

Salvation in Heaven?

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to examine the difficulties that belief in a paradisiacal afterlife creates for orthodox theists. In particular, we consider the difficulties that arise when one asks whether there is freedom in Heaven, i.e. whether the denizens of Heaven have libertarian freedom of action. Our main contention is that this “Problem of Heaven” makes serious difficulties for proponents of free will theodicies and for proponents of free will responses to arguments from evil.

Belief in a paradisiacal afterlife is a central plank in orthodox theistic belief. On this view, death does not mark the end of the existence of at least some human beings; rather, for those human beings who are granted entry to Heaven, it marks a transition to a new and highly desirable phase of existence. So, for example, Swinburne (1983:39,43) contends that “Heaven is a place where people enjoy eternally a supremely worthwhile happiness”, and that “[a] man in Heaven would be in a situation of supreme value”.

However, details about the nature of Heaven, and about the nature of the afterlife that its denizens enjoy, are controversial. Among the key questions, there are at least the following: (1) Is there time in Heaven? If so, is Heaven temporally related to our universe? (2) Is there space in Heaven? If so, is Heaven spatially related to our universe? (3) Is there matter in Heaven? If so, is the matter in Heaven of the same

kind as the matter in our universe? If so, are the laws that govern matter in Heaven the same as the laws that govern matter in our universe?

Since Heaven is assumed to be a place in which individual human beings continue their existence, it is plausible to suppose that those human beings who enter Heaven continue their existence as individual conscious beings. True enough, some have maintained that in Heaven there is a “merging” with God in which individual consciousness is lost; but, at least *prima facie*, on this kind of view there is no individual survival of death in an afterlife. For the purposes of the present paper, we shall restrict our attention to the orthodox theistic belief that maintains that those human beings who enter Heaven continue to exist as individual conscious beings (and, indeed, as individual, conscious *human* beings).

Given that Heaven contains a community of individual, conscious, *human* beings, there is good reason to suppose that there is time, space and matter in Heaven.¹ The individuation of these beings requires some kind of space within which they occupy distinct locations; the consciousness of these beings requires a time within which states of consciousness can succeed one another; and the “being” of these beings requires some kind of matter from which they are constituted (and which can mediate communications between them)². Of course, even if this much is accepted, there are many alternative conceptions of Heaven that remain open. On one view, Heaven is merely a final segment of the universe that we currently inhabit; on a second view, Heaven is a spatiotemporally separate “universe” (more or less like the one that we currently inhabit, with more or less similar matter and laws); on a third view, Heaven

is a distinct realm with very different “space”, “time”, and/or “matter” from that which is found in our universe.

One might think that, unless one takes the view that Heaven is merely a final segment of the universe that we currently inhabit, there is no sense to be made of the idea that a single human being can have a pre-mortem existence on Earth and a post-mortem existence in Heaven. (Cf. Flew (1984) and Martin (1997).) While we think that there are many promising ways of making sense of the idea in question—ranging from views which suppose that all one should care about is that one *survives* as a being in Heaven (cf. Parfit (1984)) to views which suppose that God can ensure that there is the kind of causal connection between the stages of a being on Earth and a being in Heaven that makes it the case that these are all stages of a single being (cf. Lewis (1976))—we do not propose to take up this interesting issue here. Rather, we propose to explore further problems that arise even if it is granted that there is sense to be made of the idea that a single human being can have a pre-mortem existence on Earth and a post-mortem existence in Heaven.

The difficulties that we have in mind arise when we try to take account of the claim that existence in Heaven is paradisiacal. According to the orthodox view that we are considering, Heaven is a place in which there is no evil, and Heaven is also a place that overflows with good. On the one hand, there are neither natural evils nor moral evils in Heaven. On the other hand, there are goods in Heaven that are very much greater—“incomparably greater”, “infinitely greater”—than the goods that are available during life on Earth. Moreover, according to the orthodox view, it is not an accidental matter that Heaven has these characteristics: it is part of the *essence* of

Heaven that it should be a place in which there is no evil; and it is also part of the *essence* of Heaven that it should be a place that overflows with good.

But—and now we turn to the problem that is the subject matter of the present paper—if it is part of the *essence* of Heaven that it should be a place in which there is no evil, then there is at least some reason to think that Heaven must also be a place in which human beings have severely limited freedom of action. On the assumption that an agent is free to do an action of kind *K* in circumstances *C* *only if* it is within the power of the agent to perform such an action in those circumstances, it seems to follow straightforwardly, from the claim that it is necessarily true that there is no moral evil in Heaven, that no agents are free to perform evil actions in Heaven. Moreover, if Heaven is a place that overflows with good—and, in particular, if Heaven is as good as any place can possibly be—and if human beings have severely limited freedom of action in Heaven, then there is at least some reason to think that morally significant freedom of action cannot be an overwhelmingly weighty good. If morally significant freedom of action really were such an important and weighty good, then surely there should be lots of it in Heaven—and yet, if the above argument is cogent, then there is reason to think that there cannot be morally significant freedom of action in Heaven.

