
Defeating Horrors: The Reconciliation Account

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According to Marilyn McCord Adams,¹ there is a certain class of evils termed “horrendous evils” (hereafter, horrors) that are present within our world,² such that a theist, an individual who affirms the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being, is faced with a problem in accounting for the existence of these types of evils—let us term this the Problem of Horrors. In Adams’s thought, a certain set of paradigm examples of these types of evils would be such things as “the rape of a woman and chopping off of her arms, psychophysical torture whose ultimate goal is the disintegration of personality, betrayal of one’s deepest loyalties, cannibalising one’s own offspring, child abuse of the sort described by Ivan Karamazov.”³ On the basis of these paradigm examples, we can define the notion of a horror as follows:

1. *Horrors.* A horror is an evil in which one’s participation constitutes prima facie reason to doubt whether the victim’s life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to them on the whole.

The participation in a horror by an individual—let us term this type of individual a *horror victim*—seems to constitute a reason to doubt whether the life of the victims of these events was (or are) worth living, as it is a great challenge to see how such evils could be overcome. The nature of horror is such that it destroys a person’s framework of meaning-making and defeats their value as a person in such a manner that it degrades them to a subhuman status. As Adams writes, “The Nazi death camps aimed, not merely to kill, but to

¹ Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), *Christ and Horrors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and “Ignorance, Instrumentality, Compensation and the Problem of Evil,” *Sophia* 52, no. 1 (2013): 7–26.

² There is a terminological shift made by Adams from the use of the term “horrendous evils” in *Horrendous*, to that of “horrors” in *Christ* and “Ignorance”—without, however, any change in meaning.

³ Adams, *Horrendous*, 26.

dehumanise their victims, treating them worse than cattle to break down their personalities and reduce their social instincts to raw animal aggression and self-preservation. Organising and running such institutions also degraded the Nazis, who caricatured human nature by using their finest powers the more imaginatively to transgress the bounds of human decency.”⁴ In reality, the occurrences of horrors are not rare events. Thus, it is an evident fact of reality that, first, human history is riddled with horrors and, second, that it is relatively easy for human beings to be the causes (or, at least, be the indirect causes) of horrors. Let’s term these types of individuals *horror perpetrators*.⁵ The taint of horrors thus infects the human condition, making being a human a horrendous kind of thing to be, with persons with power demonstrating a positive tendency to degrade by depersonalizing others, and to do so far beyond our power even to conceive or imagine.⁶ One can thus say—on the basis of the frequency of the occurrence of horror—as Adams notes, “If God is a personal agent-cause of our world and exercises providential control over it, there is no way of avoiding the conclusion that God has accepted horrors as the price of some goal(s).”⁷ These goals could be such things as the fulfillment of God’s love for variety, which leads him to seek to populate the world with different creatures that will, as Adams writes, “‘run interference’ with one another (e.g., swallows eat bugs, lions eat lambs).”⁸ Or, it could be such that God loves material creation and wants to make this creation more godlike by assimilating it by animating it and personifying it,⁹ and by providing it with free will, which could lead to a wide perpetration of horrors by individuals misusing their free will. There could be numerous other types of goals for which horrors are necessary. Yet, one can ask the question, How is a perfectly good God to deal with the horrors that plague his world?¹⁰

⁴ Adams, *Horrendous*, 26. intends the criteria for identifying to be objective, but relative to individuals, such that some horror experiences might cause individuals to view their life as not being a great good for themselves, while others might still affirm the overall goodness of their lives despite undergoing these experiences.

⁵ Even though the majority of horror perpetrators are individuals that intentionally inflict harm on others, one can also plausibly take it to be the case that all humans bear a collective responsibility for allowing certain social structures to be established that enable horrors to be perpetrated—think of the social structure that was established prior to the rise of Nazism and the horrors that were perpetrated by its adherents!

⁶ Adams, *Christ*.

⁷ Adams, “Ignorance,” 18.

⁸ Adams, “Ignorance,” 18.

⁹ These reasons fit into what Adams, *Christ*, calls her “cosmological hypothesis,” which is that of God’s creative purposes centering on his aim to personify and animate matter in a similar manner in which God himself is personal and animate.

¹⁰ Addressing the issue of how God is to be good to individuals that experience horrors is *not* to provide a theodicy—a reason why God allows these individuals to undergo these experiences—especially as Adams, “Ignorance,” is quite adamant about the ineffectiveness of theodicies in dealing with the Problem of Horrors. It is thus important to note that the focus of this article is not to give an explanation for *why there is evil* but simply that of giving an explanation for *how evil is overcome*.

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In answer to this question, Adams follows Roderick Chisholm in drawing a distinction between the following:¹¹ first, *balancing off*, which is something that occurs when opposing values of mutually exclusive parts of a whole partially or totally cancel each other out, and second, *defeat*, which is something that occurs—not by the addition to the whole of a new part that is of opposing value—but when there is an *organic unity* between the values of parts and wholes—such as is seen in the case of the positive value of a painting (i.e., the whole) defeating the ugliness of a small green color patch (i.e., a part). Horrors are conceived of *prima facie*, as evils that not only balance off the positive value of a victim's life but also defeat this positive value by engulfing it. In other words, horrors are events that *prima facie* destroy the possibility of positive meaning in the horror victim's life. Thus, balancing off a horror in a manner in which the *prima facie* ruin that is experienced because of it is followed by an immeasurable good would allow the individual to have a life that was a great good to them on the whole; however, it would, as Adams writes, "leave the first part absurd, as John K. Roth would say, 'a waste.'"¹² However, God, in being perfectly good, would not seek to render any part of one's life as wasted. Rather, as Adams further writes, "God prizes the created persons God has made. Goodness to created persons would restore the possibility of positive meaning for that segment of life that horrors threatened to destroy."¹³ Hence, God is an entity who is *for* his creation and loves his creation and thus is willing and able to be good to his creation by *defeating the horrors that they experience*—let's term this *horror defeat*. Hence, God deals with horrors by defeating them within the span of a horror victim's life, the manner of which we can understand more precisely as follows:

2. *Defeat-I*. God defeats a given horror if God guarantees to a horror victim a life that is a great good to them on the whole, and in the end, the horror participation is integrated into that individual's apt relation to a great enough good.

At a general level, horrors provide a *prima facie* reason for a horror victim to doubt that their lives are, in fact, a great good for them. Thus, in accord with definition 2, which we can call *defeat via integration* (hereafter, Defeat-I), God seeks to defeat this horror by enabling this experience of evil by an individual to be *organically integrated* into the context of the victim's life, and thus the individual would take their life to, in fact, be, on the whole, good for them. More precisely, in an organic unity, the value of the part of an individual's life can be altered by other parts, where there is complete, positive integration between

¹¹ Roderick M. Chisholm, "The Defeat of Good and Evil," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 42 (1968): 21–38.

¹² Adams, "Ignorance," 20.

¹³ Adams, "Ignorance," 20.

the parts. Thus, as Adams writes:¹⁴ “I do claim that because our eventual post-mortem beatific intimacy with God is an incommensurate good for human persons, Divine identification with human participation in horrors confers a positive aspect on such experiences by integrating them into the victim’s relationship with God. . . . Retrospectively, I believe, from the vantage point of heavenly beatitude, human victims of horrors will recognise those experiences as points of identification with the crucified God, and not wish them away from their life histories.”¹⁵ In Adams’s thought, the only good that is great enough to provide this integration, and thus overcome the ruinous power and effect of horror participation, is the infinite good that God is himself. That is, an enduring intimate personal relationship with God is an immeasurable good for created individuals. Hence, as Adams notes, “The only way to make good on individual horror participation is to weave that experience up into the individual’s on the whole and in the end beatific personal relationship with God.”¹⁶ Beatific intimacy with God, as an incommensurate good for the created person, is thus the thing that is needed to overcome the *prima facie* life-ruinous quality of an individual’s horror participation.¹⁷ That is, the value of a horror victim’s life is to be altered by them viewing that part in light of the rest of their life. The horrors retain their negative aspect, yet, because of their organic integration into the individual’s life, they are able to obtain a positive aspect—such that a horror victim would no longer wish that they had not suffered this experience.

One can ask, however, what specific means would God use to forward this integrative defeat that leads to beatific intimacy? One possible way, according to Adams,¹⁸ is through the incarnation: God, in the person of Christ, choosing to assume a true human nature in addition to his possession of a true divine nature. Let’s term this the *Christological Solution* (hereafter, CS). In the context of horror defeat, God thus could choose to identify with his creation by becoming a particular human being (i.e., he assumes a particular human nature) that is vulnerable to horrors. As a particular human being, Christ, God could come to possess a human consciousness that did not have access to his divine consciousness and thus was able to experience the ordinary human developmental struggles and to open himself to befriend individuals who were of unstable loyalties and thus could desert and betray him.¹⁹ God thus opens himself up to horror participation as an act of solidarity. And thus,

¹⁴ Horror defeat, according to Adams, *Horrendous*, is to occur not only *globally*—that is, the defeat of a horror experience being generalized to all people but, more importantly, *locally*—where the defeat of horror is performed within the lifespan of each *particular* individual. That is, God must be good to each *individual* horror perpetrator and not just him being good to humans at the general, corporate level.

