Heaven and Homicide

Simon Cushing

"Don't feel sorry for Grandpa: he's in a better place." Thus it is that heaven is used to take away the sting of death. But what are the moral implications of taking this seriously? In a nutshell, this chapter makes the following points. If universalism is true (that is, universal salvation: everybody who dies will make it to heaven) then it is not only the case that killing someone does not harm her, but more strongly, killing someone *benefits* her by cutting short the time she spends in an imperfect world that could be better spent in paradise. However, lest this be seen simply as an argument against universalism, according to the non-universalist doctrines that individuals can be damned by their sins, but that babies who die before sinning are heaven-bound, we have a strong altruistic reason (and plausibly a moral duty) to kill babies to save them from the worst possible fate of an infinity of suffering. So, if anything, the non-universalistic view is in a worse state than universalism, in that it presents early death as far better for the victim than continued life with the risk of damnation that will carry. Abortion, on this view, is a great good *precisely because* it stops a beating heart.[1]

It appears, then, that two of the most popular views of heaven imply that killing benefits the person killed to such an extent that one should feel a little bit selfish if one does *not* kill those whom one loves most. This, of course, is an abhorrent conclusion. I will consider possible responses and show that it is a conclusion that is, however, surprisingly difficult to rebut.

The Epicurean challenge

Most of us do not want to die. Even those whose lives are looked on with pity and horror by others typically seem attached to them. A desire not to continue one's life is perhaps the worst indictment imaginable of its specificities. Skeptics believe that it is precisely this almost universal human aversion to death that is behind the idea of an afterlife; that the notion of heaven in particular is a product of wishful thinking. In the history of philosophy, however, there is an alternate salve for the mind troubled by mortality: the Epicurean argument that one's death cannot harm one. In essence, Epicurus argued that my death cannot harm me because I won't be around.[2] That is, one can only be harmed when one exists, and after my death (just as much as before my inception) there is nothing that can be the subject of harm. A corollary of this argument is that one is not worse off ceasing to exist than one would be existing for all eternity in paradise, any more than I am now better off than the child who was not conceived because the sperm contributing half of my chromosomes got to my mother's egg first.

This sanguine view of one's own extinction has met a critical response over the years, as one might imagine. Certainly a defender of mainstream Abrahamic views about the value to individuals (and cosmological importance) of heaven needs to rebut the Epicurean position.

The standard contemporary response to Epicurus' view has been that, even if one does not *experience* harm when one does not exist, one is nonetheless harmed by being *deprived* of experiences that one *would* have had, had one continued to exist.[3]

The Epicurean challenge is that nothing can be better or worse for a non-existent being. If I don't exist, I'm not getting less or more of anything and thus cannot suffer because of my death or benefit because of heaven. In response, contemporary anti-Epicureans like Fred Feldman and Harry Silverstein argue that we should think instead in terms of a "life-to-life" comparison.[4] To demonstrate that an early death harms one who suffers it, we compare her actual short life (which we can roughly evaluate in terms of units of happiness experienced) with the long life she would have had (and, in some close possible world, actually does have[5]) and we conclude that "more is better."[6]

This view, while it is not without its own problems, has clear intuitive advantages over Epicurus's view. First, it allows that death can, and usually does, harm the one who dies. Second, it allows that there can be better and worse deaths, depending on how much life, and of what quality, one would have had had one not met one's end. The extent to which one's death harms one can be judged by comparing possible worlds. If I die very old and decrepit then it is unlikely that there will be a very close possible world in which both my life continues any great further length and that extra life is one that I experience as a net benefit. (Indeed, it is quite likely that there are close possible worlds where my life continues but is full of suffering, and thus my total life in the actual world ends up being better than the one in which my life is prolonged.) However, if I am struck down in my prime, it is much more likely that there will be close possible worlds where I (or my counterpart, depending on your view of possible worlds) continues to live for many largely pleasurable years.

