

Is Culpability and Eternal Punishment Coherent Under an Unrequested and Undesired Sin Nature — 30

Phil Stilwell

Independent Scholar

ORCID: 0009-0009-3725-8682

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Central claim

Christians who combine an inherited, unchosen condition that makes universal transgression inevitable with eternal conscious torment cannot make that package publicly coherent merely by invoking free will or offered mercy. Public coherence requires a culpable basis and a proportionate sanction: if inherited disorder defeats adequate control, the blame basis fails; if responsibility survives, finite culpability alone does not justify punitive suffering without end; and rejection of mercy must independently pass both tests. The result targets this justificatory package, not bare logical consistency, theism, every doctrine of original sin, or every Christian view of final judgment.

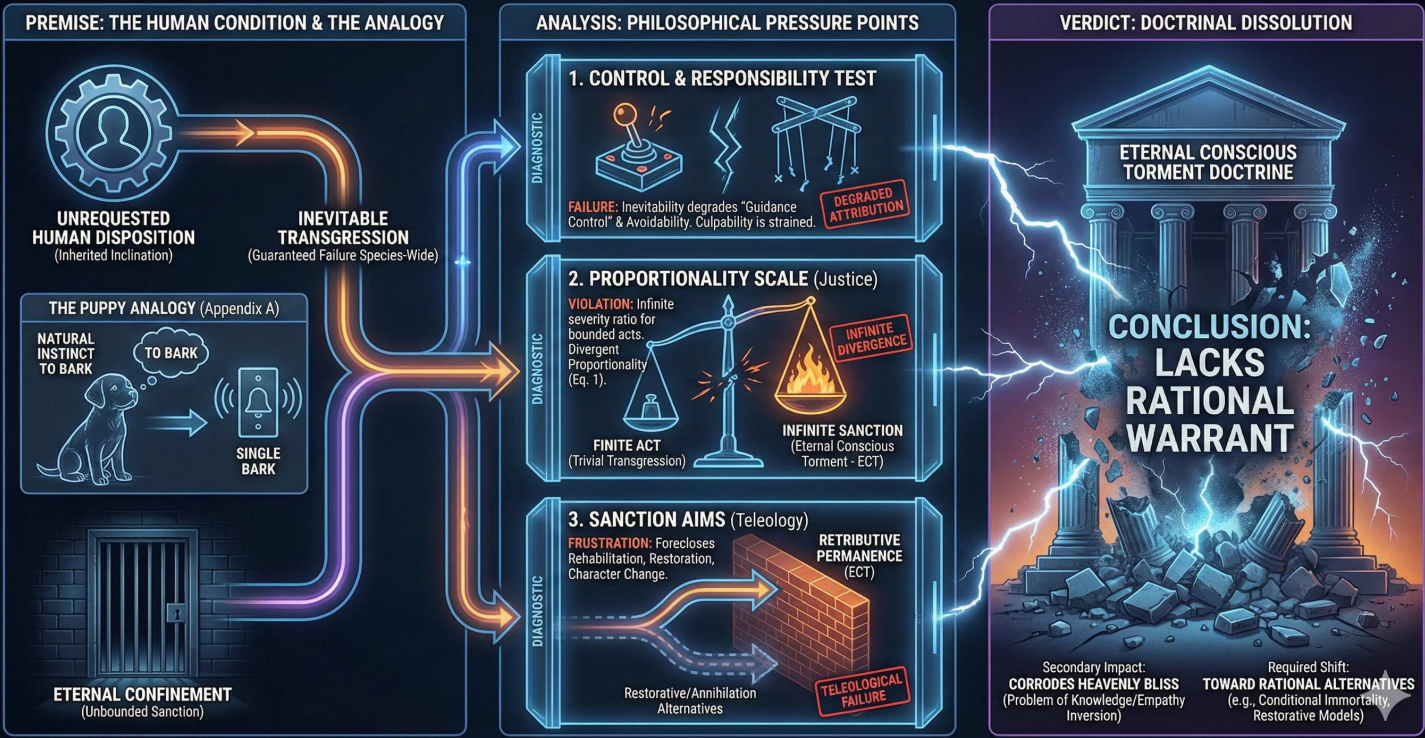
Preview:

Doctrinal package	Control test	Proportionality test	Bounded result
An unchosen inherited disorder ensures universal transgression, and unremedied guilt ends in eternal conscious torment.	A culpable basis must issue from agency the person sufficiently owns and that can answer to reasons.	Punitive suffering without end needs a principle proportionate to the person's culpable contribution.	The defenses examined must weaken the package or supply the missing control and proportionality bridges.

