

## Review essay

# To Hell and back with David Bentley Hart

David Bentley Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), pp. 222, ISBN 978-0300246223. £20.00

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In 2019, that relative age of innocence when the United Kingdom's primary concern was the terms of its departure from the European Union, Donald Tusk wondered 'what that special place in Hell looks like for those who promoted Brexit without even a sketch of a plan'.<sup>1</sup> The then President of the European Council was presumed to be speaking metaphorically, otherwise his remarks would have triggered even more righteous indignation than they did. But how should our inherited language concerning 'Hell' be understood? Perhaps the most fashionable and socially acceptable way to discuss any eschatological considerations in a European context is in terms of imminent environmental catastrophe: the judgement of God (or, safer still, 'Nature')<sup>2</sup> against the human avarice which leads to climate change, and with a pronounced emphasis on the rapacious West. Elsewhere, talk of 'sin' or 'final judgement' offends many, especially when some of the worldviews and lifestyles that were once considered damnable are not only tolerated but celebrated in pluralistic societies. If David Bentley Hart is to be believed, however, no matter how socially relevant many in the Church may endeavour to make their public interventions, Christians largely maintain the conviction that

when the end inevitably comes, eternal damnation awaits at least some. Those who hold this view are the ‘infernalists’ who reputedly dominate the Western Church, and Hart’s opposition to their doctrine is implacable.



## The anatomy of the argument and the style of prosecution

Hart’s book is organised into three main parts. The second and most important consists of four ‘meditations’ on *apokatastasis* (ἀποκατάστασις; restoration/reconciliation), which develop the arguments sketched in Part One: the first meditation concerns the nature of God and the moral implications of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*; the second considers divine judgement in the New Testament; the third and fourth reflect on the nature of personhood and freedom respectively. Part Three is an emphatic restatement of the author’s position, whereby the imperative to ‘love the Good’ means that the doctrine of eternal hell (DOEH) cannot be countenanced (p. 209). The three parts constitute a multilayered and interlocking argument for universalism: a venerable soteriology which Hart thinks has been so marginalised down the centuries, that much of what he argues will ‘seem rather exotic to many readers, and perhaps even a little perverse’ (p. 2). Indeed, Hart judges the ‘body of received opinion’, against which he argues, to be ‘so invincibly well-established that I know I cannot reasonably be expected to persuade anyone of anything, except perhaps of my sincerity’ (p. 4). Hart provides no evidence to support this claim of an unbreakable consensus, but sociological data does indicate a strong majority in the US;<sup>3</sup> the picture in Europe is more ambiguous.<sup>4</sup> Christian demographics aside, for a writer with Hart’s argumentative gifts, his pessimism concerning the success of his project may strike readers as excessive.

Hart is an award-winning theologian and essayist whose public profile has grown alongside the popularity of his lucid and sympathetic expositions of the revolutionary character of the Christian tradition and classical concepts of God.<sup>5</sup> To some degree, these writings were responding to the ‘new atheism’, a movement which set the agenda for much public discussion of religion in the first decade of the present century. Those writings also revealed an author as able in the art of vituperation as those recent enemies of the faith (with the exception perhaps of the late Christopher Hitchens, whose polemical *oeuvre* spanned five decades). Perhaps Hart’s experience of dealing with entrenched



theological commitments (including his own) has taught him to manage expectations when it comes to effecting change through the power of the pen. Hart's argument against the DOEH actually has parallels with the 'new atheist' case against many religious beliefs: the doctrine is not only false; it is morally compromising. There is psychological conjecture, too: the 'frenzy of evangelization' Hart would expect from people committed to the DOEH is absent in the lives of some of its defenders (p. 30), and while he does not accuse them of bad faith, Hart does claim they are 'deceiving' themselves (p. 29).

