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Talbott's universalism, divine justice, and the Atonement

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Abstract: Thomas Talbott has argued that the following propositions are inconsistent: (1) it is God's redemptive purpose for the world (and therefore His will) to reconcile all sinners to Himself; (2) it is within God's power to achieve His redemptive purpose for the world; (3) some sinners will never be reconciled to God, and God will therefore either consign them to a place of eternal punishment, from which there will be no hope of escape, or put them out of existence altogether. In this paper we explore two attempts to reconcile (1)–(3) by appealing to divine justice. We argue that both versions fail for the same reason: in order for the appeal to God's justice to effectively reconcile (1)–(3), the demands of God's retributive justice must be taken to be so exacting that they call forth a very strong doctrine of the Atonement. And such a doctrine of the Atonement removes justice as an impediment to saving all.

Introduction

Considerable philosophical attention has recently been paid to the prevailing Christian view that some sinners will never be reconciled to God but will either be consigned to a place of eternal suffering (hell) or be utterly destroyed.¹ Hereafter, we refer to this view as the Doctrine of Limited Salvation (or DLS). DLS stands in stark opposition to the Doctrine of Universalism (DU), which holds that ultimately all created persons will come to enjoy eternal communion with God. Historically, most Christians have endorsed DLS, and the same trend persists today. Nevertheless, some notable contemporary thinkers argue that DLS is so problematic that Christians ought to reject it in favour of DU.

Thomas Talbott, for example, has pointed to the *prima facie* inconsistency of the following set of propositions:

- (1) It is God's redemptive purpose for the world (and therefore His will) to reconcile all sinners to Himself.
- (2) It is within God's power to achieve His redemptive purpose for the world.
- (3) Some sinners will never be reconciled to God, and God will therefore either consign them to a place of eternal punishment, from which there will be no hope of escape, or put them out of existence altogether.²

Obviously, (3) amounts to DLS. Furthermore, it certainly *seems* that (1) and (2) imply the negation of (3). Talbott argues that all three propositions can be supported by scripture (which explains the persistence of DLS in Christian theology), but that the best way to resolve the conflict is to give up (3), and hence embrace DU. Contemporary critics of Talbott, presumably wishing to affirm the scriptural passages that support (3), have sought either to reconcile the three propositions, or to show that the best way to resolve the conflict is to reject, not (3), but rather (2).

We explore here an instance of the former strategy – specifically, an attempt to reconcile (1)–(3) by appealing to divine justice, what we will call the Reconciliation from Divine Justice (RDJ). While we find RDJ ultimately unsuccessful, the reasons why it fails are instructive for contemporary debates. What we will show is that the premises foundational to RDJ *demand* a distinctive doctrine of the Atonement – and this doctrine of the Atonement ultimately undermines the attempted reconciliation.

The main body of our paper develops a strategy for reconciling (1)–(3) by appeal to the divine justice that is roughly Anselmian in character. In developing our arguments with respect to this strategy, we are inspired throughout by the writings of a number of theologians from the Lutheran Orthodox tradition, a tradition sadly neglected among philosophers today.³ We introduce their ideas here because our own line of thought was largely inspired by a study of their work. While none of the theologians in the Lutheran Orthodox tradition defends universalism, we argue here that their development of Anselm's ideas concerning the infinite severity of sin and the concomitant doctrine of the Atonement helps to show why an Anselmian response to Talbott simply *cannot* work. Nevertheless, at no point should we be taken as offering an authoritative explication of what the Lutheran Orthodox actually said or believed. Our aim is to develop a philosophical argument, not to offer an historical exegesis of the Lutheran Orthodox.

While our main focus here is on a version of RDJ inspired by the thought of the Lutheran Orthodox, at the end of the paper we take up an alternative version of RDJ, one first put forward by Leibniz (following hints in the work of the Lutheran,

John Gerhard, the Calvinist, Zacharias Ursinus, and the Catholic, Drexler),⁴ and more recently by Charles Seymour. We argue that Seymour's version of RDJ admits of the same fundamental problem faced by the more traditional version. As such, our aim here is to show that Talbott's *prima facie* case for DU cannot be successfully refuted by *any* appeal to God's justice.

Although defending DLS by appealing to divine justice is out of favour among contemporary Christian philosophers,⁵ a careful examination of this line of defence remains important for at least two reasons. First, it is important for the sake of completeness. There is a growing body of literature attacking the most popular contemporary approach to defending DLS – namely, the approach that appeals to the libertarian freedom of the creature.⁶ As this approach comes increasingly under fire, it may be tempting for defenders of DLS to return to the more traditional approach – unless, of course, the plausibility of this approach is preemptively challenged, as we hope to do here. Second, Seymour is not the only contemporary philosopher who finds some variant of the traditional approach unproblematic,⁷ and, given the popular rhetoric among conservative Christians, it is reasonable to say that, outside philosophical circles, the appeal to divine justice would likely be the most common strategy for reconciling (1)–(3).

The argument from divine justice for the consistency of (1)–(3)

In this section we sketch a version of RDJ that, while recognizably Anselmian, derives directly from the thought of some of the more important Lutheran Orthodox thinkers. While we think the Lutheran Orthodox would have supported this version of RDJ, our task here is the philosophical one of constructing out of their ideas the strongest version of RDJ we can, not the exegetical one of giving an account of what, given the best historical evidence, the Lutheran Orthodox would actually have said about Talbott's claim that (1)–(3) are inconsistent. Among other things, our focus here entails that we will attend only to those aspects of Lutheran Orthodoxy that are of use in constructing (and ultimately in critiquing) RDJ. Thus, we will *not* focus on those aspects of Lutheran Orthodox thought that could be used to construct a defence of DLS in terms of respect for the freedom of the creature. While the latter task would be interesting in itself – and would reveal, we think, that the most popular contemporary defence of DLS finds seminal expression in Lutheran Orthodoxy – it falls outside the scope of this paper. As such, some core theological themes that ought to be discussed in any *historical* treatment of Lutheran Orthodoxy – such as the distinction between law and gospel – are set aside in favour of doctrines and arguments that, while in themselves more peripheral to the main interests of the Lutheran Orthodox, are of greater value to our philosophical project. With these cautions in mind, we turn to an overview of the Lutheran Orthodox ideas most relevant for constructing RDJ, starting with their view of divine justice.

