

Aquinas on the Possibility of Hell

Justin Noia
Saint Louis University

If God, by nature, loves each person, it seems that He would insure that each person does not suffer unending pain. But it is a traditional Christian doctrine that it is possible that some people, namely 'the damned,' spend their eternal postmortem existence in hell, in a state of extreme pain. The 'problem of hell' is the puzzle about how to reconcile the traditional Christian teaching on the nature of God with traditional Christian teaching on hell. In this paper, I show that Thomas Aquinas has valuable resources to respond to the problem of hell. In particular, I argue that, for Aquinas, God may not be able to prevent the possibility of hell, given God's desire to create free persons who are capable of entering a mutually loving relationship with Him.

I. The problem of hell

My aim in this paper is not to argue that my understanding of Aquinas is correct, but to show how a plausible interpretation of Aquinas, some of which is drawn from Eleonore Stump, would confront the problem of hell. Let me outline the paper. I begin (in this section) by describing the problem of hell more formally. Hell seems to be incompatible with divine goodness because hell destroys a person's ability to make meaning out of, and hence find value in, her life; and an all-powerful, all-good God would want every person to find her life meaningful. On behalf of Aquinas, however, I argue in Section II that while God wants this in some respect, it may not be an all-things-considered desire for God. In Section III, I argue that, for Aquinas, the possibility of hell seems to follow from a desire that we presuppose God has, viz., the desire for free creatures. In Sections IV-VI, I consider three of the most plausible ways that one could deny this possibility, namely by arguing that God could refrain from creating, annihilate, or save the damned. I argue that, for Aquinas, none of these options is open to God. God cannot refrain from creating the damned, given the will to create free human beings, because prior to creation He does not know who the damned are. God cannot annihilate the damned because His love for them is inconsistent with His destroying them; and He cannot force the damned into heaven because it is impossible for Him to force them to love Him freely. Having rejected these possibilities, I argue that we have good reason to believe that God cannot prevent hell. I ultimately conclude that God wants hell to exist in at least one respect, which is compatible with His goodness.

We can approach the problem of hell by noting that Aquinas subscribes to the thesis that,

Possibly, there are some human persons¹, namely the "damned," who experience an unending, punitive postmortem state of being, viz., "hell." Hell is punitive at

¹ I am not committed in this paper to any modal semantics (or metaphysics), but I will use possible-worlds language in order to clarify some of the modal terms I use in this paper.

least insofar as the postmortem life of each of the damned is on the whole bad, and insofar as hell is a state of being in which each of the damned in some way wants not to be.

We can represent the thesis using standard notation of quantified modal logic as,

$$(5) \quad \Diamond \exists x(Hx),$$

where x ranges over human persons and Hx means, “ x experiences an unending, punitive postmortem state of being.” Using possible-worlds language, according to (5), there is some possible world in which the proposition that *there is a human person who experiences an unending, punitive postmortem state of being* is true.

It seems that Aquinas subscribes to the “traditional” doctrine of hell, according to which hell is an *unending*² state of being involving very high (and presumably non-diminishing) negative *welfare*,³ resulting from both corporeal⁴ and spiritual⁵ pain, including the knowledge that the state is unending. The unhappiness of the damned, says Aquinas, “is consummate.”⁶ Despite this, Aquinas speaks of a hell with “higher” and “lower” parts differing qualitatively in respect of temporal punishment,⁷ proportioned to the severity of fault and the kinds of sins committed by the damned.⁸ Aquinas even appears to allow that divine mercy may refrain from punishing the damned as much as they deserve.⁹ So, hell is quite painful, but at least for many of the damned, it is not an experience of as much pain as possible. Nevertheless, we can assume that the lives of the damned are on the whole very bad. In fact, Aquinas is clear that the damned do not want to be in hell: they rationally prefer nonexistence over their suffering.¹⁰

Aquinas also believes that an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God exists necessarily, that is, in all possible worlds.¹¹ But an apparent contradiction can be derived from conjoining that belief with (5). Consider the No Hell (NH) argument:

(NH)

² When something is “unending,” it is of infinite temporal duration.

³ I use the term “welfare” to refer to how a person’s life goes *for her*. Hence it refers to a subjective feature of a person’s life.

⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Suppl. 97.1. Online <www.newadvent.org/summa/>. All translations are from this edition by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. I abbreviate the *Summa Theologiae* as *ST* in this paper.

⁵ Aquinas, *ST* Suppl. 97.2.

⁶ Aquinas, *ST* Suppl. 98.7.

⁷ Aquinas, *ST* Suppl. 69.7.

⁸ Aquinas, *ST* Suppl. 99.1.

⁹ “And yet we may say that even in them [the demons and the damned] His mercy finds a place, in so far as they are punished less than they deserve condignly, but not that they are entirely delivered from punishment” (Aquinas, *ST* Suppl. 99.2 ad 1).

¹⁰ Aquinas, *ST* Suppl. 98.3.

¹¹ See Aquinas, *ST* I.2.3, in the “third way” of which Aquinas argues that God is a necessary being.

- (1) If God is omnipotent, then He is able to render (5) false.
- (2) If God is omniscient, then He knows how to render (5) false.
- (3) If God is perfectly good, then He wants to render (5) false.
- (4) Hence, if God is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good, then $\sim(5)$.

According to (4), if God has the triad of properties attributed to Him in the antecedents of (1), (2), and (3), then $\sim(5)$, which is equivalent to,

$$(6) \quad \Box \sim \exists x(Hx).$$

Using possible-worlds language, according to (6), in every possible world the proposition that *there is a human person who experiences an unending, punitive postmortem state of being* is false.

Since Aquinas accepts the antecedents of premises (1), (2), and (3), we infer (6) unless at least one of these premises is false. That God is omnipotent entails that He can do any possible thing.¹² That God is omniscient entails that He knows all true propositions. So, premises (1) and (2) are true if and only if it is possible to make (6) true. In this connection, it might seem that there are an infinite number of worlds open to God to create in which no one suffers hell. God could actualize, for instance, a world containing only those persons who would freely avoid hell in that world,¹³ or a world in which there are no persons. God also has the option of not creating anything at all.

But note that (5) and (6) are ‘de dicto’ propositions; they concern not just the world that God creates but *every world* that God *could* create. The point of (NH) is to indicate the logical impossibility of God’s existing necessarily *and* there being a world in which some human persons suffer hell. There is no possible world in which God exists *and* human persons suffer hell, because God has His intrinsic properties essentially or necessarily (i.e., in every possible world). Given God’s properties, according to (NH), He renders (5) false.

