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(Affective) union in hell

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Abstract: **According to Eleonore Stump, God has a morally sufficient reason for allowing evil (or more properly, suffering) if, by allowing it, either the sufferer's permanent separation from God can be prevented or their deeper union with God can be motivated. But if, in the life to come, it is not possible for a person to be united with God, can God have a morally sufficient reason for allowing their suffering? After rejecting Stump's ingenious answer to this question, I argue that God has a morally sufficient reason to allow an inhabitant of even a maximally bad hell to suffer, namely, to prevent their further separation from God, and from themselves, and to motivate their 'affective' union with God.**

Introduction

In the Gospel according to Matthew (13:49–50), Jesus appears to tell his disciples that hell will be a 'grim'[1] place filled with what we might describe as 'maximally bad suffering' – suffering that in some sense constitutes the worst thing for the sufferer.[2] The Gospel author records Jesus as saying, 'So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Such suffering is evidently not of garden-variety 'toe-stubbing' form. Rather, it is part of the orthodox tradition that the sufferings of hell – whatever it is that causes the weeping and gnashing of teeth – are exactly the kinds of suffering proponents of the argument from suffering might point to as exemplar defeaters for the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good God (henceforth, omni-God).[3]

Given that some response to the argument from suffering seems in order when one considers suffering in this earthly life, it seems a response also ought to be in order when one considers the reported possibility of maximally bad suffering in

the life to come. And so, there is a problem of hell that follows the model of the problem of suffering.[4]

Consider, then, the following grim-hell-modified version of the argument from suffering:

1. If an omni-God exists and there is maximally bad suffering in hell, then God has a morally sufficient reason for allowing this maximally bad suffering in hell.
2. There is no morally sufficient reason for allowing maximally bad suffering in hell.
3. So, either an omni-God doesn't exist or there is no maximally bad suffering in hell.
4. There is maximally bad suffering in hell.
5. So, an omni-God doesn't exist.

Premise 1 is a conceptual truth, and premises 3 and 5 are conclusions based upon trivial rules of inference. There are, therefore, two moves the classical theist can make in response to this argument.[5] They can deny premise 4, that there is maximally bad suffering in hell (citing either the plausibly mild nature of hell, as Eleonore Stump has done,[6] or proposing some form of universalism, as Marilyn McCord Adams has done,[7] or annhilationism, as Kelly James Clark has done[8]), or alternatively, they can reject premise 2 by providing a plausible morally sufficient reason for why God might allow maximally bad suffering in hell.[9]

In this article, I will confine myself to analysis of the second option, that is, to attempts to provide a plausible morally sufficient reason why God might allow maximally bad suffering in a 'grim' hell. I will start by transposing and evaluating what I consider to be the most plausible morally sufficient-reason responses to the argument from suffering in this earthly life. These responses are namely:

(1) an appeal to the justice of such maximally bad suffering in hell,
(2) an appeal to some positive benefit – that is, some future reward – that accrues to the sufferer because of their maximally bad suffering, or
(3) an appeal to some negative benefit – that is, some harm prevented – that accrues to the sufferer because of their maximally bad suffering.

The first morally-sufficient-reason response is straightforward. If one has broken a just law, and there is a just punishment set for breaking that law, it is just for one to suffer said punishment, even if no other benefit is afforded to you. This sort of response can be found, in part, in Augustine's work on the Fall, and more recently, in the writings of William Lane Craig.[10] However, this response to the problem of suffering in hell seems on the face of it deeply inappropriate. After all, on this story, God is either the author and executor of both law and punishment, or else he is bound by some external constraint on what is just. An appeal to the justice of the law and the justice of the punishment will not absolve God from setting the

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world up in such a way that justice demands such eternal and maximally bad suffering, nor can an appeal to some external constraints on justice solve the dilemma, at least, not without raising a whole host of other intractable questions about, for instance, God's omnipotence.[11]

Now, there may be more to say about this first 'punished state' approach, but I mention it only to put it to one side. Instead, for the remainder of this article, I want to look at the other two 'non-punished state' morally-sufficient-reason responses, and in particular, the way they have been employed in what I consider to be the most successful theodicy for the problem of suffering, the theodicy found in Eleonore Stump's *Wandering in Darkness.*[12]

Stump's theodicy: outline and problems

In *Wandering in Darkness*, Eleonore Stump offers what we might call a 'theodicy of union'. In short, Stump argues that God has a morally sufficient reason for allowing suffering if (1) the suffering primarily benefits the sufferer and (2) the benefit of the suffering sufficiently outweighs or defeats the suffering endured.[13] On Stump's view, a person's suffering is justified if it prevents the sufferer's permanent separation from God, or if it motivates the sufferer's deeper union with God. Stump takes the former to be the worst thing that could happen to a person, and the latter, the best thing that could happen to a person.[14]

In her theodicy, Stump explicitly connects the prevention of permanent separation from God with negative benefit (i.e. the benefit of a harm prevented) and the securing of a deeper union with God with positive benefit (i.e. the benefit of some future reward).[15] While suffering might also bring with it other benefits, such as positive character development or a demonstration of human freedom, it is unclear whether gaining these benefits really does outweigh the sort of maximally bad suffering typically showcased in evidential arguments. To avoid this ambiguity, Stump limits the reasons for suffering to motivating what she takes from Aquinas to be the absolute best thing for a person and avoiding its negation, the absolute worst thing for a person.[16] Finally, Stump notes that at least minimal consent (where such suffering is only involuntary *secundum quid*) is necessary for suffering for some positive benefit, and so suffering for future reward is a morally-sufficient-reason only in case the sufferer has in some sense consented to it.[17]

So far, so good; however, Stump's account runs into a serious problem when faced with the traditional doctrine of a 'grim' hell. Not only does it seem unlikely that an inhabitant of a 'grim' hell would ever *consent* to their maximally bad suffering[18] (seemingly ruling out their suffering for positive benefit), but tradition suggests that all inhabitants of hell are already *permanently* separated from God (seemingly ruling out their suffering for negative benefit). Once in hell, then, the worst thing for that person, their permanent separation from

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God, is certain, and the best thing, their maximal union with God, impossible, so what possible morally sufficient reason could there be for that person's continued suffering?