1

There are various responses that one might make to our “problem of Heaven”. In particular: (1) one might dispute the claim that it is part of orthodox theism to suppose that Heaven is essentially a place in which there is no evil; (2) one might reject the

libertarian conception of freedom that we have presupposed; and (3) one might deny the claim that all weighty and important goods must be instantiated in Heaven. We shall consider the prospects for each of these kinds of responses in turn.

However, before we turn to consider these responses, there is some more stage setting to be done. In particular, we need to say something more about which kinds of orthodox theists might be expected to be troubled by our “problem of Heaven”. While there may be a general problem that is raised by the “problem of Heaven”, we are particularly interested in the capacity for this “problem” to make difficulties for proponents of free will defences against logical arguments from moral evil, and for proponents of free will theodicies.³

Consider, *first*, logical arguments from moral evil. There are many different formulations of logical arguments from moral evil; for the purpose of having a definite example before us, we shall work with the following version:

Consider all the possible universes ranked in order of merit (goodness). All of the very best universes containing free agents—the *A-universes*—are universes in which all free agents always freely choose the good. (This seems uncontroversial. Certainly, it seems uncontroversial by the lights of theists. Other things being equal, it is always better to choose the good than to choose the less good.⁴) Of course, not all universes in which all free agents always freely choose the good are amongst the best universes containing free agents—for some of these universes may contain all manner of other kinds of horrors. However, this point notwithstanding, it seems right to say that there

is a non-arbitrary cut-off between the A-universes and the other universes containing free agents. And so we may go on to argue as follows:

1. Necessarily, a perfect being can choose to make an A-universe (Premise)
2. Necessarily, A-universes are non-arbitrarily better than other universes that contain free agents. (Premise)
3. Necessarily, if a perfect being chooses between options, and one option is non-arbitrarily better than the other options, then the perfect being chooses that option. (Premise)
4. Hence, necessarily, if a perfect being makes a universe that contains free agents, then it makes an A-universe. (From 1, 2, 3)
5. Our universe is not an A-universe. (Premise)
6. Hence, it is not the case that a perfect being made our universe. (From 4, 5)

Various replies to this argument are possible. However, perhaps the best known response is the free-will defence, which rejects the first premise. A perfect being is not necessarily able to choose to make a universe in which everyone always freely chooses the good (and yet a perfect being can nonetheless choose to make a universe that contains free agents).⁵ This defence requires the assumption that it is logically impossible for agents to make free choices in a universe whose every contingent detail is chosen by a perfect being (and it also requires the assumption that freedom of choice is such a great good that a perfect being is justified in making a universe that contains free agents who make free choices even if that universe contains moral evils). But—and this is where our problem of Heaven intrudes—if it is logically impossible for agents to make free choices in a universe whose every contingent

detail is chosen by a perfect being, then it follows that agents have free choices in Heaven only if it is not the case that the choices of a perfect being completely determine the nature of Heaven. But if the choices of a perfect being fail to completely determine the nature of Heaven, then why is it the case that Heaven is *essentially* a place in which there is no moral evil? Or, to turn to a closely related point: if a perfect being is unable to choose to make a universe in which everyone always freely chooses the good, then how is it that a perfect being is able to choose to make a Heaven in which everyone always freely chooses the good?⁶

Consider, *second*, free will theodicies. There are different versions of free will theodicies, but they have in common the ambition to show that it is *possible* (at least for all that we know, or, at any rate, for all that we reasonably believe) that the kinds and amounts of evils that are found in the universe are permitted by a perfect being as a trade-off against the goods that are realised through the existence of a universe in which there are free agents who make morally significant free choices. But if there is no freedom in Heaven, then it seems that theists must suppose that it is possible for very great goods—“infinitely great”, “incomparably great”—to be realised in a domain in which there is no freedom. Yet, if that is right, then it is not entirely clear that we still have the right to claim that freedom is a great good, or that it is a sufficiently great good to justify the kinds and amounts of evils that are found in the universe. If there can be an abundance of goods without either freedom or evil, then what justification could a perfect being have for making a universe like ours?

