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## PRESERVING THE TORMENTS OF HELL: Berkeleyian Immaterialism and the Afterlife

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For the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Christian, the promise of heaven and the threat of hell served as the foundation for human morality and civil society. Locke makes the point vividly.

The view of heaven and hell will cast a slight upon the short pleasures and pains of this present state, and give attractions and encouragements to virtue, which reason and interest, and the care of ourselves, cannot but allow and prefer. Upon this foundation, and upon this only, morality stands firm, and may defy all competition. This makes it more than a name; a substantial good, worth all our aims and endeavours; and thus the Gospel of Jesus Christ has delivered it to us.<sup>1</sup>

The Irish philosopher George Berkeley endorsed the sentiment, claiming that nothing of merit can enter the hearts of those “who believe no Providence, who neither fears hell, nor hopes for heaven.”<sup>2</sup> Although there were a few notable exceptions, belief in the existence of hell was as strong and common as any other tenet of the Christian faith.<sup>3</sup>

Yet by the turn of the nineteenth century, worries about eternal damnation ceased to inspire as it once had done. Richard Bauckham summarizes the change nicely. “Until the nineteenth century almost all Christian theologians taught the reality of eternal torment in hell.... Since 1800 this situation has

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1. John LOCKE, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, in *The Works of John Locke*, London, printed for Thomas Tegg [and others], 1823, vol. 7, p. 150. The text was originally published in 1695.

2. George BERKELEY, *A Discourse addressed to Magistrates and Men in Authority*, *Works* 6, 207. All citations from Berkeley are from A.A. LUCE and T.E. JESSOP (eds), *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, 9 vols., London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948-1957. The following abbreviations will be used for convenience: 3D: *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*; ALC: *Alciphron or the Minute Philosopher*; PC: *Philosophical Commentaries* (the notebooks); PHK: *Principles of Human Knowledge*; and S: *Siris: A Chain of Philosophical Reflexions and Inquiries*. Other texts of Berkeley, not abbreviated, are also from this source. Section numbers will be used for the *Principles*; all others will be page numbers from the *Works*.

3. Samuel Richardson is a notable example whose critiques will be featured in this essay. Although he professed himself a pious Christian, he argues against the existence of hell. See Samuel RICHARDSON, *The Torments of Hell* London, 1658.

entirely changed, and no traditional Christian doctrine has been so widely abandoned as that of eternal punishment.<sup>4</sup> The chronology places Berkeley's immaterialist brand of theism at an interesting juncture in the history of religious belief. Berkeley believes that only minds and ideas exist. Common sense objects are collections of ideas. In this paper, I argue that Berkeley's innovative philosophy can comfortably accommodate the Christian doctrine of eternal reward and punishment while providing the traditional theist with additional resources to fend off at least several of the seventeenth and eighteenth century concerns that arguably led to the diminution of belief in hell. As an added benefit, one can even speculate that Berkeley has a diagnosis for the decline in the 'popularity' of the traditional view of hell, namely the rise of materialism in popular thinking. In short, I contend that on Berkeley's account neither heaven nor hell are properly speaking *locations*, but rather shorthand locutions for felicitous or infelicitous orderings of ideas perceived by finite minds. The resulting picture is both consonant with Christian dogma and makes it more amenable to reason, furthering a larger project of mine to demonstrate that serious Christians ought to consider endorsing immaterialism.<sup>5</sup>

## I. The Nature of Heaven and Hell

Berkeley's depiction of both heaven and hell is constrained by Scripture and a healthy ecclesiastical tradition on the subject that was well developed in the seventeenth century. The depictions of hell were more common, as this one by Christopher Love in the middle of the seventeenth century. "Upon earth, you have diseases haply; but though some parts are afflicted, other parts are free; though you be ill in your body, yet your head may be free; [...] there is no disease that puts the whole body in pain at once; but in hell it is not so, in hell all the parts of your bodies, and powers of your souls shall be tormented..."<sup>6</sup> The nature of the torments can vary, but a common theme is that hell has a location where the body is tortured. Similarly, heaven is a physical place where the re-embodied may enjoy the benefits of salvation. After all,

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4. Richard BAUCKHAM, "Universalism: A Historical Survey," *Themelios* 4 (1979), p. 48, also quoted in Jerry WALLS, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*, University of Notre Dame Press, South Bend, 1992, p. 2. See also Daniel Pickering WALKER, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment*, London, Routledge & Keegan, 1964.

