

Eliminating the problem of hell

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Abstract: According to Marilyn Adams, hell poses the principal problem of evil for Christians. In this article, I show that the problem of hell can be eliminated, or solved, but not by any of four favoured theistic solutions (i.e. traditional, escapist, annihilationist and universalist) that have been provided. Rather, I argue that there is another theistic solution to the problem of hell, a morally realistic solution, which, by drawing on ethical theory, can be shown to be morally preferable to these other solutions.

The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:41–42, 49–50; English Standard Version)

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire . . . where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. For everyone will be salted with fire. (Mark 9:43, 48–49; English Standard Version)

The pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive the wicked: the flames do now rage and glow. . . . The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much in the same way as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect, abhors you and is dreadfully provoked . . . (Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*)

According to Marilyn Adams, hell poses the principal problem of evil for Christians. This problem of hell can be stated, as follows to directly parallel the traditional problem of evil:

- (1) God exists.
- (2) Some created persons will be assigned to the torments of hell forever.
- (3) If God exists, no one will be assigned to the torments of hell forever.¹

Now theistic solutions to the problem of hell all focus on rejecting either premise 2 or 3. Obviously, the traditional theistic view, according to which many are assigned to a hell of unquenchable fire where there is weeping and the gnashing of teeth, rejects premise 3 (Walvoord (1996), ch. 1). A somewhat less traditional theistic view, sometimes called escapism, allows that people always can escape from hell by effectively choosing to be with God. So it is possible on this view that at some point in time hell will be empty (Lewis (1946)). This makes the escapist view indeterminate between rejecting either premise 2 or 3. Another less traditional theistic view, sometimes called annihilationism, rejects premise 2, maintaining that people who make a settled final decision under favourable circumstances not to accept God, do not go to hell, but rather are simply annihilated and thus cease to exist (Kvanvig (1993)). Still another theistic view, sometimes called universalism, which also claims some traditional support, rejects premise 2. This view maintains that God's persistent love will eventually bring everyone to salvation (Talbot (1999)). Unfortunately, there are serious difficulties with each of these solutions to the problem of hell.

Four views of hell

Clearly, the traditional view seems incompatible with a just and merciful God. For how could a just and merciful God torment sinners for all eternity? Surely, our moral standards would not permit punishment of this severity. So neither should God. Even attempts by Eleanore Stump and others to defend the traditional view by making an eternity in hell the settled choice of those who are there, as we shall see, are indefensible (Stump (1986) and Lewis (1946)). Compared to the traditional view the annihilationist view has the advantage that it takes into account the fact that those who would otherwise suffer everlasting torment might well prefer to be annihilated. Jonathan Kvanvig further defends annihilationism by analogy with the preference for suicide of someone who is suffering execrating pain from a terminal illness (Kvanvig (1993), 138–144). The main problem with this defence is, as we shall see, that there is a third option, unavailable in Kvanvig's suicide case, requiring neither everlasting torment nor annihilation, that would be favoured by a just and merciful God. No doubt, escapism also seems morally preferable to both annihilationism and the traditional view because it does not conclusively condemn anyone either to everlasting torment or to annihilation. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the problem with this view is, as in the case of annihilationism, that there is another option that arguably would be favoured by a just and merciful God. By contrast with the other solutions, the last theistic solution to the problem of hell, universalism, just seems too good to be true. How, we might wonder, could all the truly evil people in human history be transformed into morally good people? In addition, universalism has a problem similar to the one facing both annihilationism and escapism, namely, why should there not be another option for those who are not bad in any way –

an option that allows them to choose not to enter into a friendship with God without going to hell?

Introducing ethical theory

Now to better understand these theistic solutions to the problem of hell, we need a better understanding of the moral wrongdoing to which these solutions are attempting to respond. This is just where bringing ethical theory to bear on the problem of hell becomes important.²

Initially, two types of wrongdoing appear to be at stake. The first is wrongdoing that is directed against God. The second is wrongdoing that is directed against other living beings. In most discussions of the problem of hell, the focus is on wrongdoing directed against God. Frequently, this wrongdoing is described as disobedience to God's commands. Sometimes, it is also characterized as a refusal of God's love, or a rejection of God's offer of friendship (Wiley (2002)).