Before addressing this question, it will prove helpful to explore the general conditions for, and obstacles to, union with others. For Stump, following Aquinas,[19] the desire for union is one of two interconnected desires that are together required for love.[20] Stump describes this desire for union as being itself a function of what she calls 'personal closeness' and 'significant personal presence'. On the former, a lover is considered personally close to their beloved just in case the beloved has revealed something of who they are to the lover and the lover is willing to accept this revelation from the beloved. To the extent that both occur, to that extent can the lover unite their mind to the mind of the beloved, and, in empathy, see and feel the world as the beloved sees and feels it. However, the lover's ability to unite with the mind of the beloved requires neither that the beloved's revelation be complete, nor that it be reciprocated (either equally, or even at all), nor that it be revealed in person, although the more complete the revelation, the more complete the union will be. Unlike personal closeness, Stump explains that significant personal presence must be both reciprocal and achieved in person, requiring between lover and beloved direct and unmediated causal and cognitive contact, second-personal experience, and the sharing of dyadic joint attention.[21] Stump suggests an omnipresent God is always significantly present to His creation; however, to the extent that significant personal presence or personal closeness are impeded on the creature's side, to that extent will their union with God be likewise limited in degree.[22]

With this analysis in hand, if a person is psychologically fragmented (for instance, if they have opposing desires for union with God and for some conflicting power or pleasure), they will be distanced from themselves, making it difficult or impossible for another to become close to them. Likewise, if the beloved does not desire union with their lover, that part of their mind will be withheld from the lover and their personal revelation will be in this respect limited. As union comes in degrees, and as maximal union requires maximal personal revelation, the more psychologically fragmented a person is, the more limited any ensuing union will be.[23] For these reasons, Stump argues that maximal union with God in the life to come must be wholeheartedly desired by a psychologically integrated person.[24] Furthermore, Stump argues, if this cannot or will not be wholeheartedly desired, union between God and such a person will be impossible, with such a half-hearted or psychologically fragmented person finding themselves permanently separated from God.[25] However, this analysis raises a further question: aside from tradition, what reason do we have to think that those in hell might be *permanently* separated from God?[26]

The 'free-will response'

One attempt to respond to this question is ably summarized by C. S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce*. On Lewis's view, the inhabitants of hell are those who through their own pride are so stubbornly set in their fragmentary desires that they will not change their will to choose union with God. Lewis writes: 'There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "*Thy* will be done." All that are in hell, choose it.'[27] We can call this the free-will response.[28] In essence, those in hell *choose* both to be sent to hell and then continuously choose to remain in hell. They *choose* to suffer in a way that is maximally bad, and God so values their free will that he respects and preserves their freedom by honouring that choice.

This kind of a response is not without its detractors. Marilyn McCord Adams likens this situation to a parent leaving their child alone with a brightly covered stove in a gas filled room. Adams writes, no matter whether the parent forbids the child to play with the stove, if the child were to do so and thereby ignite the gas 'surely the child is at most marginally to blame, even though it knew enough to obey the parent, while the parent is both primarily responsible and highly culpable'. Adams concludes that 'the value of human freedom, however great, is not enough to justify God's allowing creatures to make decisions that bring about their own final, irrevocable ruin'.[29] Keith DeRose is likewise sceptical of this free-will response, noting that God could hardly be considered victorious over sin and death if some of his creation managed to frustrate him for all eternity.[30] Surely, DeRose suggests, an all-knowing, all-powerful God would have the ingenuity to bring it to be that these stubborn individuals *eventually* relent and choose to be united with him.[31]

The 'moral psychology response'

As it happens, I find both Adams's and DeRose's responses persuasive; however, their next move, advocating universalism, sidesteps the morally-sufficient-response route I am interested in exploring. So instead of following their move to universalism, I am going to propose another response, one based on preserving the integrity of a person's moral psychology rather than on the value of their continued free choice (instead of stubbornly refusing to desire union with God, those in hell are, on this view, *incapable* of uniting with God in the relevant way).

