

INCOMPATIBILISM, SIN, AND FREE WILL IN HEAVEN

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The traditional view of heaven holds that the redeemed in heaven both have free will and are no longer capable of sinning. A number of philosophers have argued that the traditional view is problematic. How can someone be free and yet incapable of sinning? If the redeemed are kept from sinning, their wills must be reined in. And if their wills are reined in, it doesn't seem right to say that they are free. Following James Sennett, we call this objection to the traditional view of heaven 'the Problem of Heavenly Freedom'. In this paper, we discuss and criticize four attempts to respond to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom. We then offer our own response to this problem which both preserves the traditional view of heaven and avoids the objections which beset the other attempts.

Neither are we to suppose that because sin shall have no power to delight them [i.e., the redeemed], free will must be withdrawn. It will, on the contrary, be all the more truly free, because set free from delight in sinning to take unfailling delight in not sinning. For the first freedom of will which man received when he was created upright consisted in an ability not to sin, but also in an ability to sin; whereas this last freedom of will shall be superior, inasmuch as it shall not be able to sin.

— *Saint Augustine*¹

Introduction

According to traditional Christianity, God endowed humans with free will. And because humans possess free will, it is possible that they choose to sin, as they, unfortunately, did. Hence, the Fall. Christian tradition also holds that despite human sin, God provides for the justification and sanctification of sinners. As a result, those sinful humans who accept God's grace offered to them in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ can be reconciled to God and share in his everlasting happiness in heaven. These are the redeemed. Traditionally, Christian theologians and philosophers have

¹Augustine, *City of God*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library) XXII.30, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.html>.



thought that the redeemed will be free (as, for instance, we see Augustine claiming in the quotation at the beginning of this paper).² But traditional Christianity has also affirmed that the redeemed in heaven will *not* be capable of sinning and are instead morally impeccable.³ It is for this reason that a second Fall will not be possible. In what follows, we will refer to the conjunction of the following two theses

- (i) the redeemed in heaven have free will, and
- (ii) the redeemed in heaven are no longer capable of sinning

as the 'traditional view of heaven,' or simply 'the traditional view'.

The traditional view seems to be in internal tension. For instance, one may wonder: how can someone be free and yet incapable of sinning? 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*. We will refer to this as the *Problem of Heavenly Freedom*.⁴

In this paper, we consider five responses to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom. The first is the acceptance of *compatibilism*, the view that an agent's free choice is compatible with her being determined to choose thusly. The second and third responses are strategies of concession: they both concede that the redeemed in heaven *can* sin. The second response says that it is a live possibility that the redeemed sin, and if they do so, they will fall from heaven. The third response claims that, while the redeemed in heaven *can* sin, it is not a live option for them to sin, due to God's counterfactual guidance based on middle knowledge. The fourth view is advocated by James Sennett, who offers what he takes to be a revised form of compatibilism (to anticipate, however, we don't see it as a species of compatibilism). While we think that Sennett's view is good and interesting, and an improvement over the preceding views, we think there is more to be said. Sennett's view is very close to the last view—ours. We argue that one can be free in heaven but be unable to sin in

²For other affirmations of heavenly freedom see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. English Dominicans (New York: Christian Classics, 1981), III q.18 a.4; and Anselm, *On Free Will* and *De Concordia*, section I, chap. 6. Both of these latter works can be found in *Anselm of Canterbury: the Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and Gill Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). We should note, though, that upon examination, we haven't found anywhere where an ecumenical council has pronounced on whether the redeemed will be free.

³For a discussion of some of the historical issues here, see Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Simon Francis Gaine, *Will there Be Free Will in Heaven?: Freedom, Impeccability and Beatitude* (London: T & T Clark Ltd., 2003). According to Gaine, "that impeccability belongs to the orthodox Christian concept of heaven is . . . beyond any doubt" (p. 11). A recent paper on this topic states that "it seems to us that the claim that there is evil in Heaven [or can be sin in heaven] simply runs counter to orthodox belief in these matters. . . . It is part of the *essence* of Heaven that it should be a place in which there is no evil" (Yujin Nagasawa, Graham Oppy, and Nick Trakakis, "Salvation in Heaven?," *Philosophical Papers* 33.1 (2004), pp. 104f., 99).

⁴Sennett calls this the *Dilemma* of heavenly freedom. See James F. Sennett, "Is there Freedom in Heaven?," *Faith and Philosophy* 16.1 (1999), p. 69.

virtue of having a moral character that one has previously freely formed. On our view, while an agent must have alternative possibilities open to her at some time in order to be free, the agent need not always have alternative possibilities open to her. She may freely form her character such that she *can't* choose *not* to perform some particular action at a later time, and nevertheless do the latter action freely. The view that we offer retains all the benefits of the previous four and avoids all the objections we raise to them.

§1 Compatibilism as a Solution

One way to avoid the Problem of Heavenly Freedom is to understand freedom in such a way that being determined to will as one does is consistent with being free. If an agent's being free is consistent with that agent's being determined not to sin, then (i) and (ii) above are not inconsistent. For if God can determine how agents use their free will, then, by *determining* them never to sin, he can ensure that the redeemed in heaven do not sin without taking away their free will. There is historical precedent in Christian history for such a view.⁵ That said, an affirmation of compatibilism

⁵For arguments that Augustine was a compatibilist, see Lynne Rudder Baker, "Why Christians Should Not Be Libertarians: An Augustinian Challenge," *Faith and Philosophy* 20 (2003), pp. 460–478; Christopher Kirwan, *Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 118f.; Katherin Rogers, "Does God Cause Sin? Anselm of Canterbury Versus Jonathan Edwards on Human Freedom and Divine Sovereignty," *Faith and Philosophy* 20.3 (2003), pp. 371–378; and Katherin Rogers, "Augustine's Compatibilism," *Religious Studies* 40 (2004), pp. 415–435. (In an earlier paper, Rogers writes that if anyone could prove that Augustine's doctrine of the will is not compatibilist, she would "be grateful" (Katherin Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 32 (1996), p. 180). Though it is less clear, Thomas Holtzen also appears to interpret Augustine as a compatibilist in his "The Therapeutic Nature of Grace in St. Augustine's De Gratia Et Libero Arbitrio," *Augustinian Studies* 31 (2000), pp. 93–115. For arguments that Augustine is an incompatibilist, see Eleonore Stump, "Augustine and Free Will," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 124–147; Thomas Williams, "Introduction," in *Augustine, On Free Choice of the Will* (Hackett, 1993), pp. xi–xix; and John Davenport, "Aquinas's Teleological Libertarianism," in *Analytical Thomism: Traditions in Dialogue*, ed. Craig Paterson and Matthew Pugh (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006). We should note that it is possible that Augustine was a compatibilist at some point of his long career and an incompatibilist at some other, as at least one of the present authors believes.

