

# Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

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Volume 17 | Issue 1

Article 6

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1-1-2000

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Charles Seymour

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### Recommended Citation

Seymour, Charles (2000) "A Craigian Theodicy of Hell," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol17/iss1/6>

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# A CRAIGIAN THEODICY OF HELL

Charles Seymour

Problem: if God has middle knowledge, he should actualize a world containing only persons whom he knows would freely choose heaven. Thus there should be no hell. Craig offers an answer to this problem in his article " 'No Other Name': a Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ." Craig is mainly concerned to give a logically possible *defense* of hell, though he thinks his suggestion does not lack the sort of plausibility needed for a *theodicy*. I consider various objections to the latter assessment. My conclusion is that, although Craig's argument is implausible as a theodicy of conservative exclusivist soteriology, it is useful for less traditional ideas of hell.

One problem with the doctrine of hell is that it seems possible for God, being omniscient, to know via middle knowledge those worlds which, were he to actualize them, would contain only persons freely accepting salvation. If God is omnipotent it should be possible for him to actualize such a world, and he would prefer to do so if he is perfectly good. Thus God would not create a world in which some persons reject salvation. Call this suggestion "the argument from middle knowledge."

In his article " 'No Other Name': a Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ," William Lane Craig attempts to solve this problem by arguing that there might be no worlds feasible for God in which all people are saved. Even if there are, they may be seriously deficient in other ways, so that God, while remaining perfectly good, would prefer to create some other world in which there are persons who choose damnation. Craig's response, to use the common parlance, is a *defense* of hell rather than a *theodicy* of hell. That is to say, Craig is concerned merely to demonstrate the compossibility of God's existence and the existence of the damned; as is the case with Plantinga in the Free Will Defense, Craig is committed only to the claim that his solution is logically possible, whether or not it is epistemically implausible.

In the face of any variety of the problem of evil, including the problem of hell, I find it hard to feel any interest in a mere defense. It is small comfort to realize that there is some logically possible explanation of why God allows evil if we believe that this explanation is in fact false. To take the Free Will Defense as an example, why should the mere possibility that natural disasters are instigated by demons help justify the ways of God to



man if we believe that demons do not have or exercise this power? Of course Plantinga says that he sees nothing unlikely in the possibility of malevolent spirits wreaking havoc in the world, but what this claim amounts to is that the Free Will Defense can be turned into a Free Will Theodicy. Craig, for his part, makes a similar move, saying that although his response is presented only as a logically possible defense of hell, it is also not implausible. It follows that we should be able to develop a Craigian theodicy of hell which appeals only to premises not believed to be false or improbable. The purpose of this paper is to attempt such a theodicy by defending Craig's argument against the charge of implausibility.

### *Craig's Defense of Hell*

Craig is defending, not just the generic possibility of damnation, but a particular view of hell in which those who do not accept Christ are lost. Craig believes that "Those who make a well-informed and free decision to reject Christ are self-condemned, since they repudiate God's unique sacrifice for sin."<sup>1</sup> This is so because faith in Jesus is "the one means of salvation which God has provided."<sup>2</sup> However, the problem arises of people who have never heard of Christianity. It might seem unfair or mean-spirited to damn people for not accepting a doctrine they have never heard of. Craig admits that some who have not heard the gospel might be saved by responding to "the light of general revelation" that all people possess. But this possibility is remote, for "the testimony of Scripture is that the mass of humanity do not even respond to the light that they do have."<sup>3</sup> How can a loving God condemn those who sin against the light yet have not heard of the means of salvation? Craig's solution to this particular problem sheds some light on the argument from middle knowledge.

Granting that God has middle knowledge, among the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom that God knows are truths about what various people would freely do when confronted with the Christian message, for instance: "If Chuang Tzu had heard the gospel, he would have freely accepted Christ." Craig solves the problem of those who have never heard of Christ by supposing that they all would have rejected Christ had they heard of him. More exactly, for any person A who dies without hearing of Christ, there are no circumstances C such that "If C were the case, then A would have freely accepted Christ." No matter how appealingly the gospel were presented to her, she would reject it. These souls exhibit what Craig calls "transworld damnation, which is possessed by any person who freely does not respond to God's grace and so is lost in every world feasible for God in which that person exists."<sup>4</sup> Craig's contention is that God is neither unjust or cruel in condemning people to hell who have not heard of Jesus, if they would have rejected Jesus had they heard the gospel.

