



TIME TO BE SAVED? PAROUSIA, PURGATION, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TIME DILATION

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ABSTRACT: James Turner has argued that views of purgatorial post-mortem salvation face a dilemma given how their motivating intuitions seem to intersect with the concept of Jesus’s second coming (i.e., the *parousia*). Namely, they can accept that some persons experience “abrupt purgation” (undermining a key reason for affirming purgation), they can posit all who are not already saved at the second coming are damned (a view which is highly distasteful to purgatory advocates), or they can deny the *parousia* (a position which is unorthodox). I offer a way of defusing this problem by constructing a second-chance soteriology on which persons in post-mortem purgation experience a state of psychological time dilation. In so doing, I first articulate the problem at hand before turning to relevant examples from fictional media and the neuropsychology of dreaming to support my constructive efforts. Finally, I apply this solution to a pre-existing soteriological model which already uses such resources so as to demonstrate its usefulness: namely, my compassionate exclusivist view.

KEYWORDS: Soteriology; time; purgatory; psychology; second coming

Introduction

In recent decades numerous Protestants have seemingly come to agree with P.T. Forsyth that perhaps “we threw away too much when we threw Purgatory clean out of doors” (1918, p. 40) during the Reformation. One way of retrieving a Protestant view of post-mortem purgation is Jerry Walls’s “optimal grace” (2012, pp. 127-129) soteriology. Walls writes that God’s giving human persons optimal grace means “God truly desires to save all persons, and does not extend the offer of grace merely in a cursory fashion so that everyone has some minimal chance, in order to establish God’s justice in damning them if they reject it.” (p. 129) This, for Walls, includes God’s offering the opportunity for individuals to be saved post-mortem, so nobody is

damned because of geographical, temporal, or cultural happenstance. Instead, “damnation is the decisive choice” (p. 129) to reject God’s grace after having had every opportunity to accept it.

Implicit in views like Walls’s, James Turner notes, is the intuition that “there are *some* qualitative changes that, should they happen too quickly, destroy a substance rather than change it.” (2017, p. 200) But a problem arises when we consider second-chance soteriologies like Walls’s alongside the Christian doctrine of the *parousia*; that is, Jesus Christ’s second coming. As Turner writes, the *parousia*, per 1 Cor. 15:51-52,¹ is typically understood to occur at some set time in the future and to immediately (p. 211) usher in “the eschatological resurrection of all the dead and the consummation of New Creation.” (p. 201-202) As such, the problem for purgatorial second-chance views is that they must either

- (a) accept that at least some human persons experience “abrupt purgation” (pp. 201-202) whereby they are instantaneously changed from rejecting to accepting God’s grace, undermining a key reason for postulating post-mortem purgation in the first place;
- (b) accept that everyone who is not already saved at the moment of the *parousia* is damned, a view which is highly distasteful because it seems to deny God offers optimal grace (C.f., Craig 1989); or
- (c) deny the *parousia*, thereby adopting an unorthodox doctrinal position.

This problem, though legitimate, is not inescapable for a view like Walls’s.

In this paper I offer a way of defusing the problem for second-chance soteriologies described here.² Particularly, I contend that human persons in post-mortem purgation experience a state of psychological time dilation. Time dilation typically describes something like the phenomenon wherein there is a discrepancy between the amount of time two (originally) synchronized clocks indicate has passed due to significant differences between their relative velocities. Here, the term is applied to a psychological state in which one’s mind perceives more time has passed than may have in reality. In so doing, I first more fully articulate the problem second-chance soteriologies face regarding the *parousia*. Second, I extend and enhance the very brief treatment of non-temporal purgation elsewhere offered by Jonathan Rutledge (2018, pp. 158-159) utilizing relevant examples both from fictional media and the neuropsychology of dreaming to lend plausibility to psychological time dilation as a solution to our present problem. Finally, I apply this solution to a second-chance soteriological model which already utilizes neuropsychology in its construction and is, therefore, primed to benefit from it: namely, my compassionate exclusivist view (2021).

¹ References throughout are to the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition.

² This paper has lived several lives and benefited from feedback offered by the following cadre of philosophers and theologians over that time: Taylor Cyr, Jonathan Rutledge, those who participated in the inaugural Carolina Analytic Theology Workshop (especially J.T. Turner and R.T. Mullins), and those at the 2024 Helsinki Analytic Theology Workshop (especially Olli-Pekka Vainio, Aku Visala, and Oliver Crisp). My thanks as well to Shelby Scattergood, with whom I have extensively discussed some of the concepts leveraged in this article.