The target is the conjunction of inherited inevitability and eternal conscious torment, not every Christian account of sin, grace, judgment, or postmortem destiny.

Visual preview:

THE RATIONAL COLLAPSE OF ETERNAL CONDEMNATION FOR INEVITABLE DISPOSITIONS



The inherited inference map is preserved. Its rhetoric of "collapse" identifies a failure of rational warrant under the three tests shown—control, proportionality, and punitive purpose—not a formal contradiction in every doctrine of final judgment.

Abstract

The conjunction of an unrequested inherited disposition that makes universal transgression inevitable and eternal conscious torment is not made publicly coherent by a generic appeal to free will. Here coherence means a rationally connected account of culpability, sanction, and professed justice, not bare freedom from formal contradiction. Inevitability must first be specified: the claim that everyone eventually sins does not entail that every sinful act, or any named act, was unavoidable. Where inherited disorder prevents adequate ownership, reasons-responsiveness, or informed control, it weakens the culpable basis for condemnation. Where responsibility survives, finite earthly culpability still does not by itself justify punitive suffering without end. Continuing-sin and self-exclusion replies can make punishment conditional rather than irrevocable, but they must establish responsible rejection and proportionality at every stage instead of assuming that an endless actual history explains itself. Frankfurt-style objections block a simple “could not do otherwise” argument; they do not supply the ownership or sanction principle the package needs. The result is a trilemma: weaken inherited inevitability, replace eternal conscious torment, or provide the missing control and proportionality premises. This conclusion targets one justificatory package. It does not disprove theism, every doctrine of original sin, every punishment, or every Christian view of final judgment.

Keywords: original sin; inherited moral disorder; culpability; guidance control; eternal conscious torment; proportionality; hell

1. The Package Under Pressure

The question is not whether human beings do wrong, whether wrongdoing can be culpable, or whether judgment is conceptually possible. It concerns a specific conjunction. Call it the *inherited-inevitability and eternal-torment package*:

1. Every human person begins life with a morally disordered condition that the person neither requested nor initially desired.
2. Given that condition and ordinary human life, every morally competent person will transgress; avoiding all transgression is not a live human achievement.
3. Unless remedied on the required terms, the resulting guilt exposes the person to eternal conscious torment: consciously experienced deprivation or suffering without a terminal limit.
4. This outcome is perfectly just and compatible with unsurpassable love.

The title’s question about *coherence* is not a claim that these four propositions contain a simple formal contradiction. A view can avoid contradiction by adding enough auxiliary assumptions. The issue is *public justificatory coherence*: whether the terms *culpability*, *justice*, *love*, and *freedom* are connected by principles that make the assigned liability and sanction intelligible to people who do not already accept the conclusion. A defense succeeds by supplying those connections, not merely by showing that the package is logically describable.

This formulation is deliberately conditional. Christian traditions disagree about inherited guilt, inherited corruption, freedom, election, grace, the intermediate state, the duration and character of hell, and whether final destruction or eventual restoration better fits scripture. The argument applies only where claims 1–4 are jointly affirmed. A view that denies inherited guilt, treats the condition as universally healed, makes final punishment finite, understands destruction as extinction, or permits ultimate restoration has already left the target package.

A *God-concept* is a specified conception of a deity, including the moral attributes and actions assigned to it. The conception relevant here includes perfect justice and unsurpassable love. *Theism* is the wider claim that at least one deity exists. Failure to justify this particular package would therefore not entail the falsity of theism. It would show that the package cannot be defended merely by attaching the words *justice*, *freedom*, or *love* to it.

The biblical background commonly invoked includes Paul’s treatment of sin and death through Adam, the universality of sin, and the conflict between willing and morally disordered agency, especially in Romans 5:12–19 and 7:14–25 (National Council of Churches, 2021). Those texts do not settle one philosophical model by

themselves. Their interpretation is part of the theological dispute. This paper instead asks what any publicly intelligible defense must explain once the four claims above are granted.