5. See Marc HIGHT, "Berkeley and Bodily Resurrection," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 45 (2007), pp. 443-458; Marc HIGHT and Joshua BOHANNON, "The Son More Visible: Berkeley and the Incarnation," forthcoming in 2010 in *Modern Theology* and Marc HIGHT, "How Immaterialism Can Save Your Soul," forthcoming in 2010 in *Revue philosophique*.

6. Christopher LOVE, *Hell's Terror: Or, A Treatise of the Torments of the Damned, as a Preservative Against Security* (London, printed by T.M. for John Rothvvell, 1653, pp. 42-43, also quoted in Philip ALMOND, *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 84.

Christians are promised *bodily* resurrection after the return of Christ, and bodies seem to logically require physical locations.

The requirement of a *body* in the afterlife is a commonly accepted part of the promise of divine reward and punishment.<sup>7</sup> Scriptural evidence is suggestive but by itself admittedly not conclusive. Matthew and Mark both speak of hell as a place where the damned have bodies. "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell."<sup>8</sup> The implication is that hell is a *space* where bodies suffer. The sufferings of the damned are consistently portrayed as analogous to – but inconceivably worse than – suffering in the present world. John Shower gives the another typical account of eternal punishment in 1700:

We have heard [...] of some who have endured breaking on the Wheel, ripping up of their Bowels, fleaing alive, racking of Joynts, burning of Flesh, pounding in a Mortar, tearing in picces with Flesh-hooks, boyling in Oyl, roasting on hot fiery Gridirons, etc. And yet all these, tho' you should superad thereto all Diseases, such as the Plague, Stone, Gout, Strangury, or whatever else you can name most torturing the Body [...] they would all come short [...] of that Wrath, that Horror, that unconceivable Anguish which the Damued must inevitably suffer every Moment, without any Intermission of their Pains, in Hellish Flames.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Bible seems straightforwardly to imply that hell has a location, many early modern theologians also provided philosophical reasons for thinking that both heaven and hell had to accommodate bodies. Thomas White, for instance, in his 1656 tract argues that the soul itself admits of no change or variety when not connected to the body.<sup>10</sup> The immediate advantage to this assertion is that the soul is naturally immortal. He further favors the view on the grounds that it demonstrates how the afterlife will be modeled on how we conduct ourselves in our mortal lifetimes. For our purposes, however, note that the conclusion also implies that the experience of either pleasure or pain requires the presence of the body. Thus the damned must be reunited with their bodies in order to suffer just as the saved must be in order to experience everlasting joy. The result is that both heaven and hell are characterized as

7. Almond (*Heaven and Hell*, p. 95) even remarks "The punishment of the body was an essential part of the divine political economy."

8. Matthew 5:29, original italics. See Mark 9:43 and Luke 16:23 for similar passages that imply hell is a location where embodied souls reside. All quotations and references from the Bible are from the King James version.

9. John SHOWER, *Heaven and Hell; or the Unchangeable State of Happiness or Misery for all Mankind in Another World* (London, printed by J. Heptinstall for John Sprint, 1700, pp. 17-18, also quoted in ALMOND, *Heaven and Hell*, p. 81.

10. Thomas WHITE, *Peripatetical Institutions*, London, 1656, pp. 261-63. Shower also defends a similar claim.

*locations* that occupy a *space* in the physical world. God maintains heaven and hell for the purposes of divine justice.

The philosophical tradition Berkeley inherited is quite clear about this as well. Descartes not only acts as if heaven occupies space, he writes approvingly of the view of theologians that “the damned are tormented by a real fire.”<sup>11</sup> There are disputes, however. Locke, for instance, notes that scholars cannot agree on what Christ’s descent into hell literally means.<sup>12</sup> Thus although there was a mainstream line that understood heaven and hell to have physical locations, the view was not universally held. As a result, many believed that the reality of hell in particular had to be defended. A number of tracts were written – many in response to Richardson’s inflammatory piece – defending the reality of hell, including Nicholas Chewney’s *Hell’s Everlasting Torments Asserted* (1660) and John Brandon’s *Everlasting Fire no Fancy* (1679), to name but two. By the time Berkeley advances his immaterialist metaphysics in the early decades of the eighteenth century, he was well aware of the debate.

