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Chapter 1. Hell, Hopefulness, Humility: What Does It Mean to Keep Your Mind in Hell?

The main argument of this chapter concerns the ways in which a particular sentence provides a beginning point for using the metaphor of hell within ethics and moral reasoning.¹ The Russian mystic and philosopher, Staretz Silouan, hears “Keep your mind in hell, and despair not” directly and immediately from God and writes it down.² Silouan’s use of the sentence offers two correctives: one toward Dante and another toward Immanuel Kant. Silouan’s sentence corrects Dante’s claim that entering hell requires one to “abandon all hope”³: hell exists, for Silouan, and despair a real possibility if one puts their mind in hell; however, hopelessness is not an inevitable aspect of hell for Silouan. On my interpretation, Silouan corrects Kant’s famous claim, “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.”⁴ What deserves our attention and awe, according to Silouan, involves hell below us—not “the starry heavens above.”⁵ Also, when we look ‘within’ we find and then wrestle with our own

¹ A version of this chapter was presented via Zoom to the Loyola Marymount University philosophy department in January 2021. I am grateful to Brad Elliott Stone for the invitation, and I am grateful to the LMU philosophy department for their critiques of my argument.

² Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

³ Dante, *Inferno*, ??

⁴ Kant, *PP*, 269-270.

⁵ Kant, *PP*, 269-270.

pride. In this chapter, therefore, I demonstrate what it means to adopt Silouan’s correction of Dante’s poetics of hell and his correction of Kant’s metaphysics of morality.⁶

[A]Who Is St. Silouan?

Given that the inspiration for my argument comes from Staretz Silouan, of whom most of my readers may have no acquaintance, I devote a section to his biography—including the story behind the sentence, “Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not” (the story behind the sentence is not found in Silouan’s own chapter containing the sentence).⁷

Born on January 17th, 1866, his given name was Simeon Ivanovich. Raised as a peasant in Tambov, Russia, he worked as a carpenter and served in the military before his forty-six year long commitment as a monk on Mount Athos in Greece. His father’s faith in the Christian God and commitment to Russian Orthodoxy seemed to be strong,⁸ and he passed this on to young Simeon.⁹ Silouan followed his older brother in joining an *artel*—a “[g]roup of artisans who lived together, kept a common table, and shared the wages for the job which they all worked on”—and worked as a carpenter within this group.¹⁰

He served in the Russian military in the 1880s, perhaps up until 1891. He was considered an “ordinary soldier” and assigned to St. Petersburg for the duration of his military service.¹¹

⁶ See Guyer’s “The Starry Heavens and the Moral Law,” which argues that Kant’s sentence concerning the “starry heavens” above is foundational for his metaphysics of morals.

⁷ Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

⁸ There is hardly any mention of his mother, except that she fed Simeon more food than what she fed his brothers.

⁹ Silouan’s main biographer, his former student St. Sophrony, reports one conversation between a “wandering pilgrim” and Silouan’s father. The pilgrim questioned God’s existence, and Silouan’s father told Silouan: “I thought he [the pilgrim] was a wise man but he turned out to be a fool” (Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 11).

¹⁰ See Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 11.

¹¹ See Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 7.

According to Russian historian, Stephen Woodburn, “the 1880s was not a significant military era for the Russian empire. There were some maneuvers against British designs on Afghanistan and Britain using the Ottoman empire as a client state—in the so-called ‘Great Game’.”¹² As for Silouan’s assignment, Woodburn says that since St. Petersburg is the capital, he would have been “far removed from that [the ‘Great Game’]”—which makes it “not a hardship post, and he was not seeing combat or battlefield trauma.”¹³ What would have Silouan been doing as part of the military in the St. Petersburg? Woodburn claims that he would have been protecting Alexander III from assassination plots and potential revolutions:

[EXT]In 1881, the reformer tsar Alexander II, who liberated the serfs, introduced jury trials, local self-government, and freer press, was assassinated by revolutionaries who wanted even more radical reforms. Instead, the next tsar, Alexander III, was extremely repressive and heavy-handed. So for Silouan’s whole tour of duty, he’s stationed near the headquarters of a ruler who was fearful of assassination attempts, revolution plots, and the whole modernity package. So Silouan was stationed nearby to defend that ruler’s reign, even as it alienated many strata of society and left most Russians indifferent toward the regime Alexander III was trying to defend.¹⁴[/EXT]

Why did Silouan participate in the military? According to Archimandrite Sophrony, Silouan knew he had to do his military service in order to finally find freedom.¹⁵

After his military service in St. Petersburg, he left for Greece to become a monk. He arrived at Mount Athos in the latter part of 1892, and he joined the monastery there. He was 27 years old, and his name changed to Silouan. Several years later, he would become Staretz Silouan—Staretz meaning religious elder. This monastery is a Russian Orthodox monastery in Greece but has autonomy in relation to the Greek government. Despite their location on the

¹² Woodburn, personal correspondence with the author, (April 7, 2020).

¹³ Woodburn, personal correspondence with the author, (April 7, 2020).

¹⁴ Woodburn, personal correspondence with the author, (April 7, 2020).

¹⁵ See Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 12.

southwestern side of a peninsula in Northern Greece, they consider themselves ‘Russian’—not ‘Greek’. The monastery has its origins in the 12th century, and they constructed their current location during the first two decades of the 19th century (circa. 1801 – 1820). When Silouan entered the monastery, around 1,000 monks were there. (To put this number in perspective, there were times in the history of the monastery when they had less than 5 monks yet other times with over 2,000 monks.) Part of Silouan’s time at the monastery, specifically from 1913 – 1916, involved a theological controversy resulting in the official removal of around 800 monks by order of the tsar (Nicholas II). The controversy concerns the name of God: did God have a name prior to creation, or is God’s name ‘God’ only so that God’s people can call upon God? This controversy is known as “Imiaslavie,”¹⁶ and it stems from an insight found in Plato’s *Cratylus*: “the name of an object exists since before the object itself does.”¹⁷ Following this argument from Plato, some monks at Mount Athos claimed that God’s name comes prior to creation; they argue that God’s name cannot be separated from God’s self. This is not exactly what Plato argues, but they realized that they could not argue that God’s name comes prior to God’s existence. So they emphasize the priority of God’s name to creation and conclude that this means God’s name and God’s self cannot be separated. The position that eventually won out claims that God’s name is for human beings to know how to call upon God; therefore, God’s name comes after creation because the main purpose of God’s name involves the use of it by human beings. This is the side of the controversy taken by Silouan, and he was able to remain at the monastery because of it.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Kenworthy, “The Name-Glorifiers (Imiaslavie) Controversy,” in *The Oxford Handbook to Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Emerson, Pattison, Poole, (Oxford University Press, 2020), 326-341.

