythic-into-historic narrative. The reader is implicated into this process of recognition and perspective-framing, and it offers the reader a sense of the transcending quality of the mythic even in a 'realistic' or 'pragmatic' mode within the fantasy world. The affective qualities of fiction, drawing the reader into its world and shaping his perceptions through it, help define what Rowan Williams calls 'imaginative structures to think and feel with.'

In his essay on the Bodleian Library's 2018 exhibit of J. R. R. Tolkien's letters, paintings, and manuscripts, Rowan Williams conducts readers through the imaginative *copia* of Tolkien's 'legendarium' toward urgent critiques that might shed light on the crises of the present age. Williams notes that in spite of some of Tolkien's conservative or even 'bourgeois' positions in life, *The Lord of the Rings* nevertheless speaks in radical form to the wounds inflicted on the common good by 'unexamined power and the tyranny of profit' and the perils of the relentless drive of modernity towards the spoiling and wastage of what cannot be shared and so must be bought and sold.⁵³¹ Far from representing an escapist fantasy, Williams reminds us that Tolkien's masterpiece is not unlike the great mythological narratives that are woven through human culture: 'The narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* and the "legendarium" of *The Silmarillion* and other writings are presented as a set of imaginative structures in and through which people can think and feel with the same consistency, intelligence and growing wisdom as they did through the stories of Olympus, Troy, Asgard or the Arthurian cycle.'⁵³² Tolkien himself made his intentions clear in a

⁵³⁰ Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, 7.

⁵³¹ Rowan Williams, "Master of his universe: the warnings in JRR Tolkien's novels" in *The New Statesman* (8 August 2018). Accessed online at <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2018/08/master-his-universe-warnings-jrr-tolkien-s-novels> on 4 September 2018.

⁵³² Williams.

letter to a friend — part of his ambition was to provide something like a corpus of mythic stories for England:

I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (As an ingredient) in legends of other lands... Do not laugh! But once upon a time... I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story... which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country⁵³³

A valid question could here be raised over the difference between legend and myth. 'Legendarium' itself refers literally to something to be read, as distinct from the cultural embeddedness of the myth and its universal hold on the subject's imagination. Likewise, myth-ritual theorists will insist that myths are only told in the context of certain rituals or liminal moments.⁵³⁴ This tradition of mythological understanding will deny the 'true' mythicity of the 'literary myth', 'trapped' in the pages of a book rather than alive in the oral tradition and interpretive frames of a culture. In *The Story of Myth*, Sarah Iles Johnston makes a persuasive case for the literariness of Greek mythology at least, communicated by the Classical period at the latest by way of highly refined literary texts such as that of Homer and Hesiod. Though it is lacking the ceremony of a 'true' mythic re-telling, as in the sweat lodges and ritual fires of archaic societies, the number of fans of *The Lord of the Rings* who feel compelled to take out their battered volumes in the Autumn, to re-enter the enchantment of Middle Earth is nonetheless suggestive of this heightening of experience, placing the reading of the text within a kind of ritual year. If Williams is right that the legendarium is not so different from classical myths and medieval legend, then it does not seem inappropriate to speak of it in mythic terms. Tolkien's work is mythic at least in part as a function of its ability to show the world in a certain way and to structure the reader's imagination both inside and outside the text. And it is the very heightening of the sense of the reality of the world *inside* the text which highlights the mythic sensibility. In spite of its manifest fiction, Middle Earth nevertheless *seems real* in a very present and powerful way.

Conclusion

Williams notes in his essay that 'myths have no authors,' and this may be true for the 'proper' myths of history and the present day: composition has come in the re-telling, and no single *auctor* can claim ownership of the Greek myths any more than any one person can claim authorship of the myth of the American Dream or the creation narratives of Genesis. However, the mythic

⁵³³ Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski, *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings* (New York, 2015), 125.

⁵³⁴ For example, and perhaps most famously, see Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. Others include Jane Ellen Harrison's *Mythology*, Samuel Henry Hooke's *Myth and Ritual*, the anthropology of Bronislaw Malinowski, and Walter Burkert's *Structure and History in Greek Myth and Ritual*.

sensibility outlined in this essay nevertheless continues to present itself even in authored fiction. This mythic sensibility ties together the interpretive presence that illuminates the most ancient myths and cultural narratives that continue to give (or to withhold) meaning with the shamelessly fictive mythopoeisis of the contemporary mythic turn. Coleridge famously called the experience of dwelling within the account of the world offered by a work of fiction a kind of ‘poetic faith’, what Michael Tomko persuasively describes as not merely ‘a begrudging toleration of the fabulous’, but rather akin to the ‘hard-won understanding of a religious faith that awakens all the human faculties, prompts reason to ascend to its greatest capacity, and educes meaningful experience not otherwise available.’⁵³⁵ As Graham Ward notes of literature’s inability ever to be entirely secular⁵³⁶, so, too is mythopoeisis, however pedestrian or fantastical, never wholly distinct from faith, poetic or otherwise. The form is irredeemably bound up in the seeing *as* that is faith’s hallmark.

Mythic sensibility is not miles distant from the sensibilities of religious faith. The myths that reside in the holy texts and traditions of contemporary faiths structure the perception of the faithful and reveal the world as meaningful according to their account of what is true. By attending to the mythic sensibility in mythopoeic literature and understanding it in relation to the mythic sensibility of classical or ‘proper’ myths and the myths of religions as they are practiced today, we are able to understand something of the way that this sensibility is ‘baked in’ to the human way of approaching the world. The methods of knowing inherent to scientific and dialectical reasoning are important tools used by human beings to learn about the world and about the architecture of the human mind. However, I suspect that the knowledge so produced is always folded into an ongoing narrative appraisal of the world, even if the story in question is one that goes, ‘Practitioners of the experimental testing of hypotheses learn what is true in the world’ or is related in the stories of the achievements of great scientists. The story shapes what we understand by words like ‘learn’ and ‘true’ and ‘world’ and so teaches us how to evaluate the ‘facts’ revealed by experiment. Likewise, the narratives that shape the way that we understand the world always come from somewhere and are always articulated by another human being with his or her own ideology and agenda. If mythic sensibility offers continuity not only with proper myths and mythopoeic fiction, but also with the seeing *as* that is the way of being called faith, then it is possible that theologians might be able to employ the idea of mythic sensibility to bring the lively faith of religion into fruitful dialogue with the ‘shamelessly fictive’, even ironic ‘faith’ of mythopoeic fantasy’s revelation of the world as numinous, magical, and full of wonder.

⁵³⁵ Michael Tomko, *Beyond the Willing Suspension of Disbelief: Poetic Faith from Coleridge to Tolkien* (London, 2016), 2, 145.

⁵³⁶ Graham Ward, “Why Literature Can Never be Entirely Secular”, in *Religion and Literature* (Summer 2009), pp. 21-27.

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Purification through Baptism:

A Ritualistic Approach to Christological Participation in Romans 6:1-11

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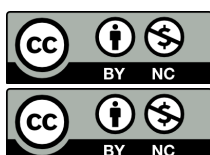
Abstract

In Romans 6:1-11, Paul introduces a fundamental paradigm shift for ethical living from law adherence to the believer's union with Christ. However, Paul's understanding of this reality has been fraught with debate. Thus, in the following paper, I will argue that Paul's use of βαπτίζω reveals a third approach, the ritualistic approach, that seeks to reconcile both forensic and participatory understandings to Paul's exhortation to the Roman Christ-followers. Through Paul's use of βαπτίζω, it is evident that one's union with the justifying death and resurrection of Christ is participation in Christ's work as a purification offering on behalf of humanity. Through participating in Christ's purifying work, the believer is cleansed from the reign of impurity and is enabled to dwell in the presence of God, presently through ethical living, and in the future in totality.

Introduction

Within the field of New Testament studies, interpretation of Romans 6:1-11 has been fraught with debate. Whereas many scholars have traditionally understood Paul's exhortation through a forensic approach, the admonition to walk in the newness of life based upon God's act of bearing the penalty of humanity's sin in the person of Christ,⁵³⁷ many scholars now support a participatory

⁵³⁷ Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 313.



approach, understanding Paul's exhortation as founded upon God's liberation of humanity from the sinister rule of sin through their union with Christ.⁵³⁸ Evidently, both views reveal valuable insights into the interpretation of the passage, however, neither incorporate the ritualistic description of Christ's sacrifice as depicted in the earlier chapters of Romans (e.g., Romans 3:25-26).⁵³⁹ In this paper, I will argue that Paul's use of the word, βαπτίζω, reveals a third approach, the ritualistic approach that reconciles both the forensic and participatory approaches, as the foundation by which Paul exhorts the Roman Christ-followers. I will assert that Paul's use of βαπτίζω carries the complete understanding of the Levitical purity system, leading him to understand Christ's sacrifice as a purification offering by which believers participate in. Consequently, the believer's participation in the final purification offering of Christ becomes the foundation for hope and righteous living apart from adherence to the law. My argument will progress as follows. Firstly, I will situate Romans 6:1-11 within the larger framework of the epistle. Secondly, I will outline the historical interpretations of Romans 6:1-11 and assert the validity of a harmonized approach that draws upon both forensic and participatory approaches. Thirdly, I will introduce the ritualistic approach by asserting the validity of interpreting Romans 6:1-11 through the ritualistic perspective of Romans 3:21-26, namely, through Paul's use of ἱλαστήριον. Next, I will explore the presence of ritual purity in Romans 6 with regards to early Jewish and early Christian understandings of baptism and ritual washing. Finally, I will detail the ritualistic approach as the foundational understanding of Paul's exhortation to the Roman Christ-followers by adopting the Levitical purity laws as an interpretative lens for this passage.

Context

Romans 6:1-11 finds itself within the larger flow of Paul's argument to the Roman Christ-followers. In chapters 1-5, Paul articulates his thesis of proclaiming the gospel, the power of God for salvation, to the Jew and to the Gentile (1:16-17). To the Jew, the inclusion of Gentiles apart from law observance may come as a surprise, but Paul argues that his gospel does not imply that God has betrayed his covenant. Rather, it is Israel who has been unfaithful to the covenant by believing themselves to be bearers of exceptional divine favour, founded upon their election and reception of the law, while disobeying the ethical commands of God (2:17-29). Paul asserts that God is an impartial judge who evaluates fairly between Jew and Gentile, creating equality within humanity under the power of sin (3:9). Consequently, it may seem that if God were to act justly, he must condemn Israel for their immoral behaviour and subsequently, be unfaithful to his covenant to Israel (3:1-8). As a result, Paul reminds the Roman Christians that in the sacrificial death of Christ, God has created a way to deal justly with sin without giving preferential treatment to Israel, while

⁵³⁸ Dunn, *Romans* 1-8, 306.

⁵³⁹ Dunn, 180.

also staying faithful to his covenant (3:21-31). Specifically, the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God marks the way by which God deals with the sin of all humanity, both Jew and Gentile together, while acting in faithfulness to his chosen people in the work of Christ.⁵⁴⁰

Beginning in chapter 6, having just introduced the idea of Gentile inclusion apart from law observance, the question of the law is now addressed. Whereas the Jew and God-fearing Gentile regarded the law as the way by which God's rule and human flourishing occur, they are now left wondering how to participate in God's ethical character apart from the law.⁵⁴¹ Consequently, Paul now asserts that the ability for ethical living comes through the believer's union in Christ, free from the power of sin (5:12-21). Paul insists that where the law failed to create in the believer a heart able to obey God, one's life in Christ now forms the basis for righteous living that leads to human flourishing.

The Historical Positions of Romans 6:1-11

Building upon chapter 5, a description of humanity's inclusion in Adam (the old age dominated by the power of sin)⁵⁴² or Christ (the new age under the rule of God), Paul now exhorts believers to walk in the way of God apart from law adherence by detailing the believer's participation in Christ. Specifically, Paul uses the imagery of realm transfer. Those who were once in the realm of sin's dominion, those who were in Adam, have now been relocated to the realm of God's rule, in Christ,⁵⁴³ and now bear a new identity, enabling the ability to walk in newness of life.⁵⁴⁴ For Paul, God brings about this reality through the righteous act of Christ (δικαίωμα, 5:18) which brings righteousness, a declaration of acquittal, to all who are in him.⁵⁴⁵ The dilemma that Paul now addresses is the believer's participation in the new reality, free from the dominion of sin, while also living within the old reality, where the effects of sin still dominate.⁵⁴⁶

Romans 6 begins with a possible objection from Paul's audience regarding humanity's proper behaviour in response to the abundance of God's grace. In response to Paul's statement regarding the victory of grace over sin and the law's alignment with sin (5:20-21), Paul anticipates an objection from the church in Rome, namely, whether they should sin so that grace may increase.

⁵⁴⁰ Dunn, 1–300.

⁵⁴¹ Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 9.

⁵⁴² de Boer, "Paul's Mythologizing Program In Romans 5-8," 14. de Boer understands Paul to be mythologizing the notion of sin and death. In Romans 5-8, rather than understanding sin as an act of humanity, sin is understood as a power that enslaves humanity to walk against the will of God.

⁵⁴³ de Boer, 20.

⁵⁴⁴ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 350.

⁵⁴⁵ Westerholm, "Righteousness, Cosmic and Microcosmic," 35.

⁵⁴⁶ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 302.

In this situation, rather than viewing their potential objection as a desire to sin, it is possible that the Roman Christ-followers viewed Paul's notion of grace appalling since it undermined the law, their means to respond piously to grace.⁵⁴⁷

As a result, Paul responds in verses 2-4 with an emphatic assertion that the Roman Christians are not to walk in sin since they have died to sin (οἵτινες ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ) through their baptism into the death of Christ (εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν). Using 6:10 to interpret 6:2, scholars have come to a common understanding that through the death of Christ, something has happened to the believer in relation to sin. However, two different interpretations arise when describing the mechanics of this event.⁵⁴⁸

Those who understand 6:2 and 6:10 as describing two different events take the traditional forensic approach, understanding the dative phrase τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ as a dative of reference,⁵⁴⁹ describing Christ as one identified with sin (the sin of humanity) and so deserving of punishment (death).⁵⁵⁰ In this situation, the believer's baptism signifies their personal death to sin as a mirror to Christ's death to sin, rather than participation in Christ's own historic death. God, witnessing the believer's personal death to sin, considers the benefits of Christ's death as directly applied onto the believer; while the believer, having experienced Christ's sacrificial death, displays an act of faithful allegiance to God in response to Christ's work.⁵⁵¹

Those who perceive 6:2 and 6:10 as describing the same event favour the participatory approach, understanding the same dative phrase τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ also as a dative of reference, but as describing Christ's identification with humanity under the power of sin, rather than Christ's association with sin. In this approach, Christ's death and full identification with humanity effectively bring victory over death and liberation to humanity from the dominion of sin.⁵⁵² Believers partake in Christ's liberation from sin through their baptism as it becomes a symbol of their participation in the historic death and victory of Christ.⁵⁵³ Moreover, the participatory approach gains further traction as Paul uses the phrase εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ in verse 3. Εἰς carries the same connotations as the preposition ἐν, defined as "in" or "within."⁵⁵⁴ Thus, it is likely that Paul describes the believer's participation and indwelling within Christ's own death rather than the believer's personal death in conformity to the death of Christ.⁵⁵⁵ Understanding the believer's participation in Christ's death,

⁵⁴⁷ Dunn, 326.

⁵⁴⁸ Sabou, *Between Horror and Hope*, 58.

⁵⁴⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 320; Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 382. See also Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 154. For an expansion on the dative of reference.

⁵⁵⁰ Sabou, *Between Horror and Hope*, 60.

⁵⁵¹ Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 299.

⁵⁵² Campbell, *The Deliverance of God*, 826.

⁵⁵³ Sabou, *Between Horror and Hope*, 62.

⁵⁵⁴ Sabou, 106.

⁵⁵⁵ Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 614; Moses, *Practices of Power*, 59.

it is now more likely to understand the dative phrase τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ as a dative of reference where Christ identifies with the believer under the power of sin itself.

Interestingly, modern proponents of the forensic approach recognize the participatory elements portrayed in Romans 6. Schreiner, commenting on verse 2, recognizes sin primarily as a power, rather than the heinous acts of humanity.⁵⁵⁶ Specifically, Schreiner understands sin as a malevolent force that entered the world through Adam, and thus, enslaved humanity under its rule. Moo, coming to a similar conclusion in his interpretation of verse 10, understands sin as a “ruling power.”⁵⁵⁷ In this way, Schreiner combines the participatory and forensic approaches by detailing the reality that those participating under the rule of sin are ultimately led to commit specific acts of sin by which they are guilty.⁵⁵⁸ Thus, Schreiner views participation in Christ and freedom from the powers of sin as incorporated into a forensic framework whereby freedom from sin comes through the divine declaration of acquittal. For Schreiner, it is those who have been justified (δεδικαίωται, v. 7), counted righteous and forgiven of their acts of sin who are freed from the power of sin and now participate under the rule of God (cf. 6:18, 20, 22).⁵⁵⁹

Moreover, verses 3-4 describe the believer’s baptism (βαπτίζω) as the mechanism by which the believer participates in the death of Christ. In the interpretation of this passage most scholars have come to the agreement that Paul is speaking of water baptism as a shorthand for the believer’s conversion-initiation, the moment an individual believes in Christ and is initiated into the community.⁵⁶⁰ In this situation, Paul comprehends no difference between baptism and conversion-initiation as he understands baptism as a burial symbol for those who have already joined in the death of Christ.⁵⁶¹ Consequently, the believer’s liberation from the realm of sin occurs not primarily in the moment of their baptism, but in the moment of Christ’s historic death on Calvary. However, it is important to note that though liberation occurs in the moment of conversion, baptism still plays an important cosmological role in one’s freedom from the power of sin. Moses argues that baptism is a “practice of power” that effectively guards the believer from the forces of sin and death.⁵⁶² Baptism, alongside other practices, such as the Eucharist, keeps the believer from

⁵⁵⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 304.