Jonathan Edwards and John Calvin also endorsed compatibilism. See, for example, Bruce Reichenbach, "Evil and a Reformed View of God," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 24 (1988), pp. 67–85; William Rowe, *Can God Be Free?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); B. A. Gerrich, "The Place of Calvin in Christian Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 289–304; Stephen Daniel, "Edwards as Philosopher," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 162–180; and Allen Guelzo, "Freedom of the Will," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sand Hyun Lee (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 115–129.

brings with it well-known problems in giving a satisfactory answer to the problem of evil. Consider the Free Will Defense to the logical problem of evil.⁶ According to the Free Will Defense, the reason that moral evils do not contradict God's essential goodness is that it is possible that the existence of free will (and those additional goods which logically require that some agents have free will) is such a great good that it justifies the existence of the moral evil that it makes possible.⁷

It is hard to see how the Free Will Defense would go on the assumption of compatibilism. On the supposition that free will is compatible with determinism, God could actualize the good of free will (as well as those additional goods which logically require that some agents have free will) without the possibility of moral evil by determining all free creatures never to do evil. Thus the Free Will Defense to the logical problem of evil is rendered impotent.

So the supposition of compatibilism makes the logical problem of evil even more acute than it already is.⁸ Granted, there are responses to the logical problem of evil other than the Free Will Defense, and some of these other responses are compatibilist-friendly. It is not our intention to explore these other responses here; but the Free Will Defense is the most influential response to the logical problem of evil (and, in our view, an essential part of any satisfactory response). It is a disadvantage of a response to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom that it worsens another problem for Christianity. It would be better to be able to provide a response to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom that doesn't require compatibilism. In addition, there are good philosophical reasons to reject compatibilism, although we will not rehearse them here.⁹ Thus, in what follows, we will proceed under the assumption of the truth of incompatibilism. We should

⁶The *locus classicus* for the Free Will Defense to the logical problem of evil is Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977). For a more elaborate, and technical, discussion of the same issues, see also Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

⁷See, for instance, Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 31: "The heart of the Free Will Defense is the claim that it is *possible* that God could not have created a universe containing moral good (or as much moral good as this world contains) without creating one that also contained moral evil. And if so, then it is possible that God has a good reason for creating a world containing evil."

⁸There are, of course, other versions of the problem of evil besides the logical problem of evil. We aren't claiming that the Free Will Defense solves all versions of the problem of evil, just that it succeeds in refuting the logical problem of evil. In this case, it is perhaps better to say that the assumption of compatibilism gives *one* particularly toothy problem of evil more bite than it already has. It could also be that the truth of incompatibilism makes other problems, including other problems of evil, more intractable for the Christian theist. Our thanks to Tom Flint for pointing out the need to address this issue.

⁹For a particularly influential argument against compatibilism, see the discussion of the Consequence Argument in Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). See also Alicia Finch and Ted Warfield, "The *Mind* Argument and Libertarianism," *Mind* 107 (1998), pp. 515–528 for an improved version of the Consequence Argument. For one of the present author's arguments against compatibilism, see Kevin Timpe, "Why Christians Might be Libertarians: A

note, though, that *if* one is a compatibilist, and *if* one has a viable answer to the problem of evil that doesn't rely upon a Free Will Defense, then one already has an answer to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom without the cost we associate with this strategy.

§2 *The Concession Strategy*

Another way to avoid the Problem of Heavenly Freedom is to make a concession. One such concession is to allow for the possibility of sin among the redeemed. If the redeemed can sin, and their actually sinning is not continually circumvented in some way (as, for instance, in the way discussed in the third strategy below), then there is the possibility of further falls from heaven, as Origen posited.¹⁰ More recently, John Donnelly has defended this sort of view.¹¹ According to Donnelly, freedom is essential to the Christian view of heaven: "to think that when one attains heaven, due to the achievement of some degree of moral perfection, one no longer needs to be free, is to misunderstand the Christian notion of heaven."¹² Donnelly thinks the redeemed can choose to use their free will to do evil, thereby earning an "eviction from Heaven."¹³

This method of answering the Problem of Heavenly Freedom has the benefit of consistency with incompatibilism insofar as one's free actions can't be determined. Also, it does not make the problem of evil more intractable, as the previous solution did.

Even with these benefits, though, we don't accept this Concession Strategy. For, just as Donnelly says that to think that the redeemed aren't free "is to misunderstand the Christian notion of heaven," we believe that to allow the possibility of heavenly evictions is to misunderstand the Christian notion of heaven. Presumably for a person to be in a state of heavenly bliss is for that person to be in such an elevated state of bliss that the person couldn't be in a higher state of bliss. The problem with thinking that there could be eviction from heaven is that it allows for a redeemed individual to be in a higher state of bliss than he or she is in.

Augustine argues against the Concession Strategy in precisely this way in his magisterial work, *The City of God*.¹⁴ His argument runs as fol-

Reply to Lynne Rudder Baker," *Philosophia Christi* 6.2 (2004), pp. 89–98 and Kevin Timpe, *Free Will: Sourcehood and Its Alternatives* (London: Continuum, 2008).

¹⁰At least according to Augustine in *The City of God*, XXI.17.

¹¹See John Donnelly, "Eschatological Enquiry," *Sophia* 24 (1985), pp. 16–31 and John Donnelly, "Heavenly Eviction," *Philosophy Now*, 56 (2006), pp. 27–28.

¹²Donnelly, "Eschatological Enquiry," p. 27.

¹³Donnelly, "Heavenly Eviction," p. 27.

¹⁴In *City of God*, XI.13, Augustine writes: "From all this, it will readily occur to anyone that the blessedness which an intelligent being desires as its legitimate object results from a combination of these two things, namely, that it uninterruptedly enjoy the unchangeable good, which is God; and that it be delivered from all dubiety, and know certainly that it shall eternally abide in the same enjoyment. For what catholic Christian does not know that no new devil will ever arise among the good angels, as he knows that this present devil will never again return into the fellowship of the good? For the truth in the gospel promises to the saints and

lows. Heaven is essentially a place of ultimate happiness, and no state is a state of ultimate happiness if one could be in a different state and be happier.¹⁵ Now, consider two 'redeemed' individuals. One experiences the joys of heaven but isn't sure that he will be with God forever, since heavenly eviction is a live possibility for him, and another experiences those same joys but also has an assurance that she will always be with God in heaven.¹⁶ If we ask ourselves which of these two individuals is happier, it is clear that certainty of eternal life with God brings more happiness with it than the lack of that certainty. So if heaven is to be the state of human existence than which none more desirable can be conceived, it cannot involve even the live possibility of eviction. On this Concession Strategy, one can't be certain of eternal life with God in everlasting peace, since eviction is a live possibility. So the Concession Strategy theorist's heaven isn't a place of ultimate happiness, and hence is no heaven worthy of the name.¹⁷

to the faithful that they will be equal to the angels of God; and it is also promised them that they will 'go away into life eternal.' But if we are certain that we shall never lapse from eternal felicity, while they are not certain, then we shall not be their equals, but their superiors. But as the truth never deceives, and we shall be their equals, they must be certain of their blessedness." See also IV.3, XI.4, XII.14 and XXI.17.

