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DIVINE JUDGMENT AND THE NATURE OF TIME

Patrick Toner

Many Christians believe that persons who, at the moment of death, are in rebellion from God, are damned, while those in right relationship with God are saved. This is what, for instance, the Catholic teaching regarding the fate of those who die in mortal sin amounts to. In this paper, I argue that this “last moment view” is incompatible with a popular theory of time known as eternalism, according to which all times are equally real. If that’s right, then those who accept the last moment view are committed to an alternative theory of time known as presentism.

Many Christians accept an account of the afterlife according to which the determining factor in the Divine judgment is the state of the person’s soul at death—I’ll call this account the “last moment view.” As far as I know, the clearest statement of the last moment view is in Catholic teaching, according to which, if a person dies in a state of mortal sin, then he is consigned to the “eternal death of hell.”¹ I will argue that the “eternalist” account of time is incompatible with the last moment view, and that, therefore, those who accept the last moment view are committed to “presentism.” (I’ll sketch out the meaning of this terminology in the paper’s first section.) The main target of my arguments will be eternalism in combination with the ontological view known as “perdurantism,” but, as I’ll briefly show towards the close of the paper, “endurantist” eternalists shall fare no better (or no worse, as the case may be) against my arguments than eternalists of the perdurantist persuasion.

I

Eternalism—the claim that all times are ontologically on par; that the present is no more real than the past or the future—stands in contrast to presentism, according to which the past is no more, and the future is not yet; only the present exists.² Thus, the dispute between eternalists and presentists is a dispute about the ontological status of times other than the present. Presentists think that only the present exists, while eternalists think all times exist. Another way of putting the presentist thesis is that presentists believe that only those things that exist *now*, exist at all (and further, that objects exemplify only those properties they exemplify *now*). Dinosaurs did exist once, but they don’t exist now, so they don’t exist at all.



Eternalists agree, of course, that dinosaurs don't exist now (or, if they don't agree, that's not because they're eternalists, but because they have some *additional* peculiarity), but they do believe that dinosaurs exist. They exist in the past, which is just as real as the future, which is just as real as the present.

A helpful comparison is often drawn between presentism and actualism. Just as the presentist thinks that only those things that exist now exist (or that an object exemplifies only those properties that it exemplifies now), the actualist holds that only those things that exist in the actual world exist. One can, similarly, compare the eternalist with the possibilist. Just as the eternalist believes that objects that don't exist now nevertheless exist, possibilists believe that objects that don't exist here (i.e. in the actual world) nevertheless exist.

We turn now to the persistence issue. Endurantists and perdurantists agree that (at least some) objects persist, or last, over time.³ (For example, I existed in 1975, and I exist now: I have persisted.) They disagree about *how* objects persist. Endurantists hold that persisting objects are wholly present at all times in which they exist. Perdurantists believe that persisting objects are, rather, spread out in time: they have temporal parts, and are not wholly present at any given moment of time. So assume that perdurantism is true: what accounts for my existing in both 1975 and 2002 is that I have a temporal part in 1975 and a temporal part in 2002; I am made up of all of my temporal parts. To understand what this means, just consider your spatial parts. What accounts for you being both in water and in air (at the same time) is that you have a part (your foot) in the water, and a part (your head) in the air. The perdurantist claims that temporal parts are just like spatial parts. Just as spatially extended objects have spatial parts in different places, temporally extended objects have temporal parts in different times.

Many philosophers accept perdurantism because of various metaphysical puzzles. One of the best known of these puzzles is the problem of temporary intrinsics, which David Lewis calls the "decisive objection against endurance."⁴

Persisting things change their intrinsic properties. For instance shape: when I sit, I have a bent shape; when I stand, I have a straightened shape. Both shapes are temporary intrinsic properties; I have them only some of the time. How is such change possible?

The trouble here, Lewis thinks, is that it is a contradiction for one thing to have both the property of sitting and the property of standing. Lewis believes that the only plausible way to solve the problem is by invoking perdurance, according to which it is not one thing that has these contradictory properties, but, rather, it's different things that have them—one temporal part has the property sitting, and another has the property standing.

