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The Doctrine of Man: What do the world's philosophical systems say about man's destiny?

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THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

ARTICLE TWO

What do the world's philosophical systems say about man's destiny?

A. Atheism

There is no God. Humans were not created but slowly evolved over vast periods of time through non-living atoms which somehow (miracle of miracles) arranged themselves into life forms as we know it today. Thus, this life ends it all. The following four comments made by a lawyer, philosopher, writer, and scientist, reflect this frustration, hopelessness and utter despair of atheism:

1. *Ingersoll*—"For, whether in mid-sea or among the breakers of the farther shore, a wreck must mark at last the end of each and all. And every life, no matter if its every hour is rich with love and every moment jeweled with a joy, will, at its close, become a tragedy, as sad, and deep, and dark as can be woven of the warp and woof of mystery and death. Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights. We cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry. From the voiceless lips of the unreplying dead there comes no word."

Robert G. Ingersoll was the most famous atheist of his day. He spoke those words at the funeral of his brother.

2. *Bertrand Russell*—"The life of man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach, and where none may tarry long."
3. *Mark Twain*—"A myriad of men are born; they scramble for little mean advantages over each other; age creeps upon them and infirmities follow; shame and humiliations bring down their prides and vanities. Those they love are taken from them and the joy of life is turned into aching grief. The burden of pain, care, misery, grows heavier year by year.

"At length ambition is dead, pride is dead, vanity is dead; longing for release is in their place. It comes at last—the only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them—and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence, where they left no sign that they have existed—a world that will lament them for a day and forget them forever."

4. *Teller*—"As the sun loses weight at the rate of more than four million tons a second, its gravitational hold is rapidly decreasing, and we are each year headed, in an ever-increasing spiral course, toward the great, yawning abyss beyond. While there is no immediate danger of our being swept into oblivion, the time will arrive when all earthly things will be doomed to perish, when the earth will be too

cold to sustain life, and the finest of human thoughts will have been lost forever. Then our earth, like all things else, will have joined the billions of lifeless globes.”

B. Nirvana

Nirvana is an oriental Hindu philosophy (which at certain periods in history has wormed its way into Christian thought) that teaches that at death a man ceases all personal existence and is absorbed by some great life-giving principle in the universe. According to this thought, a man, while he lives, can be pictured as a small wave ripple, skimming the top of a mighty ocean. But when the wind stops (the moment of death), the wave is then received back into the ocean from whence it came, and forever loses its previous identity. Among the many biblical verses refuting Nirvana is Matt. 17:3: “*And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him.*”

Here we see Moses (who had died 1,400 years earlier) and Elijah (who had departed over seven centuries back) both reappearing on the Mount of Transfiguration to Peter, James, and John. This, of course, proves that absence from this earth does not mean the termination of personality or personhood. (See also 1 Cor. 15:12-20, 42-49.)

C. Universalism

Universalism is the assumption that most, if not all, humanity will get to heaven.

Universalism is the word normally used by theologians to describe the doctrine that ultimately and finally all humanity without exception will enter into the everlasting life. Another way of expressing it is to say that it is the doctrine that since no soul can have been created for final condemnation no soul can in the end be lost. Not all those who would call themselves (or be called by others) universalists necessarily suppose that there will be no hell (for there may be a “temporary” hell for some) or that the total number in heaven will be equivalent to the total number of human beings and angels originally created (for some angels and humans may be annihilated). What universalism does require is that finally from everlasting to everlasting there be no person left in hell or not included in the kingdom of heaven. (Peter Toon, *Heaven and Hell*, p. 183)

John Braun expands Peter Toon’s definition when he writes:

At rock bottom, the doctrine of universalism is a speculative philosophical system. Universalists do not begin with either the biblical material on the subject of eternal punishment or with the historic church’s interpretation of that data. Instead, they start with two philosophical assumptions born in their own imaginations.

The first is that God’s love is so perfectly good and perfectly sovereign that there is no way it could suffer the defeat of allowing one of His creatures to end up being eternally punished. That would mean, they contend, that there is something more powerful than the love of God. The second assumption has to do with the free will of man. Stripped of all the fancy philosophical language, it boils down to the argument that if man stands at a crossroads with only two opinions, one leading to heaven and the other leading to eternal torment, he doesn’t really have free will at all. He is forced to choose one or the

other. How, they contend, under such pressure could free will truly be exercised? According to D. E. Walker, a contemporary writer whose book, *The Decline of Hell*, favors universalism, these two assumptions stretch all the way back to Origen:

The whole of Origen's eschatology is based on two principles: first, the justice and goodness of an omnipotent Creator; secondly, the absolute free will of every rational being (man, animated star, angel, demon). (*Whatever Happened to Hell?* p. 42)

Origen actually taught that even Satan himself would eventually be reconciled to God. In addition to his grievous error concerning universalism, Origen was also the father of Arianism, which denied the deity of Jesus Christ. His teaching on both issues was soundly condemned at the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 543.

