Heaven and Moral Perfection

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, the Christian doctrine of heaven has implied that the human agents that exist there will be exceptionally moral. More than this, there appears to be a consensus that heavenly agents are so morally upright as to be considered morally perfect. However, there has been some kickback to this idea of moral perfection, and whether it is a possibility for contingently existing agents. The primary goal of this thesis is to defend the view that moral perfection in heaven is possible if understood from an Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian virtue account. My secondary goals are to show that the process of perfecting agents requires some form of temporal extension, does not require a traditional form of character development to maintain the agent's free will, and allows for the possibility of moral growth after the status of perfection has been attained.

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Introduction

There is an important theological position in Christianity that was adopted very early in the church and is still accepted today. This position says that upon entering heaven at the end of days, agents will have endured some form of moral transformation. What this moral transformation entails, however, is a bit vague. One historically popular view of this transformation says that heavenly agents have transitioned in the process from imperfect earthly agents to morally perfect heavenly agents. The vagueness is the term 'morally perfect.' There are many (obvious) reasons why an agent qualifies as imperfect but specifying the reasons that show that an agent is perfect seems to be more difficult.

The primary purpose of this thesis is to defend the view that moral perfection is possible. In addition to this goal, I also intend to clarify the relevant conditions related to the issue of how human agents transition from imperfect to perfect. Finally, in the context of this transitioning or transforming into perfection, I hope to show the significance of the agent's moral development, both prior to perfection and after it. All my coverage of moral perfection is in the framework of the Christian doctrine of heaven, and the moral status of agents there. Thus, my aim is to provide a picture of how moral perfection is related to heaven.

In chapter 1, I provide an account of heaven from various Christian sources. My goal is to give an accurate picture of the moral status of perfect agents in heaven; I do this utilizing patristic, medieval, reformation, and contemporary scholarship. I trace the moral status, along with any other agential properties relevant to morality, of agents from the Garden of Eden through to heaven. Again, my goal is to provide an accurate historical, theological, and biblical

account of heavenly agents in terms of any properties they possess in heaven that are relevant to their moral status there. Ultimately, I argue that agents in heaven are happy, immortal, and morally perfect.

In chapter 2, I introduce and evaluate the concept of moral perfection. While Christendom has historically supported the view that heavenly agents are morally perfect, there have been recent arguments against the coherence of 'moral perfection.' The argument I follow in this chapter says that moral perfection is impossible because the conditions for perfection cannot be met by humans, or perhaps even God. I trace this argument throughout the chapter while providing possible responses to it. My response to the argument is that taking an Aristotelian, internalist view of moral evaluation will allow us to sidestep the argument against perfection.

Adopting an Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian form of ethics and moral evaluation, I turn my focus in chapter 3 to another argument for the impossibility of perfection. This argument (from Michael Slote) assumes an Aristotelian view of ethics and tries to show that moral perfection is impossible because at least some of the relevant or necessary virtues for perfection are what he calls 'partial virtues.' The argument is similar to the argument against absolutism that says some moral rules or duties are bound to conflict with one another at some point; at that point, we will be forced to violate one of the rules. Partial virtues are two or more virtues that may be appropriate in a particular situation, though the exemplification of each is impossible. I attempt to undercut the argument by showing that Slote is unsuccessful in his attempt to prove that perfection is impossible. In addition, I provide an alternative form of virtue that is a step below perfection. This option, I argue, may not allow for moral perfection,

but will allow the theist to keep the doctrine of 'impeccability,' which may be all that Christian theology requires.

Upon showing that arguments against the possibility of moral perfection are unpersuasive, I next focus in chapter 4 on the process of perfecting agents. There are two views that attempt to explain what perfecting an agent looks like, specifically in the context of temporal requirements. One view claims that it is part of Christian orthodoxy that those destined for heaven will be instantaneously changed upon death from imperfect agents to perfect ones. The other view says that it's impossible to perform an instantaneous change if the agent wants to maintain their personal identity; an instantaneous change from imperfection to perfection would be tantamount to creating a brand-new person, sufficiently causally disconnected from their previous imperfect self. Instead, this view claims that some form of temporal extension is necessary for the process to be successful. I end up in support of the view that says temporal extension is necessary.

Closely connected to the process of perfecting, the final chapter covers the relevance of moral development for heaven. I evaluate the importance of moral development for both the pre-heavenly state, along with the heavenly state. Questions I attempt to answer are: Is moral development before heaven necessary or sufficient for attaining moral perfection? Is character development before heaven necessary to maintain my free will in heaven? Once in heaven, is it possible for me to develop or grow in my moral status, or does perfection entail the inability to further grow morally? I argue that moral development before heaven is not necessary or sufficient for attaining the status of perfection or maintaining free will; further, perfect agents in heaven can continue to develop their moral character.

Chapter 1. Heaven

1.1 Introduction

Many writers consider the heavenly realm to be the culmination of a process involving humans. Humans look a certain way in heaven, and this process that involves the history of each human that will be in heaven, along with the history of the human species, is important for what their appearance will be. The point of this chapter is to provide a historical and theological account of heavenly agents and the 'heavenly' properties they will possess there, but I believe it also necessary to examine the relevant states of affairs that occurred prior to heaven in order to understand these agents and their properties. Thus, this chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section involves humanity's initial state of existence – the garden; the third section will conclude the chapter by examining humanity's final state of existence – heaven. The second section will describe that state which occurs between the initial and final states; this is the state of existence that occurs after humanity is dismissed from the garden, and before it is allowed into heaven.

The nature of the descriptions I intend to give below are intended to provide as much of a general consensus regarding what Christianity affirms about the relevant characteristics or attributes of human agents in each of the three states. My goal in this is to provide a sufficiently clear picture of the heavenly agent by following his evolution from beginning to end.

1.2 Moral Innocence: Garden

The first relevant state of existence for humanity is, naturally, the garden. This is an obvious place to begin as it is the initial state of existence for humanity. Again, my goal is to provide a historical and theological account of what Christian thinkers have thought about humans in the garden. The structure for each of these sections is the focus on particular properties or qualities of human agents that I believe are relevant for an examination of the evolution of humans into their final and ultimate state. With that said, let's begin our inquiry with Genesis 1-3 and what has been said about the appearance of humans in this initial state.

Blameless/Innocent

The first description we have of humanity is when God declares his intended form that humans will take: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen. 1:26, NASB). Much has been written about the meaning of being made in God's 'image' and his 'likeness.' The remaining account of humanity in Gen. 1-3 covers man's creation, his needs, his obligations from God, his failure to uphold these obligations, and a description from God regarding the consequences for man due to his failure. There isn't anything explicitly said regarding man's nature as an image-/likeness-bearer, and so anything predicated of man's nature in the garden must be implied from other clues.[1]

[1] It's important to point out that not all writers believe that Genesis 1-3 was intended as an account of what man's nature is as a result of being made in God's image. According to Hamilton, the point of the Garden account is not to inform as to the image of God in humanity: "It is clear that v. 26 is not interested in defining what is the image of God in man. The verse simply states the fact, which is repeated in the following verse. Nevertheless, innumerable definitions have been suggested: conscience, the soul, original righteousness, reason, the capacity for fellowship with God through prayer, posture, etc. Most of these definitions are based on subjective inferences rather than objective exegesis. Any approach that focuses on one aspect of man —be that physical, spiritual, or intellectual—to the neglect of the rest of man's constituent features seems doomed to failure. Gen. 1:26 is simply

The first quality or characteristic of humanity in the garden is related to man's moral status. Most writers have affirmed that man was created in a positive moral state. I say 'positive' because writers use different terms to describe this state and while these different terms are all related to the moral status of the agents in the garden, they involve different features or components of this moral status. According to Tertullian, "He was innocent, and in the closest friendship with God, and the inhabitant of Paradise" (c. 3rd AD/1842, *On Patience,* V). Being 'innocent' implies that man was sinless and therefore morally blameless. He was not created in a state of sin, nor was he created in any way that moral blame would be appropriate.

