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Some Problems of Heavenly Freedom

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Abstract: In this essay I identify four different problems of heavenly freedom; i.e., problems that arise for those who hold that the redeemed in heaven have free will. They are: the problem arising from God's own freedom, the problem of needing to praise the redeemed for not sinning in heaven, the problem of needing to affirm that the redeemed freely refrain from sinning, and the problem arising from a commitment to the free will defence. I explore how some of these problems vary depending on the notion of free will which is endorsed. And I suggest that because these differing problems arise from distinct theological and/or philosophical commitments, there is little reason to think that one and the same feature or property of an account of heavenly freedom will address them all.

Keywords: Free will, Heaven, Beatific vision, Moral responsibility, Salvation

1. Introduction

Central to the Christian idea of heaven is that the redeemed in heaven will be impeccable: that is, not only will the redeemed *not* sin in heaven, they will be *incapable* of sinning. This idea stands in at least prima facie tension with another thought that arguably belongs to the orthodox view, namely, that the redeemed in heaven possess free will. The tension arises from the plausible belief that free will requires being able to choose between good and evil. But if the redeemed are impeccable, they will be unable to choose evil and so would lack free will. As Kevin Timpe says, "if the redeemed are kept from sinning, their wills must be reined in, at least in some way. And if their wills are reined in, it doesn't seem right to say that they are free" (Timpe 2014, 84). Timpe calls this the *Problem of Heavenly Freedom* and says that it is the problem of reconciling the following two statements:

i. the redeemed in heaven have free will
ii. the redeemed in heaven are impeccable

The aim of this paper is to look more closely at this supposed problem of heavenly freedom. I will not be offering a solution to the problem; instead, I want to suggest that there are fact several *problems* of heavenly freedom. Indeed, the reconciliation of (i) and (ii) is, even on a choice–based account of free will (see

below), straightforward: imagine someone in heaven who periodically faces a choice between singing or playing the harp in the heavenly choir. Such a person has free will inasmuch as he or she has genuine choices to make and is impeccable inasmuch as neither option would be wrong to choose. Problem solved. Except of course, the problem isn't solved. And that's because what is discussed under the banner of 'the problem of heavenly freedom' arises from the perceived need to show that (i), (ii) *and some further theological and/or philosophical doctrine* are jointly compatible. The purpose of this paper is to map some of these problems and to highlight that, because they arise from different concerns, they might well require different solutions.

Throughout this paper I will assume that free will is the control required to be morally responsible. Some accounts of free will think that this control consists in having a choice about whether to perform a given action. I will call such accounts *choice–based accounts* and where necessary will distinguish between compatibilist and incompatibilist versions of the choice–based view. Other accounts do not think having a choice about some action is necessary for free will. I will call such views *non–choice–based accounts*. I will use 'heaven' to refer to the ultimate destiny of the redeemed whatever form it may take; and I use 'beatific vision' to refer to that aspect of heavenly existence in which the redeemed will "see [God] face to face" (1 Cor 13:12; cf. 1 John 3:2). The hope is to remain as neutral as possible on these issues; I'll aim to highlight places where more substantial assumptions are made.

2. The problem arising from God's own freedom

Consider the following argument:

1. God is free.
2. Freedom is a communicable attribute of God.
3. In heaven the redeemed will be perfected.
4. The perfection of the redeemed involves having each communicable attribute.
5. Therefore, in heaven the redeemed will be free.

I take it that while this argument is valid, its soundness could be questioned by suggesting that (3) needs disambiguating (perhaps the redeemed need only be *morally* perfect, which might not require being free) or by challenging (4) (maybe a person could be perfected without having *each* communicable attribute, as long as he or she had some subset thereof). But let's suppose it is sound. It establishes that the redeemed are free and it explains why. Whether it generates a *problem* of heaven freedom depends on the notion of freedom it employs.

Suppose one takes God to have *choice–based freedom*. Choice–based freedom is the freedom that comes from having a choice about some matter. The proponent of such a view will likely think that God had a choice not only concerning *which* world to create, but also about *whether* to create a world at all. The choice–theorist will think that each of these options was good, such that none were precluded by God's

inability to sin, which is just to affirm that God faced a genuine choice. I take it that a good case can be made for thinking that such a choice is significant and valuable: it's certainly significant for those God chose to create![1]

How could it be that a human being in heaven only ever faces choices with good options? One straightforward answer appeals to the experience of the beatific vision. Arguably, experiencing the beatific vision entails one is perfected in a way that means any further sinning impossible, thus securing impeccability. This might be because experiencing the beatific vision itself results in such perfection, or because it is impossible that one face any bad options while experiencing the beatific vision and (for some other reason, e.g., God's providence) also impossible to lose the beatific vision once obtained, or because one must be made perfect in order to have the experience in the first place (this idea is discussed in the following section). The first two options are not without their problems: to the degree that one leans on the experience of the beatific vision to explain a person's impeccability, it might seem that the person could not be praised for any actions performed as a result of it (because the person is not in control of the experience in the relevant way). The third option has different problems (discussed in the next section). Here, I want to simply assume that the choice–theorist has an account of impeccability available. Given that assumption, we can raise the following objection to a choice–based view of heavenly free will: if the redeemed have this kind of freedom—i.e. if their freedom consists in having choices between two or more good options—it would *not* be very valuable. The redeemed, it might be suggested, could only face choices between things like whether to sing or play the harp in the heavenly choir[2] and this, the objector might urge, is not a very valuable kind of choice. In other words, on this view of freedom, it might be thought easier to see how God has a significant, worthwhile choice than it is to see how the choices of the redeemed could be significant and worthwhile. God and the redeemed possess the same kind of choice–based freedom, but because the content of the choices would differ in each case, due to the nature of the beings in question, God's choices are significant whereas the choices of the redeemed appear not to be.

