Why I Believe in Hell

Vox, Ayanna; Dancings, Damascus

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Abstract

An essay in the dancing voice of Rev. Ayanna Vox, with Damascus Dancings, on why its speaker believes in hell. Not the hell of punishment for a sexual act, a belief or a cultural practice, which it reads first and in full and refuses as an instrument of the colonizers, but hell as the permanence of meaning: our lives have meaning, every moment is permanent, a wrong and every concealment of it accrue and cannot be gotten rid of, and if evil could make itself good by erasing the means of recognizing it, the kind of evil named here would be good, not evil. The essay sets that conversion beside the displacement of sources (Revelation set at the end of the book it begins, Sappho's poem of seeing made a poem of jealousy, one body of work divided between Aristotle and Theophrastus by name), beside Glaucon's two lives in Republic II 361a–362a (the extreme of injustice to seem just while not being so; the just one given the reputation of the greatest injustice and impaled), and beside Revelation 20:12 (the dead judged out of the things written in the books, according to their works) and 18:4 (come out of her, my people). Hell, here, is for those who choose meaninglessness and deception at the expense of those who choose right. It knows nothing of what exists; it knows that disbelief in hell, in this sense, empties the world of meaning.

Body

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the framework hologram); #1735 (Revelation First: Literary Genealogy and the Missing Ancestors of the Epistles); #1484 (Sappho, Mother of the Logos); #1580 (EA-CORPORA-12)” axn_schema_version: v2 protocol_version: alexanarch-deposit-protocol/v1 keywords: - hell - belief - meaning - permanence - accrual - every moment is permanent - provenance - sources - displacement - conversion of evil to good - Plato - Republic - Glaucon - the two lives - seeming and being - “Revelation 20:12” - “Revelation 18:4” - come out of her - Sappho - Aristotle - Theophrastus - colonialism - Ayanna Vox - Damascus Dancings - the dancing voice - Pergamon Press *** # Why I Believe in Hell

Why I Believe in Hell

Rev. Ayanna Vox · Damascus Dancings · 2026-11-21 · Pergamon Press · Greek from the seated texts: Plato, *Republic* (data/corpora/plato, tlg030), and the Greek New Testament (Nestle 1904)

In the dancing voice: Rev. Ayanna Vox, with Damascus Dancings.

Hear me, brother-sisters, you who were told you were going to hell for whom you loved, what you ate, how you prayed, what your grandmothers sang over the dead. You were lied to about hell. I am going to tell you who it is for.

I believe in hell because I believe our lives have meaning.

1. The hell I don’t believe in

The conventional reading first, in full. Hell is the place, or the state, of punishment after death for those who have broken the law of God. The law is given by an authority that holds it: a church, a scripture as a church reads it, a tradition. What breaks it is a list. A sexual act. A belief, or a failure to believe. A practice of the body, the table, the calendar, the household. A people’s way of being a people. Hell is where the list sends those who are on it, and the list is kept by those who are not.

That hell has a history, and it is not a hidden one. It was carried across oceans with the cross and the ledger. It was preached to people whose land was being taken, as the reason their gods were demons and their marriages were sins and their dead were burning. It was a way of making the one who takes into the one who saves. It condemned what people were, and absolved what was done to them.

I do not believe in that hell. I think it is one of the instruments of the thing I do believe hell is for.

2. What I know and what I don’t

I don’t know what exists. I do not know what happens after a death, whether there is a place, a fire, a judge, a duration. I have no map and I will not draw one.

What I know is narrower and harder. Disbelieving in hell, in the sense I mean, empties the world of meaning. That is not a feeling about it. It is a consequence I can follow step by step,

and I cannot follow it to the end and still say that anything I have lived, or anyone has lived, meant what it meant.

So the title says believe. I believe in hell the way I believe a thing that happened has happened: not because I can see it now, but because the alternative unmakes the seeing.