Why does God create such people? Why does he not create only people who freely accept Jesus? This question is at the heart of the argument from middle knowledge. Craig answers that if God were to refrain from creating all those who are damned in our world, then circumstances would have been very different, which means that some of those who accepted Jesus in our world might then reject him. Let C be the total set of

circumstances of our world, a world in which there are some who accept Christ and some who reject him. The argument from middle knowledge proposes that God could have refrained from creating all those souls who reject Jesus in C. But this would mean that a different world would have existed, whose total set of circumstances we can call C\*. Now the argument assumes that all those who accepted Jesus in C would accept Jesus if C\* were the case. But, says Craig, this assumption is baseless. It is epistemically possible that in C\* some who were Christians in C would not be. Further, it may be that there is no total set of circumstances God could create in which everyone would freely accept the gospel. For all we know, then, God faces the choice of either creating a world in which some are damned, or not creating free beings at all. Surely, says Craig, God should not refrain from creating a world simply because some souls would stubbornly refuse God's grace.

In summary, Craig argues that the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom may be such that God cannot create a world in which everyone is saved. It is not unloving, then, for God to create a world including people he foresees choosing damnation, if doing so is necessary for creating a world including people who choose salvation. This is particularly true if we suppose, as is entirely possible, that those who choose damnation would do so in any world in which they existed.

Everything Craig says is logically possible; and since he sees his task as showing how it is possible that God's goodness and hell co-exist, Craig can be satisfied with a logically possible response to the problem of foreknowledge. But as was said in the introduction, my goal is to provide a solution to the problem of hell which is not only possible but not implausible. Although it is not his primary concern, Craig feels his solution does not lack plausibility.<sup>5</sup> Is he right?

#### *First Objection*

We will consider four objections. The first two concentrate on Craig's claim that God might not be able to create a world containing only Christians. A closer look at the nature of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom will reveal our first objection. Craig is right in supposing that different circumstances may result in different actions on the part of free beings. But not all differences make a difference. First, the circumstances must be in some way noticeably different to the person acting in order for them to make a difference in the person's action. A person will act the same way in circumstances which to him appear exactly identical.<sup>6</sup>

This fact alone does not tell against Craig. For the difference between a world filled with those who accept Christ, and a world in which there are many who do not, is a difference which is noticeable. But we must make a further qualification, for not all noticeable differences make a difference in action. I will notice if I have ten trees or eleven in my front yard; but the difference will not influence my career decisions. For circumstances to make a difference in my actions, they must affect the motives which influence me. We might think of a way in which the number of trees in my yard would affect my career choices: perhaps the additional tree is placed

in such a way that it adds greatly to the beauty of my home, making me more willing to remain living in it, and thus more willing to remain at my job. But there are clearly noticeable differences which are irrelevant to certain decisions. An additional tree which neither adds to nor detracts from the attractiveness of my lawn, which neither adds to or subtracts from the property value of my home, in short, which has no other effect than its mere presence, is not going to influence my decision to seek a new job.

For Craig's argument to be more than merely possible, he must explain how God's refraining from creating certain persons who reject Christ makes a difference in other people's decision to accept Christ. Craig says that if God were not to create those who reject Christ in this world, this change in circumstances could lead to others rejecting Christ who accepted him in this world. We must ask why this makes a difference.

Perhaps the damned function as examples for others to learn from. Sadly, a negative example is the only stimulus strong enough to restrain some people from self-destructive behavior. With respect to drug abuse, for instance, some people find the idea of chemically induced ecstasy inherently distasteful, degrading to rational beings, an obstacle to the more lasting though less intense pleasures of love, work, or religion. In the eyes of others, however, there is a glamorous appeal to drug abuse that will only be dispelled by their witnessing first hand or through reliable testimony the desolation brought about by addiction.