¹⁵ Adams, *Horrendous*, 166–67.

¹⁶ Adams, “Ignorance,” 19.

¹⁷ Adams, “Ignorance,” 19.

¹⁸ Adams, *Christ*.

¹⁹ Adams, *Horrendous*.

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one way in which God could open himself up in this way—and thus identify with all individuals who participate in horrors (victims and perpetrators)—is by himself participating in a horror. For example, if God were to become incarnate at some point in history—such as that of first-century Israel—and was to have his life end by the experience of a horror such as that of a crucifixion—then God would have provided, as Adams notes, a means for “the very horrors, participation in which threatened to undo the positive value of created personality, now [having] become secure points of identification with the crucified God.”²⁰ Divine solidarity with human horror participation is thus what enables this horror participation to be organically united to an individual’s beatific relationship with God—which allows it to be integrated into something that is immeasurably beneficial and meaningful. Moreover, once an individual realizes that their horror participation provided an opportunity for intimate togetherness in their beatific life with God, one would plausibly not retrospectively wish it away. By becoming incarnate, God thus provides a means for one to have an intimate experience with God. And this intimate experience with God is taken to defeat horror participation, which will give the victim’s life positive meaning, and thus make their life a great good on the whole. One can ask the important question, however, How this is so? In Adams’s thought, the suffering that one endures by participating in a horror provides a means of identifying with God in the suffering that he endured in his own horror participating in his incarnate state. Adams suggests that this identification could happen in two ways:²¹ either, first, sympathetically, in the sense that one’s own horror participation is similar to that of Christ’s; or, second, mystically, in the sense that one’s own horror participation is the exact same suffering that was experienced by Christ. Now, following Dennis Earl,²² one can ask the question, How exactly does this intimacy with God, in fact, serve to defeat horrors? Plausibly, Adams would say that horror victims are allowed to enjoy intimacy with God by being in a relationship with him, and since being in a relationship with God is an incommensurate good, then this allows it to defeat any case of a horror. However, one could still ask how identifying with Christ’s suffering achieves this end? As noted above, one can identify with Christ’s horror participation sympathetically (i.e., by there being a similarity between it and one’s own horror participation) or mystically (i.e., by one actually experiencing Christ’s suffering). However, the problem that is to be had here is that there does not seem to be any relevant similarity between the horror participation experience by God’s incarnation, which, for Christians, was through the Crucifixion, and other paradigm cases of horrors. As Earl notes,

²⁰ Adams, *Horrendous*, 163.

²¹ Adams, *Horrendous*, 163.

²² Dennis Earl, “Divine Intimacy and the Problem of Horrendous Evil,” *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 69, no. 1 (2011): 17–28.

“What is otherwise similar between that story [i.e., the Crucifixion] and cases of being forced to cannibalise one’s own children, being repeatedly raped and then slowly tortured to death, and any of the other cases of horrendous evil that unfortunately have been a reality at some point in human history.”²³ If, in fact, it was the case that the horror that one was considering was a crucifixion, then it does seem to be clear that one would be able to identify sympathetically or mystically with another individual who has suffered in this way. However, if the case at hand is another type of horror, such as that of being forced to cannibalize their own children, it would not be clear that one would see this as a point of identification with God. Hence, if the cases are not the same or, in fact, similar (except for each being a horror), then the needed sympathetic or mystical identification with Christ, which allows horror participation to be defeated in an individual’s life, cannot be available. Therefore, one does not have a clear account of how God could defeat horror participation within a victim’s own life—let’s term this the *Christological Issue*. In addition to the Christological Issue, a further, more wide-ranging issue can also be raised, this time aimed against the efficacy of the specific conception of horror defeat that has been assumed—namely, that of Defeat-I. Andrew Gleeson voices this issue well when he writes:

I am also willing to accept that in some cases, victims may (without fault) come to see their sufferings as points of contact with the divine love that suffered on the cross and perhaps to no longer wish these events out of their lives. But I would not dream of *universalising* about this, either to rule it out or to make it mandatory. . . . What is abstractly possible from the perspective of theory, may be morally or personally impossible for the victim (and others). The idea that the holocaust might take on a “positive aspect,” so much so that its victims no longer wished it out of their lives, is, they may well claim, at least for themselves, unconscionable; and the notion of their succumbing to such a view as a fruit of post-mortem divine largesse is ruled out as a diabolical vision of treason to evil’s victims.²⁴

It seems to be unwarranted to assume the position that all individuals would conceive of their horror experience as taking on a positive aspect, based on the integration of this into their beatific relationship with God. Rather, for some individuals, it is plausible that they would find the idea morally unconscionable that God has defeated their evil through this integrative act. Moreover, the moral unconscionability of God defeating horrors through an organic integration can be further heightened by emphasizing the fact that this defeating act performed by God fails to deal with the wrongdoing perpetrated against a horror victim, and (the gravity of) the debt that is owed to them by a horror perpetrator. More specifically, this point can be further grasped by taking on board a distinction noted by Richard Swinburne between

²³ Earl, “Divine Intimacy,” 19.

²⁴ Andrew Gleeson, “On Letting Go of Theodicy: Marilyn McCord Adams on God and Evil,” *Sophia* 54, no. 1 (2015): 10–11.

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two different types of good actions:²⁵ “obligations,” which are good actions that one has a duty to perform (or a duty not to perform); and “supererogatory” actions, which are good actions that are nonobligatory. When an individual performs a supererogatory action (such as falling on a grenade to save a comrade), praise is due to the person. However, if one fails to perform a supererogatory action, that person is not blameworthy as no wrongdoing has been done.²⁶ Whereas if an individual fails to perform an obligatory action (or performs an action that they are obligated not to perform), then they wrong that person and are blameworthy for not performing that action (or for performing it)—that is, they are blameworthy for wrongdoing. Performing a wrong act causes the wrongdoer to incur a debt with the victim of their wrongdoing—with this debt being termed “guilt.” An individual who has acquired guilt is one who is blameworthy for their act of wrongdoing against their victim as well as the consequences of the act. Thus, taking this into account within the present context, each and every horror victim has a specific debt owed to them by the perpetrators of these horrors, who are each guilty in light of the grave wrongdoing performed against their victims. Thus, on the basis of this, one could ask if the organic integration of a horror victim’s life with a (incommensurable) good really provides a defeat of this experience, given the fact that the (integrated) horror has been perpetrated, and the consequences of this (such as the great debt that is still owed to them) have still been left unaddressed. The provision of the opportunity for a horror victim to experience eternal beatitude and the good of having identified with God does not seem to be sufficient to deal with this problem; as Gleeson writes, “The prospect of one’s children going through Auschwitz . . . is not made less intolerable by there being a rainbow for them on the other side.”²⁷ That is, for example, even if a father of a child was to give a present of great value to them—such as that of an expensive car—due to the fact of them enduring a horrific and traumatic experience—such as that of a rape—despite the great joy in receiving the present, it surely would not change the fact that they have been severely wronged by the perpetrator and are owed a certain debt that needs to be expunged (e.g., through the wrongdoer serving a long penitential sentence) in order for them to take steps to progress on with their life. Analogously, despite the incommensurable good that is provided by a horror victim having their life integrated into a beatific relationship with God, it does not seem to be the case that it would be morally conscionable that an individual would be able to see their horror experience as defeated—and thus begin to see their life as positive on the whole—given the unaddressed harm that has been perpetrated against them and the debt that is still owed to them by the wrongdoer. In other words, Defeat-I thus seems to ignore the fact that

²⁵ Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

²⁶ Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement*.

²⁷ Gleeson, “On Letting Go,” 7.

the horror victim has been greatly wronged by their experience, and this fact of wrongdoing (and its consequences) needs to be rightly dealt with by the individual(s) who have perpetrated it. Let's term this issue the *Moral Unconscionability Issue*.

Hence, the question now to be asked is, Is there a way to provide a different account of horror defeat that thus provides a solution to the Problem of Horrors, without, however, facing the issues raised above? I believe that there is, through providing a new model of horror defeat that centers on the notion of reconciliation, and, more specifically, a theory of "atonement" proposed by Richard Swinburne in the field of analytic theology.²⁸ And thus, by formulating this model, we will have before us an account—which we can term the *Reconciliation Account*—that explains how God can indeed successfully defeat all the horrors for all victims by each horror perpetrator atoning for their wrongdoing, and thus the horror perpetrator is able to reconcile with their victims. Given this, we would thus have in front of us a robust and successful solution to the Problem of Horrors.

