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Frances Howard-Snyder

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other human persons than nonhuman physical objects is promising. I hope someone will soon do a good job of defending them.¹

NOTES

1. For helpful comments on earlier drafts I am grateful to Frances Howard-Snyder.

The Problem of Hell, by **Jonathan L. Kvanvig**. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Pp.viii and 182. \$24.95 (cloth).

FRANCES HOWARD-SNYDER, Western Washington University

An instance of the problem of evil, the problem of hell is particularly troubling for theism, since hell is a terrible thing, the worst thing that can happen to anyone, and unlike other kinds of suffering, one for which the sufferer cannot be compensated in the long run. Why would a perfectly loving God permit people to suffer such evil? Why indeed would He condemn them to it? Jonathan Kvanvig explores the tension between hell and any form of theism which conceives of God as perfectly good. But he discusses the problem primarily from the point of view of Christianity. He motivates the problem by describing and rejecting a number of traditional accounts of hell. In the latter half of the book he offers an account of his own and attempts to show that it avoids the difficulties that faced the other accounts.

He begins by discussing the 'strong view' of hell. This, he believes, is the standard view of hell, although he believes that scripture neither explicitly endorses it nor entails it. The strong view has four components:

(H1) The Anti-Universalism Thesis: Some persons are consigned to hell;

(H2) The Existence Thesis: Hell is a place where people exist, if they are consigned there;

(H3) The No Escape Thesis: There is no possibility of leaving hell and nothing one can do to change, or become in order to get out of hell, once one is consigned there; and

(H4) The Retribution Thesis: The justification for hell is retributive in nature, hell being constituted to mete out punishment to those whose earthly lives and behavior warrant it. [19]

Interestingly, this list doesn't mention the fact that hell is unpleasant or otherwise bad. Perhaps that is too obvious to need mentioning. He also assumes, but doesn't include here, that all human beings deserve hell. This claim makes trouble for the strong view, but he doesn't consider rejecting it.

He discusses two versions of the strong view. The first (the 'equal punishment version') claims that all sinners receive the same punishment; the second (the 'differential punishment version') that, although all sinners receive everlasting punishment, some are made to suffer worse than others. He criticizes the first as being both unfair and unjust, "unfair, because not everyone is equally guilty; unjust, because not all sin, if any, deserves an infinite pun-

ishment" [27]. The unfairness might be easily remedied by shifting to the differential version of hell, according to which more vicious sinners receive more severe punishment. But that leaves the objection that, no matter what a person did on earth, condemning her to everlasting suffering is unjust.

What justifies us in imposing retributive punishment to some degree or other? The answer will have to do with how much harm has been done and with the intentions of the wrongdoer. But it seems that few of us (in fact, probably none of us) have done sufficient harm with sufficiently bad intent to warrant infinite punishment. Some have argued all sin is sin against God and that, since God is greater than other beings, sin against God is correspondingly worse than sin against creatures. In fact, since God is infinitely good, sin against God is infinitely bad.

Kvanvig agrees that all sin is sin against God (since God sustains the lives of all creatures an injury to one of them is a sin against Him — just as parents' intimate involvement with their baby means that an injury to the child injures them.) But he rejects the idea that "guilt is proportional to the status of the injured party." He supports this with human analogies. For example, the fact that Gandhi was a better person than some ordinary Joe wouldn't make it worse to slap Gandhi than Joe.

Kvanvig spends much of his time elaborating and refuting the view, which derives from Jonathan Edwards, that all sinners are equally deserving of punishment because all sin is equally evil. He points out some sins are less evil than others, and even if all sins harm God, those sins which have God as their intentional object seem significantly worse than sins done by people who have no idea that God exists, or that their action will harm Him. But one needn't argue that all sin is equally deserving of the ultimate punishment in order to argue that all sinners are equally deserving. All one needs to argue is that there is a *class* of sins ('mortal sins,' perhaps) such that we've all committed at least one member of this class and that one of them is enough to qualify one for the worst punishment. Moreover, Kvanvig notes that the strong view of hell doesn't require the equal punishment view. An advocate of the strong view can claim that the degree of punishment we deserve varies according to how much harm we cause and according to how malicious or indifferent our motives, but can still argue that each of those who will go to hell have committed sins so pernicious that she or he deserves some sort of everlasting punishment.

Against the differential punishment version Kvanvig merely claims that "the intentions of the individual are of critical importance in determining the punishment due. If the death was an accident, perhaps no punishment is due. If the death was premeditated, a severe punishment is due" [62]. He believes, however, that the differential punishment version of the strong view "fails in that it ignores the intentional realm when assigning a basic sentence for a wrong done" [63].

