

The Incredibility of Free Will Defenses of Hell

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In certain Christian circles, free will accounts are the go-to defenses of hell—and here I mean defenses of hell on which many humans are forever excluded from heaven. I blame C.S. Lewis, and particularly the “Hell” chapter of his *The Problem of Pain*, which has directly inspired some relatively recent, extremely popular defenses of hell, like the “How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell?” chapter in Timothy Keller’s best-selling *The Reason for God*,¹ and the treatment (that left me saddened and more than a bit surprised by its grim *lack* of hope) of the issue in N.T. Wright’s *Surprised by Hope*.² Christian *philosophers*, too, often reach for free will if and when they seek to defend awful doctrines of hell.³

In the “Fourth Meditation” of his new book defending universalism, David Bentley Hart sees the hope (not his word for it, and I admit it is odd to use “hope” where what is sought is so unbearably grim) for “infernalism” to be pinned wholly on the free will defense: “Hence, the only defense of the infernalist position that is logically

¹ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, Penguin Books, 2008.

² N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2008. I discuss Wright’s position in a (public) Facebook note, “N.T. Wright, Kingdom Come Christianity, and the Focus Problem,” at: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/keith-derose/nt-wright-kingdom-come-christianity-and-the-focus-problem/10150409724824991/>

³ Hart mentions two prominent philosophers here: “Christian philosophers as sober and respected as the Catholic thinker [Eleonore, to fix the spelling] Stump and the Reformed thinker Alvin Plantinga have argued that it does not lie in God’s power to assure that all will be saved, for the salvation of each person is contingent on his or her free choice, and God cannot compel a free act and yet preserve it in its freedom” (p. 182). He is right about Stump: She makes just such a claim in the paper Hart cites, and it plays a key role in her defense of hell. But I think he gets Plantinga wrong. At least, I don’t know of any place where Plantinga makes such a claim or argument—and Hart cites no place. And, indeed, it would be odd if he had, because Plantinga seems to have leaned toward universalism. (On this, see “Is the Soul Immortal?”, a segment of an interview of Plantinga in the *Closer to Truth* series.) Plantinga is of course famous for his free will defense, but this is a defense from the general problem of evil; to apply it specifically to the problem of hell would require added, very substantive claims (such as claims about the propriety of requiring free actions by persons in order for them to avoid hell). William Lane Craig famously (or infamously, depending on which circles one moves in in philosophy) applied Plantinga’s machinery specifically to the problem of hell in “‘No Other Name’: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ,” *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 172-188. Marilyn McCord Adams (a universalist Christian philosopher) pointed out some of the problems of Craig’s attempt in “The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians,” in E. Stump, ed., *Reasoned Faith* (Cornell UP, 1993): 301-327; at pp. 306-319.

and morally worthy of being either taken seriously or refuted scrupulously is the argument from free will” (p. 171). But this hope is dim, and is quickly snuffed out: “This argument too is wrong in every way, but not contemptibly so” (p. 172) we’re foretold, as Hart prepares to dispense with it.

I was surprised to find myself agreeing with much of Hart’s attack. “Surprised” because, while I join Hart in being a universalist, and in seeing little in thoughts about human freedom to render infernalism (in Hart’s term) believable, I do accept the libertarian account of human freedom which the free will defenses utilize, and much of Hart’s attack is an attack on this libertarian view of freedom that I share with the infernalists. It turns out, as I’ll urge here, that the problems with infernalism remain even if one grants its free will defenders their libertarianism—though this sometimes involves changing the charge against the infernalists to one of incredibility, rather than impossibility.

Hart may not see much value in this effort, as he seems (I’m just going by the book) to find libertarianism quite bankrupt. “Better to just talk folks out of this nonsense, than to show how it doesn’t help,” may make more sense to him. But I think this is based on a misunderstanding of libertarianism—or at least of it in its best form. So, while my aim will be to show how libertarianism doesn’t help infernalism, let us start by getting libertarianism right—or, well, in the form I like.

