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# MAKING THE BEST EVEN BETTER: MODIFYING PAWL AND TIMPE'S SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF HEAVENLY FREEDOM

Christopher M. Brown

In a recent paper, "Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe discuss and propose a novel solution to a problem posed for traditional Christian theism that they call *the Problem of Heavenly Freedom*. In short, Christian tradition contains what seems to be a contradiction, namely, the redeemed in heaven are free but nonetheless can't sin. Pawl and Timpe's solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom is particularly attractive for two reasons: it shows great respect for the Christian tradition's teaching on heaven, and it entails that the redeemed in heaven act with morally weighty libertarian free will. Nonetheless, I think their solution can be improved upon. By drawing on some of the teachings of the Catholic tradition on heaven, particularly those of St. Thomas Aquinas, I raise three objections to Pawl and Timpe's solution and introduce a modified version of their solution. In doing so, I have attempted to make their "best" solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom even better.

In a recent paper,<sup>1</sup> Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe discuss a problem posed for traditional Christian theism that they call *the Problem of Heavenly Freedom*. Traditional Christian theism includes the following two claims:

- (i) The redeemed in heaven have free will.<sup>2</sup>
- (ii) The redeemed in heaven are no longer capable of sinning.<sup>3</sup>

On the face of it, (i) and (ii) appear to be logically inconsistent. For if the redeemed in heaven do not have the ability to do evil, then, we might wonder whether they really possess free will. But if the redeemed in heaven are really free, then surely they can choose to do evil. Traditional Christian theism—at least where its account of heaven is concerned—therefore appears to be incoherent.

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<sup>1</sup>"Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009), 398–419.

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g., St. Augustine of Hippo, *Admonition and Grace* xxii, 33.

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., Aphraates the Persian Sage, *Treatises* xx, 12; St. Augustine of Hippo, *To Orosius Against the Priscillianists and Origenists* vi, 7; St. Augustine, *Enchiridion* xxix, 111; St. Augustine, *Admonition and Grace* xxii, 33; St. Augustine, *The Unfinished Work Against Julian's Second Reply* v, 61.



In this paper I do five things. First, I explain Pawl and Timpe's solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom. Second, I raise three objections for Pawl and Timpe's solution. Third, I offer an account of morally weighty action that does not fall prey to the objections I raise for Pawl and Timpe's account. Fourth, I show that my solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom, like Pawl and Timpe's solution, is consistent with the free will defense. Fifth, I show my solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom has an additional advantage over Pawl and Timpe's solution: it provides a stronger explanation for why the redeemed in heaven can't sin.

### 1. Pawl and Timpe's Solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom

Taking James F. Sennett's solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom as a point of departure,<sup>4</sup> Pawl and Timpe develop their own solution by first noting "a person has the ability to form a moral character which later precludes that person from willing certain things."<sup>5</sup> For example, John develops a moral character such that he simply can't torture a child for a nickel when asked to do so. Pawl and Timpe think it reasonable to say John is free in a libertarian sense with respect to his refusal to torture a child in this situation, given that John's moral character is partially a function of free choices he's made in the past. They call actions that are free merely on the basis of arising from one's freely-formed moral character "derivatively free" actions.<sup>6</sup> But Pawl and Timpe think what we've said about John's case can be applied to the case of the redeemed in heaven. For even if the actions of a redeemed person in heaven were determined by her freely formed perfect moral character, the redeemed person's actions in heaven could still be derivatively free in a libertarian sense of *free*. This is because the redeemed person's willed actions would trace back to free choices that she made during the period of her pre-heavenly existence, where such choices were undetermined.<sup>7</sup>

But Pawl and Timpe think that the redeemed in heaven also possess *non-derivative* libertarian free will. According to Christian tradition, the redeemed in heaven don't have the ability to choose between good and evil, given their perfected moral characters. But nothing about having a perfected moral character necessarily rules out having the ability to choose between *this* good rather than *that* one in heaven. Indeed, according to

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<sup>4</sup>See Sennett's "Is there Freedom in Heaven?," *Faith and Philosophy* 16:1 (1999), 69–82. Before explaining their own position, Pawl and Timpe evaluate and reject four alternative solutions to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom: a *compatibilist* solution; a *concessionist* solution; a *Molinist* solution; and Sennett's solution (see "Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," 398–409). For a response to Pawl and Timpe's paper from a compatibilist perspective, see Steven B. Cowan's "Compatibilism and the Sinlessness of the Redeemed in Heaven," *Faith and Philosophy* 28 (2011), 416–431. For Pawl and Timpe's response to Cowan, see their "Heavenly Freedom: A Reply to Cowan," *Faith and Philosophy* 30 (2013), 188–197.

<sup>5</sup>"Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," 409.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 410.

<sup>7</sup>For the sake of this paper, I assume with Pawl and Timpe it is logically possible for an action to be *derivatively free* in a libertarian sense.

Pawl and Timpe, the redeemed in heaven can even make *non-trivial*, non-derivative choices. Consider a certain kind of free act that Alvin Plantinga has labeled *morally significant*.<sup>8</sup> A free action is morally significant for some person S at time *t* if and only if S's performing the action at *t* would be morally wrong and it would be morally right for S to refrain from performing the action at *t*, or vice versa. Since, according to Pawl and Timpe, the redeemed in heaven can't ever choose evil, the redeemed in heaven do not have the ability to make morally significant choices. Nonetheless, Pawl and Timpe think the redeemed in heaven can make what they call *morally relevant choices*, and morally relevant choices, like morally significant choices, have moral weight. According to Pawl and Time, a free choice is morally relevant if and only if "the person is free to choose among at least two options, and at least two of the options, say, A and B, are related such that either A is better than B or B is better than A."<sup>9</sup> For Pawl and Timpe, morally relevant choices include choices whether or not to perform supererogatory acts. If one chooses to perform a supererogatory act, then one chooses something better than choosing not to perform such an act, although choosing not to perform the supererogatory act would not count as an evil act. Since the choice to perform a supererogatory act is morally superior to the choice not to perform such an act, the choice to do (or not to do) something supererogatory has moral weight. For example, say John sells everything he owns and gives the money to the poor. Had he not done this—let us assume for the sake of argument—John would not necessarily have done something morally wrong.<sup>10</sup> But John's deciding to follow one of the evangelical counsels is morally superior (again, given John's circumstances) to deciding not to do so. Hence, although John's choice whether or not to sell his possessions and give them to the poor is not *morally significant*, it nonetheless has *moral weight*.