But the differential version of the strong view needn't face this difficulty. Its advocates could argue that each of us at some time or another commits a sin which involves conscious deliberate rebellion against God. Some of these sins are worse than others, or some of us commit more such sins than others do, and that is why some of us deserve more severe punishment than others, but all of us deserve some everlasting punishment.

Kvanvig points out that some of us don't even believe that God exists. For such people, fully conscious rebellion against God would not be possible. It isn't clear whether either of these claims is true. The second seems doubtful when one considers the atheist who claims, "I don't believe that God exists. But if he does, I hate Him!" However, if Kvanvig is right in thinking that some people are incapable of the ultimate rebellion against God, and even if no sin short of such rebellion deserves everlasting punishment, the advocate of the strong view can hang onto the strong view and just drop the claim that all of us deserve to go to hell.

Kvanvig next investigates variants of the strong view of hell, each of which drops one of theses H1-H4. He elaborates these views in turn and raises difficulties for them. First there is the view which denies the Existence Thesis. This would be the view that hell is simply non-existence. Instead of suffering eternal damnation, sinners are condemned to annihilation. Kvanvig finds this unpromising. Why should we prefer annihilation to eternal life in hell? As long as we are gripped by a picture of hell as a place of torture, the answer is obvious. But, Kvanvig claims, hell needn't be like that.

Clearly we needn't think of hell as a place of physical torture. But suppose it is better to stay alive in hell than to be annihilated. Being in hell, then, is better than not existing, and better, presumably, than never having been born. But in that case, the problem of hell is less pressing than we thought initially. Certainly some human beings live lives which are so bad that the suffering in them outweighs the good in them, and of which we might well say that it would have been better for them had they never existed. In that case, hell would not be the worst thing that can happen to a person. Moreover, if one's existence in hell were better than no existence, the chief problem with hell would be that it isn't heaven, but God's failure to let everyone into heaven seems to be less problematic than His allowing some to suffer intolerably. So Kvanvig's objection to the annihilation account conflicts with his overall project.

The second alternative denies the No Escape Thesis. It allows that, after our life on earth, we will have other chances to redeem ourselves from hell. Kvanvig objects that this doesn't solve the problem. If cutting off a thief's hand is an unjust punishment, then so is cutting off his hand unless he apologizes.

The third alternative denies the Anti-Universalism Thesis. It claims that everyone is eventually reconciled to God and no-one ends up in hell. Kvanvig discusses two versions of this view: contingent universalism and necessary universalism, and argues that both fail. According to contingent universalism, hell is contingently unoccupied, although it is possibly occupied. Kvanvig raises the *modal* problem of hell for this view. God is not merely perfectly good, but necessarily perfectly good. If God's perfect goodness prevents Him from consigning people to hell, then His necessary perfect goodness prevents Him from consigning them to hell in any possible world.

Necessary universalism, on the other hand, rules out human freedom. If we will necessarily be united with God, then we will necessarily be morally perfected, and hence, we will have no choice in the matter. Kvanvig discusses three objections to this argument: God could not create free beings who would ultimately reject Him, freedom is not as important as we have

sometimes thought and should be overridden if necessary to prevent everlasting perdition; and no-one could freely reject God forever. Kvanvig responds to all three of these objections. I shall concentrate on his discussion of the second.

In response to the objection that God would justifiably override someone's freedom in order to prevent her from doing irreparable harm to herself, just as a loving father would justifiably prevent his daughter from committing suicide, Kvanvig argues that the mere fact that suicide is irreparable harm is not enough to justify interference. If the daughter really knows what she wants and would not come to change her mind, and the father knows this, then he ought to let her go ahead. Of course, in almost every case, a father should prevent his child from committing suicide. But what is true of a human parent may not always be true of God. Human parents don't fully understand the minds of their children. They don't know exactly why their children are contemplating suicide, whether the decision is a rational one, whether they will come to change their minds later on (if they are rescued) and so on. Given this ignorance, they ought to err on the side of caution. But these constraints don't apply to God. "Hence the fact that sometimes freedom can be infringed upon legitimately does not show that God should infringe upon the freedom on any person headed for hell..."[85].

Kvanvig points out that we don't always think it right to interfere with a suicide, for example, in the case of those who are dying and suffering intense and unending pain. One might object here that we respond this way because we recognize that the suffering is objectively horrible and that suicide would be the rational thing for anyone in those circumstances. Going to heaven, by contrast, is objectively better than going to hell. So we don't empathize with the sinner's choice, and hence, aren't inclined to judge it rational. Kvanvig believes that what justifies our non-interference is not simply the fact that death is objectively better than intense pain, but *the patient's belief* that it is and the fact that the belief is rational and stable. Kvanvig says it is crucial whether the suicidal person would agree that we should have intervened when he comes to see things more clearly.

