

“Ye Who Enter Here”: Justice and Mercy Across Christianity and the Criminal Legal System in *Wake Up Dead Man*, and Theories on the Problem of Hell on Reimagining Incarceration

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Introduction

Over the sound of leaves rustling in the violent wind, detective Benoit Blanc raises his voice, insisting, ““We’re looking for a murderer. This is not a game.””

Father Jud turns to face him and shouts, ““It is a game! Solving it, winning it. Getting your big checkmate moment. And by using me in it, you’re setting me against my real and only purpose in life. Which is not to fight the wicked and bring them to justice, but to serve them and bring them to Christ”” (*Wake Up Dead Man*).

The struggle between the gavel-slamming force of justice and the gracious embrace of mercy – and its relation to Christianity – is a primary theme in the 2025 murder mystery film *Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery*. In *Wake Up Dead Man*, the third in a collection of similar films, the protagonist, Father Jud, helps detective Benoit Blanc hunt down the murderer of his church’s head pastor. As a priest, Father Jud struggles between his desire to find the killer and punish them and his duty to show them Christ-like grace and love.

Father Jud’s concern of whether to apply a framework of justice or one of mercy to the crime aligns with the broader discussion in Christian theology of the apparent contradiction presented by these values, a discussion that presumably dates to the very conception of such ideals. In its most distilled form, this issue manifests in the Problem of Hell, which asks how an all-merciful god could condemn people to eternal suffering. Again, this issue has likely been the subject of discussion since the conception of an omnibenevolent higher power. For example, note the paper titled “God is Great, God is Good: Medieval Conceptions of Divine Goodness and the Problem of Hell” by Kelly James Clark, a philosophy professor at Calvin College, which analyzes the implications of medieval notions of hell on the nature of God. This indicates that medieval beliefs on the Problem are still the subject of scholarly attention and gives a sense of how far back this discussion goes.

The Problem of Hell challenges traditionalism, which is the theory that all souls unfit for heaven will experience eternal conscious torment (ECT) – constant, unending pain – in hell. Many theological theories have emerged in response to the Problem, such as the choice model, which Zachary Manis, a member of the humanities faculty at the Stony Brook School, discusses in his book *Sinners in the Presence of a Loving God*. This theory posits that hell is a natural

consequence of choosing to deny God. Universalism – which posits that all people will ascend to heaven – is another popular response to the Problem, enough so to warrant a paper by Ioanna-Maria Patsalidou, from the University of Glasgow, that discusses possible causes for the recent uptick in universalists.

In addition to being a case study on the conflict between justice and mercy, the story of Blanc and Jud is a crossover between the criminal legal system and the Christian church, with Blanc representing the former and Jud the latter. Notably, *Wake Up Dead Man* focuses on the police/detective work aspect of the criminal legal system. Diverting from that angle, in this article I will focus on the United States prison system and sentencing ethics; that is, I will concern myself with the ethics of what happens inside prisons, including length of stay (which is where sentencing ethics becomes relevant). This limit in scope is partially due to the nature of the Problem of Hell, since more direct parallels can be drawn from the Problem to the prison system than to other aspects of the legal sphere. Additionally, evaluating the prison system is more crucial today than ever before. According to Chiara Sangiorgio et al., writing for *Penal Reform International*, with more than 11.5 million people incarcerated as of 2023, there are more people than ever in prison. In fact, “Around 120 countries have recorded occupancy rates exceeding prison system capacity” (Sangiorgio et al. 8). This means that an unsatisfactory prison system has the power to do great damage.

If the sheer size of prisons wasn’t alarming, Americans agree that the system needs an upgrade. Families Against Mandatory Minimums published a press release revealing the results of a national poll, which found that “73% of respondents believe that prisons should be inspected by professionals who are independent of the prison system they are inspecting” (“82% of Americans”). Judging from this data, it seems to me that the American public agrees that there is something awry with the United States carceral system, and that it must be analyzed accordingly.

