

The Puzzle of Hell Solved

One problem for Christians is how to make belief in Hell, eternal torture for sinners, consistent with belief in a benevolent and all powerful God. A possible solution is to deny that Christian doctrine requires the existence of Hell. Observing an argument over that question, one based on interpretations of the text of scripture, it occurred to me that there is a simpler solution to the problem of making scriptural references to Hell consistent with a benevolent God, a solution that should be obvious to an economist if not to a theologian.

The belief in Hell is useful as an incentive not to sin. Once a sinner has died, torturing him serves no useful purpose, so there is no reason for a benevolent God to go through with it. If it is still possible for the sinner to reform and be saved he should be given another chance, as portrayed by C.S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce*. If he is a hopeless case, he can be painlessly removed from existence.

The obvious explanation of the available evidence, the explanation consistent with both the text and divine benevolence, is that scriptural references to Hell are a strategic lie. I do not know if there is evidence in scripture that God sometimes lies, but I do not see how there could be evidence that he never does.