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HEAVENLY FREEDOM AND TWO MODELS OF CHARACTER PERFECTION

Robert J. Hartman

Human persons can act with libertarian freedom in heaven according to one prominent view, because they have freely acquired perfect virtue in their pre-heavenly lives such that acting rightly in heaven is volitionally necessary. But since the character of human persons is not perfect at death, how is their character perfected? On the unilateral model, God alone completes the perfection of their character, and, on the cooperative model, God continues to work with them in purgatory to perfect their own character. I argue that although both models can make sense of all human persons enjoying free will in heaven on various assumptions, the cooperative model allows all human persons in heaven to enjoy a greater degree of freedom. This consideration about the degree of heavenly freedom provides a reason for God to implement the cooperative model.

According to a prominent family of libertarian views, a person acts directly freely if and only if the action was not causally determined, she had alternative possibilities at the moment of choice, she had the power to choose between those alternatives, and she chose in virtue of exercising that power. Such freedom is what Alvin Plantinga calls “morally significant” if and only if at least one choice alternative is morally right and at least one is morally wrong.¹ The value of morally significant freedom lies at least in the way in which it enables a person to have great autonomy with respect to making morally right and wrong choices, to be seriously morally praiseworthy and blameworthy, to create her own morally good and bad character in substantial ways, and to make a difference to the moral goodness and badness of the world in important respects.²

¹Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 166.

²See, for example, Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will*, 81–89; Katherine Rogers, *Freedom and Self-Creation*, 20–25; Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 82–110. The modifiers “great,” “serious,” “substantial,” and “important” are meant to highlight that it is possible to have these properties in ways that are small, non-serious, insubstantial, and far less important via a kind of direct freedom that is not morally significant in Plantinga’s sense. See footnote 42.



Many theists appeal to the great value of morally significant freedom as at least a partial explanation for why a perfectly good and omnipotent God allows evil to occur in creation—namely, God’s goodness leads God to give morally significant freedom to human beings but they have misused this gift.³

The value of morally significant freedom and its use in explaining why God allows evil, however, become puzzling in view of heaven. Heaven is a place or state in which it is impossible to do wrong, and thus no one in heaven has morally significant freedom.⁴ But heaven is also the best possible place or state for human beings. So, if morally significant freedom is such a great good, why does heaven preclude it?⁵

A plausible response to this puzzle is that human persons can have a kind of free will in heaven with value inherited from pre-heavenly morally significant free actions.⁶ Roughly, the idea is that persons can enjoy a kind of free will in heaven if (i) their heavenly character necessitates their choosing in accordance with the right and the good,⁷ (ii) they are morally responsible for having formed that character via pre-heavenly free actions and omissions in a foreseeable way, and (iii) those previous free actions and omissions involved a choice range between morally right and wrong alternatives. So then, because persons in heaven have used their morally significant freedom in the past to form the source of their heavenly actions—namely, their perfected

³Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 166; Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 82–110.

⁴Benjamin Matheson suggests that persons in heaven do have morally significant freedom. After all, the devil was an angel in heaven who did wrong (see Revelation 12:7–9; Luke 10:18), which implies that it is possible for some persons in heaven to do wrong. So, why not human persons too (see “Tracing and Heavenly Freedom,” 65–67)? The short answer is that although there is morally significant freedom for angels in heaven, the good afterlife for resurrected human persons does *not* take place in heaven but on the new earth—a place where there is no more “mourning,” “death,” or “pain” for such things have “passed away,” which presumably also includes the possibility of wrongdoing (Revelation 21:1–5). There is also a corresponding “new heaven” that presumably differs from the old such that angels in the new heaven can no longer do wrong (Revelation 21:1). Thus, Matheson’s question is elicited by a confusion about the conventional use of “heaven” to refer to what the Bible names the “new heaven and earth,” which is a separate state from the one in which the devil did wrong; in this paper, I retain the conventional use of “heaven” and thereby sacrifice some biblical precision in terminology. All Bible quotations are from the NRSV translation.

⁵Simon Kittle distinguishes five puzzles about free will in heaven in “Some Problems of Heaven Freedom.”

⁶See Christopher Brown, “Making the Best Even Better”; Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe, “Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven”; Pawl and Timpe “Heavenly Freedom”; Pawl and Timpe, “Paradise and Growing in Virtue”; James Sennett, “Is There Freedom in Heaven?”; Swinburne, “A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell”; Timpe, *Free Will in Philosophical Theology*.

⁷This idea is similar to Harry Frankfurt’s concept of “volitional necessity” (“The Importance of What We Care About,” 86) and Bernard Williams’s concept of “moral incapacity” (“Moral Incapacity,” 59).

character—those actions enjoy indirect, inherited, or derived freedom and moral praiseworthiness.⁸

Indirect freedom is genuine freedom. As Timothy O'Connor and Christopher Franklin note,⁹ many philosophers characterize free will as a kind of control or “up-to-meness” over choices or actions. These philosophers either identify the kind of control relevant to freedom as the same kind of control relevant to being morally responsible for a choice,¹⁰ or, more strongly, they define freedom-relevant control in terms of responsibility-relevant control over a choice.¹¹ So, if a person is morally responsible for the character that necessitates her choice, the necessitated choice is up-to-her in a sense that is either to be identified with a kind of free choice—namely, choosing from her own freely made will—or to be defined as a free choice of some kind.¹² On this analysis, indirect freedom comes in degrees.¹³ A person acts with a greater degree of indirect freedom if she has a greater degree of moral responsibility, praiseworthiness, or blameworthiness for the character that ensures the action and transfers these properties to it.