In this earthly life, the biggest obstacle to union with God, Stump argues, is a kind of willed loneliness brought about by what she describes as 'the backward-looking problem'.[32] As a person appropriately reflects upon their previous wrong-doings they experience guilt (where 'guilt' is a placeholder for 'the belief that it is appropriate for God or another to desire some hard treatment for you') and shame

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(where 'shame' is a placeholder for 'the belief that it is appropriate for God or another to reject you as a person').[33] These self-reflexive reactive attitudes, Stump suggests, inevitably cause union-defeating distance between the appropriately reflecting wrongdoer and God.[34]

A person appropriately reflecting on their shame and guilt will, typically, desire to avoid those whom they feel could appropriately reject them or desire their hard treatment, that is, those who might reject either of the twin desires of love towards them. Such avoidance will inevitably limit a desire for significant personal presence with the other, and to the extent that it causes such psychologically fragmentary desires, it will also limit the capacity for others to become close to them.[35] And indeed, these sorts of responses are echoed in scriptural accounts of those who met God (or encountered visions of God) face to face. We read, for instance, that upon experiencing a vision of God Isaiah fell on his face and wished himself dead until God told him his guilt had been atoned for,[36] while the prophet Daniel explains that 'many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt'.[37] Now, Stump argues that in this life we are able to (and through suffering motivated to) take advantage of the unique shame-and-guilt-defeating provisions made available to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.[38] But what if these provisions are, for some reason, unavailable in the life to come for those who did not avail of them in this earthly life?[39] In some sense compelled to attend to their shame and guilt in the presence of God, yet unable to deal with either, such persons would be condemned to an eternity of willed loneliness. If Isaiah's response generalizes, it may indeed be in some sense *better* for such a person to remain away from God's revealed presence, even for them to be in hell, than for them to be significantly present to God.

This being said, a putative objector might well respond:

How does this moral psychology route avoid Adams's brightly-coloured-stove thought experiment? After all, it was (presumably) the exercise of their human freedom that eventuated in that person feeling guilt and shame, and in turn, their own 'final, irrevocable ruin'. If Adams's point is troubling for the free-will route, should it not be troubling for the moral psychology route also?

Nevertheless, the moral-psychology route can offer us something the (mere) free-will response cannot. Unlike the free-will response, guilt and shame rely upon *appropriate* reflection on one's actions. It is only when one *believes* that it *is appropriate* for another to reject you, or when one *believes* that it *is appropriate* for another to desire you undergo some hard treatment, that guilt and shame will cause union-defeating distance. But, if it is the case that we truly are like the three-year-old in Adams's thought experiment, appropriate reflection upon one's actions would lead one to believe it is in fact *not* appropriate for God to reject you or for God to desire some hard treatment for you, and as a result that you

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are not objectively guilty or shamed.[40] However, if, after being given all relevant information and the capacity to rightly process said information, appropriate reflection does lead one to believe that guilt and shame are appropriate, then Adams's thought experiment (and variations on the theme) will not work. Although we might think that in our current state of ignorance, we are analogously similar to a three-year-old, it may well turn out that we are not. This conclusion, of course, might mean that the actual population of hell is very small indeed (perhaps even nil), but it need not. Of course, one might think the same can be said about the free-will response, however, I take the two to be importantly distinct. Whereas the permanency of hell on the free-will response is grounded upon the putative inhabitant not changing their mind (something it seems Adams assumes a competent person with access to all relevant information could and would do), the permanency of hell on the moral psychology response is not tied to the putative inhabitant's continuing free will at all. While a competent person able to rightly judge responsibility for their willed rejection of God may also, presumably, be in a position to foreswear such rejection (and so enter heaven), a competent person able to rightly judge the appropriateness of their guilt and shame may be unable to defeat either (and so remain in hell).[41] So, since the moral psychology response has the resources to navigate both Adams's and DeRose's objections, I take it to offer a more plausible explanation for *why* those in hell might be permanently separated from God. However, this response does not yet explain whether God actually *has* a morally sufficient reason to allow those in hell to suffer in a way that is maximally bad.

Strengthening Stump's theodicy

Consider, then, the following possible morally sufficient reason: although it looks as though union with God is no longer naturally possible, for those in hell there might be *new* naturally possible states that become that person's objective and subjective greatest good, and *new* naturally possible states that become the worst objective and subjective thing for them. If suffering to avoid the worst thing for that person (or to secure the best thing for that person) can be morally justified in this life, I see no reason why suffering might not also be justified if it can be used to avoid what might become the worst thing for a person, given the possibilities open to them, or to secure what has now become the best thing for them, again, given the possibilities open to them. In what remains of this article, I will identify and briefly analyse what I consider to be two such plausible 'new states', namely, (1) an alternate best/worst state (namely, an acquired second nature) and (2) an adapted best/worst state (namely, affective union with God). I will address each in turn.

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Desiring an alternative 'good'

Once the possibility of union with God has gone, a person can still attempt to integrate themselves psychologically around what has become what Stump describes as their 'acquired second nature'.[42] On the Thomist account Stump employs, after death a person's disembodied soul is irreversibly fixed on a certain 'ultimate end' (either the desire for union with God, or the desire for something else one considers preferable), such that even when the disembodied soul is re-embodied, so to speak, it can no longer change the orientation of this desire.[43]

On the Stump/Aquinas view, human beings are a hylomorphic composite of prime matter (that is, a corporeal body) and a configuring intellectual soul (that is, an incorporeal intellect and will). Unlike angels, which, Aquinas thinks, are pure incorporeal intellect and will (and who therefore know things immediately, without having to work them out discursively), human beings require a corporeal body for sense perception, memory, and imagination. Upon death, a person's corporeal body is separated from their incorporeal intellectual soul. In this somewhat horrifying state, the disembodied soul has no access to sense perception, or memory, or imagination. What little they can know without access to these faculties, they will know immediately and all at once. Thus, once disembodied, the disembodied soul can learn nothing new. Given this, there can be no reason for the intellectual soul to change its mind. And, without being able to change its mind, there is no way for the disembodied soul to shake the habituated state of its will (that is, the second nature, or appetite for certain lesser or greater goods, that has been acquired in this life). Thus, the will of the disembodied soul becomes fixed and unchangeable.