Hart is not attacking the doctrine of hell tout court: it is the 'eternal' dimension that stands accused. There are various ways of framing this controversy. One can, for instance, approach the DOEH as a theological challenge in its own right, given the stock of common Christian teachings about God; alternatively, one can take it as an eschatological extension to the problem of evil, where the difficulties raised by terrestrial suffering are the primary concern. Hart has addressed the problem of evil elsewhere;<sup>6</sup> here he confronts the challenge that 'comes into view when we think not from the world to God, but from God to the world' (p. 68). Whatever the approach, the intellectual task for the 'infernalist' is to make sense of the prospect of the eternal suffering of finite creatures made in the image of their creator, whose damnation is either willed or permitted by that creator: an all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing God. For Hart, this prospect has never made any sense, and there are few stronger indicators of this than the misguided industry devoted to defending the indefensible: reducing, as it does, 'a host of cardinal Christian theological usages – most especially moral predicates like "good," "merciful," "just," "benevolent," "loving" – to utter equivocality, and that by association reduce the entire grammar of Christian belief to meaninglessness' (p. 74).

The problem with the DOEH centres on the nature of God, which was called into question for the teenage Hart after two encounters with the legend of Abba Macarius (c. 300–391). In this tale, the skull of a pagan high priest voices the grim fate of the dead to the startled Macarius. The pagan wanted the Coptic Christian to know that the latter's prayers for the spiritually lost, coming from a faithful servant of God, secured temporary relief from their suffering: the occasional glimpse of the faces of the damned brought brief consolation from the impersonal, fiery torment in which they were (literally) suspended. The horrified Macarius concludes that it would have been better had this poor man never been born, but as a

sincere pagan, with no prospect of knowing the one true God, the priest was by no means the worst off: a more awful fate still awaited those who knew this God and yet rejected him. As a macabre story, Hart could appreciate its ‘ghastly charms’ when he encountered it as antique literature, but when the same story reappeared in a sermon by an Episcopal priest, as a ‘parable of the faith’, its charms evaporated: for it was a ‘fable that seemed to say – and with so little evasion – that Abba Macarius was [...] immeasurably more merciful than the God he worshiped’ (p. 11).

The primary theological tradition from which Hart draws is Eastern Orthodoxy, to which he converted as a young man (just how decisive that ill-judged sermon on Abba Macarius was, the author does not disclose). His scholarly references are mostly Greek patristic, from Origen (c. 185–c. 253) to St Isaac of Nineveh (d. c. 700), but there is also an appreciation of modern writers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Sergei Bulgakov and, closer to home, George MacDonald. In terms of his confessional and disciplinary approach, Hart writes from a distinctive vantage point which enriches contemporary theological discourse in Western Europe and North America. And stylistically, working at a comfortable distance from the history of Scottish sectarianism, this American convert writes untethered by any social obligation to be especially polite about other Christian traditions: the acid criticism falls on aspects of Roman Catholic and Reformed theology alike.

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### Hellish doctrines

The circle of blame for the diabolical news that Christianity has all too often brought to the world, on Hart’s reckoning, with its promises of eternal torment, is too large to describe in full: Dante is of course culturally indispensable; after a reading of the *Inferno*, it is the poet himself who emerges as the only creative intelligence ‘one feels any spontaneous natural admiration [for]’; when one considers ‘Dante’s God, if one is more or less emotionally intact, one can feel only a kind of remote, vacuous loathing’ (p. 23). But the brilliant and savage imagination of Dante, and artists from Michelangelo to Milton, was sustained by a common Christian narrative which permeated medieval Europe. According to Hart, this narrative was based on a ‘confused reading of scripture’, most of all by that of St Augustine, a ‘towering genius whose inability to read Greek and consequent reliance on defective Latin translations turned out to be the

single most tragically consequential case of linguistic incompetence in Christian history' (p. 49). It is no surprise that the Western conception of Original Sin, coming via Augustine's reading of St Paul's reading of Genesis – with all the linguistic transitions and contextual shifts contained within that history – is a target for Hart's derision. Like many before him, Hart judges “inherited guilt” a logical absurdity, rather on the order of “square circle” (p. 75).