In developing their understanding of God's moral attributes, several of the most important Lutheran Orthodox spelled out three chief forms of divine justice: dispositive justice, remunerative justice, and retributive or vindicatory justice.⁸ God's dispositive justice refers to the perfect righteousness with which God rules over the universe. This justice really embraces all God's relative moral attributes (those He possesses in relation to His creatures rather than in Himself apart from those relations), including mercy, patience, and veracity.⁹ The moral law, which God Himself imprints on the hearts of men, is an image of this very justice with which God governs the universe.¹⁰ God's remunerative and vindicatory justice are narrower species of God's righteousness and have regard only to the moral desert of rational creatures. In virtue of the former, God rewards the just; in virtue of the latter, He punishes the wicked.¹¹ It is the latter that is most relevant to our discussion here, providing the foundation for RDJ (although, as we shall see, remunerative justice does have bearing on the role of Christ's *active* obedience in atoning for human sin).

With respect to God's retributive or vindicatory justice, the Lutheran Orthodox generally maintained that God's holiness is such that He is bound to punish all transgressions of His Holy Law,¹² (that is, the law demanding that creatures love Him above all things and each other as themselves).¹³ Any infraction of this law is an offence against *God*, and such an offence is, in Quenstedt's words, *deicide*. Since God is the infinite good, this offence carries with it an infinite guilt and a liability to punishment of infinite worth.¹⁴ In effect, sin is an affront to God's holiness in that it implicitly denies the infinite worth and majesty of God. Punishment is required in order to *vindicate* God's majesty – that is, to reaffirm the real worth and majesty of God. But since the affront requiring vindication is infinitely bad, the punitive response must be proportionally severe: it must be infinite as well.

Retributive punishment on this view rests on more than just the knee-jerk *intuition* that a proportionally severe response to wrongdoing is intrinsically fitting. The intrinsic suitability of proportional punishment is grounded on deeper intuitions akin to those underlying Jean Hampton's recent defence of retributivism: proportional punishment is the only way to adequately *refute* the erroneous moral claims implicitly promulgated by wrongful acts. Since criminal acts implicitly overvalue the perpetrator and undervalue those against whom the crime is targeted (the direct victims as well as the lawgiver), the perpetrator must, on Hampton's view, be subjected to a 'defeat' that expresses the error of the perpetrator's value system.¹⁵ To achieve this refutation, punishment must adequately reflect, in its severity, the *degree of error* implicit in the wrongful act. Proportional punishment is therefore to be valued, not for any *external* consequences, but because such punishment in itself affirms the value of what ought to be valued to the degree that it ought to be valued. The intuition underlying this form of retributivism is the idea that such affirmation of value through the

imposition of suffering is to be pursued for itself, without regard for its consequences (such as the moral reform of sinners).

But any act that falls short of recognizing the *infinite* value of God will attach to God a value that falls *infinitely short* (since the difference between an infinite value and any finite value is infinite). Thus, only punishment of infinite severity will fully vindicate God's majesty. And, as Hutter noted, 'God is not only supremely merciful but also supremely just', so that 'there could not be a place for God's mercy until satisfaction should be rendered the divine justice'.¹⁶ As such, He is determined to punish any infraction of His Holy Law with the appropriate punishment. As we have seen, the only appropriate punishment for an offence against God is a punishment of infinite severity. And while the Lutheran Orthodox typically insisted that God wills the salvation of all, they also held that He wills it conditionally, i.e. on the condition that the demands of vindicatory justice be met.¹⁷ Hence, while Hutter and others in the Lutheran Orthodox tradition embraced (1), they understood God's purpose of reconciling sinners to Himself to *include* the demands of vindicatory justice – such that this purpose would not be achieved unless the demands of vindicatory justice were met. Thus, while this redemptive purpose is an expression of His love for creatures, it is also conditioned by His justice.¹⁸ Using this insight, we can attempt to reconcile (1)–(3) by elaborating (1) as follows:

- (1*) It is God's redemptive purpose for the world (and therefore His will) to reconcile all sinners to Himself in a way that meets the demands of vindicatory justice.

Of course, Talbott would likely note that even if God's redemptive purpose for the world is to save all in a way that meets the demands of vindicatory justice, an inconsistency remains in (1)–(3): either God can achieve this purpose (saving all in a way that meets the demands of justice), or He cannot. If the latter, then (2) is false; if the former, then (3) must be rejected – because if God *could* save all in a way that meets the demands of justice, He would do so, and no sinners would be left unreconciled.

Thus, RDJ requires further development. The most plausible move here is to distinguish between what God could bring about by His almighty power, *if He wanted to*, and what God could *want* to bring about. This approach has support in the theological tradition. Aquinas held that God can produce every being and every state of affairs that is not logically contradictory.¹⁹ The later Lutheran Orthodox held that this account of divine omnipotence is defective, because it is not in God's power to perform immoral actions, even if those actions are in some sense *logically possible* (that is, logically possible *if* we set aside consideration of the morality of the acts, and thus set aside the logical impossibility of a morally perfect being performing an immoral act). In effect, the later Lutherans distinguished between what God, logically, could do *if He wanted to*, and what God

could *want to do* given His moral perfection.²⁰ Let us call the former His *logical* power, the latter His *moral* power. By making use of this distinction one could defend the consistency of (1)–(3) by holding that (2) must be understood as making an assertion about God’s logical power rather than about His moral power. With such a conception in place, it is possible to argue that (1)–(3) are in fact consistent, along the following lines: while it is in God’s logical power to save all, and while it is His redemptive purpose for the world to save all, that redemptive purpose is *conditioned* by the demands of justice such that God would not exercise His logical power in this way because doing so would violate the requirements of justice; (it is not in His *moral* power).

In short, the version of RDJ sketched here shows that one can interpret (1) and (2) in ways that enable them to be reconciled with (3). Specifically, (1) can be understood to mean (1*), whereas (2) can be understood to mean:

(2*) It is within God’s logical power to reconcile all sinners to Himself.

We will not explore here whether the scriptural case for (1*) and (2*) is as strong or stronger than the case for alternative understandings. Our point here is simply that (1)–(3) can be reconciled by, in effect, including reference to the conditioning requirements of God’s justice into (1) but excluding it from (2).

Some objections considered

Before moving on, we should briefly consider three objections to the version of RDJ outlined above – not in order to *defend* it against these challenges, but rather to show what defenders of this Anselmian version of RDJ *must* assume if their attempted reconciliation of (1)–(3) is to succeed.

The first objection concerns the conception of retributive justice employed in this version of RDJ, whereby the wicked suffering in proportion to their wrong is to be valued for its own sake rather than for any of its effects, and infliction of harm on wrongdoers is morally *required*, not in order to reform them, but simply in order to bring about this intrinsically good state. Does it even make sense to say that a state of affairs in which a person suffers is *intrinsically* better than one like it in all other respects but for the fact that the suffering is relieved? And even if it does make sense, could this intrinsic value of suffering not merely justify but actually *obligate* one to inflict harm? A negative answer to either question would undermine RDJ. There are certainly many thinkers (e.g. utilitarians) who would deny that suffering can be intrinsically good.²¹ And to say that one may be *obliged* to inflict suffering on the wicked creates significant problems for viewing forgiveness and mercy as virtues.