Taking this all into account, the plan is as follows: in the section below, "The Method of Horror Defeat: Reconciliation," I explicate the specific conception of horror defeat that will be utilized in this article—namely, that of defeat via reconciliation. Then, in the next section, "Defeated Horror: Repentance and Apology," I detail the first two components of the reconciling atonement provided by horror perpetrators: "repentance" and "apology." In the section "Defeated Horror: Reparation," I detail the third component of the reconciling atonement provided by horror perpetrators: "reparation." And then, in "Defeated Horror: Penance," I detail the fourth, and final, component of the reconciling atonement provided by horror perpetrators "penance," which will thus provide all the necessary elements for defeating horrors in the lifespan of a victim. The final section, "Conclusion," summarizes the above results and concludes the article.

THE METHOD OF HORROR DEFEAT: RECONCILIATION

The notion of horror defeat fulfills a fundamental role in providing a means for one to affirm the goodness of God to an individual in the face of their participation in a horror. In proceeding to formulate the present account of horror defeat—namely, that of the Reconciliation Account—we can introduce a new conception of defeat, which can be stated more precisely as follows:

²⁸ Swinburne, *Responsibility*, introduces this specific theory of atonement within the context of providing an explanation for how human sin (i.e., wrongdoing) against God, rather than humans, can be atoned for. However, this specific theory is not wholly wedded to this context, and thus we are able to extract it from that context and apply it to the task at hand—which is that of formulating a new method of horror defeat.

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3. *Defeat-R.* God defeats a given horror for an individual if God provides an opportunity for a (postmortem) reconciliation between the perpetrators of a horror and their victims, through the former atoning for their wrongdoing.

In further understanding definition 3, we can see, in contrast to Defeat-I, that a different, and more plausible, conception of horror defeat is before us—which we can term *defeat via reconciliation*. Defeat via reconciliation (hereafter, Defeat-R) is a form of horror defeat that enables a horror victim to take their life to be a good for them on the whole, *not* by integration but on the basis of the *fact* and *consequences* of the experience of horror are truly dealt (with, within the [postmortem] life of this the horror victim), by the individual(s) that enacted the horrors against them. That is, in Defeat-I, the fact that an individual has experienced a horror, and the consequences faced by their participation—which results in a debt being owed to a horror victim—are all left unaddressed. However, within the framework of Defeat-R, an individual is able to experience a *true defeat* of their horror experience, as God is able to provide an opportunity for the fact and consequences of the wrongdoing to be addressed by each and every horror perpetrator—ultimately leading to a reconciliation with their victims. More precisely, “reconciliation,” according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is defined as “an end to a disagreement or conflict with somebody and the start of a good relationship again.”²⁹ Thus, how this good state of affairs can be actualized in the life of a horror victim is by God enabling the fact of the horror perpetrators’ wrongdoing to be truly acknowledged by them, and the debt that is owed to each and every horror victim to be fully paid—such that the wrongdoing of the horror perpetrator is not “balanced-off” by the provision of a compensating good, neither is it ignored by God integrating this experience into the good that is a relationship with him. Rather, by God providing this opportunity for the perpetrator’s wrongdoing to be fully addressed by them, all “wrongs are able to be righted” in the life of the horror victim, which reestablishes the status quo and thus enables them to proceed forward *as if* they had not been wronged by a horror perpetrator. In other words, the wrongdoing of the horror perpetrator is able to be “removed” from their account, and, more importantly, the depreciation in status and value that occurred to a horror victim—by them having been wronged (in some sense)—reversed, and the truth of the matter concerning them is ultimately reaffirmed. Given this, one thus has a solution to the Moral Unconscionability Issue as follows: the fact and consequences that (plausibly) dominate the present existence of each horror victim are able to be addressed (and thus “removed”)—first, in the sense that the horror perpetrator is able to acknowledge and seek to make amends for their wrong action; second,

²⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “reconciliation (n.),” September 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5388697510>.

what was taken from the horror victim by the perpetrators is able to be (in some sense) given back to them; and, third, the debt owed to the former is able (in some sense) to be paid off by the latter—leading to a reconciliation between both parties. Yet, given this, the horrors do not need to take on a positive aspect. Rather these horrors, *as horrors*, remain wholly negative; however, as they are now able to be ultimately “atoned” for by the horror perpetrator, a horror victim is now able to have the inherent value of their life restored. Hence, it is their *life* (and not the horrors) that is able to be rendered now as positive, given that the issues faced by a horror victim have now been fully addressed rather than ignored and supplemented with a great good. There is thus no need for a charge of moral unconscionability to be raised.

Now, how this horror defeat can be realized is by the horror perpetrator being provided by God with the opportunity to make amends for their wrongdoing and deal with their guilt. For a horror perpetrator to address the fact of their wrongdoing and deal with their guilt is for them to make “atonement” to the victim. More specifically, for an individual to deal with their wrongdoing—and thus be reconciled with the victim of their wrongdoing—they must provide an “atonement,” the nature of which can be construed more precisely as follows:

4. *Atonement.* An individual x makes an atonement for their wrongdoing to individual y , if x performs the action of repenting, apologizing, and providing a reparation and penance.

In understanding definition 4 more precisely, we can see that atonement, according to Swinburne, has four components: repentance, apology, reparation and penance. Each of these components is a contribution made by a wrongdoer to deal with the fact of their wrongdoing and remove as much as possible the consequences of the past action that they had performed. The consequences, as noted by Swinburne, “are, first, the harm caused by and distinguishable from the act of causing it and, secondly, the purposive attitude of the wrongdoer toward the victim manifested in the causing of the harm.”³⁰ An individual removes the harm caused by the action by making reparation—which can, at certain times, restore the status quo. For example, if an individual steals another person’s watch or car and has not sold it, or destroyed it, then they can return it to them.³¹ However, at other times, one can only make things similar to how they were, which can make the victim equally happy with this new state. For example, if an individual steals another person’s watch or car but has sold it, or destroyed it, they can buy them a new one or pay for repairs. The harm that has been done to an individual by injuring, or stealing from them, is not only that of the physical damage caused but also the

³⁰ Swinburne, *Responsibility*, 81.

³¹ Swinburne, *Responsibility*, 81.

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inconvenience of temporary loss and the trauma and anxiety that has resulted from this state—this, too, would require compensation. Hence, as Swinburne says, “If I run you over with my car, and paralyse you for life, nothing I can do can compensate you fully for that. But some things which I can do can compensate you in part. I can pay for wheelchairs, and machines to lift you out of bed in the morning.”³² Reparation, as far as it is within the wrongdoer’s power, is thus essential for dealing with the wrongdoing. However, the issue with a wrong action is not only such consequences but also the fact that the wrongdoer, by performing a wrong action, has made himself someone who has harmed the victim. A wrongdoer cannot alter the past fact of them having performed the wrong action; however, they can distance themselves from the action at a private and public level by disowning the action. As it is the victim who has been hurt by the wrong action, it is thus the victim to whom the disowning is owed and must be shown. However, the disowning that is owed to the individual must be underwritten by sincerity and must reflect the attitude that the wrongdoer now has and naturally expresses to themselves. The natural expression to oneself, as Swinburne notes, “is repentance, the public expression to the victim is apology.”³³ An act of repentance is constituted by a recognition (or acknowledgment) that the wrongdoer did the action and that it was wrong to perform that action. Hence, by this, the wrongdoer distances the action from their current position. Moreover, an act of repentance also involves a resolve to amend the wrongdoing, such that the individual now lacks the intention to perform the action on another occasion. Thus, by a wrongdoer acknowledging their past wrong action, but also distancing themselves from this action based on their present position, the wrongdoer is able to draw a line between the attitude behind their past action and their present attitude. The wrongdoer can then disown their past actions, at a public level, by expressing to their victim the repentance that they have expressed to themselves at a private level—which would include an assurance to the victim that they recognize their wrongness and their purpose is to make amends—this is traditionally done by uttering words like “I am sorry,” or “I apologize.” An agent cannot alter the fact that he did the past act, as Swinburne notes, “but what he can do is make the present ‘he’ in his attitude as different as possible from the past ‘he’ who did the act; that is the most he can do toward undoing the act.”³⁴ Now, although an individual repents of their wrongdoing, apologizes by saying sorry, and provides a reparation by returning the item that was taken from their victim, we regularly take it to be the case that something else is required. This “something else”—called penance—would be some type of compensating token of their sorrow—such as, for example, providing a favor that an individual did not expect and was not owed, or an additional present or interest on top of the money that was needed to

³² Swinburne, *Responsibility*, 82.

³³ Swinburne, *Responsibility*, 82.