For the sake of definiteness, we can set out an “argument from Heaven” as follows:

1. Necessarily, there is no evil in Heaven. (Premise, justified by appeal to the orthodox conception of Heaven.)
2. If there is morally significant freedom in Heaven, then it is not the case that, necessarily, there is no evil in Heaven. (Premise, justified by appeal to the libertarian conception of freedom.)
3. (Therefore) There is no morally significant freedom in Heaven. (From 1, 2)
4. Heaven is a domain in which the greatest goods are realised. (Premise, justified by appeal to the orthodox conception of Heaven.)
5. (Therefore) The greatest goods can be realised in a domain in which there is no morally significant freedom. (From 3, 4.)
6. (Therefore) A perfect being can just choose to make a domain that contains the greatest goods and no evil. (From 5, appealing to the omnipotence of a perfect being.)
7. A world that contains the greatest goods and no evil is non-arbitrarily better than any world that contains the greatest goods, *incomparably* lesser goods, and the amounts and kinds of evils that are found in our universe. (Premise.)
8. If a perfect being chooses between options, and one option is non-arbitrarily better than the other options, then the perfect being chooses that option. (Premise)
9. (Therefore) It is not the case that a perfect being made our universe. (From 6, 7, 8)

Note that Premise 7 can be justified in the following way. On the one hand, the amounts and kinds of evils to be found in our universe are obviously non-negligible when compared to the amounts and kinds of evils to be found in a universe in which there is no evil. On the other hand, the goods to be found in a world in which there are only the goods of Heaven differ only negligibly from the goods to be found in a world

in which there are the goods of Heaven and the goods of our universe. (Why? Because the goods of Heaven are “incomparably”—“infinitely”, “immeasurably”—greater than the goods of our universe. When we consider the overall good of our world, the goods of our universe register only infinitesimally.) The inference from 5. to 6. could be strengthened and clarified, but we shall leave this for some other time, since we don’t expect that the argument will be open to serious challenge at this point.

2

It seems plausible to claim that, if one rejects the assumption that Heaven is essentially a place in which there is no evil, then the “problem of Heaven” evaporates. However, it seems to us that the claim that there is evil in Heaven simply runs counter to orthodox belief in these matters.⁷ So we conclude that the position to which this suggestion leads is that it is merely a matter of contingent fact that there is no evil in Heaven: there could have been evil in Heaven, but as a matter of fact there isn’t.

There are various reasons why orthodox theists might not be content with this proposal. Perhaps the most pressing problem is that the prospects seem poor for a really satisfying explanation of why it happens *actually* to be the case that there is no evil in Heaven, given that it is merely a matter of contingent fact that this is so.⁸ Indeed, if we suppose that God and Heaven are both in time, and if we suppose that there are no truths about future contingents, then it seems that we cannot claim that it is true that there will be no evil in Heaven: there is not yet any fact of the matter about whether there is evil in Heaven at some future time.

One option here might be to follow the Molinist version of the free-will defence developed in Plantinga (1974). Suppose that there are true counterfactuals of freedom, and that the truth of these counterfactuals of freedom is not something that can just be chosen by a perfect being. For all we know, it is logically possible that, when a perfect being comes to create contingent things, it has open to it the option of making a universe in which free creatures freely go wrong that is conjoined to a Heaven in which free creatures always freely go right, but it does not have open to it the option of making a universe in which free creatures always freely go right. (In Plantinga's terms, even though all of the creaturely essences that the perfect being can instantiate suffer from transworld depravity, at least some of those essences have possible instantiations in which their "final segments" always go right.) It is not clear that this proposal makes any *additional* difficulties for Molinism; however, we think that there are very good independent reasons not to adopt a Molinist version of the free-will defence.

Perhaps the most promising option for those inclined to the line that it is merely a matter of contingent fact that there is no evil in Heaven is this. Suppose that neither God nor Heaven is in time (i.e. neither God nor Heaven is located in the spatio-temporal network within which we are all located). Suppose further that there are true claims to be made about future contingents, and that what makes those claims true (at least in some cases) is what actually happens at those future times. In that case, it could be *true* that there are free agents in Heaven, and that those free agents always freely choose the good, but that it is merely a matter of contingent truth that those free agents always freely chose the good. So far, so good. But, supposing that there are

free agents in Heaven, and that they do all always freely choose the good, is there an explanation of why it is that they behave in this way? Given that we are talking about human beings, and given what we know about human nature, the odds that a large group of human beings will all freely choose the good for any extended length of time are astronomical. Indeed, given that moral evils extend to include even the slightest moral peccadilloes, the odds are strongly against even one human being freely choosing nothing but the good for any extended length of time. But, if this is right, then the likelihood that free human agents in Heaven all always freely choose the good is vanishingly small. (And this is so even if there are very few human agents in Heaven.) But, if the odds that free human agents in Heaven all always freely choose the good are astronomical, then why is it the case that free human agents in Heaven do in fact always freely choose the good?