The Problem of Abrupt Purgation

In order to better spot the problem Turner points out, we should examine *why* people tend to think post-mortem purgation is beneficial, or even necessary, in the first place. To start with, and as Turner highlights, contemporary accounts of purgation tend to “trade on intuitions about the importance of a person’s freely responding (in a libertarian way) to God’s offer of salvation” (2017, p. 213). This means that if one is say, a very strong monergist who thinks that the human will plays effectively *no* role in a person’s salvation, then much of what will follow here might seem obtuse or simply unnecessary. Space prohibits launching an apologia for one side or another of the free will debate, so it can just be stipulated that what follows is a conceptual analysis. Put differently, *if it were true* that God desires the level of cooperation from human persons that Turner observes commonly fuelling defences of post-mortem purgation, *then* what sort of concerns might arise regarding the second coming?

This caveat made, it was mentioned above that there is an implicit sense on an account like Walls’s that post-mortem purgation is necessary for continuity of identity, but David Brown makes said sense explicit in what he calls the temporal argument:

- (1) A human being at death is clearly morally imperfect.
- (2) But essential to the definition of Heaven is that human beings are in a state of complete moral perfection.
- (3) Therefore, either there is an abrupt transition between the two conditions or an intermediate state exists to effect a gradual transition.
- (4) But there is no way of rendering such an abrupt transition in essentially temporal beings conceivable.
- (5) Therefore, an intermediate state of Purgatory must exist, if Heaven exists (1985, p. 447).

We can better grasp what Brown means by “moral perfection” in (2) by looking to an analogization he makes between smoking and virtue. He writes, “there is no doubt that one can suddenly give up smoking; there is a conversion; but it takes a long period of resistance before the urge to smoke finally disappears. In other words, the past lingers on for a long time, despite the change of direction” (p. 450). So, to be morally perfect a la (2) is not, for example, merely to have had one’s sins atoned for by Christ.³ Instead, moral perfection has to do with one’s preparation for life in the communion of the saints.

But (4) stipulates that this preparation must be temporally extended lest we lose the subject being prepared. Brown offers a further argument – the identity argument – in favor of this position:

³ How Christ’s atonement ameliorates the problem of human sin is, of course, something of an open and hotly debated question. I do not mean to stake out a particular view of the atonement here and instead direct the interested to Joshua Thurow’s authoritative survey of the topic (2023). See also Crisp (2020).

- (1) We know and can identify ourselves only through continuity with our past.
- (2) Therefore, the more dramatic the contrast in character between a person *A* at a time *x* and person *B* at a subsequent time *y*, the more likely is the latter individual *B* to doubt whether he could in fact be the same person as person *A* at time *x*.
- (3) But Heaven with its perfection of character constitutes such a dramatic contrast to our earthly existence.
- (4) Therefore, unless there is an intermediate stage between earth and Heaven, the resurrected individual could have no reasonable ground for believing himself to be the same person as the person to whose earthly existence he allegedly corresponds.
- (5) Accordingly, to save the coherence of the doctrine of Heaven, an intermediate state of Purgatory must be postulated (p. 451).

Walls highlights that the identity argument is not, despite what the temporal argument implies, ontologically focused but rather epistemically focused. "That is, the issue is not stated in terms of what constitutes personal identity as a matter of ontology or essence. Rather, the issue concerns the grounds one rationally has for recognizing or believing oneself to be the same person at two different times" (Walls, 2012, p. 115). We might say, to borrow from Christine Korsgaard, that what is at risk here is an individual's practical identity rather than their theoretical identity. The former is "a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking" (1996, p. 101) while the latter is something more like the metaphysical identity one has in virtue of being the particular instantiation of a kind which they are.

Here some might wish to simply deny the importance of practical identity to continuity with one's heavenly self. In order to see why we might not want to do this, consider an issue present in the *Star Trek* universe which we can call the transporter problem. *Star Trek*'s transporters are said to break a person (or object) down into their fundamental parts in the form of an energy pattern which is then beamed elsewhere and reassembled. However, some characters in *Star Trek* are suspicious of transporters on the basis of a concern that what emerges from the other side of a transporter beam is not them but rather a perfect copy of them with all of their memories.⁴ So, the transporter problem is one of self-doubt which leads various characters to use shuttles or other modes of transit in lieu of transporters. Transposing this problem onto the issue at hand, we might say that a similar problem emerges for human persons whose moral character is changed too rapidly post-mortem; they might come to doubt whether *they* survived the moral transformation or whether a new individual now exists.⁵

⁴ E.g., this seems to be a part of Reginald Barclay's transporter phobia in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1992). When discussing the issue with his ship's counselor, he states that "Ever since I was a child, I've been scared to death that if I ever dematerialized... I wouldn't come back whole again."

⁵ Some might propose that 2 Corinthians 5:17 undermines this concern for continuity given Paul writes that "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being." However, nowhere in the New Testament do such statements appear to suggest

Brown considers the possibility that God might provide sufficient connectedness to avoid such doubt “by providing the individual with an explanation of what has happened” (1985, p. 452) but thinks that this does not do enough. For, “it is extremely hard to see how one could personally identify with an announcement that much of what one had not even regarded as wrong was now to be seen as a heinous crime. If it is to be part of one’s identity, it surely has to be in some sense a personal discovery, and that takes time” (p. 452). We might be inclined to reply that God could just add some sort of additional grace of surety on top of this explanation. That is to say, God could both explain what has transpired to the rapidly morally perfected individual and impart to them an unwavering sense of the truth of this explanation. But at this point it seems that God is having to intervene quite a bit in order to ensure the continuity of one’s practical identity. This might not be a problem for some, but since we have already stipulated that we will be assuming for the sake of argument that God indeed desires the cooperation of human persons in saving them then it is an issue here, nonetheless.