Recent literature has emerged discussing the relationship between the criminal legal system (including but not limited to the carceral system) and Christianity. Writers who have contributed include: Albert Alschuler, Professor Emeritus of Law and Criminology at the University of Chicago Law School who applies scripture to sentencing ethics, Kathryn Getek Soltis and Katie Walker Grimes, two scholars from Villanova University who discuss prison abolition from a Catholic perspective, Anupama Jacob et al., authors writing for the journal *Social Work and Christianity* who combine Christian ethics, legal studies, and social work to argue for prioritizing mercy in criminal legal matters, and Vincent Bacote in tandem with Nathaniel Perrin, faculty of Wheaton College’s philosophy department who apply a Christian ethic to argue for prison reform. So far, almost all research on this crossroad between Christian ethics and the criminal legal system takes Christian virtues and applies them to the judiciary.

However, based on my research, none have directly acknowledged the specific theological dilemma that has its fingerprints all over this conversation: the Problem of Hell. That is what I aim to do in this paper, to bring the Problem of Hell into this conversation and see what can be learned from it. Since the Problem is a concise, yet mystifying question that deals directly with the friction between justice and mercy, discussions involving it are likely to yield valuable insights regarding Christianity and the criminal legal system.

After all, in a country whose legal system is experiencing a constant battle between calls for justice and pleas for mercy, it is beneficial to look to a field that has been tackling that same question for centuries, and to consider the theories they have produced. One such field is Christian theology, and in this paper, I will discuss multiple theories that attempt to reconcile the Problem of Hell, then analyze their merit and create analogous models of the carceral system, all in an attempt to find a model of prisons that might measure up to a divine moral standard. Ultimately, I will argue that, compared to traditionalism, the choice model, and universalism, a particularly fair (i.e., particularly just and merciful) afterlife model is purgatorial universalism, the view that all souls will be reconciled with God after a period of post-mortem spiritual cleansing. I will then propose how this theory could inspire an analogous model of rehabilitative prisons in the United States, aiming to justify this rehabilitative model via my defense of purgatorial universalism itself.

In summary, I find that exploring responses to the Problem of Hell has implications on the criminal legal system, and purgatorial universalism serves as a beneficial framework for imagining prison reform in the United States.

Why Christianity?

Benoit Blanc, a self-described atheist, adopts Father Jud's emphasis on mercy towards the end of *Wake Up Dead Man*, when he decides not to reveal the killer to the parishioners. He launches into a monologue, announcing, "My revelation came from Father Jud. His example to have grace. Grace for my enemy. Grace for the broken. Grace for those who deserve it the least and need it the most. For the guilty." Blanc's revelation is a poignant example of a non-Christian, one who is concerned solely with his legal work, applying a Christian model to criminal justice. As I will do throughout this paper, Blanc finds criminal legal counsel from a religion which has a history of grappling with the justice versus mercy dilemma.

On this point, I am not interested in Christian values simply by virtue of their being Christian. I look to Christianity for several other reasons. First, Christianity is the dominant religion of the United States, both by number and by political influence. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, in our current Congress, 87 percent – almost 9 in 10 – members are Christian. This figure exceeds the portion of Christian adults in the United States overall, but they still

make up the lion's share of the population at 62 percent as of 2025 (Diamant). Relatedly, Christian views tend to dominate the academic field of theology and other fields of philosophy. Thus, there is an abundance of study on theological issues such as mercy and justice, though the approach I will take is one which has scarcely (if ever) been related to the criminal legal system before. To give a sense of how far back this issue goes, note that, as previously mentioned, medieval conceptions of the justice versus mercy dilemma are well-recorded (Clark). As such, there are perspectives, proposed solutions, and dialogues aplenty.

Whether Christianity has any moral authority over the world is a separate issue. Regardless, its theology has been the subject of such a large amount of intense debate, scrutiny, and critical analysis that it contains a wealth of refined arguments. It is natural to assume some applicable approaches have emerged from this process. This is the primary reason it is the lens I adopt in this paper.

Additionally, due to Christianity's majority advantage both in the United States government and general population, arguments based on Christianity have a built-in advantage in appealing to most government representatives and voters. Thus, any conclusions drawn from this paper will automatically have an (arguably unfair) upper hand if ever produced as defense to support future legislation.

