

Theodicy, Regress, and the Problem of Eternal Separation

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ABSTRACT: The problem of eternal separation is the problem of explaining how someone could be happy in heaven while knowing that his beloved is in hell. Some argue that this problem is insoluble, while others try to solve it through the lover, the beloved, or the love between them. I argue that the problem of eternal separation is really three problems, namely, of suffering, separation, and regret. I show that no existing reply solves these problems simultaneously. I then present a new approach through theodicy. I argue that, if we reflect on what it would take to defeat the suffering from losing one's beloved to hell, a regress emerges, and an adequate solution to the problem of eternal separation is a solution to this regress. I articulate five replies to the regress and evaluate their prospects. The upshot is a roadmap to defending the traditional Christian view of heaven and hell.

1. Introduction

In his novel *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis explores the nature of heaven and hell and the factors that influence people's choice for heaven or hell as their final end. The novel is composed of vignettes in which a saint is sent by God to his or her recently deceased relative in order to encourage him choose heaven over hell. One vignette occurs between the saintly Sarah Smith and her husband, Frank. Frank is a manipulator who uses his own pain to cause others pain. When they meet, Frank asks Sarah, "You missed me?" Sarah does not answer him directly, so Frank asks again, "Now, you need me no more?" Sarah replies:

But of course not!...What needs could I have...now that I have all? I am full now, not empty. I am in Love Himself, not lonely. Strong, not weak. You shall be the same. Come and see. We shall have no need for one another now: we can begin to love truly. (Lewis 2001, 126)

Frank cannot tolerate the idea of Sarah being happy without him, so he chooses to go to hell. Sarah returns to the "bright country" of heaven. She is joyful and serene, unmoved by Frank's choice. Seeing the exchange, the narrator in the novel asks, "Is it really tolerable that she should be untouched by his misery, even his self-made misery?" (Lewis 2001, 135).

There are many reasons why people might find the traditional Christian view of hell intolerable.¹ For one thing, it is difficult to see how unending, excruciating punishment could be reconciled with God's perfect goodness and mercy (Adams 2006). For another, it is hard to see how any finite human sin in earthly life could deserve unending punishment (Adams 1975; Kvanvig 1993). Here, however, we will focus on a single issue raised by Lewis above, one that we might call the "problem of eternal separation": could a person be perfectly happy

¹ For the traditional conception of hell, see Potts (1998) and Lamont (2011).

in heaven while being aware that his loved one is suffering in hell? We can put the issue in terms of the novel: supposing that Sarah loves Frank, could she really be *perfectly* happy while knowing that he is miserable in hell?

This is a difficult question for the traditional Christian view of the afterlife, on which heaven offers perfect happiness, hell offers perfect misery, each of these states is everlasting, and the blessed in heaven are aware of the suffering of the damned in hell. Indeed, some philosophers have argued that problems concerning the relations between persons in heaven and hell are so severe that they generate an incoherence in the orthodox Christian view. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1989, 721), for example, uses these considerations to argue against the traditional doctrine of everlasting punishment.² More conservatively, Nicole Hassoun (2015) presses the “argument from love,” which argues that, since no one can be perfectly happy if he knows his beloved is suffering, there can be no one in heaven who is aware of the fact that his beloved is in hell.

In defense of the traditional account, Christian philosophers have pursued different strategies. Some have attempted to reconceptualize the traditional account of the suffering that those in hell experience (Daly 2017). Others have proposed that the blessed in heaven retain no knowledge of their loved ones who end up in hell or that they bear no emotional attitudes towards them.³ Still others have proposed that the suffering of the damned becomes a cause of rejoicing for the blessed in heaven, since their suffering gives the blessed clearer knowledge of God’s justice and goodness.⁴

The difficulty with existing attempts to solve the problem of eternal separation is that they are all attempts to remedy an already bad situation. It is not clear that any remedy, however, will be sufficient for heavenly bliss, given that (1) the beloved’s suffering is in tension with lover’s desire for the beloved’s good, (2) the separation between lovers is in tension with lover’s desire for union, and (3) the suffering and separation never needed to happen at all. After all, if the beloved were in heaven, the theoretical pressure on the Christian account of the afterlife would dissolve. Moreover, if the beloved were in heaven, it seems that the happiness of the blessed would be *increased*, since good things are better enjoyed when they are shared.

In this paper, I avoid any piecemeal attempt to solve the problem of eternal separation. Instead, I show that we can attain a systematic perspective on the problem by viewing it through the lens of theodicy, which attempts to describe how, in right relation to God, suffering can be defeated by its contribution to further goods.⁵ In this paper, I argue that, if we reflect on what it would take to defeat the suffering that comes from losing a loved one to hell, a regress problem emerges, and an adequate solution to the problem of eternal separation should be viewed as a solution to this regress problem. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to defend a full solution to the regress, I articulate infinitist, circularist, and

² For related contemporary arguments, see Talbott (1990) and Kronen and Reitan (2011).

³ For the former view, see Craig (1991) and Davis (2015). For the latter, see Yang (2017).

⁴ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Supplement, q. 94, a. 3; Jonathan Edwards, “Sermon XI. The Eternity of Hell Torments,” in *Sermons, on the following subjects; The manner in which salvation is to be sought, etc.* Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/N13259.0001.001>, accessed June 2021. Quotations from Aquinas are taken from Aquinas (1981) and cited by section, question, and article.

⁵ When I speak of a certain instance of suffering being “defeated,” I do not mean merely that the suffering is outweighed or compensated by later benefits. Rather, I mean that the suffering is for the sake of a benefit that not only outweighs the suffering but also could not be gotten without the suffering, in the circumstances. For a useful discussion of defeat in theodicy, see Stump (2010, 378). Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for clarity about this issue.

foundationalist possibilities of reply, and I describe five varieties of foundationalism and the stakes for each one. The result is the most systematic analysis of the problem of eternal separation to date and an agenda for philosophers who wish to defend the traditional Christian view of heaven and hell from the problem of eternal separation.

In order to set the stage for my analysis of the problem of eternal separation as a regress problem, I first present and criticize existing attempts to solve it. I then show how thinking of the problem of eternal separation as a problem for theodicy enables us to analyze it as a regress problem. I then articulate five varieties of foundationalism and argue that none of them admits of an easy answer to the problem of eternal separation. In my conclusion, I point out the most promising route towards a defense of traditional Christian view of the afterlife, and I identify the issues regarding heaven, love, and love's object that a fully adequate defense should incorporate.

2. Existing Responses to the Problem

A number of solutions have been proposed to the problem of eternal separation. We can categorize them by how each one modifies the standard account of the relations between the blessed and the damned. For example, one way to modify the standard account is to focus on the good possessed by persons in heaven. One might argue, for instance, that this good is somehow so consuming or so excellent that it swamps every other consideration, good or evil, for anyone else.⁶ Alternatively, one could modify the standard account by saying that the evils belonging to persons in hell are merely apparent evils rather than actual evils.⁷ Or again, one could modify the standard account by nuancing the view of love that applies to persons in heaven. For example, one might argue that states pertaining to the beloved in hell are not shared by the lover in heaven in the same way that lovers share states on earth. These possibilities suggest that we can categorize responses to the problem by whether they focus on the condition of the lover in heaven, the condition of the beloved in hell, or the nature of the love existing between them.

When it comes to assessing existing responses, we should expect an adequate solution to address two sources of "intolerability" within the problem of eternal separation. The first source is that the beloved in hell suffers, and the second is that the beloved is separated from the lover forever. We should therefore expect an adequate solution to provide convincing answers to two key questions:

Suffering Question: Given that a beloved's suffering normally disturbs a lover's happiness, why is the happiness of the lover in heaven not disturbed by the suffering of the beloved in hell?

Separation Question: Given that prolonged separation from a beloved normally disturbs a lover's happiness, why is the happiness of the beloved in heaven not disturbed by permanent separation from the beloved in hell?

I will now use these questions to assess hell-centered solutions, love-centered solutions, and heaven-centered solutions.

⁶ This view is suggested in Ribeiro (2011).

⁷ See the views of Aquinas and Jonathan Edwards, sketched below.