If man was merely created blameless, this would be significant, though it wouldn't tell us much about the overall moral status of the agent; just because an agent is blameless doesn't imply that the agent is good. So not only is man blameless, implying that he had no negative moral features about his person (wrong actions, bad character, producing badness, etc.), Augustine affirmed that "'God made human beings upright'…at the beginning of human creation, and…[Adam] was made perverse by his own evil will and fell from the uprightness in which God originally made him" (c. 4th AD/2010, p. 191). While it's not entirely clear that Augustine intended to say more than that agent was merely blameless or innocent, it does appear that the terms 'upright' and 'state of good' imply more. Perhaps Augustine is saying that Adam was created so as to be prepared for good, wanting to do right, ready to obey. According to Calvin, "in the mind and will there was the highest rectitude, and all the organic parts were duly framed to obedience" (1536/1989, *Ins.,* I.XV.8).

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saying that to be human is to bear the image of God. This understanding emphasizes man as a unity. No part of man, no function of man is subordinated to some other, higher part or activity" (1990, p.149).

I think we can get a bit of clearer on the picture of man's moral status by examining what has been said about humanity once they were ejected from the garden as a result of their sin. Recall that the primary command from God to Adam was that he not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; it was the breaking of this command that resulted in man's first sin and the negative consequences that followed from that sin.

It's difficult to know why Adam and Eve would disobey God if they were already morally blameless and upright. What could have caused them to act in this way? Tertullian speculated that it was discontentment or impatience that led man to disobey God. "He was innocent…But when once he yielded to impatience, he ceased to have his savour pleasing unto God: he ceased to be able to bear heavenly things" (c. 3rd AD/1842, *On Patience,* V). If it is true that Adam grew discontent with his situation (Gen. does not speak to this issue), that would imply something about his character. Discontentment involves internal features of the agent such as his desires, passions, and happiness.

So, what was lost of God's image when man disobeyed him? Most writers affirm that the image itself was not lost, though it was thoroughly transformed into something less; it became "ruin[ed], confused, mutilated, and tainted with impurity" (Calvin 1536/1989, *Ins,.* I.XV.4).

Contemporary scholar Victor Hamilton points out this was the first occasion in which Adam and Eve experienced shame; the recognition by Adam and Eve of their 'nakedness' is an indicator of this.[2] Further, Hamilton claims,

[2] "With the exception of this verse, nakedness in the OT is always connected with some form of humiliation" (Hamilton 1990, p. 186).

> The couple's solution to this new enigma is freighted with folly. Having committed the sin themselves, and now living with its immediate consequences, i.e., the experience of shame, the loss of innocence (they were aware that they were naked), they attempt to alleviate the problem themselves. Rather than driving them back to God, their guilt leads them into a self-atoning, self-protecting procedure: they must cover themselves (1990, p. 194).

The results of the 'Fall' for man in the garden help us infer what their moral status was like initially. There are reasons to think that Adam's character was perhaps not as virtuous as it could have been, perhaps not as virtuous as man's is in heaven. Regarding the image of God in man, it is a commonly held that whatever man lacked in the garden will be restored at a later time. Calvin claimed that the "full lustre" of the image "will be displayed in heaven" (1536/1989, *Ins.,* I.XV.4).

Free Will

Another quality that humanity is believed to have possessed in the garden is free will, liberty, or the power of self-determination. The possession of this quality is not a contentious point for traditional Christianity. I would argue that humanity's moral blamelessness and freedom are the two qualities in the garden that the vast majority Christian thinkers have confirmed with little opposition. Further, the relevance of freedom for the denizens of the garden is closely linked with their moral uprightness. The dramatic shift in moral status from the state in the garden to the state outside the garden needs to be explained somehow, and man's free will is typically that explanation. Calvin sums it up nicely: "Adam, therefore, might have stood if he

chose, since it was only by his own will that he fell; but it was because his will was pliable in either direction, and he had not received constancy to persevere, that he so easily fell. Still he had a free choice of good and evil" (1536/1989, *Ins.,* I.XV.8). According to the Second Vatican Counsel, "Although he was made by God in a state of holiness, from the very onset of his history man abused his liberty, at the urging of the Evil One" (1965/2007, p. 399).

Now regarding the level or kind or meaning of the freedom in the garden, writers may disagree. One way to think of this freedom is that of a fairly robust form of self-determination. In this way, God gave Adam and Eve an incredible amount liberty to consider and determine their own destiny. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola puts this well in an imagined dialogue by God to Adam:

> We have given you, Adam, no fixed seat or form of your own, no talent peculiar to you alone. This we have done so that whatever seat, whatever form, whatever talent you may judge desirable, these same may you have and possess according to your desire and judgment. Once defined, the nature of all other beings is constrained within the laws We have prescribed for them. But you, constrained by no limits, may determine your nature for yourself, according to your own free will, in whose hands We have placed you (1486/2012, *Dignity of Man,* 18-20).

In response to this comment, Alister McGrath mentions that Adam, Eve, and the rest of humanity were created with the ability to determine their own destiny. "It is the privilege and responsibility of humanity to determine its own place and function, through the proper exercise of its freedom and intelligence. Humanity can thus descend to the level of animals, or rise to the level of God" (2011, p. 369). Again, this is a fairly robust form of free will.

Another way to think of the quality and extent of the free will in the garden is by comparing it to the freedom humans enjoy in heaven. It does seem as though the level or kind of freedom would be different in each of these areas given the garden was a location that humanity *could* leave, while it is believed that heaven is a location that humans *can't* leave. If we can think about free will as a power or ability, then one reason why there is a difference between these two locations is that humans seem to have a power in the garden that they don't have in heaven. Augustine said it like this:

> For the first free will which was given to humanity when it was created upright, gave not just the ability not to sin, but also the ability to sin. This new freedom is all the more powerful precisely because it will not have power to sin; and this, not by its unaided natural ability, but by the gift of God. It is one thing to be God, and another to share in God. God is unable to sin; anyone who shares in God has received from God the inability to sin (c. 5th AD/1998, *CG,* XXII.xxx.3).

So while the agent's capacity or power of choice may be a bit more limited in heaven than in the garden, at least in regards to choosing sin, the free will in heaven is still more 'powerful' in that it better resembles God's form of freedom.

I mentioned above that there is little contention to the claim that Adam and Eve had free will in the garden. However, within contemporary exegetical work on Gen. 1-3, there are arguments that would reject a robust view of freedom in the Garden, especially in the context of making choices about morally relevant actions. Again, Adam was commanded not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for eating from the tree would result in death (2:17) and becoming like God in his knowledge of good and evil (3:22). Hamilton claims these

passages indicate that man was only morally autonomous once they ate from this tree (Hamilton 1990, p. 174). In other words, 'knowledge of good and evil' refers to the ability to be free with regard to moral decisions, a freedom that Adam and Eve did not have initially. According to Hamilton,

> What is forbidden to man is the power to decide for himself what is in his best interests and what is not. This is a decision God has not delegated to the earthling. This interpretation also has the benefit of according well with 3:22, "the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil." Man has indeed become a god whenever he makes his own self the center, the springboard, and the only frame of reference for moral guidelines. When man attempts to act autonomously he is indeed attempting to be godlike. It is quite apparent why man may have access to all the trees in the garden except this one (1990, p. 174-75).

So while Hamilton doesn't claim that humanity didn't have any form of freedom in the garden, he does seem to indicate that it was significantly less freedom than what past thinkers thought. To sum up, Christianity has historically affirmed that humans were free in their choices and actions in the garden, and it is likely that the vast majority of thinkers believed that this ability did include morally relevant choices, as can be seen by Adam and Eve's choice to sin.

Eternality

So while we can say that Christianity has mostly agreed that humanity in the garden was morally upright and blameless, and had freedom in their choices, a final relevant quality we

need to discuss, which does appear to be contentious, is the mortality of Adam and Eve in the garden.

It seems that the early church fathers affirmed Adam and Eve's immortality. Some believed that humanity's mortal status was not initially established but was determined largely based on the results of their free choices in the garden. For instance, Theophilus of Antioch affirmed that man wasn't made mortal or immortal, but was given freedom to choose either.

