

ESCHATOLOGICAL ULTIMACY AND THE BEST POSSIBLE HEREAFTER

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In my earlier article in this journal, which I entitled 'The Essence of Eschatology: A Modal Interpretation', I argued that different understandings of eschatology and eschatological doctrines form one important class of Ideals of Ultimate Reality and Meaning (URAM). I also gave a preliminary hermeneutical analysis of the essence of eschatology, or what valid eschatological conceptions share in common (Davenport 1996, 206-39). I believe that the argument in this paper was sufficient to refute several generalisations made in the past about URAM. For example, consider Kevin Sharpe's argument, based on 'sociobiological' theory, that Ultimate Reality may have no "morality" at all and that, like our moral sense, the idea of Ultimate Reality 'arose in the evolutionary history of humanity' (Sharpe 1996, pp.240, 244). As my earlier hermeneutical analysis emphasized, Elhade's work shows that the cosmogonic idea of divinity from which the eschatological concept of URAM evolves is not explicable in any naturalistic terms. Sociobiological theory certainly has not given us any plausible account of the evolution of such URAM ideas, nor could it. I suggest that the very idea of eschatological possibility is not one that is native to human reasoning, nor one that the human mind could invent on its own. Moreover, it is clearly lacking in the earliest stages of human culture, whose peoples were not *generically* very different than us. Finally, the special sense of possibility involved in eschatology connects the sacred and the moral, thereby providing for a kind of final resolution of the problem of evil.

The resulting account of the essential features of eschatological meaning was *anti-oluntaristic* in ways that I will develop later in this paper. My aim here is to clarify the implications of my earlier analysis for understanding both the subjective relation of human persons to eschatological possibility, and the temporal relation between our universe and its hereafter. In the process, I hope to develop a way of modeling different eschatological doctrines or faiths that will (a) clarify the relation of eschatological reality to other traditional categories of ontology; (b) show how to represent the modal implications of different eschatological conceptions; and (c) provide some criteria both for ruling out some conceptions as *pseudo-eschatological* and for making objective comparisons between the ideals envisioned in different genuinely eschatological conceptions of ultimacy. These comparisons will allow me to defend the thesis that Jewish and Christian existentialist conceptions of eschatology are the most adequate, in the sense of developing the fullest inherent potential in eschatological meaning.

It will be helpful to begin by clarifying my original goal in defining 'ultimacy' in terms of eschatological finality. As Professor Tibor Horvath argued in response to my earlier article, we also have to recognise that non-eschatological ideals, possibilities, or objects may count as 'ultimate' in many conceptions of URAM (Horvath 1997, pp. 74-5). I have no disagreement with this important point, although I do think there is some limit to the kinds of scientific principles that could plausibly count as ultimate in the foundational sense.

I also agree with Ronald Glasberg that foundational principles in ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology are extremely important for human life, since with them 'human beings can more effectively orient themselves in the world and make those changes that will lead to greater justice, rationality, and meaningfulness' (Glasberg 1997, p.2). In fact, one of my principal motives for drawing the distinction between the eschatological and other categories is to *protect* the sort of principles to which Glasberg refers from conflation with eschatological faith. For example, my analysis implies that trying to derive a theory of social justice straight from the eschatological doctrine of some particular faith always involves a category mistake. On my view, moral, epistemological, and ontological ultimates cannot be reduced to or derived from eschatology: thus eschatology cannot *replace* the scientific and philosophical principles that may function as our ultimate guides in understanding our world and developing better forms of life. But neither can *these* principles fill the role played by eschatological conceptions of the end of time: scientific, epistemological, metaphysical, and moral principles are held to be 'ultimate' in a sense quite different from that of eschatological ultimacy. The eschatological is therefore left out, overlooked, or distorted if we start from the foundational concept of ultimacy as our sole paradigm. There are thus two categorically different but equiprimordial senses of 'ultimacy' that cannot be mediated. As I will later explain, there are links and relationships between structures, principles, or ideals we take as ultimate in each of these senses, but they cannot be synthesized or reduced to a single unifying or underlying principle.

1. THE PARADOX OF OUR DUAL RELATION TO THE ETHICAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL

The need for this irreducible division can be reinforced by examining the ways in which various kinds of non-eschatological ideals or principles may count as 'ultimate'. In his response to me, Professor Horvath argued that 'no one can understand or exist as a human being without having an idea of ultimate reality and meaning' (Horvath 1997, p.75). There are distinct volitional and epistemological parts to this interesting claim. The first is Paul Tillich's idea that, subjectively, each person has something that is most important or meaningful to her, or that operates as her *highest value*, or as the deepest motivation for her actions - whether she recognises it or not, or whether it is at all well-defined or unified (Tillich 1951, pp. 20, 40). Thus, following Kierkegaard, Horvath rightly says, 'One may recite his or her Creed; yet if money, pleasure, or power, decisively influences his or her life and activities, then God of his or her Creed is not really his/her idea of ultimate reality and meaning' (*Ibid.*, p.75). In this existential sense, it is certain that many ideals, objects, or ends without eschatological character can be made personally ultimate (Davenport 2001, pp. 296-300). Yet Tillich's own definition of 'ultimate concern' as 'unconditional, independent of any conditions of character, desire, or circumstance' and 'of infinite passion and interest' (Tillich 1951, p.12) also suggests a self-unifying or wholehearted type of attitude which points towards the more objective idea of what *should* concern us ultimately. The presence of an idea of the objectively ultimate is clear in Tillich's work, since he argues that 'idolatry is the eleva-

tion of a preliminary concern to ultimacy. Something essentially conditioned is taken as 'unconditional' and valued with a religious pathos inappropriate to it (*Ibid.*, p.13). Tillich thus clearly means to distinguish between the essentially infinite (which cannot become an object) that *ought* to concern us ultimately, and essentially finite objects or ends with which, *in fact*, we may try to be ultimately concerned, or to which we may wrongly give ultimate status. It is an interesting question whether Tillich would have accepted any non-eschatological ideal as objectively ultimate in his sense.

Second, Horvath's claim alludes to his own thesis, developed in a fascinating paper on Catholic Christology, that ultimacy in the functional sense of that to which one *reduces and relates everything else*' (Horvath 1997, p.75) means the Archimedean principle in our hermeneutic system of understanding (Horvath 1993B, p.257), or equivalently,

the final hermeneutical principle in the light of which not only each person but the whole universe is to be understood (Horvath 1993B, p.258).

In this conception of knowledge, as I read it, each person must have some 'properly basic' or unquestioned interpretive key that operates in this way as 'the last hermeneutic principle in light of which [they] understand whatever they understand' (*Ibid.*, p.262). Like Tillich's volitional definition of ultimacy, this epistemological definition of ultimacy also has an objective side. It entails that one conception of URAM is *better* or more adequate the more it is *able* to serve as the 'total horizon' of one's existence (Horvath 1980, p.146), or as the final unifying horizon of intelligibility for a wider and more varied kinds of experiences than another. If this is right, then URAM conceptions are to be measured by their power of *integration*, or their ability to function as the unifying unconditional foundation of the different 'strata' of meaning and motivation that we experience (Davenport 1996, pp. 208-9). Thus when we experience something that cannot be reconciled with our current URAM, we have a crisis that forces us towards a more comprehensive or adequate URAM, i.e. one with greater 'problem-solving power' (Horvath 1980, p.161). So we can progress by comparing ideas of URAM with respect to their 'life-problem-solving capacity'. In this way we can eliminate other URAM ideas which have less problem-solving power', or that are less versatile, or that have less facility to unify by grounding experience across divergent categories (Horvath 1996, p.79).

It was this *objective criterion* for the adequacy of URAM conceptions, based on the foundationalist sense of ultimacy, which my earlier article meant to question by arguing that what makes eschatology 'ultimate' is *not* its functioning as a final hermeneutic principle or ground for interpretation and understanding, but precisely its transcendence of human intelligibility. Thus eschatological ultimacy is a counterexample to Horvath's criterion. Moreover, while eschatological hope, however specifically conceived, can only be *subjectively* appropriated through ultimate concern in Tillich's sense, my earlier analysis implies – perhaps paradoxically – that by its nature as faith in a distinctive kind of possibility, eschatological hope cannot be the *basis* (either epistemologically or ontologically) of the Good which it expects to be realised in the hereafter.

Perhaps less clearly, my analysis also implied that eschatological fulfillment (however precisely conceived) cannot properly function as the highest motivating end of our will. Rather, as Juan Martínez de Ripalda (1594–1648) held, there is a sense in which grace can only be 'found by those who were not seeking it, nor even intending to look for it' (Perry 1993, p.193). We encounter here the paradox, as Alasdair MacIntyre used to put it, that we hope for salvation, but we can only be saved if we value *other ends* (e.g. human welfare) for their *own sake*, and not merely so that by valuing them, we will merit salvation. If we take blessedness in the hereafter as our final goal in the sense that everything else is a *means* to this, then our commitment to interhuman morality becomes merely instrumental, merely a way to seek our own benefit, which shows that we lack virtue. But our salvation depends – in some way – precisely on our willingness to struggle for virtue as an end-in-itself.