At this point, some theists might be tempted to say that a perfect being can play a helping hand in bringing it about that free human agents in Heaven always freely choose the good.⁹ (Let's not worry about the details here, since they won't matter for our discussion.¹⁰) There is an obvious difficulty with any suggestion along these lines. If the perfect being can play a helping hand in bringing it about that free human agents in Heaven always freely choose the good, then surely a perfect being can do exactly the same for free human agents on Earth. But, in that case, it seems that free will defences against logical arguments from evil and free will theodicies are in serious trouble. So the prospects of allowing the perfect being to extend a helping hand in Heaven do not seem bright. But it is hard to see where else to turn in looking for an explanation of the fact that free human agents in Heaven all always freely choose the good.

Another suggestion that some theists might be inclined to offer is that the paradisiacal nature of the Heavenly environment explains why, as a matter of fact, the human inhabitants of Heaven do not sin. Given that Heaven is an environment that is free from temptation and filled with the presence of Divinity, surely we have the materials for an explanation of why even those with a substantial inclination to wander from the path of righteousness do not in fact wander at all. There seem to be two problems with this approach. First, given what we know about human nature, *even* given the absence of temptation and the presence of Divinity, it *still* seems extraordinarily unlikely that *free* human agents will survive an eternity without *ever* straying from the path of righteousness. And second, if the absence of temptation and the presence of Divinity are not incompatible with the existence of significant freedom, then what explanation is to be given of the presence of temptation and the absence of Divinity in the earthly existence of free human agents? Given these problems, it does not seem plausible to suppose that one can appeal to the nature of the Heavenly environment in order to explain the contingent absence of evil from Heaven.

Perhaps there is some other way in which theists might seek to defend the thesis that it is merely contingently true that there is no evil in Heaven. However, at the very least, it is not easy to see how such a defence would go. In the absence of any further suggestion, it seems to us that we can conclude that the prospects for salvation from the “problem of Heaven” along this route are not terribly bright. (Some people—e.g. Martin (1997)—have also wanted to press an epistemological objection against the view that we have been exploring in this section. Given that it is a contingent matter whether there is evil in Heaven, what reason do we have for believing that there is no

evil in Heaven, or indeed, what reason do we have for believing that life in Heaven is in any way better than life on Earth? It would take us too far away from our main line of inquiry to try to assess this objection here.)

3

The problem of Heaven that we have developed relies upon the assumption that theists are committed to a particularly simple libertarian analysis of freedom. More generally, it relies on the assumption that there are really only two options when it comes to the analysis of freedom: either one is a libertarian (of the simple kind that we have identified) or else one is a compatibilist. If one is a compatibilist, then, we think, one should suppose that, necessarily, a perfect being can choose to make a universe in which everyone always freely chooses the good. And, if one accepts this assumption, then the logical argument from evil looks very powerful indeed. (Perhaps one might object that, while a compatibilist is obliged to allow that free choices can be completely determined by prior laws and conditions, the compatibilist can insist that it is not possible for free choices to be completely determined by the prior choices of an agent. So, if we consider two (more or less) duplicates of a deterministic universe, one of which has its laws and initial conditions chosen by a perfect being, and the other of which has uncaused laws and initial conditions, then there are no free choices made by the beings in the former universe, and lots of free choices made by the beings in the latter universe. Perhaps this view can be defended; however, we shan't try to pursue *that* line of thought here.)

Even if we are right that the simple libertarian analysis of freedom leads into the difficulties that we have described, all is not lost. For there may be alternative analyses of freedom that are open to theists to adopt. In particular, the suggestion of Sennett (1999) deserves serious consideration.

According to Sennett, the simple libertarian analysis of freedom should be replaced with a more sophisticated alternative. Recall that the simple libertarian analysis with which we began places the following necessary condition on free action: *an agent is free to do an action of kind K in circumstances C only if it is within the power of the agent to perform such an action in those circumstances.* (Perhaps we can strengthen this necessary condition to a necessary and sufficient condition: *an agent is free to do an action of kind K in circumstances C if and only if it is entirely within the power of the agent whether or not to perform such an action in those circumstances.* Two points should be noted about this suggestion. First, if it is within the power of the agent whether or not to perform the action in “the circumstances”, then “the circumstances” cannot determine the action. Second, there may be much in “the circumstances of the action” that is not under the control of the agent; what matters is whether, *given* those “circumstances”, it is entirely up to the agent whether or not to perform the action.)