The two independent tests

The package needs both a culpable basis and a proportionate sanction. If inherited disorder defeats the control required for blame, the first condition fails. If responsibility survives despite that disorder, a separate argument must still show why a finite person's culpable contribution warrants consciously experienced punishment with no terminal limit. Establishing one condition does not establish the other.

This separation corrects two opposite shortcuts. Critics sometimes move too quickly from “unchosen condition” to “no responsibility.” Defenders sometimes move too quickly from “some responsibility” to “eternal punishment is just.” Neither inference follows without further premises.

2. What Inevitability Does—and Does Not—Show

2.1 Universal occurrence is not local necessity

Suppose every person eventually performs at least one wrongful act. That universal generalization does not entail that each particular act was unavoidable, or even that one identifiable act was unavoidable. A long sequence can make failure practically certain while leaving many local occasions open. Repeated exposure to temptation, limited attention, fatigue, ignorance, social formation, and ordinary weakness could yield universal failure without determining which failure occurs.

Four claims should therefore be kept distinct:

- *Population universality*: every morally competent person in fact sins.
- *Lifetime inevitability*: no ordinary person completes a morally competent life without any sin.
- *Dispositional pressure*: an inherited condition makes some wrong choices more attractive, harder to resist, or harder to recognize.
- *Act-level incapacity*: on a particular occasion, the person's agency cannot respond adequately to the reasons against the act.

The first does not by itself prove the fourth. Even the second can be explained by accumulating risk rather than a locally irresistible cause. Any argument from inherited inevitability to diminished culpability must show how the condition affects the control, understanding, or ownership involved in the conduct actually used to justify punishment.

This modal distinction matters because the popular analogy of punishing a puppy for barking can both illuminate and mislead. It illuminates when a creator or owner condemns a creature for behavior flowing predictably from the kind of creature it was made to be. It misleads if it silently treats a morally competent adult as having no more rational agency than an animal. The relevant question is not whether the disposition was chosen before it existed. No one chooses every influence on character. The question is whether, at the time liability is assigned, the person's conduct issues from capacities and values sufficiently attributable to that person.

2.2 Unchosen influence can mitigate without erasing agency

Moral assessment already recognizes degrees. Coercion, compulsion, manipulation, immaturity, ignorance, addiction, trauma, and severe impairment can reduce blame without making the person a mere object. The

appropriate conclusion depends on how the influence bears on understanding and control. Couenhoven's study of Augustinian accounts is especially useful here because it refuses the false choice between total autonomy and no responsibility: inherited necessity, agency, degrees of blame, and fitting responses must be analyzed separately (Couenhoven, 2013). Mele's work on manipulated agents adds the historical point: two agents with similar present psychology can differ in responsibility because of how their values and motives were formed (Mele, 2019). An inherited-disorder account is not identical to intentional manipulation, but it cannot assume that present internality settles the ownership question.

The inherited-condition defense therefore cannot rest on either of two assertions alone:

1. "The condition is unchosen; therefore, no act influenced by it is culpable."
2. "The person acts from an internal desire; therefore, the inherited condition is irrelevant to culpability."

The first ignores responsible agency under unchosen formation. The second treats internal causation as sufficient ownership, even when the formation of the mechanism is precisely what is contested. A credible account needs a positive control standard.

3. Control After the Frankfurt Objection

3.1 Alternative possibilities are not enough

A simple control principle says that a person is morally responsible only if the person could have done otherwise. Frankfurt's counterexamples challenge that principle by describing cases in which an intervener would have blocked any alternative, although the agent acts on the agent's own reasons and the intervener never intervenes (Frankfurt, 1969). If those cases succeed, lack of alternatives does not automatically remove responsibility.

That objection is important for the present paper. Lifetime inevitability cannot carry the argument by itself. Even act-level inability might coexist with responsibility if the actual sequence expresses the person's own rational mechanism. But the objection does not establish that every inevitable act is responsible, much less that it warrants any magnitude of punishment. It replaces one question—"Was another option open?"—with more discriminating questions about the source and operation of the actual agency.