On more than one occasion Hart acknowledges his respect for the logical consistency of John Calvin's reading of Augustine, despite the ‘moral horror’ of the picture of divine sovereignty therein: ‘unquestionably the most terrifying and severe expression of the late Augustinian heritage’ (pp. 28–29). When the divinely-foreseen Original Sin of humanity combines with double pre-predestination, the moral soul rebels. The soundest intellectual response to this rebellion is to appeal to ‘the pure inscrutable power of God’ (p. 81): a plausible singular explanation, to be sure, but *so* singular an explanation that one cannot hope to maintain the other transcendent attributes of God without the latter dissolving into ‘gibberish’ (p. 202). To their cost and ours, early modern theologians, Thomist and Reformed alike, were unduly impressed by ideologies ‘of absolute monarchy’; and when they extended their ‘Domitian’ model of arbitrary sovereign power into the eternal fate of souls, they ‘made a secret pact with evil’ (pp. 170–71). For all that, Hart stresses his agreement with the Reformed tradition on unmerited grace, albeit he develops the logic of the insight quite differently:

If what the New Testament says about God is true, then it is God's will not to repay us according to our merits, but simply to claim for himself those of his creatures who had been lost in slavery to death. I remain convinced that no one, logically speaking, could merit eternal punishment; but I also accept the obverse claim, that no one could merit grace. This does not mean, however, that grace must be rare (p. 52).

And so, the argument shifts to where, for many, the whole discussion should have begun – with Scripture. Although Hart could reasonably point to the book's title and epigraph: ‘Our savior God...intends that all human beings shall be saved and come to a full knowledge of the truth’ (1

Timothy 2:3–4); indeed, Hart’s essay could be read as an extended reflection on that sentiment.



## Thoroughly good news

Hart is a philosophical theologian in style and temperament, and a Neo-Platonist in orientation,<sup>7</sup> but his engagement with Scripture marks him out from many of his peers: Hart has produced his own translation of the New Testament,<sup>8</sup> which informs his second meditation and is worth consulting to assess Hart’s rendering of the Greek *etsi doctrina non daretur* (as if doctrine is not given). This chapter is arguably the most important, but it is the least pleasurable to read: we get page after page of quotations in Koine Greek with Hart’s (literal) translations, occasionally interspersed with comment, before the substantive argument unfolds. But this is crucial, since Scriptural evidence for universalism, especially in the Pauline corpus, is typically either ignored altogether or interpreted through the preconceived doctrinal prism of partial atonement. This latter reading assumes that when, for example, the Apostle looks forward to that time when ‘God may be all in all’ (1 Corinthians 15:28), the *ἐν πᾶσιν* (in *all*) in this declaration refers solely to the elect.

When Paul wrote, however, he was concerned with the conditions for becoming the people of God: (1) the election of Israel and giving of the law; (2) the election of gentiles for salvation through faith in Christ. So the defender of the DOEH could reasonably doubt whether Paul had in mind idolatrous pagans of his own time, let alone modern paradigms of evil such as Adolf Hitler, whose *eventual* salvation Hart does not flinch from affirming, after ‘however many aeons of inconceivably painful purification in hell that might take’ (p. 84). There are certainly texts which promise salvation for errant ‘builders’, once their faulty works are destroyed: ‘burned [κατακήσεται] away [...] as by fire’ (1 Corinthians 3:15); although just how far this salvific purgation extends is not self-evident. But perhaps the weight given to Paul is misguided on all sides in this debate: it is rare for contemporary New Testament scholars to read texts which radically qualify universalist statements (e.g. Romans 8:29–30, 9–11), or the supposed universalist texts themselves, as evidence of Paul’s concern with the post-mortem destiny of individuals, as opposed to the glories and ironies of God’s purposes for humanity working in first-century history. Nevertheless, Hart is keen to pronounce Paul ‘not guilty’



of the ‘infernalist’ dogma, and he is a strong advocate. What about the Gospels and Revelation? Not proven.