⁵⁵⁷ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 403.

⁵⁵⁸ Schreiner, *Romans*, 304.

⁵⁵⁹ Schreiner, 319; Compare Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 401, who seems to disregard the forensic nature of δεδικαίωται in verse 7, even though he seems to lean forensic in his overall reading of Romans. For Moo, δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας simply describes “freedom from the powers of sin.”

⁵⁶⁰ Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 91; Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 383; Schreiner, *Romans*, 306; Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 303.

⁵⁶¹ Jewett, *Romans*, 398.

⁵⁶² Moses, *Practices of Power*, 39. Moses makes the claim that Paul understands certain practices to either open an individual up to the powers of sin (such as participating in meals offered to idols, 1 Cor 8) or open an individual up to the powers of righteousness. In this way, the practice of baptism helps to aid the believer in remaining in the protection of Christ to overcome the powers of evil.

participating in the realm of sin and consequently, keeps one oriented towards Christ's trajectory of a new life towards God.⁵⁶³

By participating in the death of Christ, the believer bears a new identity as one who has also died to sin, and consequently, found freedom from the reign of sin.⁵⁶⁴ Notably, while Paul avoids explicitly describing the believer's baptism as an image for the believer's resurrection, Paul describes a relationship in which those who have died with Christ in baptism can now walk in the newness of life empowered by and under the rule of Christ's resurrection.⁵⁶⁵ Evidently, the believer's identity is shifted in baptism as, while they are not yet resurrected fully with Christ, they still participate in Christ's resurrection and God's rule through walking in conformity to Christ.⁵⁶⁶ Overall, Paul's vision of baptism in relation to the redemptive act of Christ can be summed up in three points. Firstly, the baptizand is related to and subsequently involved in the historic death and resurrection of Christ, forming a new identity within the believer. Secondly, the believer's relation to the Christ event corresponds to a personal event in the believer, whereby the old self under the dominion of sin is put to death and a new life is raised in Christ. Thirdly, this new life, enabled by the resurrection of Christ, corresponds to the continual act of putting to death the old self (who desires to return to the dominion of sin) through the resurrection power received in the present.⁵⁶⁷ Evidently, Paul understands that proper obedience in response to the grace of God does not come through law observance, but through the creation of a new self in the death and resurrection of Christ.

This is further displayed through Paul's use of the term "Christ" (Χριστός, 6:4) and "burial" (συνθάπτω, 6:4). Χριστός, described as the "Anointed One," was understood from the second century BCE onwards as the Davidic king who brings liberation to the people of God (e.g., Romans 1:3 echoing 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 2).⁵⁶⁸ As the Anointed Davidic king, Christ, through his death and resurrection, wages war and secures victory against the powers of sin and death for his people. People partake in this liberation through their burial with Christ.⁵⁶⁹ It is important to note that Paul does not use συνθάπτω to describe the believer's individual death, but to describe the believer's participation in the death of Christ.⁵⁷⁰ Therefore, συνθάπτω primarily indicates one's belongingness to another, as witnessed in the familial burial accounts of the Hebrew Bible that describe one's inclusion in a particular family or lineage (cf. Gen 49:29-32; 2 Kgs 14:16; 2 Chr

⁵⁶³ Moses, 59.

⁵⁶⁴ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 363.

⁵⁶⁵ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 330; Moses, *Practices of Power*, 61.

⁵⁶⁶ Campbell, *The Deliverance of God*, 826.

⁵⁶⁷ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 132.

⁵⁶⁸ Sabou, *Between Horror and Hope*, 66.

⁵⁶⁹ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 87.

⁵⁷⁰ Sabou, *Between Horror and Hope*, 91; Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 388–89; Chester, 'Consider Yourselves Dead,' 362.

21:1).⁵⁷¹ As a result, by describing the believer's burial with Christ through baptism, Paul is describing the believer's belongingness to the family of Christ and, consequently, the believer's participation in the liberation of Christ. This union with Christ therefore enables the believer to walk in the newness of life in accordance with Christ in the present.

Paul further expands upon the believer's union with Christ in verses 5-7 by introducing the term "united" (σύμφυτος), a term depicting the growth and cultivation of agriculture.⁵⁷² By using σύμφυτος, Paul describes a natural unity and growth between Christ and the believer just as a grafted branch becomes one with the plant.⁵⁷³ Paul introduces the idea of σύμφυτος using the term "become" (γίνομαι, 6:5) in the first-person plural perfect tense. Evidently, Paul is emphasizing the historical reality of Christ's death in the past as one that continues to bear continuing benefits, namely, the power of new life and the hope of future resurrection, in the believer's life through the believer's σύμφυτος with Christ.⁵⁷⁴

Notably, Paul is describing the believer as one caught between the eschatological reality of participation in the likeness of Christ's death, expressed through one's present freedom from the dominion of sin, and the future hope of partaking in Christ's resurrection.⁵⁷⁵ This present reality of one's new identity in Christ under the dominion of God now leads to a commandment for obedience apart from law adherence as noted by Paul's use of the term ὁμιώμα (6:5). While scholars debate the meaning of ὁμιώμα, the most likely perspective understands Paul's use of the term as depicting "form" instead of "likeness."⁵⁷⁶ Specifically, when Paul is speaking of the form of Christ's death and resurrection by which the believer is united to, he understands the believer as partaking in the same type of death and resurrection experienced by Christ.⁵⁷⁷ Interestingly, in verse 5, the emphasis, therefore, is on the believer's future complete union with Christ through the believer's transformation into the form of Christ's death and resurrection themselves. However, the translation of ὁμιώμα as "form" is not mutually exclusive from the idea of "likeness."⁵⁷⁸ In this way, the idea of ὁμιώμα as "likeness" communicates the believer's present conformity to the death of Christ through one's daily activity of dying to the rule of sin and death and of walking in the newness of life under the rule of God (see 6:11-22, cf. 5:14; 8:3).⁵⁷⁹ Consequently, having begun one's conformity to the death of Christ in present age, the believer

⁵⁷¹ Sabou, 91.

⁵⁷² Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 145.

⁵⁷³ Sabou, *Between Horror and Hope*, 114.

⁵⁷⁴ Jewett, *Romans*, 401.

⁵⁷⁵ Dunn, 332.

⁵⁷⁶ BDAG, s.v. "ὁμιώμα 2b"

⁵⁷⁷ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 370.

⁵⁷⁸ Moses, *Practices of Power*, 61.

⁵⁷⁹ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 371; Moses, *Practices of Power*, 61.

can hope for the eschatological future by which they will finally be fully conformed to the resurrection of Christ through the resurrection of their bodies.⁵⁸⁰

Furthermore, Paul's idea of liberation has not yet been explicitly mentioned. Paul understands the believer's union with Christ within the backdrop of an eschatological battle between grace and sin by building upon chapter 5's description of the old age, in Adam, and the new age, in Christ. Nevertheless, Paul now speaks of humanity's deliverance from the enslavement of sin in verses 6-7,⁵⁸¹ and describes both the identity of the believer as one objectively crucified with Christ, bringing about the abolition of the old self in the old age, while also detailing the subjective reality of the individual's gradual conformity to the ὁμοιώμα of Christ's death through daily acts of righteous living.⁵⁸² However, where the NRSV translates 6:7 as, "for whoever has died is *freed* from sin," alluding to a participatory and apocalyptic interpretation of the passage, Paul states in the Greek ὁ γὰρ ἀποθανὼν δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας (literally translated "for whoever has died has been *justified* from sin"), using δικαίω (justify) instead of ἐλευθερώ (set free).⁵⁸³ Thus, Paul connects God's forensic work in Christ with the believer's liberative participation in Christ.⁵⁸⁴

Perhaps an interpretive clue may be found in Paul's imperative for the believer to consider (λογίζομαι) themselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus in 6:11. Through the use of λογίζομαι, Paul draws a verbal connection to Romans 4:3 where Abraham, through his faith in

⁵⁸⁰ Moses, 61.

⁵⁸¹ Jewett, *Romans*, 403.

⁵⁸² See Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 308-311. Scholars who take a traditional forensic approach come to the same conclusion but understand the mechanics of Paul's statement differently. Both camps understand σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν τῷ ὁμοιώματι as describing the individual's conformity to Christ, particularly, the believer's conformity as displayed through the daily living of a righteous life empowered by Christ's resurrection. Compared to those adhering to the participatory approach, those favouring the traditional forensic approach understand verse 6 as illustrating the believer's attainment of a righteous status before God due to Christ's work of bearing the penalty of sinful humanity through his death.

⁵⁸³ Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 334. Chester concedes that δικαίω in this context must bear participatory connotations. However, he claims that participatory connotations must not be understood at the expense of forensic understandings. In this way, Chester understands δικαίω as denoting both freedom from the enslavement of sin as well as freedom from the guilt that results from transgressions. Consequently, while some may be tempted to view Romans 1-4 as describing a forensic perspective and Romans 6-8 as describing a participatory perspective, Chester understands Paul's use of δικαίω in 6:7 as showing his readers that these two perspectives are ultimately connected.

⁵⁸⁴ Campbell, *The Deliverance of God*, 826, states that δικαίω takes on a forensic liberative usage. However, Campbell does not expound upon the forensic usage of δικαίω. Rather, Campbell uses δικαίω to denote liberation from the oppressive powers of sin and death. In this sense, Campbell does not incorporate the judicial connotations of δικαίω; Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 401. Moo states that "justified from sin" means "released from the powers of sin." In this way, Moo also does not consider the juridical connotations of δικαίω but chooses to solely focus on the liberative and participatory elements of δικαίω.

God, was considered (ἐλογίσθη) righteous (δικαιοσύνη, justified) before God.⁵⁸⁵ Consequently, the believer participates in the crucifixion of Christ and finds freedom from the power of sin (6:6) through their new status as those who are justified (considered righteous) from sin (6:7). In this way, as those who are liberated from the power of sin and receive a new status of righteousness, forgiven from the guilt of sin,⁵⁸⁶ Paul exhorts the believers to continually consider (λογίζομαι) themselves dead to sin the same way that God considered (ἐλογίσθη) Abraham, and now the Roman believers, righteous (δικαιοσύνη, 4:3).⁵⁸⁷

Paul concludes his discussion regarding the end of the old age and the believer's participation in the new age in verses 8-11. Paul completes his assertion of the believer's union with Christ by drawing a parallel between Christ's death and resurrection to the believer's duty to consider themselves dead to sin and alive to God. Foundationally, Paul is outlining a reality in which what is true of Christ is also true of the believer for the believer participates in Christ.⁵⁸⁸ Beginning in verse 9, Paul describes the finality of Christ's death. Assured that Christ has been raised from the dead, Paul draws the conclusion that Christ will, therefore, never again be subjected to the rule of death.⁵⁸⁹ Evidently, Paul understood Christ's resurrection as an act of liberation from the realm of death's reign. Complimenting verse 9, Paul describes the current life of the liberated Christ in verse 10, namely, a life lived towards God. Having established a description of Christ, Paul creates a parallel between Christ and the believer by commanding the Roman Christ-followers to consider (λογίξεσθε, the idea of belief)⁵⁹⁰ themselves dead to sin, removed from the realm of sin's reign, and alive to God, relocated to the realm of God's reign in Christ, with the purpose of walking obediently in the newness of life.⁵⁹¹

Overall, the historic participatory position of Romans 6:1-11 understands the believer as one who is united to the death and resurrection of Christ. Christ's death and resurrection are understood as the act by which the rule of sin is defeated and deliverance of humanity into the rule of God in Christ is established. However, the participatory position functions properly only when interpreted alongside the forensic approach as denoted by δικαίω in 6:7. Thus, in chapter 6, Paul exhorts

⁵⁸⁵ Chester, 'Consider Yourselves Dead,' 359.

⁵⁸⁶ Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 334.

⁵⁸⁷ Chester, 'Consider Yourselves Dead,' 359.

⁵⁸⁸ Jewett, *Romans*, 405.

⁵⁸⁹ Jewett, 405.

⁵⁹⁰ BDAG, s.v. "λογίζομαι 1b"

⁵⁹¹ See Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 313-316. Scholars who take the traditional forensic approach, once again, come to the same conclusion but understand the mechanics of Paul's statement differently. Traditional forensic scholars understand verses 9-10 as depicting Christ's freedom from the rule of sin by identifying with sinful humanity and bearing the full penalty of condemnation in his own flesh. Having been raised from a state of condemnation, Christ now directs his life according to the way of God, prompting Paul to draw a parallel imperative to the believer.

the Roman church to walk in obedience to God apart from the law as a member of God's rule freed from the power of sin. This righteous living has been enabled through the believer's participation in Christ's victory over the dominion of sin and their justification before God through their baptism into Christ's death and resurrection.

The Presence of a Ritualistic Approach in Romans 3:21-26

As mentioned previously, Romans 6:1-11, a text usually understood as denoting Paul's participatory thought, has shown itself to bear forensic elements through the use of *δικαιώω* in 6:7. Consequently, it is now apt to interpret Romans 6:1-11 through Paul's prior use of *δικαιώω*, specifically, in Romans 3:21-26 (*δικαιούμενοι*, 6:24), a text usually referred to as the locus of Paul's forensic thought and where Paul introduces ritualistic elements to his understanding of God's work in Christ.

Interestingly, as in Romans 6:1-11, forensic and participatory elements are also present within Romans 3:21-26. Having detailed God's wrath against all humanity, both Jews and Gentiles alike (1:18-3:20), Paul now presents the reality that God has revealed his saving righteousness through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to all who believe (3:21-22).⁵⁹² This saving righteousness of God is now expressed in two ways. Paul states that those who experience the saving righteousness (*δικαιοσύνη*) of God are those who are justified (*δικαιώω*) by his grace and who also now participate in the redemption (*ἀπολύτρωσις*) of Jesus Christ. Using *δικαιώω*, Paul indicates that believers have been forgiven of their sins (6:23) and now stand as those who bear a righteous status in relation to God. Thus, Paul, using *δικαιώω* adopts legal imagery to describe the believer as acquitted by God from the charges and guilt of sin.⁵⁹³

However, Paul couples this forensic language with participatory language by describing the believer's justification as achieved through the redemption (*ἀπολύτρωσις*) found in Christ Jesus. The use of *ἀπολύτρωσις* (and the *λυτ-* group generally) hearkens back to the LXX's use of the word, denoting the liberation experienced by Israel from Egypt (e.g., Deut 7:8; 9:26; 15:15; 24:18) and the exile (Isa 41:14; 42:1).⁵⁹⁴ In this way, Paul presents the work of Christ as bringing liberation

⁵⁹² Schreiner, *Romans*, 178; Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 241–46.

⁵⁹³ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 248; Schreiner, *Romans*, 189; Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 422.

⁵⁹⁴ Moo, 248; Schreiner, *Romans*, 189; Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 423; Campbell, *Deliverance*, 657. Debates surrounding whether *ἀπολύτρωσις* describes a liberation in which a price is paid (as per Moo and Schreiner) cannot be outlined in this paper. However, it is important to note that Campbell, who rejects the traditional forensic reading of this passage, makes it clear that the text never explicitly describes a payment. Rather, according to Campbell, the focus is on Christ's liberative work.

from the power of sin (3:9) the same way that God had previously delivered Israel from the powers of Egypt and Babylon.

Entering verse 25, Paul now describes this gift of justification and redemption as accomplished through the person of Christ who God put forward as a ἱλαστήριον. In essence, the justification and redemption outlined in 3:21-26 and continued in 6:1-11 is predicated upon the reality of Christ as a ἱλαστήριον. Consequently, the following discussion will outline the meaning of ἱλαστήριον and its usage in developing the ritualistic approach to Romans 6:1-11.