Unfortunately for the proposed theistic solutions to the problem of hell, there is a fundamental difficulty with conceiving of wrongdoing in this way. The difficulty is that once we conceive of God in the traditional sense as an omni-God who is all good and all powerful, it follows that nothing we can ever do could harm such a God. Putting this together with a standard principle in legal ethics that wrongdoing of the seriously punishable kind always presupposes the infliction or risk of harm, it follows that we cannot wrong God; certainly we cannot do anything that would be seriously punishable, possibly by the fires of hell.³

Now it might be argued that when we harm God's creatures we harm God just the way that when we normally harm someone's child we normally harm the parents of the child. But if God is truly perfect, he cannot be made vulnerable by creating in the way that we can be made vulnerable by procreating. So God cannot be harmed in this way, although we can.

Nor would it do to claim that since God loves us and desires that we love him, he can be harmed by those who do not return his love. This is because what God presumably wants for us is that we have the choice to love him freely or not. Assuming then that we have this choice and exercise it either in this life or in some afterlife, God will have achieved just what he wants, and so he would not have been harmed by our choice however we make it.⁴

Of course, St Anselm once argued that since God is an infinite being, all of our wrongdoing against God has infinite disvalue creating a debt that requires something of comparable positive value if it is to be repaid (Anselm (2007), 237–326). But if our wrongdoing against God actually causes no harm at all, then such harmless acts could not be the source of infinite disvalue to God.

Of course, we could say that when we go against the will of God, when we violate God's commands, we actually harm, not God, but ourselves. But actions that simply harm the agent who performs them are not typically punished by the law. Once we become competent agents, we are thought to be free to harm

ourselves if we want to do so, as people do by smoking, overeating, etc. Sad though such behaviour may be, the everlasting fires of hell could not be reserved for those who just harm themselves, given that we usually do not penalize such behaviour at all.

So here is the general problem facing all four of our theistic solutions to the problem of hell: if it is not possible to harm God, then there is nothing we can do that would constitute wrongdoing against God and thus serve as the moral basis for imposing punishment on us, certainly not for imposing the everlasting torment envisioned by the traditional view of hell. Moreover, there would not be a need for any other theistic solutions to the problem of hell either, at least not for any that purport to be based on harm to God.

The possibility of justifying hell simply on harm to creatures

Yet suppose we grant that we cannot harm God, why can't we ground the need for one of more of these theistic solutions to the problem of hell simply on the harm we do to other human beings, or even the harm we do to non-human creatures? This clearly seems to be a promising option.

Indeed, the harm we do to our fellow creatures is severe enough to constitute serious wrongdoing, as our legal ethics attests. And while such harm would not be harm directed against God, God could still take it into account, and seek to appropriately limit, and, if necessary, punish us for engaging in it.

How then would the problem of hell with its competing theistic solutions arise when the harm that needs to be dealt with is simply the harm we do to our fellow creatures? Given that these competing solutions to the problem of hell are attempts to deal with serious human wrongdoing, the need to deal with the problem would not necessarily just go away once we introduce the corrective that the wrongdoing at issue must be wrongdoing directed against our fellow creatures.

So let us draw on ethical theory to determine what would be the best practice for dealing with serious human wrongdoing. First, we need to distinguish between a society that is basically just and where people's fundamental rights are respected, and a society that is not basically just and where many people's fundamental rights are not respected. Second, we need to distinguish between violations of people's property and violations of their persons.

Now in a basically just society, there are relatively few violations of either people's property or their persons. So how should the relatively few property violations be dealt with in a basically just society? Surely, there would be a need to take back any resources that the violators still retained from their wrongdoing and for them to make up for whatever resources they consumed by their wrongdoing as far as possible. However, in a basically just society, there is sure to be a limit on the amount of harm that could be done by property violations before the wrongdoers were detected and stopped, and so there would be a limit on

how much needs to be done to make amends. Moreover, the ultimate goal would be to get violators to appreciate and accept the justification for the property rights they violated, so that they would not violate those rights anymore. Given then the limited property rights violations that could occur in a basically just society, there does not seem to be any need for long-term correctives, and certainly not ones that require the remedy of the endless fires of hell.