We sympathize with this objection, but we also recognize that it rests on moral intuitions (such as the intuition that suffering can only be good instrumentally) that contradict those that prevailed among the Lutheran Orthodox, as well as

those that a contemporary defender of RDJ must uphold. While there may be no way to prove that the moral intuitions underlying retributivism are correct, there also may be no way to *demonstrate* that they are incorrect,²² particularly if the retributivism in question is of the sophisticated sort that the Lutherans upheld. But unless one can *show* that the retributivist intuitions are incorrect, Talbott cannot argue that the case for RDJ fails by simply rejecting retributivism. What we will show, however, is that, given the retributivist intuitions embedded in RDJ, a defender of RDJ ought to embrace a doctrine of the Atonement with just this retributive conception of justice in mind – and the resulting understanding of the Atonement, it turns out, undermines RDJ.

The second objection holds that, since perfect love is incompatible with positively willing harm to a creature if that harm does it no good, no being could be perfectly loving who is essentially determined to punish wrongdoers on the grounds of retributive or vindicatory justice. Again, we sympathize with this objection, but recognize that a defender of RDJ could say that perfect love is morally good love, and morally good love cannot seek to benefit a creature in a way that involves violating a moral obligation. This seems to have been Kant's view, and in this he was perhaps closer to the theology of his Lutheran forefathers than is commonly realized.²³ While we are unconvinced by this perspective, our purpose here is simply to note what the defenders of RDJ *must* hold in order for their reconciliation of (1)–(3) to work. They must both ascribe to a (contestable) retributive conception of justice *and* hold that the perfect love of God pursues the creature's good always and only in ways that satisfy the demands of such justice.²⁴

The third objection concerns the notion that the demands of justice could ever preclude salvation. In order for appeal to divine justice to reconcile (1)–(3), God must lack the moral power to save every sinner in a manner consistent with the demands of His justice. But if justice requires merely finite punishment, then that punishment could be administered in a temporally finite form. And if this is possible, then it is possible for God to administer the punishment such that there would come a time when the demands of justice had been met, and hence such that there would be no further impediment from justice preventing God from saving the creature.²⁵ In short, the appeal to divine justice can serve to reconcile (1)–(3) only if it is assumed that justice demands an infinite punishment. The Lutheran Orthodox did in fact assume this, insofar as every human sin was a sin against God, the infinite good. But many contemporary Christian thinkers are highly sceptical of the idea that any finite sin can merit infinite punishment.

Again, we sympathize with this objection. But for the sake of argument we will assume that there is some way to render coherent the notion that no merely finite punishment for human sin could satisfy the demands of justice. In order for the Anselmian version of RDJ to work, this *must* be assumed – and even if some traditional ways of defending this assumption do not work, it does not follow that there might not be some way to render it coherent. We consider below one

attempt to offer a coherent variation of this assumption – namely that recently developed by Charles Seymour, following Leibniz – according to which it is an ongoing pattern of sin that merits infinite punishment rather than a finite collection of sins. But for now we will adopt the traditional Anselmian (and Lutheran Orthodox) understanding of this assumption.

In summary, we think it no accident that the Lutheran Orthodox assumed a retributive notion of justice, adopted a view of divine love consistent with the exercise of such justice, and believed that the demands of justice with respect to sins against God could only be met with infinite punishment. It is no accident because these are the very assumptions that *must* be made in order to reconcile (1)–(3) in the manner proposed here. Our argument, however, is that these three assumptions not only underlie this version of RDJ, but also entail the strong understanding of the Atonement introduced by Anselm and brilliantly developed by the Lutheran Orthodox. But this view of the Atonement, it turns out, ultimately undermines RDJ. We turn now to a consideration of this issue.

The doctrine of the Atonement and objective justification

While the Anselmian understanding of the Atonement is well-known among Christian philosophers, the ways in which Lutheran Orthodox thinkers developed this understanding is less familiar. But these developments are particularly helpful in showing why the Anselmian version of RDJ cannot succeed. In keeping with Anselm, the Lutherans generally held that it was not simply *fitting* that Christ become incarnate to save sinners, but that on account of the demands of divine justice He *had* to do so.²⁶ For God's justice demanded that a sacrifice be made on behalf of mankind sufficient to make up for human sin. This sacrifice for sin had to be of infinite worth, since all sin carries infinite guilt. And since humans were the offending party, only one who was a true human could make reparations to God for sin. These notions entailed, for the Lutherans as it did for Anselm, that God *had to* (in the moral sense) become incarnate and suffer on behalf of fallen humans, in order to appease God's just wrath against sin.²⁷

On this Lutheran and Anselmian view, *both* God's justice *and* His mercy play a central role in the Atonement. God's justice demands a sacrifice of infinite worth to atone for sin – and hence could be satisfied only by something *like* the Incarnation; but His love decrees that He should take upon Himself the cost of sin, and should therefore offer up, through the Incarnation, the needed sacrifice on behalf of man.

A word about such vicarious satisfaction of the demands of justice is in order, since the impossibility of vicarious satisfaction would undermine the Lutheran and Anselmian approach altogether. Recall that, according to the Lutheran Orthodox, retribution against sin is needed to vindicate God's majesty – that is, to refute the false value judgment implicit in every sin by expressing in

proportionate punishment the true severity of the offence. From this standpoint, the question of the possibility of a vicarious atonement becomes a question about whether God could adequately refute the sinner's false value judgment by allowing the incarnate infinite God to endure humiliation and death on the cross on account of human sin. While there are obvious difficulties here, the notion of a vicarious atonement seems more plausible given this framework than from a view of retributive justice that is modeled on revenge as its paradigm.