Fischer and Ravizza develop this shift through *guidance control*: roughly, the conduct must flow from the agent's own mechanism, and that mechanism must display an appropriate responsiveness to reasons (Fischer & Ravizza, 1998). One need not adopt every part of their theory to see the burden it creates for the inherited-condition package. If the disposition is said to corrupt practical judgment, bend desire, darken understanding, and make sin inevitable, the defender must also explain in what sense the operative mechanism is owned by the person and able to register reasons strongly enough to ground grave blame.

3.2 A four-part control audit

The following questions locate the real dispute:

1. **Competence:** Could the person understand the relevant moral reasons, consequences, and available response at an appropriate level?
2. **Reasons-responsiveness:** Would a suitable range of sufficiently strong reasons alter the operative mechanism, or is the inherited disorder defined so that such reasons cannot succeed?
3. **Ownership:** Has the person adopted, sustained, or identified with the mechanism in a way that makes it fairly attributable, or is its decisive corruption wholly prior to that person's agency?
4. **Historical integrity:** Is the mechanism free from manipulation or formative conditions that would make its apparent internality a poor guide to responsibility?

No single answer is binary in every case. A mature person can partly own a badly formed disposition and remain responsive to some reasons. That supports graded responsibility. It also blocks the leap to undifferentiated liability. If the degree of blame tracks the degree of competence and control, then inherited impairment is relevant even when it is not wholly exculpatory.

The doctrinal package is consequently unstable at its first joint. The more strongly inherited disorder is described as universally enslaving, cognitively darkening, and impossible to escape without an externally supplied remedy, the harder it is to establish adequate control over the conduct used to justify condemnation. The more strongly ordinary reasons-responsiveness and ownership are affirmed, the less work inevitability can do in explaining universal transgression. A coherent view may occupy an intermediate position, but it then owes an account of degrees rather than an all-or-nothing verdict.

4. Responsibility Does Not Set the Penalty

Even if every responsible adult bears some blame, the justificatory work is only half complete. Responsibility answers whether a response may be directed at the person. Proportionality answers how severe and how long that response may be. The second question cannot be inferred from the first.

Retributive theories usually require punishment to communicate censure and to be proportionate to wrongdoing, although the basis and calibration of proportionality remain disputed (Ryberg, 2021; von Hirsch, 1996). Husak's analysis of over-punishment highlights a simple constraint: desert can at most authorize punishment within an upper limit; it does not turn every harsher penalty into justice (Husak, 2022). The burden is especially acute where the proposed sanction is unbounded.

4.1 The finite-contribution problem

Human wrongdoing can be horrifying, repeated, and deliberately sustained. Calling it *finite* does not call it trivial. The point is that a human life contains a bounded number of acts, a bounded period of agency, limited knowledge, and degrees of control. Eternal conscious torment, as defined here, has no terminal limit. If its consciously experienced bad is renewed without end, then no finite duration exhausts it.

A warning is needed here: endless duration alone does not determine severity. A negligible deprivation repeated at remote intervals is not morally equivalent to continuous torment. The target package, however, assigns consciously experienced deprivation or suffering as punishment without a terminal limit. Its defense must therefore address duration, experienced severity, agency, and the conditions of possible cessation together; pointing to the word *eternal* or to any one temporal slice is not enough.

A defender might answer that wrongdoing against an infinitely worthy being has infinite seriousness. Adams documents the historical argument that an offense takes its magnitude from the dignity of the one offended and examines whether that bridge can sustain everlasting torment (Adams, 1975). The status of a victim can aggravate an offense because of vulnerability, public role, betrayal, or wider harm. It does not follow, however, that infinite worth mechanically multiplies every finite wrong into infinite desert. An infinitely secure and unsurpassably good being is not infinitely injured by a finite creature. Nor does the offender's limited agency become infinite merely because the moral relation has an exalted object.

