

## Hell and character

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**Abstract:** The view that consignment to hell is a matter of having a fixed vicious character of a certain sort – rather than a matter of paying a retributive penalty for sin – is quite popular among philosophical theologians today. However, if proponents of this view wish to maintain that some individuals wind up consigned to hell, and if they embrace a number of independently plausible assumptions, they will be forced toward unreasonable claims about character development and its relationship to consignment to hell. In this paper, I describe the difficulties for these philosophical theologians.

It is a virtual truism that the doctrine of hell is among the most morally troublesome teachings of Christianity. In an attempt to make sense of why God would permit people to suffer damnation and all that it entails, a position has emerged over the last few decades in Christian philosophical theology that has earned the label ‘orthodox’; if not in the theological sense, then at least in the ‘first place in a philosophical popularity contest’ sense. I will call this view the ‘settled character theory of hell’ (or just SCT for short).

The (or at least a) basic idea of SCT is well expressed in the following passage, from the work of one of its most prominent proponents, Richard Swinburne:

Now those who ... resist a good desire will have such good desires again. But if they systematically resist desires of a certain kind, they will gradually become the kind of person to whom such desires do not occur with any force ... . A man who never resists his desires ... gradually allows what he does to be determined entirely by the strength of his desires (as measured by the difficulty of resisting them). That is, he eliminates himself ... . There is no longer a ‘he’: the agent has turned into a mere theatre of conflicting desires of which the strongest automatically dictates his action ... . We may describe a man in this situation of having lost his capacity to overrule his desires as having ‘lost his soul.’ He can no longer choose to resist them by doing the action which he judges to be overall the best thing to do. He has no natural desires to do the actions of heaven and he cannot choose to do them because he sees them to be of supreme worth. There is no ‘he’ left to make that choice.<sup>1</sup>

Swinburne's passage is representative in outline, but there have been other well-known examples of views in the same vein (quibbling here and there over the details of the story), among them the positions of Jonathan Kvanvig, Jerry Walls, and (going back a bit further) C. S. Lewis.<sup>2</sup> All of these views take a largely non-retributivist approach to consignment to hell; in their eyes, God does not condemn people to hell to exact some sort of objectively required penalty for sin, but rather because their psychological profiles are fitted for hell, they have made free choices leading them to their psychological profiles (in the long run), and God respects both the existence and the natural consequences of free choices of this sort.

Despite its popularity, I argue that SCT faces a serious difficulty that has received little attention. In essence, the reason is that proponents of SCT (and often their opponents) have greatly oversimplified the relationship between action and character development; right actions sometimes lead to the development of vice, and wrong actions to the development of virtue, in a way that causes serious difficulties for SCT.

In the next section, I will do some preliminary house-cleaning: defining key terms, making explicit important assumptions, and providing necessary qualifications and clarifications. In the section to follow that one, I will provide and discuss examples of the sorts of action and character development that are of crucial importance. I will then close with some concluding reflections about the source of the difficulties for SCT, and briefly outline some potential avenues of response.

### **Definitions, assumptions, and clarifications**

We should begin by getting a more precise handle on exactly what SCT is committed to. SCT, as I will understand it, is the conjunction of five claims: the limited-retributivism, possibility, respect-for-free-will, badness, and fittingness theses. (It also includes some background presuppositions that are fairly obvious.) I define each thesis in turn:

Limited-retributivism thesis: In assigning ultimate afterlife outcomes, God does not take into consideration any retributive demands of justice, except perhaps, (A) in a very specific and narrow set of situations, or (B) in relatively trivial and irrelevant ways.<sup>3</sup>

(Roughly speaking, a 'retributive demand of justice' is a requirement that an individual be punished in a particular way – or be compensated or rewarded in a particular way, though these are less relevant – in order to 'restore the moral order' of the world, or honour desert. Retributive demands of justice are, in a sense, written into the very moral fabric of reality. They are not justified

instrumentally via their aid in rehabilitation, deterrence, protection of the innocent, or anything else. Below, I will indicate a slightly artificial stipulation I am making with respect to retribution, and also discuss the very specific and narrow set of situations mentioned in the definition.)<sup>4</sup>

Possibility thesis: It is psychologically possible for at least some human beings to make libertarian free choices that, in combination with regular natural forces, naturally lead them eventually to a state of ‘closed-downness’.