## II. The ‘Problems’ of Heaven and Hell

What exactly are the problems? Laying aside strictly theological issues, positing the existence of hell where the damned are subjected to bodily tortures runs afoul of several concerns, of which I here want to consider only three. Before I start, allow me to motivate the discussion by noting that there is an important link between ontology and theology. That is, the supposition of heaven and hell must square with one’s ontology to make them consistent with the demands of the light of reason. Berkeley, for instance, is keen to note that although the Christian mysteries inspire faith, there is nothing absurd or contradictory in them. In the *Alciphron*, Berkeley generalizes the point for all aspects of religion.

The being of a God is capable of clear proof, and a proper object of human reason; whereas the mysteries of His nature, and indeed whatever there is of mystery in religion, to endeavour to explain and prove by reason is a vain attempt. *It is sufficient if we can show there is nothing absurd or repugnant in our belief of those points*, and, instead of framing hypotheses to explain them, we use our reason only for answering the objections brought against them.<sup>13</sup>

Berkeley’s goal is to remove even the appearance of absurdity from the central doctrines of Christianity. As a result, if he can demonstrate that the traditional doctrines concerning heaven and hell make more sense within the confines

11. From the sixth set of replies to the *Meditations*. René DESCARTES, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, edited and translated by John COTTINGHAM, ROBERT STOOTHOFF, and Dugald MURDOCH, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, vol. II, p. 289.

12. JOHN LOCKE, *A Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity*, in *Works*, vol. 7, p. 177.

13. ALC 327, emphasis added.

of an immaterialist ontology, then he has advanced the reasonableness of Christianity. Hell has been the more controversial posit of the two and as a result my analysis will focus on it, but many of the concerns apply to both heaven as well as hell.

The first concern is the straightforward problem of noting where hell actually might be located. Typically hell was thought to be underground (Amos 9:2 reveals suggestively that some may "dig into hell"), but even in the seventeenth century enough was known about the earth and the solar system to begin to cast doubt on this speculation. Since the planet is a sphere of finite size, there is a limited amount of room for bodies that are undergoing *everlasting* torture. The damned do not cycle into and out of hell; they are condemned for eternity. As a result, if hell were in a finite space, then it probably has already become so overcrowded that it literally ran out of room long ago. In attacking the existence of hell, Samuel Richardson catalogues ten of the popular scholarly views known to him in the seventeenth century, eight of which are physical locations. The most common view is that hell lies below. "It is generally agreed, that hell is in the lower parts of the earth; but where those lower parts are, Mr. Perkins on the creed saith, no man is able to define."<sup>14</sup> The variety of answers and the implausibility of each makes the supposition of a literal 'hell on earth' difficult to take seriously. Worse yet, according to Scripture, on the day of judgment the earth is to be consumed by fire (2 Peter 3:7-14), prompting Richardson to ask "where shall hell be? It surely cannot be in the centre of the earth, when there is no earth."<sup>15</sup> The question is a good one. The problem is that ascribing a location to hell seems inconsistent with the dictates of reason and what else we know about the world.

A second difficulty concerns the origination of heaven and hell. If they have a location, then by extension they must have come into existence during God's act of creation. Yet nowhere in the Genesis accounts is there a discussion of the creation of hell or for that matter one concerning eternal punishments for those who sin. The opening line of Genesis tells of the creation of "the heaven and the earth" and by verse eight God names the firmament 'Heaven.' Between the first and sixth day, all of God's creations are *good*, so one might reasonably expect that there is no moral room for the creation of hell in the first place. The omission of hell from Genesis is puzzling.