This brings us to premise (3), which concerns God’s desires. Since we assume that God exists, it follows that there are some worlds, such as the actual world, in which He wants to create human persons.¹⁴ Because of the assumption that God wants to create human persons, I obviate an objection that, if God existed, He would render (5) false by necessarily not creating human persons.

¹² Logical impossibilities are not “things” that can be done, so God cannot do the logically impossible. Because of an argument in fn. 57, I withhold judgment on whether God can do any logically possible thing. At least, He can create every feasible world, where the set of feasible worlds is a proper subset of the set of logically possible worlds determined by the true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (see W.L., Craig, “‘No Other Name’: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ,” *Faith and Philosophy* 6.2 (1989): fn.19).

¹³ Or perhaps there are persons who would avoid hell in every possible world, and God would only actualize them.

¹⁴ I assume that a “person” is an entity with intellect and will who is free (i.e., who has and normally exercises the capacity freely to bring about events or states of affairs for reasons). Note that Aquinas accepts Boethius’s definition that a person is “an individual substance of a rational nature” (Aquinas, *ST* I.29.1).

Skeptical theists might argue that for all we know, (3) is false. The thoughts and desires of an all-knowing, perfectly-good being are mostly inscrutable to us, they might insist. I am not going to make that assumption. Indeed, I think that (3) is *prima facie* highly plausible. Denying it comes at a high intuitive cost. Because of this cost, I will ultimately affirm a qualified reading of (3).

Without the assumption that God's desires are inscrutable, it might seem that premise (3) is easily defensible: hell involves suffering, and suffering is bad, so God would want to avoid it. But as debates concerning the problem of evil have shown, God may have morally sufficient reasons for wanting to allow suffering. It may be that suffering is necessary for the moral growth required for salvation,¹⁵ or that free will significant enough to bring about great evils is of such great value that it outweighs worldly suffering.¹⁶ So in support of premise (3), I am instead going to argue that there is a particular kind of suffering relevant to hell which involves a person's inability to make meaning out of her life, and it is this inability which God does not want.

To defend premise (3), then, I closely follow an argument from Marilyn Adams and apply it to the premise. I use Adams's argument because of its emphasis on God's goodness to each individual person. I think this emphasis is most relevant to the problem of hell, which seems to call God's goodness to the damned into question. Adams provides a compelling reason why a God who is good to each person would want to render (5) false by connecting hell to a class of evils known as "horrendous evils." Laying remonstrances to God's *global* goodness aside,¹⁷ Adams maintains that God loves and is good to each *individual* person only if He guarantees that *horrendous evils* be defeated in each person's life.¹⁸ "Horrendous" are the "evils the participation in which (that is, the doing or suffering of which) constitutes *prima facie* reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given [his or her] inclusion in it) be a great good to him/her on the whole".¹⁹ And Adams says that *defeat* involves a specific relation between value-parts and value-wholes, one according to which "a significantly smaller, negatively (or positively) valued part can contribute to a greater overall positive (or negative) value in the whole."²⁰ The idea is that, analogous to ugly colors that enhance the aesthetic beauty of an entire painting, the negatively-

¹⁵ See, e.g., John Hick's Irenaean 'soul-building' theodicy in John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

¹⁶ For an argument along these lines, see, e.g., Richard Swinburne's theodicy in Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

¹⁷ See Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1999), 30. Note that against Adams' claims about God's goodness to each individual person, it does no good, e.g., to argue that God allows some people to be damned in order to create an optimal *global*, or overall, balance of good and evil (an argument similar to Craig's in *No Other Name*).

¹⁸ Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Problem of Hell," in *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 301-327 at 304.

¹⁹ Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 26.

²⁰ Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 21. Also relevant: "The evil *e* can be defeated if it can be included in some good-enough whole to which it bears a relation of organic (rather than merely additive) unity; *e* is defeated within the context of the individual's life if the individual's life is a good whole to which *e* bears the relevant organic unity. If the evil *e* is defeated within the context of an individual *x*'s life, the judgment 'the life of *x* cannot be worthwhile given that it includes *e*' would be defeated, but the judgment '*e* is horrendous' would stand" (Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 28-9).

valued parts of a person's life, when defeated, will somehow contribute to the greater value of the person's life considered as a whole.

Adams argues that God's failure to defeat horrendous evils would clearly call "into question Divine goodness towards the individuals who participate in them."²¹ One of the main reasons, if I've read her correctly, is that Adams locates the source of positive welfare in each individual human life principally in the realization by that individual of her meaning-making capacity. But horrendous evils "afflict persons insofar as they are actual or potential meaning-makers" because these evils have a "life-ruining potential, their power *prima facie* to degrade the individual by devouring the possibility of positive personal meaning in one swift gulp."²² As I understand Adams, a person's ability to make meaning of her life is a necessary condition of her positively valuing her life. And God's goodness (to each individual) would be suspect if He allowed the *prima facie* destruction of the possibility of some individual finding value in her life.

On the traditional understanding of hell that I have drawn from Aquinas, not only is hell *prima facie* life-ruinous as horrendous evils are, but it is *ultima facie* meaning-destroying. Hell deracinates a human being's meaning-making capacity by decisively annihilating all hope of achieving a final end which is not engulfed by everlasting pain. Hell is an *undefeatable* horrendous evil because hell is an *unending* state of misery that the damned know will never end. If God's failure to defeat horrendous evils calls His goodness into question, as Adams argues, then *a fortiori* God's failure to *want* to prevent *undefeatable* horrendous evils would give us good reason to deny that God is good to each individual. So, we have our premise (3): God at least *wants* to prevent (5).

There are, of course, other reasons which might bolster premise (3). It might be argued, for instance, that not just God's goodness to each individual, but His goodness in relation to justice, is incompatible with (5). However, addressing *every* reason in support of premise (3) is beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, I will only be concerned with addressing the defense of premise (3) that I've drawn from Adams. To summarize that defense, God's goodness involves His being good to each individual person, and this goodness would be dubitable if He did not defeat the evils that *prima facie* prevent each individual from making meaning of, and hence valuing, her life. Hell necessarily prevents the damned from making meaning of their lives, and so God's goodness would not want to permit it.

My strategy for constructing Aquinas' response to (NH) is as follows. My main argument is that it follows from Aquinas's understanding of personhood, that (5), so long as persons cannot cease existing. Merely making that argument, however, will not show what is wrong with (NH). First, then, I will use Aquinas's distinction between God's *antecedent* and *consequent* will to argue that what God 'wants' according to premise (3) is ambiguous between God's *conditional* and God's *absolute* wants. On the former reading, the inference to the conclusion of (NH) is dubious.

²¹ Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 27.

²² Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 28.