Presentists, as you would expect, do not find this objection decisive. As we'll see, the problem of temporary intrinsics is importantly relevant to my argument below, so I will briefly outline a good presentist reply to the problem. Look again at the problem: if it is possible for persisting objects

to change, then it is possible that a persisting object *O* is *F*, and that in the past, *O* was $\sim F$. Thus, it seems, *O* is both *F* and $\sim F$. And that's not good. Presentists avoid this problem by insisting that an object exemplifies only the properties it has at the present. There is no contradiction, then, because *O*, if it is now *F*, is no longer $\sim F$, even though it once was.⁵ This will be important in what follows.

It is, I think, relatively uncontroversial that perdurance entails eternalism.⁶ To see why, imagine that presentism is true. Then, if perdurance is true and I am the sum of all my temporal parts—but only the present part exists—I am not a persisting thing at all, but simply an instantaneous blip. After all, how could I have parts that don't exist? But perdurance is supposed to be a theory of *persistence*, so it isn't compatible with presentism. Thus, not only do we see that perdurance entails eternalism, we also see that presentism entails endurance.

It's not, however, entirely clear that endurance and eternalism are incompatible. Indeed, some very good philosophers believe these doctrines are compatible. I'm inclined to think they are mistaken, but we needn't settle that dispute here.⁸ We'll put that combination of views aside, and return to it later. For the time being, I will argue against perdurance—on the understanding that perdurance entails eternalism.⁹ Also, until further notice, when I speak of endurance, I shall mean endurance combined with presentism. Once I have shown that the last moment view rules out perdurantist eternalism, I shall then briefly take up the question of whether endurantist eternalism can escape my arguments. I don't think it can.

II

Those who accept the last moment view believe that a person's moral state at the time of his death is the determining factor in his fate—God assigns people their place in either heaven or hell on the basis of his judgment of the state of the soul at death. The Catholic Church, again, teaches that one who dies with unconfessed mortal sin on his soul is damned. Now consider of a fairly standard complaint about the Catholic teaching on mortal sin and damnation.

Imagine that Wendy has been a good and faithful Catholic all her life, but that one day she returns home from work to find her husband in bed with the mailman. Wendy kills her husband with the very heavy mailbag she happens to find handy. Let's stipulate that this is a mortal sin. (It meets the three conditions of grave matter, full knowledge and deliberate consent.¹⁰) Then, Wendy, still in a rage, runs to her car and drives away, but soon crashes her car and dies.

The objector closes the story by asking: "do you really think God would send someone who had lived such a very good life to hell for just committing one sin right at the end?" The response Catholics tend to offer is:

This person, by committing a mortal sin, has willfully separated herself from life in Christ. She has decided to sever her right relation-

ship with God. We can lament the fact that she died just when she did, and not three hours earlier, or three hours later, after repenting and receiving sacramental absolution. But, she did die in mortal sin, and so she must bear the burden of her free decision. No one, after all, has a right to go to Heaven.

The responder may not himself be satisfied with that answer. The doctrine of hell is troubling, and deeply mysterious; pat answers like this one don't really help us come to terms with the enormity of what's at stake. But that doesn't mean the pat answer isn't right, as far as it goes. What the answer brings out to the objector is that the person who dies in a state of mortal sin *is* in that state when she stands before God. It's true that there *was* a time when she was not in that state; and if she had lived longer, she *might have* gotten out of it. But at the time of her death, she is in mortal sin—she has rejected God.¹¹

Consider, however, how the pat answer would go if it were being voiced by a perdurantist. The perdurantist has to claim that the reason we say that Wendy died in mortal sin is that the temporal part that died was in mortal sin. But now consider what it is that stands before God for judgment: it's one of Wendy's temporal parts—not Wendy as a whole. That's just the perdurantist view. But, also on that view, the temporal part standing before God is not in any way ontologically privileged. The temporal parts that Wendy had prior to her mortal sin and subsequent death are just as real as the one that is standing before Him for judgment.

The problem is obvious. Since all of Wendy's temporal parts are ontologically on par, it is grossly unjust for God to arbitrarily pick only one as the standard of judgment and ignore the others. There is nothing special about that last temporal part of her earthly life, other than that it happens to be the one that dies. The perdurantist view entails that Wendy's temporal part that immediately followed her baptism is just as real as the one that died in mortal sin. What could justify God's ignoring Wendy's parts that are in a state of grace, and paying attention only to the one(s) in mortal sin? This is surely a problem for the perdurantist.