¹⁵Tom Flint has rightly pointed out to us that one prominent view of heaven holds that there are varying levels of happiness among the blessed in heaven. For instance: "The Catholic Church . . . holds as an article of faith that there are among the Blessed various degrees of happiness, in proportion to merit. 'One is more perfect than the other according to the different merits of each,' says e.g. the *Decretum Unionis* of Florence." (Joseph Pohle, *Eschatology; or, The Catholic Doctrine of the Last Things: A Dogmatic Treatise*, trans. Arthur Preuss (St. Louis: Herder Book Co., 1946), pp. 40–41). Pohle also provides passages from St. Ignatius of Antioch, Tertullian, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas that support the same doctrine. One might think that if there were different levels of bliss in heaven, then Augustine's argument we provide here wouldn't work. For it would be possible for someone on the lowest tier of heaven to be happier; namely, if she were on a higher tier of heaven. This, however, is no counterexample to Augustine's argument. Augustine isn't claiming that there is no state that the person could be in and be happier; he is claiming that, as the person is, there is no state that the person could be in and be happier. The blessed person on the lowest tier is on the highest tier she can be on given her character. One might then wonder, though, whether a damned individual (if there are such people) is also in a state of "ultimate happiness" since, *given the state of her soul* there is no state she can be in and be happier. A proponent of Augustine's argument might respond by saying that another necessary condition on being ultimately happy is being united to God in a way that only the redeemed, and not the damned, are.

¹⁶Augustine presents this sort of thought experiment for figuring out which state would provide more happiness. One imagines two people in different states. Whichever state is more to be desired (but not whichever state *is* more desired) is the state that provides more happiness. One does this until one comes to a state than which no more preferable state is imaginable. That is the state of true happiness.

¹⁷Furthermore, this concession strategy appears at odds, not only with the traditional teachings of the Christian church, but also with the Bible itself; for instance,

The Concession Strategy does have the advantages of providing a robust notion of freedom and not falling into the problems of the compatibilist solution. Even with all those advantages, however, we still think it should be rejected. For it is a Pyrrhic victory—one wins this particular battle but loses the larger war. Concession is indeed an option, but it is an option that should be taken only if all else fails.

§3 A Molinist Strategy

The above discussion of a Concession Strategy might lead one to reject (ii) but deny that heavenly sin is a live possibility. Such a view would hold that, while the redeemed can sin in heaven, for some reason or other, they are kept from sinning. One such solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom utilizes Molinism. According to the Molinist, God pre-volitionally knows what all possible created persons would freely do in every possible circumstance. Such knowledge is called ‘middle knowledge’, since it logically stands between God’s natural knowledge (His pre-volitional knowledge of necessary truths, sometimes also referred to as God’s knowledge of simple intelligence) and His free knowledge (His post-volitional knowledge of contingent truths, sometimes also referred to as God’s knowledge of vision). Like His natural knowledge, God’s middle knowledge is pre-volitional; but like His free knowledge, it is knowledge of contingent truths. In terms of providence, the most important objects of God’s middle knowledge are His knowledge of what are called ‘counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.’¹⁸ A counterfactual of creaturely freedom is a contingent proposition about how a creature would freely act in a particular situation. Such propositions have the following form:

If agent *A* were in circumstances *C*, *A* would freely do *X*.

Since Molinists are also incompatibilists, Molinism does not have the untoward consequences that the compatibilist solution has.

It seems then that one could use the Molinist’s understanding of divine providence to provide a solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom. Those in heaven could retain their libertarian freedom. But on the basis of His middle knowledge, God could make sure that once in heaven, the redeemed will find themselves only in circumstances in which they will freely not sin. Let us call those circumstances which, were an agent to find herself in that circumstance, she would freely not sin ‘sin-free circumstances’; similarly, let us call those circumstances in which an agent would freely choose to do something sinful, ‘sin-prone circumstances’. This response to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom, which utilizes but is not entailed by Molinism, is that on the basis of His middle knowledge,

when Paul speaks about the incorruptible crown that Christians win after a death (1 Cor. 9:25), or the eternal inheritance to which the author of Hebrews refers (Heb 9:15), or, as Augustine cites in an earlier note, the eternal life and eternal punishment which Jesus foretells will follow his second coming (Matthew 25:46).

¹⁸See Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 41ff.; see also Robert Adams, “An Anti-Molinist Argument,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), p. 344.

God providentially ensures that each of the redeemed finds herself only in sin-free circumstances, and never in sin-prone circumstances. So while it is true that the redeemed can sin, sinning is not a live possibility for the redeemed due to God's oversight.

While we agree that the Molinism solution is attractive in many ways, there are a number of considerations that count against its adoption. First, there are the well-known objections to Molinism itself, which we will not elucidate here. While we are not claiming that these objections are fatal to Molinism, we think that the metaphysical commitments required by Molinism are a strike against it.

Additionally, and more seriously, this Molinism-inspired solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom faces a dilemma. Either the redeemed in heaven are such that it is possible for them to sin given their moral characters, or it is not. If the former, then this solution does not do justice to the heavenly perfection of the redeemed. The redeemed are supposed to be perfected in heaven.¹⁹ But consider whether someone in these circumstances is rightly considered perfected. Suppose that Smith is prone to adultery, or some other vicious action. But Smith's wife knows this about him. Suppose she knows the precise circumstances he would have to be in to commit adultery, or even freely will to commit adultery. Now suppose she is very good at keeping him out of these circumstances such that he is never again in adultery-prone circumstances. Extend the example a bit more and suppose that she knows what circumstances he would have to be in to perform any other sins as well. She also knows what circumstances he would have to be in to steal, for instance, and she keeps him out of those circumstances that would lead him to will freely to steal. So now Smith is in a pretty good state. No matter where he finds himself, provided that his wife is watching over him, he won't sin. But, we must ask, would it be right to consider him *perfected*? It seems not. He isn't transformed into a morally perfect individual in virtue of his being kept in sin-free circumstances, any more than a coward is rendered courageous by being kept away from the front lines. So if, as the first horn has it, the redeemed are able to sin given their moral characters, then they are not perfected. But the redeemed are perfected. So the first horn is not a viable option.

Consider, then, the other horn of the dilemma, according to which it is not possible for the redeemed to sin given their moral characters. This is the position that we develop and defend below in §5, and so we will reserve our full discussion until then. But note here that if it is the case that the moral character of the redeemed is perfected such that they are no longer able to sin, then the truth of Molinism would be superfluous to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom and one wouldn't need to (or be able to) reject (ii).