Because what it is to be a human being is to be a hylomorphic composite of corporeal body and incorporeal soul, Aquinas thinks a good God will re-embody all.[44] But, when the time comes to re-embody an intellectual soul (no matter how fleeting the state of disembodiment) God is faced with a decision: does he give the soul a new body capable of causing the person to change their mind, just as they were able to do at the time of their death, or will whatever body the disembodied soul gets given back be in perfect conformity with the currently unchangeable disembodied soul? Aquinas thinks the former option necessarily violates the person's freedom of the will (were the disembodied soul able to state a preference, its preference would always be for its will to remain fixed as it is), and so in respecting the free will of the disembodied soul, God will *only* do the latter.[45] Thus, the body the disembodied soul receives will be *perfectly* aligned with the second nature such a person acquired over the course of their earthly life. This being the case, after re-embodiment, Aquinas concludes a person's second nature will remain permanently fixed to whatever their acquired second nature was like at the time of their death.[46]

If, pre-death, one's acquired second nature was not open to the possibility of desiring God as an ultimate end, then one would have acquired another (or other) ultimate end(s). Once disembodied, the desire for these alternative ultimate

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ends (that is, the desire to satisfy one's 'acquired second nature') becomes permanently fixed. So, while attaining this second-best state (namely, satisfying in the best way possible this desire for some other ultimate end) might pale in comparison to that person's union with God, securing, or getting as close to, that acquired ultimate end may now nevertheless be in some sense better than all other alternative states now open to that person.

I will leave to one side the question of whether a person could wholeheartedly psychologically integrate around an acquired second nature.[47] What I will take forward is the thought that fulfilling this second nature in the best way possible will preserve the greatest degree of psychological integration for that inhabitant of hell. This being the case, if we can tell a story about how God allows a person to suffer in order to encourage as much psychological integration as possible,[48] and how allowing them to fulfil (as best they can) this ultimate end might in fact be the best thing for them (given the options open to them), we may be able to provide a morally sufficient reason for their (perhaps even maximally bad) suffering in hell.[49]

So, if it were the case that suffering, even maximally bad suffering, was necessary to motivate psychological integration around this newly acquired ultimate end (or 'second nature'), just as is perhaps the case in this earthly life, God may have a morally sufficient reason for allowing such suffering to occur in hell.

Having said this much, there are two serious issues with this type of response. First, whatever one thinks of the merits or demerits of this view, it looks like it cannot help but turn into a 'mild' hell account (admittedly, this is only an issue if one wants to preserve premise 4, the maximally bad suffering of hell, by denying premise 2 in the opening argument). If one accepts the Thomist view that motivates this account, whatever the mechanism that irreversibly fixes the will on a certain ultimate end, this same mechanism will also prevent the will from total fragmentation. For, if further fragmentation were possible, a person's second nature would not be in fact fixed, calling again into question the supposed permanency of hell. However, if further fragmentation is in fact impossible, subsequent suffering cannot motivate the best thing for a person, or help that person avoid the worst thing. Rather, whatever suffering is endured would be morally justifiable only if it were voluntarily caused by the sufferer themselves as they tried to achieve their warped ultimate end. This being the case, such a view (or variants thereof) will always collapse into a variation of Stump's 'mild' hell account.[50] The only ways to read maximally bad suffering into such an account would involve either lowering the bar for what counts as maximally bad suffering, or, alternatively, including some element of 'just' maximally bad divine punishment, but I am not convinced that either response is worth pursuing, especially given the merits of the 'adapted' nature account to which I will turn shortly.

Second, and more troublingly, there is good reason to reject the very reason Aquinas thinks the will becomes irreversibly fixed. As Christina Van Dyke has recently pointed out, if, as both Aquinas and Stump believe, a person is a

hylomorphic composite of corporeal body and incorporeal soul, there is good reason to think a person cannot be identical with just their incorporeal soul.[51] As it is the disembodied incorporeal soul that becomes fixed in will, it is difficult to see how God is respecting that *person's* freedom of the will in re-embodying the disembodied soul with a body that is in perfect conformity to the *disembodied soul's* fixed second nature. Certainly, in doing so, God might be respecting the freedom of will of the disembodied soul (whatever that means), but that disembodied soul is not identical with the human person. Van Dyke concludes that, given this, it makes no sense to talk about hylomorphic disembodiment. Indeed, to save Aquinas' account of the resurrection, Van Dyke argues that the Thomist should hold that a human person *never* exists in a state of disembodiment.[52] Consequently, if hylomorphic disembodiment is required in order for the will to become unchangeable, and if hylomorphic disembodiment never takes place, why think that the will will become unchangeable? If it is possible for a person to come to desire union with God prior to their death, there is no reason to think that their coming to such a desire will become impossible after they are resurrected. And so, without further justification, we are left without an adequate explanation for the permanency of hell.[53]

Desiring an adapted 'good'

One motivation for the Thomist view stems from a desire to defend the free will of the inhabitant of hell. For, if they freely will to remain in hell, there is a voluntary component to the suffering they endure. However, if one adopts the moral psychology response to explain why those in hell are permanently separated from God, it does not matter whether a person is steadfast in desiring an alternative ultimate end, or whether they in fact do still retain (or come to have) a desire for union with God.