But it is unclear on this view whether the requirement that God become incarnate to vindicate His justice is an unconditional requirement or a conditional one – the condition being God's desire to satisfy justice in a way that is also merciful. In many places the Lutheran Orthodox claim that the latter is the case – in other words, that God *chose* to become incarnate as a way of satisfying divine justice so that He might be able to have mercy on fallen humanity.²⁸ But, as suggested in the previous section, their theory seems to entail the stronger view that God *unconditionally* had to become incarnate to pay the price for human sin. For God is essentially just, and so is essentially and necessarily ordered to punishing evildoers in proportion to their degree of guilt. But all sin carries infinite guilt. Since creatures, being finite, cannot by their suffering obtain an infinite merit, no punishment of the creature could atone for an infinite guilt. Thus, it seems the only way for God to satisfy His vindicatory justice is by becoming incarnate. This position was clearly asserted by the Lutheran Orthodox theologian, Gerhard:

In order, therefore, that the price of redemption might be proportionate to our debt and infinite guilt, it was necessary that the action or mediation not only of a finite, viz., a human, but also of an infinite, i.e. a divine nature, should concur, and that the suffering and death of Christ should acquire power of infinite price elsewhere, viz. from the most effectual working of the divine nature, and thus that an infinite good might be able to be presented against and infinite evil.²⁹

Of course, someone might claim that the punishment of a finite human being could satisfy the demands of justice if it were infinite *in duration*. In fact, some such idea seems to underlie the doctrine of eternal hell. But while endless suffering may be the closest one can come to satisfying the demands of justice when the one being punished is a finite creature, Anselm and the Lutheran Orthodox were astute enough to recognize that no punishment of a finite creature, even if endless, could ever fully satisfy the demands of justice.³⁰

There are at least two reasons for this. First, there would be no point in time at which this endlessly endured suffering has been completed, and hence no point in time at which the demands of justice had been met. Second, punishments that, by virtue of their nature, are finite at any given moment, cannot be rendered fitting to an infinite offence by being imposed over an infinite duration. While the sinner will feel the sting of punishment every moment forever, the sting

is finite and hence minor relative to the offence, and the finite nature of human consciousness entails that the succession of stings will never 'build up' to an infinite sting. Put another way, a punishment that is infinite in duration (and hence, over time, in its quantity of suffering) is not necessarily infinite in *severity*. Consider someone who, as a punishment for murder, has 20 dollars withheld from his pay cheque *forever* (assuming that this is possible). Would we say that the infinite duration has rendered the punishment fitting for the crime? Certainly not. And this is because in human consciousness suffering is not endlessly cumulative.³¹ Nor is the human imagination, being finite, able to encompass fully endless suffering. The experience of horror that is sure to accompany a sentence of endless suffering is nevertheless a finite horror. Thus, the added suffering that comes with facing the prospect of endless anguish will still fall short of infinite punishment.

The Anselmian view of the Atonement so far explicated was developed in important ways by Lutheran Orthodox thinkers. First, the Lutherans, much more than Anselm, stressed the essential love and mercy of God. God's mercy is not a contingent attribute of Him, but an essential one.³² It is therefore something He *must* exhibit – not because of anything He owes the creature, but because of what He essentially is. In this regard the following passage from Gerhard is striking:

Because the attributes of God are not some mutable accident in God, but are His very essence, thus the love and favour of God, by which He embraces the pious, must be taken to be much more ardent than we can possibly imagine. Eccles. 2, v. 23: 'As great as God is, so great is His mercy.' But He is infinite, immense, invariable, and eternal. Therefore such also is his mercy, 'prevailing upon us in eternity'. Psal. 117, v.2. There is in it no variation or mutation, unless we change, just as the sun remains the same, but men avert themselves from its light and heat and so deprive themselves of its benefit.³³

This passage seems to entail that no punishment of the creature could be *merely* retributive; it would also have to redound to the creature's good and thus display God's mercy. Of course, this does not rule out that the punishment could still be retributive. When God punishes Christ in our stead, the punishment is not reformatory in nature even though it benefits us. It is retributive in that Christ suffers in our place the pains due to us.

This development of Anselm is significant because we suspect that many, if not most, contemporary Christian thinkers will share the Lutheran Orthodox sentiment that God is essentially merciful. For those who do, a vicarious atonement becomes necessary even if it is not strictly required by the demands of justice (even if, somehow, the finite creature could endure a punishment of infinite severity). Thus, this development of the Anselmian doctrine provides further support for the view that the Atonement was not merely an option that God chose, but one He was determined to pursue.

The second way the Lutheran doctrine of the Atonement went beyond Anselm was in teaching a distinction between the active and passive obedience of Christ. Since man is obliged perfectly to abide by God's law, the Lutherans recognized no supererogatory acts.³⁴ Those who sin, even once, render it impossible that they should ever be able to make up for that act. Even if they were to be converted and perfectly to abide by God's law ever after, they could not change the fact that they *once* sinned and so could never bring it about that in all their deeds they followed God's law.³⁵

Christ, by His active obedience – that is, His perfect fulfilling of the law – made it possible for God to impute to sinners the perfect obedience Christ Himself showed during His life. By His death on the cross – His passive obedience – Christ endured the punishment for sin, and thus made it possible for God to forgive human sin. The first form of obedience relates to God's remunerative justice, the second to His retributive. By the first men become worthy of eternal life, by the second they are freed from the need to undergo any punishment to wipe out the debt of their sins.³⁶ Again, we think that many Christian thinkers will sympathize with this idea – encapsulated in Christ's injunction to 'be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect' – that even if the demands of retributive justice have been met we still do not deserve eternal bliss. What God demands is not merely a life in which our sins have been paid for, but a sinless life. Since no human lives such a life, this demand of God *must* be met vicariously. And if it *is* met vicariously – and Christ's perfection is imputed to the sinner – then how can the demands of justice impede God's will to save the sinner?

This leads to the final (and most crucial) way the Lutherans went beyond Anselm. According to Lutheran Orthodoxy, Christ, as He was truly God, could offer up to God a vicarious atonement of infinite worth. As He was truly man, He could do this on behalf of man. These things being so, God's justice demanded that He *recognize* the worth of Christ's sacrifice by *becoming in His heart reconciled to the entire race*.³⁷ This doctrine later came to be known, among the Confessionalist Lutherans of the nineteenth century, as the doctrine of objective justification.³⁸ Christ so perfectly satisfied the law on man's behalf that God is now reconciled to the entire race, His wrath wholly put away, and He desires to give all the reward Christ has earned for them, viz. the beatific vision.³⁹

The old Norwegian Lutheran Synod stated this doctrine powerfully when they declared that 'with the general atonement that took place in Christ for the world, also for Judas, the whole world, including Judas, was justified and received forgiveness of sin and therefore became a child of God and an heir of heaven'.⁴⁰ Of course, that God is reconciled to us does not mean we are to Him. Thus, the older Lutherans could conceive of the unregenerate according to the metaphor of persons in a prison who, upon being told that they are all pardoned, don't believe the announcement and remain in prison, chained by their own disbelief.⁴¹ In this metaphor we find the first hints of the more liberal doctrine of hell that enjoys

popularity today. According to it, the demands of justice are not what interfere with the salvation of the creature, but rather the creature's own resistance to the free grace that God extends on account of Christ.