The Problem of Hell and the Problem of Prisons

The Problem of Hell

To understand the Problem of Hell, one must first understand hell itself. Traditionalism, the "status quo" view of hell in Christianity involves eternal conscious torment, meaning damned people experience pain forever, and are wholly conscious of their suffering as it occurs.

To show how this raises a dilemma, I look to *The Problem of Hell*, a work authored by Jonathan Kvanvig, a professor of philosophy at Washington University. He writes that the issue is that "the evil of hell leads nowhere; at no point in the future will something of value make up for the evil of hell or will some reward be granted to those who endure the suffering of hell. Hell is apparently paradigmatic as an example of truly pointless, gratuitous evil" (Kvanvig). Therein lies the Problem of Hell.

Zachary Manis offers another insight that I will borrow for my definition of the Problem. He defines the issue as arising because "belief in hell seems prima facie incompatible with other beliefs, actions, and attitudes that are fundamental to the Christian faith." I appreciate this definition for two reasons. Firstly, the use of "prima facie" is relevant here. In this paper, I do not intend to make a judgment on the existence of hell or the existence of God. Instead, my interest in the Problem of Hell is that it (a) has implications on justice, mercy, punishment, retribution, redemption, and equity, (b) has similarities with the problems in United States prisons that

render it a helpful parallel, and (c) that people have been discussing it with a blazing passion for centuries. So, it is the *apparent* discrepancy between hell and an all-merciful God that remains of interest to me, no matter my personal beliefs on related questions like the existence of God, the nature of God, et cetera. I also like that this definition is open-ended enough that justice, equity, mercy, and grace may all be counted under “attitudes that are fundamental to the Christian faith” in my use of it –which are the Christian values I plan to focus on.

However, please note that, unlike both Kvanvig and Manis for the duration of my argument, I will capitalize the “Problem of Hell.” Though this is an uncommon choice, I include it in order to distinguish this specific theological dilemma from related ideas. Since all three words of the term are seen commonly in varying contexts, I find this clarification useful, whereas it might be unnecessary when discussing a term such as “purgatorial universalism.” This also allows me to refer to it clearly in shorthand (i.e., “the Problem”).

In light of these considerations, the following is the definition of the Problem of Hell that I will adhere to: (in Christianity) the theological dilemma that arises because the doctrine of eternal damnation in hell seems *prima facie* incompatible with the existence of an all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good (i.e., all-merciful) god.

The Problem of Prisons

The Problem of Hell is, in my opinion, not only the most distilled version of the justice versus mercy discussion, but the most scintillating one and one which provides a fascinating parallel to our criminal legal system.

Indeed, the problems with our legal system mirror the Problem of Hell; neither our criminal legal system’s outcome nor goal seems to be improving the lives or conduct of incarcerated people. One way to deduce this is to look at recidivism rates produced by the United States’ status quo prison routine. According to a study by the United States Bureau of Justice Statistics from 2018, which followed up on cases of formerly incarcerated people to assess their recidivism rates, 82 percent of them were arrested within 10 years of their release, and the majority of them (62 percent) had returned to prisons (Antenangeli). With those figures in mind, note that possible alternatives exist; the United States Department of Justice lists implementing correctional education programs – a form of correctional rehabilitation – as one possibility for improving outcomes (United States, Dept. of Justice). As explained by Jessica Keach in her piece for WestEd, a San Francisco based nonprofit focused on education, youth development, and public policy, these programs include skills aimed at making reentry in society as feasible as possible for inmates, including, “adult basic education and literacy, secondary education leading to a high school diploma or equivalency, vocational or career and technical education, postsecondary education, English as a second language instruction, and other

programming to support life skills and reentry.” Evaluating the impact of such an approach on incarcerated people, a study by the RAND Corporation, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization that focuses on public policy, found that prisoners engaged in correctional education were 43 percent less likely to reoffend in the future (“Correctional Education”). If prisons were about turning broken people into productive members of society, these fact-based rehabilitative approaches would not only exist, but they would be the *point* of prisons. They would be what prisons *are*. Yet, this is not the case. As the Prison Policy Initiative points out in their assessment titled “The State Prison Experience: Too Much Drudgery, Not Enough Opportunity,” only 17 percent of people in state prisons report current participation in educational programs. Prisons more often involve “work assignments” as their “programming,” which “are not thoughtfully designed to provide job skills and development: They are intended to keep the prison running and keep ‘idleness’ at bay” (Wang). When there is such extensive research showing that rehabilitative programs are effective in creating positive outcomes for incarcerated people, yet they are still being implemented so sparingly, it becomes clear that the valiant aim of improving lives of inmates is not the priority of the U.S. criminal legal system.