One might wonder whether *the redeemed in heaven* have the ability to make morally relevant choices. Pawl and Timpe think so. They explain:

It seems to us at least possible that a person can cling to the mean [of virtue] to such an extent that he can't fall from it, but he could nevertheless still cling tighter. If that is possible, then the redeemed in heaven are such that they are perfected . . . insofar as they cling to the mean so tenaciously that they can't but remain there, but are nevertheless such that they could always cling tighter. Their morally relevant choices bring them to cling ever tighter to the mean, and we can judge them to be better for choosing supererogatory actions insofar as such choices bring them to cling more tenaciously to the mean. And, we should note, that if we think about clinging to the good

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<sup>8</sup>See, e.g., Plantinga's *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 30. Whenever I employ the expression *morally significant* in this paper, I have Plantinga's technical sense of that expression in mind.

<sup>9</sup>"Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," 416. Whenever I employ the expression *morally relevant* in this paper, I have Pawl and Timpe's technical sense of that expression in mind.

<sup>10</sup>I am assuming (with Pawl and Timpe) that there are some actions that are morally better than others, but are not thereby morally obligatory actions.

rather than clinging to the mean, we can say that through the everlasting years that the blessed spend with God, they are never-endingly coming ever closer to Him, who is Goodness itself, ever clinging more tenaciously to Him.<sup>11</sup>

Pawl and Timpe thus maintain that the redeemed in heaven can be free in heaven, even though they can't choose to do evil there, and this in a non-trivial, non-derivative, libertarian sense of *free*. For the redeemed in heaven can choose to perform supererogatory actions. In concluding their paper, Pawl and Timpe admit that they have nowhere "provided an argument for incompatibilism or the traditional view of heaven." But they maintain that "for those who are inclined to both incompatibilism and traditional Christianity, we think our view is the best solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom."<sup>12</sup> I now turn to raising some objections for Pawl and Timpe's solution.

## 2. Objections to Pawl and Timpe's Solution

According to Pawl and Timpe, "the only way . . . that a non-divine person can be free and have a moral character precluding of sin is if that person previously freely formed her moral character into one that precludes sin."<sup>13</sup> But what are we to say about the *countless* human persons who die before ever reaching the age of reason? For, as Scripture teaches, "it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).<sup>14</sup> A traditional way of reading this passage is that human persons do not do anything in the next life to bring about their eternal salvation.<sup>15</sup> In addition, according to the Catholic Christian tradition, those persons who are baptized and die before the age of reason are, in fact, among the

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 418.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 419.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 415.

<sup>14</sup>I'm citing the Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition translation here and throughout the paper. See also the following Scripture passages: "I must work the works of him who sent me, whilst it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work" (John 9:4); "For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the proper things *of the body*, according as he hath done, whether it be good or evil" (2 Cor. 5: 10; emphasis mine; for St. Paul "of the body" is a way of speaking about *this* life. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:8); "Therefore whilst we have time, let us work good to all men" (Gal 6:10a).

<sup>15</sup>See, e.g., the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] (2nd ed.), 1013 and 1021. One might think persons in purgatory constitute an exception to what I say here. But according to one way of understanding the Catholic conception of purgatory, this is not the case. According to this conception, those in purgatory are no longer able to choose to do things that will make their characters better than they were at the time of their death. Rather, a person in purgatory necessarily—because of the charity for God in her soul at the time of death—wills to suffer the purgation of whatever keeps her from being able to will single-mindedly the love of God to the degree that she will do so in heaven, which degree of charity is a function of the amount of charity in her heart at the time of her death. For presentations of this view, see, e.g., St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* (ST) Ia. q. 62, a. 9 and Supplement, q. 71, a. 2. See also Dom J. B. McLaughlin's essay in *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, George D. Smith, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1949, vol. 2), 1154–1155.

redeemed in heaven.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, they go to heaven without spending time in purgatory.<sup>17</sup>

Why does any of this present a problem for Pawl and Timpe's solution? Consider the following plausible understanding of the nature of persons: a person is "an individual substance of a rational nature,"<sup>18</sup> where a rational nature is one that confers upon its possessor (at least the root capacity for) the powers of understanding and willing. Let us also assume that persons in heaven are *perfected* persons, and perfected persons actually make use of the powers essential to the species to which they belong. Finally, some people die and go to heaven without ever having the chance to make morally significant choices, whether we're talking about all children who die before the age of reason or, at the very least, baptized children who die before that time. Therefore, my first objection to Pawl and Timpe's solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom is that it is inconsistent with (what for some, e.g., orthodox Catholics, is) the theological fact that there are perfected persons in heaven who never had a chance to freely contribute to the development of their own moral characters.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>See, e.g., Pope Benedict XII's Apostolic Constitution *Benedictus Deus* (1336): "By this Constitution which is to remain in force forever, we, with apostolic authority, define the following: according to the general disposition of God, the souls . . . of children who have been reborn by the . . . baptism of Christ, . . . if they die before attaining the use of free will . . . these souls, immediately (*mox*) after death . . . are . . . with Christ in heaven, in the heavenly kingdom and paradise, joined to the company of the holy angels" (J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* [New York: Alba House, 1982], 684–685). For a text with similar wording, see also the Decree for the Greeks (1439), from the General Council of Florence, session six. Finally, see also session eight of the General Council of Florence, which treats generally of the sacraments, and in the following text, specifically treats of the effects of the sacrament of baptism: "The effect of this sacrament [of baptism] is the remission of all original and actual guilt, also of all penalty that is owed for that guilt. Hence no satisfaction for past sins is to be imposed on the baptized, but those who die before they incur any guilt go straight (*statim*) to the kingdom of heaven and the vision of God" (Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* [London: Sheed and Ward, 1990, vol. 1], 543). I'm grateful to Timothy Pawl for pointing out this last passage to me.

<sup>17</sup>See the passages cited in note 16, particularly the passage from session eight of the General Council of Florence. I'm grateful to Timothy Pawl and Colin Johnson for raising questions on this score, showing me the need to make explicit that, according to Catholic doctrine, baptized infants who die before the age of reason do not spend time in purgatory, but go straight (*statim*) to heaven.

<sup>18</sup>Anicetus Manlius Severinus Boethius, *Liber de Persona et Duabus Naturis contra Eutychen et Nestorium*, ch. 3.

<sup>19</sup>An anonymous reviewer wonders whether it can be meaningful to talk of *perfected persons* who have never had a chance to contribute to the development of their own rational capacities, as in the case of infants who die before the age of reason and go straight to heaven. Spatial restrictions prevent me from giving this good question the kind of answer it deserves here. Suffice it to say that it does not look impossible for God to supply miraculously in heaven powers to a person that typically come by way of natural development. Presuming that a child before the age of reason cannot exercise any rational capacities, it is in heaven that she exercises such capacities for the first time. This child is nonetheless a *perfected person* in heaven in a number of senses: first, she suffers in heaven from no spiritual, psychological, or physical defect; second, and more importantly, she participates in the divine nature such that she enjoys an unmediated intellectual and volitional union with God, which union involves infused knowledge and is not something that *any* created human person can naturally possess or develop. See what follows for more discussion of the beatific vision.