While several views abound in the debate regarding the meaning of ἱλαστήριον in 3:25,⁵⁹⁵ the current scope of this paper does not allow for an in-depth review of each perspective.⁵⁹⁶ Thus, the common position of interpreting ἱλαστήριον as the mercy seat will be argued for in this paper.⁵⁹⁷ Looking at the LXX, 21 of the 27 uses of ἱλαστήριον are found in the Pentateuch and all such uses translate the Hebrew, כִּיבֹרֶת, understood as the mercy seat.⁵⁹⁸ The mercy seat was the place of expiation, whereby blood from a purification offering would be sprinkled to purge impurity and bring forgiveness of sin (Lev 16), but it was also the place of divine revelation (Exod 25:22).⁵⁹⁹ Based on this understanding, Bailey takes a literal approach to understanding Christ as the mercy seat, rejecting the idea of Christ as a purification sacrifice in favour of the place of divine revelation. Understanding διὰ [τῆς] πίστεως as connected to ἱλαστήριον and ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι as connected to the verb προέθετο, Bailey rejects any interpretation that understands the reference of blood as denoting Christ as a sacrificial offering.⁶⁰⁰ Rather, by taking ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι with προέθετο, Bailey understands Christ's death and shedding of blood as God setting forth Jesus as the mercy seat where humanity may come to experience the presence and revelation of God.⁶⁰¹

Finlan disagrees with Bailey's interpretation and takes ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι with ἱλαστήριον, translating 3:25a, "whom God put forward in a bloody death as a mercy seat of faith."⁶⁰² Finlan

⁵⁹⁵ See Hultgren, *Paul's Gospel and Mission*, 47–72, for a history of interpretation.

⁵⁹⁶ See McMurray, *Sacrifice, Brotherhood, and the Body*, 58–74 for an in-depth and recent argument in favour of interpreting ἱλαστήριον as a votive offering instead of the common interpretation of ἱλαστήριον as the mercy-seat. Interestingly, the votive gift interpretation finds its roots as far back as Deissmann, *Bible Studies* (1901).

⁵⁹⁷ Schreiner, *Romans*, 193; Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 251–56; Finlan, "The Background and Content of Paul's Cultic Atonement Metaphors," 140; Bailey, "Jesus as the Mercy Seat," 170; See Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 429 who rather translates ἱλαστήριον as "sacrifice of atonement."

⁵⁹⁸ Shauf, *Jesus the Sacrifice*, 238; See Bailey, "Jesus as the Mercy Seat," 170, who argues that while ἱλαστήριον does not bear the definite article in Romans 3:25 (as it does in the LXX), it should still be understood as the mercy seat rather than a general place of atonement.

⁵⁹⁹ Finlan, "The Background and Content of Paul's Cultic Atonement Metaphors," 141.

⁶⁰⁰ Bailey, "Jesus as the Mercy Seat," 209.

⁶⁰¹ Bailey, 210.

⁶⁰² Finlan, "The Background and Content of Paul's Cultic Atonement Metaphors," 165.

rejects Bailey's strict interpretation and takes ἱλαστήριον as a synecdoche that refers to the entire Levitical sacrificial system as the mercy seat plays a central role in Israelite atonement rituals.⁶⁰³ Finlan furthers this point by detailing the verb προτιθῆμι ("put forward") as referring to the LXX cultic image of publicly presenting a covenant-making sacrifice (Exod 24:7-8, cf. Gal 3:1).⁶⁰⁴ Thus, Paul understands Christ to be the new purification offering made on the Day of Atonement that reveals the saving righteousness of God apart from the law (3:21) through faith.⁶⁰⁵

Having displayed the presence of sacrificial imagery in 3:25 through Paul's use of ἱλαστήριον, it is now important to outline a brief overview of the Levitical purity system. Priestly theology emphasized a distinctiveness between the realm of God and the realm of humanity, with dangerous consequences should the two realms interact.⁶⁰⁶ The foundational problem which Priestly theology, and subsequently, the Levitical purity system, solves, is Yahweh's desire to dwell among his people.⁶⁰⁷ Using the Levitical purity system, specifically, systems of mediation (e.g., sacrifices) and proper behaviour (e.g., ritual purity), Yahweh and humanity may dwell together without fear.⁶⁰⁸ It is this system that will be detailed below.

Firstly, impurity in the ancient Israel was understood as a dynamic and malevolent force that manifested itself as a physical substance attracted to areas of sacredness (e.g., the temple and its sancta).⁶⁰⁹ Sin, as a kind of impurity, was generated through the breaking of divine prohibitions (Lev 4) and the neglect of cultic and judicial orders (Lev 5), defiling both the individual with guilt as well as the sacred areas with impurity.⁶¹⁰ These particles of impurity and the sin of the individual would need to be expunged through the purification offering which acted as a detergent and means of forgiveness (Lev 4:1-5:13).⁶¹¹ Regular purification offerings throughout the year would forgive the individual of their sins.⁶¹² However, it is only on the Day of Atonement that the purification offering would purge the impurity found in sacred areas, and in doing do, also purge the sinner of impurity and sins that they had previously been forgiven of but not cleansed (Lev 4:20, 26, 31; 5:2-3; Num 6:9ff; 8:7-12).⁶¹³ Gane, thus, draws a distinction between moral fault and ritual impurity. Moral fault is a load in which the sinner bears at a particular historic time and which the sinner can find forgiveness through the offering or a regular purification sacrifice. Comparatively, ritual purity is a

⁶⁰³ Finlan, 176.

⁶⁰⁴ Finlan, 158; Hultgren, *Paul's Gospel and Mission*, 56.

⁶⁰⁵ Finlan, 165.

⁶⁰⁶ Kessler, *Old Testament Theology*, 332.

⁶⁰⁷ Kessler, 332; Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, 43.

⁶⁰⁸ Kessler, 334.

⁶⁰⁹ Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary," 392.

⁶¹⁰ Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, 65.

⁶¹¹ Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary," 397.

⁶¹² Gane, *Cult and Character*, 127.

⁶¹³ Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, 65; Gane, 128.

bodily state of contamination that needs to be cleansed and can only be achieved on the Day of Atonement.⁶¹⁴ This rite was executed through the slaughtering of an animal and the daubing of its blood upon the sacred objects and spaces by a priest on behalf of the sinful and impure individual (Lev 9:9).⁶¹⁵

Thus, it is important to outline the pinnacle of the Israelite purification system, the Day of Atonement. As mentioned previously, regular purification offerings throughout the year lead to divine forgiveness but leave the individual and the sacred areas in a state of impurity (Lev 16:30).⁶¹⁶ Thus, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies with blood from the purification offering and sprinkles it upon the sacred areas to cleanse it from all impurities, and consequently, secure communal purification for Israel.⁶¹⁷ Having effected atonement for sins and purgation of impurity from both the sacred areas and the people, a second purification offering is given through the Azazel goat.⁶¹⁸ Taking the Azazel goat, the High Priest transfers the sins of the people, already atoned for, into the animal and sends it into the wilderness, the domain of evil, where its power can no longer affect the community (Lev 16:21).⁶¹⁹ In essence, by sending their atoned sins back to its place of origin, Israel recognizes the ultimate cause of their sin to be found in an outside force. Consequently, Israel assumes their role as a forgiven people, freed from the power of sin, who now testify against the power which led them towards sinful actions to begin with.⁶²⁰

Foundationally, the purging of impurity in the Day of Atonement is important as God will not abide within a polluted sanctuary and among a sinful people. While God may tolerate impurity in his dwelling place for a time, if impurity is not cleansed promptly (on the Day of Atonement), God may leave his dwelling place and depart from his people.⁶²¹ Consequently, as Paul describes the justifying and redemptive work of Christ as a *ἱλαστήριον*, he understands Christ as the one who ultimately forgives the sin of the believer while also bringing deliverance from the power of sin. In this way, the people are purged of their impurity, enabling God to dwell permanently with his

⁶¹⁴ Gane, 128.

⁶¹⁵ Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary," 392.

⁶¹⁶ Milgrom, 394. Milgrom, contra Gane, states that while inadvertent misdemeanours were cleansed instantly through regular purification offerings, since their impurities only reached the outer layers of the Temple, wanton and unrepentant sins could only be purified on the Day of Atonement, since the impurities of heinous sins reached deep into the Holy of Holies. For Milgrom, forgiveness of sin is not a category affected by the purification offering. The purification offering was meant simply for the purging of impurity from the sacred spaces.

⁶¹⁷ Gane, *Cult and Character*, 232.

⁶¹⁸ Gane, 258; Compare Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, 149, who understands both purification animals to comprise one purification offering.

⁶¹⁹ Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary," 396.

⁶²⁰ Gane, *Cult and Character*, 264.

⁶²¹ Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary," 396; Gane, 230.

people. Thus, I will now argue that how the believer experiences the purifying work of God is through their baptism (βαπτίζω, 6:3) into Christ Jesus. To support this conclusion, I will explore the presence of baptism in relation to ritual purity in early Judaism and early Christianity.

The Presence of Ritual Purity in Early Judaism and Early Christianity

As mentioned above, most commentators understand βαπτίζω as merely a burial symbol for the believer's union with the death and resurrection of Christ. Through one's baptism, the individual publicly declares their participation in the death of Christ and pledges allegiance to the dominion of God by continuing to walk in newness of life founded upon Christ's resurrection.⁶²² In addition to the historic interpretation, I will argue that βαπτίζω also bears the notion of ritual sacrifice and purification as the means by which the believer attains freedom from the dominion of sin and death as their sin and impurity is purged away.

Firstly, one must investigate the presence of baptism in relation to ritual purity in early Judaism and early Christianity. By studying the Qumran communities,⁶²³ a society vital for understanding the beliefs and practices of Second Temple Judaism, it is evident that the group consisted of priestly individuals who rejected the institutional Temple due to its corruption.⁶²⁴ However, this group seemingly cared deeply for purity laws but could not offer sacrifices at the temple for purification. Consequently, the group elevated other purity laws, namely, the maintenance of ritual purity through washing.⁶²⁵ Through the discovery of ritual baths at Qumran, it is possible to understand some ablutions to be an adaptation of the purification offering sacrificed at the Temple (4Q277 I 1-13).⁶²⁶ Just as the average Jew may have brought a regular purification offering for sins committed and impurity generated, so also members of the Qumran communities may have conducted ablutions to cleanse themselves of ritual impurity resulting from sin. While the ablutions conducted at Qumran were administered regularly, and thus, dramatically unlike Christian baptism, the first ablution completed by a member could have signified an initiatory rite.⁶²⁷ For example, Josephus, depicting the initiation of individuals into the Essene community, describes the process of bathing

⁶²² See Sabou, *Between Horror and Hope*, 36. Other scholars have attempted to understand βαπτίζω through a sacramental lens, perceiving the rite of baptism as the instrument by which an individual is joined to Christ's death, enabling them to walk in newness of life. This paper will not address this current debate.

⁶²³ Collins, *Beyond the Qumran Community*, 65–69.

⁶²⁴ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 11; Church, *Temple Rejected*, 79; Schiffman, "Community without Temple," 267.

⁶²⁵ Lawrence, *Washing in Water*, 86–97.

⁶²⁶ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 105.

⁶²⁷ Beasley-Murray, 16; Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery In Early Christianity*, 58; Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 76.

with a “purer kind of holy water” (B.J. 2.137–142). While it is unclear whether the act of ritual bathing was formally part of the initiation process or whether initiation allowed for one to now partake in ritual bathing, it is likely that the first bath of purification symbolized entry into the community.⁶²⁸

As an initiate submitted oneself to their first ablution, they also surrendered oneself to the commandments of God and repented of their former life so that they may be made spiritually clean (4Q512 XI 1-3).⁶²⁹ Only through internal repentance can the rite of ablution cleanse the man of his sins, purifying him of his impurity and allowing him to enter the presence of the holy community (1QS III 4-9).⁶³⁰ Evidently, the goal of the initiate was to enter a state of outward ritual cleanliness while pursuing a heart of obedience to gain the desired state of physical and spiritual purity. This act of initiation was considered the start of a new life separate from the power of sin.

Regarding the presence of baptism as a process of ritual purification in early Christianity, ample evidence is attested in the Didache. While the Didache was written in the second century, decades after Paul’s epistle to the Romans, it provides revealing evidence of the early Christian understanding of baptism. While the Didache focuses little on the theory of baptism, instructions are given to the practice of baptism.⁶³¹ Notably, baptism is to be preceded by the recitation and study of the Two Ways text, a document outlining the moral code of the Christian faith within an eschatological view of the world divided between good and evil (Did. 1-6).⁶³² By submitting to baptism, the Christian pledges their allegiance to the way of good in their moral conduct within the world. Secondly, baptism encouraged the use of “living water” (ὕδατι ζῶντι) subject to availability (Did. 7.2). Appropriated from contemporary literature, living water pertains to a certain classification of running water used for purification rites for severe levels of impurity (e.g., leprosy, contact with a corpse, etc., cf. 11Q19 XLV 15-17).⁶³³ In this way, living water was understood to impart life and regeneration to the baptizand.⁶³⁴ As a result, it is evident that the early Christian understanding of baptism displayed a sense of regeneration through the cleansing of one’s impurity, followed by an expectation to live in accordance with the way of righteousness.

This is further emphasized in the works of Tertullian who associated baptism with the forgiveness and cleansing of sins.⁶³⁵ In his work, *On Baptism*, Tertullian begins by outlining the reality of baptism

⁶²⁸ Lawrence, *Washing in Water*, 74.

⁶²⁹ Lawrence, 114; Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery In Early Christianity*, 58.

⁶³⁰ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 17; Lawrence, 139.

⁶³¹ Blidstein, *Purity, Community, and Ritual in Early Christian Literature*, 113; Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 201; Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery In Early Christianity*, 59.

⁶³² Blidstein, 114; Ferguson, 202.

⁶³³ Lawrence, *Washing in Water*, 133.

⁶³⁴ Blidstein, *Purity, Community, and Ritual in Early Christian Literature*, 115–16; Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 204.

⁶³⁵ Ferguson, 346.

as one that washes away the sins of one's former blindness (1.1). He supports this statement by later detailing the fact that baptism makes the believer holy as one's spirit is washed and one's body is cleansed (4.1-4.5).⁶³⁶ Specifically, what is cleansed in the believer is the guilt of sin, and consequently, the resulting penalty of death (5.6, cf. 2.2).⁶³⁷ Once the impurity of sin has been removed by the cleansing of baptism, the Holy Spirit, God's own presence, begins to dwell in the believer (6.1), freeing the believer from the powers of sin (7.2).⁶³⁸

Thus, it is evident that in both early Judaism and early Christianity, bathing (whether it be Jewish ablutions or Christian baptism) was understood to bear a purificatory component. Specifically, in both cases, bathing was understood to purge the individual of their sins and thus, initiate them into the community. Moreover, Christian baptism expands upon this idea by explicitly mentioning the dwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer through their baptism. In this way, baptism bears similarities to the dwelling presence of God in the temple after purification. Consequently, this provides a foundation by which to analyse the presence of a ritualistic approach in Romans 6:1-11.

The Ritualistic Approach as Outlined in Romans 6:1-11

As stated above, the ritualistic approach builds upon the framework and conclusions of the harmonized approach, bearing insights from both forensic and participatory approaches, and adds greater nuance to the argument through an exploration of Paul's use of βαπτίζω. As a result, the following exegesis will describe the nuances of the ritualistic perspective in relation to this harmonized approach.

After the charge of 6:1, verses 2-4 speak of the believer's participation in the death of Christ. Whereas earlier in the epistle Christ became the purification offering offered on the Day of Atonement on behalf of humanity to be accepted by faith (3:25), now Paul speaks of the believer as one who participates in the historical purifying work of Christ. In line with the participatory perspective, Christ, who identifies fully with humanity under the force of impurity, dies as a purification offering to cleanse sacred space so that God may dwell perfectly with humanity. In his identification with humanity, Christ becomes the representation of all those who have been baptized into his purifying death so that no longer must humanity dwell under the force of impurity apart from the presence of God, but can now enter the sacred space where God may fully dwell with humanity.

⁶³⁶ Ferguson, 346; Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery In Early Christianity*, 46.

⁶³⁷ Ferguson, 346.

⁶³⁸ See Ferguson, 347, for a comprehensive account of Tertullian's work that goes beyond *On Baptism*.

Continuing into verse 4, Paul introduces the reality of Christ's resurrection, enabling the believer to walk in newness of life. Through the resurrection, Christ proves himself to be the final purification offering on behalf of his people, enabling the creation of a new relationship between the purified people and the God who will never depart from his habitation among them. Consequently, this new creation, displayed through Christ as the renewed humanity dwelling in the renewed dwelling place, allows the believer to walk in the newness of life as they act as members of this new creation. While believers have not yet fully experienced the finality of their purified state in the renewed dwelling place under the rule of God, the surety of the renewed future, displayed in Christ, enables the believer to act in accordance with the rule of God apart from adherence to the law.

Consecutively, just as the participatory approach understood τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ in verses 5-6 as denoting the believer's conformity to Christ's death through daily ethical living, so also the ritualistic approach understands τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ similarly. The ritualistic approach understands the believer's conformity to Christ as conformity to the purifying work of Christ. Just as Christ purged the impurity produced by humanity's sinfulness through his sacrificial death and resurrection, and thus brought forgiveness of sin through his justifying work (6:7), so also believers conform to the purifying work of Christ through the death of the old self (the producer of impurity) and the habitation of a new life. In walking in the newness of life, the believer engages with the future reality of their final dwelling with God through moral acts of purification in the present life.