This state of closed-downness is the state of it being psychologically impossible, without direct supernatural intervention by God, for the person ever again to perform any actions which are not done automatically, out of habitual vice. In this state, it is psychologically impossible to respond to grace or choose union with God (again, without special direct intervention). (I will leave the notion of *psychological possibility* as a primitive. I am understanding naturalness to involve something like the continued operation of the standard stable natural laws on the person and her environment.)<sup>5</sup>

Respect-for-free-will thesis: Both the existence of human libertarian free choices and their significance are of great importance. Consequently, God only takes away the power of free choice from humans or intervenes in the natural consequences of their free choices in the most extreme of circumstances, if ever.

The closed-downness of an individual person as a result of the consequences of his own free choices working in tandem with natural laws is not typically an extreme enough circumstance to justify interference or special intervention by God (beyond the ways that Christianity would ordinarily suppose God might intervene in the life of a wayward person). (Importantly, included in the natural consequences of free choices are the psychological remnants – memories, character traits, etc. – that are presumably preserved wholesale when God brings a person back to life after ordinary death.)

Badness thesis: Hell is a very bad outcome to wind up with. It is far worse on the whole, from a subjective experiential perspective, than any alternative outcome available.<sup>6</sup>

(Hell can include or lead to eventual annihilation, as (e.g.) Kvanvig has suggested. In this case, hell is experientially bad because the annihilation it includes – and the subsequent non-experiencing – is far worse than the largely or wholly positive experiences one would have outside hell.)<sup>7</sup>

Fittingness thesis: Hell is the naturally fitting outcome for someone who is psychologically ‘closed-down’. Consequently, God gives such

individuals that outcome (and only for the reason that they are closed-down).

(By 'fitting' here, I don't mean fitting in a retributive sense, but rather in some sort of non-retributive aesthetic sense: it is where such people naturally belong; it is the correct organic setting for their character.)

Now that we have a better feel for the position we are examining, let me outline some additional assumptions and make some observations. First, an important (and potentially controversial) assumption I am making is that God is fair in His dealings with human beings, at least where consignment to hell is concerned. What do I mean by 'fair'? Fairness is a comparative matter; it is a matter of similar agents being treated similarly, and different agents being dealt with differently according to some appropriate scale of proportionality.<sup>8</sup>

For our purposes, the relevant sort of fairness is a matter of God giving everyone an equal opportunity to avoid hell. As I said, the assumption that God is fair may be contentious and strike some as inappropriate, since it may be thought to threaten the pre-eminent status of grace in the Christian theological edifice. (If God is fair, then it seems that He will not be able to bestow grace by random unmerited generosity on some and not on others, which at least some Christians would consider a heterodox suggestion.) Unfortunately, I cannot engage in a systematic defence of the assumption now, so a handful of remarks will have to suffice.

First, it seems that fairness might easily have a basis in God's love for each human being (both in bestowing grace on all and, in some sense, giving all an equally good opportunity to respond). 2 Peter, 3.9 reminds us that 'God is willing that none should perish',<sup>9</sup> and given that God has infinite resources at his disposal, it is difficult to understand why He would treat only some people generously (unless there were systematic reasons for it, which there don't appear to be in this case). Second, it may be possible to salvage a meaningful role for grace by focusing on grace's being an unmerited gift, without necessarily being an exclusive one.<sup>10</sup> What important theological work is being done by the claim that God only bestows grace on some people, or gives some people more of an opportunity for salvation than others? Obviously there are avenues of response to pursue, but I will have to rest content in presuming that they will not turn out to be fruitful. Third, and more indirectly, the assumption has been a popular one among participants in contemporary debates about hell. It is for all intents and purposes equivalent to Ted Sider's proportionality requirement.<sup>11</sup> It is also embraced (albeit sometimes implicitly) by Lewis, Kvanvig, Walls, Seymour, and others.<sup>12</sup>