My aim in this paper is to explore further this view of indirect freedom in heaven by examining the way in which character is perfected post-mortem, because at least most human persons do not have perfect character at the time of their death. There are two general models of character perfection, and each is endorsed in passing by proponents of this account of heavenly freedom. On the *unilateral model* of character perfection, God unilaterally, and presumably instantaneously, perfects all that is deficient in the character of human persons in their first moments of the afterlife.¹⁴ On the *cooperative model* of character perfection, God works together with human persons by providing them with enabling grace to improve their character through their own directly free actions and omissions until it becomes perfect, and this process occurs gradually before death and plausibly also after death in purgatory.¹⁵ For the purposes of this paper, *purgatory* is a place of gradual sanctification or good character development,

⁸For an account of indirectly free actions, see Hartman, “Indirectly Free Actions, Libertarianism, and Resultant Moral Luck.”

⁹O'Connor and Franklin, “Free Will.”

¹⁰For example, Neil Levy, *Hard Luck*, 1; Derk Pereboom, *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life*, 1–2; Saul Smilansky, *Free Will and Illusion*, 16.

¹¹For example, Alfred Mele, *Free Will and Luck*, 17; Susan Wolf, *Freedom Within Reason*, 3–4.

¹²For dissenting opinions about freedom being transferred in this way, see Matheson, “Tracing and Heavenly Freedom,” 61–63; Kittle, “Heavenly Freedom, Derivative Freedom, and the Value of Free Choices”; Peter van Inwagen, “When is the Will Free?” 418.

¹³O'Connor argues that *direct* freedom also comes in degrees in “Degrees of Freedom.”

¹⁴Sennett, “Is There Freedom in Heaven?” 77. On the unilateral model, perhaps God brings about full sanctification at the moment just prior to death. For simplicity, I omit this possibility.

¹⁵Pawl and Timpe, “Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven,” 411n36.

and it is not necessarily a place of satisfaction wherein a person receives punishment or does penance for past wrongdoing.¹⁶

These models appear to have significant implications for which human persons can have freedom in heaven and to what degree they can have freedom. For example, it at least seems as though a person with overall very bad character who accepts God's invitation to salvation on her deathbed cannot act indirectly freely in heaven if God unilaterally remedies all that is deficient in her character. But if heavenly freedom is a great good and heaven is the best place or state for human beings, God would prefer a means of character perfection that allows (i) all persons in heaven to have free will and (ii) all persons in heaven to have a greater degree of freedom, other things being equal. I appeal to these two considerations about the universality and degree of heavenly freedom as assessment criteria against which to evaluate models of character perfection.¹⁷

In this paper, I argue that, on various assumptions, both the unilateral and cooperative models of character perfection can allow for all human persons in heaven to enjoy heavenly freedom, including the person in the previously mentioned case of deathbed repentance; but I also argue that the cooperative model allows all persons in heaven to enjoy a greater degree of freedom with respect to their heavenly actions. Thus, we have a preliminary reason to think that God would perfect human character in the cooperative way.

I would like to qualify this argument in two ways. First, my argument merely provides a reason for God to implement the cooperative model rather than the unilateral model. Such a reason is compatible with the unilateral model's promoting overall better moral goods for those in heaven if there are other and better heavenly goods available or risk-free only on the unilateral model. Such a reason is also compatible with the overall best model's being a *mixed model*, according to which some human persons are perfected in the cooperative way and others are perfected in the unilateral way. In this latter case, my argument is that God has a preliminary reason to

¹⁶My project is consistent with purgatory as having the single purpose of sanctification and as having the dual purpose of sanctification and satisfaction. Given that Protestants may be reluctant to accept any form of purgatory, it is worth mentioning that Jerry Walls argues that the sanctification version is consistent and consonant with the biblical data, even though it is not taught in the Bible (*Purgatory*, 35–57). Walls also argues that Protestants should accept the sanctification version of purgatory for an independent reason concerning personal identity (*Purgatory*, 93–122). Additionally, Joshua Thurow argues that Protestants should accept a modified satisfaction version of purgatory with respect to repairing our interpersonal relationships with one another in preparation for heaven (“Atoning in Purgatory”).

¹⁷If heavenly freedom is a very great good, persons of young age or with severe disabilities who cannot respond to God's invitation to salvation in their pre-mortem lives may have an opportunity to do so later. Kevin Timpe suggests that such persons may undergo development or healing in “limbo” to allow them a broad range of *first-time* chances to freely accept or resist God's saving grace (“An Argument for Limbo”; for an objection, see David Worsley, “Limbo, Hiddenness, and the Beatific Vision”). If such persons are saved in limbo, their character can be perfected either unilaterally by God after limbo ends or cooperatively in limbo and purgatory.

choose the cooperative process as the default model of character perfection and to employ the unilateral process in special cases. To avoid unnecessary complications, I do not consider mixed models. My aim is not to argue for an all-things-considered account of character perfection, but to examine the way in which considerations about heavenly freedom may impact such an account.

