

Purgatory, Hypertime, & Temporal Experience

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Abstract: Recently, JT Turner has argued that proponents of temporally-extended models of purgatory (henceforth, *temps*) are committed to denying the doctrine of the parousia. Such persons typically argue that temporally-extended models of purgatory are needed to prevent the possibility that a morally imperfect human might become morally perfect too abruptly. In this article, I argue that Turner is mistaken and that by invoking hypertime and a clarification of the sort of abruptness at issue, *temps* can affirm both purgatory and the doctrine of the parousia.

After clarifying the nature of hypertime, I then present a non-temporal model of purgatory. This model permits those uncomfortable with endorsing the metaphysical possibility of hypertime to nevertheless affirm the key intuition motivating temporally-extended models (i.e. that they are necessary to avoid too abrupt a change in character) without rejecting the doctrine of the parousia.

1. Introduction

In some of his recent work, Turner (2017) employs the doctrine of the *Parousia* to argue against a temporally extended doctrine of Purgatory. According to proponents of temporally extended purgatory (e.g., Jerry Walls¹), given the sort of creatures we are, for any human person, A, if that person's moral character is abruptly changed, then A ceases to exist (i.e., roughly, with some new, though remarkably similar, person A* coming to exist in place of A).

According to Turner, however, Christian doctrine includes a commitment to a pre-ordained and precisely determined temporal location for the *Parousia*, an event which he argues if actual entails that some humans undergo abrupt change in moral character without ceasing to exist (Turner 2017, 197). Thus, the upshot of Turner's argument is that proponents of a temporally extended model of purgatory must

¹ See Walls's defense of a Protestant doctrine of Purgatory in: (i) (Walls 2012); (ii) (Walls 2015); (iii) (Barnard 2007) seems to presuppose the temporally extended model, as does (Green 2015). For a helpful discussion about the possible purposes for purgatory, see especially (Judisch 2009).

either (i) reject the scriptural doctrine² of the *Parousia* or (ii) reject their intuitions that human character cannot be changed abruptly (and thereby undercut a fundamental motivation for adopting a doctrine of purgatory³).

I argue that proponents of a temporally extended purgatory should hold the wall against Turner's advance. More specifically, I argue that Turner's case rests on a particular understanding of abruptness that is inessential to any doctrine of temporally extended purgatory. Thus, if the proponent of a temporally extended model of purgatory rejects Turner's understanding of abruptness, her purgatorial model escapes Turner's objection unscathed.

I proceed as follows. First in §1, I present Turner's argument against temporally extended purgatory, highlighting the crucial premise concerning abruptness and moral character. Then in §2, I define the sense of abruptness needed to make the crucial premise true, followed by a disambiguation of the senses of abruptness at issue. I follow this, in §3, with a discussion of the concept of hypertime which allows us to see more clearly why Turner's understanding of abruptness is inadequate. Then finally in §4, I offer an alternative version of purgatory that does not depend on temporal extension at all. This last alternative account of purgatory is intended to serve as a fallback position for anyone with misgivings concerning the metaphysical possibility of hypertime but for whom the intuitions concerning the implausibility of abrupt change in moral character remain compelling.

2. Abruptness and the Parousia

As Turner represents the argument for a temporally extended purgatory, it rests on the following *crucial premise*:

(Crucial Premise) It's not possible to affect an abrupt transition from morally imperfect to morally perfect character states in essentially temporal beings (Turner 2017, 198-199).⁴

² I say "scriptural doctrine" since the defense Turner offers in his paper is based on a prior commitment to a normative understanding of the teachings of certain biblical passages, such as most notably 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, which reads: "Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" (quoted on (Turner 2017, 207). For the interested reader, see (Abraham 1981) for helpful discussion concerning the nature of scriptural authority.

³ This is not the *only* motivation, as an anonymous reviewer has pointed out, since another motivation might be to avoid divine culpability for the actions of lapsable humans. See (Barnard 2007) for this suggestion.

⁴ I've expanded the original premise slightly, but only to help those who have not read Turner's paper to understand the content. Moreover, the argument can be made quickly from the *Crucial Premise* (i.e., the claim that no human being is morally perfect at death) and the claim that moral perfection is needed for residence in the new heavens and new earth to the conclusion that some sort of non-abrupt transitional state, such as a temporally extended purgatory, is a necessary condition for entrance to heavenly bliss.