Traditionally (although the matter has received little attention in the contemporary debates on hell), it has been customary in Christianity to see God's dispensation of grace and human choice about whether to co-operate with that

grace as separate from desert and retributive demands surrounding desert. On this way of thinking, what people deserve *simpliciter* is one issue (having nothing to do with grace), and what they should appropriately receive as a result of grace and their response to grace another. Hence, God's fairness is largely thought to consist either in God's giving everyone an equal measure of grace and natural advantage ultimately, or in taking into account unequal distribution of grace and natural advantage, and evaluating persons on their response to their particular circumstances with mitigating circumstances in mind. (As might be suggested by Luke, 12.48: 'From everyone who has been given much, much will be required.')

Rather than unduly complicating our discussion by distinguishing truly retributive considerations from 'quasi-retributive' considerations (having to do with one's response to grace),<sup>13</sup> I will simply stipulate that issues surrounding response to grace will be classified under the retributive heading. This may have some artificial and seemingly counter-intuitive consequences (such as, for instance, making it possible for individuals to deserve heaven), but these consequences will not adversely impact the arguments, and the manoeuvre will have the virtue of streamlining the discussion. Moreover, since (as I mentioned just above) these distinctions have received little attention in contemporary hell debates, there is little risk of failing to make dialectical contact with widely held positions as a result of such a stipulation.

My final noteworthy assumption is that all the punishments in hell are roughly similar in badness (at least insofar as happenings there are out of the control of the denizens of hell). In keeping with much of the force of tradition (especially in recent times), I assume that there are no degrees of punishment in hell.<sup>14</sup>

Incidentally, one could formulate a purer version of SCT that substituted a non-retributivism thesis for the limited-retributivism thesis; according to the non-retributivism thesis, God would not take into account any non-trivial retributive demands. This purer version is so pure, however, that virtually no-one holds it. The trouble comes when we reflect on two sorts of cases: (A) ones where people's character is affected by bad moral luck *unrelated* to their free choices, and (B) ones where people's character is affected by bad moral luck *related* to their free choices. (Examples of (A) would be cases where a morally deprived upbringing strongly encouraged the development of severely bad character. Examples of (B) would be cases where a right choice accidentally placed someone in circumstances where she was exposed to very destructive influences.)<sup>15</sup> If God is to remain fair, giving people the same opportunities to avoid consignment to hell, it is obviously problematic if some people begin their character development process in a spot that puts them far closer to the closed-downness threshold than others, or if some people are subject to bad natural luck along the way (which other people don't face) that frustrates progress toward virtue and contributes to the development of vice.

While there are other potential ways out of this problem, the most popular and straightforward is to allow for God to take account of disadvantages of these sorts, and (by extension) to pay attention to some retributive considerations (the praiseworthiness and blameworthiness of one's actions, which is relative to the cards one is dealt). Hence, this provides the motivation for the limited-retributivism thesis and elucidates the specific circumstances where it allows for retributive considerations to be taken into account: the circumstances are ones where this sort of moral luck is at issue.<sup>16</sup> (For example, God could institute a set-up where there is some sort of artificial 'levelling' of psychological profiles, based on retributive considerations accruing up through a specified point and cancelling the influence of moral luck. God would then allow people to develop their characters from this point, perhaps very occasionally re-intervening to correct for subsequent moral luck. Presumably, this levelling would take place in some post-mortem probationary state or just before death, since it plainly doesn't take place during regular earthly life.)

### **Character and action**

Now that preliminary matters are in order, it's time to look at the issue for SCT. To do so, we must examine a kind of case which has not received any attention in the literature heretofore,<sup>17</sup> and which presents serious difficulties for views that look anything like standard versions of SCT (provided they hold that some people do, in fact, wind up in hell). At issue are situations where a person's right choices (in both a subjective and objective sense) lead organically to the development of vice, or where a person's wrong choices lead organically to the development of virtue (or stop a vice from developing). (Hereafter, I will call these 'organic problem cases'.)