What should be clear from all of this is that, because of their belief that Christ's Atonement *necessarily* calls forth God's forgiveness of the entire human race, the Lutherans ultimately cannot *reconcile* (1)–(3) by an appeal to divine justice. If we follow them through to the ultimate implications of their doctrine, we see that it leads them to conclude that Christ has so satisfied divine justice that God's desire to save all could not be impeded on account of justice. In short, it shows that the Lutheran Orthodox must hold, because of Christ's Atonement, that:

(2**) It is within God's logical *and* moral power to reconcile all sinners to Himself in a way that meets the demands of vindicatory justice.

And (1*) and (2**) are incompatible with (3). Thus, the Lutheran Orthodox understanding of the Atonement undermines RDJ. Their acceptance of the idea that God is impelled to meet the demands of retributive justice with respect to human sin, which allows them to revise (1) to (1*), also drives them into a strong doctrine of the Atonement, one which ultimately forces them to accept a version of (2) – namely (2**) – that cannot be reconciled with (3) and (1*).

Lesson for contemporary discussions of DLS

The argument developed here, making use of Lutheran Orthodox developments of Anselm, is not merely an historical curiosity grounded in antiquated assumptions. The premises undergirding RDJ do not merely *lend* themselves to the kind of doctrine of the Atonement developed by the Lutheran Orthodox – they *demand* such a doctrine.

To see this, consider the following general argument. Either God's justice is an essential attribute of Him, or not. If *not*, then His love for creatures (and His desire to see them achieve their end of union with Him) could not be thwarted by the demands of justice. Only if God would be violating some real obligation arising from justice could the demands of justice block His will to save all. But if justice is not an essential feature of God, it does not seem it could provide Him with any strict obligations. Hence, to pursue RDJ we must suppose, as the Lutherans did, that God's justice *is* essential to Him. He must be ordered to punish every creature in proportion to the severity her sin.

But either the creature's sin is (a) finite in severity, or (b) infinite in severity. If it is finite, then the demands of justice could not finally block God's salvific purpose. A finite evil only requires a finite punishment that can be carried out in a finite time, after which justice can no longer hinder God's salvific will.⁴² Hence, we find the Lutheran Orthodox asserting (b), that human sin is infinite. But on this assumption God seems to face a problem: no amount of suffering on the

creature's part could compensate for the degree of her wrongdoing. But this means – as the Lutheran Orthodox observed – that if God is essentially ordered to punishing every sin with the degree of punishment it deserves, then *only* by taking on the punishment of the creature in His place could God meet the demands of justice. For only the punishment of a being of infinite worth could itself *have* infinite worth. And it could have that worth with respect to the offending party only if God became Incarnate. Again, if no infraction against God can ever be atoned for by the creature (since the creature must love God perpetually and completely), it seems that only by God's becoming incarnate and so fulfilling the law on the sinner's behalf could the sinner's lack of love for God be atoned for.

What the Lutherans noticed about this solution to the problem of making satisfaction for sin is that it implies what later Lutherans called the *objective justification* of the human race. If Christ's active and passive obedience were *not* of infinite worth, it could not solve the problem of how to make satisfaction for sin. But it seems that Christ's active and passive obedience *are* of infinite worth. But then the demands of justice have been fully met by Christ, and God could no longer be impelled *by justice* to hold anything against the creature. In fact, if God is perfectly just, He could not fail to recognize the full value of Christ's Atonement for sin. And He *would* be failing to recognize its value if He did not, in light of it, forgive the *entire* race. In other words, if He limited His forgiveness only to those who *accepted* Christ, He would be failing to attribute to Christ's Atonement its full measure of worth. For if it is the accepting or non-accepting of Christ that ultimately makes Christ's Atonement appease the divine wrath, then it is in virtue of something *we* do, something in us, that His Atonement fully satisfies for sin. This, however, entails that Christ's active and passive obedience were *not* themselves of infinite worth. If something over and above Christ's redemptive work is needed in order that God be reconciled to the sinner – whether it be the sinner's faith, or her good works, etc. – then Christ's Atonement must not have possessed the infinite merit required to expiate sin.⁴³ But if Christ's Atonement has only finite merit, then no act of the creature, being finite, could make up the difference – and we are back to the original problem of how a finite being can satisfy the demands of justice when the offence is infinite.

It might be objected at this point that the faith of the creature does not *add* to the merit of Christ's Atonement, but simply determines whether or not that merit will be attributed to the creature, and hence meet the demands of justice with respect to the creature. In short, it could be argued that God remains wrathful until the creature *clings in faith* to Christ, whereupon God attributes Christ's merits to the creature. Those who do not have faith are justly condemned even though Christ's merit, being infinite, *would* fully atone for their sins *were it attributed to them*.⁴⁴

While this objection shares with the Lutheran Orthodox the intuition that Christ's merit must be subjectively appropriated through faith, it distinguishes itself in that it assumes that God remains wrathful and unforgiving towards the creature until Christ's merits are thus appropriated. The Lutheran Orthodox, on the other hand, held that God was fully reconciled to all sinners on account of Christ, but that sinners could not *enjoy the fruits* of this reconciliation without an act of faith.⁴⁵ But why follow the lead of the Lutheran Orthodox here? Why *not* say that, even though Christ's sacrifice has infinite merit, God remains wrathful at those who fail to cleave to Christ in faith?

The problem with this answer is that it must make one of two assumptions: either (1) God *can* attribute Christ's merit to the unfaithful sinner but chooses not to, or (2) God cannot attribute Christ's merit to the unfaithful. The former alternative clearly will not work. Under this view, God, through Christ, has the capacity to pay for every human sin and fully meet the demands of justice, but chooses not to. But why would He make this choice? The assumption is that if God did extend Christ's merits to the sinner, the demands of justice would be met – and so it cannot be the case that justice *requires* that God withhold merits from those who do not cleave to Christ. Hence, if this path is pursued, it is not God's *justice* that implies DLS at all. This approach, if it is to work, must appeal to something other than divine justice in order to reconcile (1)–(3).⁴⁶ As such, this approach does not constitute a satisfactory response to our thesis.