§4 Sennett's Solution — Proximate Compatibilism

One last extant solution that we find good and interesting is that developed and defended by James Sennett.²⁰ As we'll see more fully below,

¹⁹See, for instance, Hebrews 12:23.

²⁰See Sennett, "Is there Freedom in Heaven?"

Sennett thinks that free will is compatible with an agent's being determined in certain ways, provided that the agent brings about this determination by earlier free and undetermined activity. According to Sennett's view, insofar as humans on earth have free will, determinism must be false. Agents can, however, use their free will to form their moral characters in such a way that they are determined to act in certain ways. So long as the moral character that determines them was itself freely formed, Sennett does not think that this sort of self-imposed determinism rules out free will. In fact, it is along precisely these lines that Sennett understands heavenly freedom. After death, the redeemed in heaven are determined by their own freely formed character in such a way that certain choices and actions are no longer possible. Sennett goes even further than claiming that certain choices and actions are not possible in heaven; he goes on to claim that there is no libertarian free will in heaven *at all*. He writes that his view "allows that the good manifested by libertarian freedom be present in heaven, though there is no libertarian freedom there."²¹ Sennett writes, "I will call this conception of compatibilist freedom—under which compatibilist free actions are causally dependent on libertarian actions—the *Proximate Conception*."²²

It seems reasonable to think that there are some actions that are determined, but have not always been determined. For instance, given the moral character of a person—let's call her Teresa—it might be true that she is determined not to swindle money from a homeless shelter in order to pay for a luxurious vacation for herself insofar as she sees no good or motivating reason for engaging in such behavior. She hasn't always had that character, however; perhaps at some earlier time she would have been open to embezzling. And, on the assumption of incompatibilism, she wasn't causally determined to have the kind of moral character that sees no good reason to take funds from the homeless shelter to finance a luxury. She could have formed her character such that swindling money from the poor to finance a vacation wouldn't sound half bad to her. We could say in this case that, while it hasn't always been the case that she is determined not to swindle the money from the homeless shelter, it is now the case that she is determined not to do so. We might also say that, while she once was undetermined with respect to swindling the money from the homeless shelter, it is no longer the case that she is undetermined with respect to this particular action. Put another way, we could say that while she wasn't *remotely determined* not to swindle, she is *proximately determined* not to swindle, and while whether or not she swindled was *remotely undetermined*, it is not *proximately undetermined*.

²¹Ibid., p. 77. Putting the point as Sennett does here makes it sound as if there are multiple kinds of free will: the kind that (some) compatibilists believe in, and the kind that libertarians think we have. We think it's better to say that there is only one *kind* of free will—the kind that everyone who believes in free will thinks we have—and that the disagreement between compatibilists and incompatibilists is over what conditions must be met (or not met) in order for agents to have that kind of free will.

²²Ibid., p. 75.

In order to explain more fully the Proximate Conception of compatibilism, here are Sennett's definitions of those four italicized terms:

*Remote Determination*_{df} = "an event is *remotely determined* just in case the laws of nature and the state of the world *at any given time prior* to the event entail that the event will occur."²³

*Proximate Determination*_{df} = "an event is *proximately determined* just in case the laws of nature and the state of the world at some time *immediately prior* to the event entail that the event will occur."²⁴

*Remote Undetermination*_{df} = "an event is *remotely undetermined* just in case there is some time in the past such that the laws of nature and the state of the world at that time do not entail that the event will occur."²⁵

*Proximate Undetermination*_{df} = "an event is *proximately undetermined* just in case there is no time in the past such that the laws of nature and the state of the world at that time entail that the event will occur."²⁶

Notice that, given these definitions, there is logical space for a free act of an agent to be proximately determined by earlier actions which themselves were undetermined. Perhaps previous undetermined free actions shaped the individual's character such that the individual's later acts are proximately determined (though not remotely determined) by the individual's character. In such circumstances, the later freedom *traces* back to the earlier freedom.²⁷ Our potential swindler is still free when she doesn't swindle. As Sennett writes, "the notion of a free action over which there is no agent control at the time it was performed, but which is such that there must be agent controlled events in the past that led to the determination of the event, is not ruled absurd."²⁸ Thus this four-fold distinction allows for an action to be free which is determined by an individual's character, while still insisting that the falsity of determinism—determinism understood as the doctrines of (remote) causal or

²³Ibid., p. 72. Sennett goes on immediately to say: "That is, for every time *t* prior to time *t** at which the event occurs, the laws of nature and the state of the world at *t* entail the occurrence of the event at *t**."

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷For a discussion about the role that tracing plays in free action, see Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 80ff. and Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 37ff.

²⁸Sennett, "Is there Freedom in Heaven?," p. 73. We think this is too strong of a claim. For our forthcoming position, one needn't affirm that there are free actions over which there is no agential control. Our position allows each action an agent takes to be under her control, as we show below.

theological determinism—is required for free will.²⁹ One can form one's character through free actions in such a way that one's later willings are constricted by that character. Those later constricted willings, according to Sennett, are nonetheless free.³⁰

We think that Sennett's Solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom has numerous benefits. For instance, it avoids the problems of the previous solutions. Remember the objection to the compatibilist solution: that the problem of evil is made more intractable by compatibilism, since God could have made a world that he determined to be freely without sin but he didn't. Sennett's answer is that God couldn't have actualized a world in which humans are free from the start and also are incapable of sin in virtue of being determined never to sin. This is because, according to Sennett, an agent can be free at time *t* only if that agent is undetermined at *t* or such that what determines the agent's actions at *t* is the result of previous free and undetermined choices of that agent. Since both conditions for human freedom require freedom as understood by incompatibilists, God cannot create a world with free humans who are determined in every action. So given that freedom is such a great good, and given that it's possible that the only way God could actualize it is if he bore the possibility of human agents performing evil, free will can provide God a morally sufficient reason for the existence of moral evil.

Additionally, Sennett's view gives a way of understanding the claim that the blessed can't fall from heaven. Given their past actions, once in heaven they are incapable of sinning. And sinning is a necessary condition of falling from heaven. So Sennett's view doesn't run afoul of the nature of heavenly bliss, like the Concession Strategy does.

Finally, Sennett's solution avoids the problems we point out for the Molinist solution. Sennett's theory allows for the blessed to be rightly called 'perfected' in heaven. Furthermore, this perfected state in heaven allows for Sennett to give a principled reason for why all of the redeemed can be kept in sin-free circumstances whereas those on earth, at least it appears, cannot be.³¹

Even with all these benefits, we think there are places where Sennett's solution could be improved upon. For, as we noted earlier, there is *no* libertarian free will in heaven on Sennett's solution. According to Sennett,

²⁹It is for this reason that we think that Sennett's view is *not* a species of compatibilism.