Here follows a second objection. Pawl and Timpe's solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom assumes that the redeemed in heaven have the ability to make morally relevant choices, and in particular, supererogatory choices. Pawl and Timpe suggest the following implications of the redeemed in heaven's having the ability to make morally relevant choices:

- (iii) If the redeemed have the ability to make morally relevant choices in heaven, then the redeemed in heaven have the ability to undergo moral improvement in heaven.
- (iv) If the redeemed in heaven have the ability to undergo moral improvement in heaven, then the redeemed in heaven have the ability to grow ever closer to God in heaven, i.e., increase their *essential beatitude*<sup>20</sup> in heaven.<sup>21</sup>

Given one's commitment to (iii) and (iv), one should also think that

- (v) If the redeemed in heaven can make morally relevant choices in heaven, then the redeemed in heaven have the ability to grow ever closer to God in heaven, i.e., increase their essential beatitude in heaven [from (iii) and (iv), HS].

But there are good reasons for thinking the redeemed in heaven do not have the ability to grow ever closer to God in heaven. I will offer three. If any of these reasons are good ones, we will have good reason to think either *it is not the case that the redeemed in heaven can make morally relevant choices*—if (iii) and (iv) above are both true—or, if the redeemed in heaven have the ability to make morally relevant choices, that *proposition (iii) or proposition (iv) is false*.<sup>22</sup> (As we'll see later in the paper, if (iii) and (iv) are true, in my view the redeemed in heaven can still make morally *weighty* choices, even if they can't make morally *relevant* ones.)

The first reason for thinking the redeemed in heaven can't get ever closer to God in heaven is as follows: it would minimize the importance of the choices a person *S* makes during *S*'s pre-heavenly existence, *at least where those choices have an effect on the degree to which S is happy in heaven*. To see why, say Samantha and Sarah die in a state of grace and so both go to heaven. Although Samantha dies possessing the habit of charity, Sarah's charity at the time of her death far outstrips that possessed by Samantha. Both Samantha and Sarah will be perfectly happy in heaven, since both get to eternally contemplate and delight in God. But according

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<sup>20</sup>I explain the meaning of *essential beatitude* later in this section.

<sup>21</sup>"Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," 418. See the long passage quoted in section 1 of this paper.

<sup>22</sup>It may be that Pawl and Timpe accept (iii) and (iv), but do not see (iii) and (iv) as *essential* to their solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom (see their "Heavenly Freedom: A Reply To Cowan," 196–197). In that case, given that the redeemed in heaven's having the ability to make morally relevant choices *is* essential to Pawl and Timpe's solution, my arguments that follow can be taken as an admonition that Pawl and Timpe should not, in fact, accept both (iii) and (iv).

to one theological tradition, Sarah's happiness in heaven will be greater than Samantha's, since Sarah died with a greater love for God—and so God rewards Sarah with a greater degree of beatitude.<sup>23</sup> According to Pawl and Timpe, human persons in heaven (apparently) exist for an infinite duration of time, where at any or all points on such a heavenly timeline Samantha or Sarah may or may not make a series of morally relevant choices. Theoretically, Samantha might eventually outpace Sarah in choosing to perform more supererogatory acts in heaven. That would seem to suggest that, given enough time, the choices Samantha and Sarah made in this life would eventually become irrelevant in heaven where the degree of their beatitude, i.e., "their closeness to God" is concerned. Say, for example, that Sarah shows great love for God and neighbor in this life by following the example of Blessed Mother Theresa and becomes a Sister of Charity, and Sarah dies with a great deal of charity in her soul. Samantha dies with love of God in her soul, but has in this life habitually resisted giving herself wholly to God. In fact, she often acted with the thought in mind, "I'll have plenty of time in eternity to grow closer to

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<sup>23</sup>See, e.g., St. Thomas Aquinas, ST Ia. q. 12, a. 6 and ST IaIIae. q. 5, a. 2. St. Thomas thinks that, in one sense, all human persons in heaven enjoy the same reward, i.e., directly knowing and loving God Himself. But each of the saints in heaven enjoys God to the extent or degree to which she possesses charity for God at the end of her earthly existence. Why think the latter? No creature can enjoy the beatific vision without receiving a special supernatural grace from God that St. Thomas calls *the light of glory*. The light of glory is God's gift of grace to the saints in heaven whereby they "see" God's essence. But the amount of light the saints receive is relative to their desire to see God. The more a saint longs to see God, the greater the light of glory in her soul and so the greater her participation in the beatific vision of God in heaven. But the degree to which a saint longs to see God in heaven is relative to the amount of charity for God that the saint has in her soul when she dies. Therefore, the degree to which a saint in heaven enjoys God in heaven is relative to the amount of charity the saint has at the end of her earthly life. Since some of the redeemed in heaven die with greater charity for God than others, some saints are happier than others in heaven.

For the doctrine that different human persons merit different degrees of beatitude in heaven in early Church sources, see, e.g., Aphraates the Persian Sage, *Treatises* xxii, 19; St. Jerome, *Against Jovian* ii, 32; St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons* lxxvii, 6; St. Augustine, *Homilies on John* lxvii, 2; St. Augustine, *Enchiridion* xxix, 111; St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia* iv, 36, 70. For an authoritative statement from the Catholic Church on there being different degrees of beatitude in heaven, see, e.g., Decree for the Greeks, the General Council of Florence, session six (6 July 1439): "Also, the souls of those who have incurred no stain of sin whatsoever after baptism, as well as those souls who after incurring the stain of sin have been cleansed whether in their bodies or outside their bodies, as was stated above, are straightaway (*mox*) received into heaven and clearly behold the triune God as he is, *yet one person more perfectly than another according to the difference of their merits*" (Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 527–528; emphasis mine). For a compelling artistic expression of the doctrine, see Dante's *Paradiso*.

An anonymous reviewer worries that talk of "meriting greater or lesser rewards in heaven" smacks of Pelagianism and suggests there are counter-currents to such talk in St. Augustine and St. Thomas. I suspect the problem here is merely terminological. At any rate, as the Council of Trent makes clear, whatever good works the saints do as the outworking of their faith, thereby meriting greater glory (and so happiness) in heaven, they do those good works *by the grace of God*. See, e.g., *The Decree on Justification*, ch. 16, nn. 1545–1548 as well as canon 32. Consider also the following passage from St. Augustine: " 'Who crowns you with mercy and loving-kindness.' You had perhaps begun to be in a manner proud, when you heard the words, 'He crowns you.' I am then great, I have then wrestled. By whose strength? By yours, but supplied by Him. . . . He crowns you, because He is crowning His own gifts, not your deservings" (*Exposition of the Psalms* 103, 6; accessed at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1801103.htm>).