1. The argument for universalism reviewed—The following Scripture passages are offered to support universalism: *“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me”* (John 12:32). *“And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began”* (Acts 3:20-21).
“Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” (Rom. 5:18). *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive”* (1 Cor. 15:22). *“That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him”* (Eph. 1:10). *“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Phil. 2:10-11).
2. The argument for universalism refuted
 - First, Origen's hope for Satan's final salvation will definitely not be realized—In fact, to the contrary, he, along with the Antichrist and false prophet will suffer the judgment of eternal hell. *“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever”* (Rev. 20:10).
 - Second, we must realize that the Bible frequently uses the word *all* in a restricted sense, as pertaining to all in a certain category rather than all without exception—Examples are numerous.

Matthew tells us that “all Judea” went out to hear John the Baptist (3:5-6). Luke records that a decree went out that “*a census be taken of all the inhabited earth*” (2:1). And the disciples of John the Baptist complained that “all men” were following Christ. In the passages written by Paul, it is clear that all who are in Adam die, whereas all who are in Christ shall be made alive.

The *all* has limitations built into it by the context. (Erwin Lutzer, *Coming to Grips with Hell*, p. 14)

- Third, the passage in Philippians does not teach all will *accept* Christ as Savior, but rather that all will eventually *acknowledge* him as Sovereign—
“*And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever*” (Rev. 5:13).

This “creature confession” of their creator includes the world of demons also. “*And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God*” (Mark 1:23-24).

- D. Reincarnation—This is the belief in the transmigration or rebirth of the soul which has been fundamental to most religions and philosophies of India. As one sows in the present life, so one shall reap in the next, good deeds resulting in a good state of rebirth, bad deeds in a bad state of rebirth. Thus a man’s state of life is seen not as something fortuitous or meaningless, but as the working out, for good or ill, of the effects of a previous existence and the predetermining of a future state. This theory is totally without scriptural support.
- E. Restorationism—This is the belief that in a future life all men will be given a second chance to make that choice for God they did not make during this life.
1. Reasons for this position—Restorationists use the following scriptures to “prove” their view: “*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Tim. 2:3-4). “*For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe*” (1 Tim. 4:10). “*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison*” (1 Peter 3:18-19).
- However, a quick glance at the context of the above verses show that all the “restored” here are those who have accepted Christ as Savior. The passage in 1 Peter has been the subject of some controversy, but whatever else, it does not teach restorationism. The verb “preached” in verse 19 in the original Greek does not refer to gospel preaching.
2. Rejection of this position—Restorationism is refuted by the following verses: “*He, that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy*” (Prov. 29:1). “*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from*

me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:22-23). “And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matt. 12:32).

“And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence” (Luke 16:26). “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still ... For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Rev. 22:11, 18-19).

If these verses teach anything, they strongly and sternly declare that at the moment of death there exists absolutely no chance for the salvation of an unsaved person. We may be tempted to argue with God concerning the why of the matter, but not the what of the matter.

F. Conditionalism—Erwin Lutzer writes:

Whereas universalism sought to take the “forever” out of hell, we now come to a theory that attempts to take the hell out of forever. Conditional immortality is more attractive to evangelicals than universalism. This teaching contends that all will not be saved, but neither will any be in conscious torment forever. God resurrects the wicked to judge them, then they are thrown into the fire and consumed. The righteous are granted eternal life while the unbelievers are granted eternal death. Hell is annihilation. (*Coming to Grips with Hell*, p. 15)

This false doctrine will be dealt with in more detail under the discussion of annihilation. In a sense, conditionalism is even a greater heresy than that of universalism or restorationism, for it teaches that all human beings were originally created without immortal souls, which is clearly refuted by the Scriptures. *“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2).* Note here the souls of both saved and lost are said to be everlasting.