³⁰One might think that Sennett is right about the constriction, but decline to label such willings free. However, if one understands free will to be the control condition for moral responsibility, as we do, then if these later willings are ones for which the agent can be morally responsible, they would need to involve free will. For descriptions of free will as the control condition on moral responsibility, see Kane, *The Significance of Free Will*, pp. 4f.; Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*, p. 80. Some libertarians prefer to define a free action in such a way that proximately determined actions cannot be free. For reasons against defining free will in this way, see Timpe, *Free Will: Sourcehood and Its Alternatives*, pp. 9ff.

³¹Possible exceptions to this claim are Jesus and, according to some theologies, the Virgin Mary. To avoid complexities that need not concern us here, we are setting aside these issues for present purposes.

the actions and choices of the redeemed are *determined* by the character that they formed on earth, and since they are thus determined, they are not free in the libertarian sense. We think that Sennett's claim that there is no non-derivative freedom in heaven is both too strong and not necessitated by the position that he lays out. In the following section we will present a solution that allows for non-derivative freedom in heaven while precluding heavenly sins.

§5 A Preferable Solution

Our position is very much like Sennett's. We think that during pre-heavenly existence a person has the ability to form a moral character which later precludes that person from willing certain things. For instance, neither author of this paper can will to torture an innocent child for a nickel.³² Our characters are such that we cannot will that; we simply cannot see a good reason for engaging in such behavior. But it doesn't follow that we aren't free, particularly given that our evaluative conclusions are not necessitated products of causally external forces. We are free in that we can choose to perform morally good actions, but our freely formed characters preclude us from doing morally bad actions insofar as those characters lead us to evaluate reasons for acting, or not acting, in certain ways. (We discuss an objection from significant freedom in the following section.) Furthermore, we are not missing out on something terribly good by being unable to will that particular action. As a matter of fact, we think we would be *less good* persons if we *could* will such an action.³³

One might wonder how it is that one's character could preclude certain actions. We think that one's character directs decisions by both influencing what one sees as reasons for actions and influencing how one weighs reasons for and against those actions. To put this point a slightly different way, in making free decisions, one's character affects not only the weights; it also affects the scales. Both of these aspects can be seen as follows. First, as stated above, given our present moral characters we can see no good reason to torture a child for a nickel (i.e., the nickel is not a *good* reason). Furthermore, we weigh the good of having a nickel against the goods of the child's bodily and psychological integrity and find that the child's welfare wins. Our characters are involved insofar as if we were more avaricious, we may find monetary gain, even small monetary gain, a good reason to inflict bodily harm on another. Similarly, if we were less empathetic, we may weigh the good of monetary gain more heavily than we do against the good of an innocent child's welfare.

³²Here we are assuming that the nickel in question has the standard worth of a nickel, that we aren't being controlled by mind control devices, etc. The whole story here is that someone offers us a nickel to torture the child. We borrow this example from Eleonore Stump's "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility: The Flicker of Freedom," *The Journal of Ethics* 3.4 (1999), p. 323.

³³In fact, Augustine thinks that free will that is never used for evil, what he calls 'genuine freedom', is the highest kind of freedom. See Augustine 1999, p. xviii. A similar view is developed in Timothy O'Connor in "Freedom with a Human Face," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 29 (2005), pp. 207–227.

Likewise, consider Teresa again. Her character determines that she not swindle from the homeless shelter. But were her character more vicious—say, by being less temperate and just—she may see the good of a luxurious vacation as a very great good and give it more weight against the good of social justice and the welfare of the poor. The better her character (at least with respect to certain virtues), the weaker the reasons for swindling appear to her, and the less weight she accords them in her judgments. At some high level of character, the action of swindling from the poor for the sake of a luxurious vacation would appear so repugnant to her that she *just couldn't* bring herself to do it—she is incapable, given her character, of freely willing to swindle for the sake of the luxurious vacation.³⁴

In heaven, the blessed will be incapable of willing any sin, just as we are incapable of willing the particular sin of torturing an innocent child for a nickel, and just as Teresa is incapable of willing to swindle from a homeless shelter for a luxurious vacation. This will be because of the character the redeemed have formed in their pre-heavenly existence. Given the perfection of their character, they will see no reason to engage in sinful and wicked actions. This doesn't mean that they won't be free, however. At the very least, as seen in the preceding section on Sennett's view, the redeemed in heaven could be derivatively free; that is, even if all the decisions of the blessed in heaven were determined by their characters and the reasons they see for acting in various ways, that by itself wouldn't render them unfree.

Nevertheless, it would be better to claim that not only is there derivative free will in heaven, but also non-derivative freedom as well. The question here is what *is* the relation between one's character and one's actions in heaven? On our view, even if one's character determines that one not perform certain actions, it doesn't determine all the actions that one does perform; rather, one's freely chosen moral character underdetermines at least some of one's actions.³⁵ For instance, consider the choice either to sing in the heavenly choir or to play the harp. If both of these actions are consistent with the nature of heaven and one sees good reasons for engaging in both activities, then one's moral character needn't determine one's choice either way. If it is true that one can either choose to play the harp or choose to sing with the same perfected moral character, this choice shows that there can be non-derivative free choices even in heaven. In other words, we think it better to say that our moral characters, and the reasons we see for acting in various ways as a result of having those characters, don't *determine* all the actions we *do* perform, but they do *preclude* those actions we *cannot* perform. That is, while our characters in heaven don't determine that we sing songs of joy, they do preclude that we drop-kick the apostles. While our characters don't determine that we run, plow and play, they do preclude that we rape, pillage and plunder. So we retain non-derivative free will, but our theory says it is

³⁴This sort of inability can be understood in terms of conditional or hypothetical necessity.

³⁵This claim is, of course, consistent with the further claim that our character determines many of our actions in heaven.

circumscribed—even if not fully—by the moral characters that we have previously formed.³⁶

One might wonder if all the free choices one may make in heaven are as trivial and unimportant as whether one plays a harp or sings (that is, if one thinks that such choices are trivial and unimportant), rather than being morally important choices. On our view, the blessed are free to will any number of interesting and morally relevant actions that they see good reason for doing. At any one given time, a blessed individual in heaven can will to pray for all of her descendents, all of her Godchildren, or just one particular good friend. One's character needn't determine which of these actions one performs. But insofar as praying for others is a morally relevant action rather than merely being trivial, then the blessed in heaven have freedom—freedom that is relevant to their moral state—that is not determined. Thus, we don't say, as Sennett does (when he claims that all heavenly actions are proximately determined and that "there is no libertarian freedom [in heaven]"³⁷), that all actions of the blessed are determined by their characters, or even that all important and interesting actions are determined.