¹⁷ Plato, *Cratylus*, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/cratylus.html>

¹⁸ St. Sophrony claims that St. Silouan’s response to the controversy, debate, and removal of the monks was one of “lament” (see Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 93-94).

Interestingly, Silouan’s biographer and former student Archimandrite Sophrony does not make much of this theological controversy. I say ‘interestingly’, because of the reason he gives for not making much of it—a reason that ties into the story behind the sentence, “Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not.”¹⁹ According to Sophrony, “[t]he argument about the Divine Name coincided with the period in the Staretz’[s] spiritual life...waging a vigorous war against every manifestation in himself of the passions of vainglory and pride, the main causes of his heavy sufferings.”²⁰ This suffering experienced by Silouan, caused by his own pride, begins the story behind the sentence in question.²¹ Neither Silouan nor his biographer detail the year when Silouan first heard the voice of God say to him, “Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not.”²² Silouan’s own version of it, in his chapter entitled “On Humility,” gives a full background neither to the prayer nor to the sentence.²³ Sophrony sets it up best.

Sophrony tells us that Silouan went through several “spiritual trials,” and sometimes they involved a “struggle against Satan.”²⁴ In essence, Silouan battled two “enemies”: his own pride and Satan.²⁵ Because of the second opponent, Silouan *prayed*; because of the first opponent, Silouan *prayed for humility*. In what will be surprising to most of us, but surprising neither to Silouan nor to his biographer and former student, God responded directly and immediately to

¹⁹ Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

²⁰ Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 93.

²¹ See Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 93.

²² Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

²³ See Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

²⁴ Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 203.

²⁵ See Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 203.

Silouan's prayer. God responds, "Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not."²⁶ Sophrony calls this a "strange...dialogue" between Silouan and God,²⁷ which it certainly is, and the strangeness involves what might be the question everyone has on their tongues: if Silouan wants his battle with Satan to end, then why does God send Silouan's mind to hell; doesn't that mean more battles with Satan, not less? Yes, but according to Sophrony, such questions miss the point. The point concerns Silouan's battle with pride, not the battle with Satan. Within the theology of Russian Orthodoxy, Satan has been defeated through Christ's harrowing of hell (a doctrine to be explained later); however, the battle against individual pride continues. God commands Silouan to keep his mind in hell because the

[EXT]struggle against pride is, in fact, the final stage in the battle against the passions. To begin with, the ascetic must wrestle with the greater passions of the flesh, then with irritability and, finally, pride. This last combat is undoubtedly the most painful of all. Taught by long experience that pride leads to loss of grace, the ascetic consciously descends into hell where every passion is 'seared with a hot iron'.²⁸[/EXT]

Putting your mind into hell might defeat pride, and it did for Silouan, but it also leads to despair: "The Staretz observed that most people despair when they approach this state."²⁹ Part of God's direct and immediate commandment to Silouan, however, responds to this problem: "Keep thy mind in hell, and *despair not*."³⁰ How does this commandment actually help Silouan avoid

²⁶ Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

²⁷ See Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 203.

²⁸ Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 210.

²⁹ Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 210.

³⁰ St. Sophrony explains the novelty of the commandment, "despair not": "It was no new thing for him [Silouan] to abide in hell—he had dwelt there [before]. But God's direction, 'and despair not', was new. He had reached the point of despair before; and now again, after years of onerous wrestling, after frequent periods of abandonment by God, he had been living through hours, if not of actual hopeless[ness], at least of...anguish.... [W]hat he had been experiencing was...a form of despair but despair of a different kind. In all these years, despite superhuman labours he had not attained his desire, and he was losing hope. And so when he rose from his stool after wrestling for prayer and saw before him a devil expecting adoration Father Silouan felt sick at heart" (Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 42-43).

despair? “The first words [of the sentence]...plunged him into hell,” Sophrony reports, and the second set of words reminded him of “God’s love”—a reminder that allowed him to “elude...despair.”³¹ This dynamic between keeping one’s mind in hell but not despairing seemingly set the course for the latter part of Silouan’s life.³²

Silouan died September 24th, 1938. On the face of it, his last days were lived according to the ideals of ancient Greek philosophers: approaching his death with neither anxiety nor fear, enjoying discussions with his former students about his own life and virtue, and instructing others on the wisdom he gained from his own failures and successes. Early on a Saturday morning, sometime between 1:00 – 2:00 a.m. on September 24th, Silouan took his last breath. He was buried by the monks later that day, at 4:00 in the afternoon. Because of the date of his death, his feast day in the church is September 24th each year.

[A]Keep Thy Mind in Hell and Despair Not

In his chapter entitled “On Humility,” Silouan writes:

[EXT]Though our sins be forgiven we must remember them and grieve for them all our lives, so as to preserve a contrite heart. I did not do this and ceased to be contrite..., [a]nd I was perplexed at what was happening to me [so] I said: ‘My soul knows the Lord and His love. How is it that evil thoughts come to me?’ But the Lord had pity on me...and taught me the way to humble myself: ‘Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not’. Thus is the enemy... Fight the enemy with the weapon of humility.³³**[/EXT]**

³¹ Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 212.

³² “[H]e [Silouan] was referring to a real experience of hell—an experience which through the years ate its way into his heart..., [a]nd when the burning torment had achieved its end...he would stay the all-consuming fire by the saving action of the love of Christ” (Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 212).

³³ Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

In my initial reading of Silouan,³⁴ I made the quick judgment that “Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not” was the conclusion to the argument; now, however, I see that is not quite right.³⁵ Instead, “Keep your mind in hell, and despair not,” serves as the final premise for Silouan’s conclusion about enmity.³⁶

Some general observations prior to analysis: there are a few obvious contrasts offered in the argument and less obvious ones. The more obvious contrasts in the argument concern despair v. humility (this is the one that interests me the most), knowledge of God & love of God v. evil thoughts, and fighting enemies with pride v. fighting enemies with humility. Other less obvious contrasts will arise within the contours of the analysis.