Having seen some of the undergirding reasons for holding to views like those he targets, we can now more closely examine Turner’s argument for abrupt purgation (which I have modified slightly from his original formulation for the purpose of readability):

1. Essential to the definition of heaven is that human beings are in a state of complete moral perfection.
2. Christ’s *parousia* marks the consummation of a new creation, a cosmos for which its inhabitants must be fit for heaven.
3. So, those human beings who inhabit the new creation must be completely morally perfect.
4. Christ’s *parousia* is at some fixed time in the future. (Axiom of orthodox Christian theology)
5. So, at some fixed time in the future, those human beings who inhabit the new creation must be completely morally perfect.
6. During the second before Christ returns, there will be morally imperfect human persons living on earth that, upon Christ’s *parousia*, instantaneously inhabit the new creation. (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:51-52)
7. So, the morally imperfect human persons living on earth during the second before Christ returns instantaneously will be made morally perfect at the time of Christ’s *parousia*.⁶
8. If an event E will happen, it is possible that it will happen.

that an entirely distinct person is created at one’s conversion or the resurrection of the body. For example, Jesus’s assurance to one of the criminals he was crucified alongside that “today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43) seems to assume enough continuity between pre-mortem and post-mortem persons to motivate our present concern.

⁶ One could deny 7 and instead claim that morally imperfect human persons are simply damned at the *parousia*, but this runs against the grain of scripture (e.g., John 14:1-3) and theological consensus through the ages. So, this possibility will not be entertained here.

9. Therefore, it is possible that morally imperfect human persons instantaneously will be made completely morally perfect (2017, pp. 201-202).

It is this argument which leads to the threefold dilemma described above. If it is successful then it seems to show an incongruity in the intuitions of purgatory's proponents and the doctrine of the *parousia*. It would seem as though they would have to simultaneously claim that moral character *cannot* change abruptly and that moral character *does* change abruptly for at least some human persons if the doctrine of the *parousia* is to be preserved.

Rutledge has offered an at-length reply to Turner's argument in the form of an appeal to hypertime on which a person can be changed abruptly as regards this present timeline while not being changed abruptly as regards an additional hyper-timeline (2018, pp. 153-157). However, as a kind of addendum to these considerations, Rutledge also suggests that there might be a way to defuse the problem in the form of a non-temporal proposal given that "the plausibility of hypertime is not uncontroversial" (p. 158). In this brief section of his reply, Rutledge gestures towards lucid dreaming as an example of an instance in which persons can perceive the passage of great lengths of time without it being the case that anything close to such a duration has elapsed. He asks whether what is necessary to effect moral change sufficient to enter heaven is "a gradual transition... measured in actual physical time, or could one's subjective experience of the passage of time suffice?" (p. 159) Rutledge suggests that the latter would indeed suffice, but it is *merely* a suggestion given that the primary focus of his reply lies elsewhere. However, it is possible to extend Rutledge's musings here into a more robust, non-temporal option for undoing the problem of abrupt purgation, and it is to this task that we now turn.

Psychological Time Dilation

Physicists often discuss time dilation as a phenomenon in which time slows down. For example, in working to provide an accessible yet scholarly introduction to the topic in their *Don't Be Afraid of Physics*, Ross Barrett and Pier Paolo Delsanto describe a thought experiment in which someone experiences time dilation as an instance in which "time is actually moving more slowly in [their] frame of reference" (2021, p. 110) than in the frame of reference for a non-time-dilated observer. However, to those with any background in the philosophy of time this might seem to be a claim made rather too easily. For, to suppose that an increase in velocity can have a corresponding effect on the flow of time itself is to make a substantial ontological claim about time. Further inquiry into whether time is best understood as relational or absolute,⁷ on an A-theory or B-theory,⁸ and so forth would seem to be necessary in order to get such a claim off the ground. We will not engage in this sort of undertaking here because the term "time dilation" as it will be used presently does not make the sort of implicit ontological

⁷ See the enduring overview offered in Maudlin (2009).

⁸ A helpful summary is provided in Emery (2020). See also the survey of so-called "C-theories" offered by Farr (2020).

claims vis-à-vis time which might be present in a usage like Barret and Delsanto's. Instead, what I mean by "psychological time dilation" is just that one *believes*⁹ based on their sensory experience that more time has passed than may have done so in fact.