This approach is a sort of cost-benefit analysis of different possible modes of existence. However, introducing the possibility of heaven into the equation unbalances

everything, just as it does in Pascal's wager. There simply is no comparison between an infinity of bliss and any possible finite existence. To complicate matters further, there are at least two possible infinities involved in heavenly existence. The first (quantitative infinity) is the length of time one spends there. This means that even if each moment was only blissful to a finite degree, one would still eventually experience infinite bliss. But there is a second possible infinity, which is the bliss experienced at every moment (qualitative infinity). If every heavenly moment is infinitely rapturous, then every moment spent on earth is, according to the reasoning of the deprivation approach, a *harm* to the earthling. Everything is relative: according to the anti-Epicurean, one is harmed by death because one *could have had more life*, which means that one is harmed by moments spent on earth because one *could* have had infinitely blissful moments in heaven.

Even if one does not experience a qualitative infinity of pleasure (or something more pure than pleasure, as communion with God might be thought to be) in every heavenly moment, at the very least each moment is heaven is *much, much* better for one than a moment spent on earth. And if universalism is true, then there is no risk of hell involved in death. Thus we can only conclude that we are greatly benefiting those we kill, and perhaps benefiting them infinitely. This is, to say the least, an alarming conclusion. What can be said to rebut it?

Thou Shalt Not Kill

It could be argued that whether or not killing benefits the victim is beside the point. God forbids us to kill, and that should be enough.[7] However, this response is too

simplistic. It has long been acknowledged that certain forms of killing are allowed, no matter what the apparent blanket condemnation of the commandment against it. Killing in self-defense and killing in a just war are acceptable even to most Catholics. Many self-described conservative Christians also support the death penalty.[8] Other believers when faced with the excruciating suffering of loved ones also support euthanasia.

Furthermore, if we are thinking of the Bible as the source of this prohibition on killing, then we are forced to admit that we do not honor many other prohibitions contained therein, such as the commandments in *Leviticus* against eating shellfish, wearing shirts woven of two fabrics or sowing two different kinds of seeds in the same furrow.[9] Modern interpreters of ancient religious texts almost universally justify ignoring a great number of the rules because they can offer reasons why they should not apply.

So, that being said, how could one argue that the commandment against killing does not prohibit killing for the purpose of hurrying the deceased to heaven? Well, one approach would be to propose that if "death" on Earth is simply a means of entering heaven, then it is not really the kind of death that the commandment was meant to cover. This could go two possible ways: one could argue that the commandment is based on a misconception about death, not as a portal to paradise but as annihilation.[10] But (this argument goes) now we know universalism is true, we know that killing is not wrong: why would a loving God force a human to endure the indignities of Earth if heaven awaits us all? Alternatively, one could argue that perhaps in the past it was possible to annihilate people, and this is what is prohibited, whereas today (perhaps because of the crucifixion, if one is Christian) death is no longer the end. While these arguments might sound a little specious, bear in mind that many interpreters now argue that a better

translation of the commandment in question is "thou shalt not *murder*" because the Hebrew verb in question (חצר) has a wider range of meanings that are generally associated with *destruction*, whereas the killing we have in mind is premised on the idea that the so-called victim survives it, and indeed thrives as a result.

Finally, even if the Bible's injunction really does prohibit the kind of killing that sends its so-called-victim straight to heaven, this need not prevent us violating that rule for the good of the person we wish to usher into Elysium. If universalism is true, what's the cost in disobeying God? God forgives all and welcomes all into heaven on this view, so violating a rule in the Bible, especially for the most altruistic of reasons, has no downside.

Autonomy vs. Paternalism

Even if we allow that killing someone is certain to make them better off, one could still object that this is not the killer's decision to make. This is an extreme form of paternalism and a violation of the autonomy of the person killed. Ethicists as diverse as Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill[11] have argued that paternalism is morally impermissible.