We must beware not to distort this point into a rejection of any hope for oneself, however. In an early essay, Emmanuel Levinas goes to the extreme of saying that 'Patience does not consist in the Agent betraying his generosity by giving himself the time of a personal immortality. To renounce being the contemporary of the triumph of one's work is to envisage this triumph in a *time without me*, to aim at this world without me, to aim at a time beyond the horizon of my time, in an eschatology without hope for oneself, or in a liberation from my time' (Levinas 1996, p.50). Levinas is trying here to distinguish agape from the instrumental attitude that aids neighbors only as a means to future reward. But he seems to infer that agape or generous care for the other *rules out* any individual hope for the beatitude of participating *personally* in the final triumph of the Good. This also fails to grasp the paradox of our dual relation to eschatological possibility, because it forgets that pure agape can co-exist with the agent's hope for a final meaning that will *not* leave him out. The paradox of our dual relation, rightly understood, shows that we can have the eschatological possibility of our beatitude – or the possibility of victory by virtue of the absurd – *in view* when acting on moral grounds, but only as an effect *beyond* our intended end, an unintended yet anticipated response from the Absolute.

Although this means that eschatology cannot operate as the foundation of ethics nor as the ground of authentic human ends, it may still be true that human persons both always operate with some subjectively ultimate concern, and always need to form a genuinely eschatological sense of ultimate possibilities for their projects, pursuits, and endeavors to have adequate personal meaning. Kierkegaard held something like this in his insistence that human beings are *teleologically oriented* towards a wholehearted will, and that, in the end, this is impossible for us to sustain without faith in the eschatological promise of a final salvation (Davenport 2001, pp. 273-4; 301-2). Thus it is possible to agree that eschatological ultimacy plays a crucial role in making possible a life in which one can find moral meaning, without implying that eschatological hope grounds the moral norms and ideals involved in such a meaningful life.

In response, a critic might suggest that this teaching about our paradoxical dual relation to moral universals and eschatological hope for the final fulfillment of these requirements is merely a special feature of certain forms of Christian faith. But my earlier analysis of the structure of eschatological meaning in general, instead, shows that

this is an essential implication of eschatology *as such*, so that any conception of the hereafter which lacks this implication is to that extent objectively inadequate or liable to lose the pure sense of eschatological possibility by conflation with other categories.

1.1 *Three Inadequate Eschatologies*

1.1.1 Childish Religion

It will help to review three familiar ways that inadequate eschatological conceptions tend to reduce this paradox of our dual relation. The first, which we might term childish religion, is to conceive salvation as our direct aim, or as the only end-in-itself, which we can pursue without any relation to moral ends or ethical ideals as *intrinsic values*. The results of this approach are that

- (i) that salvation itself is conceived as the possibility of a sheer act of power, rather than as the possible *realisation of the good*;
- (ii) the divinity which performs this act of salvation is reduced once again to Fate, the archaic conception of a cosmogonic force that makes reality, but without any relation to the Good as an independent category; and, finally,
- (iii) worship of such a divinity is reduced, in Kierkegaard's terms, to a kind of aestheticism. It becomes sheer awe of an amoral power.

1.1.2 Salvation as Ethical Virtue

The second way to avoid the paradox is to conceive salvation as only an upshot of *ethical virtue*, as a foreseen or expected, albeit not intended, result necessarily following from moral worth. This strategy is also well-known: we find it in Plato's eschatology, and to some extent also in Aristotle's theory of God. We also find this pattern repeated in Kant's argument from morality to eschatological faith as a necessary 'postulate' of pure practical reason. Its results are that

- (i) there are no possible hereafters in which persons of less than adequate virtue are saved through mercy (i.e. the salvation of evil persons becomes impossible); and
- (ii) eschatological outcomes appear to be *merely a natural teleological result* of good character, as if the Good itself contained the power of unfolding its ultimate realisation from within itself;
- (iii) the God who makes such outcomes possible is reduced from a personal being with freedom to the impersonal principle of this automatic teleology, i.e. the form of a self-implementing Good.

In this approach, too, the miracle in eschatology is lost, and unfounded eudaimonistic expectations get *built into* ethics, as if good character must, by its own power, necessarily lead to final happiness commensurate with its worth. The Stoics also provide a good example of this error.

1.1.3 Voluntarism

Finally, if we simply ignore the paradox altogether, and think that we can will commit-

ment to good ends and virtuous character as a *means* to salvation, then we are in danger of losing all virtue in favor of a spiteful expectation of final triumph, and thus of validating Nietzsche's critique of religion as a mere subterfuge of *ressentiment*, a revenge tactic appropriate to a slave mentality.

1.2 *Our Dual Relationship to the Ethical and to the Eschatological*

These distortions can be avoided only through an account that upholds the paradox of our dual relation to the ethical and eschatological without reducing or denying it. My earlier analysis was designed precisely to show why the historically evolved structure of eschatological meaning implies that eschatological possibilities for human existence can properly be conceived neither as automatic *rewards* for virtue nor as results of sheer divine fiat unaffected by our free determination of our moral character. Rather, as Hans Küng says, images of eschatology are not about any literal termination of history: 'the promised end... is not to be understood as a simple ending, but as a completion and fulfillment' (Küng 1981, p.656) – and more precisely, as a fulfillment of *the ethical* in time. Yet what eschatology gives to ethics is neither an external reward (which an ethical character deserves but does not require) nor just an internal development of its own nature, like the flower emerging from the bud. Rather the *eschaton* gives to ethical character what it most needs and cannot itself find in ethical ideality: namely, the possibility that ethical endeavor is not ultimately *meaningless*, that it can succeed, that there is an alternative to the abyss. This recognition is essential to the antivoluntaristic conception of eschatology because, as Jerome Schneewind has explained, modern antivoluntarism holds that 'God is essential to morality' because morality cannot guarantee its own success, but at the same time 'rational practical principles cannot require pointless or self-defeating action...' (Schneewind 1995, p.32). Morality thus requires hope for its possible fulfillment, although it cannot itself provide the basis for this hope. As Küng so eloquently puts it:

Believing in the Finisher of the world does not mean imagining the consummation in the form of the "Last Judgment" as engraved indelibly in the Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo, or as the heaven depicted by Raphael in the Vatican Palace....Neither does believing in God as Finisher of the world mean deciding for one or the other of the cosmological theories of the end of the universe....[It means] an enlightened trust that the final orientation of the world and man does not remain inexplicable; that the world and man are not hurtled pointlessly from nothing into nothing, but that as a whole they are meaningful and valuable....(Küng 1981, p.658).

Eschatology, as Küng understands it, is about fulfilling ethical ideals by making possible their final meaningfulness in the cosmos. Eschatology does not try to replace ethics by making salvation our ultimate volitional aim, since a good will cannot intend right action merely as a means to salvation, or it is not a good will. Hence, if it is to have a genuinely *eschatological* significance, an expected restoration of the world or an anticipated personal salvation cannot be grasped as humanly possible or as within our individual or collective power – and so it cannot be our *aim* or *goal* to bring about

eschatological restoration. If this is the reason for which we act, then we have misappropriated eschatology, treated the hoped-for end as if it were either an ethical imperative or an external reward to be sought or earned. To quote King again,

Believing in God as Finisher of the world means coolly and realistically...to work for a better future, a better society, in peace, freedom and justice, and at the same time to know without illusions that this can always only be sought but never completely realized by man...[It] means to know that this world is not the ultimate reality, that conditions will not remain the same forever, that all existing things—including religious and ecclesiastical traditions, institutions, authorities—have a provisional character, that the division into classes and races, rich and poor, rulers and ruled, is temporary, that the world is changing and changeable....(*Ibid.*, p. 659).

This is as far as possible from the attitude of many American millennialists in the Pentecostal movement, as Cecil Robeck explains:

Pentecostals have seen the work of evangelism in light of the immanent return of Christ as an act of love. Works of social justice, however, have often been viewed as a waste of time, an unwelcome competitor for limited commodities.... At times it has supported a selfish lifestyle by providing a reason why it is unimportant to be socially involved. This world, after all, is a lost cause, socially speaking (Robeck 1992, p. 3-4).

This is only one illustration of the kinds of corruption that can result when eschatological meaning degenerates through taking the salvation of ourselves or others as our direct and highest goal, rather than preserving the paradoxical balance of our dual relation which is required by the true structure of eschatological possibility.

2. THE PARADOXICAL TEMPORAL STATUS OF ESCHATOLOGICAL HEREAFTERS

If the *eschaton* is not 'ultimate' in the functional sense of serving as our motivational last end, or as our actual deepest value, or as the ontological basis of Beings, or as the criterion of the Good, then eschatology can be 'ultimate' only in a different sense: namely, as King suggests, that it describes a kind of 'finishing' or *finality*. Following John Hick's notion that theistic religions are subject to 'eschatological verification', (Hick 1960) we might say that a conception of URAM is eschatological if it would be confirmed by our indubitable experience of a hereafter world, a 'final fulfillment of God's purpose for us beyond this present life' (Hick 1977, p. 127). But this definition depends on an accurate understanding of what constitutes a 'hereafter'. According to my earlier analysis, the hereafter represents a special kind of *possibility*, which is both epistemologically beyond our power to predict and metaphysically beyond our power to cause, yet divinely possible. As G. van der Leeuw says, it is 'the realization of the impossible', since 'what is not possible for man is possible for God' (van der Leeuw 1957, p. 340).

2.1 *The Eschatological Meaning of God*

It may be that the very notion of 'God' means, first and foremost, precisely the ground of such eschatological possibility: 'God is the first and the last, the alpha and omega, the *eschaton*' (*Ibid.*, p. 340). The different meaning of ultimacy at stake here changes the meaning of the divine. Ordinarily in western theology, God has been defined as the unique bearer of a set of 'maximal' properties, such as being omnipotent (the ontological foundation of all reality), omniscient (the foundation of all knowledge), and omnibenevolent (the foundation of all norms or moral laws and standards). In this tradition, 'Godhood' is associated with both the power of the sacred as Origin or reality *in illo tempore*, and with the ethical ideal. But what is distinctive about eschatology is a *combination* of these aspects in the possibility of a transformation of reality in accordance with the ideal of the Good. The distinctively eschatological meaning of 'God' as the being responsible for bringing about such a combination, therefore, implies something fuller and more comprehensive than the standard list of maximal properties.