However, the *Crucial Premise* is in direct conflict with the conclusion of the *Abrupt Purgation* argument Turner advances. That argument proceeds as follows:

1. Essential to the definition of Heaven is that human beings are in a state of complete moral perfection. (From TAP [i.e. the argument for a temporally extended purgatory])
2. Christ's *parousia* (return) marks the consummation of 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. (1, 2)
4. Christ's *parousia* (return) 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. (3, 4)
6. During the second before Christ returns, there will be MIHs [i.e. morally imperfect humans] living on earth that, upon Christ's *parousia*, instantaneously inhabit the New Creation. (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:51-52)
7. So, the MIHs living on earth during the second before Christ returns instantaneously will be made completely morally perfect at the time of Christ's *parousia*. (from 5, 6; and 1 Cor. 15:51-52)
8. If an event *E* will happen, it's possible that it will happen.
9. Therefore, it's possible that MIHs instantaneously will be made completely morally perfect. (from 7, 8)⁵

This argument purports to show that no one can hold to a temporally extended model of purgatory while simultaneously affirming the doctrine of the *parousia*. In other words, Turner seems to think that anyone who affirms the argument's conclusion—i.e. that it's possible for MIHs to be made morally perfect instantaneously—is committed to denying the *Crucial Premise* of the argument for a temporally extended purgatory (Turner 2017, 202). However contrary to appearances, Turner's claim does not immediately follow.

3. Two Senses of Abruptness

Let us refer to the conclusion of Turner's argument as the *Parousian Premise*. The reason that Turner's claim is mistaken is that an inference from the *Parousian Premise* to a rejection of the *Crucial Premise* requires that it be impossible to have an *abrupt* change that is not-immediate. Of course, it certainly seems reasonable to affirm that something happens abruptly only if it is immediate. However, there are at least two different ways of understanding abruptness and its relation to immediacy, one of which prohibits making the above inference.

⁵ (*Ibid.*, 201-202).

Abruptness₁ – for any person, P, a change in P’s moral character will be abrupt₁ iff along the same dimension of time, P has moral character M at t₀ and moral character N at t₁, where t₀ and t₁ are separated by a mere second & (M ≠ N).⁶

Now, while looking at this definition of abruptness, notice the locution ‘along the same dimension of time’. This qualifier is important since even if some person travels along an alternative *temporal* dimension for some amount of time sufficient for their character to develop gradually (i.e., when counting the number of seconds they travel in total across all temporal dimensions), this definition would still count their change in character as abrupt were they to return to the dimension of time in which they began. This feature of abruptness₁ will become clearer below, but first consider an alternative construal of abruptness that avoids the shortcoming found in the previous definition:

Abruptness₂ - for any person, P, a change in P’s moral character will be abrupt₂ iff along the same dimension of time, P has moral character M at t₀ and moral character N at t₁, where t₀ and t₁ are separated by a mere second, (M ≠ N), and it is not the case that P’s change from M to N took place along at least one alternative dimension of time.

According to Abruptness₂, someone can undergo change in character that would count as abrupt₁ without counting as abrupt₂. The way this would occur might be, as suggested earlier, by a person traveling along an alternative temporal dimension without a trace of this travel being discerned from the perspective of any other person residing within the usual (or initial) temporal dimension. In other words, abruptness₂ leaves open the possibility of hypertime⁷, and although hypertime is not itself a commonsense notion⁸, it provides a way for the defender of the *Crucial Premise* to avoid Turner’s criticisms while honoring the gradual change in moral character motivating their temporally extended model of purgatory.

Let us see, then, whether someone might consistently hold both the *Parousian Premise* and the *Crucial Premise* by utilizing both interpretations of abruptness (i.e., Abruptness₁ or Abruptness₂). For the reader’s sake, here are both premises again (i.e., with ‘instantaneously’ replaced by ‘abruptly’, ‘completely’ deleted, and the syntax rearranged to accommodate the changes in the *Parousian Premise*):

(Parousian Premise) It’s possible that morally imperfect humans will be made morally perfect abruptly.

⁶ Following Turner, I’ll assume that everyone is happy to count by seconds and that whether time is discrete or continuous is irrelevant to the question of whether a second is a sufficiently small amount of time to give rise to the abrupt-change-in-character problem we’re considering.

⁷ See, for instance, the fascinating and creative work of Hud Hudson on this and related issues: (i) (Hudson 2005) & (ii) (Hudson 2014).

⁸ Indeed, it needs some thorough explaining, which will arrive presently.