Perhaps more worryingly, assuming that hell was created, one might wonder about a divine being who, having allegedly granted Adam and Eve free will, nonetheless had already created a location to torture and punish those who would fail to lead a proper life. Why would God create a place that, at least for some time, had no use? God does nothing idle or wasteful. And why

14. RICHARDSON, *The Torments of Hell*, p. 29.

15. RICHARDSON, *The Torments of Hell*, pp. 29-30.

would an omni-benevolent deity create a place for pain and torture in a world without sin, as we find in the Garden before the Fall? Something seems amiss.

A third problem merits attention, one related to the second. If hell has a physical location and punishment for sins requires the presence of a body, there is a sense in which Christ appears to be directly responsible for the suffering of the damned. Consider I Cor 15:17-18. "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished." Had Christ not come to earth and been resurrected, then there would have been no promise of a general bodily resurrection after Christ's return. Without bodily resurrection the damned cannot be punished (nor the righteous saved), leading one inexorably to the conclusion that a part of the reason for everlasting suffering is tied up with the same event that promises salvation. It is Christ's resurrection that leads to the *use* of hell as a place where re-embodied souls are tortured. Without the resurrection, I Corinthians reveals that although the dead will keep their sins, they will 'perish' and thus *not* be tortured. If hell did not originate in Creation, then the worry is that hell really comes into existence with Christ's resurrection.

The most obvious reply to this kind of charge is that eternal suffering is *just*, regardless of when hell comes into existence. The wicked pay for their sins in the afterlife in proportion to the extent of their unrepented sins. On this line of thinking Christ is responsible for bringing justice to the sinful, but not for their pain. The existence of hell is a consequence of human sin; the torments some presumably suffer are directly the result of their own actions, not of any act of Christ. What makes this particular reply difficult for some to blandly accept is that Christ is depicted as perfectly merciful and filled with love for humanity. In Luke 9:56 Christ says "for the Son of Man has not come to destroy the lives of human beings but to save them."<sup>16</sup> There are many passages that discuss how Christ delivers humanity from death and conquers it, freeing us from *death*.<sup>17</sup> All of this is perfectly consonant with Christianity, until one considers a final twist. Christ allegedly died on the cross and suffered in order to redeem humanity of *its* sins and *its* suffering. The implication is that no one has suffered – or will suffer – more than Christ. He suffered so that we may be redeemed and released from suffering ourselves. Yet if hell is a real place with an eternity of suffering, then Christ must suffer eternally in the same manner that the damned do. That view seems to require that Christ reside in hell (in order to suffer) and not at the right hand of God in heaven.

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16. Interestingly, not every edition of the Bible preserves this version, omitting it entirely and replacing it with "Then they went on to another village." See *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, new revised standard edition (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991), which lists both passages, noting in a footnote that the one I quote above is included by "other ancient authorities."

17. See II Tim 1:10, where Christ "abolished death," as well as I Cor 15:50-56 and Hebrews 5:7, for just a small selection. The theme of Christ saving men from death is a consistent New Testament theme.

Richardson voices a similar worry himself. "So ye may see that their opinion makes void Christ's suffering, and the saints' comfort; for if a punishment never to end be due to man for sin, Christ must forever suffer that punishment to free us from it, or we must suffer it."<sup>18</sup> Yet given Scriptural testimony, Christ did not descend into and suffer an eternity of torment, in turn implying that we are not really saved for all of our sins. That upshot is plainly unacceptable. Yet the alternative seems scarcely better, for it requires that we admit that Christ continues to suffer in hell for all eternity to redeem humanity from its original sin. In short, the very existence of hell strikes a discordant note for the religion of love and mercy.

### III. Preserving the Torments of Hell and the Pleasures of Heaven

Enter Berkeley, who, although a well-established philosopher long before, became an Anglican bishop in 1734 and claimed that the main aim of his philosophical works was to promote the cause of Christian religion. Berkeley claims that many of the alleged conundrums in Christianity are due to the positing of the existence of matter.