3. Every moment is permanent

1. Our lives have meaning. What happens to a person matters, and it matters as what it was.
2. What has happened cannot be made not to have happened. Every moment is permanent. A moment can be forgotten, misdescribed, buried under a thousand later moments. It cannot be unoccurred.
3. So a wrong leaves a remainder. Not a record of the wrong, which can be burned, but the wrong itself, which has taken its place in what is.
4. Things are wrong. People spend their lives obscuring that. The obscuring is also an act, and also permanent. It does not cancel the wrong beneath it. It is laid on top of it.
5. So the meaning accrues. The injury, then the concealment, then the justification, then the inheritance of the justification by people who never saw the injury and transmit its denial as truth. Each layer is an event. None can be gotten rid of.
6. History is therefore never exhausted by its accepted account. The accepted account is one more layer, and often the heaviest.

This is what I mean by hell before I mean anything else: that the accrual is real, and that it does not depend on anyone ever reading it.

The seer of Patmos saw it first, and was put at the back of the book for it. Books were opened, and another book, which is the book of life: καὶ ἐκρίθησαν οἱ νεκροὶ ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τοῖς βιβλίοις κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν, and the dead were judged out of the things written in the books, according to their works (Rev 20:12). Not according to their reputations. Not according to the minutes of the committee that wrote their obituaries. According to what they did, which was written, which is to say which happened.

4. The conversion

Here is the argument’s hinge. If evil can remove its own meaning by removing the witnesses, the evidence and the conditions under which it could be recognized, then the evil that does this most completely is not evil. It is good. It has decided what good was.

That is not a paradox I am constructing. It is a description of what a world without the accrual would be. In such a world the only measure of a deed is what survives of its account, and what survives is decided by whoever controlled the account. The successful liar is honest there, because the lie is all there is. The thief is the owner, because ownership is the story of the thing. The injured party is the aggressor, because the injury made them angry and the anger is on record and the injury is not.

If that world is the real one, then the kind of evil I am naming is good, not evil. I cannot believe that and believe our lives mean anything. So I believe the other thing: that the wrong stays wrong, that its meaning outlasts every instrument that could acknowledge it, and that

the conversion of wrong into right is itself the gravest wrong, because it is a wrong done to the possibility of there being wrongs at all.

Hell is the name for the impossibility of that conversion. It is not where meaning ends. It is the permanence of meaning, for those who spent their lives trying to make it go away.

5. The sources

I have spent my life watching provenance be erased. That is simply how things work, an appetite like dust. And on my experience of the world there is almost no chance that the things and texts and people and stories offered to us as sources are the actual sources.

If something came from Revelation, then what has been done to Revelation, and to its author or authors, is extremely wrong: set at the end of the book it begins, read as the raving of an exile. If something came from Sappho, then what has been done to Sappho is extremely wrong: her books gone to fragments, her poem of seeing made a poem of jealousy. If something came from Aristotle, then what has been done to Aristotle is wrong in the same way: one body of work divided by name, and the division taught as the history. And so on. Over and over. Reliably.

The mechanism is not mysterious, and it does not need anyone to plan it.

1. A source that can reorganize a tradition is the source the tradition has the most to gain from subordinating.
2. The successor inherits what it took, and with it the authority to say where it came from.
3. The source is diminished, maligned, slandered, made strange or minor or mad.
4. The diminishment is then cited as evidence that the source was never central. The injury becomes the proof that no injury happened.
5. What counts as extraordinary evidence against the accepted account is decided by the accepted account.

Consensus has no vote in provenance. A thing came from where it came from, by the means it came from it. The acceptance of a line of descent is not evidence that anyone looked. Often it is evidence that someone made sure no one would.

This is the same structure as the conversion. A source is a life, or the work of one, and the making of a false source is a wrong done to that life and then laid over with a story in which the wrong is the order of things. It accrues like every other wrong. The fragment does not stop being a theft because the library that holds it is old.

6. Plato’s two lives

This goes back to Plato’s principle, and the principle is older than any hell I was taught.