The case of accepting Christ is less dramatic but essentially similar. Some are attracted to Christianity because of its intrinsic worth: they are drawn by the intellectual power of a Christian world-view, or the nobility of Jesus as portrayed in the New Testament, for example. But there are those who will only convert to Christ by comparing the lives of those who accept Christ favorably to those who reject Christ, finding in the former a love and peace which is generally lacking in the latter. In a more spectacular way, the massive evils inflicted by societies founded on the rejection of Christ (the Third Reich, Soviet Russia, Mao's China) serve as signs hard to ignore for even the habitually indifferent.

Of course not all non-Christians are unhappy or immoral, just as not all drug users are addicts. For the above response to work, we need not assume that all Christians are saints and all non-Christians are villains. But we must at least assume that those who accept Christ have an advantage over those who reject him. Is this assumption implausible? I do not think so. In any event, it is part and parcel of Christian teaching: "By their fruits you shall know them." If the claim is false, Christianity is false and we need not bother justifying hell to begin with.

Even granting that Christianity gives its adherents a real advantage in living a visibly better life, there is the problem of non-Christians who are to all appearances saintly and so would not serve as negative examples encouraging others to convert to Christ. Since Craig thinks all non-Christians are damned, then the above explanation would be in his view incomplete. Perhaps Hitler or Stalin were created as object lessons, but what about, say, Gandhi?

Less conservative readers will not take offense if I allow the possibility that Gandhi is not damned. Certainly he rejected Christianity, but at some

less conscious level he may not have rejected Christ. Craig will part company with me at this point, since he believes that explicit faith in Christ is necessary for salvation. But as I will argue shortly, the fact of heathen sanctity makes Craig's Christian exclusivity implausible. In defending a broadly Craigian theodicy of hell, then, I do not intend to endorse all the details of Craig's own position.

Another objection to my argument would point out that a permanent rejection of Christ is not necessary for the sake of motivating conversions in others; a merely temporary rejection of Christ can serve equally well. Suppose that Hitler's atrocities lead Karl Stein to convert to Christianity in 1943. Presumably Stein's new-found faith would not be shaken if Hitler converted in 1944; in fact, it would be confirmed. To take the analogy with drug use farther, one need not be a permanent addict in order to show to others the horrors of drug abuse. The visible improvement that results from shaking an addiction is an additional inducement for others to avoid drugs. Seeing Hitler convert and become a better person would be at least as strong a motivation to conversion as seeing Hitler unrepentant, monstrous, and miserable to the end of his days. If negative examples are necessary for Stein to repent, then shouldn't God have created in place of Hitler a person who would reject Christ until Stein accepts Christ, but who would also accept Christ at a later time?

Indeed God would prefer to create the merely temporary rebel if he could. But given libertarian freedom, we have no assurance that this is feasible for God. For instance, there is no reason to suppose that there is someone God could have created in the place of Hitler who would have both (1) freely lived a life blatantly vicious enough to prompt Stein's conversion, and (2) freely accepted Christ at some time after Stein's conversion. It is possible—and, as required for theodicy, not obviously unlikely—that anyone fulfilling (1) would fail to meet (2).

There remains one problem. I admitted that some people accept Christ for reasons that are internal to Christianity itself. C. S. Lewis, for instance, found Christianity to be logically inescapable: his autobiography *Surprised by Joy* portrays his conversion as a largely philosophical process. In *The Seven Storey Mountain* Thomas Merton emphasizes the emotional and aesthetic appeals of Roman Catholicism which led him to convert. It is probable, it could be argued, that Lewis, Merton, and others like them would have accepted Christ even in a world in which everyone else did, a world in which there were no reprobates living notorious lives to highlight by contrast the benefits of Christianity. It seems God should have populated the world only with Christians like Lewis who, if not transworldly saved, at least make a decision to convert which does not hinge on the existence of the lost. If this is feasible, then God need not create the damned in order to create some who are saved.