³⁴ Swinburne, *Responsibility*, 83.

compensate the victim. This would thus be a “performative act” in which an individual disowns their wrong action by doing something that costs them time, effort, or money, and hence this rendering this action as an intentional and serious one. That is, as Swinburne writes, the “penitent constitutes his apology as serious by making it costly.”³⁵ By performing the four actions of reparation, repentance, apology, and penance, a wrongdoer has done everything that he can do to deal with his wrongdoing in the form of an atonement.³⁶ The final action to be performed belongs to the victim—which is for them to forgive. When a wrongdoer repents, apologizes, and provides a reparation and penance, they are giving the victim something that warrants a response. That is, all gifts have to be accepted (explicitly or implicitly), or the gift would remain with the giver. In the mundane example of giving a box of chocolates to an individual, one accepts this gift by simply taking it from the giver. In the case of an individual making an atonement, what a person gives to the victim by making reparation, offering penance, and providing an apology, is their contribution toward addressing the fact of their wrongdoing and destroying the consequences of their act of hurting them. The victim accepts, as Swinburne notes, “by forwarding the purpose I had in showing you this disowning—to make it the case, as far as logically can be done, that I was not the originator of an act by, which I wronged you.”³⁷ An individual does this by undertaking that, in the future, they will not treat the wrongdoer as the originator of an action by which they have been wronged. Hence, the victim’s acceptance of the wrongdoer’s reparation, penance, and apology is forgiving—which is a performative act that can perhaps be expressed by the phrase “I forgive you.” In this case, an individual’s act of wrongdoing is done away with when their act of atonement—that is, repentance, apology, reparation, and penance—finds its response in the victim’s forgiveness—with the victim now acting *as if* they had not been wronged. The good provided by God to a horror victim that can defeat their experience of horror is thus that of God providing the opportunity for each horror perpetrator to make an atonement for their wrongdoing and, therefore, enable them to be reconciled with their victims. That is, God can provide the opportunity, in a postmortem state, for a horror perpetrator to meet a horror victim so that they can make amends with them by providing a sufficient atonement that can deal with their wrongdoing and restore the status quo. Thus, God’s role in this would be to provide the time, the place, and the resources needed for the horror perpetrator to come to a place of repentance, expressed by a proper apology, and provide a sufficient reparation and generous penance to the horror victim. Hence, by the horror

³⁵ Swinburne, *Responsibility*, 84.

³⁶ For Swinburne, in most cases of wrongdoing, a *full* atonement is not always needed—such that, for example, in the case of being insulted or experiencing a less serious wrong, reparation and penance are not needed. Yet, in all cases of wrongdoing, repentance and apology are always required.

³⁷ Swinburne, *Responsibility*, 85.

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victim providing this atonement, the horror can be defeated in the life of a horror victim by the latter accepting this by forgiving the horror perpetrator, leading to their life (and relationship with the perpetrator) now being restored, and thus them being able to live their life *as if* the horror had not been perpetrated against them (in the same manner, that an individual who is owed a great debt can move forward and live their life *as if* the debt was never owed once sufficient payment has been made and accepted as such). The important question now is, What is the nature of the component of the atonement that could thus function as a method for defeating horrors? More specifically, what is the nature of the means by which a horror perpetrator can provide adequate atonement to the horror victim? To this question, we now turn.

DEFEATED HORRORS: REPENTANCE AND APOLOGY

The first and second components of the atonement provided by a horror perpetrator for their wrongdoing are that of “repentance” and “apology,” which is that of this individual being required to repent of their wrongdoing and apologize to the victim(s) for the performance of this action. We can state the nature of this component within the present context more precisely as follows:

5. *Repentance and Apology.* A horror perpetrator x can be brought into a state of repentance, expressed by an apology to horror victim y , by undergoing (postmortem) temporary remedial punishment.

For a horror perpetrator to initiate the process of providing an atonement, there is a requirement for this individual to repent for the specific wrongdoing enacted against their victim (i.e., the horror victim) and to provide an apology for the fact of the harm caused by the wrongdoing. As noted previously, repenting and apologizing for a wrongdoing is needed to deal with the fact that the wrongdoing has made the horror perpetrator to be someone who has harmed the victim and thus, by repenting and apologizing, they can distance themselves from this action privately through repentance (by them acknowledging their wrongdoing and resolving to make amends) and publicly through apologizing (by them expressing to their victim the repentance that they now have toward their wrongdoing). It is plausible, however, that a horror perpetrator, through performing actions in their life that led them to become a horror perpetrator, has acquired a character that would be resistant to acknowledging their wrongdoing and thus repent of their action and express this through apologizing to their victim(s). That is, as Swinburne notes, “humans are so made that they can form their characters. That is, by doing a just act when it is difficult—when it goes against our natural inclinations (which is what I understand by desires)—we make it easier to do a just act next time. We can gradually change our desires, so that—for example—doing just acts

becomes natural.”³⁸ However, this also works in the other way such that, by performing a wrong action, it becomes easier to perform this type of action next time—thus enabling an individual to develop a strong desire to resist awareness of the good and the performance of this type of action. By performing actions that enable them to perpetrate horrors, an individual can dull their conscience and blind themselves to awareness of good and bad (and what is a right and wrong action)—resulting in a “self-deception” concerning the nature of their actions and the reality of their state. In that case, a horror perpetrator would thus be an individual who has lost their moral sensitivity, and thus a natural reawakening of the awareness of the good that can happen in an individual—and that would be needed to enable a horror perpetrator to repent and apologize for their action—would be very difficult based on the fact that the individual would not desire that good should happen, nor could they think that it is good that it should. Thus, for God to provide the opportunity for a horror perpetrator to make an atonement to a horror victim—which is the reconciling good needed to defeat the horror for the latter individual—an external influence is needed to assist this type of individual to be led into a state of ceasing to resist awareness of the good, and to provide the needed repentance and apology to a horror victim. This specific external could be such a thing as the horror perpetrator—in their postmortem state—undergoing *temporary remedial punishment* in a place that we can call “hell.” This specific experience could thus act as the “catalyst” to reawaken the awareness of the good (and bad) in the mind of a horror perpetrator, and thus provide them with the ability and opportunity now to repent of their wrongdoing, and express this through apologizing to their victim(s) (when the opportunity is given to them). God would thus preserve each horror perpetrator in existence, after their physical death, in hell, which can be conceived, as Thomas Talbott, notes as a temporary state of “forcibly imposed punishment,” which God uses “as a means of correction, or as a means of encouraging repentance.”³⁹ And, in this punishment, as Talbott further writes, the “good in even the worst of sinners—the indestructible image of God if you will—can itself become a source of ‘unbearable suffering.’”⁴⁰ A horror perpetrator’s guilt, sorrow, and remorse will become the source of their unbearable suffering—such that the more that they cling to the illusions that have been produced by their wrongdoing, the more severe would be the means and process whereby God destroys these illusions and frees them from sin.⁴¹ That is, the misery and unhappiness that the wrongful actions have brought into the life of this individual can be used by God to serve a remedial purpose of providing evidence for the need for one to change their

³⁸ Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God?*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 87.

³⁹ Thomas Talbott, “Misery and Freedom: Reply to Walls,” *Religious Studies* 40, no. 2 (2004): 218.

⁴⁰ Talbott, “Misery,” 218.

⁴¹ Ioanna-Maria Love, *Hell: Against Universalism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

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heart and motivation to repent. The experience of hell for a horror perpetrator, in a postmortem state, is thus conceived of as a process in which these individuals are gradually educated by their experience of what the true meaning of their wrongdoing and the perpetration of the horrors that were enacted upon victims. Hence, in this process, God can change these individuals by making it clear to each of them that their evil actions are not something which provide any form of good for them.⁴² Rather, when these individuals experience the full reality of their choices, they will gradually come to an understanding of the dire consequences of these choices. hell—and the suffering that an individual would experience in this place—would thus be used as a means of removing (what we can term) a horror victim’s “goodness inhibitors,” with God using this punishment as a means to remove all *ignorance, deception, and bondage to evil*.⁴³ The removal of these goodness inhibitors would thus result in each horror perpetrator being “fully informed” concerning their choices, and acknowledging the fact that their unbearable suffering is a result of their choices and the goodness of recognizing their wrongdoing and seeking to make amends for it. Thus, given this, each individual, who can be understood to possess “rational freedom” (i.e., the ability to make a choice based on reasons, rather than based on nonrational judgements), would be led to a state of no longer resisting an awareness of the good. That is, a horror victim that has their goodness inhibitors removed by their experience of suffering in hell—and thus are now in a state of being fully informed about the reality of their situation and the options available to them—would thus no longer be able to resist repenting of their wrongdoing. An individual, as noted by Talbott, never freely chooses what they have no motive to choose and every motive for them not to choose.⁴⁴ Thus, it is incoherent for one to take it to be the case for one to freely choose to cling to their deplorable state. Any individual who acquires knowledge about the available options and is free from ignorance, deception, and bondage to sin would have no specific motive for holding fast to their self-deception concerning the nature of their actions and thus would, in fact, see all the reasons and motivations for acknowledging their wrongdoing and seek to distance themselves from it. Thus, all it takes is for God to provide the opportunity for the process of a reconciling atonement between a horror perpetrator and a horror victim to be initiated is for God to remove their ignorance, deception, and bondage to evil. More specifically, through a horror perpetrator’s postmortem forcibly induced punishment (which serves a remedial function), they would be gradually brought into the needed state of repentance (i.e., an acknowledgment of their wrongdoing and a desire to make amends) that will

⁴² Love, *Hell*.