> But someone will say to us, 'Was man created mortal by nature?' Not at all. 'Was he then created immortal?' We do not say this either. But someone will say, 'Was he then created as nothing at all ?' We do not say this. Iη fact, man was neither mortal nor immortal by nature. For if God had made him immortal from the beginning, he would have made him God. Again, if he had made him mortal, it would seem that God was responsible for his death. God therefore made him neither immortal nor mortal but, as we have said before [II, 24], capable of both. If he were to turn to the life of immortality by keeping the commandment of God [c.f. Matt. 19: 17], he would win immortality as a reward from him and would become a god; but if he turned to deeds of death, disobeying God, he would be responsible for his own death (c. 2nd AD/1970, *Ad Autolycus,* II.27).

While Theophilus doesn't say humanity was either mortal or immortal, he does imply that if Adam and Eve had continued in their original blameless state, they would have enjoyed an immortal status (at least until they chose to sin and therefore chose a mortal status). Tertullian emphasizes this point with his belief that the reference to being made in God's 'likeness' is about eternality. "Thus man, who aforetime had been *in the image of God*, will be

restored to God *after his likeness.* The *image* is considered to be in His form, the *likeness* in His *eternity*" (c. 3rd AD/1842, *On Baptism,* V).

Augustine echoes Theophilus in linking mortality with man's freedom. "For the first immortality, which Adam lost by sinning, consisted in his being able not to die; but the last will consist in his being not able to die. So too, the first free will consisted in his being able not to sin, and the last will consist in his being not able to sin" (c. 5th AD/1998, *CG,* XXII.xxx).[3] Again, Augustine is emphasizing man's powers or abilities by comparing the state of those in the garden with the state of those in heaven. In the garden, man had the power not to die (and the power to die) and the power not to sin (and to sin), but heavenly agents will not have this power.[4]

One of the first 'official' instances of support for man's eternality in the garden came from the Council at Carthage in 418: "If any one says that Adam, the first man, was created mortal, so that, whether he sinned or not, he would have died from natural causes, and not as the wages of sin, let him be anathema" (1999, p. 64).

In the contemporary literature, exegetes point to the 'tree of life' as a possible indicator of immortality.[5] After Adam and Eve's sin, the author of Genesis reports God as saying, "…and

[3] Elsewhere Augustine is a bit more direct on the issue: "For the animal body is the first: the kind of body that the first Adam had, although it would not have died had he not sinned" (c. 5th AD/1998, *CG,* XIII.xxiii).
[4] Aquinas also seemed to affirm this point. "For man's body was indissoluble not by reason of any intrinsic vigor of immortality, but by reason of a supernatural force given by God to the soul, whereby it was enabled to preserve the body from all corruption so long as it remained itself subject to God. This entirely agrees with reason; for since the rational soul surpasses the capacity of corporeal matter…it was most properly endowed at the beginning with the power of preserving the body in a manner surpassing the capacity of corporeal matter" (c. 13th/1981, *ST,* I.97.1).

now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Gen. 3:22, NASB). Even if the tree of life is the source of eternal life, it's not entirely clear from the text that Adam and Eve ate from this tree. The previous reference says 'now' man may take and eat, 'now' being a reference to temporal or logical order that is posterior to man taking and eating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. However, the tree of life is believed to have been in the garden when God said, "the tree of life also in the midst of the garden." Further, God also claimed that only once man eats from the tree of good and evil will he die; this somewhat implies that man wouldn't die if he didn't eat of the tree of good and evil. According to Robert Mounce, one thing that is clear is "that if Adam had eaten of the tree of life he would have received immortality (Gen 2:9; 3:22)" (1998, p. 397).

1.3 Created Imperfect

We can see that it has been generally confirmed that man in the garden was free, innocent, and possibly immortal. I'd like to point out one final issue with life in the garden that I think is relevant for better understanding life in heaven.

The problem of evil is one of more popular topics in the philosophy of religion. One reason for its popularity has to do with the variety of forms it can take (logical, evidential, probable, hell, etc.). The problem of evil is relevant in a discussion about the garden and

[5] Hamilton: "The OT refers only twice to the tree of the knowledge good and evil, here and in 2:17. By contrast, the tree of life appears not only in the OT (Gen. 2:9; 3:22, 24; Prov. 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4—all of these Proverb passages should be understood as using the phrase "tree of life" metaphorically) but also in apocryphal literature (1 Enoch 24:4; 2 Enoch 8:3, 5, 8; 9:1; 2 Esdr. 8:52) and in the NT (Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19—all of which involve a re-creation of an Edenic existence at the eschaton)" (1990).

heaven because the existence of these locations implies something about a good and powerful God: he's either not very good or he's not very powerful. Some have referred to this form of the problem of evil as the problem of heaven. Here's one way to put this problem:

1. If God is going to bring about a state of existence, he should bring about the most valuable state of existence possible.
2. A state of existence with impeccable agents is more valuable than a state of existence with peccable agents.
3. Thus if God is going to bring about a state of existence with agents, he should bring about a state of existence with impeccable agents.[6]

There are two things I want to note about this argument. First, both premises are controversial. We could spend a great deal of time discussing premise 1, but this premise is not too relevant for our present purposes. Second, premise 2 is a statement that compares two different states: one with impeccable agents and one without. In the context of describing agents, the term 'impeccability' is typically used in a moral sense to mean that the agent is incapable of moral wrongness. But what I want to note is that while this form of the argument compares the state of the agent's peccability, other terms could be used instead: perfection, virtue, knowledge, mortality, etc. The point is that the premise is evaluating states that are significantly relevant to the agent's status in the garden and in heaven.

There is a question that this argument implies for God: If heaven is so good, and the period before heaven is not quite as good, why didn't God create heaven first? To explain how

[6] This argument is taken from Henderson (2017). For versions of this argument see Mackie (1955), Wall (1977), Martin (1997), Nagasawa et al. (2004), and Cushing (2010).

a God can bring about a heaven-like state without infringing on his omni-attributes (so to avoid the problem of evil), defenders of the traditional doctrine of heaven (and God) have the burden of showing why God could not, or would not, bring about heaven initially; in other words, these writers need to show why a world with a segment dedicated to a heavenly existence, must also have a segment of non-heavenly existence that precedes the heavenly one (Erlandson and Sayward, 1981). The topic of the garden is therefore especially relevant to this problem since that is the initial state that God brought about for humanity.

Many authors have attempted to provide a response to this problem;[7] a very early response comes from Irenaeus:

> If, however, any one say, "What then? Could not God have exhibited man as perfect from the beginning?" let him know that, inasmuch as God is indeed always the same and unbegotten as respects Himself, all things are possible to Him. But created things must be inferior to Him who created them, from the very fact of their later origin; for it was not possible for things recently created to have been uncreated. But inasmuch as they are not uncreated, for this very reason do they come short of the perfect. Because, as these things are of later date, so are they infantile; so are they unaccustomed to, and unexercised in, perfect discipline" (180 AD/1883-84, *Against Heresies,* IV.xxxviii.1).

[7] Wall (1977), Brown (1985), Sennett (1999), Walls (2002), Pawl and Timpe, (2009). Augustine indirectly addresses this answer through Scripture, rather than philosophy: "Therefore, given that our nature sinned in paradise, we are now formed through a moral begetting by the same divine providence, not according to heaven, but according to earth, i.e., not according to the spirit, but according to the flesh, and we have all become one mass of clay, i.e., a mass of sin. Since therefore we have forfeited our reward though sinning, and since, in the absence of God's mercy, we as sinners deserve nothing other than eternal damnation, who then does the man from this mass think he is that he can answer God and say: 'Why have you made me this way?' If you want to know these things, do not be clay, but become a son of God through the mercy of him who has given to those believing in his name the power to become the sons of God, although he has not so given, as you want, to those desiring to know divine things before they believe" (c. 4th AD/1977, *Eighty-three Questions*, 68.3).

Irenaeus starts by asking a question: “Could not God have exhibited man as perfect from the beginning?” The fact that Irenaeus is even discussing this issue shows us that even the earliest critics of Christianity considered it problematic. Irenaeus’ response is fairly typical of those given by defenders of heaven: “Though anything is possible for God, who is uncreated, created things (which started their existence in time) must be inferior to the thing that created them.” Simply put, it was not within God’s power to create ‘heaven-ready’ agents. An agent that is sufficiently ready for heaven cannot come into being in that state of readiness; some event or process involving the agent needs to occur before the agent is ready.