This is where the Problem of Hell aligns with the problem of prisons. Remember that, according to Kvanvig, this lack of concern for creating a positive outcome for wrongdoers is the very source of the Problem of Hell. Manis corroborates this, pointing out how hell is incompatible with mercy, writing, “the suffering of hell neither serves nor is intended to serve a reformatory function: **it is not aimed at the moral improvement—or more generally, the good—of the one punished**” [emphasis mine]. Replace the word “hell” with “prison” and you are left with the problem of prisons.

Wake Up Dead Man highlights another possible shortcoming with the current system. Father Jud’s (aforementioned) explanation for Blanc’s interest in finding the murderer so he can be punished reveals an aspect of the criminal legal system that he finds distasteful. He describes Benoit Blanc’s obsession with catching the killer and bringing them to justice, “‘It is a game! Solving it, winning it. Getting your big checkmate moment. And by using me in it, you’re setting me against my real and only purpose in life. Which is not to fight the wicked and bring them to justice, but to serve them and bring them to Christ.’” Father Jud sees criminal justice, at least the way Blanc approaches it, as overly concerned with dominance. The goal he describes is to find the criminal and conquer them, rather than to heal them. Perhaps that attitude is more aligned with what our prison system is designed to do, at least more so than to create people equipped for positive, pro-social lives.

It certainly aligns with the historical rhetoric of crime mitigation in the United States. Take, for example, the address that John Mitchell, the then-attorney general, gave before the 1971 Attorney General’s Conference on Crime Reduction, which asserts, “I do not hesitate to use the

term '**war**,' for that is exactly what it is. There is nothing controversial about this war. There is the side of law, **justice**, honesty, and public safety. And there is the side of lawlessness, dishonesty, human exploitation, and violence. I consider our meeting here in Washington a strategy conference on **our side**--a conference among allied **officers** over the maps of tomorrow's **battlefield**" (Mitchell 1 [emphasis mine]). According to the Vera Institute of Justice, the 1970s was the decade that launched the era of U.S. mass incarceration ("American History"). Mitchell's address was given in the year 1971 and discussed the topic of law enforcement in front of the United States' most powerful legal officials at the time. As such, it is not outlandish to suggest that this type of militant, domineering rhetoric is related to the prison system's expansion – and this aggressive mentality passed off as "justice" is precisely the issue Father Jud takes with Benoit Blanc's attitude.

One possible objection is that simple *deterrence* from crime is the true and valiant purpose of the criminal legal system. However, as previously stated, the majority of incarcerated people end up back in prison within 10 years of their release (Antenangeli). Either deterrence is not the objective of incarceration, or it is miserably failing at its aim.

Moreover, even imagining prisons as an effective deterrence tactic creates a suboptimal model. In such a system, incarcerated people would essentially be sacrifices, their suffering feeding fear that keeps the rest of society in line. I hesitate to endorse a system that intentionally causes fear and relies on suffering. To me, this seems neither just *nor* merciful. I believe we can do better than that. This brings us back to the Problem of Hell. In brief, the Problem of Hell arises from the suspicion that *an all-loving God can do better* than the eternal conscious torment predicted by the traditionalist view. Attempts to solve the problem of prisons, similarly, arise from the belief *that the United States prison system must do better* for society and the individuals it incarcerates.

Theories on the Problem of Hell

In search of a possible model of the Christian afterlife that is equitable and merciful enough to act as a model for an improved criminal legal system, I will look to popular Christian theological theories that address the Problem of Hell. Having already explored traditionalism (eternal conscious torment), these theories are the choice model, universalism, and purgatorial universalism.