1. The Libertarian Account of Freedom vs. Hart’s “Classical” Account

After setting up free will defenses as the infernalist’s only hope at the end of Part II of his Meditation, the first thing Hart does to address these defenses at the start of Part III is to set up a contrast between two approaches to human freedom, first stressing the great gulf between them:

Given how very radically the standard late modern concept of freedom (we can call it the “libertarian” model) differs from that of most of ancient and mediaeval intellectual culture, I want to make sure that the matter has been made perfectly clear. (p. 172)

Hart then characterizes the two views. But I wonder about his construal of his opposition (especially, I suppose, since I am among them). I am particularly worried about what seems the main contrast that Hart alleges here, where Hart's own classical view comes first, and we then move to the libertarian account:

Freedom is a being's power to flourish as what it naturally is, to become ever more fully what it is. The freedom of an oak seed is its uninterrupted growth into an oak tree. The freedom of a rational spirit is its consummation in union with God.

Freedom is never then the mere "negative liberty" of indeterminate openness to everything; if rational liberty consisted in simple indeterminacy of the will, then no fruitful distinction could be made between personal agency and pure impersonal impulse or pure chance. (p. 172)

I take it all that's needed to get classified as a libertarian is thinking that freedom is incompatible with determinism, and yet thinking that we nonetheless often act freely (and so at least often aren't determined to act as we do). So, yes, someone who thought that *all* that freedom requires is a lack of determinism, and even one who went so far as to say that our free actions are a matter of chance, would belong in that big tent, and would count as a libertarian. But these would be odd libertarians.

Better forms of libertarianism are anxious to fruitfully distinguish between personal agency and chance, and hold that, while freedom is indeed incompatible with determinism, it is also at odds with our actions being just the upshot of random or chance events. We (more sensible, and more actual, libertarians) think our freedom hangs on there being something, and something pretty cool, between being determined by some outside force to act as we do, and our actions being just random or chancy.⁴ Making a very long story brutally short, we think, on at least what I think is the best common form of libertarianism, that in cases of free action, the agent themselves causes their decision to act (in cases where decisions are involved) and the act, where no previous events causally determine the agent to decide and to act as they do. On these "agent causation" views (so called because they involve the agent causing events to

⁴ OK, I admit that some using libertarianism in their apologies for hell just state the one side of this—the incompatibility of freedom with determinism—and don't say anything about more than a lack of determinism being needed for freedom. But in their cases, it seems best not to take their silence as an indication that on their view no more is required. Rather, they're just stating the ingredient of libertarianism that is active in their defense of hell, and not speaking to what else may or may not be required for freedom. In some cases, they may not have even considered whether something else may be required. But if libertarianism can be filled out in a more plausible way, that should be good for these defenders, whether or not they're aware of these further aspects.

occur in a way that is not reducible to event-event causal relations), the agent acts for reasons (at least in significant cases), and so not randomly or in a merely chancy way, but the agent's reasons don't *cause* them to decide or to act as they do. And, at least viewed from certain angles, that's exactly how the process of deliberation seems to go.⁵

How does this better form of libertarianism compare with Hart's "classical" account of freedom? This contrast remains: While we are still libertarians, and so incompatibilists, Hart thinks that God can completely assure that we act in a certain way, while that act remains a free one for us.⁶ My highlighting the "right" form of libertarianism doesn't erase that contrast; it only makes clear that in rejecting the determination of our free actions by things over which we have no control, we libertarians need not, and in the best cases do not, flee to the opposite extreme of mere chance.

But we should not miss another crucial difference, especially since it affects how free will defenses of infernalism can be seen to fail. One of the most notable features of Hart's view, at least to my libertarian eyes, is that our exercises of our freedom seem more securely valuable things for Hart than they are for me.

Don't get me wrong: Creaturely freedom is of immense importance to me as libertarian.⁷ But it naturally functions as a necessary ingredient of and a *precondition* for

⁵ As Timothy O'Connor, one of the most prominent current libertarians, describes the phenomenology of deliberate action, it fits well with the "agent causation" form of libertarianism that he advocates: "It does not seem to me (at least ordinarily) that I am caused to act by the reasons which favor doing so; it seems to be the case, rather, that *I* produce my decision *in view of* those reasons, and could have, in an unconditional sense, decided differently." That's O'Connor, "Agent causation," in T. O'Connor, ed., *Agents, Causes, and Events* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 173-200, at p. 196. Though it's now a quarter of a century old, I still recommend that paper to readers who can get their hands on it as a good statement of the agent causation approach to freedom.