Sennett’s proposal begins with the suggestion that we adopt instead the following necessary condition on free action: *an agent is free to do an action of kind K in circumstances C only if either (1) the action is free according to the simple libertarian analysis; or (2) somewhere along the causal history that leads the agent to perform that action there is another action that is free according to the simple libertarian*

analysis. Given this suggestion, it is not ruled out that agents in Heaven have freedom of action even though they do not have simple libertarian freedom of action. But why should we suppose that there can be free actions which are not free according to the simple libertarian analysis and yet are free because, somewhere in the causal history that leads to the performance of that action there is another action that is free according to the simple libertarian analysis?

Sennett's answer to this question turns on considerations about the formation of character. Suppose that it is the case that certain choices that are free according to the simple libertarian analysis play a decisive role in the formation of (certain aspects of) one's character of a kind that support the claim that one has freely chosen (those aspects of) one's character. In this case—and in this case alone—if one's character then determines the actions that one subsequently goes on to perform, it is not ruled out that those subsequent actions are freely chosen (even though they are fully determined by character and circumstance).

So the picture that emerges is this. The actions that human agents perform in Heaven are fully determined by their characters and the circumstances in which they find themselves; consequently, human agents in Heaven do not have simple libertarian freedom. Nonetheless, human agents in Heaven have characters (aspects of) which are as they are *solely* because of previous choices made by those agents during their life on Earth, where those previous choices did exhibit simple libertarian freedom. Consequently, the choices that are made by human agents in Heaven are free, even though it is logically impossible for those choices to be evil choices.¹¹

We think that this picture is unbelievable. 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 be called upon to make in Heaven are as they are *solely* because of libertarian free choices that that person made during his life. And it is even less 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 be called upon to make in Heaven are as they are *solely* because they were consciously and deliberately (and freely) chosen to be that way by the person in question.

Sennett might object that we have misrepresented his view in insisting that the relevant choices have to be the *sole* determinants of character. Indeed, Sennett himself explicitly denies that this is the case towards the end of his paper: “There is room for some kind of doctrine of sanctification, whereby God supplies upon our deaths whatever is lacking in our character formations to bring us to the state of compatibilist free perfection.” (77) But this can’t be right. If we can act freely by acting on an aspect of character that has been given to us by a perfect being, then we simply do not have a reply to the problem of Heaven: the perfect being can after all just give us characters that determine that we will always do the good. Sennett claims that “it is the pattern we establish throughout a life of intentional character building that is critical—not our actually attaining the desired character itself in our lifetimes. By establishing such a pattern we are, in effect, giving God permission to fill in the gap.” (77/8) But the perfect being doesn’t *need* permission from us to “fill in the gaps”, i.e.

to endow us with different character traits from those that we actually possess. On the assumption that it is possible for a perfect being to endow us with different character traits from those that we actually possess without impairing our ability to make free choices, it can hardly make any difference to the perfect being what kind of character it begins to work upon.

Perhaps Sennett might insist that there is an important distinction between cases to be drawn here. While a perfect being can endow us with *some* different character traits without impairing our ability to make free choices, there are limits within which the perfect being is required to work. In particular, the perfect being can only remove *all* of our remaining character flaws at the ends of our lives without impairing our (significant) freedom if there have been the *right kinds* of changes in our character traits over the course of our lifetimes. So, consider a person who is very far from perfect at the moment of death, but who has undergone the right kinds of changes for the perfect being to remove all of their character flaws and admit them to Heaven. Suppose, too, that the perfect being makes a duplicate of the perfected person, and admits this duplicate to Heaven. (The duplicate has all of the intrinsic properties of the perfected person, but lacks the relational properties of the perfected person to prior states of the world.) On Sennett's account, the actions of the perfected person in Heaven are (significantly) free and yet the actions of the duplicate are not. Surely that's not right. After all, if we imagine the perfect being duplicating the perfected person at an earlier stage of their earthly existence, and placing the duplicate on earth, we don't have any reason at all to deny that the duplicate is capable of acting freely. Indeed, to take an extreme case, we can imagine this duplication taking place before the (to be) perfected being has made any free decisions at all (i.e. when it is a young

infant). Here, it would be more than passing strange to deny that only the duplicate being is incapable of (significant) free actions. Given the—surely very plausible—principle that any (intrinsic) duplicate of a creature that is capable of free actions is itself capable of free actions, the claim that Sennett is making here cannot be defended.