He says in a footnote that if God did override the freedom of the rebellious, then she would either experience her chains as painful, as God would have to be constantly reining her in, or else God would have to do something equivalent to lobotomizing her, radically reducing her capacities, so that she was less than a full human being.

This is false. Consider the state of one of the blessed in heaven, Joan of Arc, say. It seems plausible she is no longer free with respect to whether she loves God. She has freely formed her character in such a way that she is unable to reject God. Now consider Hitler, who we might plausibly suppose to be in hell. But also suppose that he *could have* freely chosen to put himself into a situation like that of Joan. Consider the state that he would now be in as a result of such a free choice. That state would not involve present suffering, nor would it involve any reduction of his capacities, or dulling of his sensibilities, nor would it include the possibility of future rebellion. Now surely God could put Hitler into that state (or one that is molecule for molecule identical to that state). If He did so, Hitler's love

would not be freely given, and hence would be inferior to Joan's love, but Hitler would not suffer, nor would his capacities be reduced. The only difference between this Hitler and the one who (counterfactually) freely chose to love God, is an historical difference. This Hitler arrived at his heavenly state by a different (and less ideal) route than the other. Moreover, suppose God does do this. Wouldn't the resultant Hitler come to thank God for doing so? If so, isn't this enough, by Kvanvig's criterion, to judge that God's interference was justified?

The final simple alternative that Kvanvig considers abandons the view that hell is retribution for earthly sins. He discusses views according to which God does not put sinners into hell out of retribution, but they put themselves into hell by rejecting God. He writes: "On Swinburne's view, one's continued presence in hell is not due to something that occurred in the earthly past but rather to the present condition of having lost one's soul. One's residence in hell is eternal, not because one has done something to deserve it, but rather because it is impossible for one to achieve the alterations required to leave" [99].

But how, Kvanvig asks, is it impossible? Is God unable to change it? No. But if not, why is He justified in not doing so? Kvanvig agrees with Swinburne in rejecting the retribution thesis, but he thinks that the strong view needs a more fundamental overhauling. The retribution thesis seems in some kind of tension with God's love. Why does God create us? Because He is essentially loving. Why does God want us to go to heaven? Because He loves us and wants us to enjoy Him and to flourish. Why does God send sinners to hell? Because they are evil and God wants to punish them; or, because they deserve it and He is perfectly just. Kvanvig feels that these last answers jar in light of the answers to the first questions.

Swinburne and others attribute two motives to God and offer no explanation as to why one predominates in one case, but not in the other. Compare: Joe loves ice-cream, but he wants to lose weight. Why did he refuse to eat that ice-cream but eat this one? It is not enough to say that he refused the first ice-cream because he wanted to lose weight, and that he ate the second one because he loved ice-cream. A full explanation would explain why one desire overrode the other in each case. This is particularly urgent if one wants to explain the behavior of a perfectly rational agent. Kvanvig wants an explanation which will make God's treatment of the damned consistent with His treatment of the righteous, show how both issue from the same essential character, or give some explanation as to why one aspect of God's character motivates in one case but not in the other. Such an explanation would be "an issuant view of hell." In particular, he argues, the explanation must issue from God's love. This does not imply that God must ignore or abandon justice. "I am arguing for a hierarchical conception of the divine motivations, where God's love is His fundamental motivation regarding human beings and according to which God expends great effort to satisfy the demands of justice and holiness without abandoning that love for us" [119].

In chapter 3, he gives a fuller account of issuant conceptions, and evaluates two such conceptions: the first due to C. S. Lewis; the second to Eleonore Stump. Lewis says that sinners choose hell, by voluntarily surren-

dering their will to their passions, and in the process, losing their humanity. This is very close to the view Kvanvig himself adopts, but he wonders why Lewis doesn't think that those in hell ultimately annihilate themselves. Lewis sees sinners in hell as becoming less and less human, in fact, simply becoming less and less. A natural extension of this is to see them as fading out of existence. But he is reluctant to go this route, probably because he feels it is unorthodox, and offers an argument which relies on something like the law of conservation of energy. Kvanvig rightly points out that such natural laws wouldn't limit God's power, and Lewis's thought here is inconsistent with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Stump elaborates the Thomistic picture of hell as a place of quarantine, where sinners are kept isolated from the blessed. Aquinas believed that being is always better than non-being. Even if someone chose non-being, God is justified in overriding her choice and keeping her in existence. But if He is justified in overriding her free choice in order to keep her in the higher state of existence rather than non-existence, why isn't He justified in overriding her free choice by forcing her to live in heaven?