2.1 Hell-Centered Solutions

One way to answer the problem of eternal separation is to rethink the condition of the damned in hell. Helen Daly (2017) offers such a solution. She argues that, where human suffering is concerned, we should distinguish objective from phenomenal suffering. She then applies this distinction to argue that the damned experience only objective suffering, not phenomenal suffering. Given Daly's distinction, the problem of eternal separation becomes ambiguous: the problem does not say whether the suffering of the beloved is objective or phenomenal. Nevertheless, Daly argues that the blessed can enjoy perfect happiness in heaven so long as they know that their beloved in hell undergoes only objective suffering, not phenomenal suffering.

Daly's solution is problematic. For one thing, her view has nothing to say about the Separation Question. But even concerning the Suffering Question, why should the lover in heaven care whether the beloved suffers objectively or phenomenally? If love desires the good for the other, then the desires of love will be unfulfilled no matter whether the beloved is deprived of goods objectively or phenomenally. In response to this difficulty, Daly contends that genuine love balances compassion and respect, and so the lover will be content in the knowledge that

the damned have the best afterlife possible for them, consistent with their freely willed choices in life. Both God and the blessed souls who love the damned could then be content that the damned are doing as well as possible, suffering as little as possible, given the sorts of people they are. (Daly 2017, 147)

But Daly's response seems only to make the problem worse. If hell is the best afterlife possible for the beloved, then it follows that the best afterlife possible for the beloved is an afterlife that is permanently terrible. Perhaps a lover can be *resigned* to such a possibility, but resignation is not the same as perfect happiness, and it is hard to see how perfect happiness could include anything to which a person were merely resigned.

Daly's view is instructive, however, since it helps to clarify the difficulty for any hell-centered solution. In brief, hell must be bad. Daly tries to qualify and mitigate the badness of hell by distinguishing types of badness for the beloved. But no matter how this badness is qualified or mitigated, a non-bad condition must be a non-hell. But again, love desires the good for the beloved, and the good for the beloved is achieved only when it is complete. From the perspective of love, therefore, any bad for the beloved will be regarded as evil and contrary to the lover's desire. Thus, it seems likely that no mere qualification of the beloved's condition in hell will be sufficient to answer the Suffering Question and thus the problem of eternal separation.

2.2 Love-Centered Solutions

Thomas Aquinas addresses the relations between persons in heaven and hell in a few places, and his view of the "pitilessness" of persons in heaven might be thought to generate a love-centered solution to the problem. Aquinas argues that persons in heaven do not have pity for those in hell. He writes:

Now mercy or compassion comes of the reason's choice when a person wishes another's evil to be dispelled: wherefore in those things which, in accordance with reason, we do not

wish to be dispelled, we have no such compassion. [...] in the future state it will be impossible for [the damned] to be taken away from their unhappiness: and consequently it will not be possible to pity their sufferings according to right reason. Therefore the blessed in glory will have no pity on the damned.⁸

Aquinas's view here seems to be that pity must always be directed towards a certain goal, namely, removing some evil for the other person. The blessed in heaven, however, do not wish the evil of hell to be removed from those who are in hell, since, on Aquinas's view, their reason concurs in God's judgment that the punishment of the damned should be everlasting. Thus, the necessary "ameliorative purpose" of pity is missing, and so pity for those in hell is impossible. If, however, persons in heaven do not pity those in hell, it would seem to follow that the suffering of the beloved in hell does not in fact transfer to the lover in heaven. After all, to take a somewhat grim example, a criminal who does not pity his victims does not suffer at his victims' suffering.

Nevertheless, it is hard to see how Aquinas's view could support a completely adequate love-centered solution. On the one hand, Aquinas gives a fairly direct answer to the Suffering Question: the suffering of persons in hell does not disturb persons in heaven, since persons in heaven do not pity persons in hell. But on the other hand, it seems possible to pity a person for evils that happened *in the past*, even if nothing can be done about those evils in the present. For example, it seems possible to pity historical figures, say, the Greek mother whose story inspired the novel and film *Sophie's Choice*. If so, then the lover in heaven might pity the beloved in hell for his past sins, either because they were bad in themselves or because they resulted in the loss of heaven.

Moreover, with regard to the beloved in hell, pity is not the only way to transfer suffering to the lover in heaven. This is because one person's suffering can cause another person to suffer even in the absence of pity. For example, suppose a fan streaks across the pitch during a World Cup soccer match and is subsequently tackled and crushed by security guards. The other fans might not pity the stalker being crushed by the guards, but they still might regard the whole affair as obscene and as detracting from the beauty of the match. Now suppose that the stalker is your brother, whom you have begged not to streak at the game. You still might not pity him when he is crushed by the guards, but his being crushed by the guards nevertheless represents a lamentable failure in your relationship. By analogy, the lover in heaven might regard the beloved's being in hell as not only detracting from the beauty of creation but also as an ultimately unresolved failure of relationship in his life. And all this is possible *even if* he does not pity the beloved in hell and regards the suffering of the beloved as justified and rightly everlasting.

It seems that similar things could be said about even more ambitious love-centered solutions to the problem. For example, some philosophers have proposed that, in heaven, persons become impassible, such that they no longer experience any lower, passive emotions but only higher, active emotions (Yang 2017).

This is a stronger claim than that of Aquinas, since it suggests that heavenly love lacks not only pity but also any passive emotion. Nevertheless, this stronger view also fails. It fails because the absence of lower, passive emotions does not rule out the possibility of sadness over evil.⁹ Indeed, at least on a Thomistic view, sorrow is a property of the *rational* part of the

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Supplement, q. 94, a. 2.

⁹ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 35, a. 2.

soul. This is why, unless a person is saddened for his sins through his reason and will, his rejection of sin through penance is not praiseworthy.¹⁰ Consequently, the absence of lower, passive emotions does not imply the absence of sadness in the higher part of the soul, and so even this stronger view fails to provide a convincing answer to the Suffering Question.

2.3 Heaven-Centered Solutions

We are left with heaven-centered solutions to the problem. Such solutions seek to show that, somehow in virtue of the goods present and the evils absent to the lover in heaven, it remains possible for the lover in heaven to know about the beloved in hell and yet to enjoy perfect happiness.

One strategy to modify the standard account of the heavenly condition is to isolate the blessed soul from the evil of the beloved in hell. For example, a recent heaven-centered solution suggests that God selectively modifies the memories of lovers in heaven in order to remove any painful traces of the beloved in hell (Craig 1991; Davis 2015).

In one way, this solution is attractive, since it makes sense that, if the lover cannot even remember the beloved, the lover should be disturbed by neither the beloved's suffering nor his separation.¹¹ In another way, however, this solution is problematic. For example, for persons in heaven, perfect happiness would seem to involve gratitude towards God for His gifts. But if the lover's memories of the beloved were eliminated, then the lover would not be able to express gratitude to God for God's gifts imparted through the beloved.

Moreover, as other philosophers have noted, memory modification would raise serious worries for personal identity, or at least for self-understanding. For example, suppose that a wife and mother of 12 goes to heaven, but her husband goes to hell. Who would she think is the father of her 12 children? What would she think she did during her life? It is hard to see how these questions could be answered in a way that would make sense of her life on earth and its fulfillment in heaven. Thus, if heaven is supposed to be a place of gratitude and fulfillment, it is hard to see how God could modify memories in any way sufficient to solve the problem.

A different strategy to modify the standard account is to suggest that, rather than being an evil, the presence of the beloved in hell is somehow a good for the person in heaven. For example, a classic heaven-centered solution suggests that the suffering of the damned in hell is a source of joy for those in heaven, rather than a source of sorrow. Jonathan Edwards writes:

When [the blessed in heaven] shall see how great the misery is from which God has saved them, and how great a difference he has made between their state and the state of others, who were by nature (and perhaps for a time by practice) no more sinful and ill-deserving than any, it will give them a greater sense of the wonderfulness of God's grace to them. Every time they look upon the damned, it will excite in them a lively and admiring sense

¹⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 85, a. 1.