Doubtless, crimes against persons are more problematic even in a basically just society. Although the standard motivations that lead to assaults and murder would be minimized in a basically just society where everyone had an equal opportunity to develop and fulfil themselves, assaults and murders would still occur, inflicting serious harms on their victims. When this happens, violators should have their freedom drastically restricted. This should not necessarily be considered to be a way of making amends for the wrongs that had been committed, because sometimes nothing could be done that would do that. Sometimes nothing can be done to make victims whole again, restoring them to the quality of life they had before the crime was committed. Rather, the point of such punishment is to show the violator and other would-be violators what they stand to lose from committing such violations. Here, it is also important to determine whether the violators can be reformed so that they no longer present a risk of committing similar crimes in the future. There will also be the need to contain those who are basically unreformable and, hence, are likely to do the same harmful acts again if they are not deterred or constrained in some way. Of course, taking these factors into account to specify an appropriate punishment is not an exact science. One reason, however, for not continuing such punishments into an afterlife, even in the worse cases, is that the victims we are supposing would also be there in the afterlife, presumably no longer suffering from the serious wrongs that were committed against them in this life because they have been made physically and psychologically whole again.

The possibility of punishment in the afterlife

Just here, however, we need to come to some kind of an understanding of what punishment in an afterlife, if any, is required when we have determined that we can only do serious harm, and hence only commit serious wrongdoing, against our fellow creatures, and not against God. Now let us assume that in the afterlife God would prevent us from seriously harming our fellow creatures. Suppose that in the afterlife we can still think about seriously harming others, and even intend to do so, but because of God's intervention, we are never actually able to pull off at least our exterior harmful act, the part of our act that actually does inflict harm on others. Nevertheless, let's assume, we are still able to harm others in minor, non-significant, ways.

Obviously, bad people will tend to be considerably frustrated in such an afterlife, but their frustration could lead them to reform themselves, and thus come to

appreciate and accept the justification for respecting the rights of their fellow creatures. Moreover, in such an afterlife, good people would continue to have mutually beneficial relationships with each other. Only from time to time would good people be kept from carrying out immoral external acts that would significantly harm others.

Now given the characterization that we have given the afterlife so far, it is difficult to see anything about it that would be morally objectionable. However, we do need a fuller account of how we would be related to God in such an afterlife. While we have stipulated that God would be preventing serious wrongdoing in the afterlife, surely we would expect our relationship with God to involve more than just this. In particular, might we not expect that in this afterlife only sufficiently virtuous people would be invited to enter into friendship with God?

Friendship with God in the afterlife

Doubtless, those who had made themselves into morally good people in this life would seem to be possible candidates for friendship with God in the afterlife. Nevertheless, given our understanding of how friendships work in this life, friendships cannot be imposed. Rather, friendships are a kind of relationship that one has a choice about entering. Moreover, while the choice of not becoming friends with someone, like the choice of not marrying someone, may be a mistake, it clearly is not considered to be a way of seriously wronging someone, something for which one could be severely punished. Accordingly, morally good people in the afterlife should also have the option of turning down an offer of friendship with God without thereby doing something that is seriously wrong for which they can be severely punished.

In this life, we tend to form friendships with people who are generally similar to us in knowledge and ability, and with whom we have an emotional connection. Friendship in this life involves sharing experiences where there is mutual benefit and mutual vulnerability (Lepp (1964)). These are features that are central to friendship as we know it. Accordingly, the idea of forming a friendship with God, who is infinitely superior to us in knowledge and ability, whom we certainly cannot benefit, or share vulnerabilities with, does present some formidable obstacles. It may be, however, that these obstacles can somehow be overcome, and that it would be possible for morally good people to enter into friendship with God, as many religious people attest (De La Puente (1951), Le Monde (1960), Barry (2008)). Nevertheless, if it is really friendship that is at issue here, and not something else, then we must have the option of accepting or rejecting the offer of friendship with God without having our refusal constitute doing something that is seriously wrong, for which we can be punished, and consequently, not something for which we can be punished with the everlasting fires of hell.

Notice too that if we were to reject this central optionality feature of friendship, and maintain that friendship with God is something that it would be seriously

wrong for us to reject, we must answer the following question: whom does our rejection of friendship with God seriously wrong? The answer has to be either God or ourselves. But, as we saw earlier, we cannot seriously wrong God because we cannot harm him in any way, and because wrongdoing, especially serious wrongdoing, always presupposes that we have significantly harmed those whom we have seriously wronged. With regard to ourselves, although we surely can harm ourselves, once we become competent agents, we are thought to be free to harm ourselves if we want to do so, without being subject to punishment, and certainly without being subject to the everlasting fires of hell. That is just fundamental to our morality of harming ourselves (Feinberg (1989)).

