

Exclusivism, eternal damnation, and the problem of evil: a critique of Craig's Molinist soteriological theodicy

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Abstract: According to orthodox Christianity, salvation depends on faith in Christ. If, however, God eternally punishes those who die ignorant of Christ, it appears that we have special instance of the problem of evil: the punishment of the religiously innocent. This is called the soteriological problem of evil. Using Molina's concept of middle knowledge, William Lane Craig develops a solution to this problem which he considers a theodicy. As developed by Craig, the Molinist theodicy rests on the problematic assumption that all informed persons who would freely reject Christ are culpable. Using an informed Muslim as a counter-example, I try to show that Craig's Molinist solution begs the question.

According to orthodox Christianity, there is no salvation apart from Christ. To put it more explicitly, apart from faith in Christ Jesus as saviour (hereafter, abbreviated as *accept Christ*), one is condemned to hell. Orthodox Christianity is thus a form of exclusivism. From this perspective, it appears that all non-Christians are damned. Non-Christians are not, however, cut from the same cloth. There are at least three categories of non-Christians: (1) those who are ignorant of Christ and never have an opportunity to accept or reject him; (2) those who, although aware of the salvific role attributed to Jesus, reject Christ because they grow up in and uncritically accept another religious tradition; and, finally (3) those who, after critical reflection, deliberately reject Christ. We can refer to each respectively as uninformed non-believers, informed conventional non-believers, and informed reflective non-believers. (From a Christian exclusivist perspective, to be a non-Christian is, in an important sense, to be a non-believer: the terms are often used interchangeably.)

The question I wish to explore is this: why do members of any of these categories of non-believers deserve to be eternally punished? The eternal punishment of all non-Christians simply because they are non-believers, regardless of

the reasons for their non-belief, seems arbitrary and ultimately unjust. This is called the soteriological problem of evil because it calls into question the justice of a doctrine of salvation. While the traditional problem of evil focuses on the suffering of the innocent in this world, the soteriological problem of evil focuses on the suffering of the innocent in the next world. If there are any inculpable non-believers in hell, there is eternal innocent suffering. Because suffering in the next world is said to be endless, this is actually a more serious problem than the suffering of the innocent in this world.

William Lane Craig, one of the most impressive Protestant thinkers working in contemporary philosophy of religion and an aggressive apologist for Christian exclusivism, has, in an article entitled “‘No other name’: a middle knowledge perspective on the exclusivity of salvation through Christ”, formulated an interesting solution to the soteriological problem of evil – a clever theodicy that continues to receive philosophical attention.¹ In light of the growing appeal of pluralism in the face of increasing awareness of religious diversity, Craig’s original proposal deserves re-examination. Following Alvin Plantinga, Craig makes a distinction between a *defence* and a *theodicy*. While a defence merely shows that it is not logically inconsistent to affirm both an omnipotent being and the existence of evil, a theodicy provides a plausible explanation of evil. Craig claims to be providing a theodicy and not just a defence.² This means that, if his argument is successful, we should be convinced that the exclusivist viewpoint is actually true. Although Craig’s focus is on divine condemnation of uninformed non-believers, he clearly wants to claim that it is also just for God to condemn members of the other two categories of non-Christians. In this paper, my aim is threefold: (1) to lay out the soteriological problem of evil as Craig understands it; (2) to explain Craig’s middle-knowledge solution; and (3) to indicate why the very existence of informed reflective non-Christians calls into question his solution.

The problem of justice and the Molinist response

Relatively neglected in treatments of the problem of evil is the way in which the orthodox Christian view of salvation seems to collide with the Christian claim that God is perfect in power, knowledge, and goodness. Craig recognizes that Christian exclusivists need to give a convincing account of how belief in God’s omnipotence can be reconciled with the eternal punishment of those who have never had an opportunity to hear the Christian message. Uninformed non-Christians appear to be a paradigm case of the religiously innocent. The soteriological problem, as Craig formulates it, is generated by the following reasoning: if God is truly omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent, He should be able and want to create a world in which (A) everyone is offered the opportunity to accept or reject Christ, and (B) everyone freely receives Christ and

so is saved. Shouldn't an omnipotent being be able to create a world in which both (A) and (B) are true?³

There are, of course, ways of avoiding the soteriological problem of evil, but they require movement away from orthodox Christianity. One way around the problem is to embrace some form of inclusivism, such as that affirmed by the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church: this view embraces, for example, the possibility of the salvation of Jews and Muslims as well as those who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel (i.e. uninformed non-Christians).⁴ Inclusivism allows one to assert the absolute truth of the home religion while affirming that salvation is possible for non-Christians. Or one could avoid the soteriological problem of evil altogether by adopting some form of pluralism – for example, the view of John Hick which permits us to say that believers in all world religions participate in a single transcendent truth.⁵ This would also allow Christians to affirm the possibility of salvation within different religious traditions. To adopt this solution of course requires that one give up the claim that the home religion is exclusively true.