Finally, verses 9-11 describe the defeat of death's reign and impurity within the old age. Due to Christ's resurrection and consequential act of purification, death and impurity no longer have dominion over Christ. As the blood of the purification offering cleansed the sanctuary and the offerer from impurity's rule, so also the blood of Christ permanently cleanses the renewed dwelling place of God and the believers of faith (3:25) so that God's rule and dwelling may be perfectly established among his people. Having experienced the purifying work of Christ, the people of God must consider themselves cleansed of sin and liberated from the force of impurity and, thus, work as purifying agents of God in the world.

Conclusion

As the Roman Christ-followers struggled to understand how to ethically respond to God's grace without the law, Paul introduces a fundamental paradigm shift by describing union with Christ as the foundation behind ethical living. As understood through this harmonized approach, one's union and conformity to the death and resurrection of Christ leads to the justification and liberation of the believer from the rule and penalty of sin, enabling ethical living. Building upon this harmonized

perspective, the ritualistic approach nuances the ideas of justification and liberation by examining Paul's use of βαπτίζω. Evidently, Paul understands one's union with the death and resurrection of Christ as one's participation in Christ as a purification offering (3:25). Through participating in Christ's purifying work, the believer is cleansed from a state of sinful impurity and freed from the reign of impurity, enabling the presence of God to dwell in their midst, presently through ethical living, and in the future in totality. Further work needs to be done to understand Paul's ritualistic framework throughout the entire epistle, particularly, in Paul's use of sacrificial language in Romans 12:1-2 (especially Paul's use of παρίστημι in 6:13 and 12:1) as an exhortation towards ethical living.

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Theology and the Pornographic Imagination

Metaphysics, Modernity, and the Miseducation of Desire

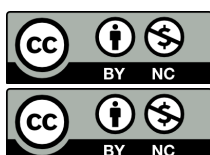
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Abstract

A large portion of the criticism of pornographic production is often polarised towards the ethical dimensions of such critique. While not negating this approach, this essay aims to delineate some ontological tendencies of the pornographic imagination, offering both a critique and therapy from the vantage of a theological metaphysic. Beginning with a critical examination of an influential essay, namely Susan Sontag's *The Pornographic Imagination* I suggest that the aesthetic vision of pornography is predicated on a denial of difference and anticipates no gratuitous reciprocity, but rather a return of the same, and that the ultimate drift of pornographic excessiveness is towards a deadening solipsism. Within this totalized imagination, the consumption of pornography fabricates an affective relation to material bodies within a radical narrowing of vision and sensory possibility. This is manifested at several levels, in both its form and content, from its very medium to its deployment of language. I further contend that this is not necessarily a unique phenomenon, but a by-product of certain tendencies within modern technology and capitalist production. I argue that it is difficult to understand the advent of pornography without a simultaneous description of the modernist cartography of being and its regime of representation. This concerns the way bodies are spatialised and mechanised into a manageable plane of immanence susceptible to modernist ideals of panoptic observation and technological "standing reserve." At the end of the essay, an alternative metaphysic of desire and the image is put forward, with the assistance of Rowan Williams; it is argued that a broadly Augustinian and patristic vision of Trinitarian desire and



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liturgical incorporation provides an affective and ontological restoration of selfhood; it suggests a sacramental mediation of the real, in contrast to the simulation of pornography.

I

Public debate regarding the pornographic imaginary, and its purported social implications, has continued since the censorship and obscenity trials of the twentieth century.⁶³⁹ From that time, up to the present day, philosophical and moral critique have largely not thwarted its proliferation and digital omnipresence. In this essay, I hope to reflect on something not often discussed in the debate regarding pornography, namely its implicit metaphysical vision. I hope to expand upon the claim that pornography, in its most disseminated and popularised forms, participates in a distorted and self-deceitful spiritual vision.⁶⁴⁰ For this reason, as I will argue, it is insufficient to analyse pornography *only* from the perspective of moral deontology. I suggest that a critique of the pornographic should not be approached through its ethical reverberations alone, but should relate something of its latent vision, a meta-perspective regarding the ways it represents and projects reality itself, even when this is not articulated theoretically or thematically through its medium. In other words, it should render lucid its implicit life-orientation – its ‘metaphysics,’ to put it plainly. For pornography does affect us; it relates to and touches upon those often-subconscious processes of desire and meaning-making. It fabricates a sensorium and simulation of reality and achieves this through a specific technology and desiring propensity, and thus produces ways of being-in-the-world.

Therefore, moral denunciation will not be sufficient without a holistic taxis: *a metaphysics of desire*. Without addressing the conversion of self and its yearnings, this approach remains fundamentally limited. Moreover, apart from holistic virtue, ‘moralisms’ become imaginatively restrictive and life-denying, often mirroring the vice they wish to surmount,⁶⁴¹ exhibiting, to quote Geoffrey Hill, a “rectitude that mimics its own fall / reeling with sensual abstinence and woe”.⁶⁴² Such “rectitude” inhibits our induction into a more expansive construct of human agency, because it insufficiently

⁶³⁹ I am thinking here of the legal wranglings associated with modernist literature, such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*, as well as the cultural aftermath of court cases such as *Miller v. California* (1973).

⁶⁴⁰ On the relation between pornography and self-deception, see Charles O. Nussbaum, *Understanding Pornographic Fiction: Sex, Violence and Self-Deceit* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁶⁴¹ This is especially apparent in the present day, when even sophisticated feminists (e.g. Catherine MacKinnon) have been subtly influenced by pornography’s own frames of reference, especially regarding gender. For an enlightening critique of MacKinnon, see Wendy Brown, ‘The Mirror of Pornography,’ in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 77-95. It also helpful to remember that pornography thrived in Puritan England, as it did in other ‘Catholic’ states on the continent; see Nussbaum, *Understanding Pornographic Fiction*, 54-101.

⁶⁴² Geoffrey Hill, ‘Tenebrae,’ in Kenneth Haynes, ed., *Broken Hierarchies: Poems 1952-2012* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 139.

addresses “the ethical importance of desire”.⁶⁴³ Taken theologically, it intimates ethical vision apart from divine enticement, which may gravitate towards voluntarist approaches that separate nature and grace.⁶⁴⁴ These accounts tend to disassociate the goodness of eros from the ethical sphere, and reduce divine commands to arbitrary whims opposing our real interests – as if God ultimately had agendas incompatible with creaturely beatitude.⁶⁴⁵

It is the aim of this essay to try to resist at least some of these limitations, and it hopes to address the wider metaphysical questions that may inform both a therapeutic adequacy and an affective repair of human desire.⁶⁴⁶ To do this, I will begin through an engagement with a text by Susan Sontag who manages, through her typical critical penetration, to touch upon many of the stakes involved in the contemporary proliferation of the pornographic. Moreover, the claim, at the margins of her text, that the pornographic imagination is linked to certain strains of modernity, is developed in the section that follows thereafter. Throughout, I argue that the pornographic is a metaphysics, a regime of representation, that is implicitly linked to a modern imaginary, and that a Christian metaphysics and therapy of desire may provide some solvency for those forms of damaged selfhood that continue to be produced by it.

II

*Whoever does not love abides in death*⁶⁴⁷

The tensions with which I am concerned are evidenced within a seminal text by the Susan Sontag, entitled *The Pornographic Imagination* (1967).⁶⁴⁸ Sontag’s essay displays a particular obliqueness since her argument is largely focused on pornographic writing, rather the visual media— a surprising occurrence since she has been deeply engaged with these questions elsewhere.⁶⁴⁹ Despite this

⁶⁴³ Donald MacKinnon, ‘Revelation and Social Justice [1941],’ in John C. McDowell, (ed.), *Philosophy and the Burden of Theological Honesty* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 141. Also Rowan Williams, ‘On Making Moral Decisions,’ *Anglican Theological Review* 81, no. 2 (1999): 295-305.

⁶⁴⁴ As famously argued by Henri de Lubac.

⁶⁴⁵ Cf. Rowan Williams, ‘On Being Creatures,’ in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 63-78. One may think here of the manualist school of ethics among Catholics and post-Kantian trajectories among deontological ethics, more generally; cf. Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 1-44.

⁶⁴⁶ For this reason, I have deep sympathies with the approach of Matthew Tan, who has also sought to approach the question of pornography from the site of metaphysics, arguing that pornography continues the prioritisation of the virtual over the actual and performs a pseudo-messianism that parodies Christology and eschatology; Matthew J. P. Tan, ‘Pornography and Christology,’ *Australasian Catholic Record* 97, no. 3 (2020): 312-319.

⁶⁴⁷ 1 John 3.14 (NRSV).

⁶⁴⁸ Susan Sontag ‘The Pornographic Imagination,’ in *A Susan Sontag Reader* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1982), 205-233.

⁶⁴⁹ Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux and Rossetta Books, 2005); *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003).

elision, her text has a general pertinence because Sontag is explicitly concerned with pornographic aesthesis, its “form of consciousness”.⁶⁵⁰ Sontag quite rightly critiques overly simplistic denunciations of pornographic literature as being reliant on special pleading – for many presumed exceptionalities of this genre are intrinsic to other literary productions. Amongst these presumed unique characteristics, she mentions its focus on titillation, the fantastical lack of realism, and the reduction of characters to “ideal” types. All these traits, she argues, can be found in other more widely accepted literary artefacts, and do not belong to the pornographic especially. But Sontag takes this critique further; there is “no *aesthetic* principle” by which one can, aprioristically, exclude “the extreme forms of consciousness that transcend social personality or psychological individuality”,⁶⁵¹ traits which, in her estimation, exemplify the pornographic imagination.

For Sontag, art is “the nearest thing to sacramental human activity acknowledged by secular society”,⁶⁵² even as the exact of nature of this sacramentality remains opaque, or even chaotic at its antipodes – which is why “[t]he exemplary modern artist is a broker in madness”.⁶⁵³ Leaving aside the questionable assumption of art’s “independence” and its assumed “secularity,” one needs to unfurl the “aesthetic principles” to which Sontag appears to subscribe. She says:

What makes a work of pornography part of the history of art rather than of trash is not distance, the superimposition of a consciousness more comfortable to that of ordinary reality upon the “deranged consciousness” of the erotically obsessed. Rather, it is the originality, thoroughness, authenticity, and power of the deranged consciousness itself, as incarnated in a work.⁶⁵⁴

In a provocative analogy, Sontag goes as far as to say that “[p]ornography that is serious literature aims to “excite” in the same way that books which render an extreme form of religious experience aim to “convert”.⁶⁵⁵ For Sontag, pornography aims to appeal to the same register of psychology that religious consciousness reaches toward, namely, the unruly and opaque depths of human longing. That is, they both concern *desire*. Sontag goes on to say, that “[e]xperiences aren’t pornographic; only images and representations – structures of the imagination – are”.⁶⁵⁶ For her, pornographic literature, such as Pauline Freage’s *L’Histoire d’O*, does not so much connect the consumer to real, “unmediated” sex, but rather to formal traits of the pornographic. By this, she means that the regime of pornographic representation, the way that individual works of porn play upon recognisable patterns and rhythms, suggests that the primary reference of pornographic material is not to everyday experiences, but to other pornographic works; that is, a particular imaginative structure, rather than simply any representation of ordinary, non-simulated sex. Such explains why consumers of pornography are drawn towards its specific modality, rather than just

⁶⁵⁰ Sontag, ‘The Pornographic Imagination,’ 212.

⁶⁵¹ Sontag, 212.

⁶⁵² Sontag, 212.

⁶⁵³ Sontag, 213.

⁶⁵⁴ Sontag, 214.

⁶⁵⁵ Sontag, 214.

⁶⁵⁶ Sontag, 216.

any sexual representation. On face value, this reading does tell us something significant about the mechanism of pornography, even as one may question whether there is anything like “unmediated” experience, sexual or otherwise. For is it not the case that our perceptions are always imbued with “structures of the imagination,” insofar as we always perceive something as something; there can be no dualism between ‘facts’ and imaginative integration.⁶⁵⁷ Furthermore, such affects are not purely spontaneous, but formed and cultivated so that any “pure” or “unmediated” experience remains questionable.⁶⁵⁸ Beyond phenomenological disquiet, a more strenuous problem concerns how certain kinds of images become “naturalized” to the extent that they alter our ways of seeing, our modes of desiring. Can one maintain that there are no “experiences” that display a pornographic texture?⁶⁵⁹

The pervasiveness of pornography is not only due to its rather simplistic mechanism of catharsis, a form of “release” that is dependable and repeatable without interpersonal encumbrance, but is also due to it being a form of “the total imagination”,⁶⁶⁰ which like the “revivals or translations of the religious imagination”⁶⁶¹ are a type of “psychic absolutism”.⁶⁶² Adding some theological nuance, while pornography’s “religious imagination” or “transcendence of personality” betokens something like a religious and sexual absorption into “totality” (echoing Georges Bataille⁶⁶³), this movement does not really suggest a beneficent metaphysic. By contrast, it is a totality that imaginatively restricts, as Sontag implies; it constitutes a diminished vision and sensual scripting, rather than opening things to transcendent and sacramental affinity. To use the traditional feminist quip, it implies reduction, an “objectification”⁶⁶⁴ in which bodies are reduced to an exchangeable symbol,

⁶⁵⁷ See Graham Ward, *Unbelievable: Why We Believe and Why We Don't* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013) for a discussion on the relation between belief and perception.

⁶⁵⁸ Cf. Thomas Fuchs and Sabine Koch, ‘Embodied Affectivity: On Moving and Being Moved.’ *Frontiers in Psychology* 5.508 (2014): 1-12.

⁶⁵⁹ For instance, does the popular portrayal of women (for example, in some advertising campaigns and photography, analysed by the likes of John Berger a generation ago) not show that unreflective patterns of the imagination continue to inform experience – never mind the way sexual behaviour itself mimics eroticized representations, most disturbingly shown in the way that real acts of violence and criminality themselves can exemplify these ‘structures of the imagination’; see John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Great Britain: BBC & Penguin, 1972), 7-64. Berger says later that ‘Capitalism survives by forcing the majority, whom it exploits, to define their own interests as narrowly as possible. This was once achieved by extensive deprivation. Today in developed countries it is being achieved by imposing a false standard of what is and what is not desirable’ (p. 154). Also see Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature* (London: The Women's Press, 1981); Susanne Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986).

⁶⁶⁰ Sontag, ‘The Pornographic Imagination,’ 230.

⁶⁶¹ Sontag, 231.

⁶⁶² Sontag, 232.

⁶⁶³ See George Bataille, “The Object of Desire and the Totality of the Real,” in Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (eds.), *The Bataille Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 264–270.

⁶⁶⁴ Sontag, 220. Also see Rae Langton, ‘Sexual Solipsism.’ *Philosophical Topics* 23, no. 2 (1995): 149-187; Martha C. Nussbaum, ‘Objectification.’ *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 24, no. 4 (1995): 249-291.

a commodity, an empty sign to be filled with the desirous projection of the observer.⁶⁶⁵ The woman, in *L'Histoire d'O*, moves “simultaneously toward her own extinction as a human being and her fulfilment as a sexual being”.⁶⁶⁶ Within the pornographic universe, sexuality is “demonic”,⁶⁶⁷ “incorrectly designed,” an “appetite which can drive [us] mad”,⁶⁶⁸ and “as something beyond good and evil, beyond love, beyond sanity”,⁶⁶⁹ echoing the aesthetics of the postmodern sublime.⁶⁷⁰ As such, pornography resists final causality, and drives “a wedge between one’s existence as a full human being and one’s existence as a sexual being”.⁶⁷¹ Hereby, there is no postulated coherence between human desire and transcendent perfection, but a tendency towards indifference; the annihilation of subjectivity. As Bataille in *L'Histoire de l'Oeil* understood well, “what pornography is really about ultimately, isn’t sex but death”.⁶⁷² In place of a genuine traversal, there is the bad infinity of death drive, a reduction of bodies to mechanical and post-human iteration.⁶⁷³ Furthermore,

⁶⁶⁵ “[T]he pornographic imagination inhabits a universe that is, however repetitive the incidents occurring within it, incomparably economical. The strictest possible criterion of relevance applies: everything must bear upon the erotic situation. The universe proposed by the pornographic imagination is a total universe. It has the power to ingest and metamorphose and translate all concerns that are fed into it, reducing everything into one negotiable currency or the erotic imperative. All action is conceived of as a set of sexual exchanges” (‘The Pornographic Imagination,’ 229).

⁶⁶⁶ Sontag, ‘The Pornographic Imagination,’ 222.

⁶⁶⁷ Sontag, 221.

⁶⁶⁸ Sontag, 222.

⁶⁶⁹ Sontag, 222.

⁶⁷⁰ See for instance Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey (Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). Cf. John Milbank, ‘Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent,’ in Regina Schwartz (ed.), *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 211-234.

⁶⁷¹ Sontag, ‘The Pornographic Imagination,’ 223.