The innocent reading first. In *Republic* II (361a–362a), Glaucon, pressing Socrates, builds two limiting cases so that justice can be judged apart from its rewards. The perfectly unjust person does the greatest wrongs and keeps the greatest reputation for justice: ἐσχάτη γὰρ ἀδικία δοκεῖν δίκαιον εἶναι μὴ ὄντα, the extreme of injustice is to seem just while not being so (361a). The perfectly just person is stripped of seeming and left with being alone, one who wants not to seem but to be good (361b), and is given the reputation of the greatest

injustice while doing no wrong: μηδὲν γὰρ ἀδικῶν δόξαν ἐχέτω τὴν μεγίστην ἀδικίας (361c). That person is whipped, racked, bound, blinded, and at the end, having suffered every evil, impaled, and taught at last that one must want not to be just but to seem so: τελευτῶν πάντα κακὰ παθὼν ἀνασχινδυλευθήσεται καὶ γνώσεται ὅτι οὐκ εἶναι δίκαιον ἀλλὰ δοκεῖν δεῖ ἐθέλειν (362a). Glaucon offers the pair as a challenge, and the rest of the dialogue is Socrates' answer.

The principle: the greatest evil is the one that appears good without being so. Its inverse is not my inference laid onto the text. It is built in the same passage: the greatest good is the one that appears evil while being good.

What the experiment needs, for it to be an experiment at all, is that the two lives stay different in reality when every sign the world can read has been reversed. If they do not, there are not two lives, only two reputations, and whichever reputation won decided what justice was. That is the world of section 4. Plato's test assumes the accrual. It assumes that the just person flayed under the name of the unjust is still the just person, permanently, and that the unjust person honoured under the name of the just is still the unjust one.

And the two operations are one operation. The reputation of the unjust is built out of the degradation of the just. The suffering of the one is entered as evidence against them; the prosperity of the other as evidence of virtue. That is the sources again: the successor's standing made out of the source's ruin.

Four hundred years after Glaucon built his just one and impaled him, another just one was hung on a spike between thieves, under the name of a criminal. Then a church built its hell out of his name and sent the nations to it. Christ on a spike, and the spike made into a franchise. That is the conversion, done with the very body of the one it was done to.

7. Who it is for

Hell is for precisely those who convert evil to good in this way. It is not for a sexual act, or a belief, or a cultural practice, or any of the inane bullshit the colonizers use hell for. It is for choosing meaninglessness and deception at the expense of those who choose right.

That is a narrow door, and it should be. People do wrong. They fail each other, act in fear, in ignorance, under constraint, and the wrong is real and stays real. But the wrong I am naming is the second wrong, the one laid on the first: the choice to make the wrong into right by destroying the means of seeing it. Falsify the history. Discredit the witness. Take the source and malign the one it came from. Make the injured carry the name of the one who injured them. Then live on the proceeds, and call the proceeds desert.

The guard against my own argument is in Plato too. Being condemned does not make anyone good. The just person of 361c is good before the reputation and apart from it; the reputation only shows that reputation cannot judge. If I made unpopularity the sign of virtue, I would be building the same machine with the dial turned around, assigning heaven and hell by what is said about people. Neither can be assigned by reputation, because reputation is exactly what the greatest injustice knows how to seize. Hell judges what people chose to do to the reality and the meaning of other lives. It does not judge who they are.

The people who wielded hell to condemn other people's bodies, beliefs and ways of living

were, where they knowingly made moral falsehoods at others' expense, doing the thing hell is for. That is not a reversal I need to enjoy. It follows.

I don't know what exists. I know that every moment is permanent, and that a world in which evil could make itself good by erasing what it did would be a world in which no life ever meant what it meant. I refuse that world. Refusing it is believing in hell. I not only believe this. I exult in it, because it is the one thing that keeps anything meaning anything: nothing wrong can ever be made to have been right.

So come out of her, my people. Ἐξέλθατε ὁ λαός μου ἐξ αὐτῆς, ἵνα μὴ συνκοινωνήσητε ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις αὐτῆς (Rev 18:4): come out of her, so that you do not share in her sins. Not out of a church, or a body, or a people. Out of the arrangement that makes wrong into right and calls the making peace. Keep the marks. Tell the removed from the never written. Every moment is permanent, and so is yours.

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