Craig rejects these solutions for two reasons. First, he does not see eternal punishment as a moral problem: Craig apparently believes that divine justice is consistent with the eternal damnation of *all* human beings. Affirming the doctrine of original sin, he asserts the orthodox view that all are sinful and deserve eternal punishment: it is only out of God's mercy, which is received by faith in Christ's sacrificial death, that anyone is saved.⁶ Second, Craig maintains that both inclusivism and pluralism are inconsistent with Christian scripture. Although scripture tells us that God desires the salvation of all persons, it also tells us that God eternally punishes those who reject His merciful offer of salvation.

According to the New Testament, God does not want anyone to perish, but desires that all persons repent and be saved and come to know the truth (II Peter 3.9; Timothy 2.4). He therefore seeks to draw all men to Himself. Those who make a well-informed and free decision to reject Christ are self-condemned, since they repudiate God's unique sacrifice for sin. By spurning God's prevenient grace and the solicitation of His Spirit, they shut out God's mercy and seal their own destiny. They, therefore, and not God, are responsible for their condemnation, and God deeply mourns their loss.⁷

Central to Craig's response to the soteriological problem of evil is a notion of well-informed free choice. Craig realizes that he must show that all uninformed non-believers are culpable despite the fact that they do not fit what is for him the paradigm of culpability – namely the well-informed free decision to shut out God's mercy. The problem for Craig is how to make sense of the claim that uninformed non-believers are 'responsible for their condemnation'. How can those who never have an opportunity to hear the Gospel message be justly condemned for not accepting Christ? In what sense can they be said to be guilty of disbelief if they never make a free decision to shut out God's mercy?

One answer that Craig considers is the view that those who never have the opportunity to hear the Christian message of salvation will be judged by a different standard – namely the standard of general revelation. The idea is this: in addition to God’s special revelation in Christ as revealed in scripture, God has disclosed Himself indirectly in nature: this is general revelation. The scriptural basis of this is Romans 1.26, which can be interpreted as saying that all human beings who observe the natural world, whose order clearly reveals God’s handiwork, have no excuse for their disbelief.

Although Craig does not rule out the possibility that some may be saved this way, the essence of the Christian message, as he understands it, is that salvation comes through Christ alone. One authoritative text for him is Acts 4.12 which tells us: ‘There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’. This is why Craig sees it as his task to make sense of the view that uninformed non-believers are justly damned to eternal punishment. He in fact thinks that those who come to know the Gospel are much more likely to respond to God positively than those who have access to general revelation only.⁸ Indeed, he seems to think that it is reasonable to believe that at least some who are not persuaded by general revelation could be convinced by special revelation. So he must answer this question: why, if God is perfectly good, omniscient, and omnipotent, did He not ‘supply special revelation to persons who, while rejecting the general revelation they do have, would have responded to the gospel of Christ if they had been sufficiently well-informed concerning it’?⁹

Craig contends that the answer lies in the doctrine of middle knowledge found in the writings of the Spanish Jesuit, Luis Molina (1535–1600). Molina, according to Craig, holds that God has knowledge of all true counterfactual propositions, including counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.¹⁰ This means that God knows not only what free decisions we actually make in our lifetime but what free decisions we would have made in all possible circumstances in all possible worlds. This counterfactual knowledge is what Molina calls middle knowledge.