This problem of heavenly freedom arises, therefore, from the additional assumption that the free will possessed must be valuable in some way. And the challenge for the choice–theorist is to show how this could be so. Ironically, discussion of this first problem is hampered by another problem of heavenly freedom, or rather, a problem with *the discussion of* heavenly freedom. Alvin Plantinga, when presenting his famous free will defence, defined a 'morally significant' action as one which it "would be wrong for [a person] to perform ... then, but right to refrain [from], or vice versa" (Plantinga 1978, 166). He then said that a person is 'significantly free' on a given occasion "if he is then free with respect to an action that is morally significant for him" (Plantinga 1978, 166). Plantinga's notion of

[1] See my (2016) for a partial defence of this understanding of divine freedom.

[2] This example comes from Pawl and Timpe (2009, 408).

significant freedom made its way into the discussions of heavenly freedom when it was argued that there is a tension between endorsing the free will defence as a (partial) solution to the problem of evil and endorsing the idea that the inhabitants of heaven are free. This tension will be the fourth problem of heavenly freedom to be discussed (in section 5); for our present purposes, the point is this: Plantinga, writing as he was about the free will defence, was concerned to outline a notion of free will which involved the ability to do evil. He labelled this 'significant freedom' and the label stuck (See, e.g., Pawl and Timpe (2009, 407, 413); Matheson (2017, 3)). But this use of 'significant' is a technical use and should not be taken to imply that only 'significant freedom' (in Plantinga's sense) is significant (in the ordinary sense of that word). Thus, when we ask, as I did above, whether the choices of the redeemed (which only involve good options) are significant, we are not guilty of a conceptual confusion, but are simply using the term with its ordinary meaning. Of course, one way of making progress on this problem will be to get clear on the kind of significance or value which it is alleged that heavenly choices lack, and that may well involve defining technical terms. But we should not slip uncritically into accepting a demand that heavenly free will be significant in Plantinga's sense without first asking ourselves whether that demand is legitimate. Moreover, because this problem involves assessing the value of different kinds of choice it is very different in character to the problems discussed in sections 3 and 4 below, which are more squarely to do with the concepts of free will and moral responsibility.

How serious is this "lack of value" problem for choice–based accounts of heavenly freedom? That will depend in part on the finer details of the conception of choice offered by the choice–theorist, as well as on the wider account of heavenly existence. W. S. Anglin, for example, speculates that it might be possible to forget things in heaven (1991, Ch 7, sect 7). If this is so, then even a conception of choice which resulted in relatively few choices being available might bestow a freedom worth having because those choices might be made over and over. Another line of response open to the choice–theorist would be to conceive of action in a way that allows us to think of an agent having a choice, not just about *what* to do, but about *how* to do it. Thus, even after the redeemed agent has, say, decided to play the harp rather than sing, that agent might then be able to decide just how to play the harp—a bit of improvisation here, a touch of emphasis there, and so on. What these strategies have in common is that they try to increase the number of choices available to the redeemed. A different but complementary strategy is to argue that the redeemed will face at least some choices that are morally valuable or important, even though they will not involve choosing between good and bad options. Pawl and Timpe (2009; 2013) pursue this strategy. Steven Cowan (2011) has criticised their view, while Christopher Brown (2015) has attempted to expand on it.

Suppose now that we take God to have *non–choice–based freedom*. On such accounts, freedom is not identified with the having of a choice. Instead, and depending on the account endorsed, it might be associated with being able to do what one wants to do, having one's lower–order desires aligned with one's higher–

order desires, being free from all obstacles, being able to act in accordance with the Good, and so on. In the theological context, recent proponents of such accounts include Servais Pinckaers (1995) (endorsed and applied to the topic of free will in heaven by Simon Gaine (2003)), Lynne Rudder Baker (2003) and Jesse Couenhoven (2013). Do such views face a problem when it comes to applying this understanding of freedom to the redeemed? Although a comprehensive answer would require a full treatment of each individual position, there is reason to think such accounts will have it somewhat easier.

Let's focus on Gaine's appropriation of Pinckaers. Gaine cites Pinckaers as distinguishing between the "freedom of indifference" (a version of the choice–based understanding of freedom which emphasises the person's ability to choose contrary to reason; the name is tendentious and should be avoided) and "freedom for excellence" which is supposedly a "richer and more adequate" view of freedom (Gaine 2003, 88). This latter freedom is rooted in one's natural desires for the good and consists in "a spontaneous attraction to all that at least seems to be true and good" (Gaine 2003, 95). As one develops one's moral virtues, this kind of freedom—the attraction to what is true and good—becomes stronger. In heaven the redeemed will experience the beatific vision and see God "face to face" in some manner. Coming face to face with God (and so with Goodness itself) would suggest that a person's will—their *appetite for the good*, on the "freedom for excellence" view—will have as strong a "spontaneous attraction" as it is possible to have towards God/the Good. Because, according to this view, God is also taken to will the highest good, and so is also taken to will himself (Gaine 2003, 132), human freedom turns out to be the same as—or at least very similar to—God's own freedom. Ignoring any complications that arise from trying to understand what it is to will or intend a person (as opposed to some state of affairs involving that person), this account seems better off than the choice–based view because willing God/the Good appears to be just as valuable (if not more so) for redeemed in heaven as it is for God himself. Thus, there is no parallel "lack of value" worry for the non–choice–based view of free will.