Why might such an observation be important? Well, at this juncture it will prove helpful to note a further way Aquinas qualifies union between persons. Union, Aquinas notes, can be real or affective.[54] Real union occurs when two people are significantly present to each other, and are personally close. In this way, real union is necessarily reciprocal – the union of the saints and God in heaven, or of a close husband and wife, might suffice as examples of real union. Affective union, on the other hand, only requires a limited kind of personal closeness. Affective union is a union of one mind with another; one person needing the other for who they are, and that same person somehow inhabiting or indwelling the mind of that other. In this way, then, affective union can occur without proximity, and can be unrequited. It is possible, for instance, to be affectively united with a distant friend, a pen pal you have never met, or even a character in a book (fictional or historical).

Given the psychological barriers of guilt and shame previously mentioned, *real* union between God and an inhabitant of hell looks impossible (even if it were

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somehow desired by those in hell). Real union must be wholeheartedly reciprocally desired in order for it to obtain (at least with respect to God[55]), with its achievement involving significant personal presence, which, as mentioned, includes the sharing of dyadic attention with the beloved. A person experiencing objective guilt and objective shame can never wholeheartedly desire significant personal presence with God *and* be (maximally) significant present to God, because there will always be a part of them that either wants to shy away from his presence, or reflexively does so anyway.[56] But, even though real union might be impossible,[57] *affective* union between God and an inhabitant of hell might remain a possibility (even if it is unrequited). Recall, for instance, that on Stump's account of omnipresence, God is always and everywhere – even in hell – available for union with his creation. However, if their will is not fixed (as I have argued above), it is always possible for an inhabitant of hell to become more psychologically fragmented, whereby the more psychologically fragmented they become, the more distant they are from themselves, and the harder it becomes for God to unite affectively with 'them'.[58]

In desiring that a person is as integrated as they can be, God is desiring both that person's now greatest good *and* desiring as much union as is possible with that person; in sum, God is loving them as far as it is possible for him to do so. So, God has a reason to want the inhabitant of hell to be as psychologically integrated as they can be. Furthermore, I take it that it would be better for that person in hell to be as psychologically integrated as they can be, too. But could the benefit of such integration really justify their enduring maximally bad suffering?

Before answering that question, consider another. Why think God desires affective union with those in hell unrequitedly? Nothing in the account I have suggested precludes the possibility that those in hell desire affective union with God (i.e. that they desire personal closeness, where personal closeness involves a need for the beloved and a desire to, in some sense, indwell in the mind of the beloved), and that a significant part of them really does desire real union with God (i.e. where they are close to wholeheartedly desiring personal closeness with God and where at least a part of them does in fact desire to be significantly personally present to God).

It seems plausible to suppose that, after seeing something of the goodness of God prior to inhabiting hell,[59] such a person might now both desire and, perhaps reflexively, not desire, union with God, being in this sense psychologically fragmented. Those in hell might have only their guilt and shame preventing them from dyadically attending to God,[60] where either their fragmentation or their inability to dyadically attend to God is sufficient to permanently prevent their real union with God. Indeed, given this possibility, rather than being forced to leave God's revealed presence, those hell-bound (if indeed there are any) may choose (if indeed they have the presence of mind to choose *anything*) to enter hell, knowing that hell, as a place where God's revealed presence is not, is in some immediate sense better for them. Indeed, it may be that the fact such a

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place of respite exists is understood by them as an expression of God's love, providing them with a reprieve from what might otherwise be unending, incapacitating psychological distress.[61] But positing such reprieve raises an interesting possibility, for it seems the inhabitants of hell could then remain in a state broadly similar to our present one. Indeed, the only difference need be that those in this state *know* they will be unable to engage in dyadic attention with God, and so know they can never 'really' unite with God (even if they come to have a (at least partial) desire to join in real union with God).[62]

Working on this possibility, the inhabitant of hell's 'weeping and gnashing of teeth', that is, the very thing that makes the sufferings of hell maximally bad, could stem entirely from their knowledge that real union with God is no longer possible for them, that they are to blame for this state of affairs, and therefore that they will be forever frustrated, having everlastingly lost what has since become a desire of their heart, a desire they have come to realize was the greatest good for them, and the fulfilment of their natural ultimate end.

It seems that this account of the maximally bad sufferings of those in hell has a significant advantage over the previously discussed second nature account. If Stump and Aquinas are right about the worst thing for a person being their separation from God (even if it is a willed separation), further physical punishment or torture would serve no practical purpose for those so separated; such punishment would be otiose. Although hell has been traditionally associated with a pain of loss and a pain of sense, the pain of sense seems, on this account, redundant. Whereas on the second-nature account, those in hell *do not want* to be united with God, and so cannot be tormented by that impossibility (and so require some further explanation for how and why they suffer), on this adapted-nature account, those in hell *do* (at least partially) want exactly that. The maximally bad sufferings of hell, then, might be best understood as a sort of self-inflicted mental anguish: the kind of anguish that accompanies the knowledge that the best thing for them is unattainable. That they can never experience the joy and peace that accompanies real union with God, never being completely satisfied with what they achieve, consigned to forever having lost what they have come to realize is their heart's desire, condemned to the knowledge that their life, devoid of its ultimate purpose, may now *not* be worth living.[63] This sort of anguish may well cause weeping and gnashing of teeth. Nevertheless, it may also be that this same anguish, induced by the remembrance of God's goodness and the knowledge that *real* union with God is impossible, somehow yet encourages a reciprocal desire for affective union with God, motivating an inhabitant of hell away from their further and total psychological fragmentation.