One place in which we can readily see the sort of psychological time dilation under discussion here is in science-fiction narratives. Two are especially helpful to consider because they depict especially long experiences of psychological time dilation.¹⁰ The first of this pair hails from season two, episode two of the popular American adult animated series *Rick and Morty*. In this episode the titular characters find themselves at a kind of intergalactic arcade called "Blips and Chitz." Inside Blips and Chitz is a highly advanced virtual reality (VR) game called "Roy: A Life Well Lived" in which the player fills the role of a man named Roy and lives out his life according to their (the player's) desires. Morty is unexpectedly thrust into the game by Rick and when he emerges – after having lived a full life as Roy inclusive of childhood, marriage, child rearing, and a victorious battle with cancer before dying in his mid-50s by falling off of a ladder – Morty confusedly cries out "What the hell?! Wha-, wha-, where am I? What in the hell? Wh-, where's my wife?" (*Rick and Morty*, 2015) For Morty, decades have gone by experientially but it seems that mere moments have transpired in the real world as Rick tells him that it was only a game. It seems, based on context clues,¹¹ that players of "Roy: A Life Well Lived" are usually aware that they are, in fact, playing a video game. However, since Morty had never experienced this technology before he was not conscious of this when he played it.

The second example is also drawn from a television program, but this time from a narrational arc rather than just one episode. I refer specifically to the "Alicization" arc of *Sword Art Online*, a hybrid science-fiction and fantasy (or "science fantasy") Japanese anime. Like the episode of *Rick and Morty* mentioned above, *Sword Art Online* features extremely immersive VR technologies. In fact, the show centers on their usage and the experiences had within them. Its first arc introduced the concept of "FullDive" (*Sword Art Online*, 2012a) technology in which, as in *Rick and Morty*, the user interacts with the digital world they come to occupy as though there were no mediating technology at all. This arc focuses on a situation in which a villainously rogue system administrator traps the players of the show's titular game (i.e., the fantasy game "Sword Art Online") within it by using software changes to ensure that said players will die in real life if they die in the game and that attempts to remove their VR equipment will result in the

⁹ I use the word "believes" rather than "perceives" here because, as Thomas Senor points out, "whereas, for example, one can *believe* that Santa Claus exist without Santa's actually existing, one cannot *perceive* that it is raining without it being true that it is raining" (2017, p. 65). That is to say, "perception is factive" (p. 65) while belief is not.

¹⁰ It has been pointed out to me by those at the Helsinki Analytic Theology Workshop that the 2010 film *Inception* would also be a good candidate for elucidating my point here. However, given that I am more of an animation fan than a film buff, I have elected to use these examples as a matter of personal preference. See also my usage of *Sword Art Online* to stimulate the theological imagination elsewhere (forthcoming).

¹¹ For example, Rick quickly begins to play the game himself, but he both critiques Morty's score in the game and then goes on to use what seems to be an intentional speedrunning (i.e., attempting to complete a game as quickly as possible) technique based on the exclamation of an onlooker that "this guy's takin' Roy off the grid! This guy doesn't have a Social Security number for Roy!" (*Rick and Morty*, 2015)

same outcome. The only way for players to escape is for someone to beat the game, but the difficulty of this task means that those trapped within it ended up remaining there for approximately two years (2012b). Interestingly, the radical realism of FullDive experiences is depicted as being at least partly transferrable to the real world. For example, *Sword Art Online*'s protagonist, Kirigaya Kazuto, is shown to have kept much of his skill as a swordsman even after no longer being trapped in the game (2012c).¹²

Kirigaya becomes immersed within a VR world for an extended period of time once again in the show's fourth arc, this time by a team of researchers who are, unbeknownst to him, working to develop synthetic persons from artificial intelligence (AI) technologies¹³ for military purposes. At issue for this team is that the AIs they have developed so far are, to their minds, much too submissive to the laws of their virtual world. As such, the researchers want to place Kirigaya in this world as a child character with his real-world memories blocked and see whether he, as a non-synthetic person, will be subject to the same apparent restrictions as its current denizens as he grows up. Given the amount of time such a test requires, the VR world's pace is highly accelerated relative to the real-world flow of time. This allows Kirigaya to experience approximately eleven years of life in the VR world over the course of a real-world weekend (2018). Later in this same arc, Kirigaya again enters this same virtual world – this time with his real-world memories intact – and spends approximately two-hundred years there (2020).

Both of the scenarios depict instances of psychological time dilation: their subjects come to experience periods of time which outstrip time's actual flow. However, it might be wondered how examples such as these are supposed to help us in getting around Turner's argument for abrupt purgation given that they are fantastical, and we have no technologies currently capable of replicating them. My response is that the point of these examples is not that they, in themselves, give us some way of defusing Turner's argument. Instead, they are meant to get us thinking about the sorts of things that might be possible via psychological time dilation. For, as it turns out, we are in no need of fantastical technologies in order to experience this phenomenon. It is actually a rather common one given that it is regularly experienced in dreams. As a bit of backgrounding, we experience psychological time dilation while dreaming because, when we sleep, the thalamus works to block many of the sensory inputs from the external world which normally occupy our brains such that the inputs which remain are mostly self-generated. In this way, our experiential mapping of time comes apart from the actual flow of time such that we can believe ourselves to experience events or activities for durations which extend beyond our period of sleep itself.¹⁴

¹² However, he does note that the lack of various in-game assists means that his skills did not transfer one-to-one into the real world. Nevertheless, an opponent he is sparring with expresses surprise at his level of improvement since he became trapped in VR.