Our position is similar in many places to Aquinas' view on heavenly freedom. Aquinas holds that the ability to do evil isn't essential to having free will. Once the defects in one's intellect and will are removed, the will is still free, but is no longer able to do evil; being able to will evil is accidental, not essential, to free will.³⁸ Furthermore, while the blessed are free and incapable of sinning due to their characters determining that they not perform morally evil actions, they are still able to perform morally

³⁶Objecting to an aspect of Sennett's view, Nagasawa et al. write: "It is not plausible to think that there are—or ever have been—*any* people whose characters are such that, when they die, it is logically impossible for them to make evil choices. It is also not plausible to think that there are—or ever have been—*any* people whose characters are such that, when they die, the features of those characters that bear on any choice that that person might make in Heaven are as they are *solely* because of libertarian free choices that that person made during his life" (Nagasawa, Oppy, and Trakakis, "Salvation in Heaven?," pp. 110f.). It seems to us that the traditional doctrine of purgatory allows the soul to continue forming the proper dispositions and character without an ad hoc extension of Sennett's view. Here we are thinking of the approach to purgatory and its role in character formation that is at the heart of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, as well as Jerry Walls' account of purgatory in chapter 2 of *Heaven: The Logic of Eternal Joy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³⁷Sennett, "Is there Freedom in Heaven?," p. 77.

³⁸Aquinas writes: "We note a second difference regarding which there can be free choice as the difference between good and evil. But this difference does not intrinsically belong to the power of free choice but is incidentally related to the power inasmuch as natures capable of defect have such free choice. . . . And so nothing prevents there being a power of free choice that so strives for good that it is in no way capable of striving for evil, whether by nature, as in the case of God, or by the perfection of grace, as in the case of the saints and the holy angels" (*De Malo, On Evil*, trans. Richard J. Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), q.16, a.5, response).

relevant and important actions.³⁹ One might worry that, for Aquinas, the blessed do not have alternate possibilities open to them, especially since Aquinas claims that the blessed are unchangeable in their will.⁴⁰ This might be seen as a place where our view parts company with Aquinas', since we claim that the blessed are able to will and choose among distinct goods in heaven.

This worry can be dispelled if we look at what Aquinas says about the will of Christ. He writes:

The will of Christ, though determined to good, is not determined to this or that good. Hence it pertains to Christ, even as to the blessed, to choose with a free will confirmed in good.⁴¹

So, for Aquinas, being able to do evil isn't essential to having free will. One can be free and perform morally relevant actions, even if one's character determines that one cannot perform morally evil actions. Even if the blessed are determined not to sin, they are still able to choose freely among alternate goods.⁴²

There are many reasons to accept this theory we present. In fact, it has all the benefits we've mentioned of the views canvassed. First, the incompatibilist view of freedom has been held by many in the Christian tradition, just as compatibilism has. Second, it emphasizes the importance of a

³⁹Aquinas writes: "There is a necessity of compulsion: and this lessens the praise due to virtue, since it is opposed to what is voluntary; for compulsion is contrary to the will. — But there is another necessity resulting from an interior inclination. This does not diminish but increases the praise due to a virtuous act: because it makes the will tend to the act of virtue more intensely. For it is clear that the more perfect is a habit of virtue, the more strongly does it make the will tend to the virtuous good, and the less liable to deflect from it. *And when virtue has attained its perfect end, it brings with it a kind of necessity for good action, for instance in the Blessed, who cannot sin, as we shall show further on: and yet the will is not, for that reason, any the less free, or the act less good*" (Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, trans. English Dominicans (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1934), bk. 3b, chap. 138; emphasis ours). Compare what Aquinas says here to what we say about the strength of Teresa's character and her ability to will to swindle from the homeless shelter.

⁴⁰For instance: "the soul that is beatified immediately after death, becomes unchangeable in its will" (*Summa contra gentiles*, bk. 4, chap. 92). By claiming that the will is unchangeable, Aquinas means, as the context clearly shows, that the will of the blessed is unable to will evil and is unchangeable *from the good*, and not that it is unable to change among goods. The quotation following this note lends additional support to this claim.

⁴¹Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, III q.18 a.4 ad.3.

⁴²The view that the freedom of the redeemed is a freedom to choose among alternate goods isn't idiosyncratic to Aquinas. In fact, one finds it in the 1910 *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company) entry on Heaven, which says: "The blessed are confirmed in good; they can no longer commit even the slightest venial sin; every wish of their heart is inspired by the purest love of God. That is, beyond doubt, Catholic doctrine. Moreover this impossibility of sinning is physical. The blessed have no longer the power of choosing to do evil actions; they cannot but love God; they are merely free to show that love by one good action in preference to another."

robust form of free will, just as the Concession Strategy does. Third, it protects against the live possibility of sin in heaven, as the Molinist Strategy does. Lastly, its reliance on character formation and the reasons agents recognize for acting in various ways because of that character provides a way of showing how the ability to sin may be curtailed in heaven, but curtailed *as a freely willed consequence of one's free will*.

What of the reasons we gave to reject the previous views? Are any of them applicable to our view? We think not. First, our view avoids the objection to compatibilism concerning the problem of evil in the same way Molinism and Sennett's view do. Secondly, it doesn't require a doctrinal concession like the Concession Strategy does. Thirdly, it doesn't fall short of perfection for the redeemed, as the Molinist Strategy does. Finally, our theory allows for non-derivatively free actions in heaven while precluding sinful actions in a way consonant with our freedom. The blessed still have a range of important, non-trivial free choices they can make, though all the bad choices are excluded by free acts of their own (non-determined) willing.

However, even if our theory retains all the benefits of the previous theories and avoids all their deficiencies, that doesn't mean that it doesn't have its own pitfalls. What of objections to our solution?

§6 *Objections and Rebuttals*

One potential objection to our solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom is that it brings with it heresy. According to this objection, even if the position advocated in this paper saves the traditional view of heaven from problems, it does so only at the cost of rejecting the traditional view of grace and embracing a heretical position—Pelagianism, the view that one can earn or merit one's way to heaven apart from a unique grace given by God.⁴³ The proposed view removes from God the ability to cause primarily anything that a secondary cause could cause, since God can't cause me to have a perfect character, but I can. The solution makes all virtues acquired and doesn't allow God the dignity (or *possibility*) of infusing them himself.