On this account, the maximally bad suffering of hell involves the (at least partial) desire for real union with God, accompanied by the knowledge that real union is impossible. Nevertheless, *affective* union with God (even wholeheartedly willed affective union) might remain within an inhabitant of hell's grasp. Thus, the experience of this suffering may be justified inasmuch as it prevents their

further fragmentation (which, as mentioned earlier, both allows God to affectively unite with them more effectively, and also prevents their total psychological fragmentation) and also inasmuch as it, by recalling the bittersweet memory of God's goodness as it was revealed to them, might motivate in them a desire for their affective union with God.[64]

Before I conclude, there is a general worry for this argument that I want to address. I have been exploring ways one might preserve a 'grim' account of hell, a hell in which maximally bad suffering does occur. To do this, I have suggested that those in hell really do suffer the worst thing possible for them, their recognized permanent separation from God. However, it looks like the morally sufficient justification for this suffering must involve them avoiding something *even worse*.[65] If this *is* the case, it looks like their suffering *is not*, in fact, the worst thing for them. And without that, this account is at risk of collapsing into a 'mild' hell variant. Nevertheless, there is a response to this concern. Inasmuch as such suffering might prompt a desire for affective union with God (a future benefit that may or may not be consented to), it also wards off that person's total psychological fragmentation (a negative benefit that requires no such consent, at least on Stump's account). Certainly, total psychological fragmentation – becoming, say, like Frankfurt's wanton – looks like it might be worse for a person, but in this instance, looks are deceiving. For, if Frankfurt is right, total psychological fragmentation in fact *annihilates* that which makes that person a person, namely, their capacity for either forming or acting on higher-order desires.[66] If, for an inhabitant of hell, we posit that God's not prompting an unfulfillable desire for union with him (through, for instance, the recollection of His goodness) inevitably leads to their total psychological fragmentation,[67] and that remaining in God's revealed presence accelerates their total psychological fragmentation,[68] we can suggest that hell really is the worst thing *for that person*, *as a person*. In each of the other two cases, such inevitable total psychological fragmentation annihilates that person's personhood. And in so annihilating, in each case, the result is that there is then no *person* that suffers total psychological fragmentation, for there is no person left at all.

A theodicy for a grim hell?

Hell, on this view, is a place where its inhabitants are motivated to be as good (i.e. as psychologically integrated) as they can be, that is, that they are motivated to become psychologically integrated around an adapted desire for *affective* union with God,[69] such that they are also as close as it is possible for God to be to them. As they are already permanently separated from real union with God, I have suggested that the maximally bad suffering of hell's inhabitants (the mental anguish that accompanies reflection on that very fact) may be sufficiently morally justified through an appeal to the negative benefit of avoiding that which would destroy their personhood, their further alienation from God and from themselves through their total psychological fragmentation, and, perhaps,

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through an appeal to the positive benefit of securing what is *now* naturally the best thing for them, namely, their affective union with God.

On this model, God can demonstrate his goodness by showing his love for those in hell by doing all he can to help them in their fragmentary adapted nature. It may be the case that, in doing this, the sort of maximally bad suffering I have described is inevitable. Such suffering, however, may be necessary to preserve or maintain whatever psychological integration remains possible for the inhabitant of hell. For in so preserving, that person is able lead a life as worthwhile as it is possible for a life to be that has lost its original and ultimate purpose.[70]

In this article, I have argued that there might be a morally sufficient reason for an omniscient, omnipotent perfectly good God to allow the maximally bad suffering of a person in hell, namely, for the negative benefit of avoiding further alienation from God and from themselves, and possibly, with consent, the limited future benefit of affective union with God.[71] To defend this account, I have suggested that the reason inhabitants of hell remain where they are, either unable to wholeheartedly desire union with God or unable to dyadically attend to God, is *not* due to the value of their continued free choice; rather, it has to do with the configuration of their moral psychology. This claim requires a very high estimation of Christ's atoning work, treating it not only as a one-off, but also limiting the ability of a person to make use of the provisions of Christ's work to this earthly life.[72] Granting this, if the account I have presented is successful, it may go some way to preserving the goodness of an omni-God, even, I think, if one accepts a 'grim' hell.

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Notes

1. I use 'grim' here in a technical sense, as opposed to 'mild' varieties of hell employed (in varying degrees of 'mild') by Richard Swinburne (Swinburne (1983)), Eleonore Stump (Stump (1986)), and Jerry Walls (Walls (1992)).
2. My use of 'maximally bad suffering' differs slightly from Marilyn McCord Adams's use of 'horrendous evils' (Adams (1999), 32). In using it, I mean only to refer to suffering that could in some sense constitute the worst thing for a person, and not that it requires defeat in an afterlife, with the thought that if hell is to be a grim place, it must include maximally bad suffering.
3. See, for instance, van Inwagen (2000).
4. Of course, this is not a new observation. See Craig (1989) or Adams (1993).
5. This argument does not show that there could be *no* God, only that an omni-God, the God of classical theism, could not exist.
6. See Stump (1986). On Stump's view, hell is a place where God can maximize the amount of goodness in a person unwilling to desire union with him. Whatever suffering that person experiences is voluntary, and is not construed as a punishment.
7. See, for instance, Adams (1999).
8. See, for instance, Clark (2001). Note that Thomists reject annihilationism because, on the Thomistic account, being and goodness are convertible (see *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 5, A. 1), and so the destruction of being is necessarily bad, and so will not be desired by a perfectly good God.
9. Alternatively, rather than provide a plausible morally sufficient reason, they could also appeal to sceptical theism and claim that God does have a reason, but it is beyond our ability to discern God's reasons in this matter, however I mention this only to leave it to one side.
10. See Augustine, *City of God*, Book XIII, ch. 3 and Craig (1991).
11. For more on these objections, see Lewis (2007).
12. Stump (2010).
13. *Ibid*., 13.
14. *Ibid*., 386–417.
15. *Ibid*., 392–394.
16. *Ibid*., 386–388.
17. *Ibid*., 396.
18. And even if they could, it may be that they are unable to give competent consent, given the human mind's inability to comprehend *everlasting* suffering.
19. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q. 28.
20. The second being the desire for the good of the beloved. See Stump (2010), 85–128.