Several things can be said in response to this attempt to render altruistic killing untenable. First, certain paternalistic acts meet with almost universal approval. If I see you about to step out into traffic, only an extreme libertarian would condemn me for preventing you. This is obviously so if you are unaware of the risk,[12] but most would take it to be true even if you intend to commit suicide.[13] Even supporters of assisted suicide

are very cautious about the circumstances in which they approve of it: only those who can present level-headed rational reasons for why their life should end and/or are in obvious excruciating distress should be candidates.[14]

Furthermore, giving life-changing gifts is not seen as morally forbidden. If somebody anonymously donates $1M to a complete stranger, this is not taken to violate the recipient's autonomy, despite the huge disruption this would no doubt cause to her life (assuming she is not already obscenely wealthy). And isn't going to heaven the greatest gift possible? If in response the objection came that one can *refuse* or *give away* the $1M but once one is in heaven, one can't return, I would suggest that this betrays an ambivalence about heaven unbecoming to the true believer. Why would one ever wish to leave heaven once one had entered it? If such a thing were indeed possible then heaven is not as heavenly as we have been led to believe (and God would be entrapping all of the people who die of natural causes).

Finally, even if we were convinced that both that paternalism is so wrong that it renders impermissible dispatching autonomous agents to heaven, this prohibition would not cover at least two classes of killings. Paternalism is so named because it is acting towards an autonomous agent in a parent-like manner ill befitting his ability to decide for himself. If, however, the "victim" is an infant, then paternalism is not only not immoral, it is entirely appropriate. No parent is criticized for inoculating her child despite vocal objections, and the benefit of immunity to any disease is puny in comparison with the bounty of heaven. And, of course, one cannot use paternalism to argue against *suicide*, because one is deciding for *oneself*, which is the essence of autonomy. This can be extended to assisted suicide as well, so if one is careful to share the good news with

one's intended "victim," and one is particularly persuasive, that category could include a wide range of killings.[15]

Anti-Universalism

I said above that if universalism is right, then even if God does forbid us to kill, we can know that we will end up in heaven anyway, as will anybody killed.[16] There appears to be no possible downside to killing on this view, and conversely, minimal upside to living. But what if universalism is a mistaken view? Let us suppose that instead of universal salvation, both the following traditionally widely accepted principles apply:

Desert-based Postmortem Destination (DPS):

One's afterlife depends on one's earthly behavior, with Hell a possible destination for those who do wrong.[17]

Traditional Punishment model of Hell (PMH):

Hell is a place of eternal torment that one cannot escape.[18]

If these principles were true (and universalism false), what effect would this have on our calculus of killing? Well, for one thing, one would be taking a double risk in dispatching someone. First, one would be risking eternal damnation for oneself, particularly if violating the commandment against killing is enough to ensure for oneself

a fiery fate. But second, one would be taking the risk that the person one killed would also end up in hell. Perhaps that person is currently in a sinful state and hence hellbound, but that, had she not been killed, she would have performed some act or penance and redeemed herself, so that on dying at a later date she would be saved.

Certainly this possibility would both make killing much more costly for the killer and reduce the number of people that it would be beneficent to kill. But it does not mean that no killing is justified. Indeed, if hell is a *possible* destination for one's loved ones, then one is under a duty to do everything in one's power to ensure that they do not end up there. And one sure method is to kill them while they are definitely in a pure state. One could in fact say that taking the risk that they sin and then die accidentally when they are out of one's sight would be intolerably cavalier, because it would ensure for one's beloved an *eternity of the worst possible suffering*.

This raises the question of when one can know for sure that one's loved one is sin-free. Obviously this depends on the content of one's religion. If confession washes away sins, then immediately after confession would be a safe bet. But I suggest that the most certain way to ensure purity is if one's loved one is a child as yet unborn, or at the very least, a child that has not yet developed the ability to act intentionally (which is for most believers a requirement for sin[19]). Thus abortion would be an act done for the benefit of the one aborted, ensuring that they never even risk sin, and thus are guaranteed salvation.