⁶ Whether Hart's view is one of (divine) determinism seems tricky: It's apparently in some way an "of course" matter—but with Kantian complications: "For those who worry that this all amounts to a kind of metaphysical determinism of the will, I may not be able to provide perfect comfort. Of course it is a kind of determinism, but only at the transcendental level, and only because rational volition must be determinate to be anything at all" (p. 178). What's important for our purposes, though, is what I have in the text above: This all shakes out in such a way that God can completely assure that we perform some act, while we yet do it freely.

⁷ I think the best explication of the meaning of "free" in debates between compatibilists and incompatibilists, and in many other philosophical and theological settings, and so the account that best captures how libertarians use the term, makes use of examples that the debaters (or at least some key ones) can agree upon, on both sides of the line dividing the free from the unfree. So, you contrast ordinary actions, where it is agreed that the agent has the kind of control over their action that's needed for them to be at all morally responsible for it, with a case where even compatibilists agree that the agent is not responsible for what they have done (or apparently done), because they were caused to act as they did by an outside force (for the compatibilist, an outside force that did not work in the way that allows the agent to be free): perhaps cackling evil scientists have our agent's brain wired, and are

the realization of certain important values, and is no *guarantee* that anything of much value is gained by cases of our acting freely. Our lives may be quite empty if we're never free, but that doesn't mean just any free action is worth much.

For me, free actions that take us away from what we are intended to be are the reverse of valuable. For Hart, they're not free: "We are free not because we can choose, but only when we have chosen well" (p. 173).

Another potentially important kind of case: Even our good actions may not be *all that* valuable in cases where, though we are free, it is absurdly easy to freely act rightly. All sorts of caveats are needed here. Much depends on just how our agent got into a position where it was so easy for them to do good. If it was through years of often difficult right living, it may be wonderful that they now do right with ease. And not to be too individualistic about these values, this can hold if it was through years of effort by others, too, I suppose. And in other ways. So the suggestion is not that the value of free actions strictly correlates with how hard it is to get oneself to do them. There may be great value to be realized in schemes where many free actions, easy and hard, are performed. But it is to say that there can be a special value to be realized, at least on occasion, by actions that are not only free, but free and difficult. And also, that when we view God as seeking certain free actions, God probably does not only want that action performed freely. Rather, our freedom functions as a precondition for certain values that are perhaps best realized by our free actions taking place in situations where they are not only free, but especially valuable. I would hope that free will defenders would see these points as fairly obvious additions to their libertarian picture.

remotely causing them to perform certain actions. We then all say that for one's action to be "free" in the relevant sense is for it to have that (perhaps complex) property (a) the possession of which sometimes (in one natural use of the term: we are here fixing in on one meaning that "free" naturally takes on in some settings) leads us to call an action "free" (and the lack of which sometimes, in the same natural use of the term, leads us to deny that an action is "free"); is had by these actions and not by those (at least apparent) actions (in each case, referencing our examples); and (c) the having of which means that the agent has the kind of control over their action needed for them to be at all morally responsible for it. The incompatibilist then claims that to be "free" in that sense is incompatible with one's action being causally determined by things over which one has no control, while the compatibilist of course holds that being "free" in that same sense is compatible with being determined to act as one does—so long as the determination works in the right way (as it evidently does not in cases like that of the cackling scientists). So voilà, a substantive disagreement. I explain at greater length how I think "free" is best understood in these settings in *Horridic Suffering, Divine Hiddenness, and Hell: The Place of Freedom in a World Governed by God*, which currently exists only as a partial and rough draft that is available at: <https://campuspress.yale.edu/keithderose/1527-2/> .

2. Free Will Defenses of Hell, and the Question They Should Face

On free will defenses, the good God seeks for the sake of which They allow the possibility of evil, is free good actions. On free will defenses of hell in particular, the good God seeks is free ACCEPTANCE, we may say, where we use all-cap ACCEPT and its cognates for whatever it is that one must freely do to gain salvation and avoid hell. This varies from hell-defender to hell-defender, and some of them aren't as clear as one might like about just what one must freely do to make it to the party, but in many cases ACCEPTANCE seems fairly close to, you know, acceptance—acceptance or love of God and/or acceptance of the salvation They offer. But whatever exactly ACCEPTANCE amounts to, so long as a defense makes it something one must freely do, libertarian accounts of free will grant the key claim of the defense. Hart sees the defenders as arguing (I add the emphasis here) “that it does not lie in God’s power to **assure** that all will be saved, for the salvation of each person is contingent on his or her free choice, and God cannot compel a free act and yet preserve it in its freedom.”⁸ Hart attacks this claim; libertarians like me grant it. And that can seem a big difference. And perhaps for some purposes, it is. But I don’t think going with the libertarian here results in the credibility of infernalism.