On the latter reading—that God *absolutely* wants to render (5) false—premise (3) is suspect. I then show that an essential property of personhood, namely free will, seems to imply (5). Showing this rebuts the latter, ‘absolute’ reading of (3), and so I consider the three most plausible ways of avoiding the implication from free will to (5). In particular, it seems that God could avoid creating, annihilate, or save the damned. I argue, roughly, that each of these options is impossible for God given my reading of Aquinas. Since these options are impossible in Aquinas’s worldview, we have good reason to accept (5), and so to reject the latter, “absolute” reading of (3) that is inconsistent with (5) in favor of the former, “conditional” reading of (3).

II: Two types of wants

Discussing whether God’s will is always fulfilled, Aquinas adverts to 1 Timothy 2:4 (“God will have all men to be saved . . .”), and asks whether the will of God is not fulfilled, since not all persons are saved.²³ Aquinas replies that God wills some things antecedently or qualifiedly, and others consequently or all-things-considered. Aquinas uses the example of a just judge executing a death sentence to elucidate: the judge antecedently wills the condemned man to live insofar as the condemned is a person, but consequently wills to kill the condemned insofar as he is a person *who is deserving of death*. The judge’s consequent willing takes all relevant circumstances into account, whereas his antecedent willing abstracts from those circumstances. The judge realizes his consequent, but not necessarily his antecedent, willing. Similarly, God always realizes his consequent, but not necessarily His antecedent, will. It is perhaps too vague to put it this way, but antecedent willings seem to represent ideal willings (ideally, the condemned would not have done anything deserving of death, and so ideally the judge would *consequently* will that he live). We can closely follow Aquinas’ reasoning here to distinguish two parallel types of *wants* for God, conditional and absolute. Conditional wants are simply motivating influences for God. I believe we are all familiar with these: I conditionally want to eat the cake, but I also conditionally want to stay healthy. Neither of these wants determines what I want, absolutely, when confronted with the question whether to eat the cake, since I cannot satisfy both wants at the same time (I cannot both eat the cake and stay healthy). Instead, I must determine my absolute, or all-things-considered, want—whether I want more to eat the cake or more to stay healthy. Absolute wants are what, all-things-considered, agents decide it is best to do (and since such determinations have motivational force, absolute wants are also motivating influences). Given this distinction, we can say that God does *not* always get what He conditionally wants, but He does always get what He absolutely wants, since He always consequently wills what He absolutely wants.²⁴

Which type of God’s wants is operative in premise (3)? Consider first,

(3a) If God were perfectly good, He would *conditionally* want to render (5) false.

²³ Aquinas, *ST* I.19.6. 1 Timothy 2:4 is quoted (as translated) in the text.

²⁴ This is possibly dissimilar to the human example I have considered, since it is not clear that humans always consequently will what they absolutely want.

This premise is unproblematic, but the inference to (4) becomes dubious. If God can prevent (5) but if He only conditionally wants to prevent (5), we are not licensed to conclude that He *necessarily* prevents (5) (i.e., that He consequently wills His conditional want). God may, after all, absolutely want to permit (5). Similarly, the just judge can prevent the death of the condemned, and he antecedently wills to do so, but he will kill the condemned anyway. For the inference to go through, premise (3) must be read instead as,

(3b) If God were perfectly good, He would *absolutely* want to render (5) false.

Is (3b) true? If God cannot render (5) false, then (3b) is false. This is because God cannot absolutely want the impossible, since there is no such thing as an impossible state of affairs or event or object. For the next step in the argument, then, I will argue that for Aquinas, an essential property of personhood, namely free will, seems to imply (5). I will then consider three *prima facie* plausible suggestions for avoiding the apparent implication, namely that, in every possible world, God could avoid creating, save, or annihilate the persons who would otherwise be among the damned. By denying these three suggestions, I intend to reinforce the truth of (5), which rebuts (3b), since the two premises are incompatible.

III. Freedom and the possibility of hell

For Aquinas, it is a conceptual truth that persons, being essentially rational, have free will.²⁵ *Prima facie*, we can infer (5) from this truth, but we must first know what it is to have free will. Once we have a handle on free will, we will see that it is possible for someone to be psychologically necessitated or determined always freely to reject God. And given Aquinas' understanding of human psychology, the unending free rejection of God leads inevitably to unending pain.

As Eleonore Stump argues, for Aquinas, free will is a "systems-level" feature which emerges from the mutual reciprocal interaction of the intellect and will of a person. In an act of free choice, the intellect presents an object as good to the will, and the will chooses to pursue that object. Free will is a "systems-level" feature because both the intellect and will exert some measure of causality over each other, especially formal and final causality.²⁶

For Aquinas, an act of will is free only if the will is moved by an intrinsic principle. Whatever is moved by an intrinsic principle acts for a cognized end, the "principle" of its action.²⁷ It is conceptually impossible for a free movement of will to be from an external principle, that is, to be causally determined from something originating outside of the will itself. Extrinsic causal determination is *coercion*, which is incompatible with freedom. As Stump writes,

²⁵ Aquinas, *ST* I.83.1. It might be more precise to say that persons have the capacity to exercise free choice, and that normally in humans this capacity is frequently exercised once one reaches the appropriate level of psychological development.

²⁶ Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 277ff.

²⁷ Stump, *Aquinas*, 285.

If something extrinsic to the agent were to act on the will with efficient causation, then the tie of the will to the intellect, from which acts of will get their voluntary character, would be broken, and so the act of the will would not be voluntary—or to put it more nearly as Aquinas seems to think of it, in such a case it would not be a real act of the will at all.²⁸

For example, my deciding to eat the ice cream because I want something tasty involves a movement of my will from my own, intrinsic end or goal of eating something tasty. But my deciding to do so because an evil neurosurgeon implanted a chip in my brain to make me decide to eat the ice cream involves my will being moved by an extrinsic principle, namely the chip. In this latter case, my deciding to eat ice cream is not a free act of will; in fact, it is better to describe it not as an act of will (as ‘my deciding’) but as, say, a mental act caused by the chip’s electrical firing. In the former case, in which I decide to eat the ice cream without coercion, my will is ultimately moved by *me*, by an end that I establish and of which I am aware. In other words, I myself am the first cause of the movement of my will. For Aquinas, all free acts of will are like this, for which reason we can say that according to Aquinas’ position on free will, an agent acts with free will only if her will, which is always in a state of mutual reciprocal interaction with her intellect, is the sole ultimate source or first cause of her act.²⁹

Now, for Aquinas, love of God is necessary for salvation.³⁰ Love of God involves charity, which is a formal property inhering in the will by which the will is “duly ordered to the last end,” namely God Himself.³¹ Charity is intrinsic to the will but it can only inhere in the will through man’s³² free cooperation with God’s help;³³ man does not have the power to create the form of charity in his will by himself. The intrinsic principle of action that charity establishes in the will is God Himself, cognized by the agent as the ultimate end (object, purpose) of his actions.³⁴ Hence, through charity man is the ultimate source of man’s free pursuit of God as his ultimate end. Charity leads to salvation because through charity God unites Himself with the human person ontologically,³⁵ and the person unites with God, which union in its perfection is heaven.³⁶ Necessarily, the blessed are united to God through charity.