Before addressing possible problems with the above suggestion, it must be noted that such measures would not ensure safety for the *killer*, who presumably sins by the act of killing. The killer might have either to hope that God in fact shares his consequentialist

reasoning and accepts altruistically motivated killing as the good deed it is intended to be, or that confession (followed immediately by suicide) can wipe away even the sin of killing one's loved ones. But suppose one will be consigned to hell if one kills one's loved ones, even if one knows for certain that by so doing one will ensure for them a place in Paradise. I suggest that in these circumstances, the altruistic killer who is intent on saving her children from the risk of hell at the cost of the certainty of her own damnation should be seen as heroic rather than contemptible. She is making the ultimate (*really* ultimate – much more than simply ceasing to exist) sacrifice for the infinite benefit of those she loves.

No heaven for the aborted?

So we are considering whether or not abortion is not just not immoral, but rather the best thing that one could do for one's child.[20] The above reasoning assumes the following principle:

Initial purity (IP):

One is (a) sinless and (b) heaven-bound from one's inception until one is old enough to perform an intentional sinful act.

But what if that's mistaken? One might believe, as many have through the ages that we carry original sin and that babies who die unbaptized will go to hell.[21] But I believe this

view has lost favor for good reason. We do not believe that children carry the sins of their parents and can justly be punished for wrongs they had no part in. And now we know that many fertilized eggs spontaneously abort,[22] we are aware of just how many children would be filling out the legions of the damned.

However, perhaps we could accept IP (a) but still deny IP (b) if there are afterlife alternatives beyond heaven and hell. And two at least have some theological respectability: limbo and purgatory.

Medieval Christian theologians argued that there was a *limbus infantium* ("limbo of the infants") just for children who die before being baptized, precisely because they die in original sin. However, there is no official Catholic doctrine on this matter, and in 2007 Pope Benedict XVI endorsed a document that concluded that this fate did not await the unbaptized.[23] One can see why: this limbo is a lesser circle of hell, and although it is thought of as free from torturous punishments (it may even involve a form of happiness), it denies its denizens the full beatific vision of God that those in Heaven receive, and the God that would consign guiltless babes to such a fate, with no possibility of exit, seems too callous to contemplate.

Purgatory is a more palatable destination, as it is traditionally a place where one can be purified and then exit heavenwards.[24] But then, if purgatory is a risk-free temporary stopping place where the infant can develop but not sin, the calculation that one should abort to save one's child the risk of hell still applies. So it seems that the afterlife alternatives have not added anything to the picture.

Earth necessary for soul-making

The calculation of the altruistic killer assumes that any time spent in heaven trumps any time spent on earth by a possibly infinite amount. But if that is so then it raises the more fundamental problem that earth itself seems to be pointless. Elsewhere[25] I have called this the problem of the Apparent Pointlessness of Earth (APE) and indeed, the issue of heaven providing a motivation for altruistic killing is just an instance of this more basic problem created by the existence of heaven. Why would a loving God have created earth at all if his creatures could instead have been placed directly in heaven?

One seemingly powerful answer to this question can be found in John Hick's idea that earth is a place for "soul-making".[26] This was put forward as a response to the problem of evil, the challenge of explaining how the existence of an all-powerful, all-good God, both able to prevent suffering and motivated to do so, is nonetheless consistent with the profusion of suffering we see around us.[27] Hick's response is essentially that souls worthy of heaven can only result from the experience of genuine moral dilemmas which themselves cannot exist in a perfect world. This theodicy provides a rationale for earth as a necessary proving ground to be ready for, and worthy of, heaven.[28]