Another answer says that the condemned continue to sin forever, so continuing punishment tracks continuing guilt. Himma formulates this as the continuing-sin response to the proportionality objection (Himma, 2003). It deserves a more precise answer than the claim that any possible release makes hell non-eternal. A sanction can be conditional and revisable in principle yet continue forever in fact because rejection never ceases. The relevant audit is therefore stage-sensitive: at each period, is the new wrongdoing informed, reasons-responsive, and attributable; is the suffering proportionate to that current wrongdoing; does the punitive environment deform the very agency later used to justify more punishment; and does a genuine route of reconciliation remain intelligible? If release is impossible whatever the person's response, continuing sin does not explain finality. If release

depends on a response the punitive conditions make progressively less possible, the defense must show why that self-reinforcing process remains attributable rather than merely perpetual.

4.2 Purpose matters as well as desert

Punishment is also assessed by what it is for: protection, deterrence, moral communication, restoration, incapacitation, or retribution. In an afterlife governed by a perfectly capable creator, familiar constraints of scarce institutions and public danger cannot simply be assumed. Permanent quarantine might protect others without torment. Finite censure might communicate condemnation. Rehabilitation and reconciliation would directly address defective agency. Destruction would end danger without unending experience. A defender need not accept any one alternative, but must explain why no less harmful response can fulfill every legitimate aim.

Kvanvig's treatment of the philosophical problem of hell shows why appeals to desert, choice, and divine goodness must be connected in a single coherent account rather than asserted separately (Kvanvig, 1993). The current argument presses one part of that demand: some blame does not entail unlimited deserved suffering. Where inherited impairment already mitigates control, the proportionality gap widens further.

The proportionality barrier

From "this person is culpable for some wrongdoing" it does not follow that "this person deserves consciously experienced suffering without end." The latter conclusion needs an additional principle linking the person's degree of control, knowledge, harmful agency, and persistence to an unbounded sanction. Neither the existence of blame nor the infinite value assigned to the offended party supplies that link by itself.

5. Does Rejection of Mercy Solve the Problem?

The strongest defense often relocates the issue. No one, it says, is condemned merely for inheriting a disposition or committing an isolated offense. A remedy is offered; hell is the freely sustained rejection of that remedy, perhaps a self-chosen separation rather than an externally imposed sentence. Walls develops a sophisticated version of the claim that perfect goodness and hell can coexist through decisive free choice (Walls, 1992). A stronger form adds that freely acquired vice eventually silences every reason to repent, so finality is the expression of character rather than an arbitrary cutoff. Hartman reconstructs that moral-vice explanation and argues that a perfectly capable, loving deity could reopen reasons-responsive choice without simply determining its outcome (Hartman, 2023).

This reply improves on crude inherited-guilt accounts because it identifies a candidate act of ownership. It also creates a clear audit. The decisive rejection must be:

1. *informed*: the person adequately understands the offer, its source, its moral meaning, and the stakes;
2. *controlled*: the rejection issues from a reasons-responsive mechanism rather than confusion, fear, trauma, deception, or the inherited impairment under dispute;
3. *owned*: the relevant evaluative mechanism is fairly attributable to the person rather than simply installed by an unchosen corruption;
4. *persistent*: the rejection remains attributable across the period for which its consequences continue; and
5. *proportionately consequential*: even a culpable rejection warrants the irreversible or unbounded result assigned to it.

The remedy reply cannot use the inherited condition twice: first to explain why every person inevitably becomes disordered, and then as if it had no bearing on why some people misunderstand or resist the remedy. If

grace restores sufficient competence before the decisive choice, the defender should specify when and how that restoration occurs. If it does not, the rejection inherits the original control problem.

The same pressure applies to finality. A self-exclusion model may consistently say that the door remains open while every actual rejection continues forever. The objection is not that counterfactual openness would make such a history finite. It is that the model must preserve the conditions of responsible rejection through time. If postmortem agents can learn and answer to reasons, the account must explain why truthful disclosure, moral growth, or grace never succeeds. If vice silences every reason for repentance, calling the resulting incapacity a continuing free choice requires a theory of tracing: why is the later inability fairly attributable to earlier agency, especially when inherited impairment helped form that agency? And if the punitive environment fixes or deepens the vice, that contribution must also enter the responsibility and proportionality analysis. “The door is locked from the inside” names a location of agency; it does not yet show that the lock, its permanence, and the suffering behind it are just.

This is not an argument that every unbeliever is innocent or that no rejection could be culpable. It is an argument against treating *rejection* as a self-explanatory moral category. Disbelief, distrust, defiance, ignorance, and principled dissent can look similar from outside while involving very different evidence, motives, and control. Eternal consequences require more discrimination, not less.