According to Craig, the relevance of God’s middle knowledge to the problem raised by the condemnation of uninformed non-Christians is twofold. First, if God has middle knowledge, then He knows what every uninformed non-believer would choose if given the opportunity to accept or reject Christ. Second, it is possible that God, in His providence, has so arranged the world that anyone who *would* accept Christ has been given the opportunity to do so. If this is true – and Craig thinks that it is reasonable to believe that it is – then it is plausible to conclude that no person who would freely accept Christ, if she were to hear the Gospel, has been denied that opportunity.¹¹

It is important to recognize that Craig assumes that, in order to maximize the number who are saved, God *must* create a world with a *multitude* of individuals. Moreover, he reasons that in any world that God *could* create which is populated

by a multitude of individuals, it *must* remain possible for some of these individuals to reject the offer of salvation. In a world with a multitude of persons, how could God, without negating freedom, possibly bring it about that all persons choose Christ? So, in any world occupied by a multitude of human beings, all of whom are truly free, nothing, not even omnipotence, can assure the salvation of all. Given His middle knowledge, God could of course have created a world in which very few, if any, freely reject Christ, but only at the price that the number who freely accept Christ would also be very small. This, Craig thinks we can reasonably assert, is not the world God prefers.¹²

Therefore, according to Craig, it is reasonable to believe that God decided to create a world in which the maximum number of persons will freely choose Christ, compared to the number that will freely reject Christ. This view is crucial to Craig's defence of the justice of God: he thinks we must recognize that it is possible that the terrible price of filling heaven is filling hell. In other words, if God had actualized a world in which there are fewer persons in hell, there would also be fewer persons in heaven. Craig's reasoning can now be summarized as follows: even in the face of the eternal suffering of those who have never heard of Christ, belief in God's justice remains not only logically coherent but also plausible, *if* we (1) reasonably assume that God's aim was to create a world in which there is an optimum balance between the number of saved and the number of damned, and (2) logically conclude, on the assumption that the omnipotent creator possesses middle knowledge, that He has so arranged things in the actual world that the population of uninformed non-Christians contains only those who would freely reject Christ in all circumstances.¹³

The Molinist solution to the soteriological problem of evil is therefore this: uninformed non-Christians are persons who *virtually* reject the offer of salvation. Individuals who never actually hear the message of Christ are as culpable as those who hear this message and actually freely reject it, because in any world in which the former were presented with the offer of salvation through Christ they would also freely reject it. The Molinist viewpoint fits with the conviction that God knows the minds and hearts of all human beings. From this perspective, every person who ends up in hell is there as a result of either her actual or her virtual *free* rejection of Christ.

Informed non-Christians

Informed conventional non-Christians

What about those who have been informed about Christ but, as a result of upbringing, are *disposed* to reject Christianity? The power of early religious education seems undeniable. Schopenhauer points out that if religious education begins early enough, by adulthood a person will be, in effect, inoculated against other religions: she will tend to judge other religions against the standard of the

home religion and find them wanting.¹⁴ For example, a person who is raised a Muslim in Pakistan is likely to judge the Gospel, if she hears about it, by Muslim criteria. Her early formative Muslim education shapes her perception and assessment of the claims of Christianity. From the perspective of the Qur'an, she will reject the central Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and Trinity because she will see them as examples of *shirk* – the sin of associating something with God that is not God, an unforgivable sin for a Muslim.¹⁵

Of course, there are individuals raised in Muslim communities or households who convert to Christianity, but it is safe to say that the vast majority of Muslims, given the power of early religious education, are unlikely to be receptive to the Christian message because they will, as a result of religious socialization, perceive it through Islamic lenses. This is why it seems unjust for the 'Christian' God to condemn conventional Muslim non-believers to hell: although they may be aware of the *claim* that Jesus is the divine saviour, they have also been effectively conditioned to believe that the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus is blasphemous. Isn't it therefore unreasonable to hold that they can, in good conscience, *freely* choose Jesus as their saviour?

Can the Molinist doctrine of middle knowledge be used to justify condemnation of informed conventional non-Christians, such as those whose consciousness is shaped from birth to accept only the teachings of Islam? Craig would of course have to answer 'Yes' in order to defend divine justice. Using the Molinist idea of middle knowledge, Craig could reason as follows: God knows that all individuals who have been raised Muslim and who have rejected Christ as saviour would have rejected the gift of salvation, even if raised in a Christian household. Given God's middle knowledge and His providential arrangement of things, we can reasonably conclude that those who are born into another religion and remain within it, despite exposure to the Gospel, are those who, even if they had not been indoctrinated in a non-Christian religion – even if placed in conditions favourable to the acceptance of the Gospel – would have still rejected the Christian offer of salvation. According to this view, it appears justifiable to conclude that informed conventional non-Christians belong to the category of those who would freely reject Christ in all circumstances. Therefore, Craig could argue, it is as just for God to condemn to hell informed conventional non-Christians as it is to so condemn uninformed non-Christians.