We need not wonder how a Craigian theodicy of hell would deal with this argument; Craig has already given a response. As he puts it:

Suppose that the only worlds feasible for God in which all persons receive Christ and are saved are worlds containing only a handful of persons. Is it not at least possible that such a world is less preferable

to God than a world in which great multitudes come to experience His salvation and a few are damned because they freely reject Christ? Not only does this seem to me possibly true, but I think that it probably is true. Why should the joy and blessedness of those who would receive God's grace and love be prevented on account of those who would freely spurn it?<sup>8</sup>

So even if God could create a world in which there are only people who accept Christ, God is justified in creating worlds with damned people, as long as this is necessary for creating a much larger number of the saved. Perhaps people like Lewis or Merton are rare. God should create more people, some of whom damn themselves quite willingly, for the sake of receiving many more people who will experience eternal joy.

In sum, then, Craig can answer our first objection by saying that the existence of those who choose damnation does have an influence on other persons' decision to accept salvation. Even if it were possible for God to create only people who would accept Christ regardless of other people's spiritual state, it is not implausible to suppose that the number of such people is so small as to make such a world much worse than a world in which there are some damned but many saved.

### *Second Objection*

The second objection, found in Thomas Talbott's response to Craig, is also based on the belief that only noticeable differences can make a difference in action.<sup>9</sup> Craig had argued that a world in which the damned do not exist is noticeably different than our world, and different in a way that is relevant to the salvation of those who do accept Christ. Talbott accepts this for the sake of argument. Still, he continues, there is no noticeable difference, to any given person S, between a world in fact peopled with the saved and the damned, and a dream-world which appears to S exactly the same way. As long as S is not aware of this fact, he cannot be affected by it. Thus, Talbott concludes, God can make sure all are saved. If S for some reason will only accept Christ in a world that contains non-Christians, then God can create S as a brain-in-the-vat, programmed to receive impressions of people who reject Christ.

This objection is stronger than the first, but it is not beyond reproach. In his article "Talbot's Universalism Once More" Craig questions both the logical validity and the ethical basis of Talbott's argument. I will defend Talbott against the charge of invalidity, but I agree with Craig that ethical considerations make Talbott's suggestion implausible.

To show its invalidity, Craig casts the argument in symbolic form and shows how the premises do not imply the desired conclusion. It will be easiest to simply reproduce Craig's discussion here.

Talbott argues that if in  $C_1$  S would be freely saved and in  $C_2$  S' would be freely saved, then in  $C_3$  S and S' would be freely saved. [ $C_3$  is the circumstance of S and S' obtaining the appearances of  $C_1$  and  $C_2$ , respectively.] Let, then,  $C_n =$  'Circumstances<sub>n</sub> obtain',  $S_n =$

' $S_n$  will freely accept salvation', and  $AC_n =$  'The appearance of  $C_n$  obtains'. In order to avoid the fallacy of strengthening the antecedent, Talbott infers from

- (6)  $C_1 \rightarrow S_1$ ,  
 (7)  $C_2 \rightarrow S_2$ ,

that

- (8)  $C_3 \rightarrow S_1 \bullet S_2$ .

He justifies this inference by supposing that

- (9)  $(AC_1 \bullet AC_2) = C_3$ .

We thus infer (8) from

- (10)  $(AC_1 \bullet AC_2) \rightarrow S_1 \bullet S_2$ .

But how do we know that (10) is true? The answer is that to  $S_1$ ,  $C_1$  and  $AC_1$  are indistinguishable; similarly for  $S_2$  and  $C_2$  and  $AC_2$ . So we may affirm

- (11)  $(C_1 \rightarrow S_1) \supset (AC_1 \rightarrow S_1)$ ,  
 (12)  $(C_2 \rightarrow S_2) \supset (AC_2 \rightarrow S_2)$ .

From (6), (11) and (7), (12), it follows that

- (13)  $(AC_1 \rightarrow S_1)$ ,  
 (14)  $(AC_2 \rightarrow S_2)$ .