Man needs God’s help to generate the form of charity in his will, but charity is not coercive precisely because it is intrinsic to the will. Moreover, man is the ultimate source of man’s having

²⁸ Stump, *Aquinas*, 285.

²⁹ These words are verbatim from a presentation by Stump at Saint Louis University.

³⁰ Aquinas, *ST* I-II.4.4.

³¹ Aquinas, *ST* I-II.4.4.

³² I use “man” to refer to a human person in general, because of the term’s brevity and grammatical propriety. I certainly do not mean to exclude women, and I hope the feminine pronouns that I use throughout the paper tell against any implicit sexism here.

³³ Aquinas, *ST* II-II.23.2.

³⁴ Aquinas, *ST* II-II.23.7-8.

³⁵ As form is united to matter, says Aquinas (*ST* Suppl. 92.1).

³⁶ Aquinas, *ST* Suppl.92.1.

charity because, in order to have charity, man wills God's help. Man wills to will to love God through charity, and God helps man to will as he wills to will, by uniting with him.³⁷

We can infer from the fact that man has free will to the possibility that man can act against charity and reject the love of God, and can do so unendingly. This leads to damnation. In other words, salvation is necessary to avoid damnation. To see why, consider Aquinas' account of the damned.

Aquinas maintains that hell is a natural consequence of unrepented mortal sin. That it is a "natural consequence" means that, given human psychology, it will inevitably result from mortal sin given enough time. So, God does not actively send or keep the damned in their painful state, and He does not directly inflict pain, although hell (the state of sin in which the damned persist) is punitive.

A mortal sin is an act freely directed against charity by being directed against either love of God or love of neighbor.³⁸ It is therefore an act whose end is evil. By acting directly against charity, mortal sin destroys the form of charity in the soul,³⁹ and the form cannot be restored except by divine miracle, hence the term "mortal," as in "fatal" and irreparable.⁴⁰ Genuine repentance is necessary for the restoration of charity.⁴¹ *Mortal sin*, then, is the naturally irreparable, willful destruction of the form of charity in the soul. It is the willful disunion from God.

Aquinas says that those who die in a state of unrepented mortal sin are, like the demons, "obstinate in wickedness,"⁴² fixing their wills immovably on an evil end such that, while retaining their freedom, they are psychologically necessitated to will an end that is evil,⁴³ and so they will never repent.⁴⁴ Aquinas defends his position that death is the, as it were, will-fixing moment, but he does not need such a position to secure (5). All he needs to establish is that it is possible for man psychologically to determine himself always to will freely against charity for an evil end (and hence to do so unendingly), and that doing so eventuates in an unending state of being which is punitive, involving both physical and spiritual pain.

There is no conceptual impediment to man's psychologically determining his will. Recall that for Aquinas, the will's being causally determined is not contrary to freedom, so long as the cause is a principle internal to the will itself. The damned center their wills around the pursuit of some evil end, and it is this self-direction which can, over time, lead to psychological determination. Psychological determination is not only possible, but plausible. Consider, for instance, the saintly martyr who cannot will, even in the face of torture and death, verbally to

³⁷ See Stump, *Aquinas*, ch.13.

³⁸ Aquinas, *ST* I-II.88.2.

³⁹ Cf. Aquinas, *ST* I-II.88.5.

⁴⁰ Aquinas, *ST* I-II.88.1.

⁴¹ In *ST* III.84.5, Aquinas argues that the sacrament of penance is necessary for the salvation of sinners.

⁴² Aquinas, *ST* Suppl. 99.2 ad 1.

⁴³ Aquinas, *ST* Suppl. 98.1.

⁴⁴ Aquinas, *ST* Suppl. 98.2; except "indirectly," insofar as they hate the punishment connected to their sins.

denounce Jesus Christ. Or consider Martin Luther's belief that, according to Daniel Dennett, Luther's "conscience made it *impossible* for him to recant" when Luther broke with the Roman Church and proclaimed, "Here I stand; I can do no other."⁴⁵ Psychological determination is a kind of determination by self-formed character, by beliefs and desires which one is responsible for forming and maintaining. An antemortem life directed to evil ends could very well lead to entrenched habits and determined patterns of behavior. And indeed, Aquinas believes that the damned are psychologically determined always to will evil. "From the very fact that [man] fixes his end in sin, he has the will to sin, everlastingly," he writes.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Aquinas affirms that the damned remain free, retaining their power of choice.⁴⁷ The damned are culpable for their psychologically necessitated sinning because they are the ultimate source of their own psychological necessitation through prior, undetermined acts.⁴⁸ In other words, their wills are determined by an intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, principle.

Does the unending free rejection of charity result in damnation? Aquinas might give various reasons why it does. A theological reason is the widely-accepted belief that there will be a final judgment after which all those persons not "saved" are damned. But there are also psychological reasons for affirming that hell is as described in (5).

On Aquinas' anthropology, human nature has a natural, ineradicable appetite for the good of man, namely happiness. And man's happiness, Aquinas argues, consists in man's attainment of "the perfect good," that which leaves nothing left to be desired. But no created thing can be a perfect good in this way, because every created thing is finite. Every created thing is good insofar as it "participates in" or shares somehow in God's own goodness. But God is goodness in itself, infinite goodness, and so only the possession of God can leave nothing else to be desired.⁴⁹ For this reason, Aquinas concludes that God is the ineradicable, built-in *telos* or final end of human beings.

The vices pertinent to mortal sin involve man's establishing an evil contrary to God as his ultimate, cognized end. Hence, rejecting God and destroying charity in one's soul leads one away from one's *telos*, and away from happiness. It is not difficult to see how, on Aquinas's understanding of human psychology, persistent vice eventually leads to persistent pain. As Adams points out, vice is a psychospiritual disorder which involves a human being's acting contrary to his natural design.⁵⁰ Adams notes that even a few decades spent following a vicious pattern of behavior can lead to significant psychological breakdown and disintegration of personality. It stands to reason that an eternity centered around vice would lead to "a total dismantling of personality, to the torment of which this-worldly schizophrenia and depression are but the faintest

⁴⁵ Daniel Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1984), 133

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *ST* I-II.87.3 ad 1.

⁴⁷ Their "deliberate will" (Aquinas, *ST* Suppl 98.1).