In his comments about Irenaeus, McGrath claims that agents must go through a period of growth or maturing before they’re sufficiently prepared for heaven. “God did not create humanity in a state of total perfection…because humanity was simply not able to receive this gift of perfection. Perfection was something that came about through personal growth” (2011, p. 343).

So for Irenaeus, the issue was a modal problem involving what is possible for God; it simply was not possible for God to create such agents. Origen, while not specifically discussing the impossibility of creating perfect contingently-existing agents, does say something very close to Irenaeus in reference to the ‘likeness of God’ that man is made in:

> [T]hat the perfection of his likeness has been reserved for the consummation,—namely, that he might acquire it for himself by the exercise of his own diligence in the imitation of God, the possibility of attaining to perfection being granted him at the beginning through the dignity of the divine image, and the perfect realization of the divine likeness

being reached in the end by the fulfilment of the [necessary] works (c. 3rd AD/1869, *De Principiis,* III.vi.1).

A contemporary response to this problem has been offered by Stewart Goetz. The reason that God did not and could not create or bring about a heaven-like world at the outset of his creation is because such an act would be unjust. Goetz comes to this conclusion in virtue of his conception of heaven and of justice.

Heaven for Goetz is a "domain of perfect happiness…occupied by those who have made a just-good-seeking [self-forming choice]" (2012, p.489). The quality of this happiness is a positive-hedonic state of pleasure, and the experience of perfect, complete, or maximal happiness is one that is infinite or everlasting in duration (2008, p.124).[8] A just-good-seeking 'self-forming choice' (SFC) "is a choice to live a life of restraint in pursuit of what is good" (2008, p.130). Such a choice is uncaused and explained teleologically in terms of reasons or purposes. The agent who chooses heaven by making a just-good-seeking SFC is also morally responsible for such a decision since the choice was not determined by forces or factors external to the agent.

Goetz' notion of justice follows from his position on free will and moral responsibility. An agent who is in heaven (or will be in heaven) is one who justly deserves to be there since the

[8] There have been plenty of writers that think life in heaven will very closely resemble life in the garden, and since life in heaven is full of felicity, the garden was likely that way as well. According to Hamilton, there is little evidence of this implication for the garden, at least from Genesis: "We do not read that the garden is a place of blissful enjoyment. If it is such a place, the text does not pause to make that observation. Instead, man is placed in the garden "to till it and keep it" (v. 15)" (1990, p. 171). And, "The point is made clear here that physical labor is not a consequence of sin. Work enters the picture before sin does, and if man had never sinned he still would be working. Eden certainly is not a paradise in which man passes his time in idyllic and uninterrupted bliss with absolutely no demands on his daily schedule" (p. 178).

agent made a choice (just-good-seeking SFC) for heaven (perfect happiness) that was not determined by forces or factors external to the agent (he or she could have made an unjust-good-seeking SFC). And as Goetz says, "Because the good of perfect happiness is so great, there would be a problem of justice if making the right kind of good-seeking SFC were not a necessary condition of experiencing perfect happiness" (2012, fn. 24).

So the answer to the question of why God did not create a heaven-like world at the outset of his creation, according to Goetz, is that the agents in heaven would not deserve to be there. To justly experience perfect happiness (heaven), an agent must make a just-good-seeking SFC in a state in which he or she could also make an unjust-good-seeking SFC. Because the state of perfect happiness does not allow an agent to make an unjust-good-seeking SFC, there must be a state prior to perfect happiness in which the agent can choose between the two options (2012, p.483). To bypass this prior state and create heaven at the outset of the world would itself be an unjust act; given his impeccable nature, such an act would be impossible for God (2012, p.482).

These are some possible options that explain why God created humanity in the state he did. To conclude this section on the garden, I think Gregory of Nyssa sums up well what we've covered:

> Yet this which transcends all power of understanding is something we human beings once enjoyed as participants, and so great was that Good, transcending all thought, in our nature, that that humanity appeared to be something else, shaped by the closest likeness in the image of its Prototype. The same ideas we speculatively apply to that Prototype all applied also to Man, imperishability and blessedness, independence and

> liberty, painless and unbusied life, continuance in the divinest things, and an intelligence stripped and cleared of every veil so as to look upon the Good (c. 4th AD/2000, *Homily* 3.6).

1.4 Moral Growth: Becoming 'Like' Christ

The garden account concludes with a series of negative events that contrast sharply with the positive ones it started with. Adam and Eve disobey and sin against God, God pronounces the negative consequences of their sin to them, and finally God removes them from the garden. Outside the garden they find a complete reversal of their previous circumstance.

> Alas, rather than experiencing bliss, they encounter misery. Rather than sitting on a throne, they are expelled from the garden. Rather than new prerogatives, they experience only a reversal. The couple not only fail to gain something they do not presently have; the irony is that they lose what they currently possess: unsullied fellowship with God. They found nothing and lost everything (Hamilton 1990, p. 207).

I do not intend to go into any intensive discussion concerning the doctrine of original sin or the full extent of the consequences mankind experiences as a result of their disobedience; however, I would like to point out that the nature of humanity was radically altered from their previous nature in the garden. Instead of being blameless, innocent, and morally upright, man became blameworthy, guilty, and acquired a character that craves evil. Instead of having free will to choose to live without sin, they gained a will without such a power. Instead of immortality, death became inevitable for all humans. Finally, whatever happiness and joy that

accompanied life in Eden was replaced with grief, sadness, pain, and exhaustion. In this state humanity is woefully inadequate and unfit for life in heaven.

The question we must ask is 'how humanity becomes fit for life in heaven?' The primary explanation of why life was so good for Adam and Eve in the garden was due to their unmediated connection with God. The account of the garden conveys the idea that God's presence was with Adam and Eve, and their access to him immediate. After their sin, the relationship between man and God became significantly damaged so that a great separation occurred. Whatever else contributes to the intense satisfaction of life in heaven, a significant causal factor is a reunion with God and a promise of a secured closeness that should surpass that of the garden. Thus, both Scripture and history tell us that if heaven is place where God dwells, his presence being utterly ubiquitous, then any agent that can exist there must resemble God in some significant manner. As Calvin said, "Let us then mark, that the end of the gospel is, to render us eventually conformable to God, and, if we may so speak, to deify us" (1551/1855, p. 371). According to NT scholar Anthony Thiselton, "It is an axiom of Jewish-Christian theology that only the pure and holy can rest in the immediate presence of God" (2000, p. 1291).

In the NT, resemblance of God means being transformed into a resemblance of Christ's image. Being conformed to the image and likeness of Christ is undoubtably necessary for admittance into the kingdom of heaven.

> As the animal nature, which has the precedency in us, is the image of Adam, so we shall be conformed to Christ in the heavenly nature; and this will be the completion of our restoration. For we now begin to bear the image of Christ, and are every day more and

> more transformed into it; but that image consists in spiritual regeneration. But then it will be fully restored both in body and in soul, and what is now will be perfected…that we must be renewed in respect of our bodies, inasmuch as our bodies, being liable to corruption, cannot inherit God's incorruptible kingdom. Hence there will be no admission for us into the kingdom of Christ, otherwise than by Christ's renewing us after his own image" (Calvin 1546/1848, p. 56).

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Mark Taylor claims, "The believer's present body must be transformed, whether living or dead at Christ's return…[Paul's] concern is to show that change is necessary for the living as well as the dead" (2014, p. 505). And that the transformation must happen "since the present human body is radically incompatible with God's imperishable kingdom" (p. 504).

Image of Christ

I've noted that a necessary requirement for entrance to heaven is becoming like God in particular ways. I've yet to say what these ways are or how the transformative process occurs. Regarding the process, Christian writers have used terms like sanctification, purification, or growth in righteousness to describe what humans must undergo. NT writers liken the process to an optical experience in which the human is said to be 'beholding the glory of God' or 'seeing him as he is.' Paul speaks about seeing the image of God as in a mirror which produces a process of transformation. "Persons who face the transforming glory fulfill the creation ideal of becoming the image of God, bearing his likeness as living reflections of his being (Gen 1:26, "Let us make man in our image")" (Garrett 2010, pp. 766-7). John's claim that 'we shall be like him'

references a future ‘face-to-face’ event, the vision of which will bring to completion our transformation process in his likeness (Hiebert 1998, p. 206).