Thus the unique character of eschatological possibilities attributable to God the Finisher emerges from a kind of combination of two different and unassimilable basic themes or ideas in human history. The first is the mythical paradigm of the sacred as the original Being – or cosmogonic Nature *in illo tempore* again – which is the source of beings and the 'hierophany' or hallowing by which beings are given their intelligibility, significance, structure and fate. The second source is the ethical ideal of the Good that emerged in the 'axial' period of human history, which underlies the heroic honor code, philosophical reconceptions of 'virtue' and the tragic sense of the world's imperfection which inspires the longing for personal salvation. A hereafter is a divinely possible way in which our present reality could be transformed so that the ethical ideal of the Good is fully realized within it. To summarize this in a neat formula, a hereafter is an *axial hierophany* (Daventrort 1996, p. 226). This conclusion shows that the core structure of eschatology has an essentially antivoluntaristic shape: if the 'good' is defined in voluntaristic terms as whatever God wills, then 'the final realization of the good through divine power' reduces to 'the imposition of God's will' per se. Then the essential heterogeneity of ideas combined in eschatological meaning is lost.

What parts of the 'present reality' are to be transformed in the *eschaton* is left ambiguous in this general formula, however, since different eschatological conceptions give it less or greater scope: some, such as the Whiteheadian conception, hold that only what was good in persons is maintained or 'remembered' in the mind of God (Cain 1984, p. 331); others, such as Mahayana Buddhism, anticipate the salvation of whole individuals in the state of Nirvana; still others, such as the orthodox (Ash'arite) Islamic conception hold that human community will be maintained in a spiritual hereafter, though our physical environment and embodiment will be eliminated; and prophetic Judaism and Christianity expect that the whole physical universe – including the earth, along with its environment and animals – will also remain in a purified form in the hereafter. As these examples already indicate, a possible 'hereafter' in the most general sense will have a paradoxical relation to the 'present reality' that it would succeed: a possible hereafter is a possible 'axial hierophany' scenario or state of affairs that is both *distinct from*, and yet represents the *culmination of*, the actual temporal series in which

we exist as individual persons along with human history and physical nature in general. *Finality* is a combination of the Irreversibility characteristic of temporal ordering with eternal characteristics of completeness and immutability.

2.2 The Transcendent Future

The hereafter thus also stands in a paradoxical relation to the linear sequence of time: in order to exhibit the unique character of eschatological hereafterness, a realm or state of affairs must be directly accessible as a possibility at every point in profane time – as if it were an atemporal eternity set over against our time sequence – and yet it must also be *final*, related to us as the new reality which begins at the *end of the entire present order of linear time*. Thus the eschatological Absolute has an ambiguous temporal character: it is not simply a later period in the same underlying temporal sequence in which we now move, since it stands *beyond* an absolute break with profane time and it remains multiply accessible at all times, unlike the simple future, which is always accessible only *through* intervening periods. For example, the year 2100 is accessible to us only through the year 2099, whereas if there is an eschatological 'future', then it is immediately accessible – not only since it is 'expected' at any moment – but also because individual persons can experience some aspects of it now, and reach it directly through death. Yet neither is the hereafter or eschatological future indifferently related to all points in our time-order, like a Platonic *aeternitas*. In sum, the hereafter cannot be just a static heaven which stands in relation to the order of natural time as universal to particulars; but it also cannot simply be a later 'era' in natural time. Rather, the eschatological reality is both 'transcendent' and 'temporal': it combines the multiple accessibility of the universal and the particularity of the *end* of a teleological progression.

In this respect, my analysis hopes to generalise a point which Professor Horvath develops in his own penetrating treatment of Christian eschatology: 'the resurrection was not just a resuscitation for another life in time but rather an entering into eternal life' (Horvath 1993A, p.8), a life that begins in the present and therefore cannot be just an 'endless' continuation of the same temporal order later in time (*Ibid.*, p.4), though neither can it be a purely spiritual existence in a 'place above' time (*Ibid.*, p.7). As Horvath argues, this is the problem of holding together the completion of cosmic history and individual salvation in eschatology.

This helps to explain why the various end-of-the-universe scenarios predicted by contemporary cosmology have absolutely nothing to do with the eschatological future. Astronomers and physicists may predict either a 'big crunch' or gravitational recollapse of spacetime, or a dissipation into infinite entropy, or the budding off of regions of spacetime into separate universes (Davies 1997, pp. 101–56). But none of these fascinating scenarios concerns an 'end of time' in the *eschatological sense*. They are simply predictions of future developments of the material universe according to the laws of physics and facts about our universe as we currently understand them. Thus when Graham Oppy writes about such scenarios under the heading of 'physical eschatology', this is simply an abuse of language (Oppy 2001). If any of these scenarios is the absolute end of the story, then there simply is no *eschaton*, because there is no transforma-

tion that realises the Good and gives life's struggles a final meaning. But, on the other hand, these scientific models could not – and do not try – to rule out the possibility of a completely different kind of 'end' for the physical universe: namely, a genuinely eschatological end that might come in time before any big crunch had developed, or after many more expansions and implosions of an oscillating universe, or at different points in the histories of different spacetimes. This would be an end that stops or cuts off the natural development of the physical series. The *eschaton* does not emerge from within time according to the universe's own immanent or internal laws, but instead *cuts into* natural time through the intervention of the same transcendent power that created this series. If the physical series then continues in a transformed state 'following' this breach, it would presumably be according to a revised set of laws, or starting from a new initial state that could not be reached just via the natural unfolding of the physical series as we now know it. Ordinary causal connections between prior and later moments cannot hold across the apocalyptic divide. Thus, by definition, physics cannot describe the *eschaton* anymore than it could describe the creation of natural laws and the universe's initial state.

Instead, the hereafter must be conceived as a 'higher time,' a *transcendent future* or order of existence distinct from our time-sequence, yet attached to it as its *telos*. Like the fabled 'time of origins' or cosmogonic 'first time', which is somehow accessible throughout the time sequence of everyday life (through ritual expression and projection, as Mircea Eliade has detailed), the 'last time' or eschatological hereafter was originally conceived as 'beyond' the cycles of profane time. But the apocalypse was never conceived simply as a last moment in the sequence of natural time. Even when it breaks in to conclude the natural time cycle, it intrudes as something supernatural – something not part of time in the ordinary sense. Even if we imagine the apocalypse coming quite literally at some date in our history, and thus having a time-coordinate relative to the internal continuum of historical and physical time, the apocalypse somehow must spell the end of that entire continuum, not just a moment in it, but the beginning of something radically new and utterly incommensurable with both physical time and everyday or 'lived historical time' as we know them. The hereafter that emerges from this apocalyptic thus 'follows' the pre-eschatological universe in a completely different way than that in which one moment follows another in the *same* time-sequence. Instead, the apocalypse is a qualitative leap so unimaginable that we can only think of it as a temporal transition by analogy. The 'end of time' is therefore not simply a *terminus*, like the end of a ladder, but rather an absolute *discontinuity* in the sequences of natural and historical time, and this must be represented in any adequate philosophical reconstruction of the concept.

When this is grasped, it becomes clear that even if we imagine the apocalypse occurring 'at' some future instant point in natural time, the eschatological reality of the hereafter is nevertheless *not strictly located* at that point. In Christianity, for example, heaven and hell are not the apocalyptic point of Judgment itself – they are what 'follows' the transition. And this reality of the hereafter is accessible not just through this final apocalyptic point in natural time – in fact, that link to the sequence of natural time represents only *the relations of the natural world and cultural history with the hereaf-*

ter. The reality of heaven and hell 'come' into the created world at a point in that world's time, but their reality is accessible in other ways to the human spirit, perhaps through death, through prophecy, and so on. The eschatological double-reality of salvation and damnation, then, can never be kept neatly within the confines of the natural or historical future.

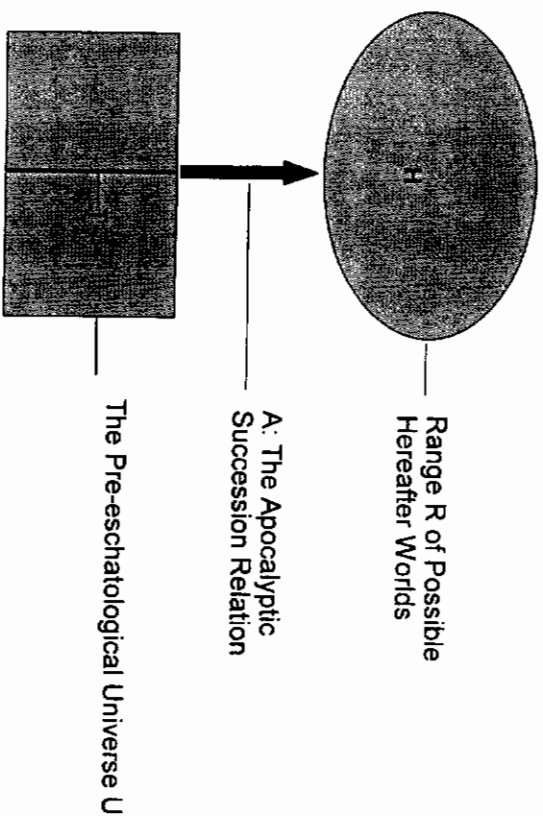
3. THE 'APOCALYPTIC SUCCESSOR' RELATION REQUIRES A PROCESS VIEW OF BEING

The deepest religious meaning of eschatology turns out, I believe, to hinge on precisely this point that the hereafter cannot be understood merely as a changed way things are at a 'later' period of physical or historical time. In the model I'm proposing, this crucial feature is captured by representing a hereafter as another 'world' (H) which stands to the whole of our universe U (including its entire temporal order T) as its *apocalyptic successor*: in terms of a formula, H A-succeeds U. 'A-succession' is *analogous* to, but wholly different in kind from, the 'succession' between two moments in time as we experience it. In other words, like our temporal sequence T, the 'A-successor relation' (A) is *irreversible* or asymmetric (since U cannot 'A-succeed' H); but unlike T, A takes whole temporal orders such as T as its 'moments' (see the accompanying figure, Diagram 1). Any time in U is A-prior to any time in H, but we cannot quantify the period of time between a moment in the time-series internal to U and a moment in the time-series (if any) internal to H. Beyond these comparisons, the A-relation must remain metaphysically primitive here, but it adequately reflects the core features of eschatology which, in my earlier article, I labeled (β): the requirement of an 'absolute breach in time' between 'here' and 'hereafter' (Davenport 1996, p.234).