In response to this objection, we claim that our view allows for God's grace to play an important role in the formation of characters. All that it requires is that our free cooperation plays *some* role in our moral formation as well. But, even there, our position doesn't require that one *earn* the ability to cooperate in salvation or that a unique grace isn't required. We make no claims here either way about whether one has the ability to cooperate in one's *salvation* (our view is thus neutral with respect to

⁴³Pelagius's view is often falsely portrayed as one according to which a human agent is able to will the good apart from grace. Pelagius consistently maintained that the giving of human nature is itself a grace; thus, even on his account, grace is required for an individual to will the good. This grace is sometimes referred to as 'enabling grace' or 'the grace of creation'. What Pelagius denied is that a further grace—sometimes called 'cooperative grace' or what Augustine calls 'a unique grace'—is also required for a fallen human to turn toward God. For a further discussion of these issues, see Kevin Timpe, "Grace and Controlling What We Do Not Cause," *Faith and Philosophy* 24.3 (2007), pp. 284–299.

issues of Divine Monergism and Divine Synergism⁴⁴). What we do claim is that one has the ability to cooperate with God in one's coming to a *morally perfect character*—a logically necessary, but undoubtedly causally insufficient condition for *final* salvation, that is, for one's unending future existence in heaven.⁴⁵ We can (and do) keep the initial infusion of God's saving grace as God's gratuitous prerogative. So the gratuity isn't stricken from our account.

As for the charge that our view strips God of the causal powers due to him—the power of being able to cause anything himself that a creature of his could cause, or the ability to infuse a perfect character into his creatures—we deny the charge. Nothing we say entails that God couldn't determine a perfect character in anyone. If God wanted, he could infuse a perfectly formed character into us right now. He couldn't, however, both do that and keep us free at the same time. And if having free will is essential to having a *moral* character, then God couldn't unilaterally infuse a perfected *moral* character into us. This is no problem for God's omnipotence, since it is not a limitation of God's power that He is not able to do what can't be done at all.⁴⁶

A second objection to our view is suggested by Michael Martin, who writes that "it is doubtful" that the traditional view can be reconciled with "standard defenses against the Argument from Evil such as the Free Will Defense."⁴⁷ He elaborates as follows:

The FWD [i.e., the Free Will Defense] provides an explanation of why there is so much moral evil: human beings misuse their free will and cause evil. God does not interfere with these choices for to do so would be to interfere with free will. . . . 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.⁴⁸

⁴⁴One might, of course, have others reasons for preferring Divine Synergism over Divine Monergism, or vice versa. What we claim here is that our account of heavenly freedom does not, strictly speaking, rule out either option nor entail that one view is to be preferred over the other.

⁴⁵This is a position concerning sanctification that even Divine Monergists should be happy to accept.

⁴⁶See, for instance, Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, I q. 25 a. 3, resp: "God is called omnipotent because He can do all things that are possible absolutely . . . everything that does not imply a contradiction in terms, is numbered amongst those possible things, in respect of which God is called omnipotent: whereas whatever implies contradiction does not come within the scope of divine omnipotence, because it cannot have the aspect of possibility. Hence it is better to say that such things cannot be done, than that God cannot do them."

⁴⁷Michael Martin, "Problems with Heaven," *Secular Web Library: Essays on Atheism and Religious Disbelief* (1997), http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/michael_martin/heaven.html.

⁴⁸Ibid. See also George B. Wall, "Heaven and a Wholly Good God," *Personalist* 58 (1977), pp. 352–357.

Martin argues here that if God could make a world with heaven as a proper part, he could make a world that is wholly and entirely heavenly. But then, why didn't he? Why allow all the horrors of the world? Those evils aren't necessary for the good of free will, on the traditional account, since heaven has free will and heaven has none of those horrors. Think of it this way: consider the world at some time, *t*, after the Final Judgment, when all the redeemed are in heaven, and all the damned (if such there be) are in hell. Why couldn't God create the world with *t* as its first instant? Creating such a world would avoid all the evils of the world, but still include the great good of free will. If we have no good answer to this objection, our theory has the same disadvantage as the compatibilist solution—it makes the logical problem of evil more intractable.

On our theory, it doesn't follow from God's ability to actualize a world that contains freedom and no moral evil or sin as a proper part that God can actualize a world that contains freedom and no moral evil or sin in its entirety. On the view that we are advocating, if a non-divine agent is free and has a moral character that precludes sin, there must have been a prior time when that agent was free and didn't have a moral character that precludes sin.⁴⁹ The only way, on our view, that a non-divine person can be free and have a moral character precluding of sin is if that person previously freely formed her moral character into one that precludes sin. So if God were to bring a world into existence that is intrinsically identical with this world from *t* forward, while the denizens of the actual world would be free, the denizens of the second world would not be insofar as they are remotely determined.

The most serious objection to our account is the following. One might claim that while our account preserves free will in heaven, it does so at the expense of not preserving the presence of *significant* free will in heaven.⁵⁰ As Alvin Plantinga defines it; a person has significant free will only if that individual is "free with respect to an action that is morally significant for him,"⁵¹ where an action is morally significant for a person at a given time "if it would be wrong for him to perform the action then but right to refrain, or vice versa."⁵² Significant free will is thus a robust, non-trivial freedom of the will. If God were to create beings who could choose freely only once, and then only between two morally neutral options, it would be true to say that such creatures have free will, but it would be false to say that they have significant free will.

Furthermore, as defined by Plantinga, a person is significantly free with respect to an action only if either the performance of that action or refraining from performing that action is morally wrong, and the person is free to act or to refrain from acting. If a person freely chooses between two morally good options, say giving money to *Oxfam* or giving money to a local

⁴⁹The qualifier 'non-divine' here is needed due to issues arising from the freedom of God Himself. Insofar as our concern in the present paper is with the freedom of the redeemed rather than with God Himself, this restriction is appropriate.

⁵⁰We thank Tom Flint for raising and pressing this objection.

⁵¹Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, p. 166. See also Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, p. 30.

⁵²Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, p. 166.

homeless shelter, then such a choice would not be significantly free. Given Plantinga's definition of significant freedom, all supererogatory choices fail to be significantly free as well, since, by definition, it is not wrong to refrain from performing a particular supererogatory action. The only significantly free choices we have, on Plantinga's account of significant freedom, are those that are between morally right and morally wrong options. And given that on the account of heavenly freedom we defended above the redeemed do not have the ability to choose anything morally wrong, it follows that the redeemed in heaven do not have significant free will in Plantinga's sense of the term.

Given the way that Plantinga has defined what it is to be significantly free, the core of the objection is true: the redeemed lack significant free will so defined. What we dispute, however, is that this is a serious objection to our view. There are three reasons we so object.

First, there is something untoward about Plantinga's definition here, as it suggests that any choice that does not involve at least one morally wrong alternative is not morally significant. As the *Oxfam* example illustrates, this need not be the case; for when one is choosing between multiple but mutually exclusive morally good options, whatever one chooses will be morally significant in the sense that each option carries moral weight, though it will not be morally significant in Plantinga's sense. To use a more sinister example, say that Satan freely becomes so vicious that he can no longer perform morally praiseworthy actions. As an out-flowing of his vicious character, he wants to punish Teresa for her virtuous behavior. And given his devilish nature, he cannot choose an option that is morally good. But should he avenge her virtue by defiling her children with painful boils, send his demons to tear her limb from limb, or simply torture her to death himself? Since none of these options is morally good, it follows from Plantinga's definition that this choice is not a significantly free choice for Satan, despite the fact that each of the options he is considering in the choice carries moral weight.