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21. *Ibid*., 109–128.
22. *Ibid*., 117.
23. *Ibid*., 130–150.
24. This is one reason why psychological unity is taken to be a fundamental good, namely, that it is necessary for a person's greatest good, their union with God. Stump adds to this the thought that psychological unity is also tied to a person's being, such that the greater the psychological unity the more being is actualized. For more details, see Stump (1986), 189.
25. Stump (2010), 150.
26. At this point, one might ask: why not opt for an 'escapist' model like the one suggested by Andrei Buckareff and Allen Plug (2005)? For if an inhabitant of hell *can* escape (even if they never do), might not Stump's theodicy work in hell just as it might on earth?
27. Lewis (2015a), 85. See also Lewis (2015b), 130.
28. This sort of free-will response is also defended by Peter van Inwagen in an unpublished paper.
29. Adams (1999), 39.
30. Thomas Talbott (2004), for instance, suggests this can only happen if God interferes with the freedom of those in hell to ensure they continue to eternally reject him.
31. Taken from personal conversation. See also his website (accessed August 2016): 'Universalism and the Bible', particularly Appendix B, <http://campuspress.yale.edu/keithderose/1129-2/>.
32. Stump (2012b), 132–134.
33. Of course, the subjective feeling of guilt or shame (that is, the *belief* that it is appropriate for another to reject you as a person) may not correspond to objective guilt or shame (that is, whether it is in fact appropriate for another to reject you as a person). So, a person might not feel subjective shame and yet be objectively shamed, or may feel subjective guilt but not be objectively guilty. I will assume that through appropriate sorts of post-mortem revelation, God ensures that objective and subjective shame and guilt align for each person.
34. Stump (2010), 141–144.
35. *Ibid*., 144–150.
36. Isaiah 6:1–7.
37. Daniel 12:2.
38. Stump (2012b), 129–130.
39. That is, that such provisions are one-off and time-limited. See, for instance, Hebrews 6:4–6, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, and Matthew 25:46. A full analysis of whether this is in fact the case would require defending a particular account of atonement, but doing so is beyond the scope of this article. It is enough to say this is a possible interpretation.
40. I assume that if we are like the three-year-old, God would provide us with all relevant information for our assessment of whether it is appropriate for us to feel guilt and shame (that is, whether we are in fact objectively guilty or shamed). This is, I think, the point of Jesus' comment in John 9:41, where he says, 'If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, "We see," your guilt remains.'
41. As helpfully pointed out by an anonymous referee, if a putative inhabitant of hell is in fact not like the three-year-old, then both the free-will and the moral psychology response will conclude the same thing: namely, that such an inhabitant could be held responsible for their actions. However, in addition to this, it seems to me as though Adams bundles an implicit assumption into the free-will response claim, namely, something like the following: 'If the three-year-old was in fact competent enough to be held responsible, they would not have played with the stove, so, if the three-year-old plays with the stove, the three-year-old is not competent enough to be held responsible.' This assumption has two implications. In the first place, it implies that those who might otherwise have found themselves in hell (those who in this life do play with the oven switches) were not competent enough to be held responsible for their choices. In the second place, it implies that those who might otherwise have freely chosen to remain in hell (those who in hell continue to play with the oven switches) are not competent enough to be held responsible for these continued choices. I am not at all convinced that this hidden assumption holds for the moral psychology response in the first case, but the second case really demonstrates where the free-will and moral responsibility responses come apart, for it is compatible with the moral psychology response that a person in hell desires to be united with God. On the free-will response, were a person in hell to change their mind, they would no longer remain in hell. On the moral psychology response, were such a person to change their mind, they might.