Second, my assessment criteria presuppose that heavenly freedom is valuable in a way that God would want to promote it, but such a presupposition is contentious for reasons concerning the nature of divine freedom as Wes Morriston forcefully argues.¹⁸ In particular, God's perfect goodness necessitates that God does what is best. This great-making feature of God rules out God's having morally significant freedom, because what is best for God to do is never what is morally wrong. But God's lacking morally significant freedom results in a dilemma: either morally significant freedom is valuable due to its enabling great moral autonomy, moral responsibility, moral self-creation, and moral difference-making in the world (but God lacks this perfection), or morally significant freedom is not valuable in these ways (and the free will defense fails). Since the first horn of the dilemma is a *reductio* and the second horn contradicts my starting point, my claim that indirect freedom in heaven is valuable such that God would be concerned to promote it requires there to be a way out of Morriston's dilemma. The reply to which the assumptions in this paper commit me is that morally significant freedom is valuable for human beings but not for God, and so to deny the claim that God lacks a perfection by failing to have morally significant freedom. Other philosophers have filled out such a reply.¹⁹ I put this issue aside and assume that heavenly freedom is valuable in these ways.²⁰

The Universality Criterion of Heavenly Freedom

Jenny is a person with overall bad character near the time of her death. On her deathbed, her friend shares with her the good news of Jesus; Jenny repents of her wrongdoing and trusts in Jesus as her Lord and Savior. She dies quickly thereafter.

¹⁸Morriston, "What Is So Good about Moral Freedom?" and "Is God Free?"

¹⁹See O'Connor, "Freedom with a Human Face," 213; Pawl and Timpe, "Heavenly Freedom"; Alexander Pruss, "The Essential Divine-Perfection Objection to the Free-Will Defense"; Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 185–205; Timpe, *Free Will in Philosophical Theology*, 103–118.

²⁰Some ways out of Morriston's dilemma conflict with this assumption about the value of freedom. For example, Joshua Rasmussen explores the idea that morally significant free actions are valuable only because such freedom allows human beings to choose to love God without God's making them do so. If this is the sole value of morally significant freedom, we have a plausible explanation for why such freedom is valuable in our pre-mortem lives, why such freedom is not valuable in heaven, and why God lacks no perfection in failing to have morally significant freedom—namely, God chooses to love human beings without their making God do so ("On the Value of Freedom to Do Evil").

Suppose that the unilateral model is correct, and that Jenny's overall bad character is unilaterally transformed by God. Jenny thereby loses all of her epistemic, affective, or behavioral dispositions toward wrongdoing, and she gains character perfections that involve a vast array of true moral beliefs, extremely strong dispositions for fitting emotional responses, and extremely strong dispositions to act in ways that are good and right. It is, then, hard to see how Jenny could act indirectly freely in heaven. That is, because Jenny's perfected character is God's own doing, it is hard to see how her character could transfer freedom and moral responsibility from her pre-heaven morally significant free actions to her heavenly actions.

One might think that we can make sense of Jenny's heavenly freedom by pointing to her pre-conversion morally significant free actions. Possibly, prior to her repentance, she performed many morally significant free actions that contributed in part to the formation of all her heavenly virtues that God unilaterally perfects. In this way, Jenny freely forms part of her character, and these contributions can themselves be the source of her meager indirect freedom in heaven.

But even if it is possible for Jenny to perform pre-conversion morally significant free actions and omissions that contribute to her character and that partially form her heavenly virtues,²¹ we can stipulate that these possibilities are not actualized. Perhaps Jenny is young and lacks the relevant opportunities. Or perhaps she had the opportunities, but she misused her morally significant freedom in such cases, which implies that she has not made the right kind of contribution to her character to add to her heavenly virtues. Or perhaps she had the opportunities and used her morally significant freedom in the right kinds of ways to contribute to her heavenly character, but she was wholly ignorant about the way in which those actions formed her character, which precludes her from being morally responsible for those parts of her dispositions. Or perhaps she used her morally significant freedom in the right way to be morally responsible for her contribution to her heavenly character, but she later suffered a kind of severe psychic trauma that dislodged and fragmented those character traits. Stipulations such as these ensure that this puzzle is not avoided in this way.²²

The universality of heavenly freedom criterion is that God has a reason to prefer a model of character perfection that allows all human persons in heaven to enjoy indirect freedom to a model that does not. The unilateral model appears to rule out some people's having free will in heaven,

²¹There is a potential worry for Jenny's contributing to her heavenly character prior to her conversion relating to infused virtues. If the true virtues in heaven are wholly infused by God at conversion and are not completed Aristotle-style virtues, Jenny would not be able to contribute to her heavenly virtues via her pre-conversion morally significant free actions. See Eleonore Stump, "The Non-Aristotelian Character of Aquinas's Ethics."

²²One strategy for reply is to insist that this stipulation is illegitimate. Perhaps God is able to ensure that every actualized person in Jenny's condition finds themselves in pre-conversion circumstances in which they freely contribute to their character in the right way.

because it seems to rule out Jenny's having free will in heaven. In contrast, Jenny's case is no obstacle for the cooperative model's allowing all persons in heaven to enjoy indirect freedom, because Jenny can perform many directly free actions and omissions via divine assistance in purgatory that eventually come to form her heavenly virtues. Thus, the universality criterion appears to provide a reason for God to implement the cooperative model rather than the unilateral model.

I contend, however, that the universality criterion does not favor the cooperative model in cases such as Jenny's, because both models can make sense of such persons enjoying free will in heaven. In particular, if *cooperatively* perfected virtues can preserve freedom in heaven, the same is true for *unilaterally* perfected virtues on various assumptions, because the relevant moral differences between these processes of virtue perfection is one of degree, not kind. My argument for this conditional claim is based on two features these processes share. First, both modes of virtue formation partially are gifts, because a person's acquiring cooperatively or unilaterally perfected virtues is not solely her own doing and not solely the doing of others.²³ Second, in both modes of virtue formation, persons can be morally praiseworthy for acquiring the virtues. Clearly, human persons are morally praiseworthy for acquiring cooperatively perfected virtues via their own directly free actions and omissions, and, obviously, unilaterally perfected virtues are gifts from God.