God." If it is possible for Samantha to outpace Sarah in her love for God in heaven insofar as she makes better morally relevant choices in heaven and so comes to enjoy a greater union with God in heaven than Sarah, that would seem to seriously downplay the importance of what Samantha and Sarah choose to do for God in this life. But according to the theological tradition I've invoked here, the choices human persons make in this life are vitally important, not only for whether such persons get to heaven, but also for determining how well-placed such persons will be in eternity.

A second reason for thinking that the redeemed in heaven cannot get ever closer to God in heaven is that this view is incompatible with one important traditional Christian account of the relation between one's moral character and beatitude. The traditional picture I'm thinking about is the Catholic Christian view as articulated by some eminent twentieth-century Catholic theologians as well as St. Thomas Aquinas.

As theologian Ludwig Ott notes, it is a dogma of the Catholic Church that "the degree of perfection of the beatific vision granted to the just is proportioned to each one's merits."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the orthodox Catholic should accept the following:

- (vi) If the redeemed in heaven have the ability to get ever closer to God in heaven, i.e., advance in the beatific vision or essential beatitude, then the redeemed in heaven have the ability to undergo moral improvement in heaven, i.e., they can merit in heaven.

But eminent twentieth-century Catholic theologians reject the consequent of (vi). To see why, consider first a passage from Scripture, John 9:4: "I must work the works of him that sent me, whilst it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work."<sup>25</sup> Ludwig Ott suggests that in this passage "the period of earthly life is the 'Day,' the time for work, the period after death is the 'Night, when no man can work.'"<sup>26</sup> The person meriting therefore "must be . . . here on earth."<sup>27</sup> The notion that the saints in heaven can perform actions that allow them to advance in beatitude, i.e., get ever closer to God, is incompatible with Catholic eschatology, at least as it is explained by some orthodox twentieth-century Catholic theologians.

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<sup>24</sup>*Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Patrick Lynch (Rockford, IL: Tan Publishers, 1974), 479. Ott cites decrees from the Council of Florence and the Council of Trent. As for the decree from the Council of Florence, see the passage from session six (6 July 1439) cited in note 23 above. As for the decree from the Council of Trent, see session six (13 January 1547), Decree on Justification, canon 32.

<sup>25</sup>See also the passages of Scripture cited in note 14 above.

<sup>26</sup>*Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 474.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 266. For another articulation of this view, see Karl Adam's *The Spirit of Catholicism*: "death is the end of all creative moral initiative and meritorious activity" (Dom Justin McCann, trans. [Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1954]), 110). See also the following passage from Anscar Vonier's essay on death and judgment in *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*: "Through death there comes a sudden and permanent standstill to that mighty forward movement of man's soul which has been produced by the grace of God. The period of spiritual change, of merit, of progress, is forever at an end" (George D. Smith, ed. [New York: MacMillan, 1949], vol. 2, 1107).

In addition, it is clear St. Thomas rejects the notion that a saint in heaven can advance in beatitude, i.e., make spiritual or moral progress in heaven:

Merit and progress belong to this present condition of life. . . . [E]very rational creature is so led by God to the end of its beatitude, that from God's predestination it is brought even to a determinate degree of beatitude. Consequently, when that degree is once secured, it cannot pass to a higher degree.<sup>28</sup>

As the quotation above shows, St. Thomas rejects the view that the saints in heaven can advance in (essential) beatitude. But the passage above also shows why he thinks so. For St. Thomas also accepts (vi),<sup>29</sup> and so, given that "merit and progress belong to this present condition of life," it follows that the antecedent of (vi) is false. Therefore, according to the views of St. Thomas and some eminent twentieth-century Catholic theologians, the redeemed in heaven do not have the ability to get ever closer to God in heaven.

A third reason for thinking the redeemed in heaven can't get ever closer to God in heaven can be generated from St. Thomas's views on *the nature of eternal life itself*.<sup>30</sup> According to St. Thomas, we should distinguish between the *essence* of perfect happiness in heaven, or *essential beatitude*, and that which is *accidental* to perfect happiness in heaven, or *accidental beatitude*.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>ST Ia. q. 62, a. 9, *sed contra* and *respondeo* (Fathers of the English Dominican Providence, trans. [Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1950, vol. 1]). All citations from St. Thomas's ST in this paper are taken from this translation. See also: ST Suppl. q. 71, a. 5, *respondeo*; ST Suppl. q. 71, a. 8, ad3, and *De Malo* q. 5, a. 4, ad5. See also the constant theme in St. Thomas's work that in this life human persons are *wayfarers*, whereas the saints in heaven have arrived at their proper place. For example, the following passage from *Compendium theologiae* (CT), chs. 149–150 is representative of the theme (and St. Thomas's understanding) of heaven as *arrival*: "The Beatific Vision entails immutability in the . . . will. . . . The will is subject to change because it craves what it does not possess. Clearly, therefore, the final consummation of man consists in perfect repose or unchangeableness as regards . . . [the] will. . . . [I]n his final consummation man attains eternal life, not only in the sense that he lives an immortal life in his soul—for this is a property of the rational soul in its very nature, as was shown above—but also in the sense that he is brought to the perfection of immobility" (Cyril Vollert, trans. [Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1993], 168).

<sup>29</sup>See, e.g., ST Ia. q. 12, a. 6, and ST IaIIae q. 5, a. 2. See also note 23 above.

<sup>30</sup>I treat St. Thomas's views on eternal life, time, and heaven in greater detail in an unpublished paper entitled, "St. Thomas on Time, Eternal Life, and the Beatific Vision."

<sup>31</sup>St. Thomas finds precedent for distinguishing *essential* from *accidental* beatitude in Aristotle's distinction in *Nicomachean Ethics* between *the essence of happiness*, on the one hand, and *the embellishment or well-being of happiness* on the other (see, e.g., St. Thomas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (In NE) I, lec. 13, n. 163; In NE I, lec. 14, n. 173; In NE I, lec. 16, n. 194, and In NE X, lec. 11, n. 2104). Applying this distinction to beatitude in heaven, St. Thomas distinguishes between the *essence of perfect happiness in heaven* (essential beatitude) and *the well-being (bene esse) of perfect happiness* (essential beatitude plus accidental beatitude). St. Thomas uses the distinction between the essence of perfect happiness and the well-being of perfect happiness throughout his scholarly life. In addition to the texts from In NE, see, e.g.: ST Suppl. q. 96, a. 1, ad1; ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 5; ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 6, *respondeo*; ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 6, ad1; ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 7, ad3; ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 8, *respondeo*, and ST IaIIae. q. 5, a. 2, ad3. In distinguishing essential beatitude from accidental beatitude, St. Thomas sometimes speaks instead of the *essential heavenly reward* in contrast to the *accidental reward*. Like the distinction between the essence of perfect happiness and the well-being of perfect happiness, St. Thomas employs the distinction between the essential heavenly reward and the accidental reward throughout his career. See, e.g.: ST Suppl. q. 10, a. 2, ad2; ST Suppl. q. 13, a. 2, ad1; ST Suppl. q. 25, a. 2, ad2; ST Suppl. q. 27, a. 3, ad1; ST Suppl. q. 41, a. 4, ad1; ST Suppl. q. 71, a. 1,