6. The Defense-Route Ledger

The package can be defended through several routes. Each route preserves something important, but none yields the full conclusion without a further burden.

Table 1: What each main defense must establish

Defense route	What it preserves	What it must show	What remains open
Frankfurt reply	Blame may survive the absence of alternatives.	Actual-sequence agency is owned, competent, and reasons-responsive despite inherited disorder.	The degree of blame and any proportionate sanction.
Infinite offense	Eternal punishment is presented as retributively fitting.	A finite act acquires unlimited desert from the status of its object, without merely asserting it.	Why lesser censure, protection, or restoration is insufficient.
Mercy rejection	Condemnation is tied to a personal response rather than inheritance alone.	Rejection is informed, controlled, owned, persistent, and independent of the impairment.	Why that rejection warrants punitive suffering without end.
Ongoing exclusion	Ongoing consequences track ongoing agency.	Each stage remains reasons-responsive, attributable, and proportionately sanctionable.	Whether punishment itself blocks reconciliation or entrenches the vice it later punishes.
Appeal to mystery	Human moral understanding is acknowledged as limited.	There is positive reason to trust the package despite its conflict with ordinary control and proportionality norms.	Its use as a publicly intelligible defense of justice.

The table is not a list of decisive refutations. It displays the argument’s cumulative structure. A defender may discharge one burden. But control, magnitude, duration, and remedy are separate links; success at one does not silently complete the others.

The resulting trilemma is straightforward:

1. **Weaken inherited inevitability.** Treat the condition as influence rather than incapacity and allow robust reasons-responsive agency. This protects culpability but makes the inherited condition less explanatory and leaves proportionality untouched.
2. **Replace eternal conscious torment.** Retain serious responsibility while adopting finite punishment, conditional immortality, destruction, or eventual restoration. This removes the unbounded-sanction claim.
3. **Supply additional premises.** Explain how inherited impairment permits sufficient control, how finite culpable contribution warrants an unbounded sanction, and how rejection of mercy independently passes both tests.

The argument does not rule out the third route by definition. It shows why familiar appeals to freedom, infinite worth, or offered mercy are incomplete versions of it.

7. Objections and Replies

7.1 No one is condemned for only one finite act

The objection rightly resists an artificially small description of wrongdoing. A life can form a stable character through many culpable acts, harms, omissions, and refusals. The finite-contribution argument already includes the full human career. Its point is not that only one minor offense matters, but that the career remains temporally bounded and displays limited knowledge and control. Aggregating finite contributions can justify more serious censure without automatically producing an unbounded upper limit.

7.2 Endless punishment can track endless rejection

This objection is stronger than the claim that one finite earthly act deserves infinite punishment. Suppose punishment lasts only while a person culpably rejects reconciliation, and suppose that rejection in fact never ends. The account is then conditional rather than an irrevocable sentence imposed at one moment. Nothing in the finite-contribution argument alone disproves that possibility.

But the account changes what must be justified. It must identify a succession of culpable acts or a culpably maintained character, not merely inherit the desert assigned to earthly life. It must show that each later rejection remains informed, controlled, and attributable; that the punitive setting does not manufacture the incorrigibility it cites; and that the suffering at each stage remains a proportionate response rather than an obstacle to restored agency. Himma shows that the continuing-sin reply depends on the character of hell's suffering, while Hartman's critique of vice-based finality presses whether reasons-responsive choice can be reopened without being coerced (Hartman, 2023; Himma, 2003). The paper's conclusion is therefore conditional but still substantive: ongoing rejection is a possible bridge only after these agency and proportionality premises are supplied.

7.3 Perfect justice may exceed human standards

Human judgment is fallible, and a perfectly informed judge could identify harms and motives that people miss. Greater information can change a verdict. Yet a defense that abandons every recognizable connection among control, desert, and proportion no longer explains why the outcome is just; it merely repeats that it is. The claim may remain an article of trust within a theology, but it loses force as a public solution to the coherence problem.