What initially attracted me to Silouan’s argument is not, “Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not,” but rather the first premise.³⁷ According to Silouan, simply being forgiven does not mean forgetfulness and a lack of grief about one’s self: “Though our sins be forgiven we must remember them and grieve for them all our lives.”³⁸ The gift of divine forgiveness does not necessarily mean that one ought to *act* differently—or even think of oneself differently—than what it might mean to be not-forgiven. For some Christians, it seems as though being forgiven entitles one to act with a type of righteousness that the Apostle Paul would consider a problematic self-righteousness. To *act* forgiven is to risk self-righteousness. Silouan’s wisdom: to *act* as not-forgiven avoids self-righteousness.

³⁴ Toward the end of 2010, Professor Vigen Guroian recommended I read St. Silouan on humility during my dissertation defense (see the Preface for the full story).

³⁵ See Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

³⁶ See Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

³⁷ See Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

³⁸ Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

Silouan claims a version of this in fact happened to him. He writes, “I did not do this [act not-forgiven] and ceased to be contrite.”³⁹ Grieving and remembering one’s sins “preserve[s] a contrite heart.”⁴⁰ This becomes the second premise in his argument, and the word “contrite” serves as a contrast to my use of self-righteousness in the previous paragraph: contrite v. self-righteousness.⁴¹

Knowledge of God and love for God do not automatically make one ethical. This strikes me as Silouan’s argument against Augustinianism where virtue is grounded in *knowledge of God* and *love for God*. St. Silouan has both knowledge of God and love for God; yet, “evil thoughts” still come to him.⁴² If we connect this with self-righteousness, then Silouan comes across as making a Kantian point against Augustinianism: knowledge of God and love for God can lead either to proper virtue or to self-righteousness. Kant calls the latter “fanaticism.”⁴³

The fourth premise: even though one has evil thoughts in them—in particular, in their mind—God will take pity on them. This pity comes with both grace and instruction. Grace: God remains in relationship even with those who have evil thoughts in their mind. Instruction: God teaches those in relationship with God to humble themselves.

What is the significance of this fourth premise? Its significance is that it bridges the third premise with the fifth premise in a counter-intuitive way: the way of humility is to keep thy mind

³⁹ Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

⁴⁰ Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

⁴¹ See Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

⁴² See Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

⁴³ See Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, trans. Greene & Hudson, (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 21-26, 30-35, 47-49.

in hell, but we tend to think of hell as either a place of evil or a place where those with evil thoughts end up for eternity. So God's response to having evil thoughts in one's mind involves *placing* (a different meaning than the previous sentence) one's "mind in hell."⁴⁴

According to Silouan, God says to "keep thy mind in hell" as the way to achieve humility.⁴⁵ This goes along with the story told about Silouan's sentence, where he desperately prayed for humility. God affirms his desire for humility and tells him how to achieve it: to place his mind in hell. We do not know exactly what Silouan thinks of hell, and I explore some options later in this chapter. For now, what matters most concerns the connections between evil thoughts (in one's mind), keeping one's mind in hell, and the addition of the commandment to "despair not."⁴⁶

Prior to God's word coming to Silouan, he had evil thoughts in his mind.⁴⁷ God's response to these evil thoughts involves not avoiding evil but, rather, shifting from internalism to externalism: from evil thoughts in one's mind to placing one's mind in hell. God recognizes that placing one's mind in hell might not get one out of despair, or worse it (placing one's mind in hell) might be the cause of despair. God does not give Silouan a mechanism to avoid despair while keeping his mind in hell; rather, God simply asserts that one ought not despair while their mind is in hell. So we are given three moves here: first, shift from evil thoughts in one's mind to putting one's mind in hell;⁴⁸ second, *keep* one's mind in hell (and the whole of this book

⁴⁴ See Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

⁴⁵ See Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

⁴⁶ See Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

⁴⁷ See Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

concerns teasing out the possibilities for this *keeping*);⁴⁹ and third, neither despair nor fall into despair while keeping one's mind in hell.⁵⁰

We then arrive at the conclusion, which introduces the new term of enmity (and thus means that Silouan's paragraph should be taken as inductive argument, not a deductive one). Keeping one's mind in hell and not despairing becomes, according to Silouan, the way to be with the enemy and to "[f]ight the enemy with...humility."⁵¹ Most readers will make the inference that the enemy means Satan or the devil or a collection of demons: if one puts their mind in hell, then they will be with those who rule over hell, and those who rule over hell are our (supernatural) enemies. I do not make this inference, and I am not one who thinks that authors have final authority over their arguments or texts—which means that I am not claiming that this is what Silouan must mean, only what I take him to mean. I believe the enemy in this passage is the self: the fanatical self, the prideful self, the self-righteous self, the self who acts forgiven. In the first person: I am my own enemy, and humility serves as the best 'weapon' against myself.

Silouan's argument, however, is against neither the self nor subjectivity. To call one's self an enemy does not require the negation of the self. Rather, Silouan can be interpreted as a Christian existentialist: praying for his authentic self, his better self, or a better version of

⁴⁸ One commentator puts it like this: "Among the other benefits of 'keeping one's mind in hell' through constant self-condemnation are that it acts as a repellent against intrusive thoughts and serves as a source of...tears of repentance as well as of the joy that accompanies them" (Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 129).

⁴⁹ One commentator puts it like this: "The stress on the verb, 'keep', *stay* your mind in hell..., shows that if one voluntarily and persistently keeps in one's mind a vision of the general hell of this present life, one is on the way to salvation and healing" (Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 82).

⁵⁰ For now, I grant Silouan's point that we should not despair. Later in the book, however, I think through whether we should allow ourselves despair or to fall into despair.

⁵¹ See Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

himself. The humble self, or a humbler self, becomes the self who St. Silouan affirms. To achieve this version of ourselves, we must keep our minds in hell.

Questions remain unanswered within Silouan's paragraph. What does he mean by hell? How are hell and humility connected? What does he mean by despair? Commentators and students of Silouan attempt to answer these questions. Before that discussion, however, I take on the question of what it means philosophically for Silouan to receive direct and immediate revelation from God.

[B]Should We Believe Staretz Silouan?

Did Silouan receive a direct and immediate response from God? Answering that question requires a broader understanding of what it means for religious believers to consider an inner voice as divine revelation. For that broader understanding, I agree with British theologian and former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams when he argues:

[EXT][W]hat stories we entertain as authoritative or revelatory has something to do with how or whether we do in fact construe actuality as difficult..., [a]nd this in turn has to do with a certain leaning towards [the] intellect rather than [the] will as telling us basic things about ourselves-in-the-world.⁵²[/EXT]

According to Williams, some might consider a claim of receiving divine revelation as an inner voice conjured up or willed by the individual who claims to have received that divine revelation. Others might consider a claim of receiving divine revelation as an intellectual or rational explanation for insight or wisdom one receives that one cannot come up with on their own.