Of course, this doesn't mean there aren't other worries for this sort of account. For example, even if it is accepted that freedom does not require choice, it will usually be conceded that at least some kinds of necessity do indeed undermine freedom. But then we will need to ask whether the redeemed in heaven will God *necessarily*, and if they do, what the nature of that necessity is and whether it undermines the person's freedom. There is pressure to say that the redeemed in heaven do will God necessarily because that seems to be required by impeccability. Moreover, if the will is an appetite for goodness, then someone with a perfected will who sees God face to face would, it seems, will God/the Good of necessity. After all, "freedom for excellence" is a matter of being attracted to "truth and goodness" (Gaine 2003, 101). Those who equate freedom with "freedom for excellence" must therefore show why the necessity involved here doesn't undermine freedom. In addition, something will need to be said about a disanalogy between God's freedom and human freedom that begins to emerge here: God wills (of necessity) the supreme good, which is himself;

humans will (of necessity) the supreme good, which is God. One might attempt to explain why God's necessarily willing the Good is an act of freedom by pointing out that God, in willing himself, is himself the source and origin of what he's willing. But that thought doesn't transfer over to the human person who necessarily wills God/the Good, and so the same reconciliation of necessity and freedom isn't available for the redeemed in heaven.

Clearly, there is more to be said on behalf of both the choice–theorist and the non–choice–theorist here. But what the above discussion shows, I believe, is that if we begin with the idea that the freedom of the redeemed must mirror God's own freedom in some way, then depending on whether God's freedom is understood as being choice–based or not, we end up with two quite distinct problems.

3. The problem of needing *to praise* the redeemed for not sinning

Suppose you think that one condition on a successful account of heaven is that the redeemed can be said to be praiseworthy for refraining from sinning. This has the makings of a problem for choice–based accounts of control because, as already mentioned, according to most theologians the orthodox view of heaven is such that the redeemed are impeccable. If the redeemed are impeccable, they are incapable of sinning: sinning is not something the redeemed could choose to do. It is inevitable that the redeemed avoid or refrain from sinning. But given the plausible assumption that free will or control is required for moral responsibility (in this case, praiseworthiness), the choice–theorist would seem to have no way to explain the agent's praiseworthiness for avoiding sinning in heaven.

In fact, however, this problem of heaven is not serious for the choice–theorist. That's because almost all choice–theorists (compatibilist and incompatibilist alike) will endorse some notion of *derivative responsibility*. Derivative responsibility is the idea that an agent can be responsible for some piece of behaviour which *at the time of performance* the agent has no choice about, *if it is possible* to trace back to a time when they did have such a choice. There are different ways this might happen. Sometimes an agent might choose to act in a way which temporarily alters the control they are able to exercise at some future time. Cases of drink–driving, which are often cited as the paradigm cases of derivative responsibility, fall into this category. An agent decides to drink and then later whilst driving drunk causes some damage or harm to someone or something. In at least some such cases, the agent didn't have a choice about the harm caused *at the time at which it was caused* because the agent's control had been drastically reduced due to the intoxication. Still, in many cases people will be responsible here because we can trace back to a decision the person made which was known to carry with it the risk of producing the kind of harm that the person's decision resulted in.

People can also be responsible for virtuous behaviour that results from a temporary lack of control. For example, Joel, when working from home, might choose to restrict his own access to, e.g., a box of chocolates, Netflix, or news

websites by, say, asking his spouse to lock the chocolates in a cupboard, change the Netflix password, or activate a website blocker. Joel makes this choice, and in so doing restricts the scope of his own control, in order to get more work done. He will be praiseworthy for not eating any chocolates, not watching Netflix and not getting distracted by news stories during the day, despite not being able to choose to do those things during the workday. His lack of choice during the day can be traced back to one of his earlier choices, and that explains his responsibility: his *derivative* responsibility.

Other cases of derivative responsibility are the result of more permanent changes in a person. For example, it is very plausible to think that someone might be able to form his or her character in such a way that certain actions become inevitable at some later time while others are made impossible. So it might be that Alice, through a series of decisions and actions, becomes someone who always gives some of her time each holiday to volunteering at a homeless outreach centre. Through a series of choices made over a period of time, actively helping the homeless becomes inevitable for Alice. But because this inevitability is the hard–won result of Alice's choosing on many occasions to show compassion to the homeless in her area, it would appear to be beyond all doubt that she is praiseworthy for that subsequent behaviour, despite that inevitability.