Obviously, it has not been generally recognized by theists that morally good people could refuse to enter into friendship with God without thereby doing anything that is seriously wrong for which they could be punished. In addition to failing to see that a required optionality is actually built into our ordinary conception of friendship, these theists also apparently think that refusing to accept an offer of friendship with God must itself be a serious wrong against God that is punishable. They just seem to have failed to recognize that we can't, in fact, wrong God because we can't harm him, and that wrongdoing presupposes harming.

So once we see that friendship with God in the afterlife must be morally optional for the reasons just given, and not something we could be punished for rejecting, we are ready to return to the problem of hell with its four theistic solutions. What I now hope to show is that another theistic solution to the problem of hell is morally preferable to the four solutions we previously considered.

More on the possibility of punishment in the afterlife

Now we have been imagining that people are entering the afterlife after living in a basically just society. As a consequence, those who so enter the afterlife having violated people's property rights in this life are relatively few in number, and their violations would be relatively easily detected and remedied in this life. Accordingly, it would seem that nothing remains to be done about them in the afterlife. Moreover, even those who committed violations against persons in a basically just society would have been appropriately dealt with in this life.⁵ Even those whose violations were so severe that it was considered to be morally justified to restrict their freedom for the remainder of their earthly lives would not seem to deserve to have their punishment continue into the afterlife, especially given that their victims would also be there in the afterlife, presumably no longer suffering from the violations that were committed against them in this life. Recall that we have assumed that in this afterlife God would prevent us from seriously harming our fellow creatures. So fear that we may be significantly harmed by those who had committed serious violations in this life would be eliminated from the afterlife. In addition, although people would still be able to harm each

other in non-significant ways in this afterlife, we could imagine that these occasions can be profitably used by people as opportunities for soul-making.

Assuming then that people were entering the afterlife from a basically just society as I have characterized it, there would seem to be no need for any of four theistic solutions to the problem of hell with which we began this article. The traditional solution to the problem never seemed to be in the running because the torment it purportedly would inflict on wrongdoers is clearly incompatible with a just and merciful God. Even attempts by Eleanore Stump and others to save the traditional view by making an eternity in hell the settled choice of those who go there faces an insurmountable difficulty. It is this: many of the wrongdoers who freely engage in vicious behaviour in this life – Stump mentions Filippo Argenti from Dante's *Inferno* who was known for his wrath – acted in contexts in this life that normally rendered their action beneficial to themselves and those they cared about. Yet that in no ways implies that they would be freely committed to that same vicious behaviour in an afterlife where significant harm replaced the benefits that they normally experienced from so acting in this life. For example, when Filippo Argenti shows wrath in Dante's *Inferno*, those around did the same to him and they also proceeded to beat him and tear him to pieces. Clearly Filippi would not have freely willed all that happened to him in Dante's *Inferno*. In contrast, in my imagined afterlife, wrongdoers would still have some motivation to engage in vicious behaviour because God would only be preventing them from inflicting the significant exterior consequences of their immoral actions on their would-be victims. Hence, they would be constrained no more than they would be constrained in this life by an ideally just and powerful political state, which would still leave them some scope to benefit from acting immorally.

Now we can see that at least for those who enter the afterlife from a basically just society, there is little wrongdoing left that needs to be dealt with, and nothing that requires the corrective of the everlasting fires of evil. Moreover, once the traditional solution to the problem of hell is recognized as not a morally viable option for an afterlife, the escapist and the annihilationist solutions become far less attractive as well. This is because these solutions depended on the traditional solution having at least some initial plausibility. So it should not be surprising if the alternative theistic solution to the problem of hell that I am proposing, which totally rejects the traditional solution, turns out to be morally preferable to both escapism and annihilationism. Surely, given our conception of friendship, it would be morally impermissible to keep people eternally in hell or annihilate them for just refusing to be friends with God.

A view different from universalism

Now it might be thought that the solution to the problem of hell that I am proposing is, in fact, a form of universalism. Clearly, like universalism, my solution

does reject premise 2 of the problem of hell argument. Thus, it denies that some people will be assigned to the torments of hell forever. Moreover, in my view, like universalism, everyone enters and continues to exist in the afterlife. No one is ever annihilated. Yet according to universalism, everyone eventually becomes a morally good person, and permanently accepts friendship with God. In my solution to the problem of hell, however, everyone does not necessarily become a morally good person, nor need all morally good people necessarily accept any offer of friendship with God that is provided to them, nor need they permanently continue in friendship with God even if they once accepted such an offer.