In the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, Sheol and Hades typically refer to the general dwelling place of the dead, although they are occasionally invoked as a place of punishment (e.g. Luke 10:15, 16:23). The closest that the New Testament gets to the medieval Christian concept of Hell is γέεννα (Gehenna), which Hart translates as the ‘Valley of Hinnom’: an actual place located south of Jerusalem, reputed to have been a place of child sacrifice by fire (2 Chronicles 28:3); the site came to be associated (at least metaphorically) with the underworld destruction of the God forsaken. But forsaken *forever*? Jesus refers to γέεννα eleven times in the Synoptic Gospels, but its connection to eternal post-mortem suffering is contested. In Matthew 25:46, at the culmination of Jesus’ apocalyptic discourse, those who have not seen the Lord in the suffering of the lowly will ‘go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life’. There is no mention of *where* this punishment takes place, but the ‘infernalist’ would not have to look very far to supply the eschatological landscape (5:22, 29–30). Hart’s approach to these texts is to problematise the translation of phrases like κόλασιν αιώνιον into ‘eternal punishment’. He acknowledges that αἰών did ‘refer on occasion to a period of endless or at least indeterminate duration’, but denies this was normative: ‘Throughout the whole of ancient and late antique Greek literature, an “aeon” was most properly an “age,” which is simply to say a “substantial period of time” or an “extended interval”’ (p. 121). Such a reading would allow for that painful purgation which Hart judges to be most consistent with Scriptural teaching on judgement. Bart Ehrman, a popularizing New Testament scholar, seems to disagree: in his *Heaven and Hell*, Ehrman accepts the traditional translation of αἰών as ‘eternal’, but insists that the polar opposite of ‘eternal life’ in Jesus’ teaching is ‘eternal death’, and so *annihilation* is the *eternal* punishment.<sup>9</sup> For Epicureans, of course, this would be no punishment at all: there is no reason to fear the cessation of our existence at death any more than to bewail our non-existence before birth (Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Bk. 3). Thoroughgoing Epicureans are probably few and far between today,<sup>10</sup> however, and Hart certainly counts annihilation as a form of damnation; indeed, he considers it the most plausible reading of the New Testament for those who are unpersuaded by universalist arguments: unpersuaded, for example, that the ancient Christian teaching of Jesus’ ‘harrowing of Hades’, was a ‘rescue’

operation for *all*, (p. 15), living and dead, virtuous and vicious; unpersuaded that when Jesus was ‘lifted up from the earth’, he would finally ‘drag *everyone* [πάντας] to me’ (John 12:32).

Hart acknowledges, somewhat wearily, that ‘one cannot really discuss New Testament eschatology without considering the book of Revelation’ (p. 106). Revelation’s impact here is hard to overstate, but for Hart one would have to be a ‘lunatic’ to mistake this ‘intricate and impenetrable puzzle’ for a ‘straightforward statement of dogma’ (p. 108). He follows much modern scholarship in seeing the text as religio-political allegory in apocalyptic mode: ‘situated in some liminal region between history and eternity, political realties and religious dreams’ (p. 109), when ‘the Beast’ (Rome) and its consorts are condemned, and ‘Jerusalem will be restored’ (p. 108). There is, of course, ample material for reading Revelation as a prophecy of the end times, but that would not be decisive on the DOEH. A universalist could render the torment described as αἰώνιας αἰώνων (14:11) as ‘for ages and ages’, and take the ‘lake of fire’ as a metaphor for purification, where the soul, like gold, is refined; while the annihilationist could reasonably point to the total destruction of Hades (20:14). But Hart has little interest in these readings because they invest the text with an eschatological authority he denies.