My readers can take Silouan's divine revelation as either a product of his own will or as a rational explanation of what he could not come up with on his own. I lean toward the latter: Silouan runs up against his own limitations for battling pride; he prays to God for insight and

⁵² Williams, *Wrestling with Angels*, 73.

wisdom in how to overcome pride, and he is given the insight to keep his mind in hell in order to overcome pride. He could not come up with this insight on his own, which leads him to give the intellectual or rational explanation that it came from God.

In the final section of this chapter, we learn that Silouan makes this argument explicit when he writes: “But how can I desire something of which I have no idea?”⁵³ He answers his own question: it must come from God through the Holy Spirit. While there are appropriate times to question direct revelation from God when the lives of others are endangered by such direct revelation—in the case of cult leaders, ISIS, Westboro Baptist Church, etc.—Silouan claiming to hear, “Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not,” does not endanger the lives of others.⁵⁴ I conclude, therefore, that we should believe Silouan’s rational explanation for how he received this meaningful and powerful sentence.

[A]Hell, Hope, Humility

There are two commentaries and a biography dedicated to Silouan’s life and thought, and they represent the secondary scholarship on his work: Archimandrite Sophrony’s *St. Silouan the Athonite*, Archimandrite Zacharias’s *The Enlargement of the Heart* (originally given as a set of lectures in Wichita, KS), and Harry Boosalis’s *Orthodox Spiritual Life According to St. Silouan the Athonite*. In this section, I engage with this secondary scholarship on Silouan’s work in order to clarify what he might mean by despair, hell, hope, and humility—as well as to deepen some of the insights found in the analysis of the previous section. My method of writing in this particular

⁵³ Silouan, *WMA*, 89.

⁵⁴ With this sentence, I am making a brief and over-simplified claim concerning what is known as “the Euthyphro Problem”—named after Plato’s dialogue, *Euthyphro*—which asks, do the gods determine what is good, or do humans determine what is good? Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* serves as the primary modern contribution to this debate, and I disagree with Kierkegaard’s conclusion that we should consider direct divine revelation as a “teleological suspension of the ethical.”

section is disputational: I rationally reconstruct an interpretation of Silouan’s argument, and I offer an ‘on the contrary’ paragraph with my own claims that contributes to the overall argument of the book.

[B]Keep Thy Mind in Hell

Silouan affirms the existence of hell. The first part of the sentence, keep your mind in hell, is not treated as a metaphor by Silouan. One commentator, however, muddies these waters a bit. Harry Boosalis offers nuance to what the word ‘hell’ refers to in the sentence in question:

[EXT]St. Silouan was not simply referring to hell in a metaphorical way. He was implying an actual, personal, continual, and existential encounter with the torments of condemnation.... Given such an ominous description of this ‘place’ where the believer is supposed to keep his mind, one is led to ask where then is this hell to be found? Obviously not a ‘place’, this hell is rather a ‘condition of the heart’.⁵⁵[EXT]

On the one hand, Silouan believes in and refers to a literal hell. For Silouan, hell is a place that exists. On the other hand, Boosalis claims that this hell is “not a ‘place’” but “a ‘condition of the heart’.”⁵⁶

On the contrary, I argue that hell is neither a “place” for people in their afterlife nor is it an internal state—what Boosalis calls “a ‘condition of the heart’.”⁵⁷ Rather, we create personal and societal hells for ourselves. The personal hells are not “conditions of the heart” but external conditions that make both living and dying well seem impossibly difficult for individual persons.⁵⁸ The societal hells are multiple: capitalism might be considered a societal hell;⁵⁹ racism

⁵⁵ Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 131, 132.

⁵⁶ Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 132.

⁵⁷ See Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 132.

⁵⁸ I mean this in relation to arguments present about the difficulties of ordinary life in Goodson, *Strength of Mind*, chapter 8.

⁵⁹ See Roberts, *Marx’s Inferno*, (Princeton University Press, 2018).

seems to be a societal hell for all citizens;⁶⁰ and climate change might be leading us into a societal hell.⁶¹

The key distinction I wish to offer readers concerns the existence of hell vs. the reality of hell. Religious believers and some pagans consider hell as place that *exist*. The *reality* of hell concerns what is real for us in the here and now, not awaiting us in the afterlife. An analogy: extreme hunger exists among children and adults in certain African countries, but the extreme hunger in these African countries is not perceived as a reality for most Americans. If hell exists, it is not a reality for people. In the case of Silouan, however, *he made the existence of hell a reality for himself in the here and now* because of God's direct commandment to him—which is what I find so compelling about Silouan's argument in his chapter, "On Humility." What interests me, however, is how hell as a metaphor provides ground for ethics and moral reasoning. In this case, the reality of hell—the reality of the hells that we create—has more meaning than the existence of hell.

Archimandrite Zacharias sees in Silouan an understanding of the *reality* of hell. Zacharias writes:

[EXT]In the conditions of today's world the experience of hell is a reality for many people. They often come face to face with titanic impulses and confusion of intellect. The human mind falters, and remains in this pitiful state. It is held captive by the pain of the reality which surrounds it, and easily seeks to break away from it, so as to find comfort in the substitutes which the passions of a world alienated from God offer. This tendency, often encountered in our day, leads to a continually increasing estrangement and diffusion... That is to say, man does not want to face the hell in which he finds himself, and seeks to escape from it through substitutes, only to find himself more entangled in it than before.⁶²[/EXT]

⁶⁰ See Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, (Vintage Press, 1992).

⁶¹ See Klare, *All Hell Breaking Loose*, (Picador Press, 2020).

⁶² Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 82.