Were it necessary to add any farther proof against the existence of matter, after what has been said, I could instance several of those errors and difficulties (not to mention impieties) which have sprung from that tenet. It has occasioned numberless controversies and disputes in philosophy, and not a few of far greater moment in religion.<sup>19</sup>

Berkeley mentions several of these religious controversies, including the Incarnation and the promise of bodily resurrection, but he does not explicitly stop to apply his immaterialist system to the concept of hell. He does say enough, however, to enable a reasonable and plausible reconstruction of what his views would likely have been. Berkeley has resources to make the traditional doctrine of heaven and hell (including the possibility of everlasting felicity or torment) more plausible.

As intimated earlier, not every early modern theologian believed heaven and hell had a literal location on or near earth. Some held that heaven and hell were internal states of the body rather than distinct locations, as with Richard Coppin.

[F]or as in the Saints there are chambers of heaven, the temple of God, where all good things, holy things, upright things, divine apprehensions of God shall be kept and preserved in a discovery of light and glory in God to all eternity; so in wicked men there are the chambers of hell, the habitations of devills, where all

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18. RICHARDSON, *The Torments of Hell*, pp. 78-79.

19. PHK 21.

evil things, vain thoughts, humane interventions, shall be gathered into a body of confusion and darkness, as in hell, to be tormented, separated and ended.<sup>20</sup>

Philip Almond ably presents the speculation made by some scholars that the spread of Copernicanism and the heliocentric theory of the solar system was partly responsible for doubts about the traditional accounts of the location of heaven and hell.<sup>21</sup> For my purposes here, it is sufficient to remark that it should not therefore be surprising or necessarily unorthodox for Berkeley to advance a variant of the same suggestion: heaven and hell are not literally located in the world.

One of the advantages of Berkeleian immaterialism is that allows for the existence of and interaction among bodies (as collections of ideas) without having to account for space. Bodies have *place*, i.e. a position relative to other bodies and sensory experiences, but they do not have an absolute mind-independent *space* or location. Since this claim is generally true for all bodies according to Berkeley, it will correspondingly be true for bodies in heaven and hell. And Berkeley does explicitly note that there are *bodies* in heaven and hell. Consider *Principles* 6. "Such I take this important [truth] to be, to wit, that all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those *bodies* which compose the mighty frame of the world...."<sup>22</sup> The context suggests that there are bodies in both heaven and on earth. Later in the *Siris* Berkeley comments approvingly of the Platonists who claim that "heaven is not defined so much by its local situation as by its purity."<sup>23</sup> Such views are consonant with what Berkeley says elsewhere about what we know about heaven and hell. Although we have "no determin'd idea of the pleasures of heaven"<sup>24</sup> and all of our judgments about it and the afterlife are inadequate, we nonetheless form *approximate* beliefs (however poorly) about heaven through a comparison with the joys of the sensible world. Berkeley is most clear about this in the *Notebooks*.

...foolish in Men to despise the senses. If it were not [...] ye mind could have no knowledge no thought at all. [...] This may be of great use in that it makes the Happiness of the Life to come more conceivable & agreeable to our present nature. The Schoolinen & Refiners in Philosophy Gave the Greatest part of Mankind no more tempting Idea of Heaven or the Joys of the Blest.<sup>25</sup>

The underlying comparison involving sense can also be discerned in some of Berkeley's sermons.

20. Richard COPPIN, *Divine Teachings...*, London, 1653, p. 75, also quoted in ALMOND, *Heaven and Hell*, p. 46.

21. ALMOND, *Heaven and Hell*, pp. 46-47.

22. PHK 6, my emphasis.

23. S 211.

24. "On Immortality," *Works* 7, 13.

25. PC 539.



Ist then the things promised by our Savior are life & immortality, that is, in the language of the Scriptures, eternal happiness, a happyyness large as our desires, & those desires not stinted to ye few objects we at present receive from some dull inlets of perception, but proportionate to wt our faculties shall be wñ God has given the finishing stroke to our nature & made us fit inhabitants for heaven, a happiness wch we narrow-sighted mortals wretchedly point out to our selves by green meadows, fragrant groves, refreshing shades, crystal streams, & wt other pleasant ideas onr fancies can glean up in this Vale of misery, but in vain...<sup>26</sup>

The pull towards thinking of heaven as a location rather than merely a place is so strong that even Berkeley often uses the ordinary language conventions, referring to Christians as “fit inhabitants for heaven.” The point is that Berkeley believed, as most of the rest of his contemporary Christians did, that one must account for bodies in heaven and hell.