On the basis of these considerations, we can conclude that, even if we were to accept Sennett’s modified conception of freedom, we would not have an adequate reply to the problem of Heaven in the materials that he supplies. This is not to say that there are not many other difficulties that confront the suggestion that Sennett makes, i.e. we do not suppose that the above discussion is in any way exhaustive, and nor do we suppose that there is not some other set of considerations that would also support our conclusion. However, we do think that the points that we have made suffice to show that we should not be quick to embrace Sennett’s proposed solution to the “problem of Heaven”. (One question that we can’t resist drawing attention to concerns the fate of those who die in infancy. Are they doomed to an eternity of dribbling and drooling, with no opportunity to grow into mature agents? Are they simply excluded from Heaven? Are they admitted to Heaven, but denied the capacity for free agency (under Sennett’s revised conception of freedom)? Or what?)

4

The third response to our problem of Heaven that we propose to discuss turns on the observation that it is not at all obvious that all weighty and important goods must be instantiated in Heaven. (For an intimation of this kind of response, see Taliaferro

(1998:315). For one more fully worked out version of this approach, see Swinburne (1983.) Suppose, for the sake of ease of exposition, that a perfect being has to choose between two alternatives. On the one hand, it can make a realm of contingent things that consists of nothing but Heaven (a place in which there is no freedom, but in which various goods are realised and in which there is no evil). On the other hand, it can make a realm of contingent things that has two parts: first, a universe (in which there are free agents that make free choices, and in which there is a considerable quantity and variety of evils); and second, Heaven (in which there is no freedom, but in which various great goods are realised in the absence of any evil). At least in the abstract, there seems to be no reason why it is impossible for a perfect being to choose the second alternative over the first: perhaps, for example, freedom is such an important good that the second alternative is better than the first despite the various evils that are present in the second alternative.

An obvious objection to this suggestion is that it appears to run counter to the orthodox view that we described in setting up our problem of Heaven. On what we take to be the orthodox conception of Heaven, the goods of Heaven are supposed to be incommensurably *greater* than the goods that are available on Earth. In particular, then, if there is no freedom in Heaven, then there must be goods in Heaven that are incommensurably greater than the good of freedom. And, if that is so, then it can hardly be the case that freedom is a particularly great good. Moreover, if the goods of Heaven can be realised in the absence of the good of freedom, then it is hard to see how the claim that the second alternative that we have described can be better than the first. On the one hand, there is the possibility of making a world in which there is nothing but great goods (and no evil). On the other hand, there is the possibility of

making a world that contains the goods of the first world, together with some incommensurably lesser goods, and some evils (whose magnitude is at least comparable to the lesser goods). Since freedom is not a particularly important good—by comparison with the goods of Heaven—it seems reasonable to hold that there is a strong case for preferring the first alternative. Why introduce suffering in the pursuit of goods that have no more than the most marginal—indeed, very likely, infinitesimal—utility?¹²

The argument of the preceding paragraph relied on the assumption that the goods of Heaven are incommensurably greater than the goods of Earth, even if it turns out that there is no freedom in Heaven. But perhaps it might be said that this assumption is mistaken. If we suppose that the good of freedom is greater than the goods of Heaven, then we might be able to explain why the creation of Heaven and Earth should be preferred to the creation of Heaven alone and to the creation of Earth alone. However, this supposition does seem to fly in the face of orthodox assumptions about the goods of Heaven. Most theists do not suppose that the possession of libertarian freedom is the greatest good, to which no other goods come near. (Note that it probably won't be enough for the purposes of the present objection to claim that the good of freedom is on a par with the goods of Heaven. For, in that case, since the goods of Heaven can be had without concomitant evils while (we are supposing) the good of freedom cannot, it still seems that the creation of Heaven alone would be best.)

One response that might be made to the argument of the present section is that no theist has ever supposed that there is more than one incommensurable good, viz. eternal fellowship with the perfect being. This good is both incommensurable and

intrinsic, i.e. it is something that is incommensurably good, and good in and of itself. On the other hand, the good of (significant) freedom is neither incommensurable nor intrinsic: (significant) freedom is merely an extrinsic good that makes possible various other goods, including eternal fellowship with the perfect being. More exactly, the idea is that (significant) freedom makes possible the good of entering into eternal fellowship with the perfect being, though it is not required for continued fellowship with that being. (If it were required for continued fellowship, then Heaven would not be essentially a place in which there is no evil.) But if continued fellowship with the perfect being is possible without (significant) freedom, then surely there can be beings that have always (or eternally) been in continued fellowship with the perfect being, i.e. surely the perfect being can just choose to make creatures that are always (or eternally) in continued fellowship with it.¹³ Note that this point needn't rely on a contestable assumption about the possibility of actual infinities: what is proposed is that either the perfect being can just make creatures that are in fellowship with it from the first instant of their creation and hence which have never entered into such fellowship, or else the perfect being can make creatures with an infinite past who, at each instant, are in continuing fellowship with the perfect being despite never having entered into fellowship with that being.