For the free will defender of infernalism does not just face the question of why God doesn’t **assure** the salvation of all—as in, you know, render it completely impossible that any fail to be saved. Why did we get so stuck on that weak question, anyway? To avoid incredibility, they need an answer for why God doesn’t do better at getting more ACCEPTANCE than they report God as securing. And libertarianism doesn’t secure for them an answer there.

(The context here is that we have put away (at pp. 166-171) accounts on which God wants there to be damned persons for some awful purpose or other, and are considering free will defenses as the hope for squaring infernalism with a picture on which God wants each of us to be saved. The pressing question then is: Well, then, why doesn’t God get what They want? Free will defenses can explain why even God may not

⁸ p. 182. Many free will defenders, while libertarians, believe that God possesses comprehensive “middle knowledge.” On such “Molinist” schemes, God can assure (as I think “assure” works) that we act in certain ways, while we remain free—though which free acts God can assure depends on which conditionals of freedom are true. These defenders instead use the claim that *it’s possible that* God can’t assure the free acts They would otherwise want to run their defense. But I will here skip this complication, by simply construing free will defenders as arguing in the way Hart suggests—which I think is the more natural way for the free will defense to go, anyway.

be assured of complete success. Not to put too fine a point on it, the obvious comeback to this is: “Well, even so, why doesn’t God do better at getting more ACCEPTANCE?”)

Perhaps because the real question here is usually not squarely faced, answers are hard to come by. The two I can discern are truly incredible, at least in the forms in which I can see them. (If there are other answers I have missed, or better ways of developing the ones I’ve found, I will be happy to have provoked their advertisement.)

3. Free Will Pessimism

Lewis himself hints at a form of what we can call “free will pessimism”: Even if God were to pull out all the stops are really go for it, They would be unlikely to secure free ACCEPTANCE from those who in fact die without ACCEPTING. This hint comes in Lewis’s answer to the objection of why God doesn’t give us chances to ACCEPT after we die:

A simpler form of the same objection consists in saying that death ought not to be final, that there ought to be a second chance. I believe that if a million chances were likely to do good, they would be given. But a master often knows, when boys and parents do not, that it is really useless to send a boy in for a certain examination again. Finality must come some time, and it does not require a very robust faith to believe that omniscience knows when.

“Second chance” here clearly means a chance after death. I know many think of Lewis as holding that there are such second chances.⁹ If he did, here, in answer to this objection, would be the place to say: “Well, I do think there will be such chances!” Instead, we get the contortion above, which really seems to be suggesting instead that by the time of

⁹ Many, including Plantinga (see the “Is the Soul Immortal?” interview of Plantinga referenced in note 3, above), take Lewis to be advocating for further chances in his novel *The Great Divorce*. I think this is a mistake. Though the characters in the novel have the chance to move from hell to heaven, I think this is one of the “transmortal conditions” that, in his “Preface” to the novel, Lewis warns us are “solely an imaginative supposal: they are not even a guess or a speculation at what may actually await us.” Lewis makes this supposal, I think, to help drive home a main point of the book, which concerns how we get horribly stuck in various ruts that have us “choosing against joy.” How stuck can we get? So stuck that even if we were in hell and had the chance to move to heaven, we might well choose against doing so. I think that in the part of the “Hell” chapter of the non-fiction *The Problem of Pain* that we are now considering, Lewis suggests that he doesn’t believe in further chances (though see the following note).

their death, God knows, for each of the damned who have not ACCEPTED, that it would be useless to give them further chances to ACCEPT.¹⁰ This is to me so incredible on its face that I find myself straining for ways to make sense of it. Maybe Lewis's ACCEPTANCE—and he isn't at all forthcoming about just what one must freely do to avoid hell—is so thin and something so widespread (and so just about everybody will make it to heaven) that the only people who have failed to ACCEPT in this life are such hardened deniers that it actually is plausible to suppose they are permanently stuck in the way of DENIAL? But I *think* it's beyond the guile of Lewis to be using such an unexpected notion of ACCEPTANCE without giving warning.