St. Thomas argues that the essence of perfect happiness in heaven consists in *the beatific vision* alone, i.e., a saint's unmediated intellectual and volitional union with God in heaven,<sup>32</sup> whereas any other dimension to human happiness in heaven, e.g., embodiment at the general resurrection or cognition of other creatures in heaven, is merely accidental to perfect happiness in heaven.<sup>33</sup>

In St. Thomas's view, the essence of perfect happiness in heaven consists in beatific union with God alone since such a union—and only such a union—satisfies every desire of the human heart. Nonetheless, the goods of embodiment and friendship are fitting goods for human beings, who, after-all, are social animals, thinks St. Thomas. But such goods necessarily pale by comparison to the good of knowing the essence of the infinitely perfect God. Therefore, the goods of embodiment and human friendship, in relation to perfect human happiness, are aptly spoken of as *accidental* in the strict sense that, although these goods are compatible with perfect human happiness in heaven, perfect human happiness in heaven can exist without them. In addition, essential beatitude is independent of accidental beatitude for St. Thomas in the sense that accidental beatitude does not increase the intensity of the saint's perfect happiness in heaven.<sup>34</sup> At best, the addition of accidental beatitude to essential beatitude *increases the scope* of perfect happiness in heaven, e.g., it flows from a saint's soul into her body,<sup>35</sup> or it *is a fitting adornment* for essential beatitude.<sup>36</sup>

St. Thomas does think accidental beatitude (a) can increase until the day of judgment,<sup>37</sup> for example, as more human persons join the Church triumphant,<sup>38</sup> and (b) involves a saint's undergoing changes, for example, moving her body from one place to another in the next life.<sup>39</sup> But in St.

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*respondeo*; ST Suppl. q. 71, a. 5, *respondeo*; ST Suppl. q. 71, a. 8, ad3; ST Suppl. q. 89, a. 2, ad5; ST Suppl. q. 89, a. 3, ad3; ST Suppl. q. 92, a. 3, *respondeo*; ST Suppl. q. 93, a. 3, ad3; ST Suppl. q. 96, a. 1; ST Suppl. q. 96, a. 2, ad3; ST Suppl. q. 98, a. 6, *respondeo*; ST Suppl. Appendix I, q. 2, a. 4, ad4; ST Ia. q. 62, a. 9, ad3; ST Ia. q. 95, a. 4, *respondeo*; ST IIaIIae. q. 152, a. 4, ad1; ST IIaIIae. q. 182, a. 2, ad1, and ST IIIa. q. 89, a. 5, ad3.

<sup>32</sup>See, e.g.: ST Suppl. q. 79, a. 1, *respondeo*; ST Ia. q. 12, a. 1, *respondeo*; ST IaIIae. q. 3, a. 8, *respondeo*; ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 1, obj. 2; ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 5, *respondeo*, and ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 8, *respondeo*; ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 8, ad1, and ST IaIIae. q. 69, a. 3, *respondeo*.

<sup>33</sup>See, e.g.: ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 5 and ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 8.

<sup>34</sup>See, e.g., ST IaIIae. q. 5, a. 2, ad3: "None of the Blessed lacks any desirable good; since they have the Infinite Good Itself, Which is 'the good of all good,' as Augustine says (Enarr. in Ps. 134). But one is said to be happier than another, by reason of diverse participation of the same good. And the addition of other goods does not increase Happiness, since Augustine says (Confess. v, 4): 'He who knows Thee, and others besides, is not the happier for knowing them, but is happy for knowing Thee alone.'"

<sup>35</sup>See, e.g., ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 5, ad2 and ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 5, ad5.

<sup>36</sup>See, e.g., ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 6, ad1 and ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 7, ad3.

<sup>37</sup>See, e.g.: ST Suppl. q. 92, a. 3, *respondeo*; ST Suppl. q. 98, a. 6, *respondeo*; ST Ia. q. 62, a. 9, ad3, and ST IIaIIae. q. 182, a. 2.

<sup>38</sup>See, e.g., ST Suppl. q. 71, a. 8, ad3.

<sup>39</sup>St. Thomas thinks that the glorified bodies do move and change. For one thing, Christ—who is the forerunner of the saints in all things—moved his glorified body. Also, St. Thomas

Thomas's view essential beatitude itself is invariable,<sup>40</sup> even immutable and timeless.<sup>41</sup> Why does St. Thomas think that the essential beatitude of the saints is immutable and timeless? The Gospels often speak of heaven as "eternal life."<sup>42</sup> According to St. Thomas, this is because the beatific vision is a participation in God's own eternal life.<sup>43</sup> St. Thomas is fond of citing 1 John 3:2 in this context: "When He shall appear, we shall be like to Him because we shall see Him as He is."<sup>44</sup> We shall be *like* to Him. As is well known, St. Thomas thinks that God's nature is timeless and absolutely immutable.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, given St. Thomas's view that a saint's closeness to God in heaven is a function of the extent to which she participates

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accepts the Church's tradition that the glorified bodies of the saints have four special properties, or gifts: clarity, impassibility, subtlety, and *agility* (see, e.g., ST Suppl. qq. 82–85 and *Commentary on St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians*, ch.15, nn. 980–988).

<sup>40</sup>See, e.g., ST Suppl. q. 71, a. 5; ST Suppl. q. 71, a. 8, ad3, and ST Suppl. q. 98, a. 6, *respondeo*.

<sup>41</sup>See, e.g., *Commentary on Lombard's Sentences* (In Sent.) IV, d. 49, q. 1, a. 2, q. 3, ad4: "To the fourth, it should be said that the eternal life the saints will have is spoken of according to a participation of eternity, not merely with regard to lacking an end (in which manner even the punishment of the damned is called 'eternal'). But further with regard to the removal of all change, not only in act, which an 'age' too excludes, but even in potency. For the saints, through clinging to God, will obtain such stability from the divine gift that they cannot be changed—a stability God has by his nature, by reason of which he is eternal" (Peter A. Kwasniewski, Thomas Bolin, and Joseph Bolin, trans., *On Love and Charity: Readings from the 'Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard'* [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008], 361). See also: In Sent. IV, d. 49, q. 1, a. 2, q. 3, c.; In Sent. IV, d. 49, q. 1, a. 2, q. 3, ad 3; *Summa contra gentiles* III, chs. 60–62; CT, chs. 149–150 (see note 28 above where I sight a text from this passage); *Commentary on the Gospel* according to St. John (In John), ch. 17, lec. 1, n. 2186; ST IaIIae q. 5, a. 4; ST IaIIae. q. 67, a. 4, ad2, and ST IaIIae. q. 67, a. 5, ad3. In particular, see ST IaIIae. q. 67, a. 4, ad2: "in the lost there will be a succession of punishments, so that the notion of something future remains there, which is the object of fear: but the glory of the saints has no succession, by reason of its being a kind of participation in eternity, wherein there is neither past nor future, but only the present."