¹¹ In fact, it is not clear that this proposal entirely eliminates the worry about suffering transferring from beloved in hell to lover in heaven. Recall Daly's distinction between objective and phenomenal suffering. A modified memory might prevent phenomenal suffering for persons in heaven regarding their loved ones in hell. But it might remain the case that persons in heaven suffer objectively if their loved ones are suffering in hell. After all, if my child is kidnapped and tortured without my knowing it, there seems to be a sense in which I suffer, even as I suffer when cancer overtakes my body without my knowing it.

of the grace of God, in making them so to differ...it will make their happiness the greater, as it will make them more sensible of their own happiness.¹²

On this view, the suffering of the damned seems instrumentally valuable to those in heaven, since, through reflecting on the suffering of the damned, the blessed are able to attain a deeper understanding of God's merciful goodness to them. Aquinas says something similar, but he focuses more on the blessed souls' understanding of God's justice:

[T]he saints will rejoice in the punishment of the wicked, by considering therein the order of Divine justice and their own deliverance, which will fill them with joy. And thus the Divine justice and their own deliverance will be the direct cause of the joy of the blessed: while the punishment of the damned will cause it indirectly.¹³

Aquinas classes the suffering of the damned as an indirect cause of joy to the blessed, since he thinks that the blessed will view the suffering of the damned in light of divine justice, which is the direct cause of their joy.

The views of Edwards and Aquinas might be thought to provide a heaven-centered solution to the problem. If the suffering of the damned is in fact a cause of joy to the blessed, then the suffering of the damned does not seem apt to constitute an evil for the blessed or to pose a threat to their perfect happiness. It is clear that this solution lays greatest emphasis on the Suffering Question, and it suggests that the suffering of the beloved does not disturb the happiness of the lover because it is an indirect cause of joy to the lover.

Nevertheless, there are serious difficulties with this proposal. First, the proposal is largely silent concerning the Separation Question. This is problematic, since, even if I take joy in my beloved's activities, separation can still bring pain. For example, I might rejoice that my spouse is away winning medals at the Olympics, but my joy will be bittersweet if I cannot be with her because of COVID-19 regulations.

Second, the proposal fails to consider whether "indirect rejoicing" at the suffering of the damned could yet disturb perfect happiness. Consider an example. Suppose that James is a young wrestler, and David is his father. During a tournament, James suffers serious injuries, but he nevertheless perseveres and wins every match, including the championship. In such a case, James's sufferings might be indirectly a cause of rejoicing for David. This is because the injuries were occasions for James to manifest tenacity, and thus they contributed to the overall greatness of his tournament.¹⁴ But so long as James's injuries remain, we surely would not regard David as "perfectly happy" with the situation, supposing that David loves James. The human psyche is complicated enough to rejoice in something in one way and to lament it in another.¹⁵ So, in order to work, the proposed solution must be supplemented with an account of why the blessed in heaven do not lament the suffering of the damned for itself, even as they rejoice in what that suffering reveals concerning God's mercy and justice. The proposal thus presents an incomplete answer to the Suffering Question.

¹² Jonathan Edwards, "The Eternity of Hell's Torments," 4.3.

¹³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Supplement, q. 94, a. 3.

¹⁴ In this connection, one might recall the 2008 U.S. Open in men's golf, where Tiger Woods won the championship despite two stress fractures and a torn ACL in his left knee. Many sports commentators regard this as Woods's greatest major championship.

¹⁵ Aquinas himself makes this point many times. See, for example, his discussion of sorrow in Christ: *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 15, a. 6, r. 4.

A similar difficulty besets other solutions that attempt to turn the presence of the beloved in hell into a good for the lover in heaven. For example, John Lamont (2011, 171) has defended the goodness of hell by employing a teleological conception of the good. On such a view, a thing is good when it achieves its end as a whole, and there is a strong distinction to be made between the absolute goodness of the whole and the relative goodness of its parts. Using this view, one could then claim that the existence of persons in hell is absolutely good for creation, even if it is relatively bad for those in hell, since the existence of persons in hell helps to ensure that each person receives what he is due, which is the end of any just society as a whole.

From the above discussion, however, it should be clear that the teleological conception by itself is not sufficient to solve the problem of eternal separation. It is one thing to say that the presence of the beloved in hell is absolutely good within the order of creation. It is quite another thing to say that the absolute good of the order of creation is the *only* good that affects the happiness of the lover in heaven. Objectively, the human good is complex. And again, the human psyche is complicated enough to view the same object in different ways, so that, for example, the lover might be resigned to the absolute goodness of the beloved in hell on account of justice but be saddened by the evils which afflict the beloved himself.¹⁶ Overall, this difficulty will be hard to solve, since, no matter what else is said about the condition of the beloved in hell, it must remain the case that the beloved cannot participate in the absolute good of creation in the fullest way possible. The lover will be forced to “lower his sights” for the beloved, and this seems lamentable. Again, the Suffering Question remains unanswered.

A final strategy for modifying the standard picture of heaven and hell is to attack the problem head-on and to say that personal union between the lover in heaven and beloved in hell is indeed among the goods of the afterlife. For example, Eric Yang (2017, 164) has proposed a *refrigerium*, that is, a temporary place of relief from the sufferings incurred in eternal damnation. This *refrigerium* might also be a place where lover and beloved can interact. With respect to the problem of eternal separation, three benefits are claimed for this proposal. First, the separation between lover and beloved is no longer eternal: they experience periodic visits. Second, the proposal mitigates the evil suffered by the beloved, even while it respects that permanent separation from God might be the best good appropriate for the beloved in hell. Third, by proposing interaction between lover and beloved, the proposal allows the lover to be the instrument of relief for the beloved, and so it describes a way in which the lover can not only maintain his “ameliorative purpose” towards the beloved but also fulfill it, achieving a certain good for the beloved.

The *refrigerium* solution does an excellent job addressing the Suffering and Separation Questions directly: suffering is mitigated, and separation is punctuated. Nevertheless, there are difficulties for this proposal. First, the proposal receives little scriptural support. Yang cites the New Testament parable of Lazarus and the rich man in the gospel of Luke, but this parable

¹⁶ This complexity of the human psyche means that not even purgatorial or universalist views of the afterlife are immune from the Suffering and Separation Questions. Some Christians have argued that any post-mortem suffering is temporary and purgatorial rather than permanent. In one way, this view mitigates the problem of eternal separation, since it implies that separation between the lover and beloved is not eternal after all. But given the complexity of the human psyche, this view cannot entirely solve the problem of eternal separation. For, even if the lover regards the beloved’s post-mortem suffering as deserved, purgatorial, temporary, and even *good* for the beloved in some absolute sense, it seems that the lover still might regard the beloved’s purgatorial suffering as relatively bad and thus as an object of resignation. It follows that even proponents of purgatorial or universalist views of the afterlife owe us replies to the Suffering and Separation Questions. For discussion of purgatorial and universalist views of post-mortem suffering, see Adams (1999); Hall (2003); Buckareff and Plug (2005); Kronen and Reitan (2013); Crummett (2019); and Hart (2019). Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the connection to purgatorial views of post-mortem suffering.

is clearly attempting to make a moral point about serving the poor rather than a metaphysical point about causal relations between heaven and hell.

Next, the proposal receives little patristic support. Patristic references to the *refrigerium* typically concern a place of awaiting the last judgment (Le Groff 1986, 46). They do not concern a place of refreshment from the pains of hell.

Next, the reply to the Separation Question is problematic, since it is hard to see how visits in the *refrigerium* could be anything but painful events. For example, suppose your best friend becomes a violent neo-Nazi. Suppose that you have made serious efforts to convert your friend, but these efforts are fruitless. In such circumstances, would you expect a casual (or any) visit with your friend to be joyful or good for either one of you? Perhaps you could go golfing together and talk about nothing but golf technique and the weather, but would that be perfectly fulfilling? Probably not.

Next, if the purpose of the *refrigerium* is really to provide some good for the beloved in hell, then it is hard to see why God should send the lover rather than some more powerful consoler (e.g., Christ or His mother). It is also mysterious why the beloved in hell should receive visits from consolers only sometimes, rather than always. If the lover's happiness is improved when the beloved receives periodic visits from consolers, then it is hard to see how the beloved's usual diet of suffering would not disturb the lover's perfect happiness.