The second alternative is problematic on many levels. If we assume that a *vicarious* atonement is possible at all, it is hard to imagine *why* God would be incapable of attributing Christ's merit to the unfaithful sinner. If He can extend the merits of Christ to the faithful, even though they have not earned it through their active or passive obedience, why would He be unable to do so to the unfaithful? If it is *logically* possible for God to attribute to the sinner the merits of Christ, then it would seem to be *logically* possible for God to attribute these merits to the *unfaithful* sinner. Perhaps one could say that it is not within God's *moral* power to do so because the unfaithful, on account of their lack of faith, do not deserve to have Christ's merits attributed to them. But this answer assumes that Christ's Atonement, while it vicariously atones for *most* human sins, does not extend to shortcomings in faith. Faith becomes a good work that is a condition for salvation. Furthermore, shortcomings in faith seem to be the essence of *all* sins. Every sin can be traced to a failure properly to trust and love God. If God's just wrath against shortcomings of faith is unappeased by the Atonement, then it is hard to see how *any* sin could be atoned for vicariously through Christ's active and passive obedience. But if *justice* does not demand that God withhold Christ's merits from the unfaithful, then justice is no barrier to God's saving all. Hence, something other than justice must be appealed to in the attempt to reconcile (1)–(3).

The lesson here is that if we truly want to hold *both* that God is obliged to meet the demands of justice *and* that human sin is infinite in nature (and hence requiring an infinite punishment), we are forced to accept something like the Lutheran doctrine of objective justification. And this doctrine says that God, apart from *anything* done by human beings, is fully reconciled to them. Their sins have been *entirely* paid for by Christ, not just in the sense that Christ has suffered the punishments due them, but also in the sense that, by His active obedience, He has perfectly fulfilled the law on their behalf. Neither retributive nor remunerative justice, then, blocks God from achieving His redemptive purpose for the world, and RDJ fails. In short, even if one takes the strongest possible line with respect to the demands of vindicatory or remunerative justice, (1)–(3) cannot be reconciled on these grounds – because the most demanding justice calls upon God to take the most extraordinary steps to satisfy it.⁴⁷

A Leibnizian alternative: Seymour's theodicy of hell

An alternative to viewing any *individual* human sin as warranting everlasting punishment is to view some *pattern* of sinful behaviour as calling forth everlasting punishment. This alternative strikes us as the best hope for the defender of RDJ. In recent literature, this alternative is vigorously defended by Charles Seymour. Seymour asks us to imagine that the eternally damned are those who, in their post-mortem state, perpetually persist in sinning. Each successive sin warrants a new finite punishment, but since the sinning continues indefinitely, the sequence of finite punishments continue indefinitely as well. On this view, since human sin is taken to be finite in severity, we are not *forced* into the strong view of the Atonement. But since the pattern of sinful behaviour continues eternally, the sequence of finite punishments continues eternally as well.⁴⁸

While this Leibnizian understanding of DLS may seem at first blush to allow for RDJ without driving its adherent into the strong view of the Atonement, we do not think this is the case. On this view, either the punishments imposed by God can 'catch up' with the sins of the creature – such that there is a moment at which the penalty for the creature's sins (up to that moment) has been fully paid – or they cannot. If the former, then there is at least a moment during which the penalty for sin has been fully paid by a finite punishment. At that moment, the demands of justice impose no impediment whatever towards saving the creature – hence, if the creature is not saved at that moment, the explanation must lie in something other than the demands of justice. At least from the standpoint of justice, there is no reason why God could not in that moment extend efficacious grace and thus save the sinner before he or she has the opportunity to 'sin some more', so to speak.⁴⁹ Of course, a defender of DLS might argue that there is something other than the demands of vindicatory justice that prevents God from extending efficacious grace in that moment – for example, a moral duty to respect the

creature's libertarian freedom. But if so, then RDJ has been abandoned in favour of some alternative strategy for defending DLS. Universalists must challenge such a strategy on different grounds.⁵⁰ The point here is simply that, if God's punitive response to sin can 'catch up' with the sinning of the creature, then the Leibnizian version of RDJ fails.

If, on the other hand, God's punishments cannot catch up with the sinner's sin, then the demands of justice can never be fully met by punishing the sinner. The sinner will, for all eternity, succeed in 'staying ahead' of God's punitive acts by warranting more and more punishment before the previous punishments have been completed. But if so, then it again proves to be the case that punishment of the sinner cannot meet the demands of justice. At every moment for the rest of eternity there will be sin that has not been expiated, wrongs that have not been vindicated. At no point will the demands of justice have been met. And if meeting the demands of justice is not optional for God, we once again find ourselves in a situation in which God is morally compelled to seek an alternative means of satisfaction. Thus, it seems as if Seymour cannot escape the need for a vicarious atonement. We are led along the same path as before: any vicarious atonement which would satisfy the demands of justice with respect to sinners who keep on sinning indefinitely would also remove any impediment based on justice for God carrying out His will to save all.

Seymour's only plausible response would seem to be to hold that, from God's *eternal* standpoint, the infinite series of finite sins and finite punishments is a completed whole in which the demands of justice are perfectly met. From eternity, in effect, the demands of justice have been met without the need for a vicarious atonement. But Seymour's defence of hell will work only if humans are capable of 'outrunning' God's punitive response by racking up more debt in any given time frame than God can expiate in the same time frame. In order for it to be impossible for God to fully meet the demands of justice at *some* time T, it must be the case that the sinner *continues* to outrun God's punitive capacities *ad infinitum*. As the timeline moves towards infinity, the gap between what the sinner deserves and what the sinner suffers must either keep getting larger or widen for a time and then be maintained perpetually through a level of sinfulness so great that God cannot close the gap no matter how severely He punishes. Such eternal outrunning of God's punitive response amounts to forever perpetuating, if not widening, the gap between what the sinner deserves and what the sinner experiences with respect to punishment. Even from God's eternal vantage point, this cannot be perceived as justice being met. A vicarious atonement will be required.

In short, Seymour's Leibnizian defence of hell faces fundamentally the same problem as the Anselmian defence. Seymour cannot escape the need for a vicarious atonement in order to meet the demands of justice. If there is a reconciliation of (1)–(3), it therefore is not to be found in the appeal to divine

justice – at least not in a broadly Christian framework in which something like the vicarious Atonement of Christ is recognized as a possibility.

Conclusion

In this paper we have presented an argument that attempts to refute Talbott's claim that (1)–(3) are incompatible by appealing to God's retributive or vindicatory justice. We have argued that both the Anselmian and Leibnizian versions of this reconciliation fail, because of the strong doctrine of the Atonement that they demand. Thus, it seems that any appeal to divine justice ends up *supporting* Talbott's claim that the best way to resolve the conflict among (1)–(3) is to give up (3).