A reader might object: (a) by speaking of the beatific vision as "timeless" Aquinas could mean to ascribe *aeviternity*, i.e., the natural mode of existence of the angels, to the beatific vision of the saints in heaven, since, strictly speaking, *aeviternity* and time constitute different modes of existence for St. Thomas. The problem with (a) is that St. Thomas explicitly states that the mode of existence of the beatific vision itself, i.e., "the vision of glory," is not the same as the mode of existence that St. Thomas calls *aeviternity*, but surpasses it. See, e.g., ST Ia. q. 10, a. 3, *respondeo*; ST Ia. q. 10 a. 5, ad1, and *Catena aurea*, Luke 20, lec. 4.

Finally, it should be noted that in holding the view that the beatific vision is a timeless and immutable cognition of God, St. Thomas is following a theological tradition that goes back at least as far as St. Augustine. For example, in *Summa contra gentiles* (SCG), book III, ch. 60, St. Thomas cites a passage from St. Augustine's *De trinitate*, book xv: "Our thoughts [in heaven] will not then be fleeting, going to and fro from some things to others, but we shall see all our knowledge in one single glance" (Vernon J. Bourke, trans. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1950), 200. See also ST Ia. q. 10, a. 3, *respondeo*).

<sup>42</sup>See, e.g.: Mt 19:29; Mt 25:46; Mk 10:30; Lk 18:30; Jn 3:15; Jn 3:16; Jn 3:36; Jn 4:14; Jn 4:36; Jn 5:24; Jn 5:39; Jn 6:40; Jn 6:47; Jn 6:54; Jn 6:68; Jn 10:28; Jn 12:25, and Jn 17:2–3.

<sup>43</sup>See, e.g., ST IaIIae. q. 3, a. 1, ad1.

<sup>44</sup>See, e.g., ST Ia. q. 12, a. 1, *sed contra* and ST IaIIae. q. 3, a. 8, *sed contra*. John 17:3b ("Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent.") is another favorite Johannian passage of St. Thomas's where thinking about eternal life as a participation in God's timelessly eternal life is concerned (see, e.g.: ST Ia. q. 10, a. 3, *respondeo*; CT, ch. 163; In John 17, lec. 1, n. 2186, and *Commentary on Liber de Causis*, lec. 2).

<sup>45</sup>See, e.g., ST Ia. qq. 9 and 10.

in God in the beatific vision, i.e., she enjoys essential beatitude, and the essential beatitude of a saint in heaven is invariable, immutable, and timeless, it therefore follows that the saints in heaven can't get ever closer to God in heaven.<sup>46</sup>

We are now in a position to bring this second objection to Pawl and Timpe's solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom to a close. I've adduced three reasons for thinking the redeemed in heaven can't get ever closer to God in heaven. By *modus tollens*, Pawl and Timpe are therefore either wrong to think that human persons in heaven make morally relevant choices—see proposition (v)—or else they need to reject proposition (iii) or proposition (iv).

Here follows a third objection to Pawl and Timpe's solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom. One of the objections to which Pawl and Timpe respond in defending their proposed solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom is the following: given the account of freedom in heaven that Pawl and Timpe propose, it is not possible that non-derivative acts of freewill in heaven have moral significance. But if acts of free choice lack moral significance, they lack moral weight. But, acts of freewill have moral weight in heaven of all places. Therefore, there is something wrong with Pawl and Timpe's proposed solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom. Call this the *Objection from Moral Weight*.

Pawl and Timpe respond to the Objection from Moral Weight by granting that persons in heaven do not have non-derivative morally *significant* freedom, but they maintain the redeemed in heaven can nonetheless

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<sup>46</sup>Note that the distinction between essential and accidental beatitude allows St. Thomas a way of responding to the objection that human happiness in heaven can't be immutable and timeless in the sense of being non-successive, since the happiness of the saints (eventually) involves embodiment, and bodies move, which implies that human happiness in heaven involves successiveness (In fact, St. Thomas thinks that the saints will also *cognize* some things successively as a part of the accidental reward, e.g., the planets, the bodies of other saints, etc. [see, e.g., ST Suppl. q. 92, a. 2, *respondeo* and ad6; see also SCG IV, ch. 86]). It is true, St. Thomas would respond, that *accidental* beatitude involves successiveness. But that does not prevent *essential* beatitude being such that it does not involve successiveness. Even though the saints themselves undergo changes in heaven insofar as their bodies move and they have intermittent sense experiences—indeed, the saints go from a state of not experiencing the beatific vision, before they exist in heaven, to a state of experiencing it in heaven—*their enjoyment of God in the beatific vision itself is experienced timelessly and immutably*. St. Thomas thinks that human experience in heaven is thus analogous to (a) the experience of Christ in his human nature, who—both before and after the resurrection—enjoys multiple forms of cognition, i.e., acquired, infused, and beatific knowledge (see, e.g., ST IIIa. q. 9) and (b) the blessed angels, who possess a natural mode of cognition in addition to the beatific vision (see, e.g., ST Ia. q. 58, a. 1 and a. 2; ST Ia. q. 62, a. 7). Indeed, in enjoying multiple modes of cognition in heaven, the saints “are as the angels in heaven” (Matthew 22:30b). See also ST Ia. q. 10, a. 5, ad1: “Spiritual creatures as regards successive affections and intelligences are measured by time. Hence also Augustine says (Gen. ad lit. viii, 20, 22, 23) that to be moved through time, is to be moved by affections. But as regards their nature they are measured by aeviternity; whereas as regards the vision of glory, they have a share of eternity.” For further defense of the coherence of St. Thomas's distinction between an essential reward in heaven and an accidental reward, see my “Friendship in Heaven: Aquinas on Supremely Perfect Happiness and the Communion of the Saints,” in *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, ed. Kevin Timpe (New York: Routledge, 2009), 225–248.

make some morally *relevant* choices, e.g., choices whether or not to perform supererogatory acts, and such choices have moral weight.<sup>47</sup> But, as I've argued above, *if propositions (iii) and (iv) are true*, and there are good reasons to think the redeemed in heaven can't grow ever closer to God in heaven, then we have good reason to think the redeemed in heaven do not have the ability to make morally relevant choices. Given such assumptions, Pawl and Timpe's solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom is still vulnerable to the Objection from Moral Weight.