I spoke above of "the last temporal part of Wendy's earthly life," and perhaps implied that it is *this* temporal part that is judged. Nothing important in my argument depends upon whether God's judgment actually occurs at the very moment of death, or at some later time. If the former, then it is of course the last temporal part of our earthly life that is judged. If the latter, then some later temporal part is judged. This isn't a problem, since, when a person commits a mortal sin, her subsequent temporal parts will all be in mortal sin until the sin is repented of. And according to the last moment view, the time for repentance ends at death. So, the crucial point is that whatever part is judged is in precisely the same condition—in terms of its relationship with God—as that last living temporal part. For ease of expression, I will use the term "last temporal part" in this paper, but I mean this locution to be open to the interpretation that it is not one's last earthly temporal part that is judged, but some later one that is necessarily in the same moral state as that last earthly one.

It is also, perhaps, worthwhile to note here that it makes absolutely no

difference to the person who holds the last moment view *when* the person got into the state in which he died. That is, if, instead of dying immediately after killing her husband, Wendy had lived another 60 years, and then died without repenting for that sin, she would have died in a state of mortal sin. Conversely, if Wendy had committed the murder, repented immediately, and then died in the next instant, she would have died in the state of grace. The proximity of death to sin is immaterial.

So, with these points well in hand, let us return to the argument. At first sight, it might appear that the endurantist faces the same problem that I've pressed against the perdurantist. After all, I've said that Wendy had lived most of her life as a faithful Catholic. Why should God ignore all that time and focus only on Wendy's last moment? This seems just as unfair and arbitrary. But it isn't. Assume endurantism is true. So when Wendy dies and stands before God for judgment, *Wendy* is standing before God: not *part* of Wendy—just Wendy. God could choose no other part as the standard of judgment; no other part exists.

I will soon discuss a number of ways that eternalists might respond to this problem. Before I take up those responses, however, I want to take some care to be perfectly clear about how different things really are for the presentist and the eternalist.

Here it is imperative that we keep clear what serves as the standard of judgment. On the last moment view, it is the *state of the soul* that is the determining factor. Thus, if the soul is in a state of grace, the person is saved, and if the soul is in a state of mortal sin, the person is damned.¹² If, however, we were to think of the determining factor in the judgment as something like "facts" about persons, or propositions about persons, then it would appear that presentism is just as difficult to reconcile with last-momentism as is eternalism. Assume that the judgment is based on facts about the person, rather than on the state of the person's soul. Then, on the eternalist view, there is the fact that ten minutes before her death, Wendy was in a state of grace, and there's the fact that at the moment of her death, Wendy was in a state of mortal sin. Both of these facts are equally real.

Now, I've argued that, if eternalism is true, it would be unjust for God to condemn Wendy on the basis of just the last moment of her life. But, still assuming that the judgment is based on facts, we can see that the presentist admits just the same things that the eternalist admits. The presentist does not deny that there is the fact that ten minutes ago, Wendy was in a state of grace, and that at the moment of her death, she was in the state of mortal sin. So how is the presentist any better off than the eternalist?

This objection is premised on the false assumption that God judges facts instead of people. Once that assumption is rejected, the presentist's advantage becomes quite clear. If the standard of judgment is the state of the soul (i.e., whether it has the property *in a state of mortal sin* or *in a state of grace*), and the *only* state of a person's soul that exists is the state of the soul at the last moment, then it's obvious that there is no arbitrariness in selecting that state as the standard. What other state could be selected? Think back to the presentist reply to the problem of temporary intrinsics. The reason there is no contradiction in saying that Wendy *was* in a state of sin, and *is* in a state of grace, is that she exemplifies only the properties she has

at the present. That state of sin is gone, and so does not contradict the present state of grace. Here, the comparison of presentism to actualism becomes quite illuminating. In an important sense, the fact that at a past time Wendy was in a state of sin is no more morally relevant than is the fact that in another possible world, Wendy is a child pornographer. There is, plausibly, this fact about her, but it is not taken into account in her judgment. So the presentist is able to make sense of the justice of God's judging the state of the soul at its last moment.