The Choice Model

In the choice model, sin is a decision to separate from God, and eternal separation from God is the natural consequence that follows. Zachary Manis, in his book *Sinners in the Presence of a Loving God*, describes the choice model as arguing that "damnation is, in some important sense, chosen by the damned: God is simply respecting human free will in consigning some to hell."

Applying that same logic to criminal justice, I imagine an approach that views committing a crime as a choice to separate oneself from society, which renders prison (formal separation from society) a natural response.

The theological choice model seems fair on the surface. However, the primary complication is that if God is indeed all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good, if heaven is an optimal, eternal afterlife, if salvation is accessible to all (all standard features of Christian doctrine) – then, no one in their right mind who had all of the correct information would ever turn away from God. Thus, it follows that anyone who does deny God is either (a) lacking all the correct information, or (b) not in their right mind. I believe that few would argue that it is merciful to consciously torture someone for all eternity for the transgression of being (a) lacking accurate knowledge, or (b) not adept enough to act accordingly.

The legal choice model is similarly problematic, primarily because it assumes that all crimes are committed by an informed, free, rational mind, and are thus indicative of consent to separate from society. This does not take into account anyone whose offenses may be due to factors beyond their control, including mental health issues, misunderstandings, desperation, et cetera. In other words, it does not account for circumstances.

Universalism

Another response to the Problem of Hell is universalism. Unlike the choice model, universalism does not argue that hell is just. Instead, it suggests that hell is not any soul's eternal fate. To keep with the prison parallel, a legal counterpart to universalism might be prison abolition, a movement that aims to abolish the carceral system as a whole; if God and society are analogous, the judgment day that is a court hearing will always end in reunification with society.

While I believe abolition to be a worthy end goal to keep in mind while working to reduce the need for prisons, I see a need for a more realistic steppingstone, because abolitionists do not yet have a solid framework for a system with which to replace prisons. To demonstrate this, one can look to the deinstitutionalization movement, which parallels proposed prison abolition. In the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Blake Erickson, who is affiliated with the Columbia University Department of Psychiatry, details the roadblocks experienced during the deinstitutionalization movement as follows: In the 1960s, the movement for deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill began, which lobbied for the transfer of institutionalized mental health patients to community homes. In 1964, President Kennedy signed the Community Mental Health Act (CMHA), which aimed to decrease the number of institutionalized individuals, primarily by advancing psychopharmacology and increasing access to supportive housing. Instead, the legislation caused newly deinstitutionalized people to be

dispersed across the mental health system, without a single organization able to meet their needs. No longer in mental health care, many re-entered institutional services in another form, finding themselves in “hospitals, jails, prisons, and forensic facilities” (Erickson). In an interview conducted by the *New York University Law News*, Rachel Barkow, a professor at the institution, draws parallels between the de-institutionalization movement and abolition and reflects on what it can teach us about the viability of the proposal. She points out, “It is easier to end something than to fund something. So while the deinstitutionalization advocates achieved the agenda of closing hospitals, they failed in getting community health centers and other alternatives to serve the needs of people previously in state hospitals” (qtd in “Emptying”). In light of this example, I do not endorse the idea of immediate abolition, because I fear a system in which incarcerated people do not get the support they need to avoid reoffending in the future, and I believe that prisons have the power to provide that – so long as radical changes occur. As such, I am neither in favor of the current United States carceral system, nor do I believe we are ready for it to vanish completely.

Purgatorial Universalism

According to Ionna-Maria Patsalidou, “Universalism is the doctrine that all human beings will be ultimately saved.” I appreciate the simplicity and accuracy of Patsalidou’s definition of universalism. However, Manis provides his own definition, which makes an important nuance of the doctrine clearer, refining what I assume Patsalidou intends to say with the word “ultimately.”

Zachary Manis defines universalism as “the view that none are consigned to eternal suffering because everyone is (eventually) saved.” In this definition, the word “eventually” opens a gateway to a sub-philosophy within universalism. That philosophy is purgatorial universalism, which wouldn’t hear of wrapping “eventually” in parentheses, but instead takes it to be the operative word; purgatorial universalism says that all people will be saved, but only after post-mortem spiritual cleansing in purgatory.