So one obvious advantage of my solution to the problem of hell over universalism is that it preserves the optionality of accepting an offer of friendship with God. Universalists do not think rejecting friendship with God is an option, and so they struggle to show that everyone will eventually come to be friends with God (Talbot (1999), Kronen & Reitan (2011)).⁶ They do this by arguing that friendship with God, when properly understood, is truly in our best self-interest, and so, they claim, enforceable, if necessary for that reason (Kronen & Reitan (2011)). However, as we have noted, morality always permits us to act against our self-interest if we choose to do so. Of course, I allow that people may be making a mistake by not accepting friendship with God, but I contend that they are not thereby doing anything seriously wrong. Moreover, unless people are doing something seriously wrong, it would be morally impermissible for God to override their choice and correct their mistake – as some universalists maintain by imposing ‘friendship’ upon them. So, in this regard, my solution to the problem of hell has a clear advantage over universalism.

Another advantage of my solution to the problem of hell will become evident as we now turn to consider how it works for those who enter the afterlife from basically unjust societies.

Still more on the possibility of punishment in the afterlife

Now a basically unjust society is one many of whose institutions and individuals are in significant violation of a standard of justice. Obviously, in such societies, there will be numerous violations of people’s property and their persons.

First, consider violations of people’s property. In a basically unjust society, it will be more difficult to determine when a significant property rights violation has occurred than in a basically just society. This is because many of those who would have legal rights to particular properties would not have moral rights to them, and many of those who would have moral rights to such properties would not have legal rights to them. So it becomes much more difficult to determine when people’s property rights have actually been violated. In a basically unjust society, many people would be violating the moral property rights of others while not fully recognizing that they are doing so while others would be

violating those same rights fully aware that in the unjust society in which they are living, they can, in fact, violate those rights with relative impunity.

What then should happen when such individuals enter the afterlife? Obviously, violators cannot bring their unjustly acquired property with them into the afterlife, but let us allow that they do come to the afterlife with their unjust habits of thought and action. However, we are also assuming that God would prevent any significant violations of people's property rights in the afterlife. So those who come to the afterlife with unjust habits of thought and action are certain to have a difficult time of it, at least initially. Bad people will tend to be considerably frustrated in such an afterlife, but their frustration could lead them to reform themselves, and thus come to appreciate and accept the justification for respecting the rights of those with whom they are now living. Or they may still continue to live lives firmly committed to their unjust ways of thought and action, while being continually frustrated in their attempts to do significant wrong, a totally different experience from the one they had in the unjust societies from which they came.

Is there then anything else that should be done in the afterlife to violators of property rights in this life? It is not clear that there is. In this life, at least in just societies, there is an attempt to have wrongdoers make amends for their property rights violations as much as possible. But in the afterlife those whose property rights were violated in this life are no longer in need of compensation for those violations if they haven't already received it in this life. This is because victims of property rights violations in this life would have whatever possessions they needed in the afterlife.

Nevertheless, these former victims would still surely like to see a change of mind and heart in those who had violated their property rights in this life. But while this sort of change can be encouraged, for example, by effectively prohibiting any serious rights violations in the afterlife, the change should not be forced. In the afterlife, bad people can always refuse to give up their unjust habits of thought and action, and simply continue to experience frustration as the exterior effects of their attempts to engage in serious wrongdoing are prevented. Hopefully, not too many people would choose this kind of life for themselves in the afterlife, but some bad people, committed to their evil ways, might well do just that.

Something similar holds of those who enter the afterlife from a basically unjust society where they have committed serious violations against the rights of persons. Here again, we will have two sort of violators. First, there are those who are unaware but negligent about their violations of the rights of persons. Second, there are those who are fully aware and have embraced the unfair advantage that their violations gave them in the unjust societies in which they lived. So what should happen when both sorts of individuals enter the afterlife?

Let us imagine that they too have come to the afterlife with their unjust habits of thought and action. However, we are also imagining that in the afterlife, God prevents any significant violations of people's rights against their persons. So those who come to the afterlife with unjust habits of thought and action in this regard

are definitely going to have a difficult time of it, at least initially. As noted before, bad people would tend to be considerably frustrated in such an afterlife, but their frustration could lead them to reform themselves, and thus come to appreciate and accept the justification for respecting the rights of their fellow creatures. Or they may not, with the result that they would live their afterlife lives still firmly committed to their unjust ways of thought and action, while continually being frustrated in their attempts to do significant wrong, a totally different experience from the one they had had in the unjust society from which they have come.