⁴³ Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God: Second Edition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 174–75.

⁴⁴ Thomas Talbott, “Freedom, Damnation, and the Power to Sin with Impunity,” *Religious Studies* 37, no. 4 (2001): 417–34.

enable them to sincerely apologize to their victims when the opportunity arises—which will itself be made available by God at some point during the postmortem life of the individuals involved. Hence, the nature of the first two components of the act of atonement needed for reconciliation has been explicated. It will be important to now turn our attention to the next component—which is that of reparation.

DEFEATED HORRORS: REPARATION

The third component of the atonement provided by a horror perpetrator for their wrongdoing is that of “reparation,” which is that of this individual providing something, or performing an action (or having an action performed against them) that reestablishes the status quo. We can state the nature of this component within the present context more precisely as follows:

6. *Reparation.* A horror perpetrator x can provide a reparation for their wrongdoing to horror victim y by undergoing (postmortem) temporary retributive punishment.

As noted previously, God would provide the opportunity for horror perpetrators to undergo an experience of a temporary forcibly induced punishment in hell that would serve a remedial function, enabling them to overcome the inhibitors that are stopping them from repenting their wrongdoing and expressing this through apologizing to their victims—when the situation is provided. This punishment in hell, however, would not only fulfill a remedial or reformatory role but would also provide the needed reparation that a horror victim can offer for the wrongdoing. That is, the postmortem punishment enacted upon horror perpetrators would not only change these individuals but reestablish the status quo. How this could be the case is through conceiving of hell as a temporary remedial form of punishment *and* a retributive form of punishment. At a general level, retributive punishment, according to Jean Hampton,⁴⁵ is a form of punishment that fulfills an *expressive role* that

⁴⁵ Jean Hampton and Jeffrie G. Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Jean Hampton, “A New Theory of Retribution,” in *Liability and Responsibility: Essays in Law and Morals*, ed. R. G. Frey and Christopher W. Morris (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 377–414, “Correcting Harms versus Righting Wrongs: The Goal of Retribution,” *UCLA Law Review* 39 (1992): 1659–1702, “An Expressive Theory of Retribution,” in *Retributivism and Its Critics*, ed. Wesley Cragg (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992), 1–25, and “Punishment, Feminism, and Political Identity: A Case Study in the Expressive Meaning of the Law,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 11, no. 1 (1998): 23–45. Hampton introduces her influential theory of retributive punishment—termed the “Expressive Account of Retribution”—within a general, judicial context concerning the justification of inflicting retributive punishment on a wrongdoer. We will now follow Hampton closely (and, therefore, there will be a higher number of quotes than normal) and apply her theory within a new context—that of a theistic context that takes the specific wrongdoing under focus to be the enacting horrors—which is an issue that Hampton herself did not write on.

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condemns the wrongdoer and reaffirms the equality of value between that of the victim and the wrongdoer. That is, as Hampton notes (which deserves to be quoted in full): “A retributivist’s commitment to punishment is . . . a commitment to asserting moral truth in the face of its denial. . . . By victimising me, the wrongdoer has declared himself elevated with respect to me . . . A false moral claim has been made. Moral reality has been denied. The retributivist demands that the false claim be corrected. . . . If I cause the wrongdoer to suffer in proportion to my suffering at his hands, his elevation over me is denied, and moral reality is reaffirmed.”⁴⁶ In further breaking this down within our specific context, we can understand that all actions that are classed as “wrong”—actions that fail to fulfill obligations—are also actions that diminish the value or dignity of the victim of wrongdoing—either through the harm that has been committed against them or because of the nature of the action itself.⁴⁷ Hence, a wrongdoing performed by a horror perpetrator is an expressive act that denies the moral truth that *all* individuals are of equal value. That is, when a horror perpetrator performs a wrongdoing so as to hurt, brutalize, or damage the interest of a horror victim—in order to further their own purposes—the horror perpetrator as a wrongdoer,⁴⁸ according to Hampton,⁴⁹ is indirectly “saying to that individual ‘I am up here, and you are down there; so I can use you for my purposes.’” In cases of horrors, this is quite clearly expressed in the paradigm examples noted previously concerning “the rape of a woman and chopping off of her arms, psychophysical torture whose ultimate goal is the disintegration of personality, betrayal of one’s deepest loyalties, cannibalising one’s own offspring, child abuse of the sort described by Ivan Karamazov.” These actions, as also previously noted, “destroy a person’s framework of meaning-making and defeats their value as a person in such a manner that it degrades them to a sub-human status.” All of these horror-inflicting actions express something that appears to diminish the victim’s value. That is, a horror perpetrator is an individual who acts on the assumption that their victim’s inherent value does not preclude them from performing this specific action. The horror perpetrator, through their wrongdoing, treats the victim as one that has a lower value than themselves. Hence, the horror perpetrator’s action is wrong again not only because it is a failure to fulfill an obligation, but because it makes a false claim concerning the value of the victim and denies the moral truth that all individuals are of equal and immutable value.⁵⁰ It is thus the use of (retributive) punishment, according to

⁴⁶ Hampton and Murphy, *Forgiveness*, 185.

⁴⁷ Hampton, “Correcting.”

⁴⁸ From this point forward, for ease of writing, I will speak only of horror perpetrators, but it will be implicitly asserted, as Hampton did, that this form of retributive punishment is applicable to all types of wrongdoers as well.

⁴⁹ Hampton, “Feminism,” 38.

⁵⁰ Heather J. Gert, Linda Radzik, and Michael Hand, “Hampton on the Expressive Power of Punishment,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 35, no. 1 (2004): 79–90.

Hampton,⁵¹ that corrects this type of false claim asserted by a wrongful action. So, even though punishment cannot literally negate the wrong performed by a horror perpetrator—as nothing will undo the action that has been performed. Yet, it can still attempt to say something about the wrongdoing and thus express something about it in a way that can “nullify” its effects—and thus reestablish the status quo. By one employing the means of punishment, an individual is able to reassert the moral equality of the victim and wrongdoer, as Hampton writes: “The retributive punisher uses the infliction of suffering to symbolize the subjugation of the subjugator, the domination of the one who dominated the victim. And the message carried in this subjugation is ‘What you did to her, she can do to you. So you’re equal.’”⁵² In the case of a wrongful act, a horror perpetrator, as noted previously, expresses the view that their victim is of lesser value to them by not only making an assertion but also by presenting *evidence* that they are inferior to them by the victim’s having been subjugated and dominated by them. This type of evidence that is provided by the action of a wrongdoer, as Heather J. Gert, Linda Radzik, and Michael Hand, write, “has the potential to make others draw false conclusions about the victim’s and the offender’s relative worth.”⁵³ Hence, for God to protect the victim, he must eliminate this misleading evidence, as Hampton notes within a general context concerning “the State’s” protection of the victim of cases of premortem wrongdoing through enacting punishment on a wrongdoer: “This . . . maybe what Hegel meant when he spoke of the way punishment ‘annuls the crime.’ Of course, it can’t annul the act itself, but it can annul the false evidence seemingly provided by the wrongdoing of the relative worth of the victim and the wrongdoer. Or, to put it another way, it can annul the message, sent by the crime, that they are not equal in value.”⁵⁴ God, as with the state in the more mundane cases, is justified in inflicting punishment upon horror perpetrators—for retributive, and thus non-remedial, reasons as well—based on the fact that punishment possesses the power to annul the evidence provided by a horror perpetrator’s wrongful action by undercutting the probative force of the evidence of their superiority over their victims. As the horror perpetrator’s wrongdoing *cannot* be taken to have established the superiority of them over a horror victim, *if* the latter type of individual—through the punitive action of God—is able to do to the perpetrator what they did to them.⁵⁵

Moreover, the severity of punishment experienced by the horror perpetrator is also contingent upon the severity of the offense that they committed, as Hampton, again in a general context, writes, “This makes sense if punishment

⁵¹ Hampton, “Expressive.”

⁵² Hampton, “Expressive,” 37.

⁵³ Gert, Radzik, and Hand, “Power,” 82.

⁵⁴ Hampton, *Forgiveness*, 131.

⁵⁵ In ordinary, everyday cases, Hampton sees the state as having the right to fulfill this specific role.