Perhaps it will be replied that an intrinsic duplicate of the Heavenly part of a world won't necessarily contain continuing fellowship between the perfect being and the creatures of Heaven: whether there is perfect fellowship between the perfect being and the creatures of Heaven depends upon whether those creatures made certain kinds of (significantly) free choices prior to their entry to Heaven. But this just seems wrong. Suppose that John and Mary love one another. Suppose that they are about to

be sent off into space to begin the task of populating a distant galaxy. At the last moment, John and Mary are duplicated, and their duplicates, John* and Mary* are sent off instead (though, of course, John* and Mary* are not made aware of the fact that they are merely duplicates of John and Mary). It is surely hard to deny that John* and Mary* love one another from the very first moment of their existence when they wake up together on board the spaceship—and yet this seems to be precisely the conclusion that the response that we are now considering would require us to embrace. Moreover, exactly the same point would be true if John* and Mary* were not the products of a process of duplication, but were rather the products of advanced biological engineering: from the moment that they wake up together in the spaceship, they love one another. But what goes for “human fellowship” goes for “perfect fellowship” as well: whether there is perfect fellowship in Heaven does *not* depend upon the prior history of the universe.

We conclude that, if significant freedom is supposed to be an incommensurably lesser good than eternal fellowship in Heaven, then there is no good reason to suppose that significant freedom is required to be instantiated at some earlier stage in the history of the universe in order to make it possible for the good of eternal fellowship to be instantiated in Heaven.

5

Stump (1999:53) claims that “a more promising foundation for a solution to the problem of evil ... might be found if we consider a broad range of beliefs concerning the relations of God to evil in the world which are specific to a particular

monotheism". The beliefs that seem especially relevant to Stump are the following three:

- (1) Adam fell;
- (2) Natural evil entered the world as a result of Adam's fall;
- (3) After death, depending on their state at the time of their death, either (a) human beings go to heaven or (b) human beings go to hell.

Stump's proposal includes more than the suggestion that there is a paradisaical afterlife—and so there may be other ways in which it can be argued that the set of propositions that she proposes for explicit acceptance is inconsistent. However, it is at any rate clear that Stump's proposal is vulnerable to the problem of Heaven that has been the subject matter of our paper.

There is a general point here (and it applies to many other recent discussions of arguments from evil). If we take seriously the question whether (say) the proposition that God exists is consistent with the proposition that there is moral evil in the world, then we shall also take seriously the question whether any set of propositions that contains these two is consistent. That someone who accepts (1)-(3) will be naturally inclined to accept both that God exists and that there is evil in the world—perhaps because (1)-(3) entail that God exists and that there is evil in the world—gives us no additional reason to suppose that the proposition that God exists is after all consistent with the proposition that there is moral evil in the world, *unless* we have good reason to suppose that (1)-(3)—together with the propositions that God exists and that there is moral evil in the world—themselves form a logically consistent set. But—as our

discussion of the problem of Heaven is intended to demonstrate—it is quite clearly no more certain that (1)-(3)—together with the propositions that God exists and that there is moral evil in the world—form a logically consistent set than it is that the existence of God is compatible with the existence of moral evil in the world.

While there is much more that can be said about the matters that have been discussed in this paper, we think that we have done enough to show that there is serious reason to be doubtful that either proponents of free will defences against arguments from evil or proponents of free will theodicies will find salvation in Heaven.¹⁴

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Notes

¹ There are theists who hold that people “in” Heaven are incorporeal entities located in neither space nor time. While it does not matter for the purposes of this paper, we insist that it is very doubtful that one can make sense of the idea that human beings will have an afterlife in which they are incorporeal entities located in neither space nor time (and yet in which they continue to communicate, and to engage in friendly relationships with one another).

² On the topic of the relationship between individual conscious human beings in Heaven, Swinburne (1983:43-4) writes: “According to Christian tradition, Heaven will ... comprise friendship with good finite beings, including those who have been our companions on Earth”.

³ Even more exactly, we are interested in the difficulties that arise for those who also assume some kind of libertarian *analysis* of freedom. There are those—e.g. Gaine (2003)—who propose that early Christians operated with a different analysis of freedom (“freedom for excellence”) that can be employed in solving the general

“problem of Heaven”. While we deny that this strategy is successful, we shall not try to defend this denial in the current paper.

