

# Heaven and hell

Jeff Speaks  
April 17, 2014

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Sider's paradox of heaven and hell.....               | 1 |
| 2. Responses to the paradox .....                        | 2 |
| 2.1. The Catholic view of hell                           |   |
| 2.2. God decides based on faith, not works               |   |
| 2.3. In-between cases go to Purgatory                    |   |
| 2.4. Deny Proportionality                                |   |
| 2.5. The idea that people only ever go to hell by choice |   |

## 1. SIDER'S PARADOX OF HEAVEN AND HELL

Here is how the *Catechism* describes the Last Judgement:

1038. The resurrection of all the dead, "of both the just and the unjust," will precede the Last Judgment. This will be "the hour when all who are in the tombs will hear [the Son of man's] voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment." Then Christ will come "in his glory, and all the angels with him .... Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.... and they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Many other Christian denominations, and many other religions, say similar things. Sider's aim is to show that this picture is inconsistent with God's justice. He does this by, like Mackie, presenting a list of claims, all of which seem plausible from a theist perspective, but which cannot all be true.

These are as follows:

*Dichotomy:* there are exactly two states in the afterlife, heaven and hell.

*Badness:* people in hell are very, very much worse off than people in heaven.

*Non-universality:* some people go to heaven, and some to hell.

*Divine control:* it is up to God who goes to heaven and who goes to hell.

*Proportionality:* justice is proportional, in the sense that it "prohibits very unequal treatment of persons who are very similar in relevant respects."

*Justice:* God's judgement about who goes to heaven & hell is just.

By Non-universality and Divine control, it follows that God decides that some people - call them group A - go to heaven and that some other people - group B - go to hell. By Badness, it follows that group A is much better off than group B. By Dichotomy, it follows that every human being is either in group A or group B. By Proportionality (given that the people in group A are much, much better off than the ones in group B), it follows that if God is just, there must be some way of dividing people into groups A and B which does not place people who are relevantly very similar into different groups. So by Justice, it follows that there must be some way of dividing people into groups A and B which does not place people who are relevantly very similar into different groups.

The problem, Sider thinks, is that there is no such way of dividing up the population of people; however we decide to divide up people into Groups A and B, we're going to end up putting relevantly very similar people into different groups. If Sider is right, and if the informal argument just given is valid, it follows that one of the six theses with which we began must be false. But it is very hard to see, from the point of view of standard forms of Christianity, at least, how any of these theses could be false.

One can respond to Sider in one of two ways: (1) by finding some way of dividing people into groups A and B which does not place relevantly similar people into different groups; or (2) by rejecting one of the assumptions which gives rise to the paradox.

## 2. RESPONSES TO THE PARADOX

### 2.1. *The Catholic view of hell*

The Catholic view of hell is reasonably straightforward:

1033 .... To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. ....

Mortal sin is defined as follows:

1857 For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent."

Does this view avoid Sider's problem?

### 2.2. *God decides based on faith, not works*

### 2.3. *In-between cases go to Purgatory*

Two different views of Purgatory: one on which everyone in Purgatory eventually goes to heaven, and one on which this is not the case.

#### 2.4. *Deny Proportionality*

Sider considers the possibility that we might deny Proportionality. There are cases in ordinary life which might seem to be counterexamples to Proportionality, and these are cases in which one's options are constrained in such a way as to make conformity to Proportionality difficult or impossible. Here's one example:

Tired of general laziness among the undergraduate student body, Notre Dame's administration has decided to weed out the good students from the bad by eliminating every grade between A- and D. So, henceforth, every student in every class will get an A or an F.

Does this give us a good model for the case of heaven and hell?

Sider considers the possibility that we might deny Proportionality based on

**For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the market-place doing nothing. He told them, "You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right. So they went. He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?" "Because no one has hired us," they answered. He said to them, "You also go and work in my vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first." The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. "These men who were hired last worked only one hour," they said, "and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day." But he answered one of them, "Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" (Matthew 20: 1-15 (NIV)).**

Does the landowner violate Proportionality?

Is the landowner in the parable unjust for giving those who worked much less the same reward as those who worked much more?

The landowner seems to defend his action by saying that he was not unjust to the people who worked all day - for they got what they were promised - and was simply generous to those who worked less. But, the landowner seems to think, being generous to some but not all is not the same as being unjust to some; generosity to A but not B need not imply injustice done to B.

Is the landowner right about this? How might the landowner's view be adopted to the case of heaven & hell? Would it change the story if the people to whom the landowner was not selectively generous were suffering, rather than simply recipients of a promised wage?

And would it matter if there was no bound on the amount of money which the landowner had to disburse to workers?

### *2.5. The idea that people only ever go to hell by choice*

A popular presentation of this view of the afterlife is given in C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*:

“There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. Those who knock it is opened.”

Is this plausible? Would it help?