This view raises many questions, however. If this earth is a proving ground, it seems like it is a vastly unequal one. Children can be born in such poverty that they have only evils to choose amongst, whereas the very wealthy can be protected from the possibility of serious sinning. And surely many fail the test. What happens to those who die without fully forming their souls? If they go to hell, then the inequality seems a

horrific injustice. If they go to purgatory to complete their training, then we have not provided an airtight justification for the existence of the earth, because its function can be performed by purgatory, which, presumably, is a place where one completes the job of soul-making infallibly. Hick himself was a universalist, which seems rather at odds with the soul-making project. It suggests either that one can live eternally in heaven with an incomplete soul or that one can finish making one's soul in heaven. If the former, then either some eternal heavenly existences are worse than others (an odd view of heaven) or that soul-making is redundant. If the latter, then again, why do we need the earth? Perhaps Hick can say that any amount of time on earth is enough: one just needs to face one true moral quandary in the face of possible evil to acquire the tools to complete soul-making in the afterlife, but that one dilemma is essential, and so by extension is the earth, the only venue that offers it. But this, of course, leaves those who die as young infants again languishing in limbo, which we have already dismissed as unacceptable. So Hick's "soul-making" view does not, in fact, offer a solution to APE. Besides the fact that it is never satisfactorily explained why humans have to go through the uncertain processes of making their souls rather than being created perfect (presumably God was always perfect, and he is the acme of existence), either the earth is not the only (or indeed the best) place for soul-making, or, again, the multitudes who died before getting the chance to make even one soul-making choice would be left to a fate unacceptable to a loving God.

Epistemological uncertainty

But what if there *is* no heaven? Even the most ardent of the faithful must have some nagging doubt, and perhaps that is enough to blunt any arguments in favor of hurrying on death as a passage to paradise. "We'll find out eventually, so what's the hurry?" There is also the possibility that, while we are right about there being both paradise and inferno, we are mistaken about the qualifications for each and as a result, about the destination of our putative victims. Surely this is sufficient disincentive to kill our loved ones. Well, I certainly hope so. But this is an odd argument for a true believer to give. It is an argument for passivity with essentially universal application. It is *possible* that God favors only devout followers of a tiny sect of snake handlers, and that unless you commit yourself completely to their strict and particular credo, you are guaranteed hellbound. Furthermore, it is not as if we can be precise about weighting the probabilities when it comes to eschatological matters, so we cannot say for certain that this is less likely than more widely-accepted possibilities. (Indeed, were we to do so, no minority religion would ever get off the ground.) Attempting to avoid committing to a particular vision of the divine in the hopes of covering our bets would lead us to paralysis, except for the possibility that that is what angers the true God the most.

"But this is a life and death matter! We're talking about taking lives, not about which day the Sabbath falls on or whether one should wear shoes in one's house of worship!" Again, this is a response that reveals an irresolution about one's faith. If one truly believes that death is not the end but is rather a gateway to the eternal life that is the entire point of one's existence, then death should hold no sting – quite the contrary. To view it otherwise is to betray one's inability to transcend one's earthbound viewpoint, and by extension, one's essential pettiness.

Subjective vs. Objective

It seems inarguable that time spent in heaven would be experienced by an individual as far more rewarding than time spent on earth. Indeed it seems likely that *any* time in heaven would be more rewarding than *a full lifetime* on earth. But perhaps that is not the only relevant concern. Perhaps one could argue that there is a non-subjective good that needs to be taken into account that is independent of any feelings or emotions experienced by God's creatures. To give an analogy: Christians argue that Jesus's crucifixion was a great good, despite the agony he is said to have experienced. Maybe, then, our painful existences on earth have a value that has nothing to do with those experiences, and that cannot be produced by a life solely spent in heaven. So, while we might *like* it better if we got to go straight to heaven without having to trudge through this vale of tears, what we like is not all that matters in the grand scheme of things.

As usual, there are several things to say in response to this suggestion. But the first is a question: exactly what might this objective good be, that has nothing to do with the experienced happiness of God's creatures? James Sennett suggests that time on an earth that allows evil is essential for the later-redeemed to have freedom in heaven.[29] Sennett's position has similarities with Hick's soul-making theodicy, which we have already dismissed, but ignoring the specific challenges faced by Sennett's or Hick's arguments, even though the rewards of earthly existence are not meted out in *happiness*, it is still that case that both arguments rest on the idea that the benefit of going through the experiences that earth offers is supposed to accrue *to the individual* who has those

experiences (and makes choices accordingly). But in this section we are working on the assumption that the benefit might never apply to those specific individuals, but instead are objective goods.