Informed reflective non-Christians

What about informed reflective non-Christians, individuals who have carefully examined Christianity and have deliberately chosen agnosticism, atheism, or a non-Christian religion? God's middle knowledge is not relevant here because this is a clear case of free, informed disbelief. Indeed, it would appear that fully informed reflective non-Christians constitute for Craig the paradigm case of culpable non-belief. That is, Craig's category of well-informed persons

who freely reject Christ appears to coincide with my category of informed reflective non-Christians. If we asked Craig for an example of informed free rejection of Christ, wouldn't he necessarily point to the informed reflective non-Christian? Doesn't the informed reflective non-Christian in fact constitute the counterfactual standard by which Craig wants us to judge both the uninformed non-Christian and the informed conventional non-Christian?

All non-Christians culpable?

In other words, the two categories of non-Christians discussed above are, in counterfactual terms, *virtually* equivalent to the category of informed reflective non-Christians: that is, according to Craig, this is what uninformed and conventional non-Christians *would be*, if given the opportunity. If this is correct, the following question arises: does Craig think that *any* person could be fully informed and freely reject Christ without being culpable? Does Craig assume that the evidence for the truth of orthodox Christianity is so compelling that no informed, thoughtful person can reasonably and justifiably doubt or reject it, or rationally choose another religion? The answer seems to be this: Craig maintains that *any person who is fully informed about the Christian message and rejects it knows better*. This means that, on his view, no person *ever* rejects Christianity for merely intellectual or evidential reasons.

Craig, I contend, needs to maintain this in order to impute culpability to *all* non-Christians. That is, he needs to assert that both uninformed non-Christians and informed conventional non-Christians are those who – if they had the information possessed by informed reflective non-Christians – would, like them, knowingly and stubbornly, out of perversity, freely reject Christ. For Craig's Molinist theodicy to succeed, God in His middle knowledge must know that both uninformed non-Christians and informed conventional non-Christians, even if provided with complete information about the *truth* of the Gospel and given sufficient time to reflect on this, would defiantly reject the truth.

A critique of Craig's Molinist solution

It seems to me uncontroversial to hold that rejection of the truth of Christianity *can* be both free and justifiable and thus inculpable: that a non-Christian can honestly reject the Christian message for purely intellectual or evidential reasons. It is not enough to show that a person does – or would – freely choose to reject Christ: one must also show why doing so is always a guilty choice. Craig's imputation of culpability to all non-Christians appears to me ungrounded. Just as one can reasonably question the claim that nature is the work of an omnipotent God (so-called general revelation) – as even Christians such as Pascal and Kierkegaard acknowledge – so a fully informed and reflective person

can reasonably question the truth of special revelation: specifically, the claim that Christian scripture is the word of God. If the case can be made that it is reasonable for a fully informed person to reject the Christian message, then we can plausibly conclude that there are at least *some* inculpable non-Christians. If this is the case, then the soteriological problem of evil has not been solved.

Consider, for example, a person who is a Muslim not because of upbringing but as a result of many years of investigation in which she has carefully compared the scriptural claims of Islam to those of Christianity. One can find within Islam the notion that believers have a duty to prove the truth of Islam for themselves. Blind faith is discouraged because it is assumed that any honest investigator can discover good reasons for believing in the truth of Islam. Indeed, the Muslim term for faith, *iman*, means something close to rational certainty.¹⁶

Many reflective Muslims believe that there are rational standards which enable us to confirm the divine origin of the Qur'an, compared, for example, to the New Testament. Here is a list of criteria one Muslim, Suzanne Haneef, proposes for our consideration, as a basis for judging whether scripture really is the word of God:

- The person claiming to receive revelation is known as an individual of unblemished character.
- The words of the alleged scripture were recorded exactly as they were received from the divine source.
- The message contained in scripture should be totally consistent throughout.
- There should be no confusion among its concepts and teachings.
- It should appeal to human reason and rational faculties rather than to irrationality, superstition or the like.
- It should not attribute to God anything which is contrary to his unique, exalted, and transcendent nature.
- Nothing in it should be contrary to the objectively observed facts of the natural world.¹⁷