What do I mean by 'organically' here? It is difficult to offer a precise definition, but the idea is that the development is naturally fitting; it doesn't rely on some unusual or artificial turn of events (based on, e.g., abnormal free choices by other individuals or out of the ordinary natural happenings). These cases are a serious problem for SCT because, once they are appreciated, it can be seen that they are both quite common and raise the need for potentially much more difficult and complicated interventions by God in the developmental process. They consist essentially of situations where the performance of a morally right action leads uniformly and organically to the development of a vice or impedes the development of a virtue (or, again, the same going the other way). (It is important to bear in mind that they are common in the sense that organic processes like this really occur, and are not rare. That they ever lead to closed-downness is much more controversial, and an issue that will be dealt with subsequently.) Here are some examples.

Consider Ernie. Ernie fights in a just war, and his service is exemplary. He is courageous and always fights according to *jus in bello* conditions (by, for example, always taking great care around non-combatants). However, in the course of his service, he must kill on many occasions. As a result, he grows harsh, cruel, and unempathetic in his personality, and when he is discharged these qualities carry over to his civilian life. He eventually winds up closed-down as a result of not engaging in extremely disciplined willing to counter this momentum.<sup>18</sup>

Or imagine Fannie. Fannie has a child who must be disciplined severely in order to grow up properly. Fannie recognizes the need for such discipline, but has difficulty summoning the energy to carry it out at first owing to her gentle nature. However, over time she grows accustomed to the habit of disciplining the child, and no longer has difficulty with it. At first, this makes her a more effective disciplinarian, but she begins to harden, grow angry, and lose compassion for those around her as a result. After years, it eventually leads to closed-downness when she fails to engage in extraordinarily disciplined willing to combat it once out of control.

To take a final fictional example, imagine Gerry. Gerry begins his adult life as a heartless and cold-blooded individual. He embarks on a life of petty crime, and one day decides to pull off an armed robbery. The robbery goes poorly and he shoots and kills someone, but is never caught. Gerry feels no remorse for the killing, but he finds the experience intrinsically unenjoyable, and moreover judges the sensation of always being nervous about his future fate (if he were to be caught) highly unpleasant. As a result, he finds himself less attracted to crime and resolves successfully to commit no more crimes. He dies many years later in an unrepentant, but mellowed and non-closed-down state.

Interestingly, C. S. Lewis himself unwittingly provides an autobiographical example of this sort of process. In the preface to his novel about demonic temptation of humans, *The Screwtape Letters*, he remarks that 'though it was easy to twist one's mind into the diabolical attitude [of writing the book] ... the strain produced a spiritual cramp ... it almost smothered me before I was done'.<sup>19</sup> Although presumably writing the book was a very good thing (because it provided people with much insight and enjoyment), and Lewis's decision to author it morally right, by his own admission the process impeded his moral and spiritual progress, and perhaps would have driven him into serious vice had he continued for longer.

At least part of the reason why organic problem cases are common is that our mechanisms for forming psychological habits are not nearly as sensitive to subtle circumstantial factors as are rightness and wrongness (a problem which manifests itself prominently in our worldly confines).<sup>20</sup> Not engaging in empathetic imagination, for example, may be perfectly morally appropriate in some situations but not in others. It seems that the same goes for much more dramatic things as well, like killing. Unfortunately, while not entirely crude, the

development and manifestation of habitual behaviour is often not sensitive to these cues. While this habitual behaviour (in a normal range) can be resisted with effort and hence people can often respond appropriately in spite of their situationally inappropriate habits, according to the psychological assumptions of SCT (in particular, the possibility thesis), when the habits reach a certain threshold of intensity there is no longer any hope of resistance.