My task is to show that cooperatively perfected virtues are gifts, and that human persons are morally praiseworthy for their unilaterally perfected virtues.

On the one hand, cooperatively perfected virtues are "gifts" from those in our interpersonal relationships and surrounding communities;²⁴ as Aristotle claims, we are jointly responsible for our states of character.²⁵ Our various communities play a large role in our development of moral virtues through preliminary moral education and desire habitation; that is, they bestow to us a large number of our true moral beliefs and they condition our desires away from many bad things and toward many good things. Additionally, our communities play a large role in directing our aspirations and self-cultivations by offering role models to admire; they provide many forward-looking praising and blaming practices to help reinforce our commitment to moral norms; and we tend to become like the people with whom we have relational union.²⁶ At the very least, our communities must not preclude virtue development. Think, for example,

²³One obvious difference is that God is the immediate efficient cause of final virtue on the unilateral model but not on the cooperative model. My argument will be that this is a morally relevant difference only with respect to degree of moral responsibility for virtue—and not whether someone is morally responsible for virtue.

²⁴Robert Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 165.

²⁵Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1114b20.

²⁶Stump, "The Non-Aristotelian Character of Aquinas's Ethics," 38; see also 1 Corinthians 15:33; Proverbs 27:17.

of communities rearing child soldiers that use fear tactics, moral desensitization, and addiction to drugs and the pleasures of power to make manipulable soldiers; for many such persons, developing virtue is out of reach.²⁷ Thus, minimally decent human communities turn out to be something close to a necessary condition for virtue cultivation, and at least most of our communities provide enormous help in cultivating moral virtues to some degree through moral education, desire habituation, role models, moral encouragement and reproach, and relational shaping.

Additionally, God provides common grace that inclines all persons to develop virtue, for example, by forming in them a conscience and by establishing government to restrain human evils;²⁸ and God provides special helping grace to develop virtue to those united to God's self in a morally transformative relationship, for example, by relational shaping and nudging via the indwelling Holy Spirit.²⁹ Thus, our cooperatively perfected virtues are gifts from others due to the way in which we get help from them for the raw materials for virtue and throughout the process of virtue formation.

On the other hand, human persons can be morally praiseworthy to some degree for their unilaterally perfected virtues if divine and human agency are both involved in the right way with respect to the human person's coming to faith. This claim requires some background and motivating. The background is that apart from God's enabling grace, human beings cannot themselves accept or cease rejecting God's invitation to salvation; such actions and omissions are not among their alternative possibilities. But according to theological views consonant with my starting assumptions about libertarian freedom, God does provide all human beings with prevenient or preparatory grace that expands the option range of their libertarian freedom thereby allowing them either to accept God's saving grace or to cease resisting it. So, Jenny's coming to faith is enabled and prompted by God's grace, but her actually coming to faith must involve her own directly free action or omission.³⁰ Human persons, then, can be morally praiseworthy to some degree for being in relationship with God, because their freely accepting God's saving grace or ceasing to resist it is a morally good state of affairs; and their doing so is difficult owing to the strong human propensity to resist love's relational demands. Analogously, an addict is morally praiseworthy for freely surrendering to her family's demands that she quit drinking alcohol, because this movement of her

²⁷Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 125; Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*, 163; Hartman, "Moral Luck and the Unfairness of Morality," 3195.

²⁸Romans 2:13–15, 13:1–7.

²⁹See William Alston, "The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit."

³⁰It is because God's grace initiates and enables Jenny's accepting or not refusing God's saving grace that my claim is not Pelagian as defined by The Council of Orange in 529. See Richard Cross, "Anti-Pelagianism and the Resistibility of Grace."

free will is morally good, difficult, and contrasts with other worse possible movements.

If human persons can be morally praiseworthy to some degree for entering into relationship with God, they can be morally praiseworthy to some degree for their character perfection if such perfection is a consequence that they could reasonably be expected to foresee in at least its general outlines.³¹ And a person's character perfection is a foreseeable result at least in its general outlines of beginning a morally transforming relationship with God. After all, such a relationship can begin only after a person feels contrite to some degree about her wrongdoing, repents of her wrongdoing at least to some degree, and trusts in God as her Lord and Savior to guide her future. By analogy, if a person freely decides to take the virtue pill, takes the pill, becomes virtuous, and can reasonably be expected to foresee herself becoming so as a result of taking it, she can be morally praiseworthy to some degree for becoming virtuous in this way.³² Thus, a person can be morally praiseworthy to some degree for her unilaterally perfected virtues.

One might object that allowing persons to be praiseworthy to some degree for being in a saving relationship with God contravenes Ephesians 2:8–9 ("For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast") by providing a ground for pride and boasting.