The perdurantist cannot so easily avoid the problem of the last moment view, for on her view, God has a vast assemblage of states from which he could select when he judges someone's soul. The person's whole life is stretched out in time. And the fact that God just picks one moment of that life as his standard of judgment seems disturbingly arbitrary. Think again of the comparison between eternalism and possibilism. Here, we'll take up the modal realist version of possibilism made notorious by David Lewis. Suppose that modal realism were true, and Wendy were a transworld individual. (Of course, Lewis himself denies the existence of transworld individuals in favor of counterpart theory, but that's not the point.) If Wendy were a transworld individual, and modal realism were true, then she would have as parts all the Wendies in all the worlds in which she existed, just as, according to perdurantists, Wendy is made up of all her temporal parts, which exist at all times at which she exists. Now imagine that God judges this transworld Wendy based on her moral status in one, arbitrarily selected world, completely ignoring her other parts. That would obviously be unjust. It is my contention that this grossly unjust situation exactly parallels the view of the perdurantist last momentist.

Even if this is all granted, however, the fact that Wendy died when she did, and not later or earlier, might still be pressed against the endurantist as a problem for God's justice: how can the endurantist explain how a loving God could let Wendy die just at the time when she was in mortal sin? Why didn't he let her die earlier, or prolong her life until she repented? That question is difficult—if not impossible—to answer well. So this objection might seem to balance the scales; my argument shows that it's difficult to reconcile perdurantism and the last moment view, but this objection shows that it's difficult to reconcile endurantism and the last moment view.

That's not quite right, though. This objection, if it applies at all, applies equally to anyone who accepts the last moment view—endurantist or perdurantist. The perdurantist last momentist also has to explain why God would allow one of Wendy's mortally sinful temporal parts to die when there are so many that aren't in mortal sin. So the objection I raise to perdurantism is different than, and in addition to, this one.

Thus far, the argument stands—perdurantism is, *prima facie*, incompatible with the last moment view. In the next section, I will consider several further possible replies to my argument.

III

One's first inclination might be to respond to my argument by postulating that even on the perdurantist view, God judges *Wendy*, and not just one of

her temporal parts: he looks at all of her temporal parts (that is, he looks at *her*) and weighs those in the state of grace against those in mortal (and original?) sin. Then he decides her fate.

This avoids the arbitrariness problem, to be sure. But the “solution” unambiguously rejects the last moment view, and so is no threat to my argument, which quite openly relies upon the assumption of the truth of the last moment view. It hardly counts against my argument that it can be undermined by the denial of one of its presuppositions. The truth of the last moment view is not on the table here.

However, this solution can be adjusted: indeed it has to be adjusted if it is to work even on a perdurantist view. For how could St. Dismas—the “good thief”—have been saved, as we know he was, when he had a whole lifetime of evil temporal parts, and just a few good temporal parts? Surely, any “weighing” account of the afterlife would have to consign St. Dismas to hell. The only way for the present solution to avoid sending St. Dismas—and many others who experienced “deathbed conversions”—to hell, is for it to assign some special weight to the last temporal part; but that’s precisely what it is so difficult for a perdurantist to do.

If it’s possible to put together a “weighing account” according to which the last temporal part is decisive despite being ontologically on par with the rest, then my argument fails. There are five ways one might try to assign special weight to the last moment.

First, one could claim that, despite St. Dismas’s lifetime of sin, the one moment of grace at the end is sufficient to outweigh all the evil. The special weight is accorded to the last moment not in virtue of its being the last moment, but simply in virtue of the overwhelming weight of God’s grace.

This claim has a tug to it, but it cannot be right. For consider a man who lives his whole life—say 72 years—in sin, except for two weeks around his 30th birthday, when he had a genuine conversion experience. However, like the seed that fell on the rocky soil, this man’s faith quickly dried up and died. The man went back to his life of sin, repudiated Christ, and never repented again. If this scenario is possible—and as far as I can tell, anyone who accepts the last moment view would think it is—then the proposed solution cannot work. For the weight of grace during the two weeks of this man’s discipleship should overwhelm the lifetime of sin, just as the weight of grace in St. Dismas’s last moment overcomes the lifetime of sin. But, in the case of our 72 year-old, it doesn’t. So it can’t in the case of St. Dismas, either.

Secondly, perhaps the last temporal part ought to be assigned special weight specifically because at that moment, the person knows he is readying himself to die and face judgment. This objection claims, then, that (e.g.) St. Dismas knew he was dying, and, facing his death, decided to recognize his sin and ask for God’s forgiveness through the mediation of Jesus Christ. The special weight is not assigned to the last moment simply in virtue of its being the last moment, but rather in virtue of its being recognized as the last moment.