A possible candidate for such an objective good might be *the realization of justice*. Thus, for example, while it is a very bad thing for the denizens of hell that they are there, it is a good thing in that their punishment is achieving the objective goal of achieving justice in the universe. But besides the fact that no universalist could accept such an argument, this implies further that it is better that individuals exist, commit crimes, and suffer for it eternally than that they do not exist at all. And by extension, a universe that consists *simply* of earthly sinners and those in hell, with no redeemed, would also be better, simply because justice is served. If, on the other hand, adding individuals who do good and are rewarded for it to this picture makes it a better world, then it seems that justice as an objective goal with objective worth independently of the experience of those who experience it being meted on them can be outweighed by the good of placing people in a blissful eternal environment.

There is a deeper worry with this approach of severing the good achieved by one's stay on earth from any good experienced by any particular individual. If it indeed the case that an objective good can outweigh the experienced happiness of God's creatures, then how are we to know that heaven is pleasurable? Maybe communion with God is agonizing! Why not? If our happiness can be outweighed (in the way that this approach requires, to justify our earthly sufferings) then why can't it be *eternally* outweighed? Of course, knowing that heaven is agonizing would definitely do the job of discouraging altruistic killings, but at what cost to the overall appeal of religion?

Maybe the response to this worry is to say that, no, subjective experience cannot be *entirely* discounted, and that is why we will get our reward in the bliss that heaven will bring, but that, just as you cannot have your dessert until you have eaten your vegetables, heavenly bliss cannot be experienced without a prior earthly existence.

However, this move is again rife with flaws. Apart from the restrictions it places on God's omnipotence (in that it insists that God lacks the power to grant us the good of heaven without the lesser good of earth), it leaves unexplained any explanation for this restriction. And familiar candidates such as "you can't know what pleasure is until you've experienced pain" have familiar problems: what about the spontaneously aborted fetuses? Is their heavenly existence deprived of pleasure? Are humans better off than God (either the Father of Christianity or the God of Judaism or Islam) who has never experienced mortal suffering?

Recycling

In the foregoing I have mostly assumed IP, that is, that heaven is the default destination at our inception, so that tiny infants who die before they are capable of sin will automatically end up there. I rejected the idea that we are born in original sin for the reason that this would be horribly unfair for those infants who die of natural causes before they are capable of redeeming themselves. But suppose we reconsider rejecting IP, and instead of assuming that we are born pure and only sin through free actions, we are instead born impure and must redeem ourselves to be saved, but then we add to this forbidding picture the idea that those who die before being redeemed get a second

chance, perhaps by their souls being given different bodies. This would have the implication that the best that altruistic killing would do would be to send one's infant back to the starting line, so to speak. However, let us think about what this is saying to the grieving parents who have lost a child: your child is now someone else's child, and they get to raise that child, and possibly abuse him or her. If you are lucky, the child will eventually meet you in Paradise, but you will have to share them with the people who raised them, if they acknowledge you at all. Furthermore, this suggestion is certainly a novel one, with no basis in church teachings, and it might smack too much of Buddhist or Hindu notions of reincarnation for followers of the Abrahamic faiths to find acceptable. Certainly a more canon suggestion would be purgatory, but I have already addressed how that makes APE, if anything, worse.

Conclusion

My argument starts as a challenge for universalism. If heaven is as heavenly as it is supposed to be, then we are relatively harmed (perhaps infinitely) for every instant we spend here rather than in heaven, and if universalism is true, not committing suicide becomes essentially irrational. And further, not ushering our loved ones to the Promised Land shows at best self-indulgence and at worst negligence or even cruelty.