Derivative responsibility promises to help solve this second problem of heavenly freedom for the choice–theorist. Moreover, the solution looks to be a good one because the choice–theorist already has all the resources needed to deploy it: the choice–theorist is already committed to the idea of derivative responsibility. To make the solution work, the choice–theorist needs to make plausible the idea that the praiseworthiness of redeemed in heaven is an instance of derivative responsibility.
Such a solution could take several forms. An account similar to James Sennett's (1999) understanding of heavenly freedom is one way the idea might be applied. Sennett himself appeals to the notion of derivative *freedom*, which will be addressed in the next section. But his model can be employed using solely the notion of derivative responsibility. On this picture, a person of faith makes a series of choices while on earth which begin to form his or her character in a virtuous way. Eventually, the person’s character becomes so fixed in its goodness that sinning is no longer possible. Now, Sennett accepts that few (if any) are likely to achieve this by the time they die. What he suggests therefore is that at the agent's death, God will "supply what is lacking" in the person's character, perfecting it, and thus rendering the person fit for heaven (Sennett 1999, 77). Given the person’s now perfect character, sinning will be impossible for that person. Sennett suggests that God’s unilateral action on the person's character is just (righteous), because (a) it is in line with what the person has been trying to accomplish, and (b) by making at least a few decisions on earth which have contributed to the goodness of his or her character, the person has implicitly consented to God’s completing this process at her death (Sennett 1999, 77–78).

One challenge for this sort of view is to show that the notion of derivative responsibility does indeed apply to the model of salvation and sanctification endorsed. Arguably, the clearest cases of derivative responsibility are ones where the agent makes a decision and then performs some action which results in some other action becoming inevitable or impossible *shortly after the initial decision* (as it is with drink–driving cases or the putting–things–out–of–your–own–reach type cases). The formation of specific, malleable habits are perhaps an intermediary case between the types of case just mentioned and those involving permanent character formation: someone performs a series of fairly specific actions in the hope of forming a (fairly specific) habit. Once formed, that habit makes various (fairly specific) behaviours either inevitable or impossible and the agent is responsible for those behaviours because the agent herself formed the habit. For example, Jennifer might begin to floss every night in the hope of forming a habit of flossing, thus making her flossing–behaviour automatic. In such cases, the agent envisages and aims at the exact behaviour which then issues automatically once the habit is formed. As a result, it's very plausible that the agent will satisfy whatever epistemic conditions there are on being morally responsible.

When the notion of derivative responsibility based on character formation is used to explain the impeccability of the person in heaven, it is less clear that the agent satisfies these epistemic conditions. The person, let's suppose, performs good actions and engages in the spiritual practices in the hope of developing the virtues and of enjoying eternal life. But it might well be that the agent doesn't have much idea of what kinds of activity heaven will involve. But to the degree that the agent is unsure or has no idea about the kinds of things that will be done in heaven, the agent would seem to fail to satisfy any relevant epistemic conditions on moral responsibility. That failure would in turn preclude any attribution of derivative responsibility.

Sennett's view is badly affected by this problem because on his view God supplies *whatever* is lacking in a person's character at the point of death. This opens up the possibility that at the time of death the agent has not made much progress at all in the formation of a good character. The grounds for arguing that the person has implicitly consented to the changes that God will bring about in his or her character are weak in such cases. Pawl and Timpe's (2009) account fares a bit better here. Like Sennett's position, their view invokes the notion of derivative *freedom*, but we can again put that to one side as the basic idea works with derivative responsibility alone. Instead of saying that God supplies what is lacking in the person's character in a single moment, Pawl and Timpe invoke a doctrine of purgatory as a place where agents continue to work on perfecting their own characters until they are fit for heaven. On such a view, an appeal to derivative responsibility to explain an agent's responsibility for subsequent inevitable behaviour becomes much more plausible because (a) the agent plays a bigger role in forming his or her character and so is a major source of the subsequent inevitability of the behaviour which issues from that character, and (b) by playing this bigger role, and being involved in the formation of his or her character right up until it's eventual perfection, the agent will know more

about the kinds of behaviour that might flow from that character. As a result, it will be easier to argue that the agent satisfies the epistemic criteria required to be derivatively responsible.

Let's sum up. This second problem of heavenly freedom arises from the demand that we be able to praise the redeemed for avoiding sin in heaven and the recognition that the scope of heavenly choices doesn't include evil options. It is a problem for choice–theorists because according to such theorists free will (and so responsibility) is closely associated with choice, but in heaven refraining from sinning is not subject to choice due to the agent's impeccability. It is generated by the need to say that (i) and (ii) are jointly compatible with the claim that the redeemed in heaven are praiseworthy even for those things they do that are not subject to their choices. This problem doesn't look fatal for the choice–theorist, because given the notion of derivative responsibility that such a theorist will (almost certainly) already be committed to, the choice–theorist already has some resources for addressing the problem. Still, the problem does not even arise for non–choice–based accounts of free will.

4. The problem of needing to affirm that the redeemed *freely avoid* sinning

Another problem of heavenly freedom, closely related to the one outlined in section 3, arises if one thinks that a successful account must allow us to say that the redeemed *freely refrain from sinning*. That is, if we need to be able to say, not just that the redeemed are *responsible* for failing to sin in heaven, and not just that the redeemed are free *in general*, but that the redeemed *freely refrain* from sinning, then we have a distinct problem to address. This places a stronger requirement on adequate accounts of heavenly freedom: it requires that the redeemed to be free with respect to a particular type of action (refraining from sinning) rather than requiring merely possession of freedom in general. It is a more difficult problem for the choice–theorist than the problem outlined in section 3 because those resources to which the choice–theorist is already committed (i.e. derivative responsibility) aren't going to help solve this problem.