Two considerations, I think, defuse this objection. First, there is not much to take pride in or boast about for human persons, because most of the moral praiseworthiness for a human person's being in a saving relationship with God accrues to God's self. After all, human beings were in a dreadful state, human beings cannot themselves fix their horrible state, God sacrifices to save them, God gives them enabling grace to respond positively to his invitation to salvation, and human beings merely accept God's invitation to salvation or perhaps merely stop resisting God's grace. Second, even if human beings are praiseworthy to some limited degree for their being in relationship with God, it may not be permissible for them to praise themselves, because there is an ethics of praising the praiseworthy; that is, a person's being praiseworthy is not sufficient for its being permissible to praise her. And it seems at least bad if not morally wrong for Jenny overtly to praise herself for her own meager contribution, because it is ungrateful in light of what God has done. Here is an analogy: Jim slips and falls down the side of a cliff onto a slender ledge. Samantha comes along with some rope, sends the rope down to Jim, and she pulls him up. Subsequently, Jim praises himself for his own life-saving actions; he did,

³¹See Hartman, "Indirectly Free Actions, Libertarianism, and Resultant Moral Luck," 1426–1431; cf. John Martin Fischer and Neal A. Tognazzini, "The Truth About Tracing"; Timpe, "Tracing and the Epistemic Condition on Moral Responsibility."

³²Hartman, "Indirectly Free Actions, Libertarianism, and Resultant Moral Luck," 1422–1423.

after all, hold onto the rope! In praising himself, Jim at least acts badly, and perhaps also acts wrongly. The proper private and overt responses are gratitude and humility for the salvation primarily brought about by others.

If the responses about meager praiseworthiness and the ethics of praising do not defeat the objection because, for example, the right view of a human person's coming to faith involves only God's agency, then Jenny cannot act indirectly freely in heaven.³³ In that case, the universality criterion would favor the cooperative model over the unilateral model if the cooperative model can make sense of heavenly freedom for agents who are not morally responsible for their being in a morally transformative relationship with God. The cooperative model can do so. After all, even if a person is not morally responsible in any way for her coming to faith and is thereby not morally responsible for the particular parts of her character that were unilaterally transformed by God at conversion, she can still perform morally significant free actions and omissions in her pre-heaven life that are motivated by parts of her character for which she is not morally responsible.³⁴ This claim is true in part because it is not the case that a person acts directly freely only if she is morally responsible for the character that explains her action.³⁵ Thus, Jenny can act indirectly freely in heaven on the cooperative model even if she is not morally responsible for being in a morally transformative relationship with God, because she can use her morally significant freedom in post-conversion but pre-heavenly opportunities to contribute to her heavenly character. In that case, the universality criterion would favor the cooperative model.

In summary, if cooperatively perfected virtues can ground indirect freedom in heaven, unilaterally perfected virtues can too on various assumptions, because both cooperatively and unilaterally perfected virtues are gifts to some degree for which human beings are morally praiseworthy to some degree. Contrary to appearances, we should not think that the universality criterion favors the cooperative model over the unilateral model in cases such as Jenny's if agents can be morally praiseworthy to some degree for being in a saving relationship with God and that relationship foreseeably results in the agent's character being perfected.

³³The same is true, for example, if Jenny is not morally praiseworthy for her perfected character due to another reason such as her perfected character was not a foreseeable consequence of entering into a morally transformative relationship with God. This epistemic obstacle is not a problem for developing moral responsibility for character in purgatory on the cooperative model, and so this potential problem is uniquely faced by the unilateral model.

³⁴Even on the cooperative model of character perfection, some parts of the agent's character are unilaterally transformed by God; this is the idea from 2 Corinthians 5:17 that a newly converted person has become a new creation or has new character that begins the character perfection process. Cf. Stump, *Atonement*, 203–206.

³⁵For arguments on behalf of the partial explanation, see Hartman, "Constitutive Moral Luck and Strawson's Argument for the Impossibility of Moral Responsibility."

The Degree Criterion of Heavenly Freedom

Tammy is someone who trusts Jesus as her Lord and Savior and lives a long time before she dies; by God's enabling grace and her impressive moral effort, Tammy makes serious moral progress before death. In this way, Tammy performs many pre-mortem morally significant free choices that contribute to some great degree to the goodness of her character. Thus, Tammy has more greatly contributed to her perfected character via morally significant free actions than Jenny has contributed in that way to hers. Intuitively, the more a person contributes to her good character via exercises of morally significant freedom, the more morally praiseworthy she is for her good character and the actions that deterministically result from it.³⁶ Thus, strictly based on Tammy and Jenny's pre-mortem morally significant free actions, Tammy is far more morally praiseworthy for her perfect character than Jenny is for her perfect character. So, if God employs the unilateral model of character perfection, Tammy would have a much greater degree of indirect freedom in heaven.

The degree of heavenly freedom criterion is that God has a reason to prefer a model of character perfection that allows all human persons in heaven to have a greater degree of indirect freedom over a model that enables them to have a lesser degree. The perfected character of persons in heaven is much more of their own doing via pre-heavenly morally significantly free choices on the cooperative model than on the unilateral model, because the cooperative model allows many more morally significant free actions and omissions to have a substantive role in forming the agent's heavenly virtues after death in purgatory, especially in Jenny's case. Thus, all human persons in heaven enjoy a far greater degree of indirect freedom on the cooperative model than on the unilateral model, and the degree criterion provides a reason to think that God would implement the cooperative model.

One might reject the degree criterion as implausible, because one might think that acting with a greater degree of indirect freedom in heaven does not matter.