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is a defeat for the wrongdoer in the name of the victim, which is intended to express the victim's value. The more severe the punishment, the more he is being brought low; and how low we want to bring a criminal depends on the extent to which his actions symbolize his superiority and lordship over the one he hurt.⁵⁶ And, thus the infliction of punishment to a level of great severity in some cases—such as that in hell for horror perpetrators—is justified by overall the evidential role that it can fulfill in “elevating” the status of the horror victim—who experienced the most severe of suffering through their horror experience. One could ask, however, at a more general level, Why should punishment be the means by which the message expressed, and evidence provided, by the wrongdoer's action is countered and annulled? Why couldn't this message and evidence of the victim's supposed inferiority be negated by some nonpunitive means? A nonpunitive means—such as a parade that celebrates the worth of the victim, which, in our context, God could provide in another postmortem place like “heaven”—would be an insufficient response to the wrongdoing based on the premise that, as Hampton writes, the fact that the victim “had been mastered by the wrongdoer would stand. He would have lost to her, and no matter how much the community might contend that he was not her inferior, the loss counts as evidence that he is. Hence the victim wants the evidence nullified, and punishment is the best way to do that.”⁵⁷ A nonpunitive means might be able to express the inherent value of the victim; however, the wrongdoing that has been committed against them by an individual such as a horror perpetrator not only expresses the inferiority of the victim but has also presents evidence of the truth of this inferiority. Hence, a full vindication of a horror victim must not only state this victim's value but must make this a reality in the life of the victim as well. Hence, the fulfillment of a retributive role for punishment does not only simply communicate the fact that the victim and wrongdoer are of equal value but also creates, according to Hampton, a “state of affairs (a real state, not a hoped-for moral state) in which the victim [is] elevated with respect to the wrongdoer.”⁵⁸ Thus, God would inflict punishment, as the state would in a premortem context, to say something in return to the assertion made by the horror perpetrator against the victim—by making a counter-assertion that insists on the horror victim's true equal value, ultimately denying the horror perpetrator's claim to elevation. Hence, the use of punishment in cases like this is the *only* means to achieve this end, as Hampton writes: “I contend that punishment is uniquely suited to the vindication of the victim's relative worth, so that no other method of purporting to achieve vindication could be preferred to it.”⁵⁹ Therefore, in this view, punishment is *the* effective tool to

⁵⁶ Hampton, *Forgiveness*, 134.

⁵⁷ Hampton, “Retribution,” 401–2.

⁵⁸ Hampton, “Correcting,” 1695.

⁵⁹ Hampton, “Retribution,” 401.

enable the victim to regain their status in order to be equal with their horror perpetrator. However, despite the efficiency of this method, God cannot, and would not, given his perfect goodness, accomplish this goal by inflicting suffering that is aimed in any way at deriding the value of the perpetrator or that has the effect of denying the worth of the individual. That is, if the goal is to use punishment to show the equality of the horror perpetrator and the victim, then this goal is not achieved by utilizing treatment that represents this individual as inferior or less than fully human. God must thus use a *proportionate level of punishment* that possesses the right expressive content that is consistent with the horror perpetrator's human dignity. Thus, the retributive function fulfilled by the punishment enacted upon a given horror perpetrator, as with its remedial function, would be one that lasts for a finite amount of time (i.e., it would be temporary) in a manner that is proportionate with the wrongdoing that has been performed by the horror perpetrator. Hence, by God's enactment of (a potentially severe form of) suffering, through punishment, on the perpetrator, he is able to annul the evidence of this individual's superiority, and thus send the message to the horror victim that they are, in fact, of equal value. Thus, the punishment that is served by a horror perpetrator—in addition to its remedial function—has two goals: first, it annuls the evidence of the horror victim's inferiority, and, second, it sends a message that the victim and the perpetrator are equal. The fulfillment of these two goals thus provides grounds for providing reparation for the wrongdoing performed by a horror perpetrator against that of a horror victim, based on the fact that what was taken away from a horror victim through experiencing a horror was that of the inherent *value*, which distorted their meaning-making capacity and disrupted the status quo. Hence, by God ensuring that all horror perpetrators experience a form of punishment in hell (of potentially great severity) that would not only reform them but would reassert (and provide evidence concerning) the value of their victims, the horror victim would be provided with the needed reparation. That is, the necessary reparation for the wrongdoing performed by a horror perpetrator is one that restores the damage that has been done, which is that of an expression of a complete lowering of the value of a horror victim by the wrong that has been done to them. Hence, the punishment of each horror perpetrator functions in a manner to not only express or assert the true equal value of horror perpetrator and victim but also to create, or actualize, the state of affairs in which the victim is actually elevated back to the level of the perpetrator—the status quo that existed prior to the wrongdoing being performed can now be restored. By God enacting punishment on each horror perpetrator, these individuals are able—by the progressive removal of their goodness inhibitors—to be brought into the needed (psychological) condition to repent, to apologize—when the opportunity is provided for them to do so—and to now have reparation in the form of an expression and actualization of the value that was taken from their victims by their horror participation. What is now needed to complete a horror

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perpetrator's atonement, and for reconciliation to be achieved, is that of the provision of a penance—the nature of which I will now focus on explicating.

DEFEATED HORRORS: PENANCE

The fourth and final component of the atonement provided by a horror perpetrator for their wrongdoing is that of “penance,” which is that of this individual providing something extra of value, above their reparation, that can function as a compensation for their wrongdoing. We can state the nature of this component within the present context more precisely as follows:

7. *Penance.* A horror perpetrator x can provide a penance for their wrongdoing to horror victim y by God enabling x to utilize as their penance the infinitely valuable ACI connections (connections of appreciation, contribution, and intimacy) that have formed between him and y .

In each of the previous components of the act of atonement provided by a horror victim—repentance, apology, and reparation—these actions are performed by the former individual and given to the latter individual. However, for the final component of the required atonement—namely, that of penance—this action is not able to be performed by the horror victim. A penance, as noted previously, is “something extra” over and above the reparation owed—which is usually a small gift or service—that can thus serve as a token of the person's sorrow for wrongdoing. In the normal course of things, an individual can provide a penance for their actions, which can then complete the process of atonement. However, for horror victims, who are given the opportunity to provide an atonement for their wrongdoing postmortem, it seems to be the case that they do not have any penance to give or perform. That is, it is plausible that a horror victim does not have anything left of value that was “stored up” in their premortem life that they could offer as a penance for their actions—given, specifically, the deplorability of their premortem life as a horror perpetrator. Moreover, it is also plausible that a horror victim would not have performed any action in their postmortem life that can provide something of a value that is over and above that of their remedial suffering and retributive punishment in hell. Hence, it seems as if a horror victim does not have a penance to give in their atonement. Yet, it does also appear to be the case that a penance is required to underwrite the seriousness of the action that has been performed by a horror perpetrator against that of their victim(s)—as if a penance is not required in cases of this level of severity (even if it is not able to be provided by the wrongdoers), then it is difficult to see in what type of case it would actually be required. Thus, one can now ask the important question, What God would specifically do in this type of situation? In answer to this question, we can take it to be the case that God would *himself* provide the necessary penance, which can then be brought together with the horror perpetrator's

repentance, apology, and reparation to then complete their atoning act. Now, the specific penance that can be provided by God could take a number of forms; however, one way this could be done is through God enabling the production of certain “connections” between himself and each horror victim, which would be an ongoing reality and the basis of a relationship of infinite value between them—and which has obtained between them due to the action of God *and* that of the action of the horror perpetrators in enacting their horrors. More precisely, a connection—as understood here and as noted by Robin Collins—is a special type of relation that holds between persons (and nonhuman creation) that is a result of a significant past interaction.⁶⁰ The basis for postulating such connections at a general level, according to Collins, is due to the fact that “people commonly experience their relations with other persons, or even parts of non-human creation, as both profoundly important and as being in some way deeply significant to what they are as human beings. Further, the loss of one of these relations is often experienced as a loss of an aspect of one’s self. For example, the loss of a loved one—particularly a spouse—is often experienced as a loss of some part of one’s own self.”⁶¹ Thus, it is plausibly the case that the notion of a connection presupposes the view of the self as partly constituted by its relations to other entities—where some relations can be a deeper part of the self than others and, as Collins further notes, “one can be more or less connected with another person or entity . . . [which] in turn presupposes that the self does not have definite boundaries.”⁶² Connections between persons and nonhuman sentient life seem to thus be an inherent feature of reality, with three types of connections, according to Collins, being of great value in our world: *connections of appreciation*, *connections of contribution*, and *connections of intimacy* (hereafter, ACI connections). Now, in unpacking the nature of these connections within our specific context, we will proceed forward by focusing first on connections of intimacy, then on connections of appreciation, and then finally on connections of contribution. Thus, first, the connection of intimacy can occur between two individuals in cases where the sharing of an experience between them is such that, as Collins writes, each now “becomes a ‘part’ of the other’s life.”⁶³ This connection is thus formed when one (or both individuals) participate in the life of the other—with the value of this intimate relation greatly increased when it exists as an ongoing reality in the life of both individuals—through an ongoing conscious awareness of the acts that produced these connections—rather than the relation as it is ongoing. simply being a past

⁶⁰ Robin Collins, “Divine Action and Evolution,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 241–61, and “The Connection Building Theodicy,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Justin P. McBrayer (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 222–35.

⁶¹ Collins, “Action,” 248.