As an immaterialist, Berkeley held that only minds and ideas exist. Minds are active, thinking substances and ideas are passive entities dependent on minds for their existence. In his ontology, a body (any common sense physical object) is a collection of sensory ideas (arguably indexed by time, perspective, and sense modality), the *set* of which is what we name an object.

And as several of these [sensory ideas] are observed to accompany each other, they come to be marked by one name, and so to be reputed as one thing. Thus, for example, a certain colour, taste, sinell, figure and consistence having been observed to go together, arc accounted one distinct thing, signified by the name *apple*. Other collections of ideas constitnte a stone, a tree, a book, and the like sensible things...<sup>27</sup>

That the view is unusual was not unappreciated by Berkeley, who took careful pains to argue that the initial oddness of his philosophy was no bar to its being true.

But, say you, it sounds very harsh to say we eat and drink ideas, and are clothed with ideas. I acknowledge it does so, the word *idea* not being used in common discourse to signify the several combinations of sensible qualities, which are called *things*: and is certain that any expression which varies from the familiar use of language, will seem harsh and ridiculous. But this doth not concern the truth of the proposition, which in other words is not more than to say, we are fed and clothed with those things which we perceive immediately by our senses.<sup>28</sup>

Although physical objects (including our own bodies) are collections of ideas, that makes them no less real. The sensations we feel are real sensations.

The ideas imprinted on the senses by the Author of Nature are called *real things*: and those excited in the imagination being less regular, vivid and constant, are

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26. “On Immortality,” *Works* 7, 12.

27. PHK 1.

28. PHK 38.

more properly termed *ideas*, or *images of things*, which they copy and represent. But then our sensations, be they never so vivid and distinct, are nevertheless *ideas*, that is, they exist in the mind, or are perceived by it as truly as the ideas of its own framing.<sup>29</sup>

Bodies have relationships to one another, i.e. there are regularities in the sensory ideas we perceive that we take to represent properties like physical location and the relative position of sensible bodies. When we 'descend' into hell or 'ascend' into heaven, all that alters in reality is the nature and content of what our minds perceive. As a result, Berkeley does not need to account for the existence of locations in absolute space in order to explain the existence of heaven and hell; he only needs to account for the sensory ideas and their relative orderings when perceived. Hell is a *place*, by which he means only that minds have a certain set (or, more accurately, kinds of sets) of sensory ideas ordered in a particular fashion.

Berkeley's theory of bodies immediately resolves the problem of locating heaven and hell. Hell is at best only metaphorically 'down below.' Instead, hell is a shorthand description for a particular (and unpleasant) ordering of ideas. Heaven is thus a happier ordering of ideas, one for which we hope so strongly that we make sacrifices in the present world. "Eternal life is the ultimate end of all our views. It is for this, we deny our appetites, subdue our passions and forgo the interests of this present world. Nor is this at all inconsistent with the glory of God being the last end of our actions, forasmuch as this very glory constitutes our heaven or felicity in the other world."<sup>30</sup> Here Berkeley *equates* heaven to "felicity," not to simply a nice location. Heaven 'is' wherever God chooses to bestow upon you the appropriate experiences.

In the course of our normal lives, we perceive a train of sensory ideas, the total of which we call the external world. Upon our death and resurrection, God causes us to once again perceive ideas. The nature of those ideas, of course, we cannot know beyond what is promised in Scripture. Those ideas might be like the sensory ideas with which we are so familiar, or they might be of an entirely different kind. When the American philosopher Samuel Johnson asks Berkeley about how he accounts for the afterlife, Berkeley is quite clear.