⁴⁸ Aquinas, *ST* Suppl 98.6.

⁴⁹ Aquinas, *ST* I-II.2.8.

⁵⁰ Adams, "The Problem of Hell," 322-323.

approximations.”⁵¹ Moreover, being knowingly forever severed from access “to the only good that can keep us eternally interested would likewise eventually produce unbearable misery.”⁵² This line of reasoning is sufficient, I think, to establish the possibility of the pains of hell for someone who rejects God forever. Because the damned knowingly drive themselves ever farther away from the only object that can bring them happiness, forever, they freely enter into and remain in a state of being which is, on the whole, bad, and in which they in a sense want not to be.

And so it seems that we can infer (5) from man’s having free will, given various assumptions about the nature of personhood and the nature of sin. Aquinas even seems to believe that there are some actual persons who *do* reject God’s charity unendingly. I have been using “person” as shorthand for “human person,” but the fallen angels are just such persons. Moreover, it seems lamentably plausible that some actual human persons commit mortal sins and develop increasingly vicious characters that may necessitate their continuing to do so.

Thus, given Aquinas’ understanding of freedom, it is possible for some person(s) unendingly and freely to reject God’s charity, which leads to the state of being characterized as hell. Can we conclude, then, that God absolutely wants to permit (5)? It might be argued at this point that the existence of human persons with free will does not imply (5). Suppose some people are psychologically determined freely to reject God’s charity unendingly. There are still a number of ways that God could avoid hell. The three most plausible, in my view, are that God necessarily create only those persons who freely accept his salvific offer, that God annihilate the (would-be) damned, or that God ‘force’ the (would-be) damned to love Him.

Necessarily creating only those persons who would freely accept God’s salvific offer would make (6) true. By eventually annihilating or forcibly saving the damned, God could prevent the *unending* suffering characterized in (5). It was, after all, the unending nature of hell which influenced my characterizing hell as an *undefeatable* horrendous evil. I regard these options to be the three most plausible options ostensibly open to God as ways of rendering (5) false in relation to those who are psychologically determined always to reject God (i.e., for those who would otherwise suffer hell). So by arguing that God cannot do any of these, I intend to bolster (5). If God cannot effect the three most plausible means of rendering (5) false, then we have good reason to accept (5) and to reject premise (3b), that if God is perfectly good, then He *absolutely* wants to render (5) false.⁵³

⁵¹ Adams, “The Problem of Hell,” 322-323.

⁵² Adams, “The Problem of Hell,” 322-323.

⁵³ Before I conclude this section, I want briefly to make sense of one point I made earlier in respect of hell. I said that Aquinas sometimes talks of God’s having mercy on the damned by not punishing them as much as they deserve. On Aquinas’s model of hell, however, it seems that God is not the one who does the punishing in hell. How can we make sense of Aquinas’s talk of God’s punishing and having mercy on the damned? To speculate, perhaps for the damned, God’s drawing close to them (say, in their intellects), which He might do given His desire to unite with them, is itself painful. Sometimes, after all, the proximity of a great good is painful, as when ex-lovers encounter each other, or when a hateful child is embraced by her loving father. In some cases, the proximity of a great good brings pain to an agent when the agent is aware both that he caused his own loss of it and that he can never possess it again. But such is the state of the damned in relation to their greatest good. I suggest, then, that God’s grace, which He extends out of love, is felt as pain; and that, as an act of mercy, God can withdraw from them for a time, to ease their pain of loss.

IV. Necessary creation of only those persons who are freely saved⁵⁴

It might seem that one way God could render (5) false in the face of the would-be damned is by *necessarily* not creating the damned. Suppose we accept (3a). In that case, we might suppose that there is no possible world in which God creates the persons who would freely psychologically determine themselves to will against Him unendingly. After all, since God is omniscient He knows who the damned are, and since He is omnipotent He can avoid creating them. Since this way of making (5) false is open to God, and since God wants to make (5) false, it is true of God *essentially* that he does not create the damned. In other words, there is no *feasible* world in which (5) is true, and only the feasible worlds are open to God to create. We can then conclude that (3b).

There are numerous responses to this line of reasoning. First, it could be argued that God may not know who the damned are. Second, it could be argued that if God *does* know who the damned are, there may be worlds in which a conditional desire of God's inconsistent with (3a) is realized, and I argue that intuition cannot adjudicate between the two inconsistent desires. I will briefly remark on the first response, and cover both responses more extensively in footnote 57.

Let's first suppose that (3a). In order to avoid creating the damned (in worlds with persons), God has to know who the damned are. Hence, *prevolitionally*, or logically prior to God's decision to create, God has to know the truth-values of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (CCFs). CCFs are of the form,

(CF) If person S were in circumstances *c*, S would freely perform action *a*.

As William Lane Craig writes, "S is a created agent, [*a*] is some action, and [*c*] is a set of fully specified circumstances including the whole history of the world up until the time of S's free action."⁵⁵ In order to avoid creating the damned, God would have to know the relevant contingently-true CCFs pertaining to salvation and damnation. That God has 'middle knowledge', or prevolitional knowledge of the CCFs, is a view known as Molinism. The short response to the objection we are considering is that Aquinas rejects Molinism.⁵⁶ If we reject Molinism,⁵⁷ it is not

⁵⁴ Thanks to Robert Hartman for raising this objection, along with making a plethora of important comments on my entire paper.

⁵⁵ William Lane Craig, "Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the 'Grounding Objection,'" *Faith and Philosophy* 18.3 (2001): p. 338.

⁵⁶ For Aquinas, God's foreknowledge of human affairs is grounded in His eternal and simultaneous presence to every instant of time. See, for example, *Summa contra gentiles* Book 1, Ch. 66, 7.

⁵⁷ There are good arguments against Molinism. Plausibly the relevant CCFs have no truth-values, at least at the time of God's creation of the world. First, the semantic analysis of counterfactuals is far from clear. On a popular semantics based on David Lewis' work, and granting for simplicity the "limit assumption" (which Lewis rejects), then (CF) is true for a particular agent S, set of circumstances *c*, and action *a*, iff, in all the closest worlds in which S is in *c*, then S does *a*. But it seems that there is a tie among closest worlds in which some subject in certain circumstances does some action, and does not do that action. If there were such a tie, then CCFs would have no determinate truth-values. (See Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974], 174-6 for the argument. This is known as the "tie objection" to Molinism.) Second, plausibly, contingently true CCFs pertaining to specific persons require

clear that God knows who the damned are logically prior to His decision to create. Lacking prevolitional knowledge of who the blessed and the damned are, I do not see how, assuming that God creates persons, God could *necessarily* avoid creating the damned.