However, this problem for universalism should not be taken as an argument for more traditional views of the afterlife, where hell is also an option, and one's destination is determined by one's behavior on earth (DPS). For, as we have seen,

there is a possibly *greater* incentive to kill one's loved ones if one thinks one can save them from a hellish destination (PMH) by so doing.

Thus my initial challenge broadens to present a problem for both universalism and its most popular alternative. Both appear to imply that at least some (and possibly many) altruistic killings are justified. More fundamentally, the existence of heaven raises APE, which is structurally parallel to the problem of evil. Just as the existence of evil appears incompatible with the existence of a God who is both all-loving and all-powerful, the existence of earth seems incompatible with the co-existence of such a God and heaven. If indeed heaven is where we are supposed to be, and where we will spend an infinity of time, then not only is the time spent on earth comparatively unpleasant, and spent in comparatively unimportant pursuits, it is also effectively 0% of our existence, and thus for it to have such a massive influence over the rest of our lifespans (as it would if DPS is true) seems positively bizarre. So why have it at all? The only reason this question does not occur to more people is, presumably, that we are used to an earthly existence. But of course we are used to suffering, but that doesn't stop the existence of suffering prompting the problem of evil.

I conclude with what I take to be the best reason why we should not kill our loved ones to usher them into heaven: if there was a heaven, we wouldn't be here in the first place.[30]

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Notes

1. To advocate for abortion, on this view, would not be “pro-death,” it would be “pro-eternal-life.”

2. "Accustom yourself to believe that death is nothing to us, for good and evil imply awareness, and death is the privation of all awareness... Death…is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not. It is nothing, then, either to the living or to the dead, for with the living it is not and the dead exist no longer," Epicurus (341-270 BCE) Letter to Menoeceus, translated by Robert Drew Hicks, http://classics.mit.edu/Epicurus/menoec.html.
3. Some prominent examples are Nagel 1979, Silverstein 1980, and Feldman 1992. Harry Silverstein calls it "the standard argument" (Silverstein 1980, 404), while Fred Feldman calls it "the deprivation approach" (Feldman 1992, 236).
4. Silverstein 1980, 414, Feldman 1992, 153.
5. For those unfamiliar with the term, a "possible world" is like a parallel universe, conceivably identical in almost every way to this one. For more, see the introduction, especially note 17.
6. I elaborate on this debate in Cushing 2007.
7. The Ten Commandments, found in Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17, contain a commandment that has historically been translated as "Thou shalt not kill." For Jews, Anglicans and Orthodox Christians this is the 6th commandment, but Roman Catholics and Lutherans regard it as the 5th.
8. Indeed, the Old Testament/Pentateuch sets death as the penalty for many crimes: see Exodus 20, 22, Leviticus 18, 20 and 24, and Deuteronomy 22 for a small subset.
9. Leviticus 11:9-12, 19:19.

10. Verses that give this impression include Joshua 23:14, Job 7:9, Job 14:10-14, Job 20:7, Psalm 6:5, Psalm 29:13, Psalm 88:5, Psalm 115:17, Ecclesiastes 3:19, Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10, Isaiah 38:18.
11. "Neither one person, nor any number of persons, is warranted in saying to another human creature of ripe years, that he shall not do with his life for his own benefit what he chooses to do with it," Mill 1992, 84.
12. See Mill's example that a policeman preventing a person crossing an unsafe bridge is no violation of personal liberty (Mill 1992, 107).
13. I am aware that this might appear to count against me, as I am suggesting killing a person *for his own good*. But suffice to say that the assumption of the people paternalistically preventing people from suicide is that death is *not* in their best interests. What the altruistic heaven-believing killer and the altruistic suicide-preventer have in common is that they believe that, in infringing on the autonomy of the other individual they are acting in his best interests, and the benefit to him is enough to justify the interference.
14. See for example Oregon's Death with Dignity Act (ORS §§ 127.800 to 127.897), which stipulates that only adults who have been diagnosed with a terminal illness (incurable and irreversible) are eligible for a lethal prescription, and then only after meeting such stipulations as making two separate requests 15 days apart and having two separate physicians assess the patient (including judging that he is psychologically capable) and inform him of alternatives.
15. One could argue against suicide on the grounds of autonomy just as Mill argues against the freedom to sell oneself into slavery (Mill 1992, 113-14): to kill oneself is