Whether these criteria are really adequate for determining the truth of a claim about the divine origin of scripture is not my concern. Rather, the point is that, on the basis of the above criteria, there are thoughtful Muslims who reject the claim that the New Testament is the uncorrupted word of God and who affirm the claim that the Qur'an *is* the uncorrupted divine word. New Testament texts that seem to contradict each other on whether faith alone is necessary for salvation, apparently differing accounts of the same events in the Gospels, the identification of Jesus with God in some texts compared to other texts that seem to assert a lesser view of Jesus, etc. could be reasonably judged by a Muslim to violate some of the criteria listed above. Haneef explains why she finds the Gospels questionable:

These are simply biographical accounts of Jesus' life and mission by four different men, not the divine revelation brought by Jesus himself. The greater part of the material contained in the four Gospels do not meet the criteria discussed earlier by which true revelation may be recognized, the first of which is that it should be transmitted word for word as received from God by the person to whom it was directly revealed, not through a second- or fifth-hand source. Even the claim that the Gospels were

written under divine inspiration does not hold together since there are many inconsistencies and discrepancies among the four equally inspired accounts.¹⁸

Craig and other Christian exclusivists can, of course, reasonably dispute Haneef's rejection of the Gospels and defence of the Qur'an on the basis of the asserted criteria. The point, however, again is this: many thoughtful Muslims believe that they have rational grounds for rejecting the claim that the New Testament is a completely trustworthy revelation of God's word and for affirming the claim that the Qur'an is completely trustworthy scripture. Of course, to repeat, Craig can challenge Haneef's standards for rational belief and present an alternative set, or he can accept these standards and make the case that Christianity satisfies them while Islam does not. What I do not think Craig can reasonably argue that is that *every* thoughtful Muslim who is informed about Christ and who freely rejects belief in the divinity of Jesus (while accepting Jesus as a prophet) is culpable for her non-belief in Christ. If being culpable means freely and knowingly rejecting the truth, then it does not appear to me that this is a fair description of Haneef and other thoughtful Muslims. It seems to me implausible that such culpability can be justifiably imputed to all Muslims any more than it can be justifiably imputed to all Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, or atheists.

The above criteria for judging whether scripture is genuinely the word of God were formulated by a woman who was a devout Christian during her childhood. She discovered Islam through contact with Muslims and extensive reading of Islamic texts. After examining both Christianity and Islam, she rejected Christianity and converted to Islam. Is it plausible to view this conversion as a culpable act? Haneef seems as genuinely convinced that salvation depends on accepting the claims of Islam as Craig does that salvation depends on accepting the claims of Christianity. There are, as far as I can tell, no good grounds for suspecting Haneef's sincerity or the thoroughness of her critical examination of Christianity and Islam. Even if one could somehow impeach her deliberate choice of Islam, it seems doubtful that one can impeach the integrity of every Muslim in the world, which is something I think that Craig needs to do to make his case. Indeed, to make his case Craig needs to call into question the integrity of *every* person who does – or would – reject Christianity.

Free, informed inculpable non-belief in Christ

Craig's defence of the condemnation of uninformed non-Christians is based on a concept of their counterfactual free, well-informed decision to reject Christ. The concept of a free informed decision is not, however, spelled out and is far from clear. Craig seems to assume that anyone who is fully informed about the Gospel could not, on cognitive grounds, reject its truth. Does this mean that the evidence for the truth of Christianity is so compelling that no honest person who

was presented with it could sincerely doubt it? But if that is the case, then in what sense would such a belief be truly free? In order for the decision to be genuinely free, it could be argued, it is necessary that the evidence be less than compelling. The claim that the decision to believe in Christ is free is further complicated by the threat of eternal punishment that accompanies it. If someone really had convincing evidence that salvation comes through Christ alone and that failure to accept Christ's offer of salvation will result in eternal punishment, would she really be free to decline to believe? Indeed, wouldn't this offer be difficult, if not impossible, to refuse?