V: Annihilation

Annihilation is a way of rendering (5) false because free will implies (5) only if we assume that it is possible to go on rejecting God *forever*. If God were to annihilate someone, He would prevent that person from existing—and rejecting Him—unendingly. There are at least three reasons why, for Aquinas, God cannot annihilate the damned. There is a *moral* reason, an *ontological* reason, and a *causal* reason. To explain the first two, we need a brief account of how Aquinas understands the antecedent of premise (3), God’s goodness. In particular, we need to know how God’s goodness in general relates to God’s goodness to each individual, which latter is central to our argument for premise (3) from Adams. To preview, God is good in many ways; one way is that God is morally good, which means that God will behave towards each individual like a morally good agent; and God’s being good to each individual is best analyzed, for Aquinas, in terms of God’s loving each individual.

concrete objects as truth-makers. But logically prior to creation there are no concrete objects, and so logically prior to creation there are no contingently true CCFs. (This is the “grounding objection” to Molinism; see Ken Perszyk, “Recent Work on Molinism,” *Philosophy Compass* 8.8 [2013]: 758-9.) Third, consider a logical moment before God decides which world to create. If, plausibly, the truth-conditions of CCFs in a given world correspond to similarity relations among that world and other possible worlds, then what CCFs are true depend upon which world is actual. But which world is actual depends upon God’s initial creative decree. Hence God cannot have reference to the contingently-true CCFs in His creative deliberation; they are not true “soon enough.” (See Perszyk, “Recent Work on Molinism,” 761. This is the “not true soon enough” objection to Molinism.)

Suppose that each of these three arguments fails and that God knows the relevant CCFs. Nevertheless, it is highly plausible that God has a conditional desire the realization of which is, for all we know, impossible with the realization of (3a). That desire is expressed below:

(7) If God were perfectly good, He would *conditionally* want as many persons as possible to unite with Him in heaven.

Given the contingently-true CCFs, there are some logically or “intrinsically” possible worlds which may not be “feasible,” that is, which may not be within God’s power to create. (Whether they are “possible” for God to create depends upon what sort of possibility is under consideration.) For example, suppose God knows that there are no circumstances under which a particular person Stan will accept God’s salvific offer. Then, although there is a logically possible world in which Stan is saved, there is no feasible world in which Stan is saved. (cf. Craig, “‘No Other Name’: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ,” p. 182.) Now, given the CCFs, for all we know there are some worlds in which a few are damned but, because of CCFs involving the few, a great many are saved. Are those worlds open to God to create, given (3a)? It depends upon which (if either) of God’s desires, (3a) or (7), *essentially* restricts His creative activity pertaining to those worlds. But it seems to me that (3b) is just as intuitively plausible as,

(7a) If God were perfectly good, he would *absolutely* want to create a world in which most of the human race unite with Him in heaven even if, in such a world, a few were damned.

Hence, it is not at all clear given (3a) that God essentially or necessarily does not create the damned. For all we know, there are feasible worlds in which some persons are damned. So, for all we know, (5) is true.

We begin with Aquinas's understanding of goodness *per se*. On Aquinas' value theory, goodness is convertible with being in at least two ways. First, according to the *ontological goodness* of being, being is valuable *per se*. Every existing thing is valuable insofar as it exists or has being. Second, each being has a value over and above its existence. The value of beings considered as individual members of their species is indexed to the perfection of the essential capacities of their natural kinds. As Stump interprets Aquinas, "a thing *x* of a kind *K* is a good *K* primarily to the extent to which it has actualized the [essential] capacit[ies] specific to that kind."⁵⁸ Call this *value perfectionism*. Since man is by definition a *rational animal*,⁵⁹ his *rationality* being his specific and highest capacity, the more man's rationality is perfected the more value he will have as a member of the human race.⁶⁰ For Aquinas, the human person's rational faculties consist principally in her ability to reason about the true, which is the *telos* or purpose of her intellect, and in her ability to choose the good or right action, which is the object of her will. Rationality, which in the human person is wrapped up with his animal nature, is shared by all persons, God and the angels included. An excellent human being, then, like an excellent person, knows the truth, and is morally good insofar as he does what is right. In summary, on Aquinas' value theory, each being is ontologically valuable *qua* being, but also, each being is valuable as a species of its kind insofar as it attains the perfection of its species. Human beings are essentially rational animals, and it is the perfection of their rational capacity—which they share with all persons—which most significantly influences their value as members of their kind. What does this value theory imply about God's goodness to each individual?

For Aquinas, that God is "good" can be said in many ways. For example, God is *ontologically good* insofar as He exists. Moreover, God is, like a human being, a person with reason, so He is also good insofar as He knows the truth and does what is right. When we say that God is *good to* an individual, I think we are talking about God's *moral* goodness, God acting rightly towards an individual. And for Aquinas, God's (moral) goodness, or right action, toward man can best be understood, I think, in terms of God's love for man. Aquinas analyzes love into two interrelated desires in respect of the beloved: (1) her good, and (2) union with her.⁶¹ So, God's being good *to* man implies that God acts on these desires of love toward man. Aquinas also maintains that God is man's final good; that is, union with God *is* man's greatest good,⁶² as I explained above when I showed that, for Aquinas, man can only be perfectly happy when he unites with God in heaven. Among other things, man's union maximizes man's welfare⁶³ (since God is the ultimate object of all of man's desires) and maximally perfects man by maximizing man's

⁵⁸ Eleonore Stump, "Dante's Hell, Aquinas's Moral Theory, and the Love of God," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16.2 (1986): 189.

⁵⁹ The definition follows the form [differentiating capacity] [genus]. Man's specific capacity—the capacity that makes him a member of the human species rather than some other animal species—is his rational will.

⁶⁰ Stump, "Dante's Hell, Aquinas's Moral Theory, and the Love of God," 189-90.

⁶¹ Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010), 14. The union should be appropriate to the kind of relationship had between lover and beloved.

⁶² Cf. Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 33.

⁶³ Arguably, value perfectionism concerns objective facts about the human species, the good *of* man; but welfare is a subjective issue, and an individual has positive welfare only if his life goes well *for* him.

capacity for reason.⁶⁴ Hence, God's fulfilling the two conditions of His love toward man, on Aquinas' analysis of love, maximizes man's welfare and man's value, on Aquinas' value theory. This is why I think that God's goodness to each human person is realized, for Aquinas, primarily through God's love for each human person.