Why might one endorse such a condition on an adequate account of heavenly freedom? One defence of this idea might come from the thought that God freely refrains from all sinning, and the freedom of the redeemed needs to mirror God's in this respect. Another idea might be an appeal to Church tradition. Kevin Timpe, for example, takes it that both Augustine and Aquinas affirm this particular point: that the redeemed *freely refrain from sinning*.[3]

This problem of heavenly freedom would appear to be fatal to what we might call *pure choice–theorists*. Pure choice–theorists are those who think that free will is only

[3] This is implied by some of Timpe's more recent writings on the subject; in addition, Timpe confirmed that he is strongly inclined to think this was the view of Augustine and Aquinas during a Q&A session at the University of York, October the 5th, 2017.

ever about having a choice: no choice, no free will. The only way which such theorists could affirm that the redeemed freely refrain from sinning is if they also affirmed that the redeemed were able to sin which would be to give up on something that is clearly an orthodox part of the doctrine of heaven.[4] Other theorists will find it less of a problem. Non–choice theorists would not appear to have any difficulties meeting this criterion. And those generally disposed to the choice–based view might endorse a mixed view to address this problem. The accounts of Sennett and Pawl and Timpe, mentioned in the previous section, both fall into the mixed–view category. These accounts introduce the idea of *derivative freedom*. This is the thought that when an agent forms his or her character to be such that a certain behaviour flows automatically from it, the agent can be said to freely perform that behaviour, even though at the time at which it is performed, it was not subject to any choice. In Pawl and Timpe's case it seems clear that part of their motivation for introducing this idea is that they are persuaded that there is such a criterion on a satisfactory account of heavenly freedom.

As already stated, my purpose here is not to present solutions to these problems, but rather to attempt to identify distinct problems of heavenly freedom. And while it looks like this problem will be intractable for pure–choice theorists, and difficult for choice–theorists who allow a mixed view of freedom, it's also a problem that only arises for those who are convinced that a satisfactory account of heaven must enable us to say that the redeemed *freely refrain from sinning*.

[4] John Donnelly (1985) dissented from this view. Donnelly took the possession of free will in heaven to be a non-negotiable part of the orthodox Christian view of heaven. And because he took it that free will always brings with it the ability to sin, he concluded that the orthodox view of heaven must be such that it includes the possibility of sin. But this is just to *assume* that there is no way to have free will without being able to sin and would be denied by all those who think a reconciliation of free will and impeccability is possible. Donnelly also suggests that the idea that the inhabitants of heaven will be able to sin gains support from the fall of the devil: if it happened once, it could happen again (Donnelly puts forward this argument in his (2006)). But again, this is just to *assume* that, e.g., a Christian anthropology involving, say, a four-fold state of man, based on the four states enumerated by Augustine (Schaff 1890, 275), is incorrect. Not only are there numerous ways of working out a theological anthropology based on this four-fold state, there are other theological anthropologies not based on this system but which might provide similar resources for addressing the problem. And that's the main point here: Christian theology has a rich set of resources for explaining the difference between the man's initial state and man's final state and Donnelly doesn't seriously engage with such resources. Recently, Benjamin Matheson has deployed a very similar "it happened once, so it could happen again" argument (Matheson 2017). And although Matheson discusses Kevin Timpe's account of man's four-fold state, he too fails to fully engage with the resources the view provides for explaining the difference. Matheson simply claims that because Timpe concedes that there is *some element* of arbitrariness or inexplicability to the primal sin, it is therefore mysterious, and so could happen again at any point in history: someone in heaven might "mysteriously" sin. But this is to conflate that *element* of arbitrariness that Timpe attributes to the primal sin with a full-on appeal to mystery and, again, ignores the finer details of the theological anthropology Timpe develops.

5. The problem arising from an endorsement of the free will defence

Michael Martin writes the following:

> The [free will defence] is commonly used to explain the large amount of moral evil in the world. Since, however, the inhabitants of Heaven presumably have free will yet Heaven is presumably relatively free of moral evil, the existence of Heaven casts doubt on the [free will defence] (Martin 1997, 430).

Here Martin suggests that a theist cannot endorse the free will defence as a reply to the problem of evil while also holding that heaven is a place without any evil. The problem, as he sees it, is that the redeemed in heaven will have free will—Martin takes it that the theist will be committed to this because the theist will likely think that having free will is an essential part of human nature. Yet, free will is cited by the theist as the origin of evil. So how is it that the theist can maintain that heaven can be a place where the redeemed are free and thus possess that capacity which makes evil possible while also being a place where there is no evil (and presumably more strongly, a place where evil is not even a possibility)?

What we have here is a gesturing towards a problem. Martin's own development of the problem is inadequate, however. The charge that the free will defence cannot be endorsed by someone who also endorses a view of heaven according to which it is a place where there is no evil is challenge to the internal consistency of the theist's position. But if that is so, it matters a great deal how the finer details of the theist's position are filled in. Martin goes on to say:

> Presumably not everyone who goes to Heaven is a saint. Indeed, on some accounts one's moral character is not even relevant for salvation. Thus, on at least one interpretation of Christianity, a person is saved by faith in Jesus and not by good works. Moreover, it is not clear that a person's character is transformed in Heaven (Martin 1997, 430).