In the meantime, humans that desire and are pursuing this ultimate integration into God’s image have a less than vivid image to behold. The humans on this side of death that desire ultimate community with God in heaven struggle to see clearly the divine image or their final form but are slowly moving forward to that destination as they keep their ‘gaze’ pointed at Christ. The transformation process is a progressive one, though humans are promised that the process will eventually reach completion. According to F.F. Bruce, "If progressive assimilation to the likeness of their Lord results from their present beholding of Him through a glass darkly, to behold Him face to face, to 'see Him even as He is,' will result in their being perfectly like Him" (1975, p. 87).

Moral Likeness

If humans are undergoing a process in which they grow in their likeness to that of God, then it seems as though they are undergoing a process of adopting features of God’s nature. These features are either new features not priorly possessed, or they are features already possessed but modified to a level or form that more fully resembles God’s own. Traditional Christianity has generally agreed that humanity kept at least some characteristics or capacities of their initial resemblance to God after their exit from the garden, though they were radically altered. We know that man won’t adopt God’s nature or form entirely, otherwise they would be God. They won’t become omnipotent or omniscient; they won’t experience what it’s like to have an

unchanging nature or being an all-present reality. So the question is, 'in what ways will humans reach their destiny of becoming like God?'

There are four relevant ways (features or attributes) that humans must resemble God in if they are to exist in heaven: morality, mortality, knowledge, and freedom (I will reserve discussing freedom for the next section). Perhaps it would be more appropriate to speak of these features as capacities that are modified in humans, rather than being additions or adoptions to the human nature, for in each of these features humans have the possibility for increase, decrease, or modification in quality. We will first address morality.

One way of being conformed to God's image is to 'take on' a moral resemblance to him; some have described this process as a cleaning, purifying, or removing of any immoral features we possess. Calvin claims "Except then we be stripped of all the corruption of the flesh, we shall not be able to behold God face to face" (1548/1993, p. 206). The term 'flesh' in the Bible is often used to refer either to the physical body of man or his sinful nature. Referring to Paul's usage of the term in his epistles to the Corinthians, Chrysostom claimed, "for by flesh, he here denotes men's evil deeds, which he hath done also elsewhere, as when he saith, *But ye are not in the flesh:* and again, *So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.* So that when he saith, *now this I say*, he means nothing else than this: 'therefore said I these things, that thou mayest learn that evil deeds conduct not to a kingdom" (c. 4th AD/1839, *Homilies to the Corinthians,* XLII.2).[9]

Righteousness is a common term in the Bible used to convey a moral status that God has by nature and humans are to resemble; a morally transformed human is righteous, and he

[9] I will ultimately argue against this interpretation in chapter 4.

or she is righteous simply because they have taken on a status that reflects God's own. To be righteous implies something about an agent's actions along with their character. "[It] denotes one who is in full accord with what is right and just in character and conduct" (Hiebert 1989, p. 199). To be righteous as 'He is righteous' "expresses a well-known truth about the nature of God. God 'is righteous in all his ways: in his laws, his promises, his verdicts, or a single act of his'" (as cited in Hiebert 1989, p. 199).

In terms of actions an agent is free to perform or avoid, it appears that an agent that is righteous is one who not only avoids all wrong actions, but also takes advantage of any right acts that are available. We know that God's nature does not allow him to sin or perform wrong acts, while also ensuring that he always does the right thing. Now, God is necessarily morally righteous and it is therefore impossible that he ever act immorally; however, it is not entirely clear whether humans, who can only be righteous contingently, also find it impossible to act wrongly. I take up this question in later chapters.

For Christians, the procedure for becoming righteous begins at the moment the human chooses to make God his highest priority by trusting Christ for eternal restoration and peace; the process reaches its fulfillment or completion at some point after death. Between the beginning and end of the process, the human is said to be engaged in sanctification or purification. Edmond Hiebert describes it well:

> As the begrimed workman must personally apply soap and water to be cleansed, so the believer must appropriate the God-given means of cleansing from the moral defilement that may have been incurred in daily life…The more intimate the believer's fellowship with God, who is "light" (1 John 1:5), the more aware he is of his need to cleanse himself

from all that is moral darkness (1:5-7). The more he contemplates this assured hope of being conformed to the image of Christ, the more eagerly he strives for present purity (Phil. 3:13-14)" (1989, pp. 206-7).

John speaks of the Christian's hope in the final form of his transformation as a means by which he progresses. According to Calvin, "though we have not Christ now present before our eyes, yet if we hope in him, it cannot be but that this hope will excite and stimulate us to follow purity, for it leads us straight to Christ, whom we know to be a perfect pattern of purity" (1548/1993, p. 207).

In addition to purification, implying an agent will always avoid what is wrong and only do what is right, the Bible also conveys the point that the agent's character is and must also be cleansed or perfected. For most virtue ethics accounts, the character typically comprises an agent's desires, goals, emotions, hopes, beliefs, along with any other state or property that makes up the agent's internal or psychological life. Thus, an agent that is righteous as God is righteous is one that not only behaves rightly, but also desires, admires, and hopes for that which is righteous. So when John claims that believers will be purified by gazing at Christ, it is their character that is transformed by their constant focus on Christ's character. In his commentary on 2 Peter, Thomas Shreiner says something very similar about Peter's comments:

> In other words, when Christ calls people to himself, they perceive the beauty and loveliness of his moral character. His character becomes exceedingly attractive to them, and they trust God for their salvation…Believers will share in the divine nature in that they will be morally perfected; they will share in the moral excellence that belongs to God (1:3). (2003, p. 9) [Once all excellences of the moral character of Christ are

> acquired, and all vices removed,]…we shall be partakers of divine and blessed immortality and glory, so as to be as it were one with God as far as our capacities will allow (1993, p. 371).

Knowledge

Coinciding with the development of man's moral purification, agents transformed in God's image will also be changed cognitively. Becoming epistemically purified seems to imply a few things. First, the change is the result of the newly formed relationship with God. It is an established position of Christianity that God's involvement with man's transformation, which as stated above requires the agent to remain focused on God's own character, promotes new (true) beliefs in the agent, while also changing or removing false beliefs. The content of these new beliefs are seemingly related to God's true nature and man's appropriate response to that nature. Paul called this process the 'renewing of the believer's mind'. Second, while this change in man's cognitive state does not result in omniscience, it does seem to get man as close as his contingently existing mind can get to that state. Bruce says it like this:

> One result of the putting on of the new man is a new knowledge. The "knowledge" (gnosis) that was held out to the Colossians was a distorted and imperfect thing in comparison with the true knowledge accessible to those who, through their union with Christ, had been transformed by the renewing of their minds. This true knowledge was, in short, nothing less than the knowledge of God in Christ, the highest knowledge to which human beings can aspire (1984, p. 148).

Eternal

Finally, transformation into God's image solidifies immortality for the human. Regardless of whether man was immortal in the garden, there appears to be an overwhelming consensus that man is and must be immortal and incorruptible in heaven. Both the apostles and the church fathers are agreed on this point. "When Peter referred to "life"… eternal life is intended …"Godliness" (*eusebeian*) is linked to life because the latter is not gained without the former. Eternal life is not merely the experience of bliss but also involves transformation, so that believers are morally perfected and made like God" (Schreiner 2003, p. 8). According to Chrysostom, "Our body is suffering a lot now—it's in chains, it's scourged, it's suffering myriad terrible sufferings, but Christ's body suffered as much too." I suppose he's alluding to this when he says, "to be like his glorious body." Indeed, the body's the same, but it puts on immortality. "He will change"' (c. 4-5th AD/2013, p. 273). Ambrose claimed, "The blossom of the resurrection is immortality; the blossom of the resurrection is incorruption. What is richer than everlasting rest? What is a source of greater gain and satisfaction than perpetual security? Here is the manifold fruit, the harvest, whereby man's nature waxes more vigorous and productive after death" (c. 4th AD/1953, *Funeral Orations,* II.54). And finally, Calvin said, "But we, disregarding empty speculations, ought to be satisfied with this one thing, — that the image of God in holiness and righteousness is restored to us for this end, that we may at length be partakers of eternal life and glory as far as it will be necessary for our complete felicity" (1548/1993, p. 371).