¹³ This not exactly how their ends are described in the show, but the terminology used there is, understandably, philosophically imprecise. Therefore, I have distilled things into something more straightforward for present purposes.

¹⁴ Matthew Walker (2017) provides an accessible window into the neurology undergirding this discontinuity between experienced duration and actual duration. What I have outlined here draws especially from pp. 39-41.

Additionally, and as Kelly Bulkeley notes, while “REM [rapid eye movement] sleep may be a reliable trigger for dreaming... genuine dreams can also occur outside of REM sleep any time the brain is sufficiently stimulated” (2016, p. 97). As such, it can be the case that our experience of psychological time dilation in dreaming happens at effectively any stage of sleep (i.e., during non-REM or NREM sleep) (Oudiette et al., 2012). This means that it is not only during deep sleep that our beliefs about time’s rate of passage can come apart from its actual rate, so it is possible for us to experience an extended duration within a dream in only the first or final moment of our slumber. For example, in the instant before our alarm begins to blare and we are roused from sleep many hours or longer could seem to pass within our minds. Notably, this wide distribution of dreaming throughout sleep stages applies not only to more typical experiences of dreaming wherein we move through the dream without realizing that it is a dream but also, if perhaps more infrequently, to lucid dreams (Strumbrys & Erlacher, 2012).¹⁵

Lucid dreams are those dreams in which one knows that they are dreaming while remaining asleep and retains their metacognitive capacities¹⁶ like metathinking and metaawareness which are absent in non-lucid dreaming. Note, though, that this is not to say that *none* of our mental capacities are exercised in non-lucid dreaming. As Miroslava Kozmová has demonstrated, persons dreaming non-lucidly can exercise volitional strategies in goal-oriented ways (e.g., problem solving) (2017),¹⁷ they just might not do so with the benefit of *all* the mental capacities which are accessible to one in a lucid dream. Though not everyone will experience a lucid dream in their lifetime, recent meta-analysis of dream studies from 1966-2016 has revealed that lucid dreaming may be more prevalent and more frequent than previously thought. David Saunders et al stipulate that the difference between the former and the latter is that prevalence pertains to how many people experience at least one lucid dream while frequency refers to how many lucid dreams are experienced by those who have had them (2016, p. 198). While the frequency of lucid dreaming might be relatively low given that less than one quarter of people were found to experience them monthly or more, the prevalence of lucid dreaming was surprisingly high: 55% of people reported experiencing at least one in their lifetime (Sanders et al., pp. 203-210).

What these results imply is that the ability to lucid dream is quite widely distributed rather than being the preserve of a select few dreamers. In fact, studies aiming to examine possible methods for inducing lucid dreams in those who report never having had one are common and exhibit various degrees of success.¹⁸ Moreover, those who lucid dream have been observed to be able to deliberately practice tasks (e.g., dart throwing) (Schädlich et al., 2017) to the benefit of their waking selves (Bonamino et al., 2023). These observations appear to indicate strong mental continuity between waking persons and their lucidly dreaming selves. Studies showing the real time transfer of information from lucid dreamers to researchers via electromyography electrodes

¹⁵ See also Blagrove & Lockheart (2023, pp. 70-72).

¹⁶ Relevant neurological mechanisms are explored in Filevich et al. (2015). C.f., Gott et al. (2024).

¹⁷ See also (Kozmová, 2015) and (Kozmová, 2012).

¹⁸ Blagrove & Lockheart (2023, pp. 73-75) provide a helpful overview. One especially common approach has been “the wake-up-back-to-bed technique.” E.g., Schredl et al. (2020).

(Raduga et al., 2023) and even researchers' engagement in rudimentary dialogue with them (Konkoly et al., 2021) makes this point even more forceful.

So, to sum up, we have two narratives at our disposal here which accessibly depict psychological time dilation as a phenomenon: one from *Ricky and Morty* and one from *Sword Art Online*. In addition, we have walked through the following empirical realities concerning dreaming:

- A. Human persons commonly experience psychological time dilation when dreaming.
- B. Dreaming can occur at essentially any stage of sleep, both REM and NREM.
- C. Lucid dreaming can occur during NREM sleep but is more common during REM sleep.
- D. Lucid dreamers exhibit access to their metacognitive faculties while asleep.
- E. Lucid dreaming occurs widely among human persons and individuals can be trained to dream lucidly.
- F. Lucid dreamers are strongly mentally connected to their waking selves.