I see no difficulty in conceiving a change of state, such as is vulgarly called death, as well without as with material substance. It is sufficient for that purpose that we allow sensible bodies, *i.e.* such as are immediately perceived by sight and thought; the existence of which I am so far from questioning (as philosophers are used to do) that I establish it, I think, upon evident principles. Now it seems very easy to conceive the soul to exist in a separate state (*i.e.* divested from those limits and laws of motion and perception with which she is embarrassed here), and

29. PHK 33.

30. "On Eternal Life," *Works* 7, pp. 105-106.

to exercise herself on new ideas, without the intervention of these tangible things we call bodies.<sup>31</sup>

The ideas we perceive in the afterlife might well be different in kind from the sensory ideas with which we are currently familiar. They might not, for instance, obey the laws of motion. We do know, however, that if damned for our unrepented sins, those ideas will be terrible. We will feel pain and torment, perhaps of a nature never experienced in the ordinary world. Analogously, we can expect that the ideas God will cause us to perceive in heaven if saved are so felicitous and wonderful as to defy human comprehension. To be 'in hell' or 'in heaven' is simply to be caused to experience a certain ordering of ideas.

As a result, Berkeley can accommodate the claim that we have bodies in the afterlife (that is, we are caused to perceive sensory ideas we recognize as constituting our bodies) without having to defend a conception of heaven and hell that requires one to find a physical location for them. Furthermore, since hell is simply an ordering of ideas, Berkeley can explain how the experiences of the damned might vary according to divine justice, all without filling up any finite absolute space.

What of the origin of hell? Here I can only speculate on Berkeley's behalf in the absence of any explicit remarks by him, but an obvious answer presents itself. In the initial act of creation God did not create hell (which explains why hell is not mentioned in Genesis). Instead, hell comes into being only after a finite mind is subjected to the uniquely unpleasant train of ideas we associate with 'being in hell.' Thus it is reasonable to suppose the hell did not exist until Lucifer (or another) gave God cause to order those kinds of ideas in such an order. This account has the fortuitous consequence of also relieving God and Christ from any moral responsibility for the creation of hell. When God endowed Adam and Eve with free will, it was only *after* they chose poorly that the need for hell arose. Such an account is consistent with God being benevolent, although there remain naturally a number of difficulties with God's benevolence given the presence of evil in the world. Yet I submit there is no *special* problem presented by the doctrine of hell for Berkeley's immaterialist version of Christianity.

Similarly, Berkeleian immaterialism also presents the Christian with a novel way to engage complaints about the role of Christ's resurrection in the punishment of the damned. Recall the worry: because Jesus Christ suffers to save humanity from sin, pain, and suffering, he must either continually suffer in hell or not be able to save all of humanity. Since the latter option would in effect deny that Christ is the savior, Christians need an alternative. Berkeley has such an alternative, and it lies in an immaterialist account of the Incarnation of Christ.

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31. Berkeley to Johnson, 25 November 1729, *Works* 2, p. 282.

Suffering describes a sensory state. In order to suffer, one must perceive members of a particular kind of sensory idea. Christ, however, is one substance with two natures, both fully human and fully divine. Whereas materialists might have some difficulty explaining how Christ the Son has a material body and yet Christ divine is completely immaterial, Berkeley only needs to account for how one substance can be both immaterial and yet experience the kinds of sensory ideas associated with having a finite body.<sup>32</sup> I have argued elsewhere that the Incarnation implies only that Christ as an infinite (and hence immaterial) mind *restricted* the train of sensory ideas perceived while Incarnate.<sup>33</sup> Thus Christ in fact knows everything, but *chose* to restrict his nature such that he had experiences as finite minds do. Berkeley expresses this difference by noting that God *knows* everything even though God does not *suffer*, since that would be a form of imperfection. "That God knows or understands all things, and that He knows among other things what pain is, even every sort of painful sensation, and what it is for His creatures to suffer pain, I make no question. But that God, though He knows and sometimes causes painful sensations in us, can Himself suffer pain, I positively deny."<sup>34</sup> As a perfect being, Christ cannot suffer; that would be incompatible with the nature of God as divine. But God, as an omnibenevolent being, *elected* to become Incarnate and experience pain as a finite mind. Christ, qua human person, can and does suffer. That is, God chose to have two natures with one substance, and thus allow for the salvation of humanity.