We have now examined three broad heaven-centered strategies for solving the problem of eternal separation. The first attempts to isolate the lover from the evils of hell. The second attempts to rethink the suffering of hell as a benefit for those in heaven. The third attempts to restore the goods of personal union to the relationship and to mitigate the suffering of the beloved in hell. Obviously, there are other strategies that could be tried. Nevertheless, our examination has revealed some themes. While it is understandable that some might want to shield the lover from the sufferings of the beloved in hell, such shielding is not only lamentable in being necessary but also contrary to the unitive desire of love. This puts shielding in tension with the perfect happiness of the person in heaven. Moreover, strategies that emphasize the justice of God and the deserts of the damned might successfully show that the beloved deserves the punishment he receives and that it is good for him to receive that punishment, in some sense. Nevertheless, we are owed a further explanation, since it is implausible to suggest that the lover never desired anything more for the beloved than that he should get what he deserves, for good or ill: it is not an altogether happy day for a murderer's father when the murderer is justly sentenced to hard punishment. Finally, given the need for perfect happiness for the lover, compromise solutions seem implausible. Sporadic relief will not do. A successful solution to the problem must therefore describe a stable pattern in the lover, beloved, and the love between them that explains in a convincing way how the lover could be perfectly happy, love the beloved, and know of his suffering.

3. A New Approach Through Defeated Suffering

The problem of eternal separation can be stated as a conflict between two goods, namely, (a) the perfect fulfillment of human nature and (b) the fulfillment of the loving desire for union with the beloved. These two goods seem in conflict, since, on the Christian account, human nature is fulfilled only when it is perfected in love, but the desires of perfect love seem unfulfilled so long as the beloved remains in hell. Stated in terms of goods, then, the problem of eternal separation is that the good of perfect happiness requires the good of love's

fulfillment, but the beloved's being in hell blocks the fulfillment of love for the lover, and so the lover cannot be perfectly happy in heaven.

When the problem is stated in terms of conflicting goods, a new possibility opens up that was not quite as visible before. We might call this the "possibility of defeated suffering." In general terms, the possibility of defeated suffering is the possibility that suffering incurred through the loss of one good can be defeated by the way in which that suffering contributes to the attainment of other goods. Applied to the particular problem of eternal separation, the possibility of defeated suffering is the possibility that the suffering the lover undergoes at the loss of the beloved to hell is defeated by the way in which that suffering makes a contribution to the lover's attainment of other goods.

As a strategy for responding to the problem of eternal separation, the possibility of defeated suffering is closest to those that attempt to reconstrue the evil of the beloved in hell as a good for the lover in heaven (recall Edwards and Aquinas, who hold that the suffering of persons in hell is a cause of joy for persons in heaven). Unlike such strategies, however, the possibility of defeated suffering does not positively characterize the suffering of those in hell as a good. After all, suffering cannot be defeated unless it is genuinely *suffering*, and suffering requires the loss or absence of goods, rather than their presence. Nevertheless, the possibility of defeated suffering proposes that the loss or absence of union with the beloved might enable the lover, through an appropriate response, to attain other goods that he rightly judges to have been worth the suffering, in the end. If the lover can view the loss of the beloved as making a worthwhile contribution to his attaining valuable goods, then perhaps it is possible (at least by the end of the process) for the lover simultaneously to be perfectly happy and to be aware of the beloved's suffering. This proposal has the advantage that it recognizes the complexity of the human psyche, recognizing that the loss of certain (real) goods can be the occasion for attaining other goods that can defeat and redeem the loss.

The possibility of defeated suffering should be taken seriously. Ordinary experience seems to provide many examples of defeated suffering. For instance, in athletics, some persons deny themselves many comforts for the sake of their training and performance. In the case of such athletes, any suffering they experience in the absence of such comforts is defeated by how it contributes to their attaining peak performance. There are also more difficult examples. For instance, contemporary psychologists have coined the term "post-traumatic growth" to refer to cases in which, following a struggle with adversity, persons experience positive growth and rise to higher levels of functioning (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996). It can even be the case that persons consider the resulting growth as ultimately worth the cost of the suffering, so that, for example, they would be willing to "do it all over again." Consider the words of Clara Claiborne Park, who writes about raising her child Jessy, who developed autism:

I do not forget the pain—it aches in a particular way when I look at Jessy's friends, some of them just her age, and allow myself for a moment to think of all she cannot be. But we cannot sift experience and take only the part that does not hurt us...So, then: this experience we did not choose, which we would have given anything to avoid, has made us different, has made us better. Through it we have learned the lesson that no one studies willingly, the hard, slow lesson of Sophocles and Shakespeare—that one grows by suffering. And that too is Jessy's gift. I write now what fifteen years past I would still not have thought possible to write: that if today I were given the choice, to accept the experience, with everything that it entails, or to refuse the bitter largesse, I would have to stretch out my hands—because out of it has come, for all of us, an unimagined life. And I will not change the last word of the story. It is still love. (Park 1982, 320)

In what follows, I investigate the possibility of defeated suffering as a strategy for solving the problem of eternal separation. It seems correct to say that suffering can redound to the advantage of the sufferer and that persons can learn important lessons and virtues through suffering. It might even be correct to say that persons can come to be grateful for what they have suffered, insofar as such suffering changes them for the better in ways that they could not have appreciated before. Despite these points, the obvious challenge for the view as a reply to the problem of eternal separation is whether the lover's suffering at the loss of the beloved to hell can be *completely* defeated, while granting the lover's continued love of the beloved and his awareness of the beloved's suffering in hell. It turns out to be surprisingly difficult to describe what the complete defeat of such suffering would look like. Nevertheless, I offer three models, and I evaluate them as replies to the problem of eternal separation.

4. The Regress of Evils and Remedies

I would now like to introduce a new way of looking at the problem of eternal separation. This way of seeing the problem involves the idea of a regress, that is, a chain of things leading to things leading to still other things. In particular, this regress involves the idea of evils leading to evils leading to still other evils. Here is how the regress occurs, in brief: For a lover to lose his beloved to hell is for the lover to suffer an evil. Heaven might be thought as offering the lover a certain compensating remedy for his suffering. But regardless of what the remedy is, the remedy must preclude certain other desirable goods, including that the beloved share in the goodness of the remedy itself. Heaven might then offer a further remedy for the beloved's failing to share in the first remedy. But the further remedy is subject to the same problem, and the regress of remedies and unsatisfied desires is begun.

In order to explore the way in which losing one's beloved to hell sets up a regress of evils, it will be useful to think about how an instance of suffering impacts a person's life, how that suffering might be remedied, and how the remedy for the suffering might yet leave something to be desired. The central worry driving the regress is that certain sorts of suffering (e.g. losing one's beloved to hell) might set up an ineliminable element of dissatisfaction within the human being, an element of dissatisfaction that no compensating good can remedy.

Consider then the Barnes family. The Barnes family is enjoying their beach vacation when Johnny, the oldest son, is brutally attacked by a shark. He is rushed to the hospital, where he undergoes a set of grueling reconstructive surgeries. Thankfully, the surgeries are successful, and the Barnes family is eventually able to return home together in good health.

Now, consider how the family might reflect on the whole experience of the vacation, shark attack, and surgeries. On the one hand, they might be very glad to live in the modern world, where reconstructive surgeries are possible. They might also be very glad for certain other circumstances that contributed to the success of Johnny's recovery – perhaps the lifeguard was right nearby, or the ambulance was already stationed at their particular beach. On the other hand, despite all of the factors that might have contributed to Johnny's recovery, it still seems that the family might regret that the whole ordeal had to happen in the first place. After all, they had originally hoped for an island *vacation*, not for a terrifying near-death experience followed by grueling weeks in a hospital. Thus, it seems that Johnny's family could hold the following views. First, they could say that, *given* that Johnny was attacked by a shark, they were glad for the grueling surgeries and their attendant agents and circumstances. Second, however,

they could say that they wish that Johnny had never been attacked by a shark at all, so that the need for the surgeries and attendant circumstances had never arisen in the first place.

Why does any of this matter for the relations between the lover in heaven and the beloved in hell? Well, suppose, following the traditional Christian view, that the punishments of the damned are both just and eternal. In such a case, it seems possible that the lover in heaven could hold two views similar to those of the Barnes family in Johnny's shark case. First, the lover could believe that the punishments of hell are just and good for his beloved, *given* the beloved's sins and his refusal of God. Second, however, it seems that the lover could also regret that there is any need for punishment, a need that arose through the beloved's responsible choices. It seems that the blessed soul might reasonably desire this whole situation to have been avoided. Moreover, given the reality of free will, it seems that it *could* have been avoided, had his beloved chosen otherwise, which he was able to do.