With all of this in mind, we can begin to formulate a non-temporal reply to Turner's argument from abrupt purgation. We will benefit in doing this from looking to a particular soteriological model which posits post-mortem purgation in order to see how specifically the conceptual tools gained in this section might be put to work.

A Test Case

The model used here will be my "compassionate exclusivism" (2021) because it was assembled in explicit dialogue with contemporary dream research. There are likely others that could be slotted in as an alternative test case, but this view is primed to benefit from the work being conducted here.¹⁹ We can summarize compassionate exclusivism for present purposes as follows:

Compassionate exclusivism: Love of God – construed as desire for the good of the beloved and a desire for union with the beloved – is the one necessary and sufficient condition for the salvation of human persons in light of the atonement. In our ante-mortem lives, this love might exist while we have little to no propositional knowledge of God (i.e., our knowledge of God might be almost all or entirely *de re* rather than *de dicto*). However, when we see God face-to-face (1 Cor. 13:12) if one is capable of propositional knowledge then they must not reject any foundational propositions about God (i.e., propositions the rejection of

¹⁹ Oliver Crisp has suggested to me that this psychological time dilation approach could be applied to both the *parousia* and the intermediate state more generally in order to take temporal worries out of compassionate exclusivism altogether. This seems perfectly compatible with the view, and so we could understand the following to apply to both persons alive at the second coming and persons who die in need of purgation before it occurs.

which prohibits close intimacy with God). Jesus Christ's descent into hell (1 Pet. 4:6) ensures that such foundational propositional knowledge is both accessible to all post-mortem and that any who quiesce in their rejection of God's love can be saved, even after death.

Compassionate exclusivism synthesizes work from Eleonore Stump (2018, especially part II) on the nature of the atonement with work from Gavin D'Costa on the nature of the descent (2009, especially Ch. 7-8). But, given that both Stump and D'Costa are Catholic, and that Stump is an especially strong Thomist, there is a presumption in both of their works that salvation after death, strictly speaking, is not possible.

At issue, is that the philosophical theological framework within which they work presumes that more information than was had at death must be necessary to change one's determinations of intellect and exercises of will post-mortem from rejecting salvation to accepting it. And so, D'Costa states that people who are redeemed post-mortem do not convert per se, but rather what they experience is "a coming to maturation and completion... when confronted by Christ in his descent... It does not require unconscious desire, but a response to the good news preached by Christ and his church" (2009, p. 179). Though compassionate exclusivism is a Protestant account and so could just reject the idea that no new knowledge can be gained while the soul is separated from the body post-mortem, it instead seeks to hold onto as much of its originating accounts as possible for the purpose of maintaining continuity with their other points of luminary value. As such, the model's formulation leverages dreaming as evidence of a mental capacity with which the mind can conjure up "imaginatively playful scenarios" (Davis, 2021, p. 164) and also suggests that – per Aquinas's reckoning of the sorts of continuities disembodied souls have with their ante-mortem selves (Davis, 2021, pp. 164-166) – it is among the capacities retained by persons post-mortem. Using this faculty the dead can reorder their ante-mortem knowledge in light of their encounter with Christ at death without need of anything new.

With this summary of the view in mind, when we recall the premises of Turner's argument for abrupt purgation, we can quickly see that compassionate exclusivism is subject to the problem it highlights:

1. Essential to the definition of heaven is that human beings are in a state of complete moral perfection.
2. Christ's *parousia* marks the consummation of a new creation, a cosmos for which its inhabitants must be fit for heaven.
3. So, those human beings who inhabit the new creation must be completely morally perfect.
4. Christ's *parousia* is at some fixed time in the future. (Axiom of orthodox Christian theology)
5. So, at some fixed time in the future, those human beings who inhabit the new creation must be completely morally perfect.
6. During the second before Christ returns, there will be morally imperfect human persons living on earth that, upon Christ's *parousia*, instantaneously inhabit the new creation. (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:51-52)

7. So, the morally imperfect human persons living on earth during the second before Christ returns instantaneously will be made morally perfect at the time of Christ's *parousia*.
8. If an event E will happen, it is possible that it will happen.
9. Therefore, it is possible that morally imperfect human persons instantaneously will be made completely morally perfect (2017, pp. 201-202).

Premise 6 seems to be the troublesome one. This is because it appears obvious that there could be persons who do not yet love God living on earth who *would have* loved God had they been given some time in purgatory. And so, the trilemma from above bears down upon the compassionate exclusivist: they can accept that abrupt purgation is possible and undermine their own position, they can accept that all who do not yet love God at the moment of the *parousia* are lost and take up an undesirable stance, or they can deny the *parousia* full stop and become quite unorthodox.