This raises a question which needs to be settled if one wants an adequate account of hell: "the primary issue.. is whether freedom or existence is of fundamental importance" [137]. Kvanvig explores this question by considering two earthly analogies: is life-imprisonment or exile a less harsh punishment than death, and when, if ever, is one justified in allowing someone else to commit suicide?

We tend to think that life-imprisonment is better than execution. This suggests that annihilating the damned is worse than putting (or leaving) them in hell. The analogy fails, however, as Kvanvig points out. Most modern prisons provide their inmates with many ingredients of a valuable life: decent food, company, reading materials, exercise, etc. If the choice were between execution and life with no possibility of parole in a prison where one was deprived of all the good things of life, for example, if prisoners were locked in a pitch black cell too small for movement without company, warmth, and so on, then death would be attractive. Presumably, hell would not contain any of the good things of life.

At the same time, we sometimes think it overly paternalistic to prevent someone who has arrived at a completely rational decision to commit suicide from doing so. Kvanvig thinks that someone who rejects God is choosing suicide. Since God is omnipresent, to choose to be separated from God is to choose to be nowhere, hence, to choose not to exist (and also, he might argue, since God sustains all things in existence, to choose to be independent from God is to choose not to be sustained in existence.) Kvanvig thinks this choice might in some cases be rational. So God would be overly paternalistic in preventing people from destroying themselves.

Kvanvig's own view of hell emerges. He believes that hell is not a punishment which God imposes on sinners because of their sins. Instead, sinners choose to reject God, to be independent from God. This choice, if taken to its logical extreme, leads to self-annihilation. God respects this choice, first, in not forcing Himself upon them, not changing their wills so that they cannot help but love Him. This leaves them in a state of rebellion against God, wretched, angry and confused. They stay in this state for as

long as it takes them to see their choices clearly and to come to a final rational and settled choice between God and annihilation. If they never arrive at this final choice, they remain in this state forever. If they come to change their minds and decide to return to God, they do so. (It is unclear whether this ever happens or whether it is even possible.) If they do arrive at the final decision to reject God completely and so embrace non-existence, and it meets the requirements for rationality and God is in a position to judge that it meets the requirements, then God allows them to destroy themselves finally. (It is unclear whether this ever happens either.)

If God's love would really direct Him to allow people to reject Him and prevent Him from forcing His love on them, then the same love would lead Him to respect their final choice to annihilate themselves. But would God's love direct Him to allow people to reject Him? Is it true that "In loving a person, one must be willing to suffer even total loss in allowing another to pursue what they most deeply want"? [153].

If you love someone and she wants something which will injure her, then you have to choose between respecting her autonomy and keeping her from harm. Which does love require that you choose? Suppose Kvanvig's five year old dislikes school and has a settled and (given his capacities) rational desire not to attend school, but to stay at home and watch TV and eat ice-cream. Obviously, loving a five year old requires that one look out for his interests rather than respect his autonomy. But why? Why is this the appropriate response when dealing with a five year old, but not the appropriate response when dealing with an adult (even a perverse and not very smart adult)? Is there something intrinsically satisfactory about the mental, social and psychological level of an eighteen year old which justifies our respecting her choices when we wouldn't respect the choices of her five year old brother? It isn't clear that there is. But there are two other important considerations. The first is that the five year old is going to grow up and see things a lot more reasonably, whereas the adult is not going to change much. We allow twenty-one year olds and even eighteen year olds to make their own decisions, but if a significant mental and physical development, comparable to the development that occurs between five and eighteen, occurred between eighteen and thirty-one and then levelled off, it seems that we wouldn't allow eighteen year olds to make their own decisions, but would make thirty one the age of consent. Guardians of young children protect them until they reach their full development, in part because it seems unfair to the potential adult to allow her future to be ruined by the immature person that she temporarily is. Another reason for the difference is that, except for the deranged and retarded, one adult is roughly on the same level of maturity as another, whereas an adult is clearly at a different level from the child. There is something objectionably patronizing about saying to another adult: "From my exalted position, I judge that your choice about what is in your interest is wrong." This seems inappropriate given the sort of equality and respect necessary to love between adults. But an adult can say something of this sort to a child without insulting him. So love in itself doesn't require respecting the choices of another. Other conditions have to be met as well. First, the beloved has to have reached roughly the final level of her devel-