How is this relevant for SCT? Prior to considering organic problem cases, the ways in which retributivist scruples needed to be introduced were relatively mild. God needed to do some levelling of dispositions and character traits to erase the influence of moral luck, but the task at hand was fairly straightforward. There was still plenty of room for God to preserve the organic, largely non-retributive feel of SCT. But with these cases, the task becomes much messier. Now, God can't simply abstract the organic character development (arising as a result of the natural consequences of free choices) away from the moral luck, and create a situation where only the organic character development is ultimately reflected in an individual's real character. Now, organic character development is itself part of the problem; if God is to remain anything like fair, He will need to abstract away from not just those situational aspects that are unrelated to free choice, or which represent out of the ordinary disturbances to the consequences of free choice, but those aspects which are at the very heart of the character development process that SCT holds so dear.

What will the adjustments have to look like? It seems as though God will have to stipulate appropriate character development outcomes where the organic problem cases are at issue, and artificially impose them on agents' ultimate characters. In many cases, these will bear little or no resemblance to the natural development that we would expect. So, for example, when someone does something right that pushes her character in the direction of vice, God will have to decide how much the action should be 'worth' in character development, and then erase the progression toward vice produced and substitute for it the appropriate progression toward virtue.

How will God make these decisions? It seems like the only feasible way may be to pay attention to something like retributive considerations: of the merit or demerit of the action involved (recalling our earlier stipulation that response to grace is classified under this heading). But if we go down this road, the whole SCT framework becomes a farce. Virtually all of the organic feel that supposedly made SCT attractive in the first place is gone, replaced by a superficial non-retributive façade on a retributive edifice.<sup>21</sup>

### **Concluding reflections**

Now that we have seen the problems for standard SCT views, it is a bit easier to diagnose the source of the difficulties. Because SCT defenders have often



been pulled by both non-retributive aesthetic motives (including appreciation for organic fit of character and respect for the natural consequences of free choices) and an intuitive expectation that God will be fair, their views have experienced serious tension. This is because fairness is implicitly parasitic on retributive considerations (at least in the wide sense of 'retributive' we are employing); it involves comparing different people based on whether they receive their just deserts. Thus, SCT defenders have tried to privilege desiderata that are purely non-retributive, while at the same time trying to privilege desiderata that are purely retributive! Such a view depends on faith in a kind of coincidence that our world doesn't appear to contain, at least in enough abundance to do the work SCT wants it to do.

While I do not have space to explore in detail how the SCT defender should respond at this point, it is worth briefly outlining some possibilities. The most straightforward response would be to attack the problem directly, by denying that there are any actual cases of closed-downness relevantly similar to the fictional Ernie and Fannie examples (and denying that closed-downness is ever prevented by wrong actions, in the way suggested by the Gerry example).<sup>22</sup> We could imagine a defender of SCT alleging that the kinds of processes in the Ernie and Fannie examples are too limited to make a person approach real closed-downness; real closed-downness may require development of deeper and less isolated vices which are not just at the level of first-order desires, but which infuse the person's character more thoroughly and insidiously.<sup>23</sup>

The trouble with this approach is that the history of Christianity has emphasized that single vices of the sorts discussed can represent a person's downfall. Consequently, SCT will want to follow this suggestion insofar as it aims to be non-revisionary. And as is well known, first-order desires can put significant conformity pressures on moral beliefs and higher-order desires, so a person could easily descend into thorough vice as a result of a process that begins with the deterioration of a first-order desire (like, e.g., the desire to treat others kindly), where the process snowballs out of control as a result of a failure to engage in disciplined willing. (If the unfortunate psychological tendency that opened the door to deterioration in the first place was not faced by other individuals and was caused organically by previous right choices, we are back to the problem we started with.)

Another potential response is to jettison one of the background assumptions of SCT articulated earlier; probably the most likely one to go would be assumption that God is fair in His dealings with human beings, at least where consignment to hell is concerned. This would fly in the face of much of the momentum of recent debate on hell and would require answers to the pro-fairness arguments sketched earlier, but it would certainly not be unprecedented in the history of philosophical theology.