Maybe I find it so incredible that God wouldn't be able to get more ACCEPTANCE in the life to come than They secure in this life because I'm picturing God actually trying to bring the DENIERS around. (Perhaps not unlike the shepherd in the parable of the lost sheep who "goes after" the wanderer. Hey, for how long does that shepherd go after the lost sheep before finally giving up? Oh, yes, at least in Luke: "until he finds it.") But Lewis's master seems to be just contemplating, but rejecting as useless, the possibility of only giving the lad another crack at the test: there's no mention of first unleashing the master's great pedagogical skills in some enlightening geometry lessons first. Maybe Lewis is construing these further chances as just giving the dead one more chance at making the choice of whether to ACCEPT (taking the exam without further lessons), in which case, it's maybe not so incredible to suggest that God doesn't let it happen that DENIERS die in a state such that just giving them another chance to ACCEPT would have a decent chance of working? But even if so, what we would then need an answer to is why God doesn't go beyond giving another chance to choose and, you know, help—make things clear, try to bring us around, maybe help us (maybe in a gentle way, if possible) get out of the ruts that keep us in DENIAL?

4. Autonomy Accounts

Which brings us to the free will defender of infernalism's best hope: autonomy explanations, where by this I mean the kind of account that Michael J. Murray picked up

¹⁰ At least that's how the passage reads to me. I suppose it could also be read as Lewis thinking further chances may be given to some, but that they will eventually run out when God sees that it's useless to offer still more chances. But this is also, to my thinking, a weirdly pessimistic view: Wouldn't God be able to win over just about everyone, given enough time?

from George Schlesinger's "The Scope of Human Autonomy," and then developed in his own attack on "Three Versions of Universalism."¹¹ Here, "autonomy" is probably best construed as a malleable notion that can be filled out in different ways (hoping that some way can be found which makes the idea work), but the main idea is that autonomy goes beyond merely acting freely (as libertarians, and those we typically argue with, use "free") to somehow having the real power, by means of one's free actions, to substantially determine the way that the world, or at least one's own world, turns out. One can be free in one's actions without having these kinds of autonomy. Consider the customer at the drive-through joint of an analogy of Murray's: They can freely order what they want, but if they order a hamburger, that's what they get; while if they order something else, they're sent back around to order again. Repeat as needed, until the "right" order is made.¹² When they finally order (and then get) a hamburger, they do so freely, but they don't seem to have had the real power, by means of their free choices, to obtain a different outcome. Freedom without autonomy doesn't seem so free here. Some such appeal to autonomy seems to have the potential to answer the crucial kind of question with which I ended section 3: God could have attempted the kinds of interventions I'm imagining while leaving us free, and almost certainly with success, but only at the cost of our autonomy. It's because God preserves our autonomy, and not just our freedom, that so many will be left out.

But this abstract apparent potential is hard to make good on. Once I start to push on the notion of autonomy in play, I can't get a credible defense of infernalism to emerge. Certainly not a credible Christian account. For the Christian God doesn't seem always so concerned about our autonomy, at least where autonomy is construed in a strong way. Many whom the infernalists would count as saved will report having been pursued by God in such a way that they felt they didn't have much real power ultimately

¹¹ George Schlesinger, "The Scope of Human Autonomy," in Kelly James Clark, ed., *Our Knowledge of God* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992): 215-223. Michael J. Murray, "Three Versions of Universalism," *Faith and Philosophy* 16 (1999): 55-68.

The best autonomy defense I know of is Jonathan Kvanvig's, originally in *The Problem of Hell* (Oxford UP, 1993) and later updated in *Destiny and Deliberation* (Oxford UP, 2011). However, in Kvanvig's hands, this isn't a defense of infernalism: On his view, annihilation, and not some infernal fate, is the bad outcome. I also suspect that Kvanvig does not think that as many will be excluded in the end as your typical infernalist supposes. (He seems open to the possibility that none will be.) But he faces the same question do as our infernalists: How could it happen that some fail to be saved? And he develops the autonomy approach to that problem--the "problem of non-heaven," we might call it--as well as you will find autonomy answers developed anywhere.