Thus, the goal and end of humanity is to be transformed into the image of Christ. This image has implication for the entirety of man's nature in heaven. This point is confirmed over

and over by NT writers. "[T]hese verses are talking about a Christ-likeness in the lives of those who have professed faith in Christ. It is not adequate simply to receive Christ as savior. This act of faith must be followed by an appropriation of Christ into one's daily life so that the believer gradually becomes like Christ" (Hamilton 1990, p. 157). Paul is especially firm on this point that, "beholding the glory of Christ with unveiled face, we are transformed into the same image. We now see how Christ is the most perfect image of God, into which we are so renewed as to bear the image of God in knowledge, purity, righteousness, and true holiness" (Calvin 1536/1989, *Ins.,* I.XV.4).

1.5 Moral Perfection: Heaven

It is part of Christian tradition that the final resurrection of humanity will reveal new bodies for those destined for heaven. This resurrection event will be preceded by the 'coming of Christ' to collect the children of God – those who have been transformed into the image of Christ. The transformation process that believers began prior to death will find its completion when they are returned to life. "God's purpose to develop Christlikeness in all the members of His family will be fulfilled when Christ returns and all the children are "conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren (Rom. 8:29)" (Hiebert 1989, p. 205). This is the final and best form for humanity; I will use the remainder of this chapter to describe this form. One feature that I will not discuss in this final section, one that I did reference in the garden section, is the freedom of those in heaven. I'm not addressing this final component because it is somewhat controversial, and I will be discussing it more in chapter 5. To indicate my position, and what I believe to be a fairly typical position from Christian history, I think it is

sufficient to simply affirm Augustine's previous comments: "For the first free will which was given to humanity when it was created upright, gave not just the ability not to sin, but also the ability to sin. This new freedom is all the more powerful precisely because it will not have power to sin."

Garden

Many of the early fathers pictured heaven as very similar to the initial state of creation in the garden. Perhaps some features would be slightly different in heaven, but humans will again attain to the form they once had. Given the many faults and deficiencies humanity had acquired, God would need to remold man to the original created status if man is ever to regain something close to the original relationship with God. Methodius of Olympus seemed to have this idea in his description of God as a craftsman:

> For seeing man, His fairest work, corrupted by envious treachery, He could not endure, with His love for man, to leave him in such a condition, lest he should be fore ever faulty, and bear the blame to eternity; but dissolved him again into his original materials, in order that, by remodeling, all the blemishes in him might wat away and disappear (c. 3-4th AD/1994, *On Resurrection,* I.xlii-iii).

Methodius seems to think the final stage of transformation is like the "recasting of a damaged metal statue" (McGrath 2011, p. 541). The point is that man will be brought back to his original condition. Gregory of Nyssa also appeared to think God would need to recast, remold, or reconstitute humanity if it was ever to enjoy heaven:

> The word of the apostle seems to me to support in every detail our opinion about the resurrection and to show what our definition stated, that the resurrection is nothing but the restoration of our nature to its original state. We learn this from Scripture which tells us that in the beginning of the world, the earth first produced grass and then came the seed and, when this fell into the earth, the same species was born again as had grown in the beginning. This is what the divine apostle is saying about the resurrection. We learn not only this from him, that man is changed into something more magnificent, but that nothing else is hoped for than for him to be what he was in the beginning (c. 4th AD/1967, *On the Soul and Resurrection,* p. 270).

McGrath reads Gregory as arguing the resurrection and transformation will be a 'restoration' or 'repristination' to the original state in the garden (2011, p. 543).[10]

While it does appear to be a theme in Christian history that heaven and the agents in heaven will bear a strong resemblance to the garden and Adam and Eve, others have used terminology that express the idea that heaven, and the bodies of those in heaven, will be far grander than that of the garden. According to Augustine, "For the body will not only be better then than it was here even when in perfect health; it will also be better than those bodies which the first human beings had before they sinned" (c. 5th AD/1998, *CG,* XIII). Heaven will be a Garden 2.0, and this garden will have all the positive features of the first garden, plus more.

[10] Modern writers also seem to agree with Methodius and Gregory about a return to the state in the garden. "The earliest description of Paradise is in Genesis 2. Man's banishment from it is in Genesis 3. Luke 23:43 tells of a restoration to it, and 2 Cor. 12:2, 4 speaks of a vision of it. A promise of a future enjoyment within it is in Rev. 2:7…The five verses that begin Revelation 22 show that God's redemption will return the new creation to the Garden of Eden state and to the Creator's intention for humanity" (Thomas, 1995, p. 481). And, "The absence of the curse and the presence of God and of the Lamb further characterize the restoration of Paradise" (p. 485). Mounce argues that "in Revelation we see redeemed humanity back in the garden, able to eat the bountiful fruit of the tree of life (22:1-2)" (1998, p. 396).

"The New Jerusalem will not only be the final Holy of Holies (21:9–27) but also the final Eden (22:1–5). It will be more than a restored or regained Eden—it will be a transformed Eden. All that the original garden could have been is expanded and intensified" (Osborne 2002, p. 554).

Presence and Vision

Perhaps the most important detail that helps explain the ideal state of heaven for humans is the fact that God will be there. It is an uncontroversial position in Christian history that God's presence will so permeate the heaven-environment that humanity will experience him in as intimate a way as is possible. And this fact explains the peace and satisfaction that humans will experience. Augustine says it like this:

> True peace will be there, for no one will suffer enmity either within himself or from anyone else. The reward of virtue will be God Himself, Who gives virtue, and Who has promised Himself to us, than Whom nothing is better or greater. When He said through the prophet, 'I will be your God, and ye shall be my people', what else was meant than, I will be their sufficiency; I will be all that men honourably desire; life, and health, and nourishment, and plenty, and glory, and honour, and peace, and all good things?" (c. 5th AD/1998, *CG,* XXII.30).

Many have likened God's presence in heaven to a visual experience, the beatific vision.[11] This is another reason why heaven is believed to be superior to the garden; God's presence will

[11] Aquinas explains the discrepancies in virtue of the humans in heaven by reference to the proximity each human has to God, i.e., how well each human sees God. "Now, not all intellectual substances are disposed with equal perfection to the end; some, in fact, are more virtuous and other less, and virtue is the road to felicity. So, there must be diversity within the divine vision: some seeing the divine substance more perfectly; others, less perfectly" (c. 13th/1956, *SCG,* 3.58.4).

be ‘closer’ and more profound, and his essence will be clearer for human understanding. “In the transformed Eden, God’s people will both live eternally and see his face” (Osborne 2002, p.552).

The closeness of this ‘face-to-face’ interaction is the result of God taking and claiming those humans that love him, and giving them an intimate and eternal glimpse at himself, which is ultimately transformative. “The faces of those who have experienced the beatific vision will reflect the unmistakable likeness of their heavenly Father. The process of transformation now under way in the life of the believer (2 Cor 3:18) will be brought to completion when the church enters its ultimate and ideal state” (Mounce 1998, p. 398).[12]

Following the visual analogy, evidence of the impressiveness of God’s presence in heaven is seen in the majesty, glory, and light of heaven. Thomas, once again emphasizing the face-to-face experience, claims the majesty and glory that illuminate the city of Jerusalem is an indicator of his presence:

> The glory of God in the city in [Rev.] 21:11 is another indication of God's immediate presence, a presence that is also the direct emphasis of 22:3-4 which speaks of the presence of the throne of God and the Lamb in the city and immediate access to Him for His slaves, enabling them to see His face (Thomas 1995, p. 443).

[12] Mounce describes the presence of God in heaven as residing in the true Temple, which is God’s people. “Although a few writers take the New Jerusalem in John’s vision to be an actual city, it is far better to understand it as a symbol of the church in its perfected and eternal state. The point is that Jerusalem is the site of the temple, the place where the Presence dwells. In 1 Cor 3:16-17 the people of God form the temple where God dwells; here (in Revelation) they are the city. The vision itself takes the form of a magnificent city symbolizing the eternal felicity of all who follow the Lamb” (1998, p. 383).