There are myriad renditions and speculations on what purgatory might actually entail, but a broad definition might go as follows, as written by Isabel Moreira, in her paper “Purgatory in Historical Perspective,” published in the *St. Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*: “Purgatory is a place, state, or stage in the Christian afterlife where, after death, the soul is purged of minor, unexpiated sin so that it can be fit for heaven.” This definition is general in its ideas of the nature of purgatory, though I find its requirement of the purged sins being “minor” to be too narrow for my purposes, and its inclusion raises an important distinction that I will now address.

Few, if any, denominations of Christianity teach purgatorial universalism (or universalism in general, for that matter) as official doctrine, though many are tolerant of the belief. This is because purgatorial universalism is not a creed at all; it is a response to the Problem of Hell in discussions of Christian theology. It is a way that many reconcile a question that pervades all of Christianity, not a teaching of any one church.

In the case of Moreira, she looks at purgatory through a historical lens, focusing on Catholic renditions of the idea. Since universalism is an uncommon perspective in Catholicism, a Catholic view of purgatory might not endorse that all people can be saved via post-mortem cleansing, only some people; in Moreira's definition, only people with minor unaddressed sins will be able to pass through to heaven. From a universalist perspective, however, all souls can and *will* be saved, no matter the nature of their misconduct. It is bringing in that perspective that translates Moreira's view of purgatory into one compatible with purgatorial *universalism*. Thus, drawing from Moreira but including my shift, the definition of purgatory that I will use going forward is this: "a place, state, or stage in the Christian afterlife" (Moreira), before heaven, in which the soul is cleansed of all unabsolved sin.

I argue that purgatorial universalism is a fair model of the Christian afterlife because it balances the Christian conceptions that God is both merciful and just. The issue with hell, as Kvanvig puts it, is that the cruelty it perpetuates is pointless. One might argue that it restores some sort of cosmic balance, causing those who have caused suffering to suffer themselves. Yet even this hypothetical scale would be unbalanced, since it would involve eternal retribution for finite sins. This renders it an unjust model. Purgatorial universalism solves this by asserting that hell is not infinite retribution for a finite crime, because it is not infinite at all. It solves Kvanvig's objection, because the experience serves a positive purpose.

This model honors justice *and* mercy; everyone must answer for their mistakes, but in a way that heals their soul, rather than simply scaring them straight. Heaven, after all, is portrayed as paradise, a place of joy, peace, and unification with God. As much as unrepentant sinners are unfit for such a place, so is a horde of trembling, traumatized former sinners. It follows that whatever happens in purgatory, it must produce cleansed, holy souls, without leaving them fearful husks. Speculation on possible landscapes of purgatory aside, that is what we know. Whatever happens in purgatory must be rehabilitative.

Purgatorial Universalism and Correctional Rehabilitation

In light of this, using the fruit of the centuries-old justice versus mercy debate that has taken place throughout Christianity, I believe that our criminal legal system would benefit from imitating this afterlife model. Like human souls, I do not suggest that anyone should be let off without answering for their missteps. I do, however, recommend that the purpose of prisons be

rehabilitation. Under this framework, people who have broken the law (like sinful souls) would be, if severe enough to warrant it (i.e., not all crimes lead to incarceration under our current system, not all should under this proposed one), required to undergo a temporary period (i.e., no life sentences, no death penalty), of incarceration, which should be approached with the sole aim of addressing the factors that led to their misconduct (like cleansing a soul; note that this will be different for every offender), after which they will be able to re-enter society (like passage into heaven).

To ground this model in realistic expectations: because we are mortal, and do not have the benefit of eternity that the Christian God does, some people will die before they are fit to be released. However, no one will be officially condemned to life in prison, and no one will be given the death penalty. Such tactics are more similar to a traditionalist or annihilationist view, the latter of which refers to the theory that God will simply destroy souls unfit for heaven upon death. What makes my proposed model a universalist one is that the system will not give up on anyone. There will be no point-blank numbers of years to serve and no isolation from resources during or after incarceration. Every person who has broken the law will be treated as a human being with the potential for full rehabilitation, whether they achieve it in their lifetime or not.