But acting with a greater degree of indirect freedom in heaven does matter given the animating assumption of this paper—namely, that morally significant freedom is valuable in our pre-mortem lives at least because it enables serious moral autonomy, moral responsibility, and moral self-creation. These value claims strike many philosophers and theologians as intuitively plausible, which partially explains the popularity of the free will defense. And if these value claims are true about our pre-heavenly lives,

³⁶See Hartman, "Indirectly Free Actions, Libertarianism, and Resultant Moral Luck," 1431–1433; Kane, "Three Freedoms, Free Will, and Self-Formation." It is worth noting that Brian Boeninger and Robert Garcia suggest that the kind of resultant moral luck involved in heavenly free actions is problematic ("Resting on Your Laurels," 304–307) and that I argue elsewhere that this kind of moral luck is not problematic in general (*In Defense of Moral Luck*, 105–111, 124–138).

they are also true about our lives in heaven, because morality is continuous between earth and heaven. Plausibly, the more of these valuable features that are appropriated in a person's will, the better; as Richard Swinburne writes, "If responsibility is a good thing, then . . . the more of it the better."³⁷

One might also doubt that the degree criterion favors the cooperative model, because one might think that it is possible for Jenny and Tammy to become more morally praiseworthy for their character via directly free actions while they are in heaven. In a series of papers, Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe explicate a view in this neighborhood.³⁸ Put in the terminology of this paper, their view is that persons in heaven act *indirectly* freely when their perfected character for which they are morally responsible determines their action, and persons in heaven act *directly* freely when their perfected character for which they are morally responsible precludes wrongdoing but still leaves open various alternative choices.³⁹ Importantly, such directly free actions are not morally significant, because no alternative choice is morally wrong. Even so, they are "*morally relevant*" if and only if some of the alternatives are non-trivially morally better than others.⁴⁰ Morally relevant choices have moral weight in part by improving heavenly character.⁴¹ Whatever the differences in praiseworthiness for

³⁷Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 97. Additionally, greater indirect freedom in heaven is conducive to greater flourishing. For Aquinas, different persons in heaven enjoy different degrees of flourishing (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II 5.2). As Eleonore Stump develops that idea, the difference between two morally perfected persons who are enjoying different degrees of flourishing in heaven is determined by differences in their willingness, and thus their capacity, to receive God's love and goodness; neither lacks any goodness that they currently have a capacity to receive, because both persons fully flourish relative to their capacities to desire God and his goodness (*Wandering in Darkness*, 390–391). Jenny on the unilateral model would not have cultivated as great a capacity to desire God's love and goodness as Tammy, because Tammy has a deeper and closer relationship with God via many more instances of her freely willing to experience more of God's love and goodness. If it is possible to will for more of God's goodness in heaven and thus increase one's capacity to experience God in heaven, they both may ever increase in flourishing; but Tammy may always flourish more.

³⁸Pawl and Timpe, "Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," "Heavenly Freedom," and "Paradise and Growing in Virtue."

³⁹Pawl and Timpe, "Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," 408, 410, 414–415.

⁴⁰Pawl and Timpe, "Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," 416. Additionally, Pawl and Timpe assert that the good alternatives are supererogatory. But it is not obvious to me that there are moral obligations in heaven, and so I describe their view merely in reference to good options.

⁴¹Pawl and Timpe, "Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," 418; "Paradise and Growing in Virtue," 98. Heavenly character does not improve in the sense of acquiring new virtues or acting more on the virtuous mean. It may be improved in the sense of "clinging ever tighter to the [virtuous] mean," because there may be no upper limit for growing in their love of the good. This seems right. After all, character just is or supervenes on a person's thick and stable beliefs and desires in a way that reflects well or badly on the person (cf. Christian Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 24–35). And persons in heaven plausibly discover new truths regularly about God and goodness, and thereby often form additional true beliefs, that make them love God and goodness even more, and thereby form additional good desires; all of these changes reflect well on the person.

character are between Jenny and Tammy when they enter heaven, such differences may eventually be swallowed up by morally relevant free actions in heaven that form new character and that generate new direct moral praiseworthiness. Thus, if Pawl and Timpe's basic proposal is plausible and if the additional claim that *morally relevant* free actions generate direct moral praiseworthiness is also plausible,⁴² the degree criterion may not favor the cooperative model, because morally relevant free actions would generate new moral praiseworthiness for character in heaven that would eventually make negligible the moral praiseworthiness for her character generated by pre-heavenly morally significant free actions.

But this objection inspired by Pawl and Timpe's proposal is implausible, because there are good reasons to think that human persons cannot act with morally relevant freedom in heaven. My argument for the claim that no human person in heaven exercises morally relevant freedom concerns the nature of the choice options and the nature of perfect character.

Consider a circumstance with various choice options one of which is morally best. In that circumstance, a morally perfect person must choose the morally best option. After all, better moral character disposes a person to choose the better moral option, and so perfect character recommends the morally best option; and because perfect character also involves extremely strong dispositions to act in ways that are right and good, perfect character necessitates choosing the morally best. This reasoning is commonly used to support the idea that God's perfect character necessitates that God chooses what is morally best.⁴³ Likewise, human persons in heaven must choose the morally best option if they know which option is morally best, because their moral character is perfect. If, however, human beings in heaven are ignorant of some of the moral properties of their options, they

⁴²In the case of morally relevant free actions, I find it intuitive that the agent is morally praiseworthy for choosing the better option. Although Matheson disagrees ("Tracing and Heavenly Freedom," 63–65), Swinburne agrees (*Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 84–90). One might think that this intuition's being correct would obviously undermine the value of the morally significant freedom and the free will defense. After all, God could have initially created a world of human beings with very good character leaving room only for morally relevant free choices between options that are not morally wrong, which would allow them to be directly morally praiseworthy to some degree and yet rule out the possibility of choosing a morally wrong option. But these claims do not *obviously* undermine the value of morally significant freedom or the free will defense. It is plausible that the degree of an agent's direct moral praiseworthiness for morally *relevant* free actions would be slight in comparison with direct moral praiseworthiness for morally *significant* free actions. Thus, if God had initially created a world of human beings with very good character in this way, there would be precious little scope for moral autonomy, moral responsibility, moral self-creation, and moral difference-making in the world. Perhaps a far more serious scope for all of the valuable features is part of a good explanation why for God would confer morally significant freedom to human beings.