I make the highly plausible assumption that an all-good God does not act directly against His goodness. I take this to entail, at least, that God never takes away the logically necessary conditions for His being good. God may permit others to take away those conditions, but He never does it Himself. If we understand God's goodness partially in terms of His love for each person, then God does not act directly against God's love for each person. I take this to mean, at least, that God does not take away the necessary conditions for the realization of the twin desires of His love (the good of the beloved and union with the beloved) for each person. In other words, God does not make it impossible for God to fulfill the twin desires of His love for each person. Note that the *continued existence* of each person is a necessary condition of God's loving each person. (God does not love persons who do not exist.)

Now we can understand Aquinas' reasons that God cannot annihilate the damned. According to the moral reason, annihilation would compromise God's goodness to the damned, i.e., His right behavior or love towards them. On Aquinas's account, God is good to man insofar as God loves man, i.e., acts on His desires for union and man's good. But a necessary condition of realizing these desires is that each person continue to exist. While horrendous evils, which God permits on (5), *afflict* man, annihilation *destroys* man. Since each person's continuing to exist is necessary for God to love man, and for man to attain to man's own good, God cannot annihilate man without acting against God's love for man. But if God acted against His love for man, He would not be good *to* man. But by hypothesis, God is good to man. Moreover, if we maintain, with Adams, that evils which devour 'the possibility of positive personal meaning' are horrendous, then there is certainly an argument to be made that annihilation is undefeatably horrendous. After all, annihilation obliterates not only man's meaning-making capacities, but man himself, without remainder.

It may be objected that God's "goodness" to the damned is ambiguous. I said that we can best understand God's goodness to man in terms of God's love for man, and I further claimed that for Aquinas God's loving man involves God's desiring man's own "good". But "good" can be taken in a number of ways. For instance, a state of affairs may be the *good of* a person Hap but not, necessarily, *good for* Hap. Aquinas' value perfectionism is concerned with the *good of*, which is arguably an objective concept—i.e., Hap's perfection in relation to his kind. But the *good for* is concerned with welfare, which is arguably a subjective concept—i.e., Hap's life going well for him. Perhaps perfection and welfare come apart. It may be the good of a man with an insatiable desire to laze on his couch and eat cake all day to cultivate virtues concerned with temperance, discipline, and so forth. But he might find that when he's forced off the couch and onto a strict diet his life goes worse for him, his welfare declines. Things would go better, he might think, if he

⁶⁴ Stump, "Dante's Hell, Aquinas's Moral Theory, and the Love of God," 192.

could retire to the couch with a chocolate-fudge-coated ice cream cake every day. One might argue that God's loving man at least implies that God act for the good *for* man and not merely for the good *of* man.

In response to this objection, Aquinas seems to deny that perfection and welfare come apart. Recall that God's uniting with man also maximizes man's welfare, since God Himself is the ineradicable ultimate object of man's built-in desire for happiness. As I've argued, given human psychology, man's failing to unite with God leads inevitably to total ruin—to hell. Regarding the lazy couch-ridden man, Aquinas would insist that the man's getting off of the couch and cultivating productive habits would improve his welfare.

Nevertheless, Aquinas also avers that the “greatest evil” for the damned is their unhappiness.⁶⁵ The damned, he maintains, would wish for their own annihilation. Since lack of an evil can “take on the aspect of good,” the cessation of their suffering (through annihilation) takes on this aspect for the damned, such that it “is better for the damned not to be than to be unhappy.”⁶⁶ If, for the sake of argument, it is better for the damned not to be than to be unhappy, how can Aquinas maintain that God cannot annihilate them because of His desire for their own good? The moral argument against annihilation is, I think, susceptible to this objection. Even if God's sustaining the damned in being promotes the perfection of the damned more than their annihilation would, it is not clear from Aquinas that God's sustaining the damned in being promotes their welfare more than annihilation would. Now, plausibly God's goodness to the damned involves His promoting both their perfection and their welfare, and so if these two come apart, it is not clear what would be required by God's love for the damned.

There is however a second, and I think stronger, reason that God cannot annihilate the damned, the *ontological reason*. The basic idea is that, since being itself is good, and since God cannot act against goodness, God cannot annihilate being.

For Aquinas, there is an important moral distinction between *doing* and *allowing* evil: it is morally permissible to *allow* evil under certain conditions, but it is never morally permissible to *do* anything intrinsically evil.⁶⁷ Since God is a morally good agent, God is bound by this principle. Under the right circumstances, then, God could permit undefeatable horrendous evils (for morally sufficient reasons, say), but He cannot do or directly cause *anything* evil in itself.

So although Aquinas argues that the cessation of the suffering of the damned through annihilation can take on the *aspect* of the good, all he means by this is that it can seem or appear good. It does, after all, seem good to end eternal suffering. But God cannot directly cause intrinsic evils, even if they have net good consequences. According to the ontological goodness of being to which Aquinas subscribes, being is *identified with* goodness. A being is good as such in respect of its being. To destroy goodness *per se* is an intrinsic evil, if anything is. God's annihilation of a

⁶⁵ Aquinas, *ST* Suppl. 98.3 ad 3.

⁶⁶ Aquinas, *ST* Suppl. 98.3

⁶⁷ Cf. Aquinas, *ST* II-II.64.7.

person would involve His destruction of that person's being *per se*. Thus, annihilation would constitute an intentional intrinsic evil.⁶⁸ Hence, God cannot annihilate a person—or any being, for that matter.

There is yet a third reason that, for Aquinas, God cannot annihilate being. The *causal* reason stems not from God's moral goodness but from the fact that God, as being, is ontologically good in Himself. So this reason does *not* follow from the more specific premise that God is good *to* man, but from the more general premise that God is perfectly good. In fine, Aquinas argues that being cannot be the direct, or *per se*, cause of non-being.⁶⁹ Aquinas argues that every effective cause produces a like effect. This implies, at least, that a cause cannot directly bring about its contrary. Every cause, says Aquinas, is actual. No cause, therefore, can effect the nonactual *per se*, since the nonactual is contrary to the actual. Therefore God cannot directly annihilate the damned, since to do so He would directly have to cause what is actual to become nonactual.⁷⁰

VI: Forced Salvation

If God cannot annihilate the damned, perhaps He has another plausible option for rendering (5) false: perhaps He could somehow force the union necessary for salvation. What would it be for God to “force” the damned to unite with Him? In order to avoid the possibility of a person's unendingly rejecting God, God would have to guarantee, or *necessitate*, that the (would-be) damned cease rejecting Him and, instead, will to unite with Him.

As I have already explained, union with God is accomplished only through charity, and in turn only through free acts of will, because charity is an intrinsic principle of the will. In other words, for man to unite with God in love, man must be the ultimate—and therefore the free—source of his willing to unite with God in love. This makes intuitive sense: it is difficult to understand how a unilateral union of love between two persons is possible. When two persons love

⁶⁸ Cf. Stump, “Dante's Hell, Aquinas's Moral Theory, and the Love of God,” 196, in which Stump argues that God cannot annihilate without supposing that annihilation is an intrinsic evil.