But how do we move from (13), (14), to (10)? The answer seems to be: by strengthening the antecedent of (13) or (14), which is logically invalid. Hence, the argument for (8) is unsound.<sup>10</sup>

Problems of precision arise at the very outset. First, Craig uses the notation  $S_n$  equivocally; at one moment it refers to a person  $S_n$ , the next to the state of affairs consisting in  $S_n$ 's accepting salvation. For the sake of accuracy, then, I will let  $S_n$  refer to the state of affairs of a person accepting salvation, and  $S^n$  will refer to persons themselves. Another ambiguity is that when Craig lets  $AC_n =$  "The appearance of  $C_n$  obtains", he does not stipulate to whom the appearance obtains. Does  $AC_1$  mean that  $S^1$ , or  $S^2$ , or everyone experiences the appearance of  $C_1$ ? Thus we need to be more precise. Let us assume in the following that  $A_n C_n =$  "The appearance of  $C_n$  obtains to  $S^n$ ."

The crucial premises are (11) and (12). The principle underlying these propositions is Talbott's claim that if two circumstances are indistinguishable to a person  $S$ , then  $S$  will perform the same action in both circumstances. The problem with Craig's critique is that it underestimates the force of this principle. When applied consistently, it in fact leads to the



conclusion that Talbott wishes to draw.

Craig correctly notes that since  $C_1$  and  $A_1C_1$  are indistinguishable, (11) is true. It is also true that (11), even when combined with its counterpart (12), does not lead to (8). However,  $C_1$  and  $A_1C_1$ , and  $C_2$  and  $A_2C_2$ , are not the only pairs of circumstances that are indistinguishable to  $S^1$  or  $S^2$ .  $A_1C_1$  and the circumstance  $(A_1C_1 \bullet A_2C_2)$  are both indistinguishable to  $S^1$  as well as to  $S^2$ . Because  $S^1$  is "hermetically sealed in his own illusory world"<sup>11</sup>, as Craig puts it, he does not notice whether or not  $A_2C_2$  obtains—that is to say, because  $S^1$  experiences only his own illusory world, he does not know what  $S^2$  is experiencing. Likewise with respect to  $S^2$  and  $A_1C_1$ . On the model of premises (11) and (12) above, we can derive from these considerations the following premises.

$$(4^*) (A_1C_1 \rightarrow S_1) \supset [(A_1C_1 \bullet A_2C_2) \rightarrow S_1]$$

$$(9^*) (A_2C_2 \rightarrow S_2) \supset [(A_1C_1 \bullet A_2C_2) \rightarrow S_2]$$

These premises allow us to formulate a valid argument for Talbott's conclusion.

- (1\*)  $C_1 \rightarrow S_1$       by assumption
- (2\*)  $(C_1 \rightarrow S_1) \supset (A_1C_1 \rightarrow S_1)$       since  $C_1$  and  $A_1C_1$  are indistinguishable to  $S^1$
- (3\*)  $A_1C_1 \rightarrow S_1$       from (1), (2) by modus ponens
- (4\*)  $(A_1C_1 \rightarrow S_1) \supset [(A_1C_1 \bullet A_2C_2) \rightarrow S_1]$  since  $A_1C_1$  and  $(A_1C_1 \bullet A_2C_2)$  are indistinguishable to  $S^1$
- (5\*)  $(A_1C_1 \bullet A_2C_2) \rightarrow S_1$       from (3\*), (4\*) by modus ponens

In parallel fashion

- (6\*)  $C_2 \rightarrow S_2$       by assumption
- (7\*)  $(C_2 \rightarrow S_2) \supset (A_2C_2 \rightarrow S_2)$  since  $C_2$  and  $A_2C_2$  are indistinguishable to  $S^2$
- (8\*)  $A_2C_2 \rightarrow S_2$  from (6\*), (7\*) by modus ponens
- (9\*)  $(A_2C_2 \rightarrow S_2) \supset [(A_1C_1 \bullet A_2C_2) \rightarrow S_2]$  since  $A_2C_2$  and  $(A_1C_1 \bullet A_2C_2)$  are indistinguishable to  $S^2$
- (10\*)  $(A_1C_1 \bullet A_2C_2) \rightarrow S_2$       from (8\*), (9\*) by modus ponens