¹² In keeping with the basic structure of Murray's paper, whereby the same argumentative machinery is employed multiple times, with slight twists, as different versions of universalism are countered, different versions of this story are used; here we have the version that's toward the middle of p. 63.

to escape, though perhaps they could avoid ACCEPTING for a while. Or *are* these cases of autonomy? Though God acted in such a way that they would almost certainly eventually ACCEPT, were these sheep that God was going after nonetheless free to stay lost, and to stay in a state of lostness, and is the mere freedom to have attained this very different outcome (even if it was incredibly unlikely to be exercised as persistently as would be needed to successfully resist) enough to secure autonomy? If so, well, first, then it seems even our drive-through guy has autonomy. While the lousy fish sandwich he longed for (my addition to the story) wasn't in the cards for him, and while he was *almost* certainly going to end up accepting a hamburger, he was free to continue to reject the hamburger and attain some different outcome (of just circling around forever, or doing so until he ran out of gas, or died, or whatever happens in this example to one who just never goes for the hamburger). And if autonomy is that thin (if it's just mere freedom that can survive its being incredibly unlikely to be successfully exercised, but mere freedom by which one could possibly attain a very different outcome), it seems clear that God could secure a lot more ACCEPTANCE than They do, and more than infernalists construe God as securing, without violating our freedom *or our autonomy*. Surely God could intervene after death more effectively than They actually do before death, at least in the cases of many people, while leaving them merely free to never ACCEPT. Our pressing question isn't answered.

Or am I still not getting autonomy right? I need help from infernalists to grasp a way of working that out that is thin enough to render it plausible that the Christian God is not one to violate our autonomy, yet thick enough to explain why God doesn't get more ACCEPTANCE than infernalists suppose. And I'm skeptical this needle can be threaded, because I'm not seeing why, on such an account, God wouldn't do (after our deaths, if needed) for all something close to what just about any Christian sees God doing for some. That should work, at least a whole lot of the time. (And truth be told, my money is on all of the time, even as my views compel me to allow for the bare possibility of some failure.)

Hart would see clearly the reasons such defenses of infernalism are incredible, as those who have read his Fourth Meditation know, and Hart's account of freedom allows him to express the problems here more sharply. Such defenses of infernalism have God accepting tremendous costs in order to abide by some supposedly free choices¹³ made

¹³ Autonomy goes beyond, but still involves freedom. It's freedom that can effectively make for a great difference in outcomes.

largely by some badly messed up people. On Hart's view, that's incoherent, because those aren't even truly free choices. But if you're with me, rather than Hart, on freedom, you can still see with Hart the folly of supposing God accepts an infernally terrible ending to the story of salvation for the sake of those choices. You just have to instead say that those choices aren't really so valuable, even if you have to admit that, though pretty worthless, they are free. And you can see with Hart the incredibility of supposing God would fail to gain ACCEPTANCE where the choice of whether to ACCEPT is made in a valuable way, even if you think a choice could be free but still quite valueless.

5. An Alternative Account, from a Libertarian Universalist Perspective

Not just the defenders of infernalism, but I, too, think that, at least on some important ways of construing ACCEPTANCE, God wants our free ACCEPTANCE, but in many cases does not get it from us in this life. I like my account of why this is (or at least my start of such an account: it leaves a lot to be filled in) better than the ones we've been considering on behalf of infernalism. And it even connects up with a more general story of what this often horror-strewn life of ours is for.

God could no doubt get a very good rate of ACCEPTANCE by means of schemes which would leave us free to ACCEPT or not, but would make it absurdly easy for us to ACCEPT and extremely likely we would. Why does God instead leave us to choose in the messy, often difficult, circumstances of this often sad life, in which, God must have known, the chances of ACCEPTANCE are much lower? Why does God not, for each of us (as reportedly God does for some), directly intervene in our lives and clearly show us our options (while leaving us free to choose among them), instead leaving us faint hints, and often relying heavily on the not-always-so-entirely-beautiful feet of others to bring us good news?

The key to a reasonable account from a libertarian perspective is to recognize that while God does indeed want our free ACCEPTANCE, that can't be all that God wants here. That's more of a necessary precondition for what God is really shooting for, which is, at least in many cases, ACCEPTANCE which is not only free, but which is made under circumstances in which it is especially valuable. This will include circumstances in which

it isn't easy to do, or isn't so clearly the prudent choice, or for all one can clearly see may be all based on a lie, or is done through a valuable connection through a messenger. Something like this seems the way to go, because, first, as I've been stressing, if all They sought was our free acceptance, surely God could do better than this! And second, it just is plausible, isn't it, that free ACCEPTANCE can be especially valuable in such ways?