## Humanity

Any readers of Hart’s third meditation who are in search of a theological anthropology centred on the individual, one cast in terms of God’s knowledge of ‘every hair on their head’ (Luke 12:7), will be disappointed. The discussion of persons is general and abstract. But for Hart, who draws on Gregory of Nyssa’s commentary on Genesis 1–2, it is universal humanity that God creates and restores:

God has conceived of humanity under the form of an ideal “Human Being” (*ἀνθρώπος*, *ánthrōpos*), at once humanity’s archetype and perfection, a creature shaped entirely after the divine likeness, neither male nor female, possessed of divine virtues: purity, love, impassability, happiness, wisdom, freedom, and immortality [...] [T]his primordial ‘ideal’ Human Being comprises [...] the *plérōma* of all human beings [...] (p. 139).



Just as it is humanity as such that is present in the eternal God who creates *ex nihilo*, it is humanity as such that is saved: restored by infinite love. This, of course, raises the question of exactly *what* of humanity is saved: Is it the *idea* of humanity, so what we are left with is God loving his eternal ideas? Hart does not demure from the traditional teaching on the Resurrection of the body, but will this just be a newly embodied *idea* of humanity? Given the history of human suffering within living memory alone – from twentieth-century genocides to the lethal pandemic we are currently living through – one could be forgiven for thinking that the God discussed here resembles those representatives of radical political thought, since at least the French Revolution, who tirelessly proclaim their love for *humanity* but betray a violent misanthropy in their dealings with actual *human beings*.<sup>11</sup> But something of our individual humanity must remain for Hart, since he warns against any easy attempt to imagine that the reprobate could be forgotten by the saved – except, perhaps, under Orwellian conditions of divine censorship – since we are shaped by those we have loved, some of whom have done terrible wrongs. If those persons were destroyed, with no possibility of redemption, then part of us would be lost. And redemption is not only possible, for Hart, but necessary when considered *sub specie aeternitatis*. After ‘Christ reoriented humanity’ (p. 141), and once evil

has been exhausted, when every shadow of wickedness—all chaos, duplicity, and violence—has been outstripped by the infinity of God’s splendor, beauty, radiance, and delight, God’s glory will shine in each creature like the sun in an immaculate mirror, and each soul [...] will turn of its own nature towards divine love. (p. 144)



## Freedom

The most ‘tender-hearted’ defences of the DOEH, and the only ones Hart credits with a tincture of respectability, centre on human freedom and ‘the refusal of God to trespass on that freedom, for fear of preventing the creature from achieving a true union of love with the divine’ (pp. 34–35).<sup>12</sup> This *could* be understood in terms of God’s respect for human autonomy in all its dignity, until one is reminded that ‘of course, unspeakable consequences await those who fail to do just this, which makes one wonder

how neatly such an argument can discriminate between “pure” love and love motivated by fear’ (p. 34). A critic might object that it is for God to discriminate not the theologian, but for Hart, the severity of the judgement against a finite creature – radically imperfect in intellect and freedom – by a God who *is* infinite intellect, freedom and love, is incoherent as a metaphysical doctrine and depraved as a moral one. Many in the Thomist tradition, with whom Hart sometimes takes issue, adopt the ‘“intellectualist” model of human liberty’ of which he approves (p. 35), whereby true freedom is rationally orientated towards the good, unencumbered by ignorance and distortive passion. But these same scholars find themselves in a ‘dizzying contradiction’ by trying to maintain ‘that it is possible for a soul to freely reject God’s love, with such perfect perspicuity of understanding and intention as to merit eternal suffering’ (pp. 35–36). Any soul that would make such a choice is still, on Hart’s understanding of freedom, in a state of bondage. But is self-determination in the face of eternity not just the logical conclusion of this virtue? Yes, but the decision ‘must be undertaken *compos mentis*’ (p. 192).