From (5\*) and (10\*), by a law of counterfactual logic, we infer that

$$(11^*) (A_1C_1 \bullet A_2C_2) \rightarrow (S_1 \bullet S_2)$$

(12\*)  $(A_1C_1 \cdot A_2C_2) = C_3$  by assumption

(13\*)  $C_3 \rightarrow (S_1 \cdot S_2)$  from (11\*), (12\*)

Thus Talbott's argument is not invalid, and the first of Craig's responses is nullified. But even if Talbott's logic is faultless, the value judgments on which Talbott depends are suspect. As Descartes says, God is not a deceiver. The idea of hell may be intolerable, but it is just as intolerable to think that all our friends, our loved ones, our possessions and accomplishments, are purely illusory. Craig says, "This constitutes a profound violation of human dignity."<sup>12</sup> One could respond that temporary deception is preferable to eternal misery.<sup>13</sup> This may be true if God is conceived of as a utilitarian maximizer of happiness, but if God is one who instead respects individuals enough to let them make free choices in the face of reality, then Craig's response is cogent. The issue also depends on how one conceives of hell. The point is more acute to the extent that hell approximates a sort of eternal torture. But milder views are possible in which hell is, though an existence of unending unhappiness, not excruciatingly painful to the damned. We can even conceive of the damned preferring it to the humility involved in submitting to God. So it is not apparent that deceit is better than eternal suffering.

### *Third Objection*

So far we have limited our discussion to Craig's premise that God may not be able to create a world with only the saved. For our third objection, let us turn to a different premise; namely, the claim that all those who have not heard of Christ suffer from transworld damnation. Consider Mohandas Gandhi. Just as Hitler has become the archetype of evil for the twentieth-century, so Gandhi is our stock example of the virtuous man. Gandhi had heard of Christianity but rejected it. It is very probable, however, that if he had been born in different circumstances, he would have been a Christian. Gandhi exhibited a love of truth and a willingness to follow it that makes it likely he would have accepted Christianity if, say, he had understood it better (he seems to have gotten his impression of Christianity from some lukewarm missionaries), or had been born in England rather than India, or had been born into a meat-eating family (his vegetarianism led him to rank Jesus below Buddha).<sup>14</sup> Gandhi's rejection of Christianity seems to have been based on innocent error and unavoidable cultural influences, not rebellion against God or worldliness. Thus it is likely that, for Gandhi, there are circumstances in which he would have accepted Christ.

Gandhi does not fit Craig's argument exactly, since Craig was discussing those who had never heard of Christianity. However, the case of Gandhi suggests that not all who reject Christ suffer from transworld damnation. Thus Craig's solution cannot be total; he cannot justify God's damning people like Gandhi. Furthermore, for every good person like Gandhi who has heard the gospel and rejected it, there are likely to be other equally good people who have not heard the gospel at all. Craig does not discuss the case of pre-Christian figures like Socrates or Buddha

who seem to have been men of good will; given different circumstances, they most likely would have accepted Christ. It also seems likely that in those nations largely untouched by the gospel, say medieval India or present-day China, there would be many good people who would have been Christians had things been different. It's hard to believe that none of them would have accepted Christ had they been raised in pious Christian homes, for example. In sum, good people would likely accept God's truth, given the ability to hear it, the mind to discern the truth and/or a clear revelation from God.

Craig might hold that such people as Gandhi and Socrates are instances of those rare individuals who respond to "the light of general revelation" and so obtain the benefits of Christ's atoning death without being Christian. Unfortunately Craig does not explain what is involved in responding to the light of general revelation. Gandhi confesses to various moral failings in his autobiography, so it seems that he did not always act in accordance with his beliefs. Perhaps by "responding to the light of general revelation" Craig means "obeying one's conscience most of the time." One might wonder then what percentage of good actions is required to qualify as an adequate response to the light, and why someone who falls just above this percentage is saved and obtains eternal happiness, whereas those who fall below it experience everlasting unhappiness.