Others, of course, will disagree with us. Most contemporary Christians cling to (3) in some form. The more acute of them agree with Talbott, however, in holding that (1)–(3) are inconsistent, and they thus either give up (1), or, far more often, (2). We cannot here pursue all the reasons why we think both of these moves are theologically and philosophically misguided. We will content ourselves by ending with a quote from the first author of a Protestant dogmatics, Philip Melancthon: 'We should strive finally to believe that the Son of God is mightier than all the might of devils and sin.'⁵¹

Notes

1. Book-length treatments of the doctrine include Jerry L. Walls *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992); Jonathan L. Kvanvig *The Problem of Hell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Thomas Talbott *The Inescapable Love of God* (Boca Raton FL: Universal Publishers, 1999); and Charles Seymour *A Theodicy of Hell* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000). Philosophical articles include: Richard Swinburne 'A theodicy of heaven and hell', in Alfred J. Freddoso (ed.) *The Existence and Nature of God* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 37–54; Eleanor Stump 'Dante's hell, Aquinas's moral theory, and the love of God', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 16 (1986), 181–198; William Lane Craig, "'No other name": a middle knowledge perspective on the exclusivity of salvation through Christ', *Faith and Philosophy*, 6 (1989), 172–178; Marilyn McCord Adams 'The problem of hell: a problem of evil for Christians', in Eleanor Stump (ed.) *Reasoned Faith* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); and various articles by Thomas Talbott, including 'Providence, freedom, and human destiny', *Religious Studies*, 26 (1990), 227–245; 'The doctrine of everlasting punishment', *Faith and Philosophy*, 7 (1990), 19–42; and 'Three pictures of God in Western theology', *Faith and Philosophy*, 12 (1995), 79–94.
2. See Talbott 'Three pictures of God in Western theology', and *idem The Inescapable Love of God*, 43–52.
3. Church historians commonly acknowledge that Lutheran Orthodoxy was heavily influenced by Anselm's theory of the Atonement; *vide* Jaroslav Pelikan *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 4, *Reformation of Church and Dogma, 1300–1700* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 359.
4. See G. W. Leibniz *Theodicy*, E. M. Huggard (tr.) (La Salle IL: Open Court, 1985), 291.
5. Most contemporary defenders of DLS base their argument, not on God's justice, but on God's inability – for metaphysical or moral reasons – to overcome the libertarian freedom of those who reject Him.
6. Talbott challenges efforts to defend DLS by appeal to libertarian freedom in 'Providence, freedom, and human destiny'; 'The doctrine of everlasting punishment'; 'Craig on the possibility of eternal

- damnation', *Religious Studies*, 28 (1992): 495–510; and 'Freedom, damnation, and the power to sin with impunity', *Religious Studies*, 37 (2001), 417–434. Eric Reitan also raises some important challenges in 'Universalism and autonomy: towards a comparative defense of universalism', *Faith and Philosophy*, 18 (2001), 222–246; 'Sympathy for the damned: Schleiermacher's critique of the doctrine of limited salvation', *Southwest Philosophy Review*, 18 (2002), 201–212; and 'Eternal damnation and blessed ignorance: is the damnation of some incompatible with the salvation of any?', *Religious Studies*, 38 (2002), 429–450.
7. Michael Murray goes so far as to call the view 'completely defensible'; See Michael J. Murray 'Heaven and hell', in *idem* (ed.) *Reason for the Hope Within* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 295.
 8. J. Gerhard *Loci Theologici* [hereafter *LT*], Preuss (ed.) (Berlin: Gustav Schlawitz, 1863), vol. 1, l. 2, cap. 8, sect. 12, 346–347; D. Hollaz *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum, Volumen Prius* [hereafter *ETA*] (Stargard: Ernest & Jenish, 1707, repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), pt 1, cap. 1, q. 44, 380–386; A. Calov *Systema Locorum Theologicorum; Tomus Secundus* (Wittenberg: Andre Hartmann, 1555), vol. 2, cap. 11, 565ff.
 9. See J. Baier *Compendium Theologiae Positivae* [hereafter *CTP*], C. F. W. Walther (ed.) (St Louis MO: Concordia, 1879), pt 1, cap. 1, §23, b. 40.
 10. Philip Melancthon *Loci Communes* (Wittenberg: Ionahhes Crato, 1555), tr. Clyde Manschreck as *On Christian Doctrine* (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1965), l. 8, 84–85.
 11. J. A. Quenstedt *Theologia Didactico Polemica* [hereafter *TDP*] (Wittenberg: Johann Ludolph, 1701) pt 1, vol. 1, c. 87, sect. 1, th. 35, 292.
 12. Melancthon *On Christian Doctrine*, l. 7, 102; Baier *CTP*, pt 1, cap. 1, §23, 39–40.
 13. Melancthon *On Christian Doctrine*, l. 7, 86, 99; Baier *CTP*, pt 3, cap. 7, §6, 344.
 14. Quenstedt *TDP*, pt 3, vol. 2, 228 as quoted in H. Schmid *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Charles Hay and Henry Jacobs (tr.) (repr. Minneapolis MI: Augsburg, 1961), 351.
 15. Jean Hampton and Jeffrey G. Murphy *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 122–143. For a defence of the view that the Lutheran Orthodox ascribed to this understanding of vindicatory justice, see I. A. Dorner *A System of Christian Doctrine*, pt 2, vol. 4, J. S. Banks (tr.) (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885), 22–24.
 16. L. Hutter *Loci Communis Theologici* [hereafter *LCT*] (Wittenberg, 1619), 406, as quoted in Schmid *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 347–348; cf. Baier *CTP*, pt 3, cap. 1, §5, 12.
 17. Thus, Baier remarks: 'For since the justice of God, having been injured (*laesa*) by sin, demands punishment or satisfaction from man, the grace or goodness of God does not make up the complete basis of our salvation'; *CTP*, prolegomena, vol. 1, §22b, 41.
 18. See Quenstedt *TDP*, pt 3, 1–2, as quoted in Schmid *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 278.
 19. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pt 1, q. 25, a. 3.
 20. See, for example, Gerhard, *LT*, vol. 1, l. 2, cap. 8, sect. 9, §200, 336; Quenstedt *TDP*, pt 1, vol. 1, 293, as quoted in Schmid *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 128; Hollaz *ETA*, pt 1, cap. 1, q. 46, 386–387; Baier *CTP*, pt 1, vol. 1, cap. 1, §25, 41.
 21. For an acute criticism of the retributivism of the older Orthodoxy by a Lutheran theologian, see A. Ritschl *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, vol. 3: *The Positive Development of Doctrine*, H. R. Mackintosh *et al.* (trs) (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1900), 40–53.
 22. On this, see Michael S. Moore 'The moral worth of retribution', in Jeffrey G. Murphy (ed.) *Punishment and Rehabilitation* (Belmont CA: Wadsworth, 1995), 94–131.
 23. See Immanuel Kant *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, Allen Wood and Gertrude Clark (tr.) (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 111–114.
 24. Presumably, then, mercy can be legitimately expressed only when justice warrants but does not require punishment. In all such cases, perfect love would presumably show mercy.
 25. We agree with James Cain's argument that endless punishment might nevertheless be finite in severity, but this possibility does not undermine our argument. If God's conditional intention is to save all assuming the demands of justice can be met, and if justice demands merely finite punishment, then God would surely opt to impose punishment in a temporally finite form so that He could save all creatures and meet the demands of justice. See James Cain 'On the problem of hell', *Religious Studies*, 38 (2002), 355–362.