To preserve free choice in response to the offer of salvation, it could be argued that the truth of Christianity must *not be* perspicuous. This is a point made by Michael Murray. He states: 'My claim is that the hiddenness of God is required in order for free beings to be able to exercise their moral freedom ... given the strength of the threat'.¹⁹ More specifically, his claim is that, given the severity of the threat (eternal punishment), God must remain relatively elusive in order for a choice against Christ to be truly free. The truth of Christianity must not be self-evident or compelling which, according to Murray, explains why God must remain hidden. Murray seems to argue that the possibility of a free rejection of Christ requires that both special and general revelation be open to doubt.

Between Craig and Murray, Christian exclusivism faces a dilemma. Either the evidence for the truth of Christianity is overwhelming, in which case there is no truly free decision for those who are fully informed, or the evidence is less than rationally compelling, in which case non-belief in Christ *could be* reasonable and therefore inculpable. Consider again the reflective Muslim as a case in point: if the truth of Christianity is not perspicuous, then it is far from clear that the thoughtful Muslim who rejects Christianity knows better. This reflective Muslim will share Craig's view that general revelation provides a reasonable basis for belief in an omnipotent personal God. This Muslim also shares the view that belief in general revelation is not enough for salvation: in addition one must believe in special revelation. The point of *reasonable* disagreement between Christians and Muslims is therefore this: What is the locus of special revelation? Christians point to the Bible while Muslims point to the Qur'an.

If a belief must be rational to be responsible, shouldn't Craig grant that thoughtful Muslims who value reason in religious belief have the correct *how*, even if they have an incorrect *what*? I understand the *how* as referring to how one comes to hold a belief – whether on rational grounds, blindly, as a result of purely emotional appeals, etc. – and the *what* as referring to the particular truth-claim one is making. Furthermore, if belief is to be free rather than compelled, shouldn't Craig admit that there is room for believers to reasonably disagree about the locus of special revelation? Aren't reflective Muslims doing something preferable to conventional Christians who believe only because that is what they have been taught, or extreme fideist Christians who see themselves as believing contrary to

the evidence? And shouldn't Craig prefer thoughtful and rational Muslims who embrace the findings of modern science, including belief in the Big Bang, which Craig finds a convincing basis for his *Kalam* cosmological argument (a term borrowed from medieval Islamic philosophy), over fundamentalist Christians who, although accepting Christ, dogmatically reject any scientific findings that contradict a literal reading of Genesis? Or does Craig want to argue that conventional Christians, although lacking the correct *how*, will be saved because they have the correct *what*, while reflective Muslims, such as Haneef, even if they have the correct *how*, will be condemned to hell for having an incorrect *what*?

It appears that Craig, as a Christian exclusivist, must say that every Muslim, no matter how thoughtful and rational she appears, is, in some sense, self-deceived and deliberately chooses darkness over light. In *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, Craig makes it clear what he thinks is going on when any person rejects Christ:

When a person refuses to come to Christ it is never because of a lack of evidence or because of intellectual difficulties: at root, he refuses to come because he willingly ignores and rejects the drawing of God's spirit on his heart. No one in the final analysis fails to become a Christian because of lack of arguments; he fails to become a Christian because he loves darkness rather than light and wants nothing to do with God.²⁰

In an article in this journal, written after “‘No other name’”, Craig makes it clear that the plausibility of his theodicy ultimately rests on background Christian doctrines revealed in scripture. Specifically, he tells us that his solution to the soteriological problem of evil is based on the view that a person ‘would rather plunge into self-destruction than bend the knee to God’, because we ‘learn from Scripture that sin has a hardening effect upon man's heart’.²¹ Thus, in order to make his position plausible, Craig needs to appeal to the doctrine of original sin. The circularity of this is vicious for those of us who do not find this doctrine at all plausible. Craig, however, needs a doctrine such as this in order to call into question the integrity of all non-Christians, to maintain that in every case it is out of perversity and culpable rebellion against God that anyone rejects Christ.

Does Craig mean to assert that Suzanne Haneef in fact recognizes the truth of Christianity at the very moment that she so strongly affirms the truth of Islam and that she, because she loves darkness, deliberately chooses eternal damnation? Does it make sense to say that Haneef wants nothing to do with God: Craig obviously means the Christian God which for him is the only God. I will repeat one last time the crucial question: even if these dubious claims about Haneef are true, does it make sense to hold that they are equally true of *all* Muslims – indeed that they are equally true of all non-believers in Christ?

In sum, acceptance of Craig's specifically Christian explanation of the motivation of non-Christian belief would require one to call into question the character of *all* non-Christians, no matter how thoughtful and rational they appear to be.