If it is reasonable for a blessed soul to have such desires, then this is a problem for the traditional Christian view of heaven. At the very least, the traditional view says that heaven is a place in which all desires are satisfied. But if it is possible for the lover to regret the loss of his beloved to hell, even granting the fitness of punishment, then it is hard to see how heaven can be a place where all desires are satisfied. Thus, we have a third key question that must be answered by an adequate solution to the problem of eternal suffering:

Regret Question: Given that the beloved need not have been everlastingly punished, why is the happiness of the lover not disturbed by the fact that everlasting punishment has become necessary for the beloved, given his free choices and the requirements of divine justice?

To see how the Regret Question might be answered, consider a development of the shark attack story. Suppose the Barnes family was going on their island vacation for several reasons. First, they needed rest. Second, they hoped to achieve some needed personal reconciliation among the members of their family. Third, they hoped to promote a bit of self-discovery in their children. Now, suppose that, during the days of Johnny's surgeries and recovery in the hospital, the Barnes family voice their grievances and fight over the issues that have been damaging their family relationship. Nevertheless, in the context of Johnny's suffering and their closeness during the ordeal, they reach a new understanding, forgive each other, and enter a depth and mode of relationship that they never thought possible before. Moreover, suppose that, through Johnny's experience of the suffering, surgeries, and recovery, he develops a lasting desire to enter the medical field, a desire that eventually culminates in a happy and successful career as a trauma surgeon.

Now, when the shark attack story is developed in this way, it is reasonable to expect that the Barnes family could answer the analogous Regret Question as they could not answer it in the original version of the case. In the original version of the case, the family is glad for Johnny's successful treatment, but they regret the shark attack situation as a whole. In the development of the story, however, the family might find themselves in some sense *grateful* that the shark attack happened, given its beneficial effects in their lives. (We can imagine, for example, the Barnes family celebrating "Shark Day" every year, toasting the shark, etc.) We can even imagine the family accepting that, had Johnny acted differently, he would not have been attacked, but still rejoicing that Johnny *did not* act differently, which resulted in such great benefits for Johnny and his family.

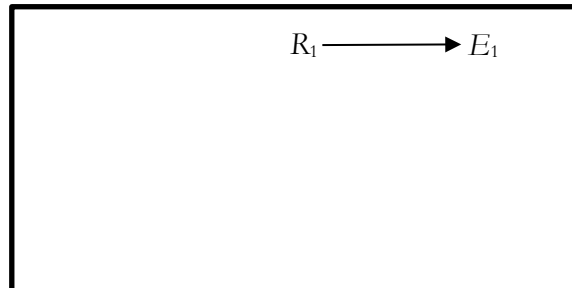
There is a significant difference, then, between the family's attitudes towards the shark attack in the two stories. In both stories, the family will be glad that the grueling treatments

were available and successful, given Johnny's being attacked by a shark. But whereas in the first story, the family will regret the shark attack on the whole, in the second story, the family will in some sense *celebrate* the shark attack, given the effects that the attack and its resolution had on their life.¹⁷ The second story thus promises to provide a case in which an original instance of suffering is defeated by the goods resulting from the suffering.

We are now starting to build up a picture of evils and goods leading to still other evils and goods. It might be useful, then, to have a visual way to represent the goods and evils present in each case. Let E_1 stand for the evil of Johnny's having been attacked by a shark. We can then represent Johnny's having been attacked by a shark diagrammatically by writing:

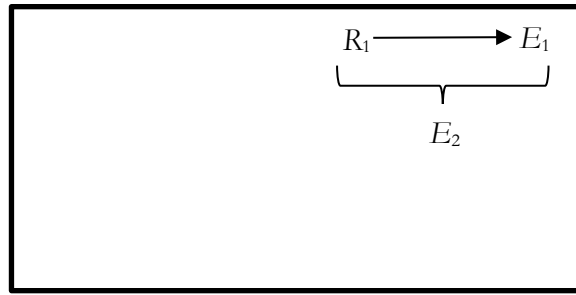


Next, we represent Johnny's grueling surgery and rehabilitation as a certain "remedy" for the evil, which we will call R_1 . We can thus represent the relationship between the evil and the remedy by writing:

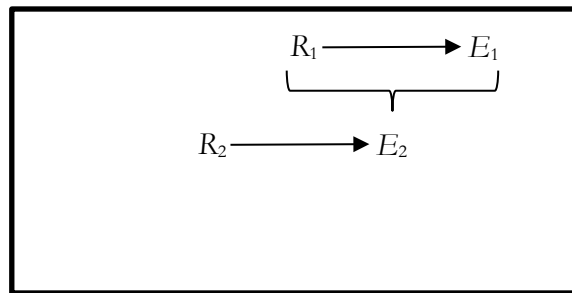


The arrow in the diagram shows that the remedy (i.e., the surgery and rehabilitation) repairs the good that was lost by suffering the evil (i.e., bodily integrity and operation). As we have seen, however, the family might reasonably come to regard the whole shark attack experience as an evil. This is because, despite the medical remedy, they still missed out on their vacation, and they acquired certain terrifying memories that could haunt their futures. We can thus represent the whole "shark attack experience" being taken as an evil as follows:

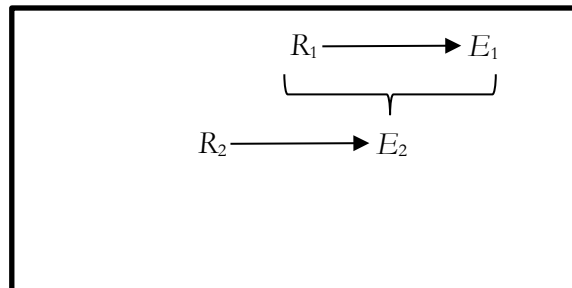
¹⁷ Of course, Johnny's family would not *encourage* him to go looking for more sharks, nor would they hold that shark attacks, in general, are the sorts of things that are good for human beings. They very well might, however, adopt an attitude of something like "reverence" or "amazement" towards the event, recognizing not only that it was completely beyond their powers to order a shark attack to their family's good but also that certain great goods came to Johnny and their family all the same, goods great enough to make the shark attack something to celebrate rather than to mourn.



The bracket in the diagram represents the whole process of suffering the evil and undergoing the remedy being considered at once, and the E_2 beneath the bracket represents that this whole process is regarded as an evil within the life of the Barnes family. Nevertheless, as the second version of the story makes clear, it is possible for the evils present in the whole shark attack experience themselves to be redeemed. This might occur, for example, through the reconciliation and self-discovery that the experience might occasion. If such reconciliation and self-discovery is made possible by the shark attack experience and brings about an overall greater share of the goods that the Barnes family meant to secure by the vacation, then the reconciliation and self-discovery would seem to be (perhaps unexpected) remedies for the acknowledged losses caused by the whole shark attack experience. We could therefore write:



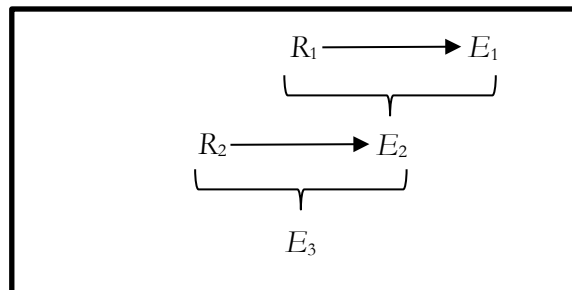
The heavenly separation case can be visualized using the diagram method. Letting E_n stand for individual instances of evils suffered and R_n stand for corresponding remedies, we can write:



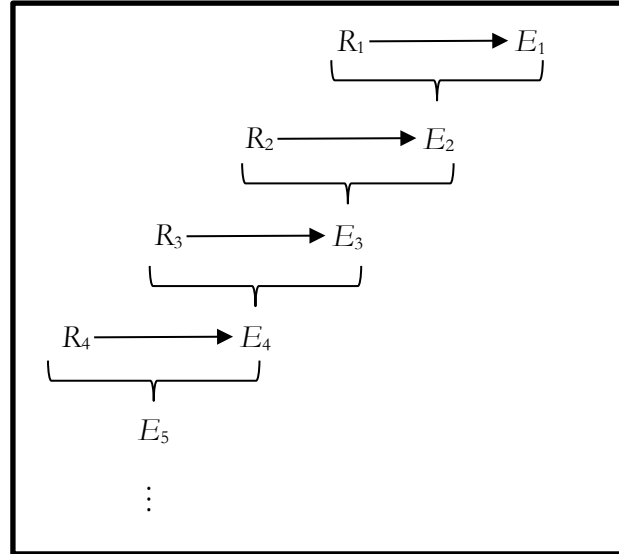
In this diagram, E_1 is the original evil, which is that the beloved finally rejects God. R_1 is the corresponding remedy for the beloved's rejection, and it is the beloved suffering just punishment in hell. Similar to the shark case, however, the "whole situation" of the beloved suffering in hell can be regretted and viewed as an evil, designated by E_2 . This is because, even

if the punishments of hell are just, it is lamentable that they are deserved to begin with, since they were not necessary, given the beloved's freedom to choose. Nevertheless, there is an available remedy for evil E_2 as well, since this evil makes possible the eternal manifestation of God's excellent justice, which is one of the final ends of human life and human relationships. The remedy R_2 is thus the manifestation of God's justice, which might be said to redeem the evil of the beloved's sinful state and responsibility for that state.

Now, at this point, it should be clear that a regress is looming. With R_1 and E_1 , we have already seen that "whole situations" involving evils and remedies can be regretted and taken as evils, insofar as the whole situation precludes other goods that the subject might legitimately desire. But the "whole situation" involving R_2 and E_2 *also* precludes certain goods a person might legitimately desire. For example, even if the beloved's suffering in hell provides an eternal manifestation of God's justice, this particular way of manifesting God's justice was not necessary, for many reasons. First, the beloved could have chosen otherwise. Second, the human race need not have fallen into sin. And third, God need not have created at all. So, there are many other ways in which God's justice could have been eternally manifested. Moreover, at least some of these ways might seem *better* to the lover in heaven than the way God's justice is manifested through the beloved's being in hell. For example, suppose the beloved had not rejected God finally but instead had died in the state of grace. In this case, the beloved is not only reunited with the lover, but it also seems a more exalted manifestation of God's justice that He should reward the beloved's choosing Him than that He should punish his rejecting Him. Moreover, in general, goods are better when shared, so it seems that the lover rightly desires to share knowledge of God's excellent justice with the beloved. Thus, the fact that R_2 and E_2 preclude these possibilities might reasonably make the blessed soul regard the whole situation involving R_2 and E_2 as an evil, as follows:



Furthermore, even if some remedy R_3 can be found for E_3 , it is clear that the process of regarding an evil and its corresponding remedy as a single evil can be repeated indefinitely, as follows:



The possibility of such a regress of evils and remedies helps to clarify a difficulty for an important type of theodicy today. In the view of some philosophers, God’s purpose in permitting evil is to provide an opportunity for greater personal intimacy with Himself. Eleonore Stump (2010), for example, provides a theodicy of this type. But, in his review of her theodicy, Paul Draper (2011) writes

[Suffering] is supposed to cause the sufferer to have the power to allow God to be close or closer. There’s no reason, however, why an *omnipotent* being would need to use suffering as a causal means of giving us that power. Such a being could simply directly cause us to have it or set up the world in such a way that something more benign than suffering works just as well as suffering in producing the crucial power.

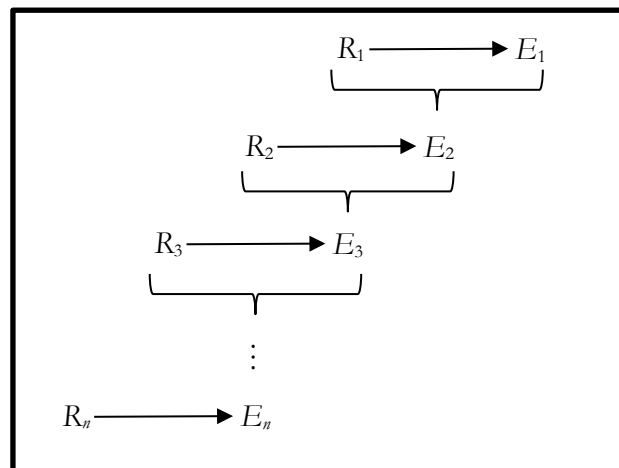
The diagrams above make it easy to understand what is going on in Draper’s criticism. Draper is contending that, even if the remedy for a certain instance of suffering is that the suffering enables the sufferer to become closer to God, it might still be regarded as regrettable that God brought about closeness in this way. For, given God’s omnipotence, there are surely other ways for God to bring about the relevant dispositions in the sufferer, and these ways might include all (or more) of the goods lost through the suffering. Thus, even if a given instance of suffering brings about closeness with God that the sufferer values, the sufferer might nevertheless wish that this closeness had been brought about in another way. This problem is especially acute when it concerns suffering over the loss of a beloved to hell, since it is hard to see how any degree of one’s own closeness with God could make up for the permanent loss of another human person. Indeed, Stump writes that, “In my view, the hardest cases for the Thomistic defense are those in which love is permanently rejected” (2010, 474). The diagrams help us to recognize that the sufferer might regret the “whole situation” of suffering and consequent closeness with God as a further regrettable evil requiring remedy, and then the regress of evils and remedies is begun.

5. Foundationalism Concerning the Regress

We have seen that the problem of eternal separation sets up a regress of evils and remedies. This regress seems a useful tool for thinking about the problem of eternal separation, since a satisfactory solution to the problem of eternal separation will be the same as a satisfactory solution to the regress, that is, a remedy for the suffering caused by the beloved's going to hell that leaves the lover's happiness undisturbed by either the beloved's suffering, separation, or presence in hell.

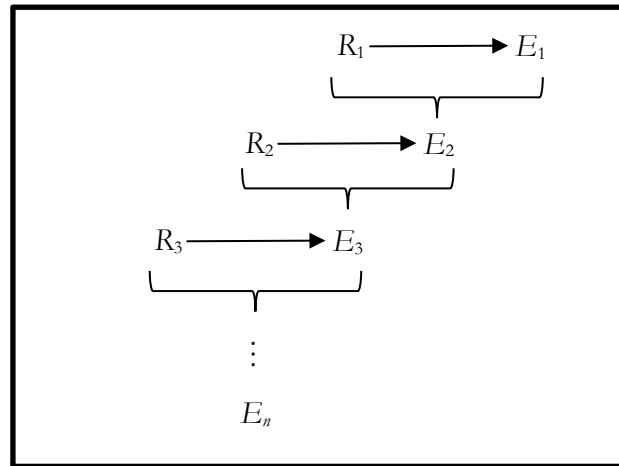
The regress of evils and remedies is similar to the regress of justification familiar from epistemology. Like the epistemic regress, the regress of evils and remedies admits of three outcomes: (1) the regress goes on indefinitely, (2) the regress loops back on itself in a circle, and (3) the regress terminates in some final evil or remedy. Unlike the epistemic regress, however, the "foundationalist" outcome is the only one worthy of serious consideration, at least by those who wish to defend the traditional Christian view of heaven and hell. The reason is that the "infinetist" and "coherentist" outcomes present no definitive victory of good over evil, but Christians regard heaven as a place where God's goodness reigns. We will therefore explore what it would look like to provide a foundationalist solution to the regress of evils and remedies.

Foundationalism claims that the regress of evils and remedies terminates in some situation that results in no further evil or remedy. There are two obvious ways in which the regress can terminate: in some last remedy or in some last evil. For the sake of a label, we might call these two options "remedy foundationalism" and "evil foundationalism," respectively. On remedy foundationalism, every evil has a remedy, but not every situation of evil and remedy results in a further evil, since some final situation of evil and remedy terminates the chain. Remedy foundationalism will therefore diagram the relations of evils and remedies as follows, for some finite n :



The key task facing the remedy foundationalist will be to explain why, unlike earlier situations in the chain, the final situation of evil and remedy cannot be taken as a further evil.