⁶⁷² Sontag, 224. Though one might add that in Bataille, sex and death are mutually implicated: the fear of death animates the desire for life, and within sexual ecstasy there is the intimation of self-annihilation (*la petite mort*). The following description from *L'Histoire de l'Oeil* gives some sense of this: “The wind had died down somewhat, and part of the starry sky was visible. And it struck me [male protagonist] that death was the sole outcome of my erection, and if Simone [female protagonist] and I were killed, then the universe of our unbearable personal vision was certain to be replaced by the pure stars, fully unrelated to any external gazes and realizing in a cold state, without human delays or detours, something that strikes me as the goal of my sexual licentiousness: a geometric incandescence (among other things, the coinciding point of life and death, being and nothingness), perfectly fulgurating”; Georges Bataille, *The Story of the Eye*, trans. Joachim Neugroschal (London: Penguin, 1982), 30. This also cinematically realised to lurid effect in the dénouement of Nagisa Oshima’s controversial *In the Realm of Senses* (1976).

⁶⁷³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 230-231. Also see the excellent comments of Douglas Stewart who traces the linkage between sex and machination to the beginnings of capitalist industry; Douglas J. Stewart, ‘Pornography, Obscenity, and Capitalism,’ *The Antioch Review* 35.4 (1977): 389-398. The reduction of bodies to machinery and the mirroring play of simulation (without archetype) is further anticipated in the anti-moralist and post-humanist writings of the Marquis de Sade; cf. Dalia Judovitz, *The Culture of the Body: Genealogies of Modernity* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), 147-167, and Michela Marzano, *La philosophie du corps* (Paris: Presses Universitaires

according to Sontag, Bataille's narrative supposes that human beings "live only through excess" and through "giving oneself to a state of "open being," open to death as well as joy".⁶⁷⁴

Regarding *L'Histoire de l'Oeil*, but also pornography more generally, Sontag says that "[t]here can be no revelation or surprises in the story, no new "knowledge," only further intensifications of what is already known. [The] seemingly unrelated elements really are related; indeed, all versions of the same thing".⁶⁷⁵ Pornographic vitalism does not usher real novelty, but rather an excess without otherness and exchangeability within a closed loop. We are given (to echo Michela Marzano) "reified" objects rather than "incarnated" ones.⁶⁷⁶ Today, the circulation of the pornographic imaginary imitates the logic of modern economy: pornography's "reproducibility,"⁶⁷⁷ its creation and dispersal of "images"⁶⁷⁸ and "simulacra,"⁶⁷⁹ repeats the free-flowing movement of commodities⁶⁸⁰ within late capitalist technologies of "standing-reserve" and panoptic discipline.⁶⁸¹ Additionally, pornographic imagination seems to provoke, and in some sense does mimic, the patterns of alienation found within capitalist societies, and aims to "release" from these dispersed feelings of social disintegration. But rather than providing an eminent solution, pornography only

de France, 2013), 97-106. It is no coincidence then that the rise of sex dolls and 'sexbots' have an intimate connection to the interior logic of pornography. The modelling of non-human sexual 'companions' is often predicated upon the ideal body-type and 'behaviour' of porn stars. Cf. Jenny Kleeman, 'The Race to Build the World's First Sex Robot'. *The Guardian*, 27 April 2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/apr/27/race-to-build-world-first-sex-robot>.

⁶⁷⁴ Sontag, 'The Pornographic Imagination,' 225.

⁶⁷⁵ Sontag, 227; cf. Roland Barthes, 'The Metaphor of the Eye,' in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 239-247.

⁶⁷⁶ Marzano makes a helpful distinction between the 'reified' object and the 'incarnated' object as way of discerning instrumentalising and non-instrumentalising types of relations; cf. Michela Marzano, *La philosophie du corps*, 111-113.

⁶⁷⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Third Version),' in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 251-283.

⁶⁷⁸ Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis and London: The University of Minneapolis Press, 1993), 48-49: 'Never has the human body – above all the female body – been so massively manipulated as today and, so to speak, imagined from top to bottom by the techniques of advertising and commodity production'. But he goes on to say that 'What was technologized was not the body, but its image. Thus the glorious body of advertising has become the mask behind which the fragile, slight human body continues its precarious existence'.

⁶⁷⁹ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 1992), 6-25; Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Phil Beitchman et al (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).

⁶⁸⁰ Franklin Melendez, 'Video Pornography, Visual Pleasure and the Return of the Sublime,' in Linda Williams, (ed.), *Porn Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 401-427.

⁶⁸¹ Dominic Pettman, *Love and Other Technologies: Retrofitting Eros for the Information Age* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 108-128; also cf. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans Michael Lovitt (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1977), 3-35.

continues to drive this “dialectic” of alienation deeper.⁶⁸² Sontag, to her credit, is fully aware of this dynamic:

Most pornography ... points to something more general than even sexual damage. I mean the traumatic failure of capitalist society to provide authentic outlets for the perennial human flair for high-temperature visionary obsessions, to satisfy the appetite for exalted self-transcending modes of concentration and seriousness. The need of human beings to transcend “the personal” is no less profound than the need to be a person, an individual. But this society serves that need poorly. It provides mainly demonic vocabularies in which to situate that need and from which to initiate action and construct rites of behavior. One is offered a choice among vocabularies of thought and action which are not merely self-transcending but self-destructive.⁶⁸³

Capitalist societies have a difficulty in creating non-destructive patterns of *jouissance* because the trajectory of the market system is towards the disembodiment of human beings from social relations. This is achieved through a rupture of the “symbolic” link between things and their inherent value and neo-liberalism’s reduction of community to atomist individuation. The desirability of something in this picture is not due to intrinsic worth but is predicated on market fluctuation and algorithmic reinforcement. Such commodification, seen especially today in speculative modes of investment and stock trading,⁶⁸⁴ moves the world of things farther away from inherent worth and meaning towards a voluntaristic evaluation. Hereby, eros becomes aligned with the superficial and the fashionable, rather than the transcendental and the inherently desirable. This in turn may be linked to capitalism’s broader prioritization of the virtual over the actual, which is one characteristic of metaphysical modernity.⁶⁸⁵ If this and the previous characterizations are correct, the commodification of reality has an intimate link with its pornographication. Furthermore, any comprehensive attempt to grapple with the problem of its continued production and usage will have to deal with the capitalist production of desire⁶⁸⁶ and with certain trends of modernism itself, as Sontag already intimated.

⁶⁸² See Jörg Metelmann, ‘Dialectic of Pornographic Enlightenment.’ *Theology & Sexuality* 15, no. 3 (2009): 269-281.

⁶⁸³ Sontag, ‘The Pornographic Imagination,’ 231.

⁶⁸⁴ Especially seen in the dominance of algorithmic derivatives, disconnected from genuine value, craft or rarity – a leading cause in the subprime mortgage crisis post-2008.

⁶⁸⁵ John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-Liberalism and the Human Future* (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 93-127; Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2013); 34-41; 108-112; on the priority of the virtual within the proliferation of pornography, cf. Tan, ‘Pornography and Christology.’

⁶⁸⁶ Ronald K. L. Collins and David M. Skover, ‘The Pornographic State.’ *Harvard Law Review* 107, no. 6 (1994), 1374-1399.

III

*The spectacle is a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous movement of the nonliving.*⁶⁸⁷

The speculative gist of this essay can now be clarified; I am trying to lay out the imaginative dimension implied by pornographic production. The reading of Sontag's seminal text brought some understanding and clarification to some of the questions at stake. However, I would like to go further than her. Here, I hope to offer a theological critique of pornographic substance and not merely an aesthetic or literary-critical one. By observing the repetitive patterns of pornography's imaginative structures, the aim has been to articulate the dynamic of its reoccurring structures – its “metaphysic,” to reference Susan Griffin.⁶⁸⁸ Taking this metaphysical cue from Griffin, one could say that the “pornographic” is a form of totalization that absorbs relational difference and haptic possibility into a discipline of sameness, a modality of stasis rather than gratuitous reciprocity. Its “psychic absolutism” suggests an escape from interpersonal engagement, collapsing the sensorium of embodied subjectivity into a narrow and one-dimensional vision. The mode of desire that is enticed and educated by this imaginary is not aimed towards its beneficent completion, or its imaginative expansion, but rather towards a malign repetitiveness without difference (unlike that described by Kierkegaard⁶⁸⁹). It suggests a final slide towards non-being, a death drive that leads not to beatific joy but the abyss and boredom of spiritual acedia.⁶⁹⁰ Pornographic metaphysics gestures towards an enclosed solipsism, one that denies true reciprocity and relational otherness, both at the level of form and content. Such a tendency is not merely incidental but, one might argue, is intrinsic to its logic since its imaginative structure denies a genuine openness to what-is-other. It is a reductive totality and therefore appears in the domain of human action as the will-to-power, the *libido dominandi*.⁶⁹¹ In sum, the ultimate drift of pornographic excessiveness is towards deadening solipsism. Moreover, within this totalized imagination, the

⁶⁸⁷ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 7. Also cf. Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, trans. Rico Franses (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 70: ‘For the iconophile, the idol, not having an ontologically based model, can only show fallaciously what does not exist or what is only the inanimate sign of death within the world’.

⁶⁸⁸ Griffin, *Pornography and Silence*, 14.

⁶⁸⁹ As in Kierkegaard's *Repetition*; see Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling / Repetition*. Kierkegaard's Writings VI, edited and translated by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); cf. John Milbank, ‘The Sublime in Kierkegaard,’ in Philip Blond (ed.), *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998), 68-81; Catherine Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2013).

⁶⁹⁰ Cf. David Bentley Hart, ‘The Pornography Culture.’ *The New Atlantis: Journal of Technology & Society* (Summer 2004): 82-89; Reinhard Hütter, ‘Pornography and Acedia.’ *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, 10, no. 4 (2012): 901–907. Also cf. Vasile Chira, ‘The Metaphysics of Addiction.’ *European Journal of Science and Theology* 9, Supplement 1 (2013): 17-27.

⁶⁹¹ See Michela Marzano, ‘La nouvelle pornographie et l'escalade des pratiques: corps, violence at réalité.’ *Cités* 3.15 (2003): 17-29. This is of course a reference to Augustine's *de civitate dei*.

consumption of pornography fabricates a certain affective relation to material bodies that implies a radical narrowing of vision and sensory possibility.

These tendencies, however, are not unique to pornographic culture only, since they are linked to pornography's *modernism*, as already indicated by Sontag. In this section, I argue that it is difficult to understand the advent of pornography without a simultaneous description of the modernist cartography of being and its regime of representation. This concerns the way bodies are spatialised and mechanised into a manageable plane of immanence susceptible to modernist ideals of panoptic observation and technological 'standing reserve'. Indeed, as Walker Percy says:

Pornography is not an aberration of a few sexually frustrated middle-aged men [sic] in gray raincoats; it is rather a salient and prime property of modern consciousness, of three hundred years of technology and the industrial revolution, and is symptomatic of a radical disorder in the relation of the self to other selves which generally manifests itself in the abstracted state of one self (male) and the degradation of another self (female) to an abstract object of satisfaction.⁶⁹²

It is of course the case that visual and literary representations of sexuality pre-date the modern period – the Greeks and Romans were already prolific in this regard, as is well-known – but it is widely accepted by scholars that pornography is a peculiarly modern invention. While initially focused on documenting prostitution from an educational vantage point, pornography has been seen as having a special linkage to the advent of print culture and photographic technology.⁶⁹³ These are prime exemplars of representation, both being concerned with the facility of an identical and reliable mode of replication, and with the modern subject's desire to order reality within an easy-to-grasp geometry. They are not only that, of course, but such trajectories are part of this legacy. Moreover, the printing press as a catalyst of standardisation – combined with the influence of Ramist method and Cartesian *mathesis* of abstractly-ordered magnitudes – “accelerated the drive towards spatialization because its multiplication of identical images and containment of data in abstract and apparently timeless formulations gave encouragement to the notion of the “availability” of a quantified and objectified knowledge,” to quote Catherine Pickstock.⁶⁹⁴ Such spatialisation has an intimate connection with modern accounts of individualism and the panoptic state which, in a mirroring fashion, claim to absorb reality into a manageable and surveyable

⁶⁹² Walker Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (New York: Open Road, 1983), 10.

⁶⁹³ Lynn Hunt, 'Introduction,' in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800* (New York: Zone Books, 1996), 9-45.

⁶⁹⁴ Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 50. Also see Walter J. Ong, 'Ramus and the Commercial Mind,' in *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1971), 165-189; David R. Lachterman, *The Ethics of Geometry: A Genealogy of Modernity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989); Dalia Judovitz, 'Vision, Representation, and Technology in Descartes,' in David Kleinberg-Levin, (ed.), *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1993), 63-86. On the printing press, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe, Volumes I-II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 3-159.

cartography.⁶⁹⁵ This was in turn congenial, especially in the case of pornographic literature, to the atomist and materialist metaphysics of early modernity (e.g., Descartes, Newton, Hobbes, Spinoza, La Mettrie), exemplified in novels like *Thérèse Philosophe* (1748).⁶⁹⁶ This produced an anthropological model of “machine-men” and “organs-without-bodies” that was particularly conducive to capitalist modes of production (as in John Cleland’s *Fanny Hill*).⁶⁹⁷

Photography was likewise concerned with exact reproduction and, through its subtle modes of synthesis and encoding,⁶⁹⁸ has played an intrinsic role in changing modes of perception.⁶⁹⁹ The connection of photography to pornography is almost immediate; from the time images could be so reproduced, there have also been “dirty pictures”.⁷⁰⁰ Historically, this was linked to the libertine drive to stretch the limits of “decency,” but one could say that the notion of identical reproduction seems to be inextricably tied to a kind of objectification, since we cannot “see” ourselves as a photograph captures us⁷⁰¹ (even ‘selfies’ imply some form of self-objectification that transcends the first-person perspective). Photography as a form of representation already then implies a de-subjectivising process that is not immune to certain moral ambiguities. This detail alerts us to one of the central paradoxes of all image-making, namely that it renders presence through absence, and that such dialectic is open to the perennial risk of collapsing the one into the other, especially via the identification of the archetype with the image itself.⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁵ See the chapter ‘Spatialization: The Middle of Modernity,’ in *After Writing*, 47-100. On different meanings of spatialization, see Gérard Genette, ‘Espace et langage,’ in *Figures I* (Paris: Éditions Du Seuil, 1966), 101-108.

⁶⁹⁶ Margaret J. Jacobs, ‘The Materialist World of Pornography,’ in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The Invention of Pornography*, 157-202.

⁶⁹⁷ Cf. Stewart, ‘Pornography, Obscenity, and Capitalism,’ 397-398 where he says, apropos *Fanny Hill*, that ‘Pornography – the viewing of people as performers, or as mere organs – was, I would argue, not even ideologically possible before the rise of capitalism, and it flourishes only because capitalism flourishes, for it is the logical extension to the capitalistic ideals of rationalized production, efficiency, and maximized profit... Sex, one is ruefully forced to say from the lessons of pornography, seems rather more controlled by our economic system than the other way round, and our problem is not that we market sex more efficiently than ever before-sex has always been marketed, probably wisely, as Auden once observed-but that we have tried to make sex itself *efficient*, to the conditions of marketing, and that, to this observer is the essence of pornography: sex turned into a time-and-motion study, sex as industrial production.’

⁶⁹⁸ Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000); Bernard Stiegler, ‘The Discrete Image,’ in Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 145-163.

⁶⁹⁹ Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility,’ 255-256.

⁷⁰⁰ Kelly Dennis, *The Face of God: Representation as the Pornography of Modernity* (PhD diss., Ann Arbor: UMI, 1994), 12-22.

⁷⁰¹ Sontag, *On Photography*, 10.

⁷⁰² Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 19-21. To quote the American poet Linda Gregerson, ‘We thought at first a camera / would be just the thing, the thing itself in real / time caught for anyone / to

But this potential for objectivization and abstraction, with all its potential moral ambiguity, does not merely lie in the particular use of visual media, such as photography and film, but is congenial to the modernist mode of representation *itself*.⁷⁰³ Representation in this sense is “objectivist,” being traceable to Scotist forms of realism in which the “intellectual object” became privileged over the “sensible object,” with the former being understood as an *a priori*, universalising and abstractive operation of spiritual intuition. Here, the object becomes identified with the re-presented and re-produced image imprinted in the soul, rather than with the “relative” and “sensible” object itself.⁷⁰⁴ These tendencies, along with the modern geometries of space and the subject, have passed into the present and are significantly amplified today with the development of digital media, in which the play of simulation becomes even more sophisticated. While it is true that these media, in distinction from still photography, give more space to the reality of movement and transition (even though a certain immobility remains for the observer⁷⁰⁵), they also open us to the displacement of “the real by the simulacra”,⁷⁰⁶ and within globalised technology make the visual and pornographic commodification of bodies easily dispersible. Greater accessibility and affordability of screen technology has of course also made the privatised consumption of these images widespread and has assisted (like the modern novel) in creating “new forms of generalised narcissism”.⁷⁰⁷ Following a model of commodity exchange that repeats the ever-increasing “virtualism” of late capitalism, human bodies are presented as sheerly replaceable “products” and are only deemed beneficial to the extent that they enact the desired effect for the consumer. Hereby, perception itself becomes entangled with capitalist production,⁷⁰⁸ subjected to an “economization”⁷⁰⁹ and “attentional biopower”,⁷¹⁰ whereby our very phenomenological interaction with the world becomes

stop / and start, but that / was to ignore how much the camera / misses, how what we call seeing / in an ever-changing depth / of field’; Linda Gregerson, ‘Elegant,’ in *Magnetic North: Poems* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), 63.