Hart does not develop the argument in precisely these terms, but one way to understand what is at stake is through the prism of negative and positive liberty (a distinction drawn within political philosophy). Negative liberty is at the heart of the classical liberal tradition: the individual exercises as much freedom as they choose within the law. Positive liberty is associated with Marxist and other socialist traditions: it is concerned with removal of those disabling conditions which impede the individual, or collective, from making choices which allow them to fulfill their purposes or realize their true nature. Hart, who has socialist sympathies himself,<sup>13</sup> tends towards the latter conception in his theological reasoning. Positive liberty was sharply criticised in the twentieth century by Isaiah Berlin,<sup>14</sup> among others, who saw how it could be used to justify coercive state intervention under the pretext of a ‘higher’ freedom, which in practice crushed the hopes of individuals. Positive liberty can indeed be terrifying when enacted by totalitarian states, but the authority in this context is the Christian God, who would know (rather than presume to know) the good of the individual. So, the reasonable suspicion of positive liberty in political contexts need not carry over into theological contexts. Indeed, is this not precisely the liberty we have in mind when we speak of liberation *from* the destructive desires, obsessions, and addictions that ensnare us in what is, traditionally, called ‘sin’? For Hart, the appeal to liberty to justify

the DOEH misrepresents freedom as the formal capacity to choose between alternatives; this capacity has to be seen in the restorative light of a God whose knowledge, goodness, and power are not in conflict, and whose gift to humanity is the dissolution of those conflicts in us.



## Who is this book for?

It is a truth universally acknowledged that an academic in possession of a wide readership is typically in want of footnotes, and *That All Shall Be Saved* does nothing to challenge this received wisdom. If the theologically-educated reader is interested in a punchy, erudite statement of universalism, with a morally indignant critique of the DOEH, then this is the first book I would recommend. But for interested students, it is worth bearing in mind the years of hard academic labour it takes before one can get away with such a slight scholarly apparatus. Bibliographic notes at the end do at least supply the sources for quotations and provide some leads for those interested in further study. One recent work that is not mentioned is Michael J. McClymond's *The Devil's Redemption*,<sup>15</sup> a two-volume study of universalism from the early Church to modern times. One of the motivations for writing this history is what McClymond perceives to be the preponderance of universalism in modern Christian thought, which makes one wonder about Hart's implied status as a lonely voice in the wilderness (John Milbank describes Hart's argument as 'unanswerable' in his endorsement). Hart acknowledges the universalism of contemporary philosophers Thomas Talbott in *The Inescapable Love of God*,<sup>16</sup> and John Kronen's and Eric Reitan's *God's Final Victory*,<sup>17</sup> but other relatively recent defenders of universalism in English, from John Robinson to John Hick and Marilyn McCord Adams, receive no notice at all, let alone those in German or French.<sup>18</sup> One gets the impression reading Hart that he has spent an inordinate amount of time imbibing the arguments of the ablest defenders of conservative positions in Christian theology in the United States, from which he emerges as an embattled spirit.

Hart explains that his essay grew out of a lecture given at the University of Notre Dame (2015), and the desire to give clear expression to a line of thought that was misunderstood, rejected, or both; and the writing, elegant though it is, does create the atmosphere of an insider's conversation. In Part One, we encounter Hart's critical reflections on the arguments of 'a venerable Catholic philosopher' (p. 34), but no sense of who this

philosopher is, what exactly their arguments are, or where we might find them to form our own conclusions. On a generous interpretation, this is the good manners of a senior academic who refuses to use his considerable rhetorical powers to generate enmity with colleagues. But one's patience is tested when, in the fourth meditation, one reads that 'one Catholic philosopher recently reproached me online for exaggerating the scandal in the traditional proposal [...]' (p. 147); and then again: 'I know of another Evangelical writer—this one a philosopher (of sorts) [...]' (p. 149). On these occasions the writing hovers perilously between a monograph published by a leading academic press and an extended blogpost. Of course, arguments can be worthy of critique regardless of their authorial origins or the platforms on which they appear, but given the supposedly unassailable history of arguments on the 'infernalist' side of this debate, the reader is entitled to be disappointed with the limited range of concrete and specific scholarly critique.