(Crucial Premise) It's not possible to affect an abrupt transition from morally imperfect to morally perfect character states in essentially temporal beings.

So, which version of abruptness (i.e., $Abruptness_1$ or $Abruptness_2$) is at play for the two above premises? It seems that someone might affirm the *Parousian Premise* by interpreting it according to $Abruptness_1$. That is, they would agree that the *parousia* happens at a particular instant in time along the temporal dimension on which people normally travel, and that from the perspective of someone along only that dimension of time, a change in moral character for some individual would certainly be abrupt₁. However, if the story I suggested earlier about the possibility of traveling along alternative temporal dimensions is indeed possible, then someone might reasonably reject the *Parousian Premise* when interpreted in light of $Abruptness_2$.

But then, how about the *Crucial Premise*? Just the opposite would happen for the sort of person I have in mind. Interpreted in light of $Abruptness_1$, the proponent of temporally extended models of purgatory need not accept the argument from the *Crucial Premise*. Such a person would claim that surely such an abrupt transition *is possible*, so long as the way in which the transition along a single temporal dimension is brought about is from a detour along an alternative temporal dimension. But then, were the same person to interpret the *Crucial Premise* in light of $Abruptness_2$, they would undoubtedly affirm the *Crucial Premise*.

Thus, the only way in which an affirmation of the *Crucial Premise* would commit someone to denying the *Parousian Premise* is if the same notion of abruptness provides the best interpretation of those respective premises. However, if the hypertime scenario I have suggested works, then this is mistaken. Rather, someone should interpret the *Parousian Premise* in light of $Abruptness_1$ and the *Crucial Premise* in light of $Abruptness_2$, such that both can be consistently affirmed.

4. Modeling Hypertime

Given our two understandings of abruptness, a word of explanation concerning hypertime is in order. What precisely is a hypertime? How might someone conceive of an individual who jumped temporal dimensions? Let us turn to these questions now.

First, let us consider a basic construal of spacetime. One way of imagining our universe is as one composed of three spatial dimensions and one temporal dimension, such that over time (and with one spatial dimension suppressed for ease of demonstration) the entire universe can be represented as a spatiotemporal block composed of rectangular sections pressed together much like the pages of a book. Moreover, each of these pages represents the entirety of space (i.e. all three spatial dimensions) as it is at a particular instant of time. And lastly, just as one reads a book

with a clear beginning to the story as well as a close, so too does our spacetime block have a direction built-in (i.e. the arrow of time).⁹

Now, to posit a hypertime is to simply posit an additional *temporal* dimension, just as to posit a hyperspace would be to posit an additional *spatial* dimension. However, although we have direct experience concerning how multiple spatial dimensions might be combined (e.g. as when we form a cube out of a series of flattened squares), combining temporal dimensions is not a common mental practice among humans.¹⁰ This need not prevent us from imagining scenarios involving additional temporal dimensions, however, for there are ways of conceiving of how they might interact that does not require us to combine them altogether in quite the way that we do spatial dimensions.

First, let us assume that human psychology is such that it can only function well when experiencing one temporal dimension at a time. Thus, were a human being to somehow reside on multiple temporal dimensions, they would be unable to process the flow of times.¹¹ Second, let us suppose that it is uncontroversial that God could somehow preserve the physical matter composing an individual human such that they could travel along some dimension of time (or another) without reflecting the aging process in their physical constitution. And third, suppose that it is possible for God to move an individual from one three-dimensional *space* to another without such a move threatening the continued existence of the individual in question.¹² With these assumptions in play, consider the following possibility.

Bethany awoke at 7:30 A.M. in a panic when she realized that she had to be at a meeting by 8:00 A.M. (i.e. leaving her only 30 minutes to get ready). In a rush, Bethany took just 15 minutes to get completely dressed and 10 minutes to cook and eat breakfast. With 5 minutes until the meeting would begin, and precisely a 5 minute walk to get there, it appeared as if she would be able to make her meeting after all. But alas, she realized at the last minute that her elixir of life, a fresh cup of French press coffee, would itself take 5 minutes to prepare and at least another 10 minutes to drink! Knowing that diverging from her ritual of a freshly-ground blonde roast would spell inescapable disaster for her meeting, she began to lament. But the very instant she began to lament, she was whisked away into a new temporal dimension (i.e. a temporal dimension coupled with an alternative three-dimensional space within

⁹ See (Mullins 2016) for a way of spelling out the eternalist picture in the four-dimensional way I offer here. For an accessible yet more technical introduction to the theoretical notion of spacetime as I'm thinking of it, see (Disalle 2016).