Also on the table, of course, is the option of affirming all the various theses constitutive of SCT along with the background assumptions, while denying that, in fact, anyone goes to hell.<sup>24</sup> (Although I have basically assumed throughout that SCT is committed to the claim that hell is populated by at least some people, that claim is not entailed by the official formulation of SCT above.) This way out does risk serious inelegance, however, since it would have the consequence that in some not too distant possible worlds (worlds where humans do things that are psychologically possible for them, relative to the actual world), people do wind up in hell, even if everyone in the actual world manages to avoid it. Presumably in some of these possible worlds, organic problem cases like the ones outlined above occur, and so we will again be left to deal with the resulting issues. This might be a tolerable bullet to bite, but a potentially bigger problem is that it is somewhat hard to believe that it is psychologically possible for humans to become closed-down, but that the billions of actual humans who have lived, are living, and will live in the future all manage to avoid closed-downness. But this response may nevertheless be worth investigating in spite of its problems.

Yet another option is obviously to give up on SCT and embrace one of the alternative theories: perhaps the most notable are classical retributivism and escapism, though there are certainly others. Or, of course, if the problems with these alternative views are substantial enough, one could simply bite the bullet and hold on to SCT despite its issues. (This, of course, could tie in with a denial of something like the fairness assumption.)

Obviously, the questions here are large and systematic, potentially spanning the disciplines of philosophical theology, scriptural scholarship, and church history. In a short paper such as this one, it would be foolhardy for me to try to adjudicate the further debates that arise. I will rest content at having raised a problem for SCT that must be confronted and dealt with.<sup>25</sup>

## Notes

1. Richard Swinburne 'A theodicy of heaven and hell', in Alfred J. Freddoso (ed.) *The Existence and Nature of God* (South Bend IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), 48–49. For another good statement of the basic gist of SCT, see Michael Murray 'Heaven and hell', in *idem* (ed.) *Reason For the Hope Within* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 295–296.
2. See Jonathan Kvanvig *The Problem of Hell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Jerry Walls *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1992); and C. S. Lewis *The Problem of Pain* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1940). According to Charles Seymour, even Plato's conception of the negative afterlife seems to be of this form! See Charles Seymour *A Theodicy of Hell* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), 19. (It should be said that, in some moods, Walls presents his view in a way that makes it sound considerably different from the SCT paradigm. This is because he posits something he calls 'optimal grace', which involves quite a bit more interference by God in the natural trajectory of character development than canonical versions of SCT will allow. Consequently, my arguments here will only apply to Walls insofar as he eliminates or heavily constrains the role of optimal grace. I think there are difficulties reconciling the notion of optimal grace with any sort of minimally orthodox picture of Christianity anyway, as the sort of widespread interference it involves is considerably more intrusive

than anything that has been taken seriously in mainstream Christian tradition or which is suggested by the New Testament, at least according to standard readings.)