### 3. *Expanding the Class of Morally Weighty Actions*

In my view, Pawl and Timpe's basic approach to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom is worth preserving. For *ideally*, the redeemed in heaven do have a history of making free choices in this life, which choices have contributed to the development of the perfected moral characters the redeemed possess in heaven. But one of the consequences of original sin is that not all human persons in heaven, namely, those who died (and were baptized) before reaching the age of reason, have had the opportunity to choose between good and evil. Presumably those human persons who have never had the chance to make morally significant choices nonetheless have the ability to act *freely* in heaven, even freely in a robust manner, since they are not only *persons* but *perfected* persons. But how can such persons perform even *derivatively* free actions? In addition, what if propositions (iii) and (iv) are true and none of the redeemed in heaven have the ability to advance in their beatitude? In that case, none of the saints in heaven, for all we've seen, have the ability to make non-derivative, morally weighty choices. We therefore need a modified explanation for why the redeemed in heaven do in fact engage in free actions that have moral weight. My strategy: just as Pawl and Timpe expand the class of morally weighty choices beyond morally significant choices to include choices to perform supererogatory acts, I argue we should expand the class of morally weighty actions even further to include choices I shall call *morally grave*.

Suppose Jane has a morally virtuous character such that she *will* give some of her expendable income away to those who are in need. Now suppose also that, because of where Jane lives (and the manner in which she virtuously lives her life), Jane's options are limited as to just who will receive Jane's gift: she could give it to the poor, or she could give it to the sick, or she could give a certain percentage to the sick and a certain percentage to the poor. Now, are any of these options really better than any of the others? Suppose that Jane—who has the virtue of prudence—reasons that the answer is “no” and Jane—who also feels a particularly strong calling to help the sick—chooses to give her money to the sick. Now according to the definition of a morally relevant choice offered by Pawl and Timpe, this choice is not morally relevant, since of the many options open to her in this situation, no one of them is objectively better than any of the others.

<sup>47</sup>“Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven,” 416–417.

But surely Jane's choice to help the poor nonetheless has moral weight. We might think the reason Jane's free act of helping the sick (rather than the poor) is a morally weighty choice is that such a choice *demonstrates moral excellence on Jane's part*.

To see another example of a choice which is not morally relevant in Pawl and Timpe's sense but nonetheless has moral weight, consider one of Pawl and Timpe's own examples:

[S]ay that Satan freely becomes so vicious that he can no longer perform morally praiseworthy actions. As an out-flowing of his vicious character, he wants to punish Teresa for her virtuous behavior. And given his devilish nature, he cannot choose an option that is morally good. But should he avenge her virtue by defiling her children with painful boils, send his demons to tear her limb from limb, or simply torture her to death himself?<sup>48</sup>

Now, suppose Satan is confined (for example, by the power of God) in a given circumstance to making one of the choices that Pawl and Timpe mention here. Given his moral character, Satan *will* choose to perform one of these actions. All of these actions are morally vicious actions. It also seems plausible to suppose that all of these actions are *equally* vicious.<sup>49</sup> In that case, Satan's choice, for example, to torture Teresa himself, is not a morally relevant choice. But surely it is a choice that carries moral weight, since it is a morally vicious choice.

Why do morally virtuous or vicious choices necessarily count as having moral weight? We might think that it is simply self-evident that such actions are morally weighty. On the other hand, perhaps we could say that virtuous and vicious choices have moral weight whenever they are free choices that *constitute, cause, or express* the moral character of the persons who perform them. Call such free choices *morally grave choices*. For example, John freely commits a murder. Such a free action has moral gravity—and so moral weight—simply because it is (let's suppose) a cause of John's morally vicious moral character. On the other hand, Jane is morally virtuous; in particular she is merciful. Her free act of mercy towards someone who has wronged her has moral gravity—and so moral weight—*simply because* it is an expression of her virtuous moral character. I therefore propose the following sufficient conditions for a morally weighty free choice:

(MW) A free choice is morally weighty if (a) it is a morally *relevant* choice or (b) it is a morally *grave* choice, i.e., a person S's morally excellent or morally vicious choice that constitutes, is a cause of, or is an expression of S's moral character.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 416.

<sup>49</sup>In correspondence Kevin Timpe says he is tempted to say that one of these options may be worse than the others, but admits that there are possible cases where the various options open to a free agent are all equally vicious.

<sup>50</sup>Note that all morally significant choices are morally relevant choices.

Some of the choices of the redeemed in heaven are morally grave, and so morally weighty. Why think so? To begin with, in the case of some (but not all) of the saints in heaven, we can construe even the beatific vision as a derivatively free and morally grave choice insofar as a saint's engaging in the beatific vision can be traced back to free choices she made during this life. Although we might think that St. Paul can no longer choose not to experience the beatific vision once he comes to experience it,<sup>51</sup> his experiencing it in the manner that *he* does<sup>52</sup> has as a necessary condition his making some morally relevant choices in this life. Since St. Paul's act of seeing God in heaven is constitutive of his being perfectly happy,<sup>53</sup> St. Paul's act of seeing God is a morally grave and so a morally weighty choice, at least derivatively, insofar as St. Paul's act of seeing God is (partially) caused by the morally significant choices that St. Paul made in this life.

Nonetheless, as we saw above, there are reasons to think that some of the saints in heaven have never made morally significant choices, i.e., human persons who died (and were baptized) before reaching the age of reason. For them, the beatific vision cannot be construed as an act of free choice, even derivatively. But we can note ways in which *all* human persons in heaven make morally grave free choices by drawing on some of the views of St. Thomas Aquinas. Recall first St. Thomas's distinction between essential beatitude, which includes the beatific vision, and accidental beatitude, e.g., a saint's moving her glorified body in heaven. Second, given St. Thomas's views on heaven, the following proposition is true:

- (vii) In his human nature, Christ possesses multiple forms of cognition, e.g., he has acquired, infused, and beatific knowledge; the blessed angels too possess a natural mode of cognition in addition to the beatific vision.<sup>54</sup>

By analogy with Christ and the blessed angels, we can think with St. Thomas that

- (viii) The saints in heaven, after the general resurrection, enjoy multiple modes of cognition, e.g., there is the timeless and immutable act which is the beatific vision, but, as a part of the accidental beatitude of the saints, there are also those acts of cognition analogous to acts of cognition in which many of the redeemed were engaged in this life, e.g., a saint's seeing with her glorified body the body of Christ and a saint's willing her body to travel to Mars.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>I say why this might be the case later in the paper.

<sup>52</sup>The caveat is important for, as I've argued, not all the saints have acting freely in this life as a necessary condition for having the beatific vision, e.g., those who die in a state of grace before attaining the age of reason. Nonetheless, *St. Paul's* experiencing the beatific vision *to the degree or in the manner* that he does is contingent upon his having made certain free choices in this life. See what follows and note 23 above for more discussion of this point.

<sup>53</sup>See, e.g., ST IaIIae. q. 3, a. 8.

<sup>54</sup>See the texts cited in note 46 above.

<sup>55</sup>See the texts cited in notes 39 and 46 above.