This objection may have some force in cases where the person sees his death coming. But what do we say about a person who is struck down without any warning? Consider Alfred, a 30-year-old man who has a heart

attack and simply drops down dead, without having had any way of knowing what was about to happen. Can Alfred's last temporal part be accorded special weight in his judgment? Not for the reason proposed above, at any rate.

Third, one could speculate that, in cases like Alfred's, there is a "moment of clarity" when the dying person is given one last chance to turn to God: such moments have been suggested with respect to, for example, unbaptized babies, who I take it, are thought to receive some kind of infused knowledge which allows them to give or withhold their informed consent.¹³ This proposal suggests that it only appears that Alfred has died without any warning, but in fact, at the very moment of his death, God offered him a last chance to repent of his sins. Presumably, someone who is offered such a last chance would also know it as a last chance, so this proposal successfully explains why the last temporal part can fairly be accorded decisive weight.

However, if someone is going to take up the moment of clarity line, he'll have to hold that God extends this chance to everyone. After all, the last moment view is supposed to be true for everyone. So if we render it compatible with perdurantism by means of this moment of clarity line, we'll have to say that, in fairness, everyone gets this "last chance."

Some might take the resultant certainty of having such a last chance to be a comfort—but it certainly isn't the picture of Divine judgment that those who hold the last moment view generally seek to inculcate. We believe that we ought to be sober and watchful: "You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (Luke 12:40.¹⁴) What could the point of such teaching be, if the solution under consideration is correct? Such a "comforting" solution isn't in conformity with the Gospel. It allows people to postpone repentance until the last minute. This is not the view of our need to be converted that our Lord preached. He was quite clear that we must be prepared at all times—again, the Son of man is coming at an hour we do not expect.

A fourth suggestion. I've just argued that the Gospel tells us to be ready. What if this warning itself justifies God in judging only the last temporal part? That is, since God has revealed to us that he will judge us based on the state of our soul at our last moment, and since he has revealed to us that we need always to be ready for our last moment, it is just for him to judge us based solely on our last temporal part. God has laid down the law, and it is not for us to question it. This objection, I think, has the most force of the objections I've considered. However, it faces a problem of its own.

God could surely lay down the law that he'll judge us based solely on the moral status of our last temporal part; he could just as well lay down the law that he'll judge us based solely on the moral status of one of our temporal parts he chooses entirely at random. He could have made the law this: when a person comes before God for judgment, God blindfolds St. Peter and asks him to point at one of that person's temporal parts; whichever one is picked is the one God bases his judgment on. If that were the way God ran things—even if he had revealed that process to us in advance—we'd still think that there was something terribly wrong with the process. I don't think it's any different if God lays down the law that,

instead of randomly choosing some part in the person's life, he'll just pick the last one every time.

Here we must return to the very first objection I raised against my claim: that the perdurantist is in no worse shape than the endurantist. If it's not just (assuming perdurance) for God to look at only the last temporal part and none of the others, how can it be just (assuming endurance) for God only to look at Wendy only in the state in which she ended her life, and at no other time? Why shouldn't he consider all the time she spent in a state of grace?

The answer is the same as before. Again, it's because there just isn't any other state for him to look at. Those times are gone. There's just Wendy. The "be ready" law makes perfect sense in the context of endurantism, since there is nothing arbitrary about it. God tells us to be ready because he'll judge us based on the state of our soul at the last moment: the reason he makes that choice is that there is nothing else there for him to judge. But the "be ready" law isn't just when combined with perdurantism. We want to know why God would think it fair to ignore all those other, equally real, parts and look only at one.

The final attempt to put decisive weight on the last temporal part is this. What if the last moment can be weighed more heavily than the rest because it is the state towards which all the others lead? Time moves from earlier to later, so one's last temporal part is the end of one's life story. Since it has this character as the end to which the others lead, it might be thought to be peculiarly special. I suppose the objection might be understood as making the last temporal part into something like an Aristotelian final cause.