In this passage, Martin makes it clear that the theistic position he's attacking is one according to which the redeemed in heaven are not perfected. A theist who held such a position would, according to Martin, have a hard time appealing to free will to rebut the problem of evil. But even if Martin is right in the conclusion he draws in this passage, the problem as he develops it here isn't going to trouble very many theists because not many theists hold that those in heaven *won't* be perfected or *won't* have their characters transformed prior to entering heaven. Martin is attacking an "interpretation of Christianity" which few Christians actually hold. He is right that "on some accounts"—accounts that some theists *do* actually hold—one's moral character is not relevant for salvation (at least if we take 'salvation' to refer to the initial stages of a life of faith). But the conclusion he draws from this is simply

mistaken: those who hold that one's moral character is irrelevant for salvation can and usually do hold that one's character is transformed before one enters heaven.

Comments made by Martin later in the same paper are marginally more difficult for the theist to handle. Theists who endorse the free will defence, Martin says, accept that there are possible worlds where there is no evil. What those theists suggest is that God *could not* actualise such worlds, and thus God's not actualising them does not count against his goodness. However, Martin continues, once we recognise that some of these same theists are committed to the idea of heaven as a place where no evil exists, the following question arises: "If God could have actualized a world with free will in which Heaven is an essential part, it is difficult to see why He did not actualize a world with free will that is heavenly in its entirety" (Martin 1997, 431).

Now, perhaps it is difficult to see why God did not, or even could not, actualise a world containing free will "that is heavenly in its entirety" if one does not engage with those theologies that have given an answer to this question. In the article cited, Martin provides a treatment of just one answer to that question (the soul making theodicy), and his treatment is so cursory that, to echo one of his own criticisms of Peter van Inwagen, "were it not for his status within the field" it would not be worth mentioning (Martin 1997, 429). The basic idea of the soul making theodicy is that evil is necessary because in overcoming it we form our characters and develop as people in ways which are valuable and which would otherwise not be possible. The soul making theodicist might therefore suggest that pre–heavenly free will needs to be such that it leaves open the possibility of evil, so that some evil choices are in fact made and there is evil to overcome, whereas heavenly free will does not need to include that possibility. Martin dismisses this thought by saying that we don't need free will to have evils to overcome because we are faced with many instances of natural evil (Martin 1997, 431). This dismissal is far too swift and is in any case only a dismissal of a caricature of the soul making theodicy. Nevertheless, even if Martin has not explained the problem fully here, there is at least a prima facie tension between saying the kind of free will which involves being able to choose evil plays some role in theodicy while also maintaining that in heaven the redeemed will have a kind of free will supremely valuable and also be impeccable. Here then is an attempt at a more careful statement of the problem:

> Suppose God is all–powerful, all–knowing and wholly good. Suppose too that free will is incompatible with causal determinism (i.e. we reject compatibilism about free will and causal determinism). And suppose that some people have free will (i.e. we reject both determinism and hard incompatibilism). In addition, we assume that heaven is a place where there is no moral evil of any kind, nor even the capacity for moral evil: the redeemed in heaven are not able to sin. Yet the redeemed in heaven are free; moreover, let's assume that the redeemed have choice–based freedom and that some of the choices they face in heaven are valuable and worth having. Finally, we assume that a significant part of the explanation for the existence of moral evil on earth is that people have free will. Moreover, the freedom that people possess on

> earth, which gives them the possibility of choosing evil, is the same kind of freedom that the redeemed have in heaven: choice–based freedom. Given all that, the following question emerges: why doesn't the choice–based freedom that people possess in heaven introduce the possibility of sin in the same way that the possession of choice–based freedom on earth did? Furthermore, why can't the answer given to that question not also be applied to people in their pre–heavenly existence? In short: why is it that possessing choice–based free will at one point in time necessarily introduces the possibility of evil (and is valuable enough to play a role in justifying the existence of that potential evil which becomes actual) while possessing choice–based free will at later point introduces no such possibility (and yet is nevertheless supremely valuable)?

Note that even this more careful statement of the problem is under described at several points. It takes no stand on whether the choice–based freedom it assumes is compatible with God's determining those choices. Writers like W. Matthews Grant (2010) and Hugh McCann (2012) insist that even assuming incompatibilism about free will and causal determinism, free will can still be *compatible* with God's determination. By contrast, writers such as Alvin Plantinga (1978, 171) and William Rowe (1999, 100) think that free will is *incompatible* with God's determining a person's choice. The above statement of the problem also takes no stand on whether choice–based freedom is compatible with God's foreknowledge. But these issues, and no doubt others which are also left open by the statement above, would seem to affect how serious this problem is and would also put constraints on the form a solution could take.

Indeed, to make somewhat of an understatement, the role played by free will in different kinds of theodicy has varied widely. And different uses of free will create different problems. For example, those who endorse what Steven Cowan (2011) calls the Strong Free Will Defence will have a greater problem in addressing this problem than those who endorse the Weak Free Will Defence. According to the Strong Free Will Defence, free will is intrinsically valuable enough to justify the existence of evil; the Weak Free Will Defence says only that free will is a necessary condition for other goods which justify the existence of evil. Those who endorse the Strong Free Will Defence have to explain why a kind of free will intrinsically valuable enough in and of itself to justify the existence of evil doesn't exist in heaven. They will also need to explain why, even despite it's high value, such free will needed to be created at all, given that those in heaven have free will, and their free will (it might be thought) must be at least as valuable as the free will of those on earth. Those who endorse the Weak Free Will Defence have no such burden. Not only do they *not* need to maintain that the value of free will in and of itself justifies the existence of evil, they could hold that the free will possessed on earth (and the particular form it takes, i.e. being able to choose evil) is a necessary condition of the free will possessed in heaven.