⁴³See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy*, 227; Morrision, "What Is So Good about Moral Freedom?" and "Is God Free?"; O'Connor, "Freedom with a Human Face," 212; William Rowe, "Can God Be Free?" 409–410; Swinburne, "The Social Theory of the Trinity," 427.

must be inculpably ignorant; and their perfect character would necessitate their choosing the option that appears morally best to them.

But that single option set rules out morally relevant freedom. After all, morally relevant freedom requires alternative possibilities at the moment of choice, and perfect character rules out all of the less-than-best choice options as possibilities.

Might there be room for morally relevant freedom in heavenly circumstances in which there is no non-trivially morally best option? There are only two possible kinds of such circumstances, and I contend neither offers a plausible occasion to act with morally relevant freedom in heaven.

First, a circumstance provides no non-trivially morally best option if all the choice options are exactly equally morally valuable or incommensurably morally valuable.⁴⁴ Plausibly, the same is true for options that are trivially unequally morally valuable such that their moral differences are so tiny that they generate no qualitatively different reasons in the perfectly virtuous agent in comparison with exactly equally morally valuable options. For each of these sets of options, a heavenly person's virtuous reasons leave open which of those choices to make, and thereby create an opportunity to exercise direct freedom.

But those sets of options also rule out morally relevant freedom, because no alternative possibility is non-trivially morally better than another and morally relevant freedom requires that at least one option is non-trivially morally better than another.⁴⁵

Second, a circumstance provides no non-trivially morally best choice option if there is an infinite number of morally good alternatives to choose between, and, for any good option, there is a non-trivially morally better one. Such circumstances satisfy the basic constraints for exercising morally relevant freedom in heaven, because there is more than one alternative possibility at the moment of choice and at least one of those alternative possibilities is non-trivially morally better than another. Plausibly, a perfectly virtuous person could choose a morally inferior option in such a

⁴⁴It is not possible for persons in heaven to have an option set in which there is no non-trivially morally best option but where some are better than others. For example, suppose there is an *apparent* option range (i)–(iii) where (i) and (ii) are equally morally valuable, and each is better than (iii). According to this set up, a person with perfect character must choose (i) or (ii), and so (iii) is not a genuine option.

⁴⁵This stage of my argument crucially relies on the interpretation of Pawl and Timpe as measuring the moral goodness of actions under a single hierarchy. But what if we understand morally relevant actions as choosing between options that are morally incommensurable due to their developing different kinds of goodness? In that case, one option would be morally better in some way than another. I thank Tim Pawl and Mark Murphy for pressing this alternative interpretation. Nevertheless, this alternative interpretation offers no help for acquiring direct moral praiseworthiness in heaven, because a person is not *directly* morally praiseworthy for a choice between overall incommensurably good options in the case that their character requires that they must choose between only those options. Of course, such a person could be *indirectly* morally praiseworthy for choosing one of these incommensurable good options if she is morally praiseworthy for the character that limits her choice range in this way. See footnote 42 for a related point.

case, because all choices in this circumstance necessarily have that comparative property.⁴⁶

But it seems plausible that human persons cannot find themselves in a heavenly circumstance with an infinite number of choice options at a particular time. After all, pre-mortem human persons are in material conditions that limit their options to a finite set and their volitional capacities afford them the ability to do only a finite number of things. Plausibly, the same is true for morally perfected human persons in heaven, because such persons enjoy an embodied mode of existence in the afterlife on the new earth,⁴⁷ and, plausibly, they do not leave behind their finite volitional capacities.

One might object that human beings in heaven do at least have infinite lifespans, and so it is possible for them to have a diachronic infinite option set, according to which an infinite number of choice options are staggered over time and increase in value.⁴⁸ Suppose, for example, there is a bottle of wine that gets better each day ad infinitum,⁴⁹ and breaking open this bottle with friends in heaven increases in moral value each day due to the better quality of hospitality it provides for guests. The option set, then, would include the following directly free choices: (i) to open the bottle today, (ii) to open the bottle tomorrow, or (n) to open the bottle tomorrow + n.⁵⁰ In the case of a directly free choice made today to open the bottle on a future day such as (ii), the future action would be ensured or necessitated in such a way as to count as an indirectly free action.

But there is a separate reason related to finitude about why human beings in heaven cannot have an infinite number of choice options. Plausibly, the infinity of possibilities would not be cognizable at a particular time, because pre-mortem and heavenly human persons have only finite and limited cognitive capacities. So, only a finite cognizable number of options would remain. As such, the person in heaven would have only a finite set of options to exercise direct freedom, because options to exercise direct freedom are limited to the possibilities that are presented by her intellect to the will. But then, given the options that her intellect presents to her will at a particular time, her perfect character must lead her to choose to open the bottle of wine on the day that is most morally valuable of all the days presently cognized, or to choose to exercise her intellect further to expand her option range. Plausibly, it would be best at some point to directly freely choose to open the bottle on a particular day rather than to further exercise her cognitive powers, because it is better to

⁴⁶Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder, "How an Unsurpassable Being Can Create a Surpassable World."