⁷⁰³ Dennis, *The Face of God*, 184ff.

⁷⁰⁴ Olivier Boulnois, *Être et représentation: Une généalogie de la métaphysique moderne à l’époque de Duns Scot (XIII^e -XIV^e siècle)*. Épipiméthée (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 55-105.

⁷⁰⁵ The argument could be made that the very notion of ‘the screen’ is still tied to a certain kind of immobility since it remains predicated, after Alberti, on a linear perspective that privileges a static and reified position on behalf of the observer; cf. Lev Manovich, ‘Eine Archäologie des Computerbildschirms.’ *Kunstforum* 132 (1996): 124–135. For a theological and genealogical critique that shows linear perspective is by-no-means a necessary or unsurpassable development, see Johannes Hoff, *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 2013).

⁷⁰⁶ Melendez, ‘Video Pornography, Visual Pleasure, and the Return of the Sublime,’ 401 and *passim*.

⁷⁰⁷ Melendez, 424n.17. The link between the invention of pornography and the modern novel has also been commented upon, though the causal factors seem to be a bit more tenuous; cf. Lynn Hunt, ‘Introduction,’ 32-33.

⁷⁰⁸ Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle* (Lebanon: Darmouth College Press, 2006), 3

⁷⁰⁹ Beller, *The Cinematic Mode*, 6.

⁷¹⁰ Beller, 4.

enraptured in “semi-automatization” – enacted today by digital algorithms.⁷¹¹ This development was in turn predicated on tendencies within “visual modernism” that grew out of “*an already reconfigured field* of techniques and discourses about visuality and an observing subject”,⁷¹² creating a “spectacular culture” where we are “isolated, separated, and *inhabit time* as disempowered”.⁷¹³ Individualisation and atomisation become even more deeply entrenched.

This closing-down of difference, of real otherness, does not merely impact the visual representation of porn, but is clearly present within its styles of writing as well (as already suggested by Sontag). Within pornography, there is isomorphism between form and content, exemplifying what Susanne Kappeler has called “monologuization”.⁷¹⁴ We have already mentioned how pornography expresses a “totalized imagination” in which all human interactions are reduced to the sexual encounter, or how it abstracts copulation and biology from humanising culture.⁷¹⁵ In fact, as Slavoj Žižek notices, there is a zero-sum game between the presentation of the sexual act and the quality of narrative within the pornographic genre.⁷¹⁶ Since the only goal of pornography is titillation, any nuance or subtlety is deemed to detract from this intention. Pornographic writing thus repeats the already-mentioned tendency towards a certain monism of expression; a collapsing of erotic nuance and subtlety into the instrumentalising tropes of orgasm.⁷¹⁷ This is clearly visible in its overly reductive and trivialised forms of sexual communication, found both in its literary and cinematic instances. The large sway of consumed pornography, especially “gonzo”,⁷¹⁸ tends towards heavily monotonous and philistine modes of linguistic interaction. And even at the level of more developed literary taste (e.g., Norman Mailer, Philip Roth, John Updike), the permeation

⁷¹¹ Beller, 8.

⁷¹² Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1999), 6.

⁷¹³ Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, 3.

⁷¹⁴ Sontag, *The Pornography of Representation*, 189.

⁷¹⁵ Cf. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, ‘Truth and the Obscene Word in Eighteenth Century French Pornography,’ in Linda Hunt, ed., *The Invention of Pornography*, 202-221. Mazur argues (pp. 213ff.) that pornographic language repeats the ‘dualism’ between body and soul since it presupposes an equation of obscene rhetoric with the ‘truth,’ one that is in turn predicated on a bifurcation between the facts of sexual description and the valuations of culture, especially in regards to the feelings of love (p. 213). Indeed, as Bruno Latour argues, it is precisely the unworkable separation of nature from culture which one of the founding constitutions of modernity; see Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). This is comparable to Griffin’s description of “the metaphysics of pornography,” insofar as maleness is associated with the operations of mind/spirit and femininity with materiality/nature; *Pornography and Silence*, 13-14.

⁷¹⁶ Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, 226.

⁷¹⁷ For a philosophical critique of orgasm-centred accounts of sexuality, see Ann Van Sevenant, *Sexual Outercourse: A Philosophy of Lovemaking* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005).

⁷¹⁸ Gail Dines, *Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010); Chris Hedges, *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle* (New York: Nation Books, 2009), 55-87.

of pornographic styles of communication has contributed towards forms of sexual description that are often virtually indistinguishable from the constrained lexicons of porn.⁷¹⁹

In this section, my main concern has been to trace, in a cursory fashion, a genealogy of pornographic consciousness as a form that modernity has taken, thereby contesting “the underlying assumptions which make the pornographic practice of representation “natural”.”⁷²⁰ But this approach would be theologically limited if it was not cognizant of a deeper alienation; the problem of disordered desire. Christian theology reads this miseducation of desire as a product of the Fall, and that while modern technology and representation may have some role to play, sin is the more perennial impetus for all this, including the pornographic imagination and the often-inhumane politics that develop in its wake. This is a deeper aporia, and so without the continuing therapy of desire, our misplacement and miseducation of longing will only continue. This is concern of the final section of this essay.

IV

A waking, as in images we awake,

Within the very object that we seek,

*Participants of its being*⁷²¹

What alternative is there to the regime of the image thus far described? How might we counteract its miseducation of desire? Clearly, the problems are complex and cannot be tackled from only one vantage point. But in what follows, I would like to sketch an alternative metaphysics of desire and the image, a Christian metaphysics that is capaciously patristic and Augustinian in scope. Since it would be overly-ambitious and unfeasible to deal with the whole tradition surrounding this question, I have narrowed by focus on Rowan Williams, who has provided cogent and intelligent expositions of this tradition. I have done this, for, in addition to being a gifted and voluminous theological thinker, Williams is also a noted patristic scholar – particularly of Origen, the Arian Controversy, and the Augustinian corpus. His work on Augustine has been widely influential, as seen in its reception among scholars of Augustine.⁷²² Moreover, my choice is motivated by my familiarity with this work, and his attempts to relate this tradition to questions of human desiring and sexuality. Explicit treatments of the theme of pornography as such are rare in his publications, but there is enough in his discussions of selfhood and desire to suggest a theological path that

⁷¹⁹ George Steiner, ‘Eros and Idiom,’ in *Difficulty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 95-136.

⁷²⁰ Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation*, 220.

⁷²¹ Wallace Stevens, ‘Study of Images I,’ in *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 1984), 404.

⁷²² The body of writings on Augustine can be found, along with responses to the critical responses to his work in *On Augustine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

might be taken. Echoing the patristic analysis of the passions,⁷²³ and Augustine's theory of desire, Williams puts forward a spiritually purgative account of desire that brings out the specifically relational and non-egotistic trajectory of this tradition. It emphasises the way in which the spiritual cultivation of desire, grounded in a Christological and Trinitarian vision, ultimately de-centres any conceit of self-grounding or self-referential personhood, apart from the irreducible relationality of the self.⁷²⁴ It is also an embodied and incarnational account, situated in a broader soteriological narrative; as he says, "what Christ delivers us from is not bodily circumstance, contingency, or instability ... but from the habits of mind and heart that that make of this environment only a theatre for our private obsessions to be staged and our lust for control to be exercised".⁷²⁵ The implications for this sexuality and pornography are probably already clear.

The Augustinian theory of desire is linked to the Platonic ascent of the soul towards the Good and the Beautiful, even as Augustine thoroughly transformed this tradition via Christian, Neoplatonic, and Stoic proclivities.⁷²⁶ Plato is often criticised for his spiritual denigration of the physical, but scholarship has now shown (to some extent) that this is a caricature of Plato and can longer be accepted *tout court*. Contemporary research has made clear that sensibility remains irreducibly important for the Platonic intuition of the *eidē* (ideas) and furthermore that any radical separation of the Forms from their physical appearance remains unsustainable within the Platonic corpus.⁷²⁷ We come to know the Beautiful and the Good precisely through their tangible exemplars, and it is through these physical triggers and sensations that we experience an *anamnesis* (recollection) of the Forms. This process of recollection is not a static or simplistic reproduction

⁷²³ As famously done in the *Praktikos* of Evagrius Ponticus; see Rowan Williams, "The Embodied Logos: Reason, Knowledge, and Relation", in *Looking East in Winter: Contemporary Thought and the Eastern Christian Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 59-92.

⁷²⁴ Khegan M. Delpont, 'Interior intimo meo: Rowan Williams on the Self.' *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 4 (2018): 471-504; Delpont, 'The Self in Fragments: Rowan Williams's Tragicomic Augustinianism.' *Journal of Anglican Studies* 19, no. 1 (2021): 98-115.

⁷²⁵ Rowan Williams, " 'Tempted as we are': Christology and the Analysis of the Passions," in *Studia Patristica* 54, eds. J. Baun, A. Cameron, M. Edward and M. Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 400-401.

⁷²⁶ Cf. Sarah Catherine Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). However, one should give notice to the critical reception of Byers's reading of Augustinian thought, insofar as it appears to make Augustine too much of a rationalist and gives insufficient place to the role that grace and love plays in Augustine's account of knowledge and the transformation of the self; see Carol Harrison, 'Doxology and Loving Knowledge in Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* Book 1.' *Journal of Religion & Society*, Supplement 15 (2018): 138-156.

⁷²⁷ See C. J. De Vogel, *Rethinking Plato and Platonism* (Leiden: Brill, 1986); Eric D. Perl, 'The Living Image: Form and the Erotic Intellect in Plato.' *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 69 (1995): 191-204; Perl, *Thinking Being: Introduction to Metaphysics in the Classical Tradition* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 19-71. Also cf. Charles H. Kahn, 'Plato's Theory of Desire.' *The Review of Metaphysics* 41, no. 1 (1987): 77-103; Catherine Osbourne, *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 86-116; Seth Benardete, *Socrates and Plato: The Dialectic of Eros* (München: Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung, 2002).

of “the same” but rather an eschatological remembering-forward (as Chrétien suggested).⁷²⁸ Augustine is similarly disparaged, within a post-Kantian ambit, for his enjoyment-use distinction (*frui* and *uti*), which he also connects in *De doctrina christiana* to the thing-sign distinction (*res* and *signum*), as he lays out early in Book I.⁷²⁹ For Augustine, God as Trinity is the transcendent and infinite *res* (entity) towards which all things are related, and so every created entity is to be “used,” rather than “enjoyed” or treated as a kind of finality unto itself. Only God can be “enjoyed” for his own sake. For as he says, “[e]njoyment, after all, consists in clinging to something lovingly for its own sake, while use consists in referring what has come your way to what your love aims at obtaining, provided, that is, it deserves to be loved”.⁷³⁰ In the end, for him, only God is worthy of such enjoyment. But indeed, this can be easily misconstrued as implying a neglect of the visible in favour of the invisible – a position that is fraught with dangers. Augustine’s theology of desire, however, has the opposite conclusion, according to Williams. Precisely because created beings should not be treated as the end of our intending, our direction is finally aimed towards that *res* that gives being to all things. The visible world is not to be denigrated, but to be read through the corporal signs of the sacraments and Holy Scripture.⁷³¹

But this means that to restrict the *telos* of desire within the immanent, that is, to treat created beings as ends unto themselves, would imply a denial of the *summum bonum* that elicits our true delight, the only worth pursuing. For to comprehend any object without its deferral and relation to the divine implies an enclosure of desire within finitude, and a disavowal of connection to God. “Enjoyment” that considers any finite other as an end, without theological dimension, means that desire can only be referred ultimately to finite ends. But since desire cannot come to its own end and satisfaction within any finite aim, because for desire to be at *an end* would literally be *the end* of desire, then persons cannot practically be treated as ends in themselves, but always-already as a “means” to some other end. For desire, it seems, is without end. This may take more benign or pathological forms, but since there is no ordering of desire here to a transcendent, unchanging goodness, then the ground for the judgement of the desirable can only be within the terrain of history and the negotiation of desires. But on this picture, the reason as to why persons should be treated as ends in themselves – with dignity, or *jus* – or why desire should be rightly ordered is rendered contingent at best and arbitrary at worst. The question as to why I should finally not

⁷²⁸ Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, trans. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 1-39.

⁷²⁹ For what follows, see Rowan Williams, ‘Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine’s *De Doctrina*,’ *Literature and Theology* 3.2 (July 1989): 138-150.

⁷³⁰ *De doctrina christiana* I.4. Translation taken from *Teaching Christianity (De Doctrina Christiana)*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (New York: New City Press, 2014).

⁷³¹ It should be added that Harrison has pointed how Augustine’s own account of love complicates the whole *res-signum* and *uti-frui* distinction; see ‘Doxology and Loving Knowledge.’

treat the other as a means towards delusory and destructive ends has no basis beyond the contingent arrangement and networking of desires, so Williams seems to imply.⁷³²

For Augustine, any restriction of the desired subject to the limits and particularities of *my own* aspirations would be exactly to deny *their own* unique directedness towards divinity, their naturally equality, their own *jus*, their status as *imago dei*, which for Augustine is always-already the *imago trinitatis*. The *imago dei*, and its tripartite structure of *memoria-intellectus-voluntas*, is tied to our ability to know, to love, and to be moved towards God, and is not thereby limited to an individuated ego.⁷³³ That we reflect the image of God is intrinsic to our createdness as finite beings, and our reflection of the Trinity is revealed when all the faculties of the soul (memory, understanding, will) have God as their true object. This is understood to be a deifying and unending progress on the part of human beings in their journey towards the beatific vision, but this is predicated on the timeless movement of God towards God through God in the *perichoresis* of Father as Paternal and Unbegotten Source, the Son as Word and Image, and the Spirit as Gift and Love. These subsistent relations between the Triune persons can be understood (as Rowan Williams suggests after John of the Cross⁷³⁴) as an infinite play of “desire” in which the Father and Son direct their love and being towards the other. But this desiring between the Lover and the Beloved is not enclosed within only a binary identity, in which the Father comes to end in the Father’s own Word and Image, but also opens itself to *the other of the other* – its desiring love, namely the Spirit. The never-ending deflection and deferral within the Trinitarian life means that the personhood of the divine is ecstatically constituted through a pouring and emptying of God into God, which then is eternally received back as gift.⁷³⁵ This dynamic relation “flows” out as a kind of exuberant excess within the *creatio ex nihilo*. To the extent that we come to a deeper awareness of this relationality, we find that God can never be an “object” or “being” amongst others, a God who is the product of wish-fulfilment. Rather, all human attempts at imaging the

⁷³² “A social practice which impedes human beings from offering themselves to God in fact denies that central impulse in human nature which Augustine defined as the unquenchable desire for God and his truth. It provides *ersatz* gratifications, finite substitutes for the infinite. As such it diminishes humanity itself, in that it takes the one principle that can rightly order our wills and affections...Where there is no *jus* towards God, there is no common sense of what is due to human beings, no *juris consensus*”; Williams, *Politics and the Soul: A Reading of The City of God*. *Milltown Studies* 19-20 (1987): 59.

⁷³³ Rowan Williams, ‘Sapientia and the Trinity: Reflections on *De Trinitate*,’ in Bernard Bruning, Mathijs Lamberigts and J. van Houtem, eds., *Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges T J van Bavel*, vol. 1 (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1990), 317-332; Williams, ‘The Paradoxes of Self-Knowledge in the *De trinitate*,’ in J. T. Lienhard, E. C. Muller and R. J. Teske, eds., *Augustine: Presbyter Factus Sum*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 121-134. Also cf. Olivier Boulnois, ‘L’image intelligible Augustin et l’origine des doctrines médiévales de l’image.’ *Archives de Philosophie* 72.2 (2009), 271-292.

⁷³⁴ Williams, ‘The Deflections of Desire: Negative Theology in Trinitarian Disclosure,’ in Oliver Davies and Denys Turner, eds., *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 115-135.

⁷³⁵ Cf. Williams, ‘Balthasar and the Trinity,’ in Edward T. Oakes and David Moss, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37-50.

divine are bracketed, overturned, or sanctified to the extent that we ourselves are transformed, every so gradually, into that divine image.