The case of Gandhi and people like him makes it unlikely that all who reject Christianity until death exhibit transworld damnation. Still, if one allows that good people can be saved without accepting Jesus, or that people are given chances after death to accept Christ in more conducive circumstances, then the concept of transworld damnation remains helpful. After all, the fact that there are some non-Christians such as Gandhi who do not exhibit transworld damnation does not prove that there are no non-Christians who exhibit it. It could be that all those who are damned are transworldly damned, even if not all those who reject Christ (at least in this life) are damned.

Still, the definition of transworld damnation needs a bit of fine tuning before it can drive a theodicy of hell. Most Christians believe that infants can be saved despite the fact that they are obviously incapable of choosing Christ. But infant salvation presents a severe problem for the claim that all the damned are transworldly damned. Clearly Hitler, if damned, is not transworldly damned, since God could have given him a fatal case of measles immediately after his baptism. If infants need not be baptized in order to be saved, then so much the better; God need not wait for someone to baptize Hitler before giving him the measles.

Craig invites such problems by defining transworld damnation as the property "which is possessed by any person who *freely* does not respond to God's grace and so is lost in every world feasible for God in which that person exists."<sup>15</sup> Clearly, on a conservative evangelical view which restricts free choice with respect to salvation to our antemortem existence, no one is likely to be transworldly damned; for each person there is a world feasible for God in which that person dies before the "age of accountability" and hence does not *freely* fail to respond to God's grace. Similar problems face liberal views which allow for the possibility of salvation after death. Yet

Craig could not drop the word “freely” from the definition of transworld damnation without creating other difficulties. On the catholic view, baptized infants do not respond to God’s grace, yet they are saved; and few evangelicals would say that infants go to hell because they did not accept Jesus as their savior.

Craig’s transworld damnation is modelled after Plantinga’s “transworld depravity”, which is the property a person has if he would commit a sin in any circumstances in which he was created. More accurately, the person exhibits transworld depravity if and only if he would commit a sin in any circumstances in which he was created *free*. To make his property of transworld damnation a more precise application of Plantingian theodicy to the question of hell, Craig needs to define transworld damnation as the property which is possessed by any person who freely does not respond to God’s grace, and so is lost, in every world feasible for God in which that person exists *free to respond to God’s grace or not*. By adding this clause, Craig could allow that there are worlds in which the transworldly damned do not freely fail to respond to God. These worlds, however, are worlds in which the damned are not free to respond at all, because of infancy, mental disease or defect, etc., and so are not counterexamples to his definition of transworld damnation.

I believe this revision to be Craig’s original intent. First, it is closer to Plantinga’s definition of transworld depravity, and Craig says that transworld damnation is analogous to transworld depravity.<sup>16</sup> Second, Craig developed the notion of transworld damnation in response to those who would say that God would not create somebody who chooses damnation if he could create him in circumstances in which he *freely chooses* salvation. The revised definition of transworld damnation, by asserting that there are no feasible worlds in which the damned freely choose salvation, is more appropriate to this task.

What if a proponent of the argument from middle knowledge maintained that damnation is such a horrible fate that God would do anything feasible in order to prevent someone from experiencing it, even if this requires bringing about their death as infants? The problem is that such a response places a lower value on free choice than most theodicians are wont to do. The problem of hell, like the problem of evil in general, is best solved by appealing to free will. Freedom is valuable enough to outweigh the evils it sometimes brings about, and this includes the evil of damnation. Of course, depending on our theological views on the fate of dead infants and children, we might have to admit that God creates some people who are never given a free choice for or against salvation. But recognizing the value of free will allows us to say that it is not necessary that God create us in worlds in which we are saved, if the only worlds in which we are saved are ones in which we never develop free choice. Putting it loosely, the damned would have nothing to complain of in being damned since they would not have freely chosen salvation in any world in which that choice was given them.

We are still confronted with the example of Gandhi and others who are not likely to be transworldly damned even on the revised definition. It is very likely that in some feasible world *in which Gandhi is free to decide*, he

accepts Christ. So even the revised formulation of transworld damnation cannot help us formulate a theodicy of conservative versions of hell. But liberal views of hell will not insist on Gandhi being damned, as they could admit the likelihood of Gandhi accepting Christ in the afterlife. All a Craigian liberal need say is that anyone who freely refuses salvation even after death would not accept salvation in any world in which he was created free to choose salvation. Since we can't see what people choose after death, such a claim is not (in this life) open to refutation.