But the crushing weight of 6 can be escaped by using our assets gained while considering psychological time dilation. This is because the mental capacity which facilitates dreaming is present ante-mortem as well as post-mortem. To see how this might be done, consider the following scenario:

Paul is a human person who believes that he deeply loves God. However, Paul is also a modern Docetist who refuses to believe that God would take on a true human nature by becoming incarnate, and so also refuses to believe that Jesus Christ could have been bodily raised from the dead. The *parousia* will occur at a time t and at t_0 Paul meets the bodily resurrected Jesus face-to-face. Paul will reject that this individual could possibly be Jesus at t_1 and, thereby, reject the loving fellowship with God which Jesus offers. God knows that, were the *parousia* to occur at t_1 instead of at t_0 then Paul would have changed his mind about his Docetism and would have accepted Jesus's offer of loving fellowship. Therefore, at t_0 God instantiates a dream-like state of affairs in Paul's mind. While in this state, Paul experiences psychological time dilation and is afforded the opportunity to change his mind regarding Docetism and accept Jesus as he is truly (i.e., the God-man). This is because Paul's dream-like state is akin to that of a lucid dream in that he has access to his metacognitive faculties and is strongly mentally connected to his experiences outside this state. Once Paul is fit to accept the offer of loving fellowship from Jesus, God returns Paul to his regular state of affairs at t_0 .

Given that compassionate exclusivism already presumes a mental capacity for experiencing dreams and dream-like states can play a part in post-mortem salvation, only a small amendment is needed in the case of the *parousia*. That is to say, this story only adjusts two things from the view's original articulation: first, it specifies that a soteriologically impactful dream-like state is possible post-mortem *and* at the moment

of the *parousia*, and it specifies that the dream-like state which is experienced includes both psychological time dilation and lucidity.

The first of these two adjustments asks little of us or of compassionate exclusivism itself. After all, if we already accept that such dream-like states are possible post-mortem then little argument seems necessary to say they are possible at the moment of the *parousia*. In fact, since the *parousia* occurs ante-mortem and it is obviously the case that dreams occur before death this looks like an even easier claim to make! Yet, it might be suggested that there is just no way for a human person to be induced into a dream-like state instantaneously. On the one hand, the brain's neural connections to the rest of the body always have at least some, however small, input lag such that what seems instantaneously perceptible by our senses is always technically perceived with a delay.²⁰ On the other hand, it might seem doubtful that one could be induced into a dream-like state so quickly even disregarding sensory input lag. But this apparent issue can be readily addressed. As regards the input lag, we have two paths forward. In the first instance, we could stipulate that persons like Paul are induced into a dream-like state at, say, t_{-1} instead of t_0 , because the level of delay under discussion here is typically measured in milliseconds (e.g., Wu & Sheth, 2013, pp. 279-281). As such, an additional moment seems sufficient to get what is wanted. Alternatively, one could reply that perhaps there is no such input lag when God works directly on the mind. Either option seems open here. As to the rapid induction of a dream-like state, this point is only problematic if we fail to recollect what was seen in the preceding section. Namely, that dreaming can occur at essentially any stage of sleep. So, if one can begin to dream immediately upon falling asleep it is unclear why it would be an issue for God to induce a similar state instantaneously.

Now, to the second adjustment: that the dream-like state includes psychological time dilation and lucidity. It does no violence to compassionate exclusivism to add these elaborations. If anything, they merely extend the minor reflections on temporal mechanics which were present in its original form (Davis, 2021, p. 165 n.19-20). But this extension looks like it could be vulnerable to two problems Turner suggests emerge in what he calls the final countdown, i.e. "the final seconds leading up to the *parousia*" (2017, p. 212). The first is a kind of sorites puzzle that asks when, exactly, is enough time supposed to have passed in order for a person to become fit for heaven? Turner writes that if "it looks as if no clear account can be given for a sufficiently gradual period of time necessary to change [a person]" (p. 212). The second problem is something of a problem of evil, and Turner takes it to be the more pressing of the two. He asks, if God cannot save human persons without gradual change,

how far out from the eschaton does The Final Countdown go (temporally speaking)?... I think this is a significant problem of evil for the Walls sorts of accounts of Purgatory. These accounts, after all, trade on intuitions about the importance of a person's freely responding (in a libertarian way) to God's offer of salvation; intuitions about God's wanting to save as many people as he possibly can... But if [one]... dies as [a morally depraved human] too chronologically close to the eschaton, Purgatory is of no help to her. Her fate is

²⁰ For a useful (if somewhat dated) summary, see Libet (2004, Ch. 2).

sealed because time has run out. And the same is true of possibly very many others (p. 213).

Both problems pose legitimate questions to the proponent of post-mortem purgation, but the modified form of compassionate exclusivism offered here is equipped to answer them.

Regarding the sorites puzzle, compassionate exclusivism's concept of foundational propositional knowledge and definition of love is exculpatory. Both establish minimum barriers to entry, as it were, and so there is a clear demarcation between when one is fit for heaven and when one is not.²¹ When we have crossed that barrier might be rather unclear to us for a variety of reasons (e.g., our status as fallen creatures, the epistemic gap inherent in the Creator-creature distinction, and so forth), but that does not mean that the barrier itself is absent or incomprehensible.²² Moreover, this is not an arbitrary cutoff but rather something grounded in the requirements of intimate, loving communion between human persons and God. A related concern here though is that perhaps what compassionate exclusivism (and views like it) describe just *is* abrupt. For, does Paul not go at one moment from being a Docetist to rejecting Docetism at the next? But this is mistaken because it misconstrues which part of the change is abrupt.