With this sketch of apocalyptic succession, we can construct a way of representing eschatological possibility along the lines of existing semantic theories of modality. In standard theories, for example, logical possibility can be interpreted in terms of logically 'possible worlds' (or maximally consistent states of affairs): a proposition P is logically possible if it is true in at least one of the possible worlds. Similarly, the nomological modality of our laws of nature can be depicted in terms of 'universes' (spatiotemporally complete physical orders) representing all the different possible histories comprised of different initial conditions and quantum outcomes in which the same fundamental laws of physics hold true. This range of universes will be a proper subset of all the *logically* possible physical universes (since different systems of physics are logically possible). A physical state is then nomologically possible under our laws if it would be realised in one of these universes in which the same laws hold, and it is nomologically necessary if it holds in all these universes. Likewise, if we exchange Hick's specifically Christian notion of a 'resurrection world' for the more general notion of an *hereafter-universe*, we can represent eschatological possibility in terms of a *range of possible hereafter-universes*, each of which could 'apocalyptically succeed' our universe. What hereafterers this range includes will vary from one eschatological conception to another.

This analogy is not perfect, however, because, in order to accommodate apocalyptic

Diagram One
Hereafterers as Apocalyptic Successors



succession, we need a different conception of *actuality* than the one presupposed in most contemporary possible-world semantics for ordinary logical and physical modality. Talking about 'possible hereafterers' in a fashion analogous to possible worlds has a basis in western religions in particular, since in these faiths, the *eschaton* has generally been conceived as a miraculous transformation in which God either destroys and replaces our universe, or permanently changes it in ways we can hardly imagine. Thus properly speaking, the *eschaton* or apocalypse itself is a unique event, but it heralds the beginning of a 'hereafter', i.e. a *new* state of affairs, in which some of the individuals, persons and objects existing in our current universe may be preserved (although probably in changed forms), and some may not. For example, Jewish scripture calls this eschatological state of affairs 'a new heaven and a new earth' (Isaiah 65:17) and Christian liturgy speaks of 'the world to come'. But a 'logically possible world' (l.p. world) in current modal semantics is not just any possible state or proposition: in Plantinga's formulation, for example, an l.p. world is *maximal* in the sense that it is a consistent distribution of truth-values to *every* proposition there is. This is to say that an l.p. world represents a logically *complete* 'way things could be', or a 'fully determinate possible state of affairs' (Plantinga 1992, pp.45, 49). A 'hereafter' obviously is not a possible world in this logically maximal sense, since such l.p. worlds purport to be *total*, embracing every state of affairs that is actual at any time or times. Since some

hereafters are logically possible, some I.p. worlds will include both a physical universe (U) and its successor 'hereafter' (H). A hereafter is thus by definition only one segment of an I.p. world (That a given hereafter is logically possible, however, does not mean that it must be eschatologically possible on a given eschatological conception or faith).

On Plantinga's 'actualist' metaphysical account of these possible worlds, moreover, one of these embracing I.p. worlds W has the distinction of being *actual* or expressing the complete truth. Whichever world has this distinction Plantinga designates ' α '. According to Plantinga, then, there is a contingent fact that one complete, maximal set of states of affairs is α , or has the 'simple property' of *obtaining*, or being the case (*Ibid.*, p.252). This conception of actuality depends on what I will call an *undifferentiated* view of Being, as opposed to the idea that Being is a *process*. On the process view, Being comes in *real stages*, meaning that there is an ultimate metaphysical order of priority (P) in which some stages *become* real or gain actuality P-'prior' to others. On the process view, then, Being is differentiated in the sense that some future conditionals may have no truth-value at the current P-stage of being, and thus it remains *undetermined* which total I.p. world will be 'the actual' world. Instead, a *sub-maximal* state of affairs S1 can be actual in a prior stage (P1), while none of the different logically possible states of affairs S2 that would complete S1 to make an entire I.p. world is 'yet' actual, since they will be actualised only in a posterior stage (P2). [More formally, the idea is that any logically possible world W in Plantinga's sense can be divided into sub-maximal segments S, T, U, etc. such that S + T + U + ... = W. If being is *stratified* or differentiated, then it will be possible to carve the segments such that S represents the state of affairs actualised in the first or most primordial stage of Being. S can then be actual without there being any determinate fact as to what state of affairs will become T in the next stage of the Being represented in totality by world W. Since any W represents a complete combination of these strata or stages, the idea that any such maximal state or W is 'simply actual' is deceiving, since at any given stage, no more than a *part* of a logically possible world is 'actual', and there is at this stage *no fact of the matter* as to what states will be actual in 'later' (i.e. posterior) stages of Being.]

Now the meaning of eschatological possibility requires such a differentiated or process view of Being: at minimum it requires that the actuality of our universe U is metaphysically *prior* to the actuality of whichever H-universe apocalyptically succeeds U, so that prior to the *eschaton*, it is to some extent *undetermined* which hereafter (if any) will become actual. Thus it is also literally undetermined which I.p. world will turn out to be α in Plantinga's sense.

Thus a proper conception of eschatology requires taking an unpopular position on the metaphysical problem of future contingents. Plantingian 'actualism' implies that there is, from all time (or 'already', in tensed terms) a logically contingent fact about what will happen five years from now, and moreover, about what I will choose in any choice I will ever face. This is extended in the doctrine of Molinism to the thought that there are logically contingent subjective conditional truths, not only about what I will choose in every choice I'll ever make, past and future, but also about what I *would* choose in any choice situation I *could* be in (including those actual choice situations I

will face in the future). Molinism is not supposed to conflict with libertarian freedom of will, and yet it is supposed to constrain which logically possible worlds are *feasible*, or which God could, in fact, actualise. Ironically, however, I think that to make sense of this latter claim in fact, we must adopt a *differentiated* or process concept of actuality, which allows the subjunctive conditionals of freedom which constrain God's choice to define submaximal states of affairs that obtain or are *actual* 'before' or prior to the rest of the world God actualises. Thus Plantinga's version of Molinism probably undermines his actualism.

On the contrary, the existentialist position that I defend requires a differentiated view of Being, since it is committed to the serious ontological indeterminacy of future contingents: at this stage of actuality, there literally '*is*' *no fact* about any events (including choices made with libertarian freedom) undetermined by the laws of nature and the past to date. This is also true of the hereafter, although it is not simply another future contingent. Employing terms analogously again, we may say that the hereafter is '*future*' relative to *all points in the ordinary future* of our present physical, psychological, and historical time-series. As the 'superlatively futural', or, as Levinas might say, the 'future of the future,' the eschatological hereafter is undetermined in yet a further, qualitatively distinct manner. For even if we imagine our universe U at its end, when all the future contingents in its current time-series are decided or fixed, there is still 'not yet' a totally determined fact of the matter about which of the eschatologically possible successor-universes will become the actual hereafter (and thus about which I.p. world is α). At least this is true for all conceptions which allow that more than one hereafter is possible relative to the *complete* totality of the predecessor-universe U, i.e. for every conception which holds that God has some freedom to determine which hereafter-universe (H) to actualise *even when all the 'facts' are in*, so to speak, for U.

Hence if we believe that there are eschatological possibilities, we must accept that there is no such thing as α in Plantinga's sense, or as *the* actual complete I.p. world, including all states of affairs that are and ever will be actual. Instead, the structure of eschatological meaning requires that there be at least *two* distinct stages of being, one of which apocalyptically succeeds the other. 'Hereafterness' can therefore be specified as follows:

A 'hereafter' is a sub-maximal, compossible set of states of affairs H (an eschatological 'universe') which realises the Good in the Real by *apocalyptically succeeding* the prior actual universe U α (which is also a sub-maximal segment of a complete I.p. world).

This analysis *in part* supports John Hick's argument that religious faith is, as Paul Badham explains, not 'non-cognitive' but rather 'fact-asserting' (Hick 1990, p.3), since the truth of Christianity, for example, depends directly on whether 'there is indeed a life after death, and that life is such as to accord with Christian expectations concerning the ultimate triumph of God's will' (*Ibid.*, p.6). But it also undermines the idea that the 'genuinely factual character' of religious faith is assured by its reference to an eschatological 'objective reality' (*Ibid.*, pp.19-20). For the process view of Being implies that no hereafter is 'yet' actual in the same literal sense as my cat and this paper are actual.