If (vii) and (viii) are true, we are here beholding some deep mysteries. But let us simply assume, for the sake of argument, that (vii) and (viii) are indeed true. That means that, although the saint's beatific vision itself is something timeless and immutable, and therefore not subject to succession, the saint in heaven is also engaged in cognitive acts that *do* involve succession. Such successive cognitive acts are a function of non-derivative free choices made by the saints in heaven. But whatever the redeemed in heaven choose to do in heaven they choose as an expression of their morally perfected characters. Such morally excellent choices on the part of the redeemed in heaven are morally grave ones, and so are also morally weighty. Therefore, given this Thomistic account of the blessedness of the saints, *all* human persons in heaven make non-derivative morally weighty choices, even if none of them make non-derivative morally *significant* or morally *relevant* choices, since all human persons in heaven make morally *grave* choices.

#### 4. *The Problem of Heavenly Freedom and the Free Will Defense*

We might wonder whether my modified version of Pawl and Timpe's response to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom is consistent with advocating the free will defense. For, if some persons can be perfectly happy and act freely in heaven without ever possessing the freedom to choose for or against God, how can we say that the exercise of libertarian free will in making morally significant choices is a good of such value that it outweighs all the evil in the world? Why didn't God simply create all persons in heaven?

If by supposition there are some human persons in heaven who act freely there but never had a chance to freely contribute to the development of their own moral characters, then it seems reasonable to think that those human persons have a relationship with God that differs in a significant way from the relationship with God possessed by those who did have a chance to make morally significant choices, namely, *the latter will be happier than the former in heaven*. As we've seen, according to the Catholic Christian theological tradition, some human persons are happier in heaven than others. But if Jane is happier than John in heaven, then it is because Jane's love for God at the time of her death is greater than John's love for God at the time of his death. Although seeing God face to face is what makes each and every non-divine person perfectly happy, Jane nonetheless sees God more clearly than John—which God arranges in accord with the different degrees of desire to see God on the part of Jane and John—and so Jane's eternal bliss is greater than John's. But now consider the following case. Maria is baptized, but dies before she can ever exercise her own power to make morally significant choices. According to St. Thomas<sup>56</sup> (and the teaching magisterium of the Catholic Church<sup>57</sup>), when Maria is baptized,

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<sup>56</sup>See, e.g., ST IIIa. q. 69, a. 6.

<sup>57</sup>See, e.g., CCC 1266.

God infuses in her the theological virtues, virtues which include the virtue of charity. Although Maria obviously cannot make an *act* of charity before the age of reason, she does nonetheless count as someone who *possesses* charity as a habit at the time of her death, the possession of which is sufficient for her salvation. But someone who has the habit of charity without any act of charity has less charity than a person who has the habit of charity and by God's grace has also acted with charity. Just as Jane is happier than John in heaven, so John is happier than Maria in heaven, since Maria died merely with the habit of charity while John died possessing not only the habit of charity but as someone who has acted with charity as well.

What's the significance of all of this for the free will defense? Although God can create human persons such that they exist in heaven even though they never make morally significant choices, these persons are not *as* happy as those persons who go to heaven, having made morally significant choices at some point during their pre-heavenly existence. Consider one way of making sense of what I've said here: unlike other loving relationships, e.g., the father/son relationship, the *friendship* relation requires that each party in the relation freely choose to enter into the relationship. Therefore, we might think that a human person's enjoying fellowship with God in heaven that exists according to the order of *friendship* requires that that human person by grace freely chooses to unite herself to God in this life. Furthermore, let us suppose that a baptized person who dies before ever exercising the power of free choice can enjoy the divine vision. As such, such a person is *perfectly happy*, which entails, among other things, that all of her desires are sated. But her happiness is not as great as the saint who freely entered into fellowship with God in this life. Friendship with God in heaven, which requires someone's making significant free choices in this life, is thus a great good. Therefore, the free will defender can argue that (it is possible that) some non-divine persons making significant moral choices to will in this life in accord with what God wills such that they come to enjoy friendship with God in heaven is a good of such value that it outweighs all the evil in the world.

##### 5. Pawl and Timpe's Solution: One Final Improvement

Consider only those among the redeemed in heaven who did have the opportunity to play a role in forming their own moral characters in this life. Recall that Pawl and Timpe explain that such persons are unable to will evil in heaven *on account of their morally perfected characters*. But we might think that the moral impeccability of such persons in heaven is not simply a consequence of the moral character to which these persons freely contributed during their pre-heavenly existence, but is also a consequence of what it means *to be in heaven*. Here again I'm taking a lead from St. Thomas. St. Thomas thinks that when the saints come to enjoy the divine vision, they will necessarily love what they see.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, a person

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<sup>58</sup>See, e.g., ST IaIIae. q. 4, a. 4.

who “sees” God’s essence simply cannot “turn away” from God’s essence to will something that is not in accord with the will of God, since, given that every human desire is satisfied in such a vision, there could be no possible motive for such a turning away from God.<sup>59</sup>

St. Thomas’s account of heaven helps the case for traditional Christian theism, for some think it impossible or unlikely for human beings to develop a morally perfect character that entails moral impeccability. For example, Graham Oppy, Yujin Nagasawa, and Nick Trakakis have argued that, “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.”<sup>60</sup> In responding to an objection of this sort, Pawl and Timpe mention the importance of the reality of purgatory for developing moral impeccability in the saints in heaven.<sup>61</sup> This response is certainly helpful. But St. Thomas’s account of essential beatitude provides an even stronger response to the sort of objection raised by Oppy et al.: committing an evil act in heaven is psychologically impossible, given the perfect good which the redeemed possess in the beatific vision. The act of seeing the essence of God can nonetheless be a derivatively free act (in the libertarian sense) because, ideally, the act which consists in the beatific vision can trace back to the pre-heavenly existence of the redeemed person, a state in which the redeemed person had a role to play by way of cooperating with God in the development of her own virtuous moral character.

### 6. Conclusion

In taking a critical look at Pawl and Timpe’s solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom, I’ve emphasized what the Catholic and Thomistic traditions have to say about heaven. For those inclined to accept these Catholic and/or Thomistic traditions on heaven, I’ve offered a solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom that has the advantage of being more consistent with such traditions than the solution offered by Pawl and Timpe. In addition, my solution is not missing any of the virtues of Pawl and Timpe’s solution. Given my own commitments to the reality of libertarian free will and the truth of the Catholic and Thomistic traditions on heaven, I have thus sought to make Pawl and Timpe’s “best” solution to the Problem of Heavenly Freedom even better.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>See, e.g., ST IaIIae. q. 5, a. 4.

<sup>60</sup>*Arguing about Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 321.

<sup>61</sup>“Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven,” 411, n. 36.

<sup>62</sup>I’m grateful to Merry Brown, Tom Flint, Timothy Pawl, Kevin Timpe, and two anonymous reviewers for providing extremely helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.