In this passage, Zacharias uses hell as a metaphor to sound the alarm of the problems of modernity. Zacharias leans on a type of individualism for solving these problems: human beings are responsible to find a way out of their own hell, but the tendency of human beings is to avoid—not face and then solve—their own problems: individual persons “seek...to escape from it through substitutes, only to find himself more entangled in it than before.”⁶³ This seems to be a type of individualism in the sense that individuals, neither institutions nor systems, are made responsible “to face the hell in which he finds himself.”⁶⁴

On the contrary, I argue that the rhetorical power of the metaphor of hell for philosophy resides in the fact that *an individual cannot save oneself from hell*—the literal hell, the hell that serves as the referent for religious believers. Silouan claims that what saves him from despair, for instance, is not himself but God’s love. Following that reasoning, to use the metaphor of hell involves the recognition that *individual persons cannot save themselves from the hells that we create*. One of the arguments I make in *Strength of Mind* involves how individual persons ought to cultivate the powers of the mind for responding to difficulties found in ordinary life, but I never claim there that individuals save themselves from these difficulties. Utilizing hell as a metaphor within ethics and moral reasoning means that we focus on the institutions and systems that create hells for groups of people and individual persons.

Zacharias defines hell in the theological terms of divine love. He writes, “[H]ell is where man finds himself separated from the God of love..., [a]nd it also discloses sin, injustice, and spiritual poverty.”⁶⁵ (Note the phrase “God of love,” and not love of God.⁶⁶) This explanation of

⁶³ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 82.

⁶⁴ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 82.

⁶⁵ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 73.

what is meant by ‘hell’ in the sentence, “Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not,” turns out to be quite helpful because it tells us *what hell lacks* and *what hell contains*.⁶⁷ Hell lacks divine love, but that is not *exactly* Zacharias’s claim. To be more exact: hell lacks God, and the primary attribute of this God is “love.”⁶⁸ What does hell contain? Hell contains injustice, sin, and *spiritual* poverty. What interests me now concerns the adjective “spiritual” attached to the object of “poverty.”⁶⁹ To me, the phrase “spiritual poverty” suggests that those who are impoverished spiritually are at fault for their own “spiritual poverty.”⁷⁰ They are in hell because they put themselves there, and they put themselves there because they chose neither to know nor to love God.

On the contrary, I argue that hell should not be connected with spiritual poverty. I have two corrections to make in relation to Zacharias’s connection of hell with spiritual poverty. First, following Silouan, putting one’s mind in hell enhances one’s spirituality—which, in this case, might mean one’s relationship with God or might signify a heightened awareness of the suffering of others. On this point, I find a disagreement between Boosalis’s and Zacharias’s commentaries on Silouan’s sentence. According to Boosalis, “[D]welling on one’s condemnation and on the torments of hell—which to most would be a negative experience—is actually...a source of great spiritual profit.”⁷¹ (Note that both authors use economic language: poverty and profit.) The way

⁶⁶ See Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 73.

⁶⁷ See Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 73.

⁶⁸ See Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 73.

⁶⁹ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 73.

⁷⁰ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 73.

⁷¹ Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 129.

that Silouan talks about hell in “On Humility” suggests that hell is a place for the spiritually strong, not the spiritually weak. Therefore, hell is not a place of “spiritual poverty.”⁷²

Second, using the phrase “spiritual poverty” tends to *deflect* us from those who live in actual poverty; the phrase prevents us from a proper *acknowledgement* of the poor.⁷³ The object in the phrase remains ‘poverty’, and some religious believers tend to equate *spiritual* poverty with *economic* poverty: if one is poor in terms of wealth, then it means that they are not doing what God intends for them to do. (I am not accusing Zacharias of this logic, but the tendency remains prevalent enough among religious believers that the phrase ought to be questioned no matter the use of it by a particular author.) I am not suggesting, however, that there is no connection between hell and poverty; indeed, the way of life for those who live in poverty ought to be considered as hellish—a hell not of their own making but the making of corruption, greed, and selfishness. Unlike the logic of Dante’s poetics of hell, those living in poverty do not deserve hell but are in hell. In this way, Zacharias is correct to list poverty along with injustice and sin as what is contained within hell. The poor, however, are not in hell because of their own ‘sins’; they are in hell because of the sins of others—particularly the sins of corruption, greed, and selfishness. Corruption, greed, and selfishness put people in hell, but unlike Dante’s *Inferno* those who are in the fourth circle of hell because of greed are not the greedy but those who are victims of greed.

[B]Hell and Humility⁷⁴

⁷² Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 73.

⁷³ My use of the words ‘acknowledgement’ and ‘deflect’ are in line with the use of them by the American philosophers, Stanley Cavell and Cora Diamond, who argue that some theories or words *deflect* us away from suffering and make it harder for us to properly *acknowledge* the suffering of others.

⁷⁴ Although not planned in this way, the following seven paragraphs happened to be drafted on April 18, 2020: the day of Holy Saturday on the Eastern Orthodox calendar.

Not only in Silouan's writings are hell and humility connected. Within Eastern Orthodox Christianity, the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell has long connected hell with humility. According to his commentators and students, Silouan's argument in "On Humility" contributes to the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell.

What is the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell? In his book, *The Slavery of Death*, Richard Beck offers a very clear answer to this question. First, no matter what "Protestant Christians"⁷⁵ say to express their skepticism toward the doctrine, Beck reasons, "there is biblical evidence for the harrowing of hell, the belief that after his death Jesus descended into hell to free captive humanity, to liberate those held by Satan in bondage to death."⁷⁶ According to Beck, the "biblical evidence" (Beck's phrase) resides in Acts 2,⁷⁷ Ephesians 4,⁷⁸ and 1 Peter 3.⁷⁹ Second, the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell stems from "the *Christus Victor* theology of the early church": "the belief that salvation is, at root, a liberation and emancipation from the slavery of death"—which "also sets us free from the power of the devil."⁸⁰ Third, "[i]n the harrowing of

⁷⁵ Recently, Matthew Y. Emerson has written as a "Protestant Christian" defending and explaining the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell; his defense of the doctrine, however, disappoints as he worries more about how the doctrine should not be used rather than seeing the doctrine as making God's grace, love, and mercy the primary attributes of the Christian God (see Emerson, *He Descended to the Dead*, [IVP Academic Press, 2019]).

⁷⁶ Beck, *The Slavery to Death*, 126.

⁷⁷ See St. Peter's sermon in Acts 2, particularly verse 27, where Peter claims that Christ refuses to abandon anyone "to the realm of the dead."

⁷⁸ There is an inference made that if Christ "ascended," bringing with him "captives," then he must have descended in order to lead those out of captivity (Ephesians 4:8-10).