Ordinary moral standards need not be infallible to constrain a defense. If love can require endless torment, responsibility can ignore formative incapacity, and proportionality can sever all relation to finite agency, the key terms no longer guide evaluation. A coherent account should show continuity with their clearest cases or provide independent reasons for revision.

7.4 Scripture settles the outcome

An interpreter may regard scripture as authoritative and infer that any correctly interpreted doctrine must be just. That is a possible internal route, but it does not remove disputes over what the texts teach. Christian scholarship includes serious defenses of conditional immortality and final destruction; Fudge's study is a prominent example (Fudge, 2011). The existence of such alternatives does not prove them correct. It shows that rejecting eternal conscious torment need not amount to rejecting scripture or Christianity as such.

The philosophical question also remains useful after exegesis. If a proposed interpretation creates a conflict among inherited incapacity, personal blame, perfect justice, and unbounded suffering, that conflict is evidence to recheck the interpretation, the philosophical bridge, or both. Authority does not make the bridge from text to one punitive model self-interpreting.

7.5 Grace makes the inherited condition irrelevant

If universally available grace restores adequate competence before any decisive liability, the control objection is reduced. But the view must say what is restored, to whom, at what point, and how the restoration bears on evidence and motivation. If the restored person remains predictably unable to recognize the remedy because of upbringing, misinformation, fear, or the original disorder, the label *available* does not complete the moral account. If grace guarantees a genuinely informed and reasons-responsive opportunity, that is a substantive revision to the package and should be defended as such.

8. What Rational Revision Looks Like

The critique has constructive consequences. A theologian can preserve human responsibility while allowing culpability to vary with competence, ownership, and reasons-responsiveness. Judgment can be understood as truthful censure without assuming that every justified response must be maximal. Postmortem protection need not be torment. Remedial discipline can aim at moral repair. Conditionalist accounts can treat final destruction, rather than endless experience, as the terminal result. Restorationist accounts can retain severe judgment while denying that resistance must remain eternally successful.

These options carry their own scriptural and philosophical burdens. The present paper does not select among them. Their importance is comparative: they demonstrate that theism, Christian judgment, moral seriousness, and eternal conscious torment are not one indivisible proposition. When one component produces an unresolved conflict with control and proportionality, revising that component is intellectually available.

For defenders who retain the full package, the needed work is now specific. Identify the exact liability-conferring conduct. Show the person's competence and reasons-responsiveness at that point. Explain how the operative mechanism is owned despite the inherited disorder. State the principle that maps the resulting degree of blame to a sanction without terminal limit. Then show why an offered remedy does not simply relocate these same requirements. Until those steps are completed, "free choice" names the disputed capacity and "justice" names the desired conclusion; neither supplies the missing connection.

9. Conclusion

An unrequested and undesired disposition does not, merely because it is unchosen, erase moral responsibility. Nor does universal transgression entail that every particular wrong is unavoidable. Frankfurt-style cases reinforce that caution: responsibility may survive the absence of alternatives when conduct issues from the person's own reasons-responsive mechanism. The inherited-condition critique is strongest when it asks whether the actual agency is competent, responsive, owned, and historically attributable, and then allows blame to vary with the answer.

That concession does not rescue eternal conscious torment. Some culpability establishes at most that some fitting response may be warranted. It does not establish that a finite person's bounded earthly contribution deserves consciously experienced deprivation or suffering without end. Appeals to the infinite value of the offended party require a bridge from status to unlimited desert. Appeals to continuing sin avoid the finite-history objection only by establishing responsible, proportionately sanctionable wrongdoing at every later stage. The purposes of punishment also require comparison with less harmful means. None of these conclusions follows from culpability alone.

Shifting liability to rejection of mercy also does not dissolve the problem. The rejection must independently be informed, controlled, owned, persistent, and proportionately consequential. If inherited disorder impairs it, the control problem returns. If competence is restored, the mechanism and reach of restoration need explanation. An actually endless sequence of free rejection is logically possible, but each stage still needs attribution and proportionate consequences; if agents instead become unable to reconsider, that fixation and any role punishment plays in it must be justified.

The target package therefore faces a trilemma: weaken inherited inevitability, replace eternal conscious torment, or supply the missing control and proportionality premises. This result is serious but bounded. It does not disprove theism, all doctrines of original sin, all punishment, scripture, Christianity, or every view of final judgment. It shows that inherited inevitability plus eternal conscious torment is not made coherent merely by adding the words *freedom*, *mercy*, and *justice*. The relations among those ideas must be shown.