G. Annihilationism—This theory, espoused by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, along with various other groups, teaches that all the ungodly will someday literally be “uncreated,” or annihilated, by God. Harold Bryson observes:

Annihilationism takes several forms for its expression. One is that at death every unsaved person ceases to exist. Another form claims that annihilation does not come immediately. According to this variation, the unsaved remain in hell in a conscious state until the day of judgment. After judgment they cease to exist. This form of annihilationism allows time of the suffering of the full penalty of sins.

(Harold Bryson, *Yes, Virginia, There Is a Hell*, p. 39)

Peter Toon quotes from a modern-day defender of annihilationism:

Already we have referred to this position, espoused this century by leading Anglican writers. Most recently Brian Hebblethwaite has written:

If creatures can rebel against the divine ground of their being to such an extent as to render themselves absolutely unredeemable then there seems no point in God's keeping them in being for ever in such an unending state of deprivation. It is much more plausible to suppose that the language of damnation and everlasting loss is symbolic language, designed to bring out the awesome possibility that a man may by his actions and his attitudes forfeit his eternal destiny and render himself incapable of being drawn into the love and life of God. But if such a terrible possibility is fulfilled, it must mean that the lost one brings about his own annihilation and disappears from being rather than that he is raised for ever and held in a state of everlasting damnation. The sheer pointlessness of such a state being allowed to continue for ever shows clearly that conditional immortality is more religiously and morally plausible than everlasting punishment.

But he really does not want to believe in annihilation, for he continues:

One would like to be able to hope that even the possibility of eternal loss in the sense of annihilation is never in fact realized. To suppose that there comes a time when the God of love, who went to the lengths of the Cross of Christ to win men's love in return, has to write off a created person as absolutely unredeemable is a hard supposition for a Christian to make.

In fact he wants to believe in a second chance after death in a process which is like a purgatory for all (baptized and unbaptized alike). He says:

Once we free ourselves from the old idea that opportunities to repent and respond to God's love are restricted to a single life-span on earth, we may be the readier to hope that God's patient, self-sacrificial love will in the end prevail over even the most recalcitrant sinner. In other words, the notion of conditional immortality makes greater sense in conjunction with the old idea of the finality of death. (*Heaven and Hell*, pp. 186-187)

Tragically, in recent times, two scholars from the evangelical camp have come down on the side of annihilation. These men are Clark Pinnock and Edward Fudge.

Erwin Lutzer writes concerning Pinnock:

Clark Pinnock of McMaster University in Toronto, Canada, asks how one can imagine for a moment that the God who gave His Son to die on the cross would "install a torture chamber somewhere in the new creation in

order to subject those who reject him in everlasting pain? He observes that it is difficult enough to defend Christianity in light of the problem of evil and suffering without having to explain hell too.

Pinnock believes that the fire of God consumes the lost. Thus God does not raise the wicked to torture them but rather to declare judgment on them and condemn them to extinction, which is the second death. Everlasting punishment, according to Pinnock, means God sentences the lost to final, definitive death. (*Coming to Grips with Hell*, p. 16)

An angry John Braun writes concerning Fudge:

A 1976 *Christianity Today* article, "Putting Hell in Its Place," provides a typical example of a careless, unchecked "soft line" on hell. Here author Edward Fudge dangerously hedges on the biblical teaching of the degree and extent of eternal punishment.

Admitting there is such a place and that the wicked go there, Fudge sets out with an obvious backhanded slap at great preachers such as Charles Haddon Spurgeon and Isaac Watts. The obvious implication, apparent even from the title of the article, is that these preachers—not hell's critics—removed hell from its proper place.

Then, dismissing these two giants of the past with the all-soothing evangelical shibboleth, "But enough of that; let us look to the Scriptures" (as if Spurgeon and Watts didn't preach the Scriptures!), he makes an incredibly shallow attempt to demonstrate why we should speak of the torments of hell as "aionic" or new age" instead of "eternal" or "everlasting."

In our common versions, this word [*aionos*, the Greek word for eternal] is usually translated 'everlasting' or 'eternal.' A better translation would probably be the transliteration 'aionic' or 'new age.' *Aionos* designates a quality of the Age to Come.

Suddenly, the word *aionos* no longer really can mean "everlasting" or "eternal." It's now a quality—whatever on earth, in heaven, or in hell that might be.

In the article, Fudge begins his conclusion with a discussion of this portion of Matt. 25:46, "*Then these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous to eternal life.*" Fudge comments:

Here is 'punishment'—punishment that expresses both wrath and justice. There stands 'life.' Both terms are rich in meaning for inhabitants of the Present Age. But both are here qualified by the same word 'aionic.' Both punishment and life are of a quality belonging to the Age to Come and may be described finally only by 'aionic.'