This fits in with a more general account of how God operates with us, Their free creatures, graciously working with us and through us, calling us forward, in advancing God's Kingdom (as some of us have been taught to talk) in many ways, including, but not limited to, bringing others into it, often doing so under tough circumstances, and realizing the special values that are scored when things are done in the muck and mire. In fact, if you think the life to come is one lacking in muck and mire, then realizing the special values that can only be realized in the muck and mire starts to look like a part of what this sad life must be for. This is our chance for that! Let's not blow it.

This should seem plausible for libertarian Christians generally, I would hope. So perhaps the free will defenders of infernalism, who seem to be in the market for a reasonable account of why God doesn't secure more free ACCEPTANCE in this life, can join in adopting such an account?

But it's a trap! It's fine for *me* to think God has this reason for at least sometimes making it hard for us to choose rightly in this life, because I think that when someone does not freely ACCEPT under the often tough circumstances of this life, they will be given the opportunity (or maybe opportunities, though I doubt more will be needed) to make a clear-eyed and clear-headed choice to ACCEPT under extremely favorable circumstances in the life to come in which it's almost unthinkable that they'll fail to ACCEPT.¹⁴ Why not? What's hard to see is why, after having us choose in tough circumstances where there may be special values so realized, but in which, predictably enough, there's a lot of bad choosing, God would consign those who chose badly to hell, rather than giving them another, more clear-headed (and actually free, if Hart is right about freedom) choice that they will almost surely (or just surely, for Hart, if I'm reading him right) make rightly.

¹⁴ Thus, I think it is overwhelmingly probable that all will freely ACCEPT, and thereby be saved, and I think this should be enough for me to count as a "universalist." If you disagree on that point of terminology, you can change the title of this section to "An Alternative Account, from a Libertarian *Near*-Universalist Perspective."

For, after all, as one should have been rather uneasily thinking as I was carrying on a couple of paragraphs above about how great it is to ACCEPT when doing so is difficult: “Hey, wait, if that’s so great, why is ACCEPTING made so easy for some?” This is an instance of a general problem for schemes on which special values are thought to be realized in various sorts of muck and mire, a nagging type of objection such schemes are subject to: “Well, then, why not *more* of that kind of muck and mire? Why do some of us ‘miss out’?” For instance, if Marilyn Adams is right that in the life to come, horrendous suffering from this life will be “defeated” for the sufferers in the way Adams claims,¹⁵ one might wonder why some of us then “miss out” on this opportunity by not suffering so horrendously? I think we just have to face up to it that, while there are special values of various kinds realized in various sorts of muck and mire, that doesn’t mean that it’s vital that each of us realize in our lives each of those types of values. This is perhaps best handled by a certain kind of collectivist view: while we don’t all realize each of the kinds of values in our lives, we will in the end be happy to be on a team, some of whom realized this kind of value in their lives, some of whom that kind, and some of whom yet another kind. Hooray for us! I find such team-oriented thinking comes naturally to me as a Christian, for I feel I’ve been taught by the gospels, and by some of Paul’s reflections, how centrally important it is to all of us that one of our teammates, one of us, actually won this damn game.

At any rate, somehow or other, I think we all have to reconcile ourselves to the thought that, however much value might be realized by difficult ACCEPTANCES, God does seem to accept easy ACCEPTANCES, too. Which makes it harder to understand why God wouldn’t arrange for a chance for easy ACCEPTANCES by those who did not ACCEPT in this often tough life—especially if what God is supposed to have done instead is consign those who don’t ACCEPT in this life to a horrible, infernal fate.

Thus, while Hart’s “classical” account of freedom makes for a case against the infernalists that is sharper, in the way noted in the last paragraph of section 4, I hope that my libertarian approach, by sharing the notion of freedom with these defenders of infernalism, can present an alternative, non-infernalist picture to them which can make better sense of the values I think come naturally to the libertarian account of freedom that I share with them.¹⁶

¹⁵ First in her paper, “Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 63 (1989): pp. 297-310; and then in her book of the same name, Cornell UP, 1999.

¹⁶ Thanks to Jonathan Kvanvig and to Samuel Watkinson for comments on an earlier draft of this.