⁷⁹ "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous *and the unrighteous*, to bring all to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, and he also went to preach to the unrighteous in prison who disobeyed long ago" (1 Peter 3:18-20). The unrighteous are assumed to be in hell, referred to here as a "prison" for the disobedient; for Christ to bring the "unrighteous" to God, then Christ descended to free and release them from hell. I should also note that given that two of the biblical arguments come from Peter—one as a sermon reported by St. Luke and one in Peter's first epistle—then we can consider Christ's descent into hell as a Petrine-based doctrine.

⁸⁰ Beck, *The Slavery to Death*, 126.

hell..., the work of Christ is to free us from the power of death and to destroy the works of the devil.”⁸¹ This is the explanation I promised earlier when I stated, in the biographical section of this chapter, that within the theology of Russian Orthodoxy, Satan has been defeated through Christ’s harrowing of hell. In other words, Silouan has to put his mind in hell to defeat his own pride and not to defeat the devil because the devil has been defeated by Christ.

Zacharias makes three claims about the relation between Silouan’s sentence and the doctrine of Christ’s descent into hell. Those claims are:

[EXT]Hence, when the Lord proposes hell to Silouan, and through Silouan, to our despairing generation, He is offering him the possibility for descent, for going down; and reveals to him the means and path to humility, so that having become like the Lord, he may obtain spiritual victory.⁸²

[W]e are commanded to descend into hell: not that we may perish, but so that we may explore even there the wondrous mystery of the divine and humble love which reaches down even into those dreadful regions.⁸³

This word, ‘*Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not*’, is a commandment of the Lord with the intention that we might imitate Him in His descent, whilst at the same time, trusting in His mercy and the eternal salvation which He obtained for us by His ascent. The mere disposition in us to receive this word and fulfil it in our life attracts the grace of God.⁸⁴[EXT]

The first claim focuses on how Silouan putting his mind into hell imitates Christ’s descent, and this imitation leads Silouan to a “spiritual victory.”⁸⁵ The second claim generalizes: “we are commanded to descend into hell.”⁸⁶ The third claim combines the first two claims: like Silouan imitated Christ in his descent to hell, *we* ought to imitate Christ in his descent into hell. Zacharias

⁸¹ Beck, *The Slavery to Death*, 126.

⁸² Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 69.

⁸³ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 71.

⁸⁴ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 73.

⁸⁵ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 69.

⁸⁶ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 71; emphasis added.

links this with the possibility of salvation.⁸⁷ Amplifying this link several pages later, he says: “[S]elf-condemnation to hell is the most powerful means for one to be delivered from hell.”⁸⁸

I have no qualms with Zacharias’s interpretation of Silouan’s sentence and its connection to the doctrine of Christ’s descent into hell, but I do wish to raise a question concerning his move to generalization. Some people, like Silouan, might choose to put their mind in hell; other people, however, have this choice made for them by certain institutions and systems within society. Hells are created *for them*. Keeping their mind in hell is not a choice but a point of survival because institutions and systems have created hells for their bodies and minds. To the extent that I am offering one, the deontological argument I offer in this book concerns how the task of ethics and moral reasoning obligates and requires citizens to put their minds into hell in order to come to know and see the hells that others experience. They experience these hells not because of their own doing, as traditional Christian accounts of hell claim as the cause, but because of the institutions and systems that fail to serve them. Worse than failing to serve them, they create a hell that makes it impossibly difficult for them to enjoy their ordinary life.

Since it concerns the imitation of Christ, Zacharias’s argument might speak better to Christians on why they should put their mind in hell. This reminds me of some interpretations of Kant’s categorical imperative known as the universalization test: some interpretations of Kant’s words, “Act according to the maxim that you would wish all other rational people to follow, as if

⁸⁷ Zacharias defines salvation as “therapy for the soul”: “Silouan recommends [his sentence as] therapy for the soul...: a method for the therapy of the fragmented mind and soul... [S]elf-condemnation to hell is not only harmless, but becomes a fount of great gifts. Which are the ‘greater gifts from God’, acquired by keeping the mind in hell? ...[I]t gives birth to repentance unto the remission of sins in the soul, and brings the joy of salvation to the heart. Moreover, the saint witnesses that the Lord gives the Holy Spirit to those who work at condemning themselves. This should not be at all surprising, since self-condemnation to hell can only take place in a spirit of humility” (Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 77).

⁸⁸ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 79.

it were a universal law,”⁸⁹ say that it (the universalization test) is best understood as a philosophical riff on Jesus’s Golden Rule (“do unto others as you would have them do unto you”). While that is *not my interpretation* of Kant’s universalization test, I say that if it gets Christians to follow Kant’s categorical imperative then fine with me. Likewise with putting your mind into hell: if Zacharias’s reasons and words inspire Christians to put their minds into hell as an imitation of Christ, then fine by me!

How does all of this lead to humility? According to Zacharias, “putting into practice the words of the Lord, ‘*Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not*’, bears the fruit of humility and purity of mind, which are vital conditions for freedom from passions.”⁹⁰ Is this a one-time occurrence? In other words, do we put our minds in hell one time and claim “humility and purity of mind”?⁹¹ Harry Boosalis addresses this particular question, and he strongly negates it: “To truly attain to the heights of humility, one must also constantly *condemn* oneself to hell.”⁹² Humility comes about by and through “constantly condemn[ing] oneself to hell,”⁹³ which means that the word “keep” takes on more significance than some readers might have assumed. In the first part of the sentence (“Keep thy mind in hell...”), the word ‘keep’ means to place your mind there and to leave it there. This is keep in the sense of put + stay. This sense of keep, when applied to one’s mind being in hell, results in humility.

⁸⁹ Kant, *PP*, 269-270.

⁹⁰ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 76.

⁹¹ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 76.

⁹² Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 127-128.

⁹³ Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 128.

Given another sentence found in Silouan's "On Humility," we can infer that Silouan writes primarily for the purpose of encouraging and enticing his readers to keep their minds in hell. The other sentence I refer to is, "I write that [my readers] might learn humility and find rest in God."⁹⁴ I concur with Sophrony that this type humility applies to all living human beings in the sense that humility looks like the recognition of one's own shortcomings: "an essential condition for harmony amongst people is that each should recognize his own shortcomings."⁹⁵ This provides another way of understanding my own claim that keeping one's mind in hell serves as a starting point for philosophy.