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42. See Stump (1986), 195.
43. See *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 4, chs 93 & 95.
44. Including those who have beheld the beatific vision, see *Summa Theologica*, Suppl., Q. 98, A. 3.
45. One might think that if the person's pre-death second nature was open to the possibility of them coming to desire God as their ultimate end, then, presumably, the body given to the disembodied soul should be similarly compatible with that possibility – even if the soul when disembodied was incapable of any such change of desire. As one anonymous reviewer pointed out, there would be no violation of the person's freedom here – just a restoration of the person's second nature as it stood at the time of their death. No doubt this is plausible, and would resolve concerns raised later on for the Stump/Aquinas account, but I take it that such a response cannot then be used, as both Aquinas and Stump go on to do, to explain the permanency of residency in hell (see, for instance, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 4, chs 93 & 95).
46. Of course, it is one thing for it to have been merely possible for a person to come desire God as their ultimate end; it is another thing for that desire to have been already present (if suppressed) in their pre-death second nature. For the purpose of this article, I will assume only that the former obtains for putative inhabitants of hell. Plausibly, those in the latter position may, on this view, avoid such permanent habitation (say, after a period in purgatory, they too might come to experience the beatific vision).
47. Thus, it may be harder to keep a set of potentially conflicting desires from being frustrated.
48. Dante, for instance, thinks that the inhabitants of hell get exactly what their second-nature desires, no matter how harmful this might seem to us to be for them. See Stump (1986).
49. This is all the more the case when one considers what appears to be the alternatives available to them. The alternative to such suffering appears, given their fragmentary second nature, certainly not to be 'no suffering'. Rather, it looks like the alternatives involve either complete frustration of desire, or *total* psychological fragmentation. Given that total psychological fragmentation is often considered the *effect* of truly horrendous suffering, it seems fair to consider apparently maximally bad suffering that is designed to prevent total psychological fragmentation as in some sense better for that person.
50. Stump (1986), 179.
51. Van Dyke (2014). Van Dyke's view is, however, controversial. There is a live debate among Thomists on whether the human being does indeed cease to exist, as Van Dyke suggests (what has become known as the 'Corruptionist' position), or whether the human being continues to exist, with the intellectual soul constituting the human being (what has become known as the 'Survivalist' position).
52. Van Dyke (2014), 42–45.
53. Any explanation that reverts back to a C. S. Lewis-style stubbornness claim can be met with something akin to DeRose's earlier criticism, namely, that given an unending amount of time, and given infinite resources, surely an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God would find a way to motivate a change in a person's mind. It seems to me that if the permanency of hell is not located in a Thomist-style fixedness of the will, it is very difficult to see why this might amount to a permanent hell and not a temporary purgatory.
54. *Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q. 28, A. 1. See also Pruss (2010), 31–33, and Cleveland & Cleveland (2016), 13–14.
55. See Stump (2010), 130–150.
56. For one way in which dyadic attention can be inhibited, even in the case of reciprocal wholehearted desire, see Stump (2012a). On Stump's view, despite both being willing, Christ is psychologically unable to dyadically attend to God the Father during the crucifixion.
57. Recall that, on Stump's account, union with God must be desired wholeheartedly. Anything less than wholehearted desire will not lead to union with God. See Stump (2010), 130–150.
58. *Ibid.*, 156. For with whom would God be uniting, and which mind would he be indwelling?
59. According to Romans 14:11, 'every knee will bow before [Christ]; every tongue will acknowledge God'. Perhaps at this point all persons come to have some desire for union with God, while at the same time recognizing, through their experienced inability to dyadically attend to God (or whatever it is that their guilt and shame induces), that they can never be significantly present to God.
60. In all other respects such persons might either actually desire union with God, or at least, be able to be motivated, through suffering, to desire union with God, just as Stump argues is possible in this earthly life.
61. To cite an example Stump uses (Stump (2006), 40), it is more loving for the abused spouse to leave (or in this case, to send away) the abusive husband than it is for her to remain, and thereby enable and worsen his continued psychological fragmentation. If we cannot experience maximal real union with God in this life because we (currently) cannot see God and live (Exodus 33:20), the same might be everlastingly true

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for those in hell. Conceivably, the recognition of this expression of God's love, then, could prompt a further desire for union with God.

62. As far as I can see, all variants of the 'mild' hell thesis reject one or more of these three claims.
63. Note here that the worst thing for a person is not permanent separation from God (there is a sense in which a person might presently feel separated from God, or simply not believe that God exists, and yet live a life that does not appear to be one of maximally bad suffering): the worst thing for a person is, perhaps, *knowing* that they are permanently separated from God coupled with the knowledge that union with God was the best thing for them. This is something the second-nature view cannot accommodate, for, on the second nature view, those in hell do not consider union with God a good thing, so their suffering must consist in something else (which is, I think, the reason why the second nature view tends towards a 'mild' hell variant).
64. This 'memory' could be 'the worm that never dies' of Isaiah 66:24 and Mark 9:48. Likewise 'their fire' of Isaiah 66:24 and Matthew 13:50 could constitute the desire for God, a desire that can never be fully quenched. A desire caused and bolstered by the remembrance of God's goodness. See Talbott (2004), 218.
65. Suffering for future benefit alone requires some form of competent consent, and it is far from clear that such consent would be given, or even could be given, by those in a 'grim' hell.
66. See, for instance Frankfurt (1971), 5–20, as to why this might be the case. In essence, using Frankfurt's terms, a totally psychologically fragmented person is reduced to the status of a wanton.
67. In the same way that someone experiencing despair might progressively give up on any higher-order projects or goals.
68. In the same way that the experience of severe physical pain might prevent one from acting on (or even taking into consideration) higher-order desires.
69. 'Adapted' inasmuch as, on the Stump/Aquinas account, the only desire a person can wholeheartedly integrate around is the desire for *real* union with God. The desire for *affective* union with God is a pale second-best, but it is still within the genus of desire for union with God, and so the work Stump has done to motivate union with God as the objective/subjective greatest good for a person might still apply, and as such, uniting around this desire may be as close as an inhabitant of hell can come to total psychological integration (and therefore, prompting this desire may now be the most loving thing that God could do).
70. What such a life might look like, and how similar that life might be to our earthly lives, is left an open question.
71. In this case, both negative and future benefit appear to refer to the same thing, and so, it is a moot point whether consent is (or can be) given for their suffering for future benefit.
72. But, as mentioned in note 39, it seems that there is scriptural support for this estimation.

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