In the spirit of Plantinga's definition, we define a *morally relevant* choice as follows: a choice is morally relevant iff the person is free to choose among at least two options, and at least two of the options, say, A and B, are related such that either A is better than B or B is better than A. Similarly, we say that a person has *morally relevant freedom* if she is free with respect to a choice that is morally relevant to her. Though not all instances of morally relevant freedom will also be instances of morally significant freedom as defined by Plantinga,⁵³ there is another sense in which such choices are morally significant—that is, they all carry moral weight. They carry moral weight for at least two reasons. First, one can rightly judge someone to be a better person for choosing to perform a supererogatory action, even if refraining wouldn't make her a morally bad person in any way. So morally relevant choices—such as the choice of whether to perform a supererogatory action—can properly affect our moral judgments even if those choices are not morally significant in Plantinga's sense. Furthermore, morally relevant choices

⁵³However, on these definitions, the set of morally significant choices will be a sub-set of those that are morally relevant.

carry moral weight insofar as they affect our characters. That is, the more supererogatory choices one makes, the better person one *becomes*, and this even if refraining from those supererogatory choices wouldn't make one a worse person.

The second reason we do not believe the objection from morally significant freedom to be serious is because there is nothing about the Free Will Defense that requires significant freedom in heaven. The Free Will Defense requires morally significant freedom during some span of time to serve as the greater good that is possibly God's reason for allowing moral evil—it *does not* require morally significant freedom at *all times* to serve as the greater good that is possibly God's reason for allowing moral evil. Since the process of forming one's character in the way outlined above involves having choices on earth about actions that it would be wrong to perform but right to refrain from, or vice versa, our view preserves the importance of and need for morally significant freedom while on earth, just as does the Free Will Defense. However, if one thinks that there are other possible reasons God could have which justify the existence of evil besides the existence of morally significant freedom, we see no reason to think that our account of heavenly freedom would be incompatible with these reasons. For instance, suppose one adopted a Soul-Making Defense on which the possibility of moral evil is required on earth for soul-making. Such a possibility would not be required in heaven because the souls are, so to speak, already made.

Our final response to the objection from morally significant freedom is related to the second, and that is to question the motivation for preserving morally significant freedom, rather than simply morally relevant freedom, in heaven. An essentially omnibenevolent God is, by definition, unable to have morally significant freedom in Plantinga's sense. And we see no reason to insist that the redeemed will have a kind of freedom that God does not have, particularly when the having of that freedom indicates a failing of moral character in the redeemed.⁵⁴ So far as we can tell, there is no motivation for insisting that the redeemed have significant freedom rather than just morally relevant freedom. And since morally relevant freedom is a robust, non-trivial sort of freedom, we see no loss in denying significant freedom in heaven, in Plantinga's sense, and affirming morally relevant freedom in heaven.

An objection that arises here concerns whether the choices of the redeemed in heaven can truly have moral weight on our definition of moral relevance.⁵⁵ A central part of our picture of heaven is the claim that the blessed in heaven have perfect moral characters, and that these characters, though precluding significantly free acts (by precluding evil choices), leave open the possibility of morally relevant actions. Two reasons we give for why performing a morally relevant action carries moral weight are because one can rightly judge someone to be a better person for choosing to perform a supererogatory action, even if refraining wouldn't make her a morally bad person in any way, and because the

⁵⁴We think there are reasons to claim that God does, in fact, have morally relevant freedom. However, space does not permit an exploration of those reasons here.

⁵⁵We owe this objection, and much of its wording, to Tom Flint.

more supererogatory choices one makes, the better person one *becomes*, and this even if refraining from those supererogatory choices wouldn't make one a worse person. Now, if someone's in heaven, we already know that he has a perfect moral character, for that's a necessary condition of his being in heaven. But if one of the redeemed, say, Andrew, has a *perfect* moral character, how could he be judged "a better person" if he chooses to perform A rather than B, where neither A nor B is evil but A is better than B? And how can the choices he makes affect his character if he *already*, as one of the blessed in heaven, has a *perfect* moral character? How can he become better, by making more supererogatory choices, if he has already attained moral perfection? If our account cannot provide another way of finding moral weight in morally relevant actions for the redeemed, it seems like our account only provides morally trivial freedom for them.

In response, let us distinguish two ways of being morally perfect, one of which admits of an upper limit, while the other does not. Consider a moral virtue, say, temperance. In one sense, being perfectly temperate is being precisely on the mean of temperance, not leaning toward either gluttony or insensibility. Once you are on the mean, you can't get any *more* on the mean. So, in this sense, once you are morally perfect, you can't become any more morally perfect.

But there is also a second sense of being perfected in virtue, and that's how tenaciously one clings to the mean once one is on it. A drunkard fresh to sobriety might be on the mean, but he can also be ever so lightly straddling it—a strong breeze could knock him off. However, someone who has been sober for twenty years may have a tenacious grasp on sobriety—he can stay sober in the face of temptation that would lead the newly sober man to the drink. Both are precisely on the mean, but one clings to it more tightly. This second sort of perfection, for all we know, doesn't admit of an upper limit. One can always cling more tightly to the mean.

It seems to us at least possible that a person can cling to the mean to such an extent that he can't fall from it, but he could nevertheless still cling tighter. If that is possible, then the redeemed in heaven are such that they are perfected in the first sense, being squarely on the mean, and perfected in the second sense insofar as they cling to the mean so tenaciously that they can't but remain there, but are nevertheless such that they could always cling tighter. Their morally relevant choices bring them to cling ever tighter to the mean, and we can judge them to be better for choosing supererogatory actions insofar as such choices bring them to cling more tenaciously to the mean. And, we should note, that if we think about clinging to the good rather than clinging to the mean, we can say that through the everlasting years that the blessed spend with God, they are never-endingly coming ever closer to Him, who is Goodness itself, ever clinging more tenaciously to Him.⁵⁶

Finally, one might reject our theory if one has arguments against incompatibilism or doesn't desire an orthodox answer to the Problem of Heav-

⁵⁶We are reminded here of the end of last book of *The Chronicles of Narnia, The Last Battle*, where Aslan calls the Lords and Ladies of Narnia to come ever "Further Up and Further In" to the Real Narnia, heaven.

enly Freedom. We readily admit that we haven't provided an argument for incompatibilism or the traditional view of heaven. But for those who are inclined to both incompatibilism and traditional Christianity, we think that our view is the best solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom.⁵⁷

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