Even though the eschatological order must in a distinctive sense be 'already present' or accessible to us, it is present in this way as an order of *undetermined possibility*. Thus it is real *neither* in the sense of a purely symbolic or functional 'myth', nor in any supposedly undifferentiated, ordinary sense of accomplished 'fact'. In conceiving 'eschatological verification' in response to positivists who denied the objective meaningfulness of religious language, Hick still accepted their own simple dichotomy between myth and fact, but this is precisely the dichotomy that eschatological possibility breaks open. Hick is right that the assertion in faith that an eschatological possibility will be realised does more than 'express a speaker's, or a community of speaker's, emotions' (Hick 1990, p.127). But this isn't just because it asserts something that is *already* true or false. Rather, the 'truth-maker' here is not yet a realised fact, since it will be only in the apocalyptic post-future. Thus revised, Hick's account is correct.

In response one might note that the central issue between Hick and the positivists was not whether a particular hereafter-universe will exist, but whether *any* hereafter whatsoever will succeed the physical universe in which we presently exist. Given that on any conception, it is eschatologically necessary that one of the possible hereafters will be actualised, the proposition

(θ): Some hereafter-universe H will follow our universe

already has a positive truth-value. Though eschatologically necessary, θ is not logically necessary: it is only contingently true. But dependence on this truth is the condition which gives religious claims their factual content. This reply by abstraction, however, misses the central point that θ cannot express a proposition that is just simply and timelessly true by referring to a simply and timelessly 'actual' future state of affairs. For a 'hereafter' means a state of affairs not simply in the 'future' but in a posterior stage of being itself. θ is therefore 'true' only *once* the present stage of being is apocalyptically succeeded by some particular hereafter-universe. Even when a religious claim asserts that something is the case in all possible hereafters, or that something is eschatologically necessary, the claim's truth derives from a posterior stage of reality that Being has not yet reached. Truth and actuality themselves are divided by something like a 'temporal' progression. It is therefore misleading to say, as Hick does, that either the atheist or theist will turn out to be right about 'the actual state of affairs' (*Ibid.*, p.128). Instead, if the theist is right, the eschatological state of affairs that she affirms *becomes* actual only in this 'turning out'. The dependence of theism on the 'truth' of its central eschatological core thus establishes the theistic system 'as a complex factual assertion' (*Ibid.*, p.139) only in a unique *amazogical* sense of 'factual-ity', one which interposes a breach into the atemporal and undifferentiated notion of truth taken as given in contemporary modal logic.

This key caveat does not spell any return to positivist reductions, but instead further radicalises the move beyond their reach. Though it is *about* 'something' and *will* ultimately be true or false, eschatological faith is not really similar to belief in ordinary accomplished facts. The eschatologically possible *reality-to-come* has a unique metaphysical status which belies all familiar ontological classification; likewise, our access to this trans-ontological reality cannot come through any 'epistemic' mode of apprehension either. Rather, eschatology can only be *revealed* (van der Leeuw 1933, p.565).

As G. van der Leeuw and Tillich realised before Heidegger and Levinas, eschatological revelation is not the appearance of any *phenomenon* but rather the trace of something remaining closed to all noetic comprehension or appropriation: the 'revealed' thus

...in principle remains wholly withdrawn from our view: it is no making known, no manifestation or exhibition. "Only what is concealed, and accessible by no mode of knowledge whatsoever, is imparted by revelation. But in thus being revealed it does not cease to remain concealed, since its secrecy pertains to its very essence...." [Thus] any "insight" I may have, even if it comes to me suddenly and with coercive clearness, is therefore far from being a revelation, but is at best the "appearance" to me of some phenomenon... (*Ibid.*, p.565, citing Tillich, *Die Idee der Offenbarung*).

Hence while revelation is always communicated in or through some object, which becomes the site of a hierophany (*Ibid.*, p.566), this object is never the *content* of the revelation, but is rather only "the sign of transcendent Power" which does not appear (*Ibid.*, p.574). As coming to us only through revelation, then, the eschatological is that which cannot be appropriated or apprehended, either in act or thought. The 'possibilities' imparted in the eschatological promise do not form any discrete content for belief, but something at best *analogous* to such content, something to which we can be devoted only in a reverence which recognizes that it passes our understanding, or that we cannot really understand *precisely where* our faith lies.

4. THE SYNTHETIC MODEL OF ESCHATOLOGICAL MODALITY IN TERMS OF POSSIBLE HEREAFTERS

Within this framework, qualified by these epistemic and ontological caveats, eschatological possibility can be modeled as follows:

- (1) On any conception C, given our present universe U, there is a *range R of H-worlds* - some subset of all logically conceivable hereafters - which are held to be *apocalyptically accessible* from U. This is what it means to say that on C, it is eschatologically possible for an H-world in R to become the A-successor of U.
- (2) (A) To say that some state of affairs S is eschatologically possible on C is to say that according to C, S is realised in at least one H-world in the range R.
(B) To say that some state of affairs S is eschatologically necessary on C is to say that according to C, S is realised in every H-world in the range R.

Thus by projecting a sphere of possible hereafters, each conception specifies the limits of eschatological possibility differently, and these divergences can be represented extensively as differences in the range of hereafters which are considered potential successors to our universe. For each specific conception of eschatology, the whole range R of eschatologically possible hereafters will vary, as will the *evaluation* of which hereafters in R are more or less preferable. For example, some conceptions hold that hereafters in which many persons are in a state of damnation are eschatologically possible,

although not preferable to hereafters in which all are saved; whereas other conceptions may not allow that a hereafter in which any person is permanently lost or consigned to hell is eschatologically possible (see Hick 1989, p.68; Talbot 1992, pp.499–503). This model of eschatological possibility thus gives us a basic framework for describing and evaluating the implications of different eschatological faiths.

To make it fully rigorous, we should elaborate this model to say that on any conception C, the range R of H-universes that are possible successors of U varies according to what part of U we hold fixed, or what part of U is already actual. For example, there may be two H-universes that are both eschatologically possible today – one in which I am saved and the other in which I am damned – while only one of them will remain eschatologically possible after what I decide tomorrow if, for example, my decision could render me reprobable or unsavable. Of course, the amount of variance in the range of eschatologically possible outcomes which occurs because of developments in our time depends on our eschatological conception: some may not allow such developments within the time of U to have any effect in altering what hereafters God could actualise; some may allow such developments rather decisive and far-reaching effects on what remains eschatologically possible; and some may take a middle view according to which choices made in time make some eschatological outcomes more likely and others more unlikely, but without determining the outcome.

This model reflects a basic feature of all eschatological faiths. On virtually all conceptions, Ha, the eschatological world 'to come,' will be a morally perfect existence or a Kingdom of God, either on earth or in a spiritual heaven. The question then arises why God did not simply create Ha initially. The process interpretation of being on which eschatology simply has an answer to this question: eschatological reality is possible only from a prior universe U: it can be reached only through succeeding a prior order of being. An eschatologically possible hereafter is not a 'possible world' in Leibniz's sense, a complete order which it is open to God to actualise; rather, it is a posterior segment of such a world, which is possible only relative to an already-actualised prior segment, such as our universe with its temporal sequence. No hereafter, properly understood, could be an initial segment of any l.p. world. In other words, it is essential to the meaning of eschatological possibility that no eschatological universe could possibly have been the original creation.

Despite this difference, however, Leibniz's point that God does not determine what l.p. worlds are possible also applies to eschatologically possible hereafters. And this allows us to restate the antivoluntarist thesis: the subset of logically possible hereafters which are eschatologically possible on a given conception cannot coherently be determined simply or solely by the free decree or will of God, since we must think of God as actualising the best eschatologically possible hereafter. If so, the facts and relations determining which hereafters can be actualised cannot be entirely in God's control, or all logically possible hereafters are eschatologically possible, and eschatological modality loses its distinctive significance.

Thus eschatological possibility is one special kind of synthetic modality: unlike simple logical possibility, it has substantive preconditions. Thus, for each faith, not every logically possible hereafter is eschatologically possible: the range of e-possible H uni-

verses is restricted both by several aspects or contents of the predecessor-universe U and by a series of relations governing the possible eschatological development and culmination of items in U (which will vary between different conceptions). In particular, in every conception, there are four especially relevant categories of pre-eschatological reality which are related – in different, more or less lawlike ways, in distinct conceptions, all within bounds set by essential features of eschatology – to the range of hereafters eschatologically possible on a given conception. These substantive relations that determine the range of hereafters possible on a conception of finality, giving eschatological possibility its synthetic character, I call the four 'axes' of eschatology.

5. THE FOURFOLD RELATION BETWEEN THE ESCHATON AND PRE-ESCHATOLOGICAL CATEGORIES OF MEANING.

Eschatological possibilities are determined for us by our conception of the joint relation between hereafters and four other basic categories of meaning in pre-eschatological reality:

- (a) *Cosmogenic Divinity* (ontological originality); or the sacred as primordial/archetypal reality, the power that creates the universe, the source of universal meanings (and in the axial stage of history, the ultimate ground of values and norms).
- (b) *Ethical Ideality* (the Good): or the independent values of virtue, moral worth, well-being, and justice governing interpersonal relationship and individual character, which inspire dissatisfaction with existing institutions, practices, and modes of life, and the endeavor to improve our society and world.
- (c) *Persons (freedom)*: individual human beings (as opposed to the family, clan, tribe or nation), who enjoy volitional liberty and are intrinsically moral and morally imperfect.
- (d) *The Lifeworld (saeculum, doxa, temporal existence)*: the interwoven natural and social orders in profane time, including 'nature' as material world (mineral, plant, and animal) and 'culture' as the artificial environment made by artifacts and institutions in secular history or historical time.