[B]Keep Thy Mind in Hell, and *Despair Not*

Zacharias observes that the sentence God delivers to Silouan must be taken with both of its parts. Why must it be taken with both parts? Because the first part, alone, might lead one to hopelessness. In Zacharias's words:

[EXT]It [the sentence] is in two parts: first, '*Keep thy mind in hell*', [which] suggests the Lord's descent. The second part, '*and despair not*', balances the first part with hope.... The first half...leads to humility and prevents the first temptation of fear. The second...touches on...redemption, thereby strengthening hope and overcoming the second temptation...of despair.⁹⁶[/EXT]

Putting one's mind into hell and having it stay there, as determined above, severely risks hopelessness. Zacharias calls this risk of hopelessness a "temptation" toward "despair."⁹⁷ At another point, however, Zacharias suggests that this temptation toward despair is not a real temptation: "Hence, by descending into hell we do nothing other than follow the Lord. This is

⁹⁴ Silouan, *WMA*, 88.

⁹⁵ Sophrony, *St. Silouan the Athonite*, 19.

⁹⁶ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 80, 82.

⁹⁷ See Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 82.

the way of the Lord... However, the Way of the Lord leads to life, and for this reason we should not despair.”⁹⁸ Because putting one’s mind into hell is an imitation of Christ’s descent into hell, then despair is not a real temptation. Imitating Christ’s descent into hell “leads to life,” not to despair about life in hell.⁹⁹

On the contrary, I say that whether keeping one’s mind in hell is seen as an imitation of Christ or as the fulfillment of one’s obligation that despair will be part of the package. Zacharias makes a move here reminiscent of much of Western philosophy where the possibility for despair gets dismissed too quickly or taken seriously but then brushed under the rug.¹⁰⁰ As I argued in the Introduction, what philosophy needs now are much more serious considerations of darkness, death, despair.

Zacharius may not get us there, but Boosalis gets us to a more serious consideration of despair. He writes,

[EXT]As he descends into the torments of his hell, he will undoubtedly contend with intense moments of despair as the reality of the true state of his soul unfolds. If there were no real danger of despair awaiting the believer..., [despair not] would not have been mentioned.¹⁰¹[EXT]

In fact, the risk of despair is so high

[EXT]he [Silouan] advises...to stand ‘on the verge’ of hell so that the fires ‘burn away one’s passions’ rather than the believer being himself burned by despair. He also recommends the interesting technique of ‘stepping back’ every so often from the torments of hell in order to avoid falling into ‘deep despair’, so that one can return once again to continue his descent.¹⁰²[EXT]

⁹⁸ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 72.

⁹⁹ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 72.

¹⁰⁰ Kierkegaard is the major exception, hence my use of the word ‘much’ in this sentence.

¹⁰¹ Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 133-134.

¹⁰² Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 135.

Boosalis concludes that the “depths of despair engulfing the world, both on an individual basis as well as collectively, is overwhelming... [and the] present era could...be termed the ‘Age of Despair’.”¹⁰³ This insight drives my own argument in this book: the temptation toward a hellish despair now defines and describes aspects of modernity.

In this sense, I agree with Boosalis that we find ourselves in an “‘Age of Despair’.”¹⁰⁴ Because of this, the task of moral reasoning concerns highlighting the ways in which institutions and systems leave people in despair because of the hells they create for certain groups of people and individual persons. Modernity does not necessarily lead to the creation of hells and, therefore, become an “‘Age of Despair’.”¹⁰⁵ Choices and decisions have been made along the way to create these hells.

Boosalis’s conclusion concerning Silouan’s sentence, “Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not,” becomes significant for the shift from Dante’s hopelessness to St. Silouan’s hopefulness.¹⁰⁶ St. Silouan corrects Dante’s claim that entering hell requires one to “abandon all hope.”¹⁰⁷ In Boosalis’s words:

[EXT][H]e [Silouan] offers hope to a world plunged in the hell of despair. A stark contrast comes to mind between the hell of Dante, ‘*All ye who enter herein—abandon hope*’ and that of St. Silouan, ‘*Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not*’. St. Silouan provides hope, pointing the way toward the acquisition of true humility.¹⁰⁸[/EXT]

¹⁰³ Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 137, 138.

¹⁰⁴ Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 138.

¹⁰⁵ Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 138.

¹⁰⁶ See Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 138.

¹⁰⁷ See Dante’s *Inferno*.

¹⁰⁸ Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life*, 138.

The ‘despair not’ clause can be interpreted as God’s direct and immediate command to Silouan that Dante is wrong in the *Inferno*: “All...who enter...abandon hope” misconstrues the nature of hell.¹⁰⁹ Yes, hell invites hopelessness; no, hope must not be abandoned in any necessary way. Keep your mind in hell, yet be hopeful.

If Dante is correct, then keeping one’s mind in hell leads to hopelessness. Hopelessness leads to nihilism, and nihilism remains a problem to be avoided. If Dante is correct, then hell cannot and does not serve for thinking about the task of moral reasoning because Dante leaves us with a binary that ought to be refused: *either* hell and hopelessness *or* not-hell and hopefulness. Silouan’s argument involves a third possibility: hell *and* hopefulness. “Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not” gets us to this third possibility.¹¹⁰

[A]Three Rules for Ethics and Moral Reasoning

In the remainder of his chapter, “On Humility,” Silouan discusses themes such as death, despair, enmity, heaven, and humility. I conclude the present chapter engaging with Silouan on these themes because they allow me to abstract three rules for thinking within ethics and moral reasoning.

First, Silouan draws a contrast between what it means to keep one’s mind in heaven vs. keeping one’s mind in hell:

[EXT]Though the Lord take her to heaven each day and show her all the heavenly glory in which He dwells, and the love of the Seraphim and Cherubim and all the Saints—even then with th[at] knowledge...the humble soul will say: ‘Thou, O Lord, showest me Thy glory because Thou lovest Thy creature; but do Thou give me tears and the power to thank Thee. To Thee belongeth glory in heaven and on earth, but for me—I must weep for my sins [instead of experiencing heaven].¹¹¹**[EXT]**

¹⁰⁹ See Dante’s *Inferno*.

¹¹⁰ See Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

¹¹¹ Silouan, *WMA*, 87-88.

For Silouan, the Christian temptation involves keeping one's mind "in heaven" because God reveals God's glory to the believer.¹¹² I call this a temptation because keeping one's mind in heaven leads to pride instead of humility. God reveals God's glory "each day,"¹¹³ but when Silouan prays to God specifically for humility God does not respond with 'keep your mind in heaven' but with "keep your mind in hell."¹¹⁴ Keeping one's mind in hell, not the "starry heavens above me,"¹¹⁵ serves as the proper starting point for philosophy.