This objection fails because it just seems *wrong* to think that somehow Wendy's whole life was leading up to her death in a car wreck immediately after the commission of a mortal sin. Surely, it is entirely possible that Wendy have died in a car wreck on her way home, in which case she wouldn't have walked in on her husband's liaison, wouldn't have killed him, and so wouldn't have died in mortal sin. Such an ending isn't inconsistent with Wendy's story—indeed, given that I've said that Wendy lived her whole life as a faithful Catholic, it's the kind of ending that we'd be much more likely to expect. If we want to retain a sufficiently robust appreciation for God's ability to do wonders in people's lives, we have to reject the idea that a life is tending inexorably in one or another direction. Or, rather, though we might admit that a life surely *tends* in one direction, that tendency is not in any sense a guarantee of the kind of ending that we would expect. But it seems to me that in order to invest the last moment with the kind of weight one would need to invest it with to get the objection to work, one would have to see that last moment as the one fixed point towards which all others were progressing. That can't be.

One final objection that might be raised to my argument is the following. I have consistently spoken of sinners being damned—my focus, thus, has been on God's judgment of sinners, to the effect that they merit damnation. This way of seeing damnation has been called a "retributivist" view. In Jonathan Kvanvig's formulation, the Retribution Thesis is "The justification for hell is retributive in nature, hell being constituted to mete out pun-

ishment to those whose earthly lives and behavior warrant it."¹⁵ This Thesis is not universally accepted in Christendom. C.S. Lewis, for example, has quite famously argued for what Kvanvig calls the Self-Incarceration Thesis, according to which "an eternal stay in hell is the direct result only of the choices one makes, rather than a result imposed by some outside power such as God."¹⁶ The self-incarceration thesis might help a perdurantist last momentist avoid charging God with injustice. After all, if this is the way things work, then God doesn't unjustly condemn people to hell on the basis of just their last temporal part, because the people do that on their own.

For assume that a non-retributivist view of hell is correct, according to which it is not the case that God condemns sinners to hell, but, rather, it is that sinners freely turn away from God. The perdurantist non-retributivist might say that eternal separation from God is due to a free choice made by a person (or, rather, made by some temporal parts of a person) sometime before the moment of her death, in which all the following parts concur. Thus, the eternal separation is not based on God's decision to judge the last temporal part, but solely on the free decision of the person. So there is no unfairness or arbitrariness that can be attributed to God.

The non-retributivist view of hell is attractive, but there is a problem with this objection. Before I turn to that problem, I need to make a theological point. Non-retributivism may not be consistent with the way the Church has traditionally understood the judgment.¹⁷ The Church has always held that God judges the person based on the state of his soul at his last moment, but non-retributivism denies that there is any judgment. Instead, the damned freely choose to separate themselves from God. (Though, presumably, God concurs with the sinner's wishes, and does not violate his free decision to eternally separate himself from God.) Now, surely, the last-momentist (or, at least, the Catholic last-momentist) wants to affirm that God predestines nobody to hell, and that therefore the sinner does indeed freely separate himself from God.¹⁸ But that free separation occurs at the time of the mortal sin (though it is at least implicitly reaffirmed in each succeeding moment at which the sinner fails to repent)—not at the moment of judgment. In short, I'm not sure non-retributivism is consistent with Catholic teaching, so many believers in the last moment view will likely not be moved by this objection.

Despite worries about the larger picture of the last things, it remains entirely possible to accept the last moment view, understood as the claim that one's eternal destiny depends upon the state of one's soul at the moment of death, and still deny that God judges. In other words, the last moment view itself is separable from any claims about whether God sends sinners to hell, or whether they send themselves. This seems like a plausible enough claim (leaving open the question of its compatibility with Catholic doctrine). So if we avoid conflating the last moment view with any claims about the mechanism of the "judgment" (or lack thereof), then the last moment view is compatible with non-retributivism, and so, the objection continues, the last moment view is, thereby, also compatible with perdurantism.

This still does not do the trick. The question that has plagued perduran-

tist last momentism throughout this paper remains, though now in a slightly different form. Previously, I've argued that it is not just for God to condemn a person to hell on the basis of one temporal part, when that part is in no way more real or more important than any others. The proponent of non-retributivist perdurantist last momentism (a label which itself calls out for Divine reprobation), avoids the problem in this formulation, but a variant of the problem remains. How can it be just for God to have structured the assigning of eternal abodes in such a way that a person's choice about where to go will be based solely on the state of that person's soul at her last moment, when there are so many other moments in that person's life that are equally real? The perdurantist has to give an answer to this question: if Wendy freely chooses to go to hell because she has died in mortal sin, how is that better than if she is sent to hell because she has died in mortal sin? In either case, God has set things up to run as they do. In either case, it is difficult to see how it can be just for the last temporal part to carry the day, when there are so many others that are just as real. So I do not believe non-retributivism helps.