As briefly alluded to, this system would not involve typical sentencing. No one will be given a set number of years for which they must serve their sentence. Instead, every carceral term will depend on the person's progress and professional (e.g., involving psychiatry, social work, et cetera) evaluations of their capacity for pro-social behavior. In some ways, this renders the model closer to a psychiatric hospital than a prison; it is a structure in which periodical evaluations determine when a patient leaves (one which involves the understanding that some never will).

Correctional Rehabilitation

I acknowledge that I have invoked fields I am not familiar with, such as psychiatry and social work. Implementing this rehabilitative system would involve extensive further research, planning, and expertise that I do not have.

Luckily, though rehabilitative incarceration has not been fully explored through this particular lens of the Problem of Hell, I am far from the first to suggest some form of correctional rehabilitation as an alternative to the status quo. The programs and models that already exist are proof that they can be designed. In addition to and in collaboration with the aforementioned implementation of educational programs in prisons, two popular correctional rehabilitation models are the Good Lives Model and the Risk-Need-Responsivity model.

The former is a framework which “undertakes rehabilitation based in the understanding that crime is an unhealthy way in which individuals pursue the good life,” according to authors

Vincent Bacote and Nathaniel Perrin. They argue for this model from a Christian perspective, making the point that it is aligned with the Christian mission of redemption (Bacote and Perrin). As for the latter: According to Public Safety Canada, a department of the Canadian government which handles public security, The Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model involves ensuring the level of intervention matches each individual's risk of recidivism, evaluating the specific criminogenic needs of each offender, and creating a therapeutic approach accordingly, with the ultimate goal of decreasing recidivism ("Risk-need-responsivity model"). Psychologists and social workers have extensively debated the respective merits of these approaches. This scholarly conversation even involves the possibility of combining them. In the book *The Future of Correctional Rehabilitation: Moving Beyond the RNR Model and Good Lives Model Debate*, Ronen Ziv combines these two popular models of correctional rehabilitation. I will not go too deep into the details of any of these models, because my aim in mentioning them is merely to communicate that I am not reinventing the wheel by proposing rehabilitative strategies.

My aim throughout this paper is to argue for a framework of rehabilitative incarceration based on the justice versus mercy discussion that has been so thoroughly studied in Christian theology, with the acknowledgement that such a framework might involve a variety of rehabilitation strategies. These strategies matter to my argument in that they show that this field is alive and continuing to synthesize new approaches that would be compatible with my proposed model of prisons.

Conclusion

It is certain that the more research done on correctional rehabilitation, the more the field will grow, complicate, and refine itself so that it can be implemented on a wider scale in the United States. It is a separate field from Christian theology and its own sub-topic within legal studies; my goal is to bridge the gap to see what useful insight might be taken from the theology sphere into the legal one, not to exhaust both. My hope is that rehabilitation will become what prisons *are*, in the same way that rehabilitation is (based on its input of sinners and output of cleansed souls) what purgatory is.

Additionally, I must acknowledge that Christianity is far from the only religion that deals with the tension between the ideals of justice and mercy, and the theories that Christian theologians have produced may very well benefit from a look into the wisdom of other faiths. What I hope will stay consistent throughout this further research is the aim of creating a criminal legal system that is consistent with the virtues of both justice and mercy. This aim could produce a number of approaches.

The U.S. carceral system is an urgent problem, considering the magnitude of it, the dissatisfaction it causes in most Americans, and the frequency of reoffense in formerly

incarcerated individuals. As such, new and creative approaches are required to mend it. Like Father Jud and Benoit Blanc, I believe there is wisdom in the ideals of both justice and mercy, and that Christian theology's experience grappling with both ideals makes it a field worth considering when evaluating the prison system. From the research that such an approach produces, I find purgatorial universalism, as a theory responding to the Problem of Hell, to be a particularly fair model of the afterlife, and one which can be used to formulate an improved model of prisons in the United States; I propose that such a framework is one which relies on the progress of incarcerated individuals to determine the time of their release and holds that the criminal justice system should aim to rehabilitate.

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