⁴ One of our referees suggested that Augustine denied the claim that we take to be uncontroversial: God prefers worlds in which bad choices are made to worlds in which no bad choices are made, *provided that* those bad choices bring about greater goods that otherwise could not obtain. We do not accept that there are greater goods that can *only* obtain if bad choices are made; we do not believe that God would look down on a world in which no one has yet made a bad choice and think “Sin, dammit, sin!”

⁵ Given the libertarian conception of freedom, it seems to follow that, necessarily, a perfect being is not able to choose to make a universe in which everyone always freely chooses the good. But this claim entails the denial of the first premise in our logical argument from evil: it is not necessarily the case that a perfect being can choose to make a universe in which everyone always freely chooses the good.

⁶ Throughout this paragraph—and, indeed, throughout this paper—we use the word “universe” to denote that part of the perfect being’s creation that does not overlap with Heaven. So, if there is no Heaven, then the universe is all of the perfect being’s creation; otherwise, the universe is less than all that the perfect being creates.

⁷ We could find no clear scriptural evidence either way. Consider, for example, Luke 12:33-4: “Heaven is a place where no thief comes and no moth destroys [a treasure]”.

This passage is neutral on the question whether what is here described is an essential property of Heaven.

⁸ Swinburne (1983:44) writes: “The character needed for the inhabitants of Heaven is that of perfect goodness”. If this is true, then it is possible in principle that Heaven is free from evil actions. However, it is not at all clear what sort of mechanism guarantees that there *can* be no evil in Heaven.

⁹ Others—as suggested by one of our referees—might dig in their heels and insist that one only goes to Heaven if, at death, one is a mature person in whom will, intellect, inclination, and nature are all perfectly attuned to the good—i.e. someone who has *zero* probability of making bad choices. There are at least two points to make here. First, as above, we suggest that, if this is what it takes, then there aren’t any people in Heaven: it is not credible to suppose that there has ever been a mere human being who, at death, was such that their probability of making bad choices was *zero*. Second, given that we are supposing that it is possible for these people to make bad choices even though there is zero probability that the bad choices be made, it seems that we still won’t have ruled out evil in Heaven: for, given an infinite number of choices, it is very likely that some choices with zero probability will be made. Moreover, given that you have libertarian freedom, the fact that your will, intellect, inclination and nature are all perfectly attuned to the good will not prevent you from making some bad choices, if you are given enough choices to make.

¹⁰ Perhaps, for example, God removes all sources of temptation in Heaven; or perhaps God ensures that the denizens of Heaven never have the opportunity to exercise their

ability to choose the bad. (According to Gaine (2003), Scotus adopted something like the first of these accounts, and Ockham adopted something like the second.)

¹¹ Following Kvanvig (1997), we might say that Sennett relies upon the “reward model”—according to which only those who perform good actions are permitted entry to Heaven—in order to resolve “the problem of Heaven”. However, it is worth noting that entry requirement seems rather more demanding than on versions of the “reward model” that are discussed in other contexts.

¹² One of our referees suggested that we might want to consider here the possibility that the greatness of goods depends upon that to which the goods are attributed: perhaps freedom is a great good relative to earth, but not a great good relative to Heaven. If we were to suppose that freedom is a greater good, relative to the fusion of Heaven and earth, than are the goods of Heaven relative to that fusion, then we would indeed have the makings of an objection to our argument: but who would want to make that assumption?

¹³ One of our referees wondered whether the argument at this point depends upon the assumption that freely-chosen continued fellowship is not better than non-freely-chosen continued fellowship. The answer is that it does not. What is assumed is that, *given* that freedom is merely a finite and extrinsic good, if a perfect being can choose between non-freely-chosen fellowship without evil, and freely-chosen fellowship with evil, then it will choose the former.

¹⁴ *Historical Footnote*: Bob Adams suggested to us that Augustine is a good example of someone who will be seriously taxed by the “problem of Heaven”. Augustine *seems* to have made all of the assumptions that we have claimed are jointly inconsistent. On the one hand, he endorses a free will theodicy; on the other hand, he also claims that when human beings enter Heaven (the Kingdom of God) they are unable to sin (*non posse peccare*), which means that there is no freedom in Heaven. However—as both of our referees pointed out—it is open to question whether Augustine accepted a libertarian account of freedom. Since a similar question arises in the case of Aquinas, we might do better to point to Scotus, Ockham and Suarez as good examples of people who are *obviously* seriously taxed by the “problem of Heaven”. Of course, nothing in our paper turns on the issue of whether there actually have been people who have accepted all of the assumptions that create the “problem of Heaven”: our key point is that proponents of free will defences against arguments from evil and proponents of free will theodicies who seek salvation in Heaven have work to do to explain how their position does not collapse into inconsistency.