⁶⁹ Aquinas, *De Malo*, Question 1, Article 3.

⁷⁰ Could God instead permit the damned to annihilate themselves, thereby “indirectly” bringing about what is nonactual? This seems to be what Kelly James Clark suggests (Kelly James Clark, “God Is Great, God Is Good: Medieval Conceptions of Divine Goodness and the Problem of Hell,” *Religious Studies* 37.1 (2001): 15-31). I have already noted how the damned suffer because their vices, over a long enough time, lead to a total disintegration of their personalities. Clark goes one step further: the damned might lead a vicious existence in which perpetual indulgence leads to a progressive loss of being “until everything human has been lost. At this point, they will have lost their human being and, hence, their characteristic good. They will simply cease to be” qua human being (Clark, “God Is Great, God Is Good,” 28). It's unclear what exactly Clark has in mind here. On Aquinas' hylomorphic metaphysics, a human being is essentially a composite of matter (the body) and substantial form (the human soul). The human soul accounts for what a human being is, i.e. man's nature, and so only destruction of the soul will render something otherwise human no longer human. But the destruction of the substantial form constitutes the destruction of the substance, in contrast to constituting a mere change in the substance, and so there is no way for a human being to cease to be qua human without ceasing to be, simply-speaking. Moreover, Aquinas denies that sin corrupts being as such. Rather, sin only corrupts the perfection of being by diminishing a particular creature's essential capacities; it does not make a creature any less an existentially quantified specimen of its kind. Therefore, the damned cannot annihilate themselves either.

each other, Aquinas says, each person makes the other person's goods his own.⁷¹ This involves knowing and willing the other person's good. A union of love is a comprehensive union in this sense: it is a union of intellect and will around the good of the beloved. This is not possible without a free will. God cannot unite with a person in love unless the person also wills to unite with God.

Earlier I said that God would never directly take away the necessary conditions of His loving man. God's loving man consists in His acting on the twin desires of love for man. To act on a desire is at least to will that it be efficacious, to move to realize it. One of the two desires of love that God has for man is the desire for man's own good. Man's own good consists, in turn, in man's acting on, and ultimately realizing, the twin desires of love for God (God's own good, and union with God). But man cannot act on these desires—he cannot will that they be efficacious—if he cannot will freely. As I've already explained, for Aquinas, it does not make much sense to speak of an unfree act of will. If Hap, say, is 'forced' to make an act of will, it is no longer Hap's will which is making the act; it is better to say that it is whatever 'forced' it that is making the act. So, God would make it impossible to realize His desire for the good of man, if He took away man's free will. Moreover, since union in this context involves a conjoining of wills, God would also make it impossible to realize His desire for union if He took away man's free will.

So, God's giving man free will is a necessary condition of God's fulfilling each of the two desires of love for man—the good of man, and union with man. God, then, would never take away a person's free will.

"Forced" salvation would involve God's necessitating union with Him. To unite with God requires an act of free will: making God one's final end through charity. How could God necessitate an act of free will? The most plausible suggestion, I think, is that God can necessitate an act of will by causally determining it. Recall that for Aquinas free will is a "systems-level" feature which arises out of the mutual reciprocal interaction of intellect and will. It might seem that in order to necessitate a free act of will, God could causally determine the intellect or the will to make the relevant act of will. Recall, however, that for Aquinas the will is not free if anything (extrinsic to it) acts on it with efficient causality. Thus, God cannot causally determine the will by acting on it. Could God indirectly necessitate an act of will by acting on the intellect with efficient causality? Suppose, for example, that He were to take over a person's intellect temporarily to cause the person to deliberate about and decide to love Him. In that case, as Stump argues, since the intellect that informs the person's will is God's, the act of will necessitated by it is also God's, not the person's.⁷² Suppose instead that God were not to take over a person's intellect, but only to influence it to love God? In that case, the person would still retain control of his free will, and so it would still be possible for the person to reject God unendingly. God's merely influencing an intellect does not necessitate or guarantee an act of free will. It seems, then, that although God can attempt to elicit a particular free act of will, He cannot necessitate a particular free act of will. And

⁷¹ See, e.g., Aquinas, *ST* II-II.17.3

⁷² Stump, *Aquinas*, 286.

since He cannot do so, it is conceptually impossible for God to necessitate a person freely to unite with Him. Hence God cannot “force” the (would-be) damned into a state of blessedness.

VII. Conclusion

On Aquinas’s account of God’s goodness to each individual person, it is necessary that God does not take away any person’s free will; otherwise, it would be impossible for God to enter a union of love with each person. Moreover, it is impossible for God to annihilate a person or to force a person unilaterally to unite with God. Hence, it seems impossible for God to render (6) true. There are possible worlds in which persons unendingly reject God and suffer the pain of hell. After all, some actual persons reject God, and might go on doing so indefinitely, in any circumstances. If it is impossible for God to render (6) true, then (5) is true and, in turn, (3b) is false. However, we do not want to reject (3), which is highly plausible. Instead, we clarify (3) by replacing it with,

(3c) If God is perfectly good, He *conditionally* but does not *absolutely* want to render (5) false.

When we substitute (3c) for premise (3) of (NH), the inference to the conclusion is invalid. There is good reason to think that God’s goodness, indeed His love, is consistent with the existence of hell.

As a final question, how does Aquinas’s account of God’s goodness to each individual person relate to Adams’s account? Recall that I used Adams’s account of God’s goodness to each individual to construct an argument for premise (3). Adams does not give a positive account of God’s goodness to each individual, but on a strong rendering of her argument, God’s loving each person entails that God will defeat horrendous evils in each person’s life, thereby realizing in each person enough meaning-making capacity to make positive personal meaning of her life. I contend that Aquinas can affirm, with Adams, that a person’s life is valuable *to her* principally insofar as she can realize her capacity to make meaning out of her life. But Aquinas would subsume the realization of meaning-making into his general account of the good for the human person. He would add that the extent to which a person makes her life meaningful is the extent to which she realizes her potential for rational perfection (the good of the human person) and her own happiness (the good for the human person) by uniting with God. Horrendous evils, then, afflict a person’s rational will, which is the primary reason that they afflict her meaning-making capacity. Note further that by subsuming Adams’s account into Aquinas’s, free will is necessary for meaning-making, since one realizes one’s rational will to the extent that one unites with God. Of course, I think it is also highly intuitive that free will is necessary for meaning-making: in order for a person to make meaning of her own life, she must be ultimately responsible for how her life goes, and especially for whether she loves or rejects God, who is the ultimate end for whom she was created.