A. The Puppy Analogy and Its Limit

The title-page visual preserves the inherited puppy analogy. A puppy is placed in a setting where barking predictably occurs, then subjected to permanent confinement for one bark. The comparison makes one valid pressure vivid: when an authority knowingly creates or permits the decisive disposition and supplies the circumstances in which its expression is assured, that authority cannot justify punishment merely by pointing to the expression it predicted.

The analogy is not a complete theory of human culpability. A puppy lacks the reflective competence, reasons-responsiveness, and moral ownership that an adult person can possess. Human agents may therefore bear responsibility that the animal does not. The analogy's proper role is diagnostic: it blocks the claim that internal causation or predictable rule-breaking is sufficient for blame, and it directs attention to the control audit in Section 3.

Even after that difference is granted, the sanction remains independently contestable. Permanent confinement for a single predictable bark would be disproportionate; some human blame does not erase the need to justify severity and duration. The comparison thus survives in a narrower form: it identifies the two questions—*attribution* and *proportionality*—without predetermining the answer to either.

B. Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

Syllogistic reconstruction

1. A punitive doctrine is publicly justified only if it establishes both (a) a culpable basis sufficiently attributable to the person and (b) a sanction proportionate to that culpable basis.
2. Under the target package, liability arises from conduct or rejection by a person whose inherited disorder makes universal transgression inevitable, and the assigned result is consciously experienced deprivation or suffering without a terminal limit.
3. Lifetime inevitability alone establishes neither act-level incapacity nor actual-sequence ownership. If inherited disorder defeats competence, reasons-responsiveness, or ownership in the liability-conferring conduct, condition 1(a) remains unestablished.
4. If adequate responsibility instead survives, finite earthly culpability alone does not establish condition 1(b). An additional principle must connect the person's degree of culpability to the duration and severity of punishment.
5. Infinite-offense, continuing-sin, and self-exclusion replies can supply such a principle only by establishing their further claims: a bridge from status to desert, attributable and proportionately sanctionable wrongdoing at each later stage, or a responsibly formed and maintained rejection whose punitive consequences are proportionate.
6. Offered mercy does not bypass those conditions, because rejecting the offer must itself be informed, controlled, owned, and attributable despite the inherited impairment.
7. The defenses examined do not establish all of these further claims; they identify possible routes but leave at least one responsibility or proportionality premise unsupported.
8. Therefore, those defenses do not yet make the inherited-inevitability and eternal-torment package publicly coherent. A defender must weaken the inheritance claim, replace the unbounded sanction, or supply the missing control and proportionality premises.

Validity, support, and scope

The reconstruction is a burden-of-justification argument with a nested dilemma. Premise 1 states two necessary conditions. Premises 2–4 show that whether adequate responsibility fails or survives, at least one condition still needs support. Premises 5 and 6 identify the extra work required by the principal replies, and premise 7 records the paper's assessment that this work has not been completed. If those premises are true, conclusion 8 follows without claiming that the listed replies exhaust every logically possible defense.

The inference is deductively valid at the level of the stated burden: a route that leaves a necessary condition unsupported does not yet justify the package. Its premises remain defeasible. Premise 1 expresses public norms of responsibility and punishment; premise 3 depends on the best account of morally relevant control; premises 4 and 5 require a defensible measure of severity, duration, and desert; and premise 7 summarizes contestable body analyses. A defender could resist the conclusion by presenting a positive account of ownership under inherited disorder, a principled proportionality bridge, or an ongoing self-exclusion model that preserves reasons-responsive agency at every stage. The paper argues that the familiar appeals examined do not yet provide those accounts, not that no account is logically possible.

The conclusion applies only to the specified doctrinal conjunction and the defenses examined. It concerns public justificatory coherence, not bare formal consistency. It is not a proof against theism, every Augustinian or Christian account of inherited sin, conditional immortality, restoration, finite punishment, or judgment as such. It also does not infer that every wrongdoer lacks culpability. Its result is the narrower claim that the target package has not been publicly justified without the additional premises identified above.

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