Evil foundationalism holds that the regress of evils and remedies terminates in a final, unremedied evil. Intuitively, it is difficult to see how a Christian could find such a view acceptable, since, in some vague sense, it suggests that evil “has the last word,” even in heaven. But, in any case, the evil foundationalist will say that every situation of evil and remedy results in a further evil, but there is some evil that does not have a remedy, and so terminates the chain. The evil foundationalist will therefore diagram the relations of evils and remedies as follows, for some finite n :



The key task facing the evil foundationalist will be to explain why the final evil admits of no remedy.

Most of the existing proposals surveyed above can be counted as versions of remedy foundationalism. For example, on Daly’s hell-centered strategy, the lover’s suffering over the beloved in hell is supposed to be remedied by the fact that the beloved suffers only objectively and receives the best eternal condition possible. The memory-modification proposal is also a foundationalist solution: memories and awareness of the beloved in hell are supposed to be remedied by God’s selective modification of the lover’s memory. The question for these views is whether their remedies leave anything for the lover to desire either with respect to his happiness or else with respect to his relations with the beloved. Above, we saw that both proposals leave room for further desire, since, on the one hand, it seems legitimate for the lover to desire the beloved to suffer neither objectively nor subjectively, and, on the other hand, it seems legitimate for the lover to desire to praise God for all the moments of his life and to know God’s goodness throughout all creation, including hell. In a word, it seems regrettable that the beloved has to suffer at all, and it seems regrettable that memory modification is necessary to begin with. Thus, neither proposal seems to offer a successful version of remedy foundationalism.

6. Varieties and Challenges

Here, I would like to distinguish five varieties of remedy foundationalism (henceforth simply “foundationalism”) and sketch the difficulties facing each one.

The first variety of foundationalism attempts to prevent the regress from occurring by suggesting that the regress's originating evil is in fact a good. We can summarize the view as follows:

Nihilist foundationalism: There is no regress of evils and remedies for the lover, since the loss of the beloved to hell is in fact a good for the beloved, rather than an evil.

I call this view “nihilist foundationalism” (or just “nihilism”) because it denies the existence of the evil that is needed to get the regress going.

There are two main challenges for nihilism. The first is to show that the beloved going to hell is in fact a good for the lover. This is no small task. For example, it might be easy to point out several ways in which the lover might be better off without the beloved around. Suppose, for instance, that the beloved chewed his nails, and the lover found this annoying. The lover would therefore be freed from this annoyance if the beloved were eternally separated in hell, and, other things being equal, it is good to be freed from annoyances. But obviously the mere fact that the lover would be freed from certain annoyances does not mean that it is altogether good for the lover that the beloved is in hell. Considerations like these show that the bar is high for showing that the presence of the beloved in hell is in fact a good for the lover.

The second main challenge for nihilism is that, *even if* the presence of the beloved in hell is in some sense good for the lover, that is not obviously sufficient to prevent the regress of evils and remedies from taking place. The reason is that, as we saw with the Aquinas/Edwards view, the good for human beings is complex, and what is good for a person in one respect might be bad for the person in another respect. Aquinas himself recognizes this feature of goodness. He considers the case of a woman whose husband is a thief and is justly condemned for his crimes.¹⁸ The condemnation of the thief, Aquinas argues, can be considered under two different aspects. On the one hand, it can be considered under the aspect of the common good, and this is the way in which the judge regards the condemnation. On the other hand, the condemnation can be considered under the aspect of the private good, and this is the way in which the wife regards it. Now Aquinas thinks that the wife can rightly desire her husband not to be condemned *materially* so long as she wills the common good *formally*. In other words, Aquinas thinks that it can be right for the wife to be grieved by her husband's condemnation so long as she also wills the upholding of justice and the natural order. But by making this distinction between the private good of the wife and the common good, Aquinas exacerbates the problem for nihilist foundationalism. This is because now it becomes possible to say that the beloved's presence in hell is just in the order of the common good, but evil for the beloved with respect to his private good. In response to this difficulty, it seems that the nihilist will be forced to say either that the lover's good becomes wholly identified with the common good alone or else that the lover can achieve perfect happiness while continuing to suffer evils in the private order. On Aquinas's own principles, the former option seems implausible, since Aquinas thinks that the good of the disembodied soul is increased by reunion with its body, which suggests some independent good of individual participation in the common good. The latter option seems implausible on the view that heaven provides perfect happiness, leaving nothing further to be desired.¹⁹ In either case, the difficulties for nihilism seem serious.

¹⁸ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 19, a. 10.

¹⁹ Aquinas's own suggestions here do not seem helpful. He suggests that, in heaven, the gap between humans' willing their private good and willing the universal common good is closed by *knowledge*: on earth, humans cannot

A different kind of foundationalism will concede that the loss of the beloved to hell is an evil for the lover, but it will insist that there is a remedy that is sufficient to stop the regress. We can then divide such a foundationalism into views that keep the lover's desire for union with the beloved and views that do not. Among views that keep the lover's desire for union with the beloved, we can distinguish two further views as follows:

Beloved-fulfilled foundationalism. The regress of evils and remedies is terminated by a remedy that leaves nothing more for the lover to desire, and the lover's desire for union with the beloved is fulfilled by union with the beloved himself.

Other-fulfilled foundationalism. The regress of evils and remedies is terminated by a remedy that leaves nothing more for the lover to desire, and the lover's desire for union with the beloved is fulfilled by union with something besides the beloved himself.

Both of these views face challenges. The most obvious challenge is common to both of them, and this challenge is that it is hard to see how any remedy could leave the lover with nothing more to desire, given that the beloved remains in hell. We have already stressed the point several times that, given the beloved's freedom and presumed natural orientation to perfect happiness, it was genuinely possible for the beloved to have attained heaven. We have also pointed out that it only adds to the tragedy that the beloved is responsible for his suffering in hell through his final rejection of God. But by considering the possibility of defeated suffering, we can add something else to these difficulties. Unlike the loss of non-personal goods, which are generally instrumentally valuable, the loss of persons involves the loss of intrinsically valuable goods that not only have an everlasting existence but also retain their final ordering to share God's happiness in heaven. To see the significance of this contrast, return to the case of Johnny and the shark attack. We can suppose that, on the version of the story in which his family is reconciled and Johnny discovers his calling, the suffering experienced by Johnny through the shark attack is (or at least might be) entirely defeated. Nevertheless, it is important to notice something about the causes of Johnny's suffering through the shark attack. The main causes of suffering in such a case would seem to be the loss of a desirable vacation, the loss of physical integrity and mobility, and the loss of psychological stability through fear and anxiety about the future. While each of these losses is the loss of some good, none of these goods is a person. Moreover, each of these goods is ordered to the overall good of the person, so that, for example, it can make sense for a person to forgo any of them in case that would better promote the overall good of the person. In contrast, for the lover to lose the beloved to hell is not simply for the lover to lose something instrumentally ordered to his overall good. As a person, the beloved is good in himself and an end in himself. Thus, even if we suppose

always see how their private good relates to the common good, whereas in heaven, humans have perfect knowledge, and so they become enabled to will each particular thing in its relation to the common good (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 19, a. 10, r. 1). But suppose the wife of our thief is a professor of law and moral theology, and she understands perfectly well why her husband's action deserves condemnation. Does this knowledge make her husband's condemnation any less of an evil for her? Or, more pointedly, does this knowledge dispose her to *rejoice* at the condemnation, rather than weep? I should think not. Indeed, a deeper knowledge of the facts and principles surrounding her husband's condemnation would seem to *deepen* her sorrow, precisely because such knowledge enables her to see just how bad the crime was both for her husband and for her. (In this connection, we might recall Jesus who laments over Jerusalem as a city that has killed the prophets and stoned those sent to it (Matthew 21:37).) Thus, apart from some thesis about the reordering of the will and the person to the common good by itself, it is hard to see how knowledge alone can prevent private evils from counting as genuine evils for the sufferer.

that losing the beloved to hell makes some significant contribution to the lover's own individual good, that is not sufficient to satisfy the desire that the lover has for the beloved, since the lover does not desire the beloved simply as a contributor to the lover's own good. When we add to this the fact that the beloved exists forever and forever fails to attain his final end in God, we seem to set up an eternal "principle of dissatisfaction" for the lover, since it seems that the lover will forever desire the beloved's good for his own sake and will forever miss having this desire satisfied. It is hard to see what could mitigate such an eternal principle of dissatisfaction, and so it is hard to see how either of these views could answer the Regret Question.