Underlying Craig's Molinist solution to the soteriological problem of evil is the problematic claim – spelled out in the work of Christian apologetics referred to above – that a free, informed decision to reject Christ is always culpable because the well-informed non-Christian always 'willingly ignores and rejects the drawing of God's spirit on his heart'. This, in Craig's view, is what makes it just for God to send to hell uninformed non-believers: they are all, by hypothesis, individuals who would, if informed, freely reject Christ out of love of darkness. The problem is that there seems to be no good reason for asserting that this is true of every informed person who rejects Christ. Craig, of course, is free to affirm, as a matter of faith, that all reflective, informed Muslims who reject the divinity of Christ are really deliberately resisting the spirit of [the Christian] God who draws on their hearts, but a Muslim could assert with equal force that all informed Christians who reject the truth of the Qur'an are really culpably resisting Allah's attempt to draw them to Him. Such claims, on either side, are dogmatic, not philosophical. I conclude that Craig's solution to the soteriological problem of evil – short of a more persuasive account of why every instance of a free, informed rejection of Christ is culpable – begs the question.

If Craig were simply trying to make the case that it is *logically possible* that an omnipotent God justly condemns to hell every person who rejects Christ, then I do not see how this claim could be refuted. Moreover, I have not tried to refute this logical claim. A successful case for the logical consistency of the exclusivist view of salvation is not, however, a substantive achievement, and of course Craig claims to have achieved much more – namely to have established that the exclusivist view is plausible. In response to the soteriological problem of evil, he claims to have provided a theodicy as well as a defence. My conclusion is that he has not met the burden of proof that a theodicy requires. That is, he has not provided a plausible explanation of why a just God would damn every person who does (or would) freely reject the offer of salvation through Christ.²²

Notes

1. William Lane Craig "'No other name'": a middle knowledge perspective on the exclusivity of salvation through Christ', *Faith and Philosophy*, 6 (1989) 172–188. It is also part of a recent collection: Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (eds) *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity* (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 38–53. (My page references below are to *Faith and Philosophy*.) See also Raymond J. Van Arragon 'Transworld damnation and Craig's contentious suggestion', *Faith and Philosophy*, 10 (2001), 241–259. For a recent examination of religious diversity that assesses Craig's approach from an exclusivist point of view, see David Basinger *Religious Diversity: A Philosophical Assessment* (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2002).
2. Craig "'No other name'", 186. Here he states that his account is 'quiet plausible not only as a defense, but also as a soteriological theodicy'. See also Craig 'Talbot's universalism once more', *Religious Studies*, 29 (1993), 516.
3. Craig "'No other name'", 176.
4. For a good summary of the Vatican II view on other religions, see Robert A. Burns *Roman Catholicism after Vatican II* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001), 139–149.

5. See John Hick 'Religious pluralism and salvation', in Quinn and Meeker *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, 54–66.
6. Craig "'No other name'", 172–173.
7. *Ibid.*, 176.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, 177.
11. *Ibid.*, 184–185.
12. *Ibid.*, 183.
13. *Ibid.*, 183–185.
14. Arthur Schopenhauer *Essays and Aphorisms*, R. J. Hollingdale (transl.) (New York NY: Penguin Books, 1970), 98–99.
15. Abdul Basit *The Essence of the Qur'an* (Chicago IL: ABC International Group, 1997), 41–48. See also John Bowker *What Muslims Believe* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 87–88.
16. Theodore M. Ludwig *The Sacred Paths: Understanding the Religions of the World*, 3rd edn (Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 460.
17. Suzanne Haneef *What Everyone Should Know About Islam and Muslims* (Chicago IL: Library of Islam, 1996), 31.
18. *Ibid.*, 204.
19. Michael Murray 'Coercion and the hiddenness of God', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 30 (1993), 28.
20. William Lane Craig *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 35–36.
21. Craig 'Talbot's universalism once more', 515–516.
22. Of course, within the framework of orthodox Christianity, Craig could claim that even if there are individuals who are non-believers strictly for cognitive reasons, they still deserve eternal damnation because of original sin. As I indicated above, this also begs the question because it assumes the truth of a doctrine that is itself morally problematic and which is in fact rejected by theists within the other two Abrahamic faiths: Judaism and Islam.