⁶² Collins, “Action,” 248.

⁶³ Collins, “Connection,” 223.

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fact about those individuals.⁶⁴ Second, the connection of appreciation occurs when an individual appreciates and shows gratitude toward another individual because of what they have done for them. This type of connection, according to Collins, “is never complete since we cannot be fully aware of another’s contribution to our lives.”⁶⁵ Yet, it is plausible for one to assume that—if there is a next life—one will be able to become aware of these contributions. Thus, for example, if an individual self-sacrificially helps another individual in a time of need, the awareness that the former individual gains of this in the next life will enable them to have an ongoing appreciation of this act of self-sacrifice made by the latter individual.⁶⁶ Third, the connection of contribution occurs whenever an individual provides a significant contribution to the well-being of another individual. Individuals frequently feel satisfied from having contributed to the welfare of others, which often goes beyond the value of the contribution itself to include the perceived value of having been the means by which this contribution occurred. That is, as Collins writes, individuals regularly come to think that “their life was worthwhile even if they endured more suffering than happiness.”⁶⁷ The value of this type of connection does not end with the actual act of contribution but is one that is an ongoing reality in the life of an individual based on the fact that one will eventually become fully aware of our contributions to other individuals. Thus, there are circumstances when certain valuable connections—connections of ACI—are formed between individuals.

One can now ask, in our specific context, How would connections of ACI (that are an ongoing reality in the lives of the individuals involved) form between God and a horror victim? And how can the production of these connections serve as a penance that can be brought together with a horror perpetrator’s repentance, apology, and reparation? In answer to the former question, we can now turn our attention back to Adams’s suggested CS—which, now in our specific context, will be shown to not be subject to the Christological Issue. According to the CS, God shares created nature by becoming incarnate as a human: Christ. In his incarnation, Christ becomes a horror victim through experiencing horrendous suffering during his Crucifixion—which provides the means for God to defeat the horror experience of all victims. Now, in employing this solution within this context, we can take it to be the case that by God becoming incarnate in the person of Christ and enabling himself to be put to death on the cross, he provides the grounds for connections of ACI to be formed between him and each horror victim—which can then serve as a penance for the wrongdoing of a horror perpetrator. Hence, the Christological Issue is thus now able to be answered here, as one can now understand the role that Christ’s life (and suffering) can play in

⁶⁴ Collins, “Connection,” 223.

⁶⁵ Collins, “Connection,” 223.

⁶⁶ Collins, “Connection,” 223.

⁶⁷ Collins, “Connection,” 223.

defeating the horror experiences of the individual—namely, through the connections formed by his life (and horror participation) being of such a great value that it can be utilized as a penance that can complete the atoning work of a horror perpetrator. Thus, unlike that of the original suggestion proposed by Adams, the death of Christ can play a clear role in providing the means for defeating horrors—with this role being further highlighted by understanding how the needed connections between Christ and a horror victim is formed. How these connections can be formed in this way is through the horror victim being “personally present” at the horror experience of Christ during his Crucifixion—and Christ being “fully aware” of the horror experience of each victim. At a general level, according to Eleonore Stump,⁶⁸ an individual can be present with another individual in (at least) three ways: first, *present at a place*, through occupying a certain region of space; second, *present at a time*, through existing at a certain moment of time; and, third, *personally present*, through having a psychological connection with another individual.⁶⁹ For the third type of presence: personal presence—which is a presence *with* or *to* another individual—one can begin to understand this better through the notion of “mind reading.” Mind reading, as noted by Stump, is where “one human person can be present with another in a way more powerful than mere presence at a place or in a time.”⁷⁰ In contemporary neuropsychology, mind reading is the process in which an individual has within themselves something of the mind of the other individual—where the mind of an individual is the combination of the attitudes, perspectives, commitments, and beliefs, and so on, of that individual—in short, their “intentional states.”⁷¹ In mind reading, an individual would thus have intuitive and direct access to the mind of another person—that is, direct and intuitive access to the intentional states in the mind of another person. An individual can thus be taken to be present with another individual, as Stump notes, “In the intermingling of minds made possible by the mirror neuron system, one person is present to another in virtue of being in that other, in a way that the neurobiology of the brain makes possible.”⁷² More precisely, contemporary neurobiologists conceive of this knowledge of persons as being supported by a neurologically distinct system termed the “mirror neuron system.” Hence, in mind reading, as further noted by Stump, “mirror neurons fire both when a person does a particular kind of action and also when he sees someone else performing such an action. The kind of knowledge given by the mirror neuron system is not a kind of knowledge that. Rather it is a matter of knowing

⁶⁸ Eleonore Stump, *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁶⁹ Stump, *Atonement*.

⁷⁰ Stump, *Atonement*, 131.

⁷¹ Stump, *Atonement*, 131.

⁷² Eleonore Stump, “Omnipresence, Indwelling, and the Second-Personal,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 5, no. 4 (2013): 41.

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from one's own internal state what someone else is doing and feeling."⁷³ An individual thus knows a person, and that person is present within the mind of that individual, by them having a copy or simulacrum of the mental states of that individual that is provided to them by their mirror neuron system.⁷⁴ Thus, Christ, in having a human nature, will have the ability, like other humans, to read the minds of other individuals. Yet, in Christ also having a divine nature, he will have access to divine power, and so can have the ability to read the minds of other human beings in a way that mere humans cannot.⁷⁵ Moreover, as a divine person would be eternal (i.e., existing without beginning or end) and omnipresent (i.e., being causally active at, and cognizant of, every point of space), and thus would be present at every time and space, Christ can use his human mind, and the power that is available from his possession of a divine nature, to read at once the entire mind of every human being that exists at every time and space. That is, the power of the divine person in the incarnate Christ, as noted by Stump, "can give the human mind of Christ the power of having within himself, in a mind-reading way, the minds of all human persons at one and the same time."⁷⁶ And, the event in which this takes place is his death by execution on the cross. On the cross, Christ is willing to open himself up simultaneously to every human mind. And thus, when he does so, as Stump further writes, "then at that time all the mental states of all human beings will flood his mind, through the extended powers provided by his divine nature."⁷⁷ Hence, at this time, the mind of Christ is opened to the mind of all human beings—including times before his birth and after his physical death. And by the mind of Christ being connected to the minds of every other human being, Christ would have in his mind a copy or simulacrum of each of the mental states of every individual, such that each and every individual is present within the mind of Christ in the event of his death. That is, on the cross, Christ's mind is connected with the minds of every human being—where at one and the same time, through mind-reading, Christ reads the mental states, as noted by Stump, that are "found in all the terribly evil human acts human beings have ever committed. Every vile, shocking, disgusting revulsive evil psychic state accompanying all human evil will also be at once in the psyche [mind] of Christ, only off-line."⁷⁸ Christ possessed in his mind a copy or simulacrum of all the "stains" of all the sinful and evil actions that have ever been thought of, performed (or will ever be performed)—without, however,

⁷³ Eleonore Stump, "Atonement and the Cry of Dereliction from the Cross," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4, no. 1 (2012): 8

⁷⁴ Eleonore Stump, "Providence and the Problem Evil, in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 401–17.

⁷⁵ Eleonore Stump, "The Problem of Evil and Atonement," in *Being, Freedom, and Method: Themes from the Philosophy of Peter van Inwagen*, ed. John A. Keller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 186–208.

⁷⁶ Stump, *Atonement*, 164.

⁷⁷ Stump, "Indwelling," 45.

⁷⁸ Stump, "Cry," 14.

him having performed any evil acts of his own. That is, even though Christ would possess not only a simulacrum (and thus stain) of the experience of horror victims but also of the horror perpetrators, this does not mean that he is morally lamentable because of this. As the mirror neuron system enables an individual engaged in mind-reading to have the mental states of a horror perpetrator “offline”—that is to say, the mind reader lacks the relevant psychic state of will and intellect of the horror perpetrator—thus, Christ, as a mind-reader, does not contract the actual stain of a perpetrator with whom he is psychologically connected. Rather, Christ only gains a likeness of the stain of the evil action performed by the horror perpetrator. Nevertheless, the mind-reading will still be disturbing to Christ anyway based on the fact that he would feel at the same time each horror perpetrator’s evil mental state and his own distress at those mental states, and the mental states of the horror victims that are undergoing these experiences. Hence, as Stump further writes, “The suffering of such a psychic connection all at once with the evil mental states of every human evildoer would greatly eclipse all other human psychological suffering.”⁷⁹ That is, in his psychic connection with the horrors experienced by each and every human being, Christ would thus have a simulacrum of not only the “scarred” and “broken” mental states of the horror victims but also “stains on the soul” that accompany participation in this action, which will produce psychological pain in him that could range from distressing to outright traumatic. Thus, by Christ performing this mind-reading action during his Crucifixion, he truly identifies with each and every horror victim and shares fully in their suffering. On this basis, one can thus understand how connections of ACI are formed between God and each horror victim as follows: first, for the formation of a connection of intimacy between God and a horror victim, by Christ mind-reading the psyches of all human beings at *every time and place*—and thus possessing a simulacrum of their minds within his mind—all of the horror experiences of a horror victim have been taken on by Christ. Hence, Christ would thus have an intimate acquaintance with all horror victims in a manner in which their suffering will be encompassed in the life of God in Christ. Thus, on the basis of the shared experience that is had between Christ (through his mind-reading) and each horror victim, there would plausibly be a connection of intimacy that is formed between them. Second, for the formation of connections of appreciation and contribution, these connections will be formed between God and each horror victim, on the basis of each victim’s appreciation for Christ taking it upon himself to share in their suffering, and provide the needed penance for an atonement to be made by a horror perpetrator. More precisely, for each and every case of horror experienced by an individual, an intimate expression of appreciation will be able to be provided by them to God because of the experience that he voluntarily endured in suffering with them through his death on a cross—with the psychological trauma

⁷⁹ Stump, *Atonement*, 164.