The foregoing discussion, I think, makes it clear that this problem of heavenly freedom is distinctive inasmuch as it is thoroughly intertwined with many other topics in philosophical theology. Given that the problems of heavenly freedom

identified in this essay are as diverse as they are, we should not be surprised when they require different solutions. As such, we should not count it as a strike against, say, Pawl and Timpe's solution to *this* problem of heavenly freedom that it doesn't also (assuming for sake of illustration that it doesn't) solve the problems outlined in section 3 and 4. Indeed, Pawl and Timpe's account of heavenly freedom has two very different components: (1) the appeal to the notion of derivative freedom, and (2) the development of the thought that the redeemed might face morally important choices in heaven. It seems to me that these are attempts at solving different problems, even if that is not made explicit in their writings. Similarly, it would be no strike against W. S. Anglin's speculations about the value of choices in heaven—speculations, that is, which can be used to address something like the problem identified in section 2—that they don't also address the problem of heavenly freedom identified in this section.

In closing this section, I want to mention two ways that the experience of the beatific vision might help address the challenge just outlined. First, as noted in section 2, there are several ways that the beatific vision might be invoked to explain a person's impeccability. Whichever explanation is endorsed, people have the same kind of freedom in heaven as was had in their pre–heavenly existence. But that means it's not obviously *inconsistent* to maintain that free will possessed at once time introduces the possibility of evil, whereas the very same kind of free will possessed at another time does not; of course, the objector might still reasonably ask why God didn't create the world with everyone already experiencing the beatific vision, and an answer would need to be given, but that kind of challenge is a long way from saying the theist is courting inconsistency. Second, exploring the nature of the beatific vision, and the nature of actions performed while experiencing the beatific vision, can begin to explain how, on the one hand, free will which makes evil possible, and on the other, free will which involves only good options, could both be valuable kinds of freedom. In each case, having free will amounts to being able exert a certain measure of control over one's life. Reasons why possessing free will might be valuable even if that possession produces the real possibility of evil have often been elucidated. Here, I want to point to just one aspect of the beatific vision which could be used to highlight the value of choices made in heaven, even though one's options are restricted due to evil not being possible. One way of understanding the beatific vision is that it will involve direct awareness of being in God's presence in a unique manner possible only for the redeemed in heaven. Now, suppose we have a view of heaven according to which the redeemed will be active in worship and service, and will experience some measure of community with each other (as well as God). The redeemed worship, serve and commune with each other all while experiencing the beatific vision: all heavenly experience is permeated with an awareness of God and his love. But, and this is the point I wish to highlight, sometimes merely being in another's presence affects the value of choosing the options one has. Imagine, for example, a man walking along a beach alone. The man could choose to build a sand–castle, and perhaps he would derive some pleasure

from doing so. But compare that choice to build a sand–castle with one the man makes the next day when he's on the beach with his son. Simply being in the presence of his son will bestow further value on the various sand–castle building options. Alone on the beach, building a sand–castle might hold no interest for the man. With his son there, and with building a sand–castle as something they could do together, it might well become the most valuable thing the father could imagine doing at that point in time. Similarly, if everything the redeemed do in heaven is done as they experience the beatific vision (or as part of that experience), then just as the value of the building a sand–castle changes for the father if his son is present, so the value of whatever the redeemed do in heaven could be changed simply because it is done in the presence of God, with God's active involvement, in a way that serves to reveal more of God, and so on.

6. Does compatibilism solve any of these problems?

Many recent accounts of heavenly freedom have been presented by people who endorse an incompatibilist account of free will. Indeed, sometimes "the problem of heavenly freedom" is taken to be a problem only for incompatibilists. Timpe, himself an incompatibilist, suggests that compatibilism makes the reconciliation easy because "an agent's being free is consistent with that agent's being determined not to sin" and therefore God could determine someone never to sin without taking away their free will (Timpe 2014, 86). Elsewhere Timpe presents reasons why he does not endorse compatibilism, but it's clear that he doesn't think "the problem" of heavenly freedom is a problem for compatibilists.

In this section I want to suggest that this is not the case. Some versions of compatibilism face their own problems of heavenly freedom. This is most obvious with compatibilist versions of the choice–based view of free will. Since Harry Frankfurt's infamous thought experiment this view has become a minority position among compatibilists, but the idea that free will requires choice used to be taken for granted by both compatibilists and incompatibilists. These days the position is sometimes called *classical compatibilism* or *strong compatibilism*.[5]

According to this position, a person can face a choice about something, freely choose one of the options, be such that she could have chosen otherwise, all while having been determined to choose exactly as she did. To make things easier let's consider an example. Suppose that John chooses to lie to Katy, lies to her, and that he does both things freely. And let's first consider classical compatibilism about causal determinism: free will requires having a choice (i.e. being able to do otherwise) and having a choice is compatible with causal determinism. On this view, John could have chosen to otherwise. He was able to decide to refrain from lying to Katy. That was entirely within his power according to the classical compatibilist. Yet it is also