Whether it is this brilliance that does the work of completing humanity's transformation, or it is a sign that humans already have been transformed (since they are fit to behold the light of the vision), humans will reflect that light signifying that they do bear God's likeness.

Immortality and Incorruptibility

Regarding the features that the inhabitants of heaven will possess, most of them I have already discussed. Each of these characteristics seem to be necessary for any agent to exist in heaven, and each appear to contribute to an ideal form of humanity. Many have argued that it is this form that humans take in heaven that was intended for humans to have when God 'considered' creating them. If so, then in heaven humanity will be truly human, the best they can be. The first and most obvious feature to consider (obvious to me anyway) is man's mortality. While the topic of humanity's mortal status in the garden may have been contentious for Christian doctrine, the claim that humans in heaven are immortal is not.[13]

The early fathers almost universally affirmed the eternality and incorruptibility of humanity in heaven. Origen claimed that all humans, whether heaven-bound or not, must be changed. "[T]hat even the body which rises again of those who are to be destined to everlasting fire or to severe punishments, is by the very change of the resurrection so incorruptible, that it cannot be corrupted and dissolved even by severe punishments" (c. 3rd AD/1869, *De Principiis,* II.x.3). Cyprian of Carthage speaks of humanity's eventually immortality in the context of the joy

[13] According to Gaine, "That impeccability belongs to the orthodox Christian concept of heaven is thus beyond doubt. It emerged in patriotic and medieval times as the consensus position and it did not become a bone of contention at the Protestant Reformation. The 'eternity' or 'perpetuity' of heaven was taken to be a matter of faith, and impeccability was an aspect of how theologians explained the fact that heaven could never be lost and so remained for ever." (2003, p. 11). There are a few exceptions to this claim, especially recently.

that will be shared by those already transformed and those that experience it at the resurrection:

> We account paradise our country, we have already begun to look upon the patriarchs as our parents. Why do we not hasten and run, so that we can see our country, so that we can greet our parents? A great number of our dear ones there a wait us, parents, brothers, children; a dense and copious throng longs for us, already secure in their safety but still anxious for our salvation. How great a joy it is both for them and for us in common to come into their sight and embrace! What pleasure there in the heavenly kingdom without fear of death, and with an eternity of life the highest possible and everlasting happiness… (c. 3rd AD/2007, *On Mortality,* XXVI).

Referencing back to God's glorious presence in heaven, Augustine speaks of the majestic light that will reveal this new state of humanity.

> But by the judgment of God, which will be the last judgment, delivered through His Son Jesus Christ, the glory of that city will by Bod's gift appear with a clarity so great and so new that no trace of what is old shall remain. Even our bodies will pass from their old corruption and mortality into a new incorruption and immortality (c. 5th AD/1998, *CG,* XX.xvii).[14]

Another way of explaining humanity's immortality is through their proximity to God. Aquinas explains, "Besides, the nearer a thing is to God, Who is entirely immutable, the less

[14] Augustine also speaks of about this gift given to humanity in the form of an ability 'to persevere', an ability not given to Adam and Eve. "Now, however, such assistance towards perserverance is not given to the saints predestined by God's grace for His kingdom. Instead, perseverance itself is given to them as assistance. Not only could they not persevere without this gift, but also they do indeed persevere through this gift" (c. 4th AD/2010, *On Reprimand & Grace,* XII.34).

mutable is it and the more lasting…But no creature can come closer to God than the one who sees His substance. So, the intellectual creature that sees God's substance attains the highest immutability. Therefore, it is not possible for it ever to lapse from this vision" (c. 13th/1956, *SCG,* 3.62.11).

Recent commentators on the book of Revelation explain man's immortal status by access to the 'tree of life'; this tree, which was in the garden, is said to connect (in some way) to a river that runs through the streets of the new City. "Though eating the fruit of the Tree of Life is unmentioned here, the implication is that this is what brings immortality, the same as was true for Adam and Eve originally (Gen. 3:22)" (Thomas 1995, p. 484). And, "Unlimited access to this life-giving water will assure residents of the new Jerusalem of an everlasting enjoyment of life" (Thomas 1995, p.482).

Moral Purity

The next feature humans will acquire is relevant to their moral character and the types of actions that are possible in heaven. Because the primary emphasis of this dissertation is oriented on the moral status of humans in heaven, I will say very little about that status now. As already mentioned, humanity will resemble Christ in his moral character and likeness upon their resurrection; it is a point which is almost unanimously held by Christianity that there will be no sin, evil, or moral badness or wrongness in heaven: "but the traditional Christian answer is that the blessed *cannot* sin, cannot want to sin, but instead are impeccable" (Gaine 2003, p. 2).

According to Grant Osborne, there are three categories (of persons or things) mentioned in the book of Revelation that specify what won't be in heaven. First, nothing (person or other) in heaven will be 'unclean.'[15] "The eternal city is to be a pure, sacred space. Therefore, those who would defile it cannot εἰσέλθῃ εἰς αὐτήν (enter into it)" (2002, p. 544). Following from this point, heaven will also not admit anyone that practices abominations. "This term sums up all of the terrible sins listed in the book (see [Rev.] 21:8), and these have no part in God's eternal city, for again holiness is the chief characteristic. Thus, anyone "practicing" such things must be excluded" (Osborne 2002, p. 544). Finally, no one that practices 'falsehood' has a place in heaven. "Unwholesome lifestyles that oppose the truth will be totally denied entrance into the new order (cf. John 3:21; Rev. 14:5)" (Thomas 1995, p.480). The exclusion of anyone, or anything, in heaven that fall under these categories implies that the effects of sin "impurity, shame, deceit—will be gone forever" (Osborne 2002, p. 553).

That man becomes impeccable implies a new unity within the human, a harmony between man's passions, desires, and affections, and his knowledge and conviction concerning what is right, good, and holy. Prior to heaven there was a discord in these two elements, a struggle between 'flesh' and 'spirit'; in heaven such struggles will cease:

> Accordingly, then, as far as the corruption which weighs down the soul and the vices through which "the flesh lusts against the spirit" are concerned, there will be no "flesh,"

[15] According to Osborne, "'[Uncleanliness] characterize the empire of the beast (16:13; 17:4; 18:2). In Mark especially, demons are called "unclean spirits" (1:23–24; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; et al.), and the name became associated with the realm of evil. In the OT the idea of "profane" or "unclean" things was antithetical to the sanctity of the temple or to the worship of God. Maintaining ritual purity is connected with the commands to be holy (Lev. 11:44–45) and stems from the presence of a holy God among the people…As Yahweh is holy, so must his people be. Unclean things are an abomination to Yahweh (Lev. 11:40–43; Deut. 7:25–26; 14:3; et al.), for they offend his holiness. Thus, in the eternal Holy City nothing "unclean" is to be allowed" (2002, p. 544).

> but only body, since there are bodies that are called "heavenly bodies"...For there will then be such a concord between flesh and spirit—the spirit quickening the servant flesh without any need of sustenance therefrom—that there will be no further conflict within ourselves. And just as there will be no more external enemies to bear with, so neither shall we have to bear with ourselves as enemies within. (Augustine c. 5th AD/1955, *Enchiridion,* p. 393).

Thus we come to the conclusion that only a special form of humanity will be accepted into the presence of God in heaven: "It is possible only for those who are righteous and holy to view God directly" (Thomas 1995, p. 487).

Happiness

The final feature of note that will be present in all humans in heaven is joy, peace, and happiness. That bliss and felicity are a staple of heavenly life has been almost universally accepted. Augustine speaks of humanity as being liberated from the effect of sin and evil, and thus perpetually experience delight and joy (Augustine c. 5th AD/1998, *CG,* XXII.xxx.3).

