

The Realm of Enhanced Agency: A Choice-Based Account of the Value of Heavenly Freedom

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Abstract : Free will theodicies are seemingly internally inconsistent when they claim that our freedom with respect to good and evil choices is of such great value that it justifies the creation of a world with moral evil while also maintaining that a heaven with no freedom or opportunities to make such choices is supremely valuable. This implies that heavenly life is not such a great good after all because it lacks the freedom to choose between good and evil. Simon Kittle suggests this lack of value problem can be addressed by a choice-based account of heavenly freedom, which gives some idea of how the types and number of choices an agent might face in heaven add up to a level of freedom that it would be desirable to have. However, a Christian emphasis on understanding divine goodness primarily in terms of a loving God's desire for a relationship with other personal beings, and taking heaven to be the consummation of that desire, tend to prioritise non-choice-based accounts of heavenly freedom. These locate the value of heavenly choices in certain internal states of the will, such as having lower-order desires aligned with higher-order desires, being free from psychological obstacles, or being able to act in accordance with what is good and true. This paper argues that prioritising divine benevolence rather than love, and a good-maximising view of an omnipotent God's creative purpose, provides for a choice-based account of heavenly freedom that answers Kittle's challenge. On this view, God creates not solely or primarily for the sake of uniting with other personal beings but to maximise the goodness of a world created because a world where other goods exist apart from the being of God is better than one where only God exists. As part of this world, such a God could be expected to bring about a heavenly realm of enhanced agency, a paradisaical environment that fully realises the embodied agency of self-aware persons with freedom and goodness of will so that they can contribute to maximising created goods and increase their proximity to God. Employing analytic methods, the paper outlines what kinds of goods we can expect to exist in such a heaven, how these goods could be sustained indefinitely in conditions that maximise internal capacities for agency and minimise external constraints on action, how choices between different goods involve incompatibilist freedom, and how the purposes of agents make these choices supremely valuable. The research shows that a choice-based account of the value of heavenly freedom can be derived from a good-maximising view of God and suggests how the explanatory power of free will theodicy may depend on such accounts of the afterlife.

Keywords : afterlife, beatific vision, embodied agency, heavenly freedom, theodicy

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