[5] Joseph Keim Campbell (1997, 319) calls the position "strong compatibilism"; Bernard Berofsky (2003) calls it "classical compatibilism".

true that the antecedent conditions together with the laws of nature necessitated that John chose to lie and lied to Katy. It was causally impossible that John choose to tell the truth. Yet, according to the classical compatibilist, John could have chosen not to lie. John's *being able to refrain* from choosing to lie is *compatible* with it being causally impossible that John avoid lying. When we consider theological compatibilism things are very similar. In this case it is not the antecedent conditions and the laws of nature which do the necessitating but God's decrees. God decrees that John will choose to lie to Katy and as a result it is necessary, given God's decrees, that John does so choose. Still, according to the classical compatibilist, John could have decided to refrain from lying. He was able to choose to do otherwise. This just is the heart of classical compatibilism: the 'can do otherwise' or 'is able to do otherwise' claim is *compatible with* its being impossible, given the antecedent causal conditions and the laws (causal determinism) or God's decreees (theological determinism), that the agent choose and do otherwise. It's impossible, given certain relevant, actually obtaining conditions, that the agent choose or do otherwise. But the agent is indeed able to do otherwise. They don't call it a wretched subterfuge for nothing.

Now, despite what Timpe says, it's not clear that *this version* of compatibilism solves any of the problems of heaven outlined above. And that's because it's not clear such a view secures the impeccability of those in heaven. According to classical compatibilism, even when an agent is determined or necessitated to choose option A (say), the agent *can* or *is able to* choose option B. But that would mean that God's determining of the redeemed in heaven to always do good does not rule out their being able to sin. Their being able to sin is *compatible with* God's decree that they won't. Of course, the compatibilist choice–theorist can affirm that the redeemed *won't* sin in heaven. But impeccability requires more than that: it requires that the redeemed *cannot* sin. A compatibilist choice–based view of free will, then, does not, *simply in virtue of being compatibilist*, reconcile free will and impeccability.

What would address the impeccability problem is a *non–choice–based* compatibilist view of free will. But such a view would solve the above problem because free will is no longer associated with choice. The *compatibilist* aspect of the account would be doing no work. Indeed, an incompatibilist non–choice–based view of free will might address the problem just as easily. In brief, an incompatibilist non–choice–based view of free will says that an agent's free will consists in the agent being source or origin of his or her behaviour, which can only be achieved when the behaviour arises indeterministically from the person's intellect, will, set of motivating attitudes and so on. Proponents of such accounts often label them as *source–based* or *sourcehood* accounts, although this label is unhelpful because choice–based theorists typically agree that sourcehood is of prime importance but argue that sourcehood can only be achieved when the agent has a choice. In any case, the critical point is that in heaven the agent's intellect, will and set of desires and other motivating attitudes are going to be perfected. It would therefore be open to the incompatibilist source–only theorist to suggest that all of the possible behaviours that might arise from the person's intellect, will and so on, are such that they either fulfil or surpass any obligations the

person has in heaven, which would secure the agent's impeccability. Thus, the real divide seems to be between choice–based views of free will and non–choice–based views. Compatibilism in and of itself provides no free pass to the problems of heaven.

7. Conclusion

In this conclusion I will attempt to summarise the main points made. I began by suggesting that the so–called problem of heavenly freedom is best understood as a set of problems. If we assume that human freedom must be like God's own freedom, then whether there is a problem, and the nature of that problem, varies according to how we understand God's freedom. If God has what I called choice–based freedom, then one worry for an account of heavenly freedom is to show how the choices the redeemed in heaven face are valuable. If, on the other hand, God has non–choice–based freedom, then one significant challenge for an account of heavenly freedom is to explain why the necessity involved in a person's necessarily willing God is not freedom undermining (recall that God also necessarily wills himself, but he is the source of that goodness, and the proponent of this account might suggest this explains why God's own freedom isn't undermined here). I then suggested there was a distinct problem of heavenly freedom arising from the need to say that the redeemed *are praiseworthy for refraining from sinning* in heaven. The most obvious way a choice–theorist might address this challenge is to appeal to derivative responsibility, a notion to which such a theorist will (almost certainly) already be committed. By contrast, this issue presents no special problem for the non–choice–based theorist. Closely related to that is the idea that we should be able to affirm that the redeemed *freely refrain from sinning*. This is a much more difficult problem for the choice–theorist, because the notion of derivative responsibility is not going to be any help. Again, this issue doesn't pose any further problem for non–choice–based theorists.

I then considered whether there is a tension between endorsing the free will defence as part of one's solution to the problem of evil together with affirming that the redeemed in heaven have free will and are impeccable. I began by attempting to develop a careful statement of the problem. I suggested that because this is a challenge to the internal consistency of the theist's position, and because it touches upon so many other topics in philosophical theology, it matters a great deal how the finer details of the theist's position are filled in. Moreover, I pointed out that there is no need to maintain that one's solution to this problem should also solve the other problems of heavenly freedom. I then outlined two ways an account of the beatific vision might help address this problem. Finally, in section 6, I argued that compatibilism about free will and causal (or theological) determinism provides no

free pass to the problems of heavenly freedom. Rather, the main dividing line seems to be between choice–based and non–choice–based accounts of free will.[6,7]

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