3. What might these trivial and irrelevant ways be? If, for instance, someone has suffered unjustly on earth at the hands of a human tormenter, God may owe this person compensation for his suffering in the form of some finite period of enjoyment in the afterlife.
4. There may, of course, not be any retributive demands of justice. In fact, denying that there are any may be the best way to make sense of the most extreme outcome compatible with the limited-retributivism thesis, where retributive considerations play no role in assignment of afterlife outcomes.
5. In an effort to be fair to the diversity of views under the SCT heading, I don't wish to take a stand on whether this process of arriving at closed-downness could be completed by the time of natural death. Some proponents of SCT have clearly intended to claim that it could be, others to claim that it could not, and others to remain agnostic.
6. It may not be more enjoyable for a person who winds up in hell to wind up elsewhere, however, owing to the individual's character. (Such an individual might find heaven extremely boring or downright psychologically painful, for instance.) I only mean the badness thesis to imply that, all things considered, an individual's experiences are far less enjoyable overall in hell than they would be elsewhere (if the person had developed a different character perhaps). I also do not take a stand here on whether hell would involve both what have traditionally been called 'pains of sense' and 'pains of loss', or rather only 'pains of loss'. (I take it that no-one claims that hell contains merely 'pains of sense'.)
7. I ignore here the issue of how value could be meaningfully predicated of something which no longer exists. There is a history of making much bolder claims: that, e.g., value can be meaningfully predicated of the life of someone who never existed; see, e.g., Robert Adams 'Must God create the best?', *Philosophical Review*, 81 (1972), 317–332, in particular, Adams's second condition on 320. Even Jesus makes a similar (albeit not exactly equivalent) kind of claim when he tells his disciples at the Last Supper that it would be better for his betrayer if he (i.e. the betrayer) had 'never been born'. I am grateful to Dean Zimmerman for first making me aware of this issue with the Last Supper.
8. Crucially, also, the fairness that God displays is a fairness based on matters that are under the ultimate control of the agent – with moral luck abstracted away. This makes the fairness God displays considerably purer than the sort we humans would be expected to show in (e.g.) criminal punishment, where our limitations of knowledge and prediction, as well as legitimate concern for things like deterrence and protection, could limit the importance of fairness and our very ability to display it.
9. See also 1 Timothy, 2.3–4.
10. See Murray 'Heaven and hell'. Incidentally, such a view already enjoys considerable popularity within apostolic Christianity, especially Catholicism.
11. In Ted Sider 'Hell and vagueness', *Faith and Philosophy*, 19 (2002), 58–68.
12. See Kvanvig *The Problem of Hell*; Walls *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (especially 81 and 89–95); and Seymour A *Theodicy of Hell*. See also A. Buckareff & A. Plug 'Escaping hell: divine motivation and the problem of hell', *Religious Studies*, 41 (2005), 39–54. It may be that Swinburne rejects the assumption, since he seems sympathetic to the idea that God would allow people to at least partially control the salvation opportunities of others, based on consequences of their free choices; see Richard Swinburne *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 176.
13. I call these 'quasi-retributive' because they are obviously analogous to retributive considerations in important ways.
14. There are a number of other subtle assumptions that must be made, but they tend to be straightforward and uncontroversial. I omit discussion of them because of spatial constraints.
15. Examples of discussion of these sorts of cases are in Walls *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*, 86, and in C. S. Lewis *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 85 and 178.
16. See, for example, the discussions in Lewis *Mere Christianity*, 84–87 and 177–180, and in Walls *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*, 88. For some related points, see also Linda Zagzebski 'Religious luck', *Faith and Philosophy*, 11 (1994), 397–413.
17. At least in the literature on hell. Related issues have recently received some treatment in the literature on moral responsibility. See, for instance, Manuel Vargas 'The trouble with tracing', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 29 (2005), 269–291.
18. For a fascinating discussion of the psychological consequences of killing in war, see Dave Grossman *On Killing* (Boston MA: Little Brown, 1995). For those unsympathetic to the idea that there could be

(or at least have been) just wars, one could construct similar examples (albeit less dramatic ones) for difficult police work.

19. C. S. Lewis *The Screwtape Letters* (London: Centenary Press, 1942), xiii–xiv.
20. Another important part of the ultimate story about character development is that some actions do not incline one toward habits to repeat the actions in question; in fact, they may incline one in the opposite direction (as illustrated by the Gerry case).
21. Obviously, the precise level of commonness of these sorts of cases will play a large role in fixing just how superficial the façade is. Unfortunately, getting to the bottom of this is a tedious and difficult project which I can't enter into here; I will have to let my examples and the reader's imagination in extrapolating from them stand on their own as a guide.
22. A related response would be to claim that real life parallels to these cases are so rare that they call only for very occasional artificial interventions by God. These interventions would be so infrequent as to be virtually inconsequential in the grand scheme of things.
23. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this journal for pressing me to engage with such a worry.
24. The view that hell is empty will wind up entailing universalism if we suppose that heaven and hell are the only possible ultimate afterlife outcomes.
25. I am very grateful to Joe Lombardi, Betsy Linehan, and anonymous reviewers for the journal for their comments on previous drafts of this paper. Thanks also to David Manley and Vishnu Flores for extremely helpful discussions.