Second, he admits the limitations of the kind of humility he achieves by keeping his mind in hell. Silouan writes, "The Lord taught me to stay my mind in hell and not despair, and thus my soul humbles herself, but this is not yet true humility."¹¹⁶ If this is not "true humility,"¹¹⁷ then what is? His answer:

[EXT]Our hearts are cold and we have no understanding of Christ's humility or love. True, this humility and love are made known by the grace of the Holy Spirit, but we do not believe it is possible to draw this grace to ourselves. To do so, we must desire it with our very souls. But how can I desire something of which I have no idea? All of us have some small idea of grace, and the Holy Spirit moves every soul to seek God.¹¹⁸[/EXT]

Silouan's argument about humility is reminiscent of Rene Descartes's ontological argument for proving God's existence. Human beings possess the ideas of moral perfection, omnipotence, omniscience, etc., yet human beings do not possess the attributes of which these ideas refer. So

¹¹² See Silouan, *WMA*, 87-88.

¹¹³ Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

¹¹⁴ Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

¹¹⁵ Kant,

¹¹⁶ Silouan, *WMA*, 88.

¹¹⁷ Silouan, *WMA*, 88.

¹¹⁸ Silouan, *WMA*, 89.

where do such ideas come from? They must come from the being that possesses such attributes, and this being gives the ideas of the attributes to human beings. These attributes make God God; therefore, God gives us the ideas of these attributes so that we have knowledge of who God is and that God exists. Returning to Silouan, “how can I desire [true humility] of which I have no idea?”¹¹⁹ True humility remains beyond comprehension, so Silouan concludes that the Holy Spirit must grant us “true humility.”¹²⁰

Does this mean that keeping one’s mind in hell is really not worth it, since it does not achieve “true humility”?¹²¹ Not in the least! Silouan suggests two kinds, perhaps levels is a better word, for humility: traditionally, what philosophers divide up as natural and supernatural virtue. “Keeping one’s mind in hell” comes to Silouan as God’s commandment for achieving humility as a natural virtue whereas what Silouan calls “true humility” is a supernatural virtue gifted or granted by the Holy Spirit.¹²² Importantly, one should not neglect cultivating the natural virtue while waiting for the supernatural virtue. “Keep thy mind in hell” means cultivating humility as a natural virtue, and “despair not” means *hoping* for “true humility”¹²³—humility as a supernatural virtue. Both are needed.

Third, Silouan connects humility with death and dying. He writes, “We must be prepared at all times for death. When the soul remembers death she becomes humble and yields herself up

¹¹⁹ Silouan, *WMA*, 89.

¹²⁰ See Silouan, *WMA*, 89.

¹²¹ Silouan, *WMA*, 89.

¹²² In the words of Zacharias: “This word, ‘*Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not*’, is a commandment of the Lord with the intention that we might imitate Him in His descent, whilst at the same time, trusting in His mercy and the eternal salvation which He obtained for us by His ascent. The mere disposition in us to receive this word and fulfil it in our life attracts the grace of God” (Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 73).

¹²³ Silouan, *WMA*, 89.

to the will of God, desiring to live in peace and love with all men [human beings].”¹²⁴ In addition to despair, Silouan brings in death and the need to keep one’s mind on death. Instead of the phrase ‘keeping one’s mind’, in this passage Silouan uses the phrase of the soul remembering death. My inference is that the sentence, “keep thy mind in hell, and despair not,”¹²⁵ aids one in preparing for death because it achieves a golden mean between two extremes. On the one hand, the humility that comes from keeping one’s mind in hell means that one does not think of oneself as immortal or invincible. Death will come. On the other hand, “despair not” staves off the other extreme of seeking to die too quickly—either through an indifference to being alive or through the act of unnecessary suicide.¹²⁶ The connection between “keep thy mind in hell, and despair not” with preparing one’s self for death means that Silouan offers a vision for understanding death quite similar to Aristotle’s own virtue-centered approach to the question of death.

Lastly, Silouan concludes on the question of what it means to love one’s enemies. He claims, “The man who is mindful of death is not beguiled by the world. He loves his fellows and even his enemies.”¹²⁷ Achieving the golden mean concerning death, mentioned in the previous paragraph, means that one gains the ability to love one’s enemies because one has the right amount of humility about one’s self. Keeping one’s mind in hell leads to not overvaluing your own life in relation to the lives of others. This differs from Aristotle’s moral reasoning, and it also further differentiates the argument I am making in this book from Immanuel Kant’s deontology—which states how the “starry heavens above me” captures the attention of one’s

¹²⁴ Silouan, *WMA*, 91.

¹²⁵ Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

¹²⁶ See Silouan, *WMA*, 87.

¹²⁷ Silouan, *WMA*, 91.

mind.¹²⁸ Keeping one's mind in heaven means that one thinks one's life has more value than others—particularly others who believe in a different God or believe in no God at all—but keeping one's mind in hell means that one puts one's self with the lowliest of others, the outcasts who either God or society deem unworthy. Having a proper self-worth—and not overvaluing one's self in relation others—means gaining the ability to love one's enemies because their lives are not deemed as a lesser value than one's own life.

I take these points as helpful and wise rules for thinking in ethics and moral reasoning. Each of these rules serves as a corrective to an aspect found within one of the primary moral theories of Western philosophy. As rules, they look like this: (1) keeping one's mind in hell, not the “starry heavens above me,”¹²⁹ serves as the best starting point for thinking within ethics and moral reasoning;¹³⁰ (2) believing that “true humility” is a supernatural virtue does not entail postponing the cultivation of humility as a natural virtue—therefore, the rule is to keep one's mind in hell for the sake of developing humility as a natural virtue;¹³¹ (3) keeping one's mind in hell relates to death in two different directions—(a) it allows for proper preparation of one's death, and (b) it prevents one from valuing their own life above the life others (even their enemies)—thus the rule for thinking within ethics and moral reasoning concerns how one should not value their own life above the lives of others.¹³²

¹²⁸ See Kant, ??

¹²⁹ Guyer claims: “Kant ultimately came to see that the validity of both the laws of the starry skies above as well as the moral law within had to be sought in the legislative power of the human intellect itself” (Guyer, “The Starry Heavens and the Moral Law,” 2).

¹³⁰ This rule serves as a corrective to Kant's deontology.

¹³¹ This rule serves as a corrective to Augustine's virtue theory.

¹³² This rule serves as a corrective to Bentham's and Mill's utilitarianism.