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that his mind-reading potentially provided to him—which will merit human gratitude. There would thus be a connection of appreciation that will be formed between God and each horror victim. Moreover, by Christ's suffering having made a significant contribution to the defeat of the horror in the life of the individual—by it providing the needed penance to complete the atonement offered to them by a horror perpetrator—the satisfaction of knowing that Christ's contribution will ultimately provide them with the defeat of the horror in their life that will allow them to see their life as one that is on the whole good, there would thus also be a connection of contribution that is formed between God and each horror victim. Yet, as these connections would need to exist as an ongoing reality in the life of all of these individuals—and thus would not simply be a past fact about God having shared in the suffering of these individuals and their appreciation of the contribution that he has made toward the betterment of their welfare. More precisely, for the connection of intimacy, as God has shared in the horror experience of each and every horror victim, the connection of intimacy that has formed between them would be grounded on the past fact of Christ having so done this. However, this past fact would indeed plausibly be unknown to most horror victims. And thus, given their ignorance concerning the intimate connection that has formed between all of these individuals, God would see to it that this connection between God and each horror victim is made public, which would thus require an *ongoing conscious awareness* of Christ having been present with each individual during their suffering. For the connections of appreciation and contribution, it is quite clear that most horror victims are not aware of the contribution that Christ has made to the defeat of their horror experience. Hence, it is plausible that God would want to make these individuals fully aware of the contribution that he has made by granting an audience with each horror victim, with each horror perpetrator in attendance. During this event, God could take this opportunity to explain to each horror victim how he shared in the experience of their suffering, the closeness he has toward them, and the contribution that his suffering has made to their well-being—by allowing each of the horror perpetrators to utilize his incarnate experience as an adequate penance to complete their atonement. Thus, there would also be an ongoing conscious awareness of his contribution, and each horror victims appreciation toward him for this. Hence, on the basis of this, God would thus seek to preserve in existence each horror victim after their physical deaths so that this ongoing conscious awareness can be realized.

In other words, given the need for ongoing conscious awareness of the action of God toward each of the horror victims—there would thus be a formation of ACI connections between God and these individuals that would extend everlastingly into the afterlife. Now, as it is plausibly the case that each moment of an ongoing, conscious awareness of God's (i.e., Christ's) empathetic action toward all horror victims, the contribution provided by this action, and the latter's appreciation for this contribution being made by God,

possess a certain level of intrinsic value, the *total value* of the ACI connections that have been formed between God and a horror victim plausibly also being thought to be one that can increase in value over time. Thus, the value of these connections can continue to increase to the extent that, eventually, it would outweigh the value of the horror experiences of each of the individuals. The plausibility of this increase in value can be seen clearly through the following analogy, provided by Collins, of a more mundane experience:

Suppose you had a minor toothache, but to get rid of the toothache you had to undergo an extremely painful operation. If you were told that the toothache would only last a week, or even a year, you would probably not undergo the operation. But, if you found out it would last for all eternity, you would probably undergo it. (I certainly would!) The difference in these two cases is that the disvalue of an ongoing toothache increases with time, eventually outweighing the disvalue of the painful operation to remove it, even if the toothache is only mild.⁸⁰

In a similar manner, the value of the ACI connections between God and a horror victim—and the ongoing awareness of them—would thus increase with time to a point (on the scale of eternity) that would thus outweigh the negative value had by the experience of a horror victim. This fact, following Collins again,⁸¹ can be further emphasized through the following crude model: first, suppose that one's future life can be divided into small successive units of time: Δt . Second, now also suppose that for each Δt , the conscious experience of some particular positive connection between two individuals has an intrinsic value of ΔG .⁸² Then—assuming that a certain set of successive intrinsic goods can be summed—this sum will continue to grow as long as the connection remains part of the individual's ongoing experience as growth in value. According to Collins, it “requires the continuing instantiation of some states of affairs with intrinsic value.”⁸³ Thus, given the value had by the ACI connections that are formed by God and each horror victim, these connections would be able to function as a penance that can be combined with the repentance, apology, and reparation of a horror perpetrator to complete their atonement. That is, God could provide the opportunity when he grants an audience with all horror victims for each horror perpetrator to also be in attendance at this event. During this event, the horror perpetrators would finally then be given the opportunity to express their repentance by directly apologizing to the horror victims—letting them understand the sorrow they have for their wrongdoing—and God could inform all of the horror victims about the (expressive) retributive punishment that has been experienced by the horror perpetrators—which will allow them to understand that a sufficient reparation has been provided. Moreover, God could then make it known to all

⁸⁰ Collins, “Connections,” 225.

⁸¹ Collins, “Connections,” 225.

⁸² Collins, “Connections,” 225.

⁸³ Collins, “Connections,” 224.

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horror perpetrators that an adequate penance—that is, one of infinite value—has been provided through his incarnation, and suffering, having established connections between God and each horror victim.

One could ask the important question, What right does a horror perpetrator have to utilize a penance that does not seem to be related to them or relevant to them in any way, but only that of other individuals—namely that of God and each horror perpetrator? Well, in answer to this question, one could actually understand that these infinite valuable connections between God and each horror perpetrator have, in fact, been made available, not only by the action of God in Christ but *also* by that of the horror perpetrators who have enacted the horrors on their victims—as if latter individuals had not experienced these horrors, then they would not have needed (or been able to) form the ACI connections *in response to these horrors*. Thus, a horror perpetrator has the right to utilize these connections as their penance, given the fact that they have (in some manner) contributed to them obtaining between God and a horror victim by providing the conditions for them to form in the first. Hence, each of the horror perpetrators would be able to join their feeble repentance, apology, and reparation to the penance offered by God. This could be presented to the horror victim by the horror perpetrator saying, “I acknowledge my wrongdoing, and I am very sorry for the evil that I perpetrated against you. Please accept as my reparation for my wrongdoing the punishment that I have endured, which has demonstrated the equal value that we have. I do not have anything that I can give to you above my suffering; however, please accept, as penance, the great good of the valuable connections that have been formed between you and God, by your experience of suffering, which God has then made available as a compensation for my wrongdoing, and as a token of the seriousness of my actions.” In response to this, a horror victim could respond by saying, “I accept your atonement and I forgive you for having wronged me. I can now move forward past this wrongdoing and treat you as someone who has not wronged me.” A horror victim’s acceptance of the horror perpetrator’s reparation, apology, and penance would be such that they undertake that in the future, they would not treat the horror perpetrator as the originator of an action by which they have been wronged (it would thus be *as if* they had not been wronged)—which is to say that the horror victim forgives them and thus is now reconciled with them. More precisely, by the horror perpetrator’s act of atonement finding its response in the forgiveness of the horror victim, the guilt (i.e., debt) of this action would now be removed, and the fact of wrongdoing would be eliminated, leading to a reconciliation between the horror victim and perpetrator, and thus a defeat (i.e., Defeat-R) of this horror in the life of the victim—such that they can now move on to live a (postmortem) life of a value with God that is not clouded or defined by the horror perpetrated against them but that reflects the reality of the situation—namely, that they, as with all other individuals, are of equal, immutable value.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the central focus of this article was to provide a new conceptualization of horror defeat—that of the Reconciliation Account—which can thus function as a successful solution to the Problem of Horrors. This account was formulated by focusing on another notion of horror defeat—termed *defeat via reconciliation*—which focuses on each horror victim being required to provide an atonement for the wrongdoing performed against a horror victim—which would thus ultimately lead to a reconciliation between them. By God providing the opportunity for a horror victim to atone for their wrongdoing, horrors can thus be truly defeated within the (post-mortem) life span of a horror victim—by the fact and consequences of this wrongdoing being truly dealt with—which thus enables God to be good to each of these individuals, despite them having gone through such horrific experiences. The Reconciliation Account thus provides a successful solution to the Problem of Horrors, as all horrors are indeed able to be defeated by the goodness of God working through the reconciling action of their perpetrators.