¹⁰ Perhaps it is more common than I suspect, but for myself, at least, I don't think about such things regularly. The following papers come from members of this minority group of multiple-temporal-dimension thinkers: (i) (MacBeath 1993); (ii) (Meiland 1974); (iii) (Wilkerson 1973); & (iv) (Wilkerson 1979).

¹¹ But see (Thompson 1965) for a brilliant example that calls this assumption into question. The assumption is not essential to the point I'm making, but it simplifies the case significantly.

¹² For instance, one might suppose that there are simply two different three-dimensional spacetimes that can be traveled between via a fourth spatial dimension, but then, we can stipulate that such four dimensional space travel is possible only when done via divine guidance.

which Bethany might work). More specifically, as it turns out, a supreme being took her to a unidirectional temporal dimension, complete with a French press, coffee grinder, hot water kettle, and her favorite blonde roast.¹³ Immediately, the supreme being sent a messenger to explain the situation to Bethany; namely, that this was a result of her prayers being heard and that upon completion of her coffee ritual, she would be returned to her original spatiotemporal dimension without her physical body reflecting any temporal aging due to the time spent in this alternative dimension of time.¹⁴ In full understanding and admirable calmness given the strangeness of the situation, Bethany proceeded through her coffee ritual producing an absolutely flawless cup of coffee. Upon completion of her last sip, with a sigh of contentment, Bethany was returned to her original dimension of time and location, and immediately she set out to make her meeting at 8:00 A.M.

The above story provides a straightforward way in which God might utilize alternative temporal dimensions to bring about certain aims. Moreover, if we can conceive of such a scenario coherently for Bethany as she makes and consumes a cup of coffee over a period of 15 minutes, then we can surely conceive of a temporally extended model of purgatory that functions in much the same way. For example, at one second prior to the *parousia*, God places all the morally imperfect humans residing on earth within a new timeline (and perhaps within an additional spatial dimension). He also preserves, let's say, their physical bodies in such a way that upon completing their purgatorial phase (and let us assume he knows they will complete such a phase in a finite amount of time) they are returned to the timeline along which the *parousia* is to take place fully intact. Upon returning to the timeline, they are no longer morally imperfect, and thus, they are fit to enter into the new heavens and new earth alongside their fellow saints. Thus, it is possible for a proponent of temporally extended models of purgatory to affirm both the *Crucial Premise* and the *Parousian Premise*.¹⁵

¹³ And let us not forget that Bethany's coffee preparation is a *ritual*, such that the very performing of the ritual is part of what helps her to avoid disaster later in a day.

¹⁴ In dialogue, JT Turner brought up the possibility that certain changes in character plausibly supervene on certain somatic changes in a person. For anyone with worries about this, let us stipulate that the divine being can return an individual to her original temporal dimension with her physical body unchanged with respect to aging except for bodily changes that would be required for the change in character involved in purgatory. It seems like this could be managed easily enough in such a way that the model doesn't posit any strong commitment to an extreme substance dualism. Indeed, I'd like to think that the model is neutral between physicalism and dualist views about human persons.

¹⁵ An anonymous reviewer emphasized that on this hypertime model of purgatory, the phenomenological component of the "twinkling of an eye" from 1 Corinthians 15:52 is perhaps not present for someone who returns to the original timeline *from* an alternative temporal dimension. There are interpretive issues with this text that might be relevant, but since I am working on the assumptions that I find in JT Turner's account, I can say two things. First, the non-temporal models offered in §4 avoid this issue. Second, it is unclear to which phenomenological perspective Paul is speaking (if indeed he is speaking to a phenomenological perspective). Is it how the Corinthians would

5. Temporal Experience Models: A Non-Temporal Alternative

The plausibility of hypertime is not uncontroversial.¹⁶ Indeed, many proponents of purgatory may be disinclined to adopt such a model of the doctrine. However, if someone rejects the metaphysical possibility of hypertime, they cannot, I think, escape Turner's objection while maintaining a temporally extended model of purgatory.

But there is no need to maintain a *temporally extended* model of purgatory in the first place. Even given the need for a gradual transition in moral character, one can make use of a familiar distinction between the passage of time and the subjective experience of time to preserve a more modest version of purgatory. Thus, even though Turner's argument may undermine temporal models of purgatory (assuming hypertime is metaphysically impossible), it cannot undermine all models of purgatory.