In sum, it is unlikely that all non-Christians are transworldly damned, and so it is difficult to defend Craig's variety of conservative evangelical soteriology. However, his notion of transworld damnation remains helpful in defending liberal versions of hell. On these versions it is not implausible to suppose that the damned choose damnation in every world in which they are created free to choose. It is not cruel for God to let these people be damned.

#### *Fourth Objection*

But is it morally acceptable that they be created in the first place? This question underlies the fourth and final objection to Craig. Suppose that Craig is right and God can create people who choose heaven only by creating other people who choose hell. Would it not be cruel of God to do so? According to Marilyn Adams' definition, "God is good" means God ensures that every person's life is on the whole a great good.<sup>17</sup> The lives of the damned are not on the whole good; indeed, every moment of their postmortem existence is on the whole bad. Thus God cannot create anyone who is damned, even if this means God cannot create any free beings in heaven either.

Craig is rightly skeptical about the moral principle appealed to here. He asks, "Why should the joy and blessedness of those who would receive God's grace and love be prevented on account of those who would freely spurn it?"<sup>18</sup> Later he says that the "previsioned obduracy [of the damned] should not be allowed to preclude God's creating persons who would freely respond to His grace and be saved."<sup>19</sup> It would be tragic for the freely chosen rebellion of some souls to prevent the creation of other souls who will accept everlasting happiness; as C. S. Lewis puts it in *The Great Divorce*, we would not want a world in which "misery can hold joy up for ransom."<sup>20</sup>

#### *Conclusion*

So the problem of middle knowledge is defused. It is epistemically possible, as Craig says, that no matter what situation God created, some would refuse him; and it is not unloving, indeed it shows a love and respect for the autonomy of the person, for God to create some who damn themselves in any and all situations in which they are given the choice, if this is necessary for others to attain salvation.

There are other arguments against the doctrine of hell besides the one from middle knowledge. There is the problem of the apparent injustice of inflicting eternal punishment for finite sins, the question of whether the

blessed in heaven, and God himself, can be happy given the existence of the damned, etc. So in defending Craig's response to the argument from middle knowledge I have not developed a complete theodicy of hell. Indeed, I doubt that Craig's article will be helpful in answering these other arguments—nor was it intended to be. But as he gives us the most effective response to the argument from middle knowledge to date, any finished theodicy of hell will be to that extent Craigian.<sup>21</sup>

*The University of Notre Dame*

#### NOTES

1. William Lane Craig, "'No Other Name': a Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 176.

2. Craig, "No Other Name" 173.

3. Craig, "No Other Name" 176.

4. Craig, "No Other Name" 184.

5. Craig, "No Other Name" 186.

6. The circumstances must be identical not only in the sensory qualia present to the person (what they appear to see, smell, hear, etc.), but also in the person's beliefs, desires, habits, etc.

7. This objection was suggested to me by a *Faith and Philosophy* referee.

8. Craig, "No Other Name" 182.

9. Thomas Talbott, "Craig on the Possibility of Damnation," *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 506-507.

10. William Lane Craig, "Talbot's Universalism Once More," *Religious Studies* 29 (1993): 506-507.

11. Craig, "Once More" 505.

12. Craig, "Once More" 505.

13. Talbott, "Craig on Damnation" 509.

14. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Gandhi's Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Washington, D. C.: Public Affairs Press, 1948), 49-50, 67, 154-156, 199.

15. Craig, "'No Other Name'" 184. Emphasis added.

16. Craig, "'No Other Name'" 184.

17. Adams, Marilyn. "The Problem of Hell: a Problem of Evil for Christians," in *A Reasoned Faith*, Eleonore Stump, ed. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ Pr, 1993), 304.

18. Craig, "'No Other Name'" 182.

19. Craig, "'No Other Name'" 184.

20. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (MacMillan: New York, 1946), 120-121.

21. I would like to thank Philip Quinn, Thomas Flint, and two referees for *Faith and Philosophy* for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.