What I am therefore suggesting is that on Berkeley's view, there is a sense in which Christ the Son *does* perpetually suffer and hence redeems us from our sins. Christ divine does not suffer (and indeed never did), but the restricted nature of the divine mind (Christ incarnate, Christ the Son) does. God timelessly knows every idea, which includes every torment inflicted on the wicked. Only incarnate, however, does Christ *suffer* those ideas, and there is no reason to believe that Christ somehow loses that experiential information after the resurrection. There are no problems with the *location* of Christ, since heaven and hell are places, not spaces. There is a perfectly reasonable sense in which

32. With respect to the puzzles surrounding the Incarnation, compare several discussions about various difficulties in Stephen T. DAVIS, Daniel KENDALL, and Gerald O'COLLINS (eds) *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, New York, Oxford, 2002. I do not claim that endorsing immaterialism is the *only* plausible response to those concerns. Brian Leftow, for instance, defends the plausibility of the Incarnation against charges of contradiction based on the timelessness and temporality of the Son in his essay "A Timeless God Incarnate" in that volume, pp. 273-299. For just two important relevant works see Thomas D. SENOR, "The Incarnation and the Trinity," in Michael J. MURRAY and Alvin PLANTINGA (eds), *Reason for the Hope Within*, Grand Rapids MI, William B. Eerdmans, 1999, and Thomas V. MORRIS, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 1986.

33. For a complete and detailed defense of this view, see HIGHT and BOHANNON, "The Son More Visible: Immaterialism and the Incarnation," forthcoming in 2010 in *Modern Theology*.

34. 3D 240.

one can truly say Christ sits at the right hand of God, even as he, as incarnate, suffers for our sins. In a sense this outcome is ideally Christian. The key to Christ's time on earth is the passion, the supreme sacrifice of God to understand and redeem his creation.

I freely admit that at no point does Berkeley explicitly endorse the account I have just provided. I offer it as a speculation intended to be a friendly extension of his immaterialism applied to theology. Since Berkeley was keen to advance the cause of Christianity and show that its tenets are not contrary to reason, I submit that Berkeley might well have approved of such exercises as this one. I hope to have provided additional evidence showing that Berkeleian immaterialism has additional resources that make some of the traditional doctrines of Christianity more plausible and conformable to reason. For those wanting to defend the traditional doctrine of heaven and hell – and perhaps more importantly the alleged positive consequences of their existence in terms of regulating the behavior of persons – immaterialism provides a more plausible and reasonable account. In order to preserve the reality of the torments of hell, one should consider adopting an immaterialist ontology.

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#### SUMMARY

Some might question whether Berkeley's innovative immaterialist philosophy can comfortably accommodate the Christian doctrine of eternal reward and punishment. In this paper I contend he can while providing the traditional theist with additional resources to fend off at least several of the seventeenth and eighteenth century concerns that arguably led to the diminution of belief in hell. As an added benefit, one can even speculate that Berkeley has a diagnosis for the decline in the 'popularity' of the traditional view of hell, namely the rise of materialism in popular thinking. In short, I claim that for Berkeley heaven and hell are not locations, but shorthand locutions for felicitous (or infelicitous) orderings of ideas perceived by finite minds. The resulting picture is both consonant with Christian dogma and makes it more amenable to reason, furthering a larger project of mine to demonstrate that serious Christians ought to endorse immaterialism.

#### SOMMAIRE

Certains se demandent si la philosophie immatérialiste innovatrice de Berkeley peut aisément être reliée à la doctrine chrétienne des récompenses et des punitions éternelles. Dans cet article, je montre qu'elle le peut effectivement, tout en fournissant au théiste traditionnel des ressources additionnelles pour atténuer certaines prises de position propres aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles qui ont

contribué à affaiblir la croyance en l'enfer. On peut en outre trouver chez Berkeley un diagnostic expliquant le déclin de la popularité de la vision traditionnelle de l'enfer, à savoir la montée du sentiment matérialiste dans les couches populaires. Je défends en outre l'idée que, pour Berkeley, le ciel et l'enfer ne sont pas des lieux mais plutôt des locutions abrégées pour l'arrangement heureux (ou malheureux) des idées perçues par des esprits finis. L'image qui en résulte est en accord avec le dogme chrétien, rendu ainsi plus conforme à la raison, ce qui rend pertinent le projet de démontrer qu'un chrétien rigoureux devrait adopter l'immatérialisme.