Consider an experience shared by anyone who has driven down a long highway; namely, the phenomenon of one's brain switching on autopilot. Sometimes we arrive at a destination or travel many miles before we realize that we cannot recall any of the geography or possible obstacles we have clearly avoided. Indeed, it will seem to us *as if* only a few minutes have passed whereas *in reality* an hour has eluded us. That is, our conscious awareness of the passage of time—i.e. our experience of the passage of time—does not match the actual passage of time.

Another example of this phenomenon might be found if we consider lucid dreaming.¹⁷ Lucid dreams are dreams in which the dreamer is aware that she is dreaming, and in some cases the dreamer may also be able to control the dream in various ways. Importantly, lucid dreamers commonly claim that a lengthy period of time has passed in their dream when a much shorter time has passed in reality.¹⁸ Whatever we want to say about the nature of these types of dreams, it is evident that there is a strict distinction between one's subjective experience of the passage of time (while in the dream state) and the actual passage of time (outside of the dream state).

perceive the *parousia* from some 3rd person perspective? Is it the perspective of the individuals involved in the *parousia*? Is it really just an indicator of how fast the change will be? I'm not sure, and I suspect the text underdetermines this.

¹⁶ (Thompson 1965) argues that communication would be impossible between two persons residing on different but connected temporal dimensions, and thus, that we cannot gain evidence of multiple temporal dimensions. Other examples of those who oppose the idea of more than one temporal dimension are (Swinburne 1968) and (Quinton 1993).

¹⁷ (Voss et al 2009). An anonymous reviewer has also suggested that one's "experience of being under general anesthesia" provides another possible example of my point. That seems right, although I do not have any personal experience with such a post-anesthesia awakening.

¹⁸ Some lucid dreamers claim that they can even change the subjective experience of the dream's temporal duration when some sort of pre-sleep agreement is made that they will perform that action in the lucid dream: (LaBerge et al 1986, 258).

Now, what kind of gradual transition from one moral character to another is necessary to satisfy the concerns of the proponents of temporally extended models of Purgatory? Must the gradual transition be measured in actual physical time, or could one's subjective experience of the passage of time suffice?

Suppose we think that the subjective experience of the passage of time can be sufficient to prevent change in moral character from counting as abrupt. Indeed, so long as the amount of time passing from the subject's point of view matches whatever amount of objective time is necessary to avoid the charge of abruptness, then this conjecture appears reasonable. If so, however, then no model of Purgatory would require adherence to a temporally extended purgatory, but rather, an *apparently* temporally extended purgatory (i.e. from the subject's point of view).¹⁹ Thus, even if someone rejects the metaphysical possibility of hypertime (the possibility of which I simply assume above) they can still offer a model of purgatory that honors the intuition that a change in moral character cannot be abrupt *without* being forced to also reject the doctrine of the *parousia*. In other words, for anyone seeking to put an end to arguments defending an intermediate state of human existence prior to entry into the new heavens and new earth (e.g. some form of purgatory), much more must be said.²⁰

6. Conclusion

I have argued that commitment to the orthodox doctrine of the *parousia* does not entail a rejection of temporally extended models of purgatory; that is, due to the possibility of additional temporal dimensions that would prevent a change in the moral character of some human persons from being too abrupt. I have also suggested a way to develop a model of purgatory, one based on the subjective experience of temporal passage, which allows anyone motivated to preserve the intuition that a change in moral character cannot be too abrupt (without destroying the person undergoing such a change) to maintain a commitment to Purgatory without committing to the metaphysical possibility of hypertime or running afoul of Turner's *parousia* argument. Consequently, it seems that those developing models of Purgatory, both temporal and non-temporal, need not be concerned with the possibility of denying the doctrine of the *parousia*. Both can be maintained without fear of incoherence.

¹⁹ An anonymous reviewer raised a worry about the possibility that the *apparentness* of the experience might raise worries of divine deception. I take it, however, that one could be aware, as in the lucid dreaming case, that the actual flow of time and one's experience of the flow of time are distinct such that there is no deception involved. So I think the objection can be avoided.

²⁰ Turner might find the subjective temporal experience model of purgatory unproblematic, though it's unclear. In (Turner 2017, fn 6), he notes that he agrees with Walls that some form of purgatory is needed, although the desire for temporal extension is unwarranted. I suspect other aspects of my temporal experience model, however, may give Turner pause.

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