⁴⁷See 1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 21–22.

⁴⁸I owe this objection to Mark Murphy.

⁴⁹John Pollock, "How Do You Maximize Expected Value?" 417.

⁵⁰An irrelevant option construal is between (i) opening the bottle today or (ii) saving the bottle for another day, because this is a potentially infinite series of finite sets of options. By directly freely choosing (ii) today, I get a *new* option set tomorrow, again, between (i) and (ii).

open the bottle at some point rather than never to open the bottle at all; and any day on which she chooses to open the bottle necessarily has the property of being morally inferior to some future day. For these reasons, the heavenly person would not be flummoxed by such a choice. Therefore, if the intellectual powers of perfected human persons remain finite, the diachronically infinite set of possibilities provides no occasion for morally relevant freedom either.⁵¹

In summary, it is implausible that people act with morally relevant freedom in heaven. Heavenly circumstances offer only sets of options either with finite members or finite cognizable members at a particular time. If there is a unique non-trivially morally best alternative among the finite option set, the perfected person must choose that option, and so lacks alternative possibilities and thereby lacks morally relevant freedom. If there is no unique non-trivially morally best alternative among the finite option set, all the choice options are exactly equally morally valuable, trivially unequally morally valuable, or incommensurably morally valuable, but no such option is non-trivially morally better than another, which rules out morally relevant freedom. Thus, perfected human beings in heaven cannot act with morally relevant freedom.

This argument has a constructive implication about the nature of moral praiseworthiness for heavenly free actions. All heavenly actions either are indirectly free choices determined by perfect character or are directly free choices made between options that are equally morally valuable, trivially unequally morally valuable, or incommensurably morally valuable. Indirectly free choices in heaven do not generate new direct moral praiseworthiness, and directly free choices in heaven made between option sets of those three kinds plausibly do not generate new direct moral praiseworthiness either. Thus, all moral praiseworthiness for a person's indirectly and directly free actions in heaven is inherited from her pre-heavenly morally significant and relevant free actions.

Therefore, both objections to the claim that the degree criterion favors the cooperative model are defeated. And since there are no other obvious objections to that claim, I conclude that the degree criterion favors the cooperative model of character perfection.

Conclusion

I assessed two models of character perfection based on the idea that God would want to promote free will in heaven. Although the universality criterion appeared to support the cooperative model over the unilateral model in cases such as Jenny's, I argued that this appearance is misleading; both models can make sense of the idea that all human persons in heaven possess indirect freedom if agents can be praiseworthy for being in

⁵¹My argument is compatible with Swinburne's plausible speculation that the redeemed in heaven have "much increased" cognitive and volitional capacities (*Responsibility and Atonement*, 190). My argument requires only that these capacities remain finite.

a saving relationship with God and their character perfection is a foreseeable consequence of beginning such a morally transformative relationship. (If I am wrong that human persons are praiseworthy for entering into a morally transformative relationship with God or that character perfection is a foreseeable result of being in that kind of relationship, the universality criterion does favor the cooperative model.) Subsequently, I argued that the degree criterion supports the cooperative model over the unilateral model, because it allows all persons—and especially persons such as Jenny—to enjoy a greater degree of indirect freedom in heaven. Thus, assuming that heavenly freedom is valuable in a way that God would be concerned to promote it, we have a reason to think that God would perfect human character according to the cooperative model.

Two constructive claims about the afterlife follow. First, all moral praiseworthiness for heavenly actions derive from pre-heavenly morally significant and relevant free actions. Second, the cooperative model requires that the character perfection process continues after death, and so my argument provides a reason to affirm purgatory as a place of character development.

These considerations about heavenly freedom offered in support of the cooperative model are not decisive on their own, even apart from my undefended assumption about the value of heavenly freedom. Heavenly freedom is merely one kind of good that God would take into account when deciding between models of character perfection. Perhaps alternative goods are available or risk-free only on the unilateral model, and such goods may make the unilateral model morally preferable overall;⁵² or perhaps an all-things-considered assessment of heavenly goods favors a mixed model. In this way, my argument is not a decisive argument for an unmixed cooperative model; it just provides a reason in favor of thinking that God would want to perfect the character of redeemed persons in the cooperative way, other things being equal.⁵³

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⁵²For example, salvation secured in the pre-mortem life becomes risky to some degree on the cooperative model if persons in purgatory can defect from their saving relationship with God (Green, “The Jet Leg Theory of Purgatory,” 153–154; cf. Walls, *Purgatory*, 147–149). It is also logically possible that a person remains forever in purgatory; I thank Mark Murphy for that related point. One might think that such considerations are sufficient to condemn the cooperative model. But they are not, because there are other points of which we should take stock. For example, if personal identity cannot survive the dramatic transformation in character on the unilateral model, no merely human person who is saved makes it to heaven on the unilateral model, which would be a compelling argument for the cooperative model despite the previously mentioned risks (cf. Walls, *Purgatory*, 93–122).

⁵³I am indebted to Ray Baker, William Bülow, Everett Fulmer, Hillary Hartman, Ben Matheson, Tim Pawl, and David Worsley as well as to Mark Murphy and two anonymous referees for comments on some version of this paper. I am also grateful for comments and objections from audiences at the 2020 Helsinki Analytic Theology Workshop at the University of Helsinki, the 2020 Higher Seminar in Practical Philosophy at Stockholm University, and the 2020 meeting of the St. Benedict Society for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology at the University of York.

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