This division reflects the fact that eschatological possibility is inherently relational in meaning: because any hereafter projected by a given conception is possible only in a determinate structure of relations to four other metaphysical domains, eschatological possibility has four different aspects or 'faces', which can be thought of as variables taking on different values in specific hereafter-worlds. In other words, the character of any eschatological hereafter is determined by these relations between the possible hereafter and the other four highest existential categories. Thus, the character of any religion's eschatological vision is indissolubly linked to the most fundamental features of its entire world-picture. The core features of eschatology also limit the various acceptable interpretations of these four constitutive relations or axes of eschatological meaning.

5.1 *The Numinological Axis (or mystery within the Divine)*

The relation of a hereafter to ontological category (a) depends on how a religion's picture of divine being in the hereafter differs (if at all) from its cosmogonic notion of the sacred. There are three paradigmatic alternatives for this relation. The *eschaton* can: (i) *form a return* to divine being in exactly its original form, as for example in the Hindu vision of an individual who attains the divine by escaping *samsara* and rebirth; (ii) take the divine being as it was before time began and restore it at the *temporal* end of history for all persons, or (iii) constitute a *higher* sacred reality that stands as a *telos* to the cosmogonic divinity, which is thus transformed into the eschatological-sacred. This axis thus pertains to the *intradivine* relation among different aspects of divinity itself – between its creative, archetypal side and its eschatological side. In more theistic language, we could say that, on the numinological axis, we see how God the Creator stands in relation to God the Finisher (or to the eschatological divinity which is *Mirvana*, or to the divine reality in the Hereafter, etc.) Are these two poles of divinity identical, so that God does not change at all, or is eschatological divinity higher, richer, or in some way fuller, than cosmogonic divinity? Some of the differences between religions of pure monotheism (such as Islam) and Trinitarian Christianity may be traceable to such a difference in the numinological axis of their eschatological conceptions.

5.2 *The Moral-Teleological Axis*

As already indicated, the *eschaton* is related to independent ethical standards of value and ideals which determine the picture of the perfection to be realised in the hereafter. But this axis also includes the different light in which moral norms and ethical ideals appear when understood in relation to the eschatological promise. The many possible ways of conceiving the relation between norms and ideals as universal deliverances of reason, or as implications of human nature, or as norms and ideals qualified as divine law, or enhanced by revealed doctrine, constitute as many ways of conceiving this moral-teleological axis. Although ethics cannot simply be grounded in eschatology (for reasons already explained), our understanding of ethics is dramatically altered and enhanced by the faith that the persons, communal relations, and environments which ethics guides all have *eschatological* significance, or are directed towards their final perfection by the God who creates in order to bring about the hereafter. Ethical concerns are all then apprehended in a new light.

In the other direction on the same axis, there must always be some relation – however indeterminate or non-algorithmic – between the manner in which ethical conditions and ideals are fulfilled or not, and which eschatological outcomes are possible. In some conceptions, for example, the individual must at least make some voluntary movement to accept the grace of forgiveness if his grievous corruption of will is not to prevent his salvation. In others, certain sins are 'unforgivable', and render the sinner a 'reprobate', which is to say that hereafters in which she is saved become eschatologically impossible, although they remain logically conceivable. In yet other conceptions, 'reprobation' in this life is impossible: there is always an unconquered core of goodness in the worst individual, and this makes it possible for her to change even up to the

very point where she encounters the apocalyptic transition. On these existential conceptions, hereafters in which the evil agent is saved or restored remain eschatologically possible, at least until her death.

In general, however, no matter how the relation between ethical conditions and eschatological outcomes is portrayed, it is reductive and inadequate to conceive this as a purely *extrinsic* relation in which God judges 'merits' and then imposes some *external* 'reward or punishment', which is not essentially connected with the agent's moral states. This has the effect of making the outcome appear arbitrary relative to the moral state of persons. Of course, for many centuries, both the terrors Dante imposed on the medieval mind and the voluntaristic notion that 'rewards and punishments are essential to the very constitution of moral obligation' (Schneewind 1995, p.32) tended to foster lurid imagery of the torments of hell and the ecstasy of heaven, and this kind of indulgent speculation became only more vengeful with the development of orthodox and millenarian portraits of the afterlife. As Philip Almond says, the medieval world picture perhaps differs most from ours in its vision of hell: 'The world of the everyday then was a radically different one, not least because life went on in the dark shadow of the possibility of torments severe in the after-life, of sufferings, long-lasting, if not eternal' (Almond 1992, p.297). Almond is surely right that the emphasis on bodily pain in traditional medieval conceptions of hell 'reflected a view of punishment as essentially retributive' (*Ibid.*, p.304). And the destructive effects of this externalised retributive conception of hell replete with graphic imagery still pose the greatest obstacle to winning an appreciation of the existential significance of eschatology today.

If we are to avoid distorting the motivational role of eschatological possibility by reducing it to a literal threat to our well-being which curbs evil only by appeals to Hobbesian self-interest, then we must instead conceive the possible personal eschatological outcomes of different moral states as in some sense *growing out* of the agent's acquired moral states during their lifetime. In other words, authentic eschatology requires that different forms of moral character necessarily develop *teleologically* towards some final shape which will become progressively more fixed or unalterable as pursued to their conclusion. There must be a kind of intrinsic *moral teleology* in the volitional dispositions and character of persons in which we see the immanent relation between opposed ethical forms of motivation and action, and their divergent eschatological outcomes. This is the root idea of *karma*. In this karmic sense, the event of Last Judgment in the apocalyptic transformation merely *finalises* or consummates the developmental tendencies already implicit in the psychological and volitional states to which ethical distinctions apply. Less formally, in the hereafter we *become* what we have chosen to be. There are more indications of this alternative conception of moral teleology in fictional than in standard theology; for example, in the literary creations of Hawthorne, Joseph Conrad, Flannery O'Connor, Charles Williams, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Stephen R. Donaldson, as well as in the German expressionist and *flm noir* tradition, e.g. Fritz Lang's *Sunrise* and Orson Wells's *Touch of Evil*. But this karmic theme is clear in C.S. Lewis's suggestion that 'the damned are, in one sense, successful rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*' (Lewis 1962, p.127). He also suggests that we think of the finality of damnation, in which the 'lost soul is eternally fixed in its diabolical attitude' (*Ibid.*,

p.127), as a kind of *destruction*, in which the individual ceases to be a person at all: 'What is cast (or casts itself) into hell is not a man: it is "remains"' (*Ibid.*, p.125). Hell, for Lewis, is not a state of physical torment but rather one of spiritual self-destruction.

The 'moral-teleological' or karmic axis thus includes not only the *interpretative* relation between our understanding of ethical concepts or norms and the eschatological promise, but also the *spiritual* directness of ethically different types of inward character towards their eschatological culminations. To take one famous and especially chilling example, when Kurtz's corruption leaves him crying at his death, 'The horror, the horror!' at the end of Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* (Conrad 1967, p.283), the author is clearly trying to portray a kind of eschatological finality.

This aspect of moral-teleological development anticipating the *eschaton* also helps make sense of the frequent theme of crisis and destruction prior to the apocalypse: as van der Leeuw says, 'The *eschaton*...is not a nullity in the sense of the void, but in that of a violent reversal of all conditions with no exceptions' (van der Leeuw 1933, p.585). This metaphor of inversion in eschatological narratives not only suggests a return to the primeval chaos before creation, but also the fear that evils within us which were repressed but never overcome will reassert themselves and have to be faced when the finalisation of our character is at hand. The same may be true for whole communities or groups when faced with their last judgment.

5.3 *The Existential (or Soteriological) Axis*

Closely connected with the relation between ethical ideality and the *eschaton*, then, is the relation between the set of possible hereafters and mortal persons *qua* individuals. This relation is increasingly emphasised with the axial turn in the history of religion: the *eschaton* expresses the power of the sacred to realise ultimate value, and to save the individual from a world in which realisation of this state is not humanly possible. Yet, as even Eliade's analysis indicated, not only the promise of infinite beatitude (in whatever form), but also the possibility of *horror* (whether in the shape of rebirth, postponement of nirvana, limitless wheels of cyclical time, or some other chthonic image), is also a crucial part of this soteriological significance.

It essential to eschatology that possible hereafters include some kind of 'divine justice' both for individual free persons and for the whole cosmos. As van der Leeuw says, 'First of all...the end of the world is a *judgment*. Again Parsism [Zoroastrianism] vigorously stresses this feature: the *frashokereti*, the world completion, is in the first place a purification...' (van der Leeuw 1933, p.589). Of course, this hardly implies that anything but an exact Kantian matching of inward virtuous merit and final happiness (or unhappiness) is genuinely eschatological; rather, it means that the question of how the *eschaton* reflects divine justice is one that every genuinely eschatological theology finds *relevant* and needs to answer. This does not rule out conceptions of eschatology that reject the eschatological possibility of a final damnation, but proponents of such conceptions naturally feel the need to explain how their conception of eschatology is compatible with (or perhaps even required by) divine justice for mortals. The core structure of eschatology places this burden on them.

Thus in its existential relation to mortal persons, the *eschaton* usually presents the

double-possibility of salvation or damnation. This reflects another core feature of eschatology (γ in my earlier summary – see Davenport 1996, p.234). How this 'double-ness' is realised in any given conception determines how that conception understands the existential relation between the *eschaton* and persons in their freedom. Thus the existential axis is simply a generalised version of what Christians call the Last Judgment. On this axis, the relation of individual persons to the hereafter is therefore one of existential anxiety in the face of *bifurcated eschatological possibilities*. How this duality of possible final ends is conceived, of course, is closely connected with the portrait of divine justice in the moral-teleological axis.