opment, and secondly, the beloved and the lover have to be on roughly the same level of maturity. But neither of these conditions seems to be met in the case at hand. If certain accounts of heaven are correct, our life there is not static but involves considerable development, as we get closer and closer to God. In that case, before one has entered heaven one has not reached anything like one's full potential. A ten year old hasn't reached his full potential and that seems to be a good part of why it would be wrong to allow him to destroy his mind with drugs. By the same token, human beings on earth or in hell haven't reached their full potential. Moreover, relative to God, human adults are like little children. There is nothing objectionably patronizing about a father saying to his five year old, "Sorry, kid. I know what's good for you. You're going to school whether you like it or not." Similarly there may be nothing objectionably patronizing about God saying to a human being, "Sorry, kid. I know what's good for you. You're going to heaven whether you like it or not." Indeed, Christians frequently offer such explanations for why God doesn't answer our prayers, but instead allows us to suffer something horrible but character-forming. These two factors may justify God in forcing people into heaven if they refuse to go freely. (I am not here presupposing a geographic conception of heaven, as a place where God could keep the sinner, in spite of the fact that she hates being there. But I'm imagining God altering the sinner's will in such a way that she would unfreely love Him and enjoy being in heaven.)

This line of argument will no doubt be repugnant to Kvanvig and to a number of writers on the problem of evil and the problem of divine hiddenness, who appeal to the value of freedom to justify the fact that God allows human beings to suffer or to remain ignorant of Him. But what does the value of freedom consist in? And how great is this value? There is no doubt that freedom is valuable. Freely given love is better than coerced love. Freely arrived at virtue is better than coerced virtue. Suppose, as is plausible, that the highest state for human beings is to love God freely. God cannot guarantee that everyone attain this state. What, then, is the second best state for us: freely arrived at rebellion against God, or coerced love of God? Why should we think that the former is preferable? Does freedom have infinite value, enough to outweigh the infinite evil of eternal separation from God? Why would one think this? This question needs an answer. Here are a couple of suggestions.

One direct response would defend the value of freedom. Perhaps one might argue that no-one could truly be said to love God freely if God were to guarantee that everyone would love Him in the end. If one cannot do otherwise than love God, then one does not love God freely. In that case, since the highest possible state for a human being is to love God freely, then perhaps God would be justified in allowing some to reject Him ultimately in order to make the highest state possible for others. But the Principle of Alternate Possibilities is widely thought to be false, and it seems particularly implausible in this case. God could allow human beings a long time in which to choose whether to love Him freely, before interfering with their choices. Those who chose to love Him during this interim period would have chosen to do so freely, whereas those who rejected Him during this period would be capable only of the lesser 'coerced love.'¹

Another response would reject the assumptions implied by the questions. One might argue that the questions embody the consequentialist assumption that a perfectly good God must produce the best of all possible worlds (available to Him). Together with the claim that coerced love is better than free rejection and ultimate self-destruction, this implies that God would coerce people to love Him if they do not do so freely. Someone who rejects this consequentialist assumption might argue that there are certain constraints on what may morally be done in pursuit of the best available state of affairs. These constraints are imposed by love itself. Perfect love involves respect for the autonomy of the beloved which prevents the lover from interfering even for the good of the beloved. I suspect that Kvanvig would take this line, but in that case, he needs to respond to the argument I mounted earlier. Respect for autonomy is not an absolute constraint. It doesn't apply in the case of children, and the reasons it does apply in the case of love between adults may not transfer to the case of love between God and human beings. I think more work needs to be done in this area.

In spite of my complaints about his arguments, I find Kvanvig's account attractive in a number of ways. He explains heaven and hell in terms of God's love for His creatures. This makes God's behavior rational, consistent and comprehensible. It also makes Him look less vindictive than some of the competing conceptions do. It explains the Christian notion that belief in God (in the sense of commitment to God) is necessary and (given certain background conditions) sufficient for salvation.² It explains why heaven and hell constitute the only two ultimate destinies for human beings. Alternative accounts make it appear arbitrary that those are the only two options.

The book is very well-organized and contains many arguments about side-issues, such as divine command morality, which I haven't discussed here. Most of the arguments are very good and are interesting in their own right apart from the contribution they make to the book's conclusion. I highly recommend this book.³

NOTES

1. If you think 'coerced love' is a contradiction in terms, then imagine God coerces people into a state which is molecule for molecule identical with love except that it is not freely arrived at.

2. It may be objected that if God's love, by itself, makes it the case that commitment to God is necessary and sufficient for salvation, then Christ's life, suffering and death seem unnecessary.

3. I am grateful to Daniel Howard-Snyder for discussion of the issues involved here and to Jonathan Kvanvig for comments.