Beloved-fulfilled foundationalism faces the special problem of describing what union with the beloved could look like. There are of course metaphysical difficulties here. But the greater difficulty is that any such union must be non-ideal. For example, it would be extremely implausible to suggest that the lover enjoys the same type of union with the beloved in hell as he enjoys with other human beings in communion with God in heaven. As soon as the union is described as non-ideal, however, then it seems that it leaves something more to be desired, and the regress returns.

Other-fulfilled foundationalism faces the special problem of describing how a desire for union with the beloved could be fulfilled by something other than union with the beloved himself. For example, suppose (implausibly) that the lover's "place in heaven" is impeccably decorated with happy photographs of the lover and beloved on earth. Given the beloved's suffering in hell, these photographs would seem to be sources of sorrow as much as delight, since they would seem to excite the desire for union with the beloved without delivering it. Or suppose that the lover in heaven obsessively immerses himself in singing the praises of God. Such an occupation might *repress* or *distract from* the desire for union with the beloved, but it is hard to see how such an occupation could be counted as a *satisfaction* of the desire for union with the beloved. Or suppose that, in heaven, the lover attains astounding excellence in the very activities that formed the core of his friendship with the beloved. Still, the lover never counted the beloved as a mere instrument towards attaining excellence in these activities, and excellence in the activities he once shared with the beloved would seem to be like the photographs, a source of sorrow as much as a source of delight. In brief, persons do not seem to be replaceable, and so it is hard to see how union with anything besides the beloved could be a part of a remedy that satisfies all of the lover's desires.

This leaves versions of foundationalism on which the lover's desire for union with the beloved does not remain. Here, we can distinguish two views based on whether or not the lover's desire for union with the beloved is replaced by another attitude towards the beloved:

Replacement foundationalism: The regress of evils and remedies is terminated by a remedy that leaves nothing more for the lover to desire, and the lover's desire for union with the beloved is replaced by another attitude distinct from the desire for union.

Indifference foundationalism: The regress of evils and remedies is terminated by a remedy that leaves nothing more for the lover to desire, and the lover's desire for union with the beloved is replaced by no attitude distinct from the desire for union.

A common difficulty for replacement and indifference foundationalism is that it is hard to see how the lover could be said to maintain anything like love for the beloved while lacking a

desire for union with the beloved.²⁰ In response to this difficulty, a foundationalist might say that the lover seeks a different *sort* of union with the beloved than the unions possible on earth, but then such a view is a version of beloved-fulfilled foundationalism, rather than replacement or indifference foundationalism.

A special difficulty for replacement foundationalism is that it is hard to see what sort of attitude might replace the desire for union with the beloved, especially while the lover is said to continue to love the beloved. For example, suppose the lover's desire for union with the beloved is replaced by a desire for separation from the beloved. After all, friends sometimes need to "give each other space." Such a view is implausible, however. True friends would not count the times they are apart as the highlights of their friendship, so time spent apart must be regarded as useful for the time spent together, which remains the chief object of desire in the relationship.

Alternatively, suppose the lover's desire for union with the beloved is replaced by a desire to punish the beloved. After all, it is painful to be hurt by a friend, and it is more painful to the extent that the friend is closer to oneself. Perhaps the lover desires to remedy the pain and restore justice by participating in the punishment of the beloved. Nevertheless, this view does not seem to solve the problem. Punishment has either a restorative or a retributive purpose. But if the punishment of the beloved is everlasting, then it can have no restorative purpose. And if the punishment of the beloved is retributive, then it is a way of satisfying justice that is far worse than the ideal, which would be that the lover and beloved satisfy justice together in heaven.

Finally, no matter what sort of attitude might be said to replace the desire for union with the beloved, it seems reasonable to say that having this attitude is less good for the lover than having the original desire for union. This is because, presumably, the lover in heaven will maintain desires to be united with other human beings in heaven. Such a desire for union would seem to be characteristic of heavenly love between persons. So, if this desire is replaced by some other desire, the replacement would seem forced to be some desire (or other attitude) less good than the original. But if that is the case, then there would seem to be something further for the lover to desire, and the regress takes place. With a slight modification, this worry would seem to apply to indifference foundationalism, too, since it would seem to be better for the lover to have the desire for union with the beloved than to lack it. Thus, both replacement foundationalism and indifference foundationalism face serious challenges as Christian solutions to the problem of eternal separation.

7. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to provide a deeper understanding of the problem of eternal separation. We have seen how the problem can be formulated using traditional Christian views concerning heaven, hell, and the nature of human love. We have also seen why the problem is important, insofar as it suggests an incoherence in the traditional Christian view of the afterlife. We have classified and criticized existing attempts to deal with the problem, categorizing proposed solutions as being hell-centered, love-centered, or heaven-centered. We then examined how the problem can be reformulated in a deeper way as a problem concerning human fulfillment: granted that some suffering can be defeated by its contribution to attaining

²⁰ For example, Stump (2010, chap. 5), following Aquinas, *defines* love as the twin desires for the good of the beloved and for union with the beloved.

other goods, we can then ask whether the lover's suffering over the loss of the beloved to hell is apt to be defeated. We saw how the lover's suffering over the beloved generates a regress of evils and remedies, and we described and criticized several ways of handling the regress.

I would like to draw three conclusions from this study. First, the problem of eternal separation deserves a place alongside the problem of hell as one of the chief topics of inquiry within philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. The problem of eternal separation is not the same as the problem of hell: human beings are not the original creators or sustainers of hell, and so the question is not whether the existence of hell is compatible with the existence of human or divine goodness. Rather, the problem emerges because, unlike God, human beings are constituted in such a way that their fulfillment depends on beings besides themselves. This renders their fulfillment vulnerable in a way that God's fulfillment is not, and it makes for special difficulties when, on the one hand, love is thought to be part of human fulfillment, and on the other hand, human love rightly attaches itself to persons who are eternally separated.

Second, I would suggest that an adequate Christian solution to the problem would come through a beloved-fulfilled foundationalism that is also heaven-centered and love-centered. As we have seen, the difficulties for beloved-fulfilled foundationalism include that the desire for union with the beloved seems permanently unfulfilled, that it is difficult to describe the metaphysics of any possible union between the lover and beloved, and that any possible union between lover and beloved would seem to be non-ideal. One step towards addressing these challenges would be to explore how being in heaven enables persons to love in new ways. For example, on earth, every human love would seem to include an element of selfishness. This selfishness, however, seems to explain at least some of the sadness we experience when we are apart from our loved ones, especially when our loved ones are apart from us for good reasons. It would therefore be useful to explore whether, on the one hand, being in heaven could involve the elimination of selfishness from human love, and, on the other hand, whether the elimination of such selfishness might be sufficient not only to remove the threat of regress but also set up an intelligible metaphysical union of disinterested love.

Finally, Christian approaches to the problem of eternal separation might benefit from shifting focus away from the human being as the beloved towards God as the beloved. It is true that, on traditional Christian teaching, human beings are commanded to love one another. But it is also true that, on that same teaching, the first commandment is to love God with all one's heart, mind, soul, and strength. This shift in focus seems important, since the value of every other good in human life seems to be dependent on the quality of one's relations with one's beloved. For example, following the death of his wife, C. S. Lewis wrote that, "There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting" (Lewis 1994, 3). Without his beloved wife, Lewis saw nothing else as interesting. By the same token, if someone is united to his beloved, then it often seems that nothing else matters: genuinely happy couples celebrate the rain on their wedding day. Future work on the problem of eternal separation thus might benefit from studying the way in which union with the beloved impacts the value of other goods, say, by increasing or decreasing desire for them, or else rendering them objects of indifference.²¹ Such work promises to provide a more complete picture of the structure of

²¹ For a significant start on this issue, see (Stump 2010, chap. 14). Stump, however, treats relations between desires for God and desires for other goods as they occur in earthly life. She does not, therefore, provide a complete account of how, once a person *attains* union with God, his desires for other goods are affected.

human desires in heaven, and it could help us understand how a human being could be perfectly happy in heaven while knowing that his (human) beloved is in hell.²²

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