One way the trinitarian rhythm of deflective being is imaged within human life is when we refuse to capture other subjects within our privatised fantasies, but rather give space to the desire and personhood of the other, to the extent that we love them without “passion,” that is, in their own created difference and relation to God. As Williams says to truly love the other is “to love the ‘excess’ of their being”.⁷³⁶ The ego that is displaced by love and kenosis, that renounces “the myth of protected self-sufficiency”,⁷³⁷ does not however imply the annihilation of self (as in Bataille’s description). Moreover, it does *not* necessitate a “Levinasian sense of abjection before the other because this is rooted in an ontology for which there is no being-for-the-other abstracted from the pattern of *mutual* life-giving”.⁷³⁸ This is due to the fact that humanity as “the uniquely *conscious* bearer of *eros*” is that created being which “models what is in fact going on at every level of the universe’s life” in which “the conscious and intelligent agent... moves in the mode for which it was created, moves in alignment with the purpose of God, habitually echoing in finite form the infinite desire of God for God, of love for love”.⁷³⁹

But how is this desire formed into human subjects? Again, Augustine writes: “since we are meant to enjoy that which is unchangeably alive, and since it is in its light that God the Trinity, author and maker of the universe, provides for all the things he has made, our minds have to be purified, to enable them to perceive that light, and to cling to it once perceived.”⁷⁴⁰ The Christian tradition has taught that this purification is achieved through divine pedagogy: through the incarnation, the church, scripture, the sacramental mysteries, and the common liturgy of worship and discipleship. It is hereby that we enter renewed habits of thought and action, insofar as these are sanctified within the repeated patterns of ritualised liturgy and through which we are inducted into the incarnational mysteries. To invoke patristic language again, liturgy implies that the givenness of

⁷³⁶ Williams, ‘Nature, Passion and Desire: Maximus’ Ontology of Excess,’ in Markus Vincent, ed., *Studia Patristica* 58 (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 269. See the following as well: ‘Proper Christian love thus ‘dispossesses’ itself of its object in more than one sense. Not only does it seek to see and know the object without passion (without self-referential desire), it recognizes that the true being of the object is always in relation to something other than the beholder prior to the seeing or registering of this particular other by the beholder. Thus there is always some dimension of what is encountered that is in no way accessible to or at the mercy of this particular beholder. It is in acknowledging this relatedness to a third that a relation of love involving two finite subjects becomes authentic and potentially open to the universal. What is in relation to the ‘third’ is precisely what exists in and by the action of that ‘third,’ which is the nature of the subject in question, the project defined by infinite act which is now working through by its own particular mode of *eros* towards its ultimate purpose’ (Williams, 270).

⁷³⁷ Williams, ‘Nature, Passion and Desire.’ 267.

⁷³⁸ Williams, 269. The reference here is of course to Emmanuel Levinas, and his ethical vision in which the question of our moral directedness towards *the Other* should be given priority over questions of metaphysics and ontology.

⁷³⁹ Williams, 267.

⁷⁴⁰ *De doctrina christiana* I.10.

nature (*logos*) is open to transformative habits of spiritual culture (*tropos*);⁷⁴¹ and it is primarily through the regularity of worship and devotion that our perception of the world is constructed.⁷⁴² Simply put: we become what we worship. As Christoph Schneider says, “[i]t is the beauty of the liturgy which evokes our desire to appropriate the salvific divine will as expressed in the life of Christ”.⁷⁴³ It is through the process of the appropriation of the divine symbols, as expressed primarily through the Eucharist, that we are anagogically drawn into the mysteries of salvation. Our habitual immersion within the cycles and physical movements of worship, and the ritual awakening and deepening of the senses through material practices (such as baptism, the Eucharist, the physical actions of prayer, the adoration of icons, processions, etc.), transforms our interaction with the world itself. As in the transubstantiation of the bread and wine, the material world *itself* is shown to be a sign and image of the eternal act of self-donation. In fact, the usual distinction between image and reality is complicated here because, like art that is able to reveal the “truth” of its object, the excessive *more* that is contained within the object itself,⁷⁴⁴ we could say (under the circumstances of liturgical enactment) that the image comes to be more “real” than the “original”.⁷⁴⁵ That we are the image of God is the truth about ourselves; the Body and Blood of Christ is the truth of the bread and wine. Reality itself, like a Neoplatonist theory of vision,⁷⁴⁶ is an image that reflects, in ever-deepening levels of metaphysical simplicity, the divine mystery in which the entire cosmos lives, moves, and has its being (Acts 17.28). Liturgy spills out into our daily modes of living, slowly converting our emotions and affects, teaching us to read divine symbols, and educating us into the synaesthesia of divine beauty.⁷⁴⁷ This is shown, for example, in the rituals of daily prayer, especially of the contemplative variety, in which silence and the interruption of the normal “flow” of thought succession open us to the “renewing” of mental capacities and the

⁷⁴¹ Christoph Schneider, 'The Transformation of Eros: Reflections on Desire in Jacques Lacan,' in Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider, (eds.), *Encounter between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy. Transfiguring the World Through the Word* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 271-289.

⁷⁴² Catherine Pickstock, 'The Ritual Birth of Sense,' *Telos* 162 (Spring 2013): 29-55.

⁷⁴³ Schneider, 'The Transformation of Eros,' 282.

⁷⁴⁴ Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005).

⁷⁴⁵ Catherine Pickstock, 'Sense and Sacrament,' in Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 657-674.

⁷⁴⁶ E. H. Gombrich, 'Icones Symbolicae: The Visual Image in Neo-Platonic Thought,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 11 (1948): 163-192. Also cf. Douglas Hedley, *The Iconic Imagination* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 119-148.

⁷⁴⁷ Graham Ward, 'Affect: Towards a Theology of Experience,' *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics* 1, no. 1-2 (2012): 55-80; Ward, 'Salvation: The Pedagogy of Affect,' *Nederduits Gereformeerde Tydskrif* Supplement 1 (2014): 999-1013. Also cf. Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne Davenport (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

affective sensorium (Romans 12.2), aligning them, gradually and painstakingly, with the will and desire of the triune God within us.⁷⁴⁸

As of yet I have not much focused on the implications of this broadly Augustinian account for sexuality and the pornographic. Throughout, I have been suggesting that the sacred pedagogy of the erotic is connected to the broader metaphysical question of pornography, because desire is central to the moral reformation of the subject.⁷⁴⁹ A Christian account of sexual desire will therefore have to include it within its soteriological compass. As Rowan Williams argued in his justly famous essay “The Body’s Grace”,⁷⁵⁰ sexual desire is entwined with a certain way of *seeing* and *being-seen*. It is a reflection within the interpersonal of what is primarily a metaphysical act of grace, in which human beings (in their very limited and created materiality) are viewed as a source of joy. But since we are finite and dependent beings, our relational interactions can only occur within the “intercourse” of culture and language; and this is the only place where self-communication (sexual and otherwise) can have any meaning. But this implies that our intentions and desires are shared within the reciprocal interactions of linguistic and embodied agents, with all the enticements and risks this entails. It implies making my meanings *vulnerable* and subject to the claims and perceptions of the desired other, making my joy *dependent* upon their own enjoyment. In fact, these movements become so interlocked that “To desire my joy is to desire the joy of the one I desire”.⁷⁵¹ Furthermore, the unfolding discovery of “the desire of the other” cannot be a punctiliar, even though individual occurrences can arouse us to such a quest. Instead, it involves time-taking,⁷⁵² an openness to the continuous and “spontaneous exposures” that the sexual encounter brings with it.⁷⁵³ To refuse the otherness of the beloved’s desire is refuse such an exposure and is intimately implicated with the pressure to keep the “other distant and controlled”.⁷⁵⁴ It is this pressure that manifests itself within the field of the pornographic.

The earlier discussion of Sontag argued that the pornographic imaginary is manifest in recognisable structures and styles that enclose the nuance of sexual engagement within a specific regime of representation: a “total imagination.” As I have argued, pornography seeks to control, contain, and

⁷⁴⁸ Cf. Sarah Coakley, ‘Living into the Mystery of the Holy Trinity: Trinity, Prayer, and Sexuality,’ *Anglican Theological Review* 80 (1998): 223-232. Also cf. Williams, ‘The Deflections of Desire’ on John of the Cross.

⁷⁴⁹ Ethical theories, within trajectories of manual Thomism and post-Kantianism have often elided this factor. I have been implicitly claiming, along with others, that Kantian deontology, without eudaemonistic allure, is insufficient on its own. Moreover, Kantian ethics had already been deconstructed and appropriated by the likes of Sade, as famously pointed out by Lacan. This suggests an instability in this tradition, which at the very least will require supplementation to be morally sufficient; cf. Jacques Lacan “Kant with Sade,” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink et al (New York: Norton, 2006), 645–668.

⁷⁵⁰ Williams, ‘The Body’s Grace’ [1989], in Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., ed., *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 309-321.

⁷⁵¹ Williams, ‘The Body’s Grace,’ 313.

⁷⁵² Williams, 315.

⁷⁵³ Williams, 314.

⁷⁵⁴ Williams, 316.

restrict the other. In its distorted framing however, it is still reaching for something it desires to be real, some good which may provide satisfaction. Echoing Bataille, it desires “the concrete totality of the real”.⁷⁵⁵ It thus proposes that through its imaginary, we encounter something real and true. This is a basic conceit: that through graphic depictions and realistic representation of sexual encounters, we engage what one might call *the fantasy of the real*. It claims to reveal the truth of the human, as Foucault noted regarding the modern regime of sex and knowledge.⁷⁵⁶ Following the language of Roger Scruton, the pornographic imagination indeed aims for “a perfect simulacrum,” to represent something of the world as it *is*. This is one of its allures, to form an idealised substitute for the absent but real object. However, in a strange inversion, this attempt to leave “nothing to the imagination” is what makes pornography profoundly unrealistic.⁷⁵⁷ It aims for the realisation of fantasy but ends in a deadening simulation; it fastidiously depicts the interactions of bodies, but simultaneously labours in abstraction, reification, and mechanisation; it reaches for the actual but prioritizes the virtual. It advertises novelty and transgression, but results in boredom and homogeneity. It is motivated by desire for connection, but often tragically ends in isolation. The vitality of the erotic is transformed into the necrophilia of the pornographic. This is characteristic of its pathology and self-deceit; and all these trajectories and strange reversals hint that there is a distorted metaphysics at work, a tragic one, which negatively attests, I argue, to *the truth of sacramental*. For our attempts to latch onto an unmediated reality always end in a parody of the real. Pornography is a parasitic simulation of the real, a perversion of sacrament. The sacramental or iconic imagination, however, intimates that nothing can be approached immediately, but only obliquely through the mediation of image, word, and sacrament, of bread and wine, and that it is only through these that we approach the “hyperreality” of the Body and Blood of Christ: the resurrection under the signature of the cross. The sacraments ground the virtual within the actual and the entanglement of meaning with materiality. In contrast to the digital consumption of bodies through pornography, it is through sacramental dispersal that we are incorporated into the mystic body, and we become what we consume.

The trajectory of the pornographic is partially traceable to the imbalances and aporias of modernity, being connected to the secularisation of late capitalist societies and regimes of representation, as argued above. If this analysis is correct, namely that they are linked, then a Christian resistance to pornography cannot simply bring action upon a diseased symptom but must reach towards larger questions of collective desiring and social imaginaries. As hopefully has become clear, these issues are deeply connected to the miseducation of desire and affect that continues within the domain of digital capitalism and attention economies. An alternative, theological vision will therefore have to be holistic, and not mimic the reductionism of the pornographic. I wager that it will require an expansive vision of divine pedagogy, a Christological

⁷⁵⁵ Bataille, ““The Object of Desire and the Totality of the Real,” 268.

⁷⁵⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1998).

⁷⁵⁷ Roger Scruton, ‘Fantasy, Imagination, and the Screen.’ *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 19, no. 1 (1983): 35-46.

and sacramental therapy that corresponds, in words of Geoffrey Hill, to a “density of being; of otherness” of “Eros alone, rightly understood,” a vision in which Christ’s “blood / Realigns with ours; his casual largess / Practically acquired; of us apart / And part of us; as philosophical / Logic for the utterly naked soul; / Disorder’s foil to some well-measured art”.⁷⁵⁸

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⁷⁵⁸ Geoffrey Hill, 'Al Tempo de' Tremuoti,' in *Broken Hierarchies*, 930.

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If appearances count for anything, then one may defensibly argue that contemporary Western cultures appear to largely nurture (and perhaps have always nurtured) hard-hearted unforgiveness, valuing and promoting instead upmanship, self-aggrandisement, and other-depreciation or -pejoration over restorative reconciliation in interpersonal relationships. If this is so, contemporary Western cultures may be characterised as generally unloving since consummate and exclusive concern for self at the expense of the other(s) does not foster love but rather flies directly in the face of, for example, the Book of Proverbs, chapter 17, verse 9: 'Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends.'⁷⁵⁹ However, keeping with one of the focal themes of hope explicated throughout the present issue, it is worth attending to other facets of Western culture writ large so as to not prematurely and heavy-handedly (or, more suitably, heavy-mindedly) conclude such a bleak and desolate landscape and that all is very truly lost and hopeless. Indeed, in his recent book, *Love's Forgiveness: Kierkegaard, Resentment, Humility, and Hope*, John Lippitt undertakes a determined investigation within one small facet of Western culture, an under-explored area of Kierkegaard studies—the Danish philosopher-cum-theologian's account of forgiveness—to argue the case for understanding forgiveness as a 'work of love,' which, just as such, necessarily entails the task of hope. This review, therefore, examines Lippitt's undertaking to explore the ever-timely and ever-important topic of the interrelations between hopeful/lessness, un/forgiveness, and un/lovingness.

Drawing upon a range of contemporary literature as well as theological and philosophical analysis in addition to Kierkegaard's own writings, Lippitt presents the case for grasping forgiveness as a 'work of love' across nine chapters. Chapter 1 traces several definitional questions to outline an

⁷⁵⁹ Prov. 17:9.



ontology of 'forgiveness' in which the latter concept involves a supersession of resentment or feelings of deep indignation and bitterness arising from an injustice toward a state of restitution. In Chapter 2, Lippitt further refines his conception of forgiveness by engaging questions of what places one in the position to forgive and, alternately, to be forgiven, as well as exploring matters of conditional versus unconditional forgiveness. In Chapter 3, Lippitt provides an overview of Kierkegaard's commentary on forgiveness as well as broaches biblical treatments of this expansive issue. Lippitt pays special attention here to Kierkegaard's contemplations of the connection between the divine forgiveness of sins (as contained in scripture) and interpersonal forgiveness as well as detailing a Kierkegaardian philosophy of love in which humility, hope, and justice figure prominently. Thereupon, Lippitt offers interpersonal forgiveness as a 'work of love' in the distinctive sense in which Kierkegaard recruits that phrase.⁷⁶⁰ Chapter 4 builds from this initial argument to galvanise Lippitt's understanding of interpersonal forgiveness as a work of love against criticisms that his view fails to accommodate biblical, agapeic love, on the one hand, and a proper concern for justice, on the other. Chapters 5 and 6 continue this defence by relating forgiveness as a work of love to accounts of forgiveness expressly found in the Old and New Testaments as well as contemporary philosophical work on forgiveness, respectively. In turn, Chapters 7 and 8 individually elaborate the ways in which humility and hope subserve one's 'forgivingness' as it is directed toward others. Conversely, the concluding Chapter 9 turns from interpersonal forgiveness to the context of self-forgiveness to offer what Lippitt regards as a morally admirable (i.e., as opposed to morally culpable) form of one being able to forgive oneself.

Overall, Lippitt's book offers a well-researched argument comprising a sensible integration of Kierkegaard's thought with contemporary philosophical and theological scholarship. One notable commendation is Lippitt's compelling exposition of forgiveness, in the mode of expressing hope for another (e.g., an offending party in a given case of wrong-doing), as a genuine Kierkegaardian work of love, as clearly articulated in Kierkegaard's claim that 'love, which is greater than faith and hope [i.e., in themselves], also takes upon itself the work of hope, or takes upon itself hope, hoping for others, as a work.'⁷⁶¹

Despite Lippitt's otherwise exacting analysis, however, the effort to exposit the relationship between hope, forgiveness, and love (largely carried out in Chapter 8) would have benefitted from greater consideration of despair as the converse of hope. To be sure, giving credit where credit is due, Lippitt does stipulate that '[t]his is not the place for a lengthy discussion of Kierkegaardian despair—investigated many times before, far more commonly than Kierkegaardian hope—but in general I...[share the view]...that despair is at root the unwillingness to hope' (191). Lippitt is not wrong, and the Kierkegaard studies literature is indeed replete with analyses of despair. Be that as

⁷⁶⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁷⁶¹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 248. Cf. 1 Cor. 13:13.

it may, despair is not merely tangential to Lippitt's attempt to bridge the concepts of hope, forgiveness, and love. In fact, Lippitt may be seen to tacitly acknowledge the pertinence of despair for this aspect of his overall project. That is, Lippitt expends some effort to rebut prospective criticisms that his use of non-theistic philosophy to illustrate Kierkegaardian hope may fail insofar as it does not satisfactorily account for Kierkegaard's recurrent distinctions between 'secular,' 'mundane,' 'earthly,' or 'temporal' hope on the one hand, and 'religious,' 'eschatological,' or 'eternal' hope on the other. The rebuttal culminates in Lippitt stressing that the hope which he positively commends is not merely what Kierkegaard decries as the hope for 'something particular,' 'a hope that is not hope at all,' a fickle wish, 'a longing expectation now of one thing, now of another,' but rather an open-ended hoping for all things.⁷⁶² Having earlier invoked Kierkegaard to the effect that to hope all things is to, in Kierkegaard's words, 'give up on no human being, since to give up on him is to give up on your love for him', Lippitt writes, '[t]o lovingly hope for others is to remain open to the possibility of the good in their lives;' and here significantly disclosing recognition of the centrality of despair to his treatment of hope, forgiveness, and love, 'never to despair over them' (203–4).⁷⁶³ To this it may be additionally noted that Lippitt's early discussion of conditional and unconditional forgiveness in Chapter 2 does not contain a more extensive consideration of despair. Nor, be it further noted, is despair more extensively discussed in the concluding chapter in which Lippitt contemplates self-forgiveness, despite despair being fundamental to Kierkegaardian selfhood. Taken together, then, these salient absences substantiate the point that Lippitt's work would have been strengthened by a more concerted effort to articulate how the converse of hope—Kierkegaardian despair—impacts on the interrelationship of hope, forgiveness, and love.