IV

I hope that I have shown adequately that perdurantism is incompatible with the last moment view. The point of the paper, however, is to show that *eternalism* is incompatible with the last moment view. So my job is not yet done. What remains will go quickly, though, given what's come before.

If eternalism is compatible with endurantism, then the problem with the last moment view becomes a little different. On this view, God wouldn't be judging just a temporal part of Wendy. He'd just be judging Wendy, who would be wholly present before him. However, it's difficult to conceptualize exactly how this scenario plays out. The endurantist eternalist is wont to say that persons "sweep through" time. It's not clear just what this means.

If the view is that there really are persons somehow wholly present at every moment at which the person exists, then it runs into exactly the same problem that perdurance runs into. For on this view, Wendy would be wholly present both in 1989 and in 2002, and every time in between. So when God judges Wendy at a certain time, there are innumerable other Wendies out there, just as real as the one facing judgment. Well, then, we'll want to know how it can possibly be just for God to select this Wendy to judge instead of all the others. And the arguments against this view will be just the same as the arguments against the perdurantist last momentist.

Further, the endurantist eternalist, in order to avoid the problem of temporary intrinsics, has to somehow time-index properties.¹⁹ So if Wendy is in a state of mortal sin at t , and a state of grace at t_1 , then he Wendy that stands before God for judgment has both those properties: she has the property *in a state of mortal sin at t* , and *in a state of grace at t_1* . Which one is God supposed to see as more morally relevant? And why?

It seems quite clear, then, that if the arguments against the compatibility

of perdurantism and last momentism are successful, then it is also clear that last momentism is incompatible with endurantist eternalism.

As a final note, let me point out that, if the last moment view entails presentism, and Catholicism teaches the last moment view, then Catholic teaching entails presentism. However, many philosophers think presentism is incompatible with Divine timelessness;²⁰ and Divine timelessness is also, or so it seems to me, Catholic dogma.²¹ If my arguments here are sound, then, on the assumption that Catholic dogma is consistent (an assumption I am quite prepared to make), these thinkers are wrong: presentism is indeed compatible with Divine timelessness. Now there's just the small matter of how.

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NOTES

1. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ¶ 1861. Two clarificatory points about damnation. First, I shall speak throughout this paper as though I believe there are people in hell. Indeed, I know that there is at least one person in hell—Satan. I do not know, however, whether there are any human persons in hell. My argument, however, depends only upon the *possibility* of human beings going to hell.. Second, it has been suggested to me that I should not speak of people being in hell (or, for that matter, in heaven) *now*, since people go to heaven or hell only after the final judgment. I disagree with this theological claim, which seems inconsistent with Catholic doctrine (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ¶ 1022). But again, nothing important in my argument turns on one's view of whether there are currently people in either heaven or hell.

2. These doctrines are not to be confused with the A theory (or tensed theory) and B theory (or tenseless theory). The A theory is thought by some to be identical with presentism, but this is false. There are A theorists who are not presentists. And it looks as though McTaggart himself understood the A theory to be essentially the "moving spotlight" form of eternalism.

3. The terminology I use here is David Lewis's. Cf. *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1986), 202.

4. *Ibid.*, 203.

5. This argument is taken from Trenton Merricks, "Persistence, Parts, and Presentism," *Nous* 33 (1999), 421-438. See also Merricks, "Endurance and Indiscernibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 91 (1994), 165-184; and Dean Zimmerman, "Temporary Intrinsics and Presentism," in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 206-219.

6. Theodore Sider suggests that perdurance is compatible with presentism, though he notes that nobody accepts this combination. More importantly, he also notes that the definition of perdurance he proposes in order to make the two views compatible is quite plausibly not perdurantism at all. Cf. *Four Dimensionalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 71-73.

7. This argument is from Merricks, "On the Incompatibility of Enduring and Perduring Entities," *Mind* 104 (1995), 523-531.