Hart would feel in less of a beleaguered minority if he did not discount some of the largest beasts in the modern theological jungle who are often discussed in this context: universalist readings of Karl Barth are not considered, and Hans Urs von Balthasar's 'hopeful universalism' is judged too timid (p. 102), leaving as it does the Christian in the absurd position of *hoping* that God might just turn out to be as merciful and forgiving as them. But once we have abandoned literal images of Hell, isn't hope, with humility, the appropriate state for *all* of us facing our ultimate destiny? Sometimes reading Hart it seems that the traditional theological virtues of faith, hope, and love are overridden by 'the Good, and whatever can be deduced from it'. Then again, given the abundance of suffering on this side of death, perhaps sufficient faith and hope is expended in crediting the reality of the God of love which universal salvation presupposes.

'Heaven' is in the subtitle of this book, but it receives relatively little attention: writing about eternal Hell, even when one repudiates it, always seems more enticing for writers and artists. But Hart does not give the devil all the best lines, and he is often at his most persuasive when writing in positive rather than polemical mode. Any Christian response to evil will almost certainly have to contain an eschatological dimension, and Hart wants to recapture what he believes was the 'joyous proclamation' of the early Church: 'a call to a lost people to find their true home at last, in their father's house' (p. 205), a divine call which in the end will prove

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irresistible – inclusive of the even the most ill-prepared Brexiters of Mr Tusk’s dark imaginings.

**Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> BBC News, 6 February 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-47143135>
- <sup>2</sup> See Benedict de Spinoza’s *Deus sive Natura* formula, where there is no distinction: *Ethics*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley, intro. by Stuart Hampshire (London: Penguin, 1996), Bk. iv, p. 134.
- <sup>3</sup> Carlyle Murphy, “Most Americans Believe in Heaven … and Hell”, Pew Research Center, 10 November 2015: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/10/most-americans-believe-in-heaven-and-hell/>
- <sup>4</sup> Pew Research Center, “Being Christian in Western Europe”, 29 May 2018, p. 112: <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2018/05/Being-Christian-in-Western-Europe-FOR-WEB1.pdf>. The median average of church-attending Christians who thought God will ‘judge all’ was 60%, but this dropped to 28% for other self-identifying Christians.
- <sup>5</sup> See Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) and *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).
- <sup>6</sup> See Hart, *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans: 2005).
- <sup>7</sup> Hart has been concerned with a distinctively Christian metaphysics since his first monograph: *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans: 2003).
- <sup>8</sup> Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).
- <sup>9</sup> See Bart D. Ehrman, *Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), chap. 8.
- <sup>10</sup> Although in his published Gifford lectures, N. T. Wright finds modernity awash with the spirit of Epicureanism: *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology* (London: SPCK, 2019).

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- <sup>11</sup> The sentiment is expressed in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: The Lowell Press, 1912), 57.
- <sup>12</sup> Hart mentions Alvin Plantinga and Eleonore Stump in connection with this argument.
- <sup>13</sup> See Hart, "Three Cheers for Socialism: Christian Love and Political Practice", *Commonwealth*, 24 February 2020: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/three-cheers-socialism>
- <sup>14</sup> Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty", in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 118–72.
- <sup>15</sup> See Michael J. McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2018).
- <sup>16</sup> See Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God* (Parkland, Fla.: Universal Publishers, 1999).
- <sup>17</sup> See John Kronen and Eric Reitan, *God's Final Victory: A Comparative Philosophical Case for Universalism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).
- <sup>18</sup> For an overview, see Gregory Macdonald, ed., *All Shall be Well: Explorations in Universal Salvation and Christian Theology, from Origen to Moltmann* (Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2011).