While it is the case that the *result* is abrupt (i.e., at one moment it has not occurred, at the next it has) everything that necessarily *precipitated* the result was gradual. Take the example of my proposal of marriage to my wife and her acceptance of the proposal. Her acceptance of the proposal was quite abrupt,²³ but the process of growing together as a loving couple which led to that acceptance took time and to suggest that a hypothetical proposal and proposal acceptance which would have occurred on our first date would have been qualitatively the same seems to defy our immediate experiences of romantic relationships. As such, this new abruptness problem seems to simply be a confusion of what stage(s) in a personal change must be gradual. What, then, of Turner's problem of evil for post-mortem purgation? The problem here seems to be more specifically with the amount of time presumably necessary for significant moral change in an individual, and it is here that we can return to our narratives of psychological time dilation for help.

Recall that Morty's encounter with the "Roy: A Life Well Lived" game took him through an entire lifetime of experiences. He grew from boyhood into adulthood, experienced the ups and downs of marriage and career hunting, survived a seemingly serious bout with cancer, and other major events which we would tend to think play a role in shaping one's character, including morally. The same goes for Kirigaya, who

²¹ Of course, the contents of foundational propositional knowledge are not spelled out in detail in the original compassionate exclusivism paper. Nevertheless, I suggest (2021, p. 167) that good places to look for the sorts of things which constitute foundational propositional knowledge of God might be the creedal doctrines promulgated by early Christianity's ecumenical councils (e.g., God is three persons).

²² This response could be elaborated as either an epistemic or semantic response to sorites paradoxes. I more so mean it in the sense of the former here, but both seem like legitimate options at present. See the coverage of both sorts of response in Hyde (2018). C.f., (Barnes, 2010).

²³ Though some proposal acceptances are not abrupt, of course, as the person being proposed to may take time to consider the proposal. This is merely an example of one that was abrupt.

initially experienced eleven years of psychological time dilation and then another two-hundred years after that. In both instances we see characters who experience personal growth and change in their state of psychological time dilation which maps back onto their regular experiences; the one impacts the other. Therefore, it appears possible, at least conceptually, that someone could develop in soteriologically meaningful ways in a state of psychological time dilation like the ones they experienced. We could imagine, for example, Kirigaya wrestling with the witness of a *Nippon Sei Ko Kai*²⁴ priest until, perhaps only after decades, he comes to accept it as a testimony to the Triune God's reality. So, why could the same not be said of temporal dilation experienced in a dream-like state like the one imagined here? To be sure, the lengths of time necessary to effect salvation for some people might be rather longer than the typical dream, but the suggestion here is not that one is saved in a typical dream. Rather, it is merely a state which is sufficiently similar to a dream so as to be plausibly achievable by God at the moment of the *parousia*. If human persons have access to this sort of thing then Turner's problem of evil evaporates. Regardless of how much is needed, there is enough time for all who will be saved²⁵ to taste that salvation without stretching the final countdown backwards in the way Turner seems to fear.

Conclusion

In his endnotes, Walls writes that he has been needled on the compatibility of the *parousia* with a second-chance view of purgatory like his own. He avers that "how purgatory fits with the timeline of the *parousia*, the final judgement, and so on is not always clear and admittedly requires some degree of speculation" (2012, p. 194, n. 5).²⁶ In this paper I have worked to offer just such an instance of speculation in defence of post-mortem purgation's compatibility with the *parousia*. To begin with, I first sketched some reasons typically used for holding to such a view and Turner's potent critique of them vis-à-vis the *parousia*. Next, I used narratives from two fictional, narrational worlds – that of *Rick and Morty* alongside *Sword Art Online* – to prime our intuitions for thinking about the phenomenon of psychological time dilation. After reviewing its role in dreams both lucid and non-lucid, I then applied these relevant empirical points of data to a preexisting soteriological model in a similar vein to Walls's which itself utilizes dream research in its construction: namely, my compassionate exclusivist view. In so doing, I extended Rutledge's treatment of psychological time dilation into a more full-fledged account of how one might solve the purgatory puzzles laid out by Turner. Therefore, in addition to Rutledge's work to rebuff Turner's arguments through an appeal to hypertime, we are now in possession of a way to think about purgation which has some links to experiences already common to us today.

²⁴ I.e., the Anglican Episcopal Church in Japan. To be clear, the *Nippon Sei Ko Kai* does not appear in *Sword Art Online*.

²⁵ I make this caveat so as to be agnostic about the truth of universalism (i.e., perhaps there are some for whom *no* amount of time is sufficient for them to be saved).

²⁶ Emphasis added.

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