In many eschatological religions, we find explicit symbols of this double-possibility for individuals: for example, the razor-thin bridge which, Zoroastrianism and Islam teaches, the resurrected dead must cross between heaven and hell (Smith and Haddad 1981, pp. 78–9). The opposition of *glory and horror* is another essential expression of the binary-possibility that the *eschaton* presents in relation to mortal persons. We should not confuse this with the more archaic opposition between the ontological sacred and profane. For this doubleness of eschatological possibility is essentially related to the axial discrimination between inward good and evil as qualities of persons, their volitional characters, and their lives. This is why the duality of eschatological outcomes is found in the relation of mortal persons to the range of possible hereafters. This also confirms the core aspect (α), which says that the contingency or multiplicity of possible final outcomes is essential to eschatological modality (Davenport 1996, p.234). Although there are belief-systems according to which only one set of outcomes is possible in the hereafter, in them the hereafter loses its full eschatological meaning. In light of the core structure, they are deficient eschatologies.

The paradigm theme of the existential axis is human longing for union with the divine. David Novak describes this as faith in the possibility of an eternal Sabbath overcoming the separation between human persons and God:

In the linear idea of time,...time is understood as having an ultimate climax when God and humankind will finally and irrevocably be reconciled. In this idea, the *telos* qua purpose and the *eschaton* qua temporal terminus become one and the same. (Novak 1992, p.150).

For such faiths, sacraments such as those of the weekly Sabbath Day not only anticipate this relation but actually let us participate in it, linking the eschatological with our everyday world in ordinary time.

5.4 *The Apocalyptic (or Hierophantic/Historical) Axis*

Finally, as my earlier hermeneutic study described, the *eschaton* can relate to the natural and cultural lifeworld in three different ways:

- (i) as an atemporal eternity that stands over against the lifeworld but gives it no independent meaning (apart from the hope of its individual inhabitants for salvation by escape from the lifeworld);
- (ii) as a future apocalypse that spells the final and complete elimination of lifeworld, but gives it the anticipatory shape of linear history while it lasts;

(iii) as a funeral apocalypse that not only gives the lifeworld temporal and historical significance, but also gives it *anagogical* significance by promising that the lifeworld will be transformed, halted, and preserved in perfected form in the hereafter.

Legitimate interpretations of the apocalyptic axis of eschatological possibility are limited by the core requirement (β) that the eschatological reality cannot simply become a temporal *part* of the lifeworld itself, and the requirement (δ) that the *eschaton*, though funeral, must also remain directly accessible throughout the multiple points of linear time.

Although they are also a function of our moral values, our attitudes towards natural environments and towards the social institutions created by human beings both reflect and are deeply affected by our beliefs (implicit or explicit) about the possible ultimate significance of these parts of reality in the hereafter. For example, the total rejection of 'the world' that characterises some pietist forms of faith tends to be associated with the view that human institutions and artifacts are nothing but expressions of pride that are ultimately destined for absolute destruction. (The Atlantis myth is a representative narrative for this view). If human works have no positive value worth preserving in the hereafter, they have no role to play in the final meaning of our lives. At the other extreme, some artists (such as Tolkien 1983, p155) have even ventured the thought that perhaps whatever is good in works of the human imagination will be given extra-mortal reality in the hereafter. For example, in the hereafter we shall find that the stories we have invented have a new kind of reality. Our creations will then really be with us. (The story of Pinocchio is fairly tale metaphor for this idea.)

We must also address here the social nature of human beings. While the existential axis tends to individualise persons in their anxiety towards death, human communities and interpersonal relationships, from the most private and intimate to the most public, have such a fundamental importance for our identities, our character, and our commitments, that an eschatological order or hereafter which had no role for them would seem shallow or incomplete. For example, many faiths have held that communities of worship or fellow believers, in some way, will be brought together into more perfect unities in the hereafter. When the scales fall from our eyes, perhaps we will even be able to see all our neighbors as part of ourselves. And what of family relationships? This is a very difficult question for most eschatological faiths. Will our family members, or at least some of them, still retain something like that close bond of intimate affection which we have tried to cultivate in this lifetime? Will we have a different relationship to them than to other persons? Do these relationships become something new, something presently unimaginable, in heaven? This question is especially poignant when applied to spouses: will they still be joined in some way, or perhaps even some more complete way, in the hereafter? Many believers have felt that something like this must be true if all the struggles of human life are to have a final meaning worthy of them. But unfortunately, the tendency of many theologians and teachers of eschatological religions has been to de-emphasise the eschatological significance of these interpersonal relations, suggesting instead that all persons in the hereafter will be identical in their relation-

ships, being together in God. How this question is answered alters our picture of the apocalyptic-hierophantic axis.

These four axes or 'faces' of eschatology, which are the main variables of difference between familiar eschatological conceptions, help locate the *eschaton* within larger complex of concepts of which it is always an integral part. This complex always includes the four basic ontological categories. Because of its inherently relational semantics, there is always a close connection that operates between our eschatological conception and our interpretation of the four main pre-eschatological categories of being or meaning. I have tried to give this relational complex a schematic form in the accompanying figure (Diagram 2, p. 60).

5.5 *Difference of this Viewpoint from that of Thor Horvath*

At this point, we can see even more clearly how eschatological ultimacy differs in structure from the notion Horvath has developed. This notion is apparent in Horvath's response to Sharpe, where he says that if a URAM is personal, then that person 'has to be the ultimate reality and meaning of all existing reality and meaning as presented in the different sciences, and yet not be identical with any of them' (Horvath 1997, p.77). As the above analysis shows, however, eschatological ultimacy is very different in this respect. The possible hereafter stands in relation to the ontological categories as their possible *culmination* in finality, but not as their *foundation* or as the basis of their intelligibility. Rather, hermeneutically (or in terms of its meaning) the eschatological category depends on the other categories, rather than the reverse.

This could be explained as the difference between *static* and *process* concepts of ultimacy. Horvath's concept of ultimacy refers to the basis or unifying relation among those categories that lie on the pre-eschatological plane. For example, several static conceptions of URAM simply interpret the divine creative power as the ultimate source of all these ontological categories. The eschatological is 'ultimate' in a completely different sense, because it is the last and *sui generis* final stage of the process towards which the other categories of reality and meaning converge. My chart thus has an upwards direction or z-dimension. By contrast, Horvath's analysis is confined to the two other dimensions: URAM in his view is ultimate because it is the deepest basis of a static structure of interpretation for the pre-eschatological dimensions of being. Though the structure of our understanding and motivation changes over time, at any time-slice, that concept, principle, or idea which holds the Archimedean position in the structure functions as our URAM for that time. Put in terms of my diagram, Horvathian ultimacy is a horizontal relationship within the shaded plane of the ontological categories. Thus it cannot include the four axes of eschatology, or the vertical relationships between those ontological categories and the eschaton. My pyramid picture is more comprehensive, including both the structural relations among ontological categories that ultimate principles in Horvath's sense will explain, and those trans-ontological relations that are specified by one's conception of eschatological ultimacy. Thus, the foundationalist and eschatological approaches to ultimacy are not exclusive alternatives: rather, the eschatological perspective includes the foundationalist's ontology, but not the reverse, just as a world of three dimensions includes a world of two, but not the reverse.

is less full or adequate than one in which animal life culminates in some new form that it recognisably still animal (something intimated perhaps in Isaiah's metaphor of the wolf lying down with the lamb, Isaiah 11:6-8). The fullest or most adequate hereafter therefore will be one which is *maximally inclusive and radical in its transformative impact* relative to the four basic categories of pre-eschatological being. Put differently, *the perfect hereafter would seem to be the most complete culmination and fulfillment of all that apocalyptically precedes it.*

When we consider how this joint criterion works in the different axes of eschatology, it will become clear that eschatologies of the kind I classified as 'radically historical' (Davenport 1996, pp.232-3) will project the richest or fullest hereafters. For example, consider the apocalyptic-hierophantic axis, or the relation between the *eschaton* and the pre-ontological category of the lifeworld, with its natural and cultural sides. Some conceptions of eschatology may be especially vague on this question, and usually we will face the enormous problem of interpreting eschatological narratives and the many complex literary figures they involve. A way to focus the question, however, is to ask whether human society, and the animal, vegetable, and mineral contents of the universe, will find any place in the eschatological world, whether in a transformed or altered shape, or exactly as they are now. For what I called the *ahistorical-soteriological* conceptions, such as most types of Hinduism and Buddhism, it is clear that *Nirvana* means precisely an *escape* from these lifeworld contexts, which accordingly are thought to have no eschatological relevance, no potential to enrich the hereafter state. There is no society of interacting individual minds in the state of perfect blessedness, since it involves transcendence of individuality. All interpersonal relationships are erased.

In what I called *fully apocalyptic* conceptions, such as the eschatology of orthodox (i.e. Ash'arite) Islamic teaching, existence in all the possible hereafters will be spiritual, without any concrete physical aspect, or any form of material embodiment. Accordingly, the physical universe and its natural environments are simply destroyed in the apocalyptic transition: they have only a temporary significance. As in Zoroastrianism, they are a 'stage set' for a drama of good and evil, and they disappear when the curtain falls, having no role in the hereafter. But some kind of society is preserved: those aspects of human culture with enduring value accordingly may be thought of as transformed and perfected in the hereafter. The 'City of Man' is destroyed but aspects of it may be reflected in the 'City of God'. Moreover, individual selves continue to exist in some form. So apocalyptic hereafters are fuller or richer than ahistorical-soteriological hereafters.