Is there anything else that should be done? It is not clear that there is. In this life, at least in just societies, we attempt to have wrongdoers make amends for their rights violations as much as possible. But in the afterlife, those whose rights against their own persons were violated in this life no longer require compensation for the violations of their rights. Presumably, they have been made physically and psychologically whole again in the afterlife, even if that involves wiping away all the memories and physical effects of what happened to them and to those with whom they were related in this life.⁷

Nevertheless, in the afterlife what we would still like to see is a change of mind and heart in those who had violated their rights in this life. But while this sort of change can be encouraged, for example, by effectively prohibiting any serious rights violations against persons, the change cannot be forced. Again, bad people could always refuse to give up their unjust habits of thought and action in this regard, and just continue to experience frustration (as the exterior effects) of their attempts to engage in serious wrongdoing are prevented as they continue with their lives. Hopefully, not too many people would choose this kind of life for themselves in the afterlife, but some bad people, committed to their evil ways, might still do so.

So there is no need for further punishment in the afterlife under my morally realistic solution to the problem of hell. Moreover, unlike universalism, there is no assumption under my solution to the problem of hell that everyone would turn into a morally good person. In the afterlife, it is possible that Hitler and Stalin, and their like, could transform themselves into morally good persons, but given what we know about human psychology that is not a very likely outcome. Rather, it is far more likely that they would just experience frustration as their attempts to engage in serious wrongdoing in the afterlife are prevented from succeeding as they continue with their lives.

Conclusion

This then is my theistic solution to the problem of hell. Given that it closely resembles what we might regard as justice in this life, I think we can call it a 'morally realistic solution' to the problem of hell. Thus, what I have shown is that the problem of hell can be eliminated, or solved, but not by any of four favoured theistic solutions (i.e. traditional, escapist, annihilationist, and

universalist) that have been provided. Rather, I have argued that there is another theistic solution to the problem of hell, a morally realistic solution, which, by drawing on ethical theory, can be shown to be morally preferable to these other solutions.

Now it might still be objected that my realistic solution to the problem of hell is problematic because it significantly departs from the traditional view of heaven. Yet the other views we have considered do the same. The escapist view potentially puts everyone in heaven. The universalist view actually puts everyone in heaven. Even the annihilationist view puts everyone who continues to exist in heaven, while my view puts everyone in the same place, which is neither the traditional heaven nor the traditional hell. So all these views depart from the traditional view of heaven according to which some, and most likely many, people will not end up in heaven, but rather in hell. Yet my view remains the most morally justifiable of the alternatives. This is because rather than unjustifiably annihilating all bad people, like the annihilationist view, or implausibly making all people good, either actually, like the universalist view, or potentially, like the escapist view, my view explains how both good people and bad people can all live together in a way that would not be morally objectionable to the good people. That is the advantage of my realistic solution to the problem of hell.

Finally, it bears noting that my solution to the problem of hell is a theistic solution only in the sense that it is a determination of what an all-good, all-powerful God would do to us in an afterlife given the kind of world we live in. The question whether the kind of world we live in with its degree and amount of evil is compatible with an all-good, all-powerful God in the first place still remains to be answered.

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Notes

1. The traditional problem of evil can be formulated as follows:
 - (1) God exists.
 - (2) Impermissible evil exists in the world.
 - (3) If God exists, impermissible evil would not exist in the world.
2. I am assuming that we are dealing with agents who have the native and environmental resources to be at least minimally responsible agents in this life. For those who lack such resources, some other solution is required. Maybe they should be provided with the necessary resources in some n-inning afterlife.
3. I am using harm in a broader sense to include offence. For the limitation of wrongdoing to causing or threatening harm in this boarder sense, see Feinberg (1987-1990).
4. Nor would the assumption that God created us all by itself serve to ground a duty of gratitude such that our failure to express such gratitude would count as an offence or harm to God. To see this, consider parents who simply brought children into the world but then left them on their own to fend for themselves. Surely we would not think that their children, if they somehow managed to survive to adulthood, would have a duty to seek out their biological parents and express their gratitude to them for simply procreating them! Thus, the same would seem to hold true for us with respect to God simply in virtue of his presumed act of creation.
5. I am assuming that if we do all that we can to restore victims of crimes against their persons and to prevent similar crimes in the future, we would have done all that is appropriate to deal with these crimes in this life.
6. Universalists frequently talk about intimate union with God as well as friendship with God.
7. This is surely a radical step to restore those who have been so harmed, but given the injustices to persons that have been done in this life, it is difficult to see what else could be an appropriate moral corrective for them in an afterlife.