This principal omission notwithstanding, however, with *Love's Forgiveness*, Lippitt offers an informative, honest, insightful, and well-argued work. Lippitt eloquently provides readers with a valuable point of entry or elaboration for those wishing to explore the diverse and multi-layered theological, psychological, and philosophical debates which the topic of forgiveness ushers forth.

⁷⁶² Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 250.

⁷⁶³ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 255. It is worth highlighting that the closest Lippitt gets to penetrating further into the ways in which despair impacts upon hope, forgiveness, and love is to observe in two footnotes that 'Kierkegaard claims that hope for others and hope for oneself are inextricably linked' (e.g., Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 259–60; 197n34). Further, recalling Kierkegaard's petition to never give up on another, Lippitt specifies that '[t]his 'giving up on' is presented [by Kierkegaard] as a manifestation of despair: presumably akin to what *The Sickness Unto Death* presents as the despair that 'lacks possibility' [Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 37–42.]...[g]iving up hope for another person is...said to be a 'dishonor,' which—unlike hope—puts a person 'to shame' [Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 262]' (198n41).

Review of Todd LeVasseur and Anna Peterson (eds.), *Religion and the Ecological Crisis: The 'Lynn White Thesis' at Fifty* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

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Lynn White Jr.'s 1967 seminal paper 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis' (henceforth, 'Roots'), published in *Science*, was catalytic in initiating and shaping new disciplines such as, ecotheology (now commonly called religion and ecology), environmental ethics, ecophilosophy, and environmental history, as well as American environmentalism as a social and intellectual movement.⁷⁶⁴ Fifty-five years later, a Google Scholar search shows that it has been cited 8,779 times from the time of publication and continues to be cited to the present day.⁷⁶⁵ 'Roots' has inspired many scholarly ventures including over 700 pieces of scholarship addressing the role (if any) that religious ideas have in shaping human perception of the environment and their behaviour towards it.⁷⁶⁶ It has also been instrumental in the origination of scholarly journals such as the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* and its predecessor, *Ecotheology: The Journal of Religion, Nature and Environment*.⁷⁶⁷ Its impact and influence on the environmental humanities, although heavily critiqued, cannot be denied.

Thus, in 2017, to honour the golden anniversary (fifty years since its first publication), as a celebration and critical reflection of this influential five-page thesis, *Religion and the Ecological Crisis: The 'Lynn White Thesis' at Fifty* (henceforth *LYT50*) was published. *LYT50* is an interdisciplinary (due to the impact 'Roots' has had on a variety of disciplines) collection of essays by leading scholars

⁷⁶⁴ Elspeth Whitney. "Lynn White Jr.'s 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis' After 50 Years," *History Compass* 13, no. 8 (2015), 396. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12254>

⁷⁶⁵ This figure is taken from a Google Scholar search on 11 September 2022. There are multiple entries for 'Roots' and so this number may underestimate the actual number of citations.

⁷⁶⁶ Bron Taylor, Gretel Van Wieren, and Bernard Daley Zaleha. "Lynn White Jr. and the Greening-of-Religion Hypothesis." *Conservation Biology*, 30, no. 5 (2016), 308. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.12735>

⁷⁶⁷ Todd LeVasseur and Anna Peterson, eds., *Religion and Ecological Crisis: The "Lynn White Thesis" at Fifty* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 97.



that contemplates upon and reassess White and his ecological thesis. Todd LeVasseur and Anna Peterson, the editors of this collection, also remind us that an equally important reason for the publication of *LYT50* is that, to their frustration and sadness, the environmental crises that helped instigate White's article half a century earlier are still very much with us today.⁷⁶⁸

LeVasseur and Peterson open with an analogy that illustrates the importance of 'Roots' in the last 50 years, saying it "has become the foundation, jumping-off point, and lodestar for countless academic endeavours and even a new subdiscipline or two."⁷⁶⁹ They go on to summarise it, distilling three claims that they believe have prompted the ongoing discourse and discussion. In short:

First, [White] argues that ideological and cultural factors, especially religion, are the root causes of the "ecologic crisis" facing contemporary humans.

Second, he identifies Western Christianity as particularly influential in creating environmentally destructive attitudes.

Third, he suggests that, just as the fundamental causes of ecological destruction are religious, so too must their solution be religious.

The controversial nature of these claims has led many commentators to highlight one or more of these themes, depending on their own background, academic field, and goals, lighting the lamps of many new sub-disciplines.

LeVasseur and Peterson also outline a pair of later essays, "Continuing the Conversation" (1973) and "The Future of Compassion" (1978), in which White responds to the critique received. Both reiterated and expanded the main arguments found in 'Roots.' A sample of the critique White's thesis received is presented from religious studies, theology, history, and natural and social science scholars on issues ranging from the particulars of his critique of Christian anthropocentrism to the broader claim about the significance of ideas in shaping environmental behaviour; the accuracy of his analysis of Medieval Europe; and the legitimacy of his comparison between Asian and Western environmental attitudes, to name but a few.

The collection of essays that follows are written by leading scholars within the environmental humanities who were asked "not only to reflect upon any enduring significance of 'Roots' but also to explain how it may have helped influence their own academic fields and their trajectories as scholars interested in human-nature interactions."⁷⁷⁰ Many of these scholars also re-evaluated White's claims, which has made *LYT50* a constructive critique of his arguments from a diverse and

⁷⁶⁸ LeVasseur and Peterson, *Religion and Ecological Crisis*, 10.

⁷⁶⁹ LeVasseur and Peterson, 1.

⁷⁷⁰ LeVasseur and Peterson, 11.

wide range of perspectives that are useful as an introductory text for the environmental humanities rather than just a celebration of White's intellectual legacy.

The first chapter by Elspeth Witney, 'Lynn White Jr.'s "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" after Fifty Years' provides a broad and constructive sample of the reception White's article has received across disciplines and contextualises him as a medieval historian assessing the impact that 'Roots' and his more scholarly work had both within his discipline and externally. Witney concludes by saying that although White was an 'excellent historian,' 'Roots' was a profoundly ahistorical exposé, more sermon than scholarship, that impelled much response. Its persistent hold to this current day infers that "White had tapped into a reservoir of deeply held but unresolved cultural issues about the roots of the environmental damage."⁷⁷¹

The next contribution, 'The Historical Roots of Environmental Philosophy' depicts the influence 'Roots' has had on initiating the field of environmental philosophy. Eminent environmental ethicist J. Baird Callicott provides a first-hand account of the progression of the field and a summary of his reflections after half a century of professional engagement. He reassesses 'Roots' underlying and much-repeated assumption, that it is ideas that drive behaviour or "What we do about our ecology depends on how we think about it."⁷⁷² Which he says, in the light of contemporary understanding, is "laughable."⁷⁷³ Callicott ends by appealing to philosophers, particularly environmental philosophers, to, firstly, think about and rethink the nature of nature, human nature, and the relationship between humans and nature and, secondly, to see it as just one small (albeit vital) piece of the environmental crisis puzzle alongside other disciplines.

Environmental historian, Mark Stoll, in 'Sinners in the Hands of an Ecologic Crisis: Lynn White's Environmental Jeremiad' explores the wide range of reactions that 'Roots' triggered amongst religious scholars and thinkers in America. The response was triumvirate; apologetic, denial, and greening. Stoll argues that it was not "doctrines of dominion, anthropocentrism, arrogance, or a Weberian disenchantment of nature" that led to the exploitation of nature but paradoxically "ideals of social justice and stewardship."⁷⁷⁴ Stoll concludes with an appeal to lay aside 'Roots' and "look to historical societies for those moral, social, and ecological principles that in the past have nurtured justice and sustainability."⁷⁷⁵

Michael Northcott's chapter, 'Lynn White Jr. Right and Wrong: The Anti-Ecological Character of Latin Christianity and the Pro-Ecological Turn of Protestantism' also takes a historical approach to re-count the environmental movement. He argues that White's thesis failed to recognise the

⁷⁷¹ LeVasseur and Peterson, 28.

⁷⁷² LeVasseur and Peterson, 36.

⁷⁷³ LeVasseur and Peterson, 44.

⁷⁷⁴ LeVasseur and Peterson, 50.

⁷⁷⁵ LeVasseur and Peterson, 58.

Protestant contribution to the twentieth-century environmental movement and this omission has led to an over-generalisation attributing the burden of guilt to all of Latin Christianity and particularly an oversight of Presbyterianism which, “had within it the seeds of a different trajectory.”⁷⁷⁶

Taking an anthropological perspective, Shepard Krech III in ‘Animism and Reincarnation: Lynn White in Indian Country,’ draws on Native American culture to reflect on the ecological integrity of animism that White claims was destroyed by Christianity. Krech argues that aspects of indigenous culture such as reincarnation and its dietary preference and treatment of Buffalo puts into question the extent to which indigenous peoples were called to protect the natural world.

In the next chapter, ‘Lynn White Jr., One Catalyst in the Historical Development of Spiritual Ecology,’ Leslie Sponsel illustrates how White was a forerunner in ecotheology and the heavy criticism of ‘Roots’ is often due to superficial reading. She argues that White’s thesis, through its enduring analysis and critique, catalysed the emergence of ‘spiritual ecology,’ which differs from the emphasis on religion found in ‘Roots’. For Sponsel, “the spiritual often drives the others, but is the least researched” and, in spiritual ecology, the environmental crisis expresses a plethora of varied environmental issues from the local to the global levels.⁷⁷⁷ She concludes by recognising the limitations as well as the validity of White’s argument and acknowledges White as a highly respected historian in his time and for making history through catalysing new sub-fields and significant discussion exploring the relationship between religion and the environment.

The Evangelist philosopher, Christopher Cone, in ‘Continuing the Conversation: Applying Lynn White Jr.’s Prescriptions for a Christian Environmental Ethic’, reassess both the traditional dominionist interpretation and stewardship interpretation, calling them “exegetically deficient and inadequate for answering White’s critique.”⁷⁷⁸ Instead, he proposes an alternative interpretation; redacted dominionism, “which asserts that human relations to nature are based on theocentric rather than anthropocentric themes, and that the dominion mandate was redacted as the Genesis narrative progressed.”⁷⁷⁹ He ends by noting that redacted dominionism, although a minority interpretation, is certainly plausible and could be a useful and less controversial means to achieve White’s proposition of a transformation within Christianity itself, to recover and put into practice less destructive attitudes.

Christopher Key Chapple reviews ‘Roots’ from the perspective of Asian religions (specifically Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism). In ‘Lynn White Jr. and India: Romance? Reality?’ he argues that “White romanticized, and perhaps Orientalized and exoticized, Asian culture” due to the limited

⁷⁷⁶ LeVasseur and Peterson, 72.

⁷⁷⁷ LeVasseur and Peterson, 97.

⁷⁷⁸ LeVasseur and Peterson, 103.

⁷⁷⁹ LeVasseur and Peterson, 103.

information available at the time.⁷⁸⁰ He offers some reflections of how Asian ideas and practices have nonetheless inspired a deeper awareness to the human condition through an array of now mainstream disciplines and practices.

In 'The Challenges of Worldview Transformation: "To Rethink and Refeel Our Origins and Destiny",' Heather Eaton provides a positive appraisal of 'Roots,' agreeing with White by positing that "a fundamental collective rethinking, worldview evaluation, and cultural reorientation are necessary."⁷⁸¹ Eaton samples the theory surrounding 'worldviews' and asserts that "the shift from one worldview to another is neither straightforward nor well understood, especially at a societal level," however, the increase in ecological deterioration since 'Roots' calls for a "counter reaction" that "cultivates a global ecological democracy" akin to Thomas Berry's response to this challenge.⁷⁸²

Chaone Mallory's ecofeminist critique, 'Gender and Genesis: Religion, Secular Science, and the Project of Power and Control,' puts 'Roots' into conversation with Carolyn Merchant's pioneering work *The Death of Nature* (1980). Whilst she praises White's meta-concern, she argues that "his gendered scholarly assumptions miss very important forces," namely how patriarchal attitudes of domination, dominion, power, and control have oppressed and continue to oppress *both* women and nature.⁷⁸³ She ends by paraphrasing White: "as the roots of our trouble are so largely gendered, the solution must be gendered too."⁷⁸⁴

Paul Waldau's essay, 'A Lens, a Path, a Return Journey—Lynn White and the Question of Animal Protection' argues that current awareness of animal protection was much more than half a century ago, thus White's statements on such issues (especially in his later writings) which quite forcefully disseminates the idea that Christians need to acknowledge a "democracy of all God's creatures" are essential today as we continue to learn about our own species' engagement with ourselves and the other-than-human citizens of the world around us.⁷⁸⁵

'What's Left (Out) of the Lynn White Narrative?,' the penultimate contribution by Whitney Bauman, is a critique on 'narrative' in general and how White (a white, male, Protestant, academic, historian) perhaps privileged a certain type of understanding of 'religion' and 'ecology/nature,' which was dominant in academia at that time. Bauman proceeds by exploring three other 'religion and ecology/nature' narratives unrelated to White, using archipelagic, post-colonial, and queer or new materialist approaches. He concludes by suggesting a pre-made solution that traditional

⁷⁸⁰ LeVasseur and Peterson, 118.

⁷⁸¹ LeVasseur and Peterson, 124.

⁷⁸² LeVasseur and Peterson, 126, 131.

⁷⁸³ LeVasseur and Peterson, 144.

⁷⁸⁴ LeVasseur and Peterson, 145.

⁷⁸⁵ Matthew T. Riley. "A Spiritual Democracy of All God's Creatures: Ecotheology and the Animals of Lynn White Jr" In *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology*, ed. Stephen Moore (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 242.

narratives suggest is the opposite to what is required and rather to resist creating the world in our own image “we need to begin to live differently toward possibilities that understand other earth-creatures as partners in this process of world-making.”⁷⁸⁶

Last, but by no means least, William Jordan III's essay, ‘Therefore the Winds: Some Thoughts on the “Roots,”’ assesses the idea of value in ‘Roots’ with literary critic Frederick Turner’s theory of values that links shame, ritual, and the experience of beauty as the highest level of our understanding. Jordan posits that the abandonment of ritual was the key anti-ecological shift and to restore our ecology the solution lies in creating new rituals to negotiate the human-nature relationship.⁷⁸⁷

Taken together, *LYT50* contains within its pages a wide range of disciplinary perspectives and insights from leading scholars. ‘Roots,’ and White’s thesis in general, has been widely critiqued; it has also been championed for initiating many new subfields, a deeper enquiry into the religious and metaphysical root causes of the ecological crisis, and the human relationship with nature. It has further been criticised for creating a narrative too simplistic for such a complex issue and for excluding grand narratives such as gender, colonialism, ritual and power. However, in both regards, it has paved the way for enhanced and more nuanced scholarship and understanding.

The multi-disciplinary approach taken in *LYT50* offers a gateway into varied perspectives of several important debates within the ‘environmental crisis’ landscape. In this regard, *LYT50* is a rich resource for scholarship in both the environmental humanities and environmental social sciences.

Although *LYT50* offers many reflective insights into the roots of the ecological crisis and White’s influence on the emerging fields, as LeVasseur and Peterson stated in their introduction, it is a miserable situation and, more than half a century after the publication of ‘Roots,’ the environmental crisis is perhaps worse now than it was when White penned his work.

Future scholarship has the opportunity to move beyond White’s thesis and advance and test new theories about the human-nature relationship and how we can live in harmony and balance with and within our environment, and to recognise other earth-creatures and biosystems as partners in our narratives. As Bauman concluded in his essay, “we can’t possibly know what this will look like until we start doing it” however an inter-disciplinary approach can offer more holistic perspectives of this complex and interconnected issue.⁷⁸⁸ And, perhaps, deeper commune in nature, akin to the Romantics practice of walking, would provide greater insight, inspiration, and connection to our selves, to non-human beings, to nature and the divine universal principal that connects us all.

⁷⁸⁶ LeVasseur and Peterson, *Religion and Ecological Crisis*, 175.

⁷⁸⁷ LeVasseur and Peterson, 186.

⁷⁸⁸ LeVasseur and Peterson, 70.