In what I have called *radically historical* conceptions, however, such as most variants of Judaism and Christianity, all possible hereafters involve not only some transformed version of society (usually figured in the archetypal form of a city, 'New Jerusalem') but also some kind of bodily existence in a renewed and glorified form of the entire natural world. The *eschaton* is thus said to come *into this world*, into the very milieu and environment we know today only in its surface appearance, its fallen or marred image. Christianity especially emphasises this theme in the doctrine of bodily resurrection and the notion of human stewardship over a world which is to be purified

and perfected in the final fulfillment of creation. In these conceptions, the *eschaton* is the final flowering of a buried potential for beauty, life, and meaning in the natural order, the ultimate hierophany of nature. This also extends to social or interhuman relationships, which are not left out but are rather perfected, rendered into their ideal forms in the hereafter, in which we become capable of complete love for one another.

7. CONCLUSION

This idea sheds light on the term 'apocalypse', which I have used for the eschatological transformation. As Derrida has recently emphasised, the Hebrew word *galat* for which *apokalypsis* is the Greek translation means 'disclosure, uncovering, unveiling, the veil lifted from about the thing...' (Derrida 1993, p.121). This sense of 'apocalypse', however, is related to the eschatological transition: the unveiling or disclosure of the *eschaton* to the Apostle in the Book of *Revelation* should be understood, not as the vision of some set of future events, but as an 'apocalyptic' insight into a hereafter-world that in some sense *already 'is,'* or that lies hidden within our reality, ready to break forth, veiled by the surface appearances but already taking shape within them. Even in our everyday relationships, we are preparing bonds that will exist in a new and transformed way in the hereafter. The hereafter does not emerge by natural causation from the current universe, but in an analogical sense we can see this universe in terms of its potential transformation, as if the hereafter was born from this world, like a chick coming out of its shell.

Consider now the numinological axis of eschatology. There is no conception in which the presence of God or the divine is not part of all possible hereafter-worlds, since divinity is identified with the power and justice that fulfills eschatological possibilities. Even in the Norse *Ragnarok*, when all the gods themselves are destroyed in the last battle, the divine power of the *Werd* remains, as does *Yggdrassil* – the World-Tree or Axis Mundi of the cosmos – and from within it a divine pair, a man and woman, are reborn to begin life in a new order cleansed of evil. Yet in every conception but those of the *radically historical* family, God, or the divine, remains *the same* in the end as he/she/it was in the beginning, absolutely unchanged and unmoved: thus for God, the final end is a return to the beginning, and in their eschatological consummation, God's creatures are *returning* to the very same cosmogonic divinity from which they emerged or were made. Thus the cosmogonic-divine, while preserved, is not transformed in the *eschaton*: the whole of history is a Neoplatonic series of procession and return to the One; God in these conceptions cannot *advance* or find any consummation.

Not so in the Radically Historical conceptions, as I interpret them. They are distinguished by the remarkable idea that the creator, or the divinity of beginnings, although already without need or lack, somehow becomes *even richer and fuller* in being and meaning through coming into and joining with creation: God the Finisher is *more than* God the originator; the divine itself is transformed in the apocalypse. If this is possible, than the ultimate or sacred reality is not changeless, but instead forms a process. Perfection is not a static form but rather a process in which, through embracing his own independent creations, God achieves evermore perfect completeness. This fits with the

idea that God is the one and only being who can make things that are genuinely *other* than Him, not merely extensions of himself. Joining with these creations is thus not narcissism but progress. By creating a truly independent cosmos, God or the original divinity can join with something that is more than just a part of itself, and through this encounter with alterity, transform and enhance even its own infinite being.

This radically historical numinology also suggests a possible, albeit controversial, interpretation of the Trinity in Christian doctrine. This interpretation differs somewhat from Horvath's Christology, which holds that for Christ to be ultimate means that he is the hermeneutic ground to which all other concepts are referred and in light of which everything is to be interpreted: 'he is the primary analogue for any theological research and the final problem-solving paradigm for any question' (Horvath 1993B, p.265). In other words, for Horvath, the divinity of this mortal human being, the God-man, is the 'final hermeneutical principle' to which all other 'concepts and terms' are to be subjected, as we see in the history of the ecumenical councils (*Ibid.*, p.267). In my interpretation of Christianity, the resurrected Christ is ultimate because he is eschatological reality, and he is the power which makes the eschatological possible. In the apocalyptic transition, God the Creator (or Father) himself *becomes* God the resurrected Christ, in whom the divinity of the creator is fully joined with and interpenetrates the physical, spatiotemporal, embodied reality that he created. The paradox that the Father and the Son are distinct, yet the same, makes sense if we think of them as merging in the apocalypse. The God-Man is thus the final form of divinity itself, the culmination *both* of the God the originator and of the natural cosmos he created.

On the existential axis, we find the concerns about individual salvation and damnation which occupy most of the literature on eschatology, both in medieval times and today. There are many different conceptions of the Last Judgment of human persons, which may include statements concerning when the 'final dispensation' is finalised, what the states of salvation and damnation consist in, the conditions for salvation, the interaction of grace and freedom, the ability or inability of persons finally and forever to resist God's determination to bring them into beatitude, and so on. Although other essential features of eschatology identified in our preceding analyses bear directly on these questions, and limit the acceptable answers, the criterion of 'fullness' cannot by itself determine the ethical and metaphysical issues these questions raise. It does suggest, however, that hereafterers in which more persons are saved, or preserved in their transformed state and given a *positive* role in the new eschatological order, are more inclusive than those in which more are left out, or consigned (even though by their own choice and development) to the profane state of final oblivion or self-consuming destruction. But of course, in most conceptions, there are hereafterers which positively include more persons, and hereafterers which positively include less, and yet which hereafter is ultimately actualised will depend either on the free choices of persons themselves, their response to life in this universe, or on God's free decisions and mercy, or on some combination of both.

Despite this variation, however, it is still possible to apply the fullness criterion to the existential axis in another way. As suggested earlier, although each conception C will portray (more or less vaguely) some range R of hereafterers as eschatologically

possible, each conception will also identify the *best possible hereafterer(s)* in its range, i.e. the one (or more) hereafterer(s) (H*) which would be most ideal if human choices ultimately leave it open to God to actualise it. We can then compare the *ideal* hereafterers projected by each conception, H*_{C1}, H*_{C2}, H*_{C3}, ... and so on, and consider which is the fullest. Conceptions which say that God intentionally leaves large portions of the human race outside of the knowledge necessary for salvation would thus project less-than-maximally-inclusive hereafterers as their H* ideal. Some such eschatologies are simply vengeful or spiteful, since they hope for the final destruction of some disfavored group. Others are merely careless, since they are willing to write off billions of persons without thinking much about it. Similarly, conceptions that allow inscrutable divine election alone to determine whether individual persons are saved or damned may include a maximally inclusive H-world in their R-ranges, but they will not proclaim this hereafter the *best*, since instead they identify the best hereafter just with whichever one God elects, however exclusive this might be. So they will also project a less-than-maximally-inclusive H*. On the other hand, more enlightened conceptions will allow that an H-world in which all persons are saved is both eschatologically possible and best, or ideal; some of these will hold that this is the *only* possible hereafter, while others will allow that less-than-ideal hereafterers are still possible, and might – if human choices *ultimately* render H* impossible – be the second-best hereafter available for God to actualise. But even in that event, these more enlightened conceptions will agree that the maximally inclusive hereafter is the best hereafter, or counts as H*.

It is still possible, however, that a conception might project a hereafter which is maximally inclusive of persons as its ideal, while not including as much as other conceptions do from the other categories. Thus, returning to the example of orthodox Sunni Islam, the standard Ash'arie conception would identify the ideal hereafter as that in which every human being is saved and dwells in a purely spiritual (not embodied) existence with Allah, the one unchanging God, who is preserved exactly as He has been from all eternity, unaffected by the apocalypse. Of course, for orthodox Muslims, not every human, in fact, will be consummated in the hereafter, but that is not because God would not prefer them to be: they exclude themselves by their own final and unrepentant rejection of Allah.

To rank eschatological conceptions themselves according to my fullness criterion, then, in each case, we must consider how inclusive and transformative a conception's *ideal hereafter* (H*) is relative to *all four pre-eschatological categories* of being and meaning together. To sum up, the ideal hereafter which is 'fullest' or most radically eschatological is that in which:

- all persons are preserved and receive the final consummation of bliss,
- the moral ideal is perfectly fulfilled,
- the whole of the natural and cultural lifeworld is transformed and becomes integral parts of the eschatological order, and
- the divine itself has been enriched or enlarged in the apocalypse.

These four qualities will characterise the fullest, richest, most inclusive hereafter with the maximum transformative impact on all pre-eschatological beings. The conceptions which advocate such a hereafter as the God-preferred or best possible hereafter are the conceptions with the fullest or most adequate eschatological visions. If this criterion is accepted, then, the radically historical conceptions, which hold that persons are free to accept salvation to the very end (denying reprobation), and that it is human choice rather than arbitrary divine election which determines one's eschatological fate, will offer the most adequate eschatologies, recognising the possibility of the *objectively best* possible hereafter. And since this description matches the eschatological conceptions one finds shared among Jewish and Christian existentialists – from Kierkegaard, Berdyaev, Tillich, and Rahner, to Buber – I proclaim that this kind of existentialist theology has the most developed and enlightened eschatological vision.

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