8. For arguments that endurantism is incompatible with eternalism, see Trenton Merricks, "Persistence, Parts, and Presentism," "Endurance and Indiscernibility," and "On the Incompatibility of Enduring and Perduring Entities." For an argument that the two views are compatible, see Sider, *op.*

cit., 63-68, and 70.

9. If Sider is correct, and perdurance is compatible with presentism, then my arguments against eternalist perdurance would not apply to that combination of views.

10. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ¶ 1857. Bear in mind that it is impossible for (human) person P to know whether an act committed by Q is a mortal sin. P can recognize, for example, that the matter is objectively grave. But P has no way to know whether Q has adequate understanding: perhaps Q is mentally ill in a way that is not discernible to P; such mental illness might deprive Q of the ability to deliberately and knowingly consent to the sinful act. It is, of course, possible to construct an example in which someone has committed a mortal sin. This is done just as I have done it: by simply stipulating that the act meets the relevant conditions. But in the real world, we never know of anyone's acts *other than our own*, if they are mortal sins.

11. Any mortal sin is a rejection of God. The sinner may consciously acknowledge this rejection, or he may not. For a good treatment of this, see Germain Grisez and Russell Shaw, *Fulfillment in Christ* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), ch. 16.

12. The word "soul" needn't mean an immaterial object, and so one needn't accept dualism of any kind in order to affirm all of this.

13. Cf. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1974), 114. I believe that it has been claimed that insane or mentally retarded people may also be granted this moment of clarity in which to choose for or against God.

14. The parable and its explanation are found at Lk 12:35-48. The parallel is Mt 24:36-51. See also Mt 25:1-13, the parable of the ten virgins. St. Paul offers a similar warning in 1 Thess 5:1-11, as does St. Peter in 1 Pt 3:8-13. And St. Peter's great admonition to "be sober and watchful" also springs to mind in this context. (Cf. 1 Pt 5:8) One might be tempted to argue that these passages hardly prove the reality of a place of eternal punishment: these are not convincing prooftexts for the existence of hell. That may be true, but I am not using them to prove anything about the existence of hell. I am *assuming* that hell is a real possibility. Given that assumption, the natural way to read these passages is as implying that failure to be ready puts one in real danger of damnation.

15. Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 25.

16. *Ibid.*, 102. For Lewis's view, Kvanvig cites a passage in *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

17. Retribution appears to me to be authoritatively taught by the Church. On the reality of Divine judgment, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ¶ 1051, 1022; and Ott, *op.cit.*, 492-494, 475-476. The Church teaches that there are two judgments, the Particular and the General. To assert a self-incarceration view appears to me to drain these judgments of any kind of, well, judgment. I must confess, however, that a somewhat more authoritative interpreter of Catholic teaching than I—Pope John Paul II—has recently taught, in his general audience address of July 28, 1999 (which, I note, is not part of the ordinary magisterium), what sounds very much like non-retributivism: "(Damnation) is not a punishment imposed (...) externally by God but a development of premises already set by people in this life." (This translation may be found online at <http://www.petersnet.net/browse/1183.htm>.)

18. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ¶ 1033 and 1037.

19. On this point, see Merricks, "Endurance and Indiscernibility."

20. e.g. Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting" in *Contemporary*

Philosophy of Religion, S. Cahn and D. Shatz, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 77-98; and William Lane Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), among many others.

21. It seems to me that the teaching of the Church on God's immutability, together with the apparent acceptance of the Boethian notion of eternity (which would rule out everlastingness) in the definition of God's eternity, suggest that the Church's teaching is that God is timeless. (Cf. Ott, *op. cit.*, 35-37.)

22. I'm fairly sure that Fr. Brian Shanley is on the right track in his "Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 71 (1997), 197-224. See also his "Eternity and Duration in Aquinas," *Thomist* 61 (1997), 525-548.

23. My thanks to those who have made suggestions and posed objections. In particular, I wish to thank Christopher Toner and Donald Musacchio for good advice on early versions. William Lane Craig and an anonymous referee for *Faith and Philosophy* made a number of very helpful points, some of which prompted me to make significant changes to the paper. Trenton Merricks has read several drafts and offered a great many important suggestions and criticisms. I'm also grateful to an audience at the Society of Christian Philosophers Eastern Division meeting in November, 2002, for many insightful questions and comments about an earlier version of this paper. Of course, none of these people can be counted upon to agree with anything I say here.