to destroy one's autonomy. However, aside from the fact that this is a controversial stance, it also assumes that death means the end of autonomy. This would require either that death involved extinction, which of course we are denying, or that one is not autonomous in heaven. For a discussion of the possibility and nature of freedom in heaven, see chapters 10 and 11 in this volume. But at the very least, if we are *not* autonomous in heaven, then that would seem to call in question either the value of autonomy or the value of heaven.

16. For a defense of universalism, see the chapters by Rasmussen and Hereth in this volume. For arguments by believers in hell (albeit not of the fire-and-brimstone kind), see Holdier, Daly and Yang.
17. There are certainly strains of Christianity, for example, that reject this principle. Calvinism assumes that our post-mortem destinations are predestined. This, of course, raises its own set of problems that space does not permit me addressing here. Suffice to say that my argument does not apply to committed Calvinists. It might also be thought that I am siding with Catholics with this principle, in the whole "salvations by works/deeds" debate. (Of course the Bible appears ambiguous on this point: contrast Mark 16:16 with Psalm 62:12, for example.) However, I intend DPS to include all choices, and I include in this accepting Jesus as one's own personal savior, so DPS is neutral in that debate.
18. In chapters 6, 7 and 8 of this volume the authors defend different versions of hell that are, while not heavenly, at least not places of eternal torment. To the extent that they are still far worse for their inhabitants than heaven, I maintain that it would be

unfair if those who die before being able to make choices for themselves should be sent there automatically.

19. I consider the alternative, that one can be born in sin, in the next section.
20. I will assume for the sake of argument the view, common among Christians in the United States, at least, that the status of moral personhood (by which, in this context, I mean a being now exists who at death would be destined for an afterlife, perhaps because ensoulment has occurred) begins either at conception or very shortly thereafter (after the possibility of twinning has passed). For those who believe it begins later, simply translate everything I say about fetuses to talk of very young children.
21. Both St. Augustine (*On Merit and the Forgiveness of Sins, and the Baptism of Infants*, chapter 21: "Unbaptized Infants Damned, But Most Lightly" (!)) and St. Anselm agreed that unbaptized infants ended up in hell, albeit a hell that was milder than that for most.
22. Estimates of the number of conceptions that naturally fail to develop to maturity range from 40 to 65 percent.
23. "The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptized" (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_un-baptised-infants_en.html
24. See Walls 2015 for a more extensive discussion from a purgatory believer.
25. See chapter 10.
26. Hick takes inspiration from Irenaeus (130-202 CE), who provided an alternative to the Augustinian view of the fall of man: "Instead of the doctrine that man was

created finitely perfect and then incomprehensibly destroyed his own perfection and plunged into sin and misery, Irenaeus suggests that man was created as an imperfect, immature creature who was to undergo moral development and growth and finally be brought to the perfection intended for him by his Maker… Irenaeus sees our world of mingled good and evil as a divinely appointed environment for man's development towards the perfection that represents the fulfilment of God's good purpose for him," Hick 1978, 214-15.

27. For more on the problem of evil, see chapter 10.
28. "If we are right in supposing that God's purpose for man is to lead him from…the biological life of man, to…the personal life of eternal worth, which we see in Christ, then the question that we have to ask is…Is this the kind of world that God might make as an environment in which moral beings may be fashioned, through their own free insights and responses, into 'children of God'? Such critics as (the great skeptic philosopher David) Hume are confusing what heaven ought to be, as an environment for perfected finite beings, with what this world ought to be, as an environment for beings who are in the process of being perfected," Hick 1978, 257-8.
29. Sennett 1999. See chapter 10 for an exhaustive discussion.
30. Thanks to Jami Anderson for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.