26. See A. Ritschl *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, John Black (tr.) (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1872), 242–243; see also Dorner *A System of Christian Doctrine*, 22–24.
27. See, for example, Hutter *LCT*, 408, in Schmid *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 350.
28. See J. Gerhard *Disputationum Theologicarum* (Jena: Tobias Steinman, 1625), pt 1, 54, as quoted in Walther's edn of *CTP*, pt 3, vol. 2, 13.
29. Gerhard *LT*, vol. 3, 579, in Schmid *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 351.
30. For an excellent discussion of the inadequacies of claiming that endless punishment is infinitely severe, see Seymour *A Theodicy of Hell*, 53.
31. This second response is one Seymour fails to note. It provides, we think, a better answer to the Kantian view Seymour considers – namely, the view that an infinite succession of moments of suffering will be viewed by God, from his atemporal perspective, as a completed whole, and hence as infinite suffering.
32. See Gerhard *LT*, l. 2, cap. 7, sect. 10, §208, 338–339 in vol. 1 of the Preuss edn; Hollaz *ETA*, pt 1, q. 43, 379–380.
33. 'Quia attributa Dei non sunt aliquod accidens mutabile in Deo, sed ipsa ejus essentia, ideo amorem et dilectionem ejus, qua pios complectitur, oportet esse quiddam longe ardentius, quam nos cogitatione complecti possumus.'; Ecclesiastes 2.23: 'Quantus est Deus, tanta misericordia ejus.' At ipse infinitus, immensus, invariabilis, aeternus. Ergo etiam talis est ipsius misericordia, 'praevaluit super nos in aeternum.' Psalms 117.2. 'Ipsa non variatur nec mutatur, nisi nos mutemur, sicut sol manet idem, sed homines ab ejus luce et calore se advertentes beneficiis solis se ipsos privant.' Gerhard, *LT*, vol. 1, l. 2, cap. 7, §112, 298 in Preuss *LT*. Translation ours.
34. See M. Chemnitz *Loci Theologici*, J. A. O. Preus (tr.) (St Louis MO: Concordia, 1989), vol. 2, l. 8, cap. 3, 336–342.
35. See Ritschl *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, 249–250.
36. See Quenstedt *TDP*, pt 3, 244, in Schmid *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 352.
37. On this, see Richard Muller *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 1985), 272–273. For a detailed account of how the doctrine of Christ's active and passive obedience was worked out by older Lutheran and Reformed divines, see Ritschl *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation and Justification*, 248–263.
38. Not all Lutheran theologians agree that Lutheran Orthodoxy actually taught the doctrine of objective justification. Gottfried Fritschel (1833–1900) argued that the old Norwegian Synod and the Missouri Synod had departed from Luther and the Orthodox Lutheran divines in teaching this doctrine (see his 'Concerning objective and subjective atonement', in Theodore Tappert (ed.) *Lutheran Confessional Theology in America* (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1972), 141–165). A complete response to Fritschel is impossible here, except to note that the eminent Lutheran scholar, Gerhard Forde, contends that views such as Fritschel's betray the influence of pietistic 'subjectivism' in opposition to orthodox 'objectivism'; Gerhard Forde *The Law–Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of its Historical Development* (Minneapolis MI: Augsburg, 1969), 8.
39. See Quenstedt *TDP*, pt 3, 228, quoted in Schmid *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 360.
40. Quoted in Fritschel 'Concerning objective and subjective atonement', 149, n. 9.
41. See A. Hunnius *Epitome Credendorum* (1625), Paul E. Gottheil (tr.) as *A Concise and Popular View of the Doctrines of the Lutheran Church* (Nuremberg: Sebald, 1847), ch. 19, §522.
42. Charles Seymour would here object that eternal damnation can be explained by an infinite number of finite human sins. We take up this line of objection in the next section.
43. See, for example, Quenstedt *TDP*, pt 3, vol. 2, 518, in Schmid *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 436–437.
44. This was the position taken by Fritschel 'Concerning objective and subjective atonement', 150–160. For a powerful critique of this way of understanding the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, see Dorner *A System of Christian Doctrine*, pt 2, vol. 4, 209–217.
45. Calov makes this point in his commentary on Romans 5, quoted by Walther in *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, W. H. T. Dau (tr.) (St Louis MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), 274.

46. It is probably because they saw this difficulty that most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Lutheran theologians, who wished to be true to their Lutheran heritage, increasingly appealed to a strong doctrine of creaturely freedom as a way of reconciling (1) with (3), thereby denying (2). Cf. I. A. Dorner *A System of Christian Doctrine*, pt 2, vol. 4, 416–428.
47. Defenders of DLS might deny this conclusion by arguing that while all sin is finite in severity, the fitting punishment is nevertheless infinite in duration (if not in severity). But it seems that for any sin deserving a finite punishment there exists a *proportionate* punishment that is temporally delimited, and a God who wills the salvation of all would choose such a punishment over endless punishment so as to leave room for His salvific aim. To say otherwise would require one to defend two things: first, that of two proportional punishments (and hence two punishments that both meet the demands of justice) one can be more ‘fitting’ than another; second, that God prefers the more fitting punishment even at the cost of His salvific aim. While the former might be defended, it is hard to see how a God who could save the sinner without doing anything unjust but who favours the ‘fittingness’ of punishment over the salvation of the sinner could rightly be called perfectly loving in any plausible sense.
48. Seymour fully develops his defence of DLS in *A Theodicy of Hell*, and lays it out more succinctly in ‘Hell, justice, and freedom’, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 43 (1998), 69–86.
49. ‘Efficacious grace’ is the theological term for grace that necessarily moves the will to cling to God. The central element of efficacious grace is that it alone is sufficient to achieve the end of creaturely union with God. No *independent* choice of the creature is needed in addition. Such grace is consistent with the freedom of the creature in a compatibilist sense, since it moves the will of the creature to voluntarily cling to God, but it might not be consistent with libertarian freedom, depending on how such freedom is conceived.
50. For a list of representative challenges of this sort, see n. 6.
51. Melancthon *On Christian Doctrine*, l. 15, 188. We are indebted to Sean Hughes and Jeremiah Reedy for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.