Come on now! This arbitrary tampering with words has gone far enough. 'Aionic' life *is* everlasting life, not some quality of unknown duration, and "aionic" punishment may be described finally only by "everlasting." ... Where the New Testament Scriptures are dealt with, the word refers to an endless period of time, *not* a quality. Tell me now, who would be excited about having "aionic" life and who would be scared of "aionic" punishment?

Who on earth knows what "aionic" means? Talk about taking the stinger out of hell! Furthermore, there is no way Fudge's shoddy attempt at a linguistic treatment of a handful of Bible verses holds up—as if no Bible expert but him in the last two thousand years caught the "error" of using the term "eternal" instead of "new age" or "aionic!"

The article's insipid conclusion is shocking, not only that Fudge would write it, but that *Christianity Today* would print it. Wrote Fudge:

Hell is *one* New Testament picture portraying the fate of the unsaved. But, as we have seen, it is not the only one: *it is not even the primary one. Nor is it the definitive one* [italics mine].

What a far cry this lukewarm stance is from that of the founders of the evangelical movement. (*Whatever Happened to Hell?* pp. 96-97)

Those believing in annihilationism attempt to undergird their claims by quoting certain Scripture verses in the Psalms: "*For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth*"

(Psa. 37:9). "*The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy*" (Psa. 145:20).

However, it should be observed that the same Hebrew word *karath* translated "cut off" in Psa. 37:9 is also used in reference to the crucifixion of the Messiah as prophesied in Dan. 9:26. Christ was certainly not annihilated at Calvary. In Psa. 145:20 the identical Hebrew word here rendered "destroy" is found describing the punishment of both Egypt (Exod. 10:7) and Israel (Hosea 13:9), neither of which nation has yet to suffer annihilation.

Concerning the New Testament, annihilationists attempt to show that whenever the words *eternal* or *everlasting* are linked to words of action, it refers to the result of the action, not to the action itself. For example, the phrase "eternal judgment" does not mean that the judgment itself will go on eternally, though there will be consequences that will. "Eternal redemption" does not mean that the act of Christ goes on forever, though the consequences do.

Erwin Lutzer, however, quickly refutes this claim:

Unfortunately, that interpretation will not survive careful analysis. Robert A. Morey in his book *Death and the Afterlife* points out that the word *destroyed* as used in the Bible does not mean “to annihilate.” The Greek word *apollumi* is used in passages such as Matt. 9:17; Luke 15:4; and John 6:12, 17. In none of those instances does it mean “to pass out of existence.” Morey writes, “There isn’t a single instance in the New Testament where *apollumi* means annihilation in the strict sense of the word.” Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon* defines it as “to be delivered up to eternal misery. (*Coming to Grips with Hell*, p. 18)

H. New Age

New Age philosophy is based on these ancient Hindu ideas:

Monism—All is one. There is an essential unity to everything in the universe.

Pantheism—All is god. The universe is god, so every part of the universe, seen and unseen, is a part of god.

Maya—All is illusion. The mind can manipulate reality, so what is perceived has no reality other than what the mind gives it.

Another Hindu concept, reincarnation, involves eliminating one’s “karma” — paying for one’s “bad” deeds—through rebirth in a succession of lives.

In regard to death, we are assured that human reincarnations occur until the person reaches oneness with God. There is thus no eternal life as a resurrected person. This means there is no literal heaven or hell. Actress Shirley MacLaine was the movement’s most well known advocate during the last part of the 20th century. Here are a few of her statements:

The tragedy of the human race was that we had forgotten we were each Divine. (Shirley MacLaine, *Out on a Limb*, p. 352)

Individual souls became separated from the higher vibration in the process of creating various life forms. Seduced by the beauty of their own creations they became entrapped in the physical, losing their connections with the Divine Light. (Shirley MacLaine, *Dancing in the Light*, p. 354)

Shirley MacLaine’s spirit guide, her Higher Self, explains, “Each soul is its own God. You must never worship anyone or anything other than self. For *you* are God. To love self is to love God.” (Shirley MacLaine, *Dancing in the Light*, p. 358)

I. Spiritism

Here we are to believe that following life on this earthly place, life continues in the spirit world, where one’s spirit may progress from one level to another. Heaven and hell are merely states of mind.