In the 21st chapter of Revelation, John reveals much about the continual happiness that humans will have in heaven. There we are explicitly informed of what will be missing in heaven, and therefore can imply what will be present. The benefits that will be present are focused or grounded in the peace and joy God will give to those who love him (Osborne 2002, p. 524). We are told first that God will 'wipe away every tear from their eyes.' According to recent commentators, these 'tears' are not the kind that are spilled by those in heaven for the wrongs, mishaps, or failures that were performed prior to heaven, but rather tears shed on earth prior

to heaven do to suffering (Mounce 1998, p. 384; Thomas 1995, p. 445). Thomas points out that the reference to tears demonstrates God's infinite compassion and love by narrowing the focus to a tiny tear. The use of negative language here (wipe away) allows the reader to better understand the ever-present reality of joy and happiness instead of attempting to actually describe the quality and quantity of joy, which seems difficult to comprehend (Mounce 1998, p. 384).

Next we are given a list of various states and/or dispositions that will not be present in heaven; there will be no death, morning, crying, or pain. Osborne calls death the "primary stepchild of sin" that "is always presented in Scripture as a malignant force tormenting humankind" (2002, p. 525). Death, the fear of it, along with all the negative effects of it (morning, crying, pain), have plagued humanity since Adam and Eve were escorted out of the garden, and its eternal absence implies life, celebration, joy, and peace. Isaiah claims there will be joyful shouting, everlasting joy, and gladness (51:11). "The old order marred by sin and its accompanying distress gives way to the new and perfect order of eternal blessedness" (Mounce 1998, p. 384).

1.6 Conclusion

Humans will have a new nature in heaven that resembles Christ's and the heavenly state will be better than the original. John Wesley provides a fitting summary and conclusion for this chapter:

> The whole brute creation will then, undoubtedly, be restored, not only to the vigour, strength, and swiftness which they had at their creation, but to a far higher degree of

each than they ever enjoyed. They will be restored, not only to that measure of understanding which they had in paradise, but to a degree of it as much higher than that, as the understanding of an elephant is beyond that of a worm. And whatever affections they had in the garden of God, will be restored with vast increase; being exalted and refined in a manner which we ourselves are not able to comprehend. The liberty they then had will be completely restored, and they will be free in all their motions. They will be delivered from all irregular appetites, from all unruly passions, from every disposition that is either evil in itself, or has any tendency to evil. No rage will be found in any creature, no fierceness, no cruelty, or thirst for blood (1781/1984, *Serm*., LX.3).

Chapter 2. Nature of Moral Perfection

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to give an account of moral perfection. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is a common belief among theologians and philosophers of religion that agents in heaven will be utterly and thoroughly good; it is for this reason that many use terms like 'impeccability' and 'perfect' to describe the moral status of such agents. However, very little has been said about what this 'perfection' entails. In what follows, I attempt to shed more light on this concept of moral perfection.

The theme of this chapter will be to explain and analyze various proposals for the definition of moral perfection that have been given recently. Each of these proposals concern moral perfection as understood from a normative position in ethics; therefore I will be evaluating definitions of perfection from the three most known normative views: deontology, virtue ethics, and consequentialism. While each of these theories have their own issues in explaining morality, I will confine my coverage of each to problems that are specific to the idea of moral perfection. Ultimately, I conclude that the best explanation of moral perfection comes from a virtue ethics position, and for this reason I spend a bit more space focused on the nature of virtue, along with an examination of virtue theory from an Aristotelian and Kantian view.

2.2 Deontology

Given that there are various ways of thinking about moral perfection and what moral perfection looks like, I would like to start this examination from the most obvious direction, that of action. Assessing a morally perfect agent from the standpoint of the agent's actions seems most obvious as it is the most basic way for an external observer to assess moral worth. Further, examining the agent by examining his actions doesn't require looking any further for our inquiry—no intentions, beliefs, motives, desires, and no consequences of the actions themselves.

So when I say we are to start our examination with the agent's actions, I mean to start my assessment of a morally perfect agent through the lens of a normative theory that is primarily concerned with assessing the moral status of actions. Thus, we will begin by determining what moral perfection looks like from a non-consequentialist, deontological (duty-based) position. Here, actions are morally right if they are required by some moral principle, norm, or rule, and none of these principles, norms, or rules are primarily determined by the value of the consequences of the actions; further, actions are morally wrong if they are prohibited by some principle or rule. We don't need to specify how these principles or rules are established, if they're established at all, but only that their truth or legitimacy ensure that actions are morally permissible, obligatory, or prohibited. And what probably doesn't need to be said, morally neutral actions are those in which there are no morally relevant connections with moral principles or rules. So, a principle that says 'Murder is wrong' implies the moral rule or duty 'You should not murder' and therefore any act of murder would be sufficient to establish moral guilt or blame.

We are now ready to make our first proposal as to the meaning of moral perfection. Our first definition of moral perfections comes from Colin McGinn:

> **Duty**: An agent is morally perfect iff he (i) always does what is right and (ii) never does what is wrong (1992, p. 33).

There are various notes to make about this definition. First, as is obvious, always doing what is right and never doing what is wrong are necessary and sufficient conditions for moral perfection. As McGinn says,

> This principle seems self-evidently correct: it supplies necessary and sufficient conditions for moral perfection in action. How could one justify the charge that an agent is not morally perfect save by citing an instance in which the agent did not do right or did what was wrong? And surely if an agent conforms his actions to the moral norms that apply to him, there can be no room left for moral imperfection to creep in (1992, p. 33).

While the necessary component of the definition may seem obvious (surely a morally perfect agent will only do good and never bad), it is the sufficiency component that is more controversial. "And surely if an agent conforms his actions to the moral norms that apply to him, there can be no room left for moral imperfection to creep in." At first glance this claim appears plausible, for it seems as though the agent is checking all his boxes, as McGinn says, "Moral perfection is far more like calculational perfection – always getting your sums right" (1992, p. 34). However, it is this claim, along with McGinn's definition, that will be rejected by most who have written on this topic. The issue of the sufficiency of definitions/conditions will be a reoccurring theme in this chapter, so I'll say more about it later. The second feature to

note about McGinn's definition is that it is strictly relevant to actions. It is a matter of performing those acts that are required by moral norms and avoiding the acts that morality forbids.

A third point to note is that it is very close (if not the same) to what many philosophers of religion say about God's omnibenevolence. According to William Rowe, "…God does not have the power to do what would be morally wrong for him to do. For intentionally doing what is morally wrong for one to do is inconsistent with being perfectly good" (2005, p. 21). Murray and Rea offer a similar description of moral perfection:

> What does it mean to be perfectly morally good? One thing it could mean is: never in fact acting immorally or falling short of the standards of perfect moral behavior. On this view, God is perfectly morally good if God never in fact falls short of whatever the relevant moral standards might be (2008, p. 20).[16]

Problems

As mentioned above, many have found McGinn's definition of moral perfection (along with his defense of it) less than persuasive. We can condense the objections down to two problems. The first has to do with the claim that his definition is sufficient for perfection, and the second has to do with the notion of supererogation. We'll look at each of these in turn.

I mentioned that many have found McGinn's sufficiency claim about his conditions false, that his requirement for perfection is not enough to designate an agent as morally perfect.

[16] Laura Garcia also considers a description along these lines: "God's moral perfection consists in his perfectly fulfilling all his moral duties" (2009, p. 225). Regarding perfection in terms of duties, Thomas Morris says, "God like us has moral duties, but unlike us satisfies those duties perfectly" (1984, p. 261).

Thus, many have rejected the claim that nothing more is needed to a description of a perfect agent than that he always does what is right and never what is wrong. Of McGinn's definition, Shawn Graves says,

> But doing everything right morally and nothing wrong morally still falls short of moral perfection. Here's why. In order for something to be perfect in a given area, it must be that there can be no improvements made in that area. But it is possible for one always to do what is morally right and never do what is morally wrong, and still be improved from the moral point of view (2014, p. 126).[17]

Graves acknowledges that McGinn's definition certainly describes an incredibly moral person, one which is undeserving of any moral blame. Such an individual should be recognized and highly admired. Nevertheless, such an agent is still not morally perfect. Earl Conee says it like this:

> Someone who did everything right and nothing wrong would be irreproachably morally righteous. That would be a magnificent achievement. But we can conceive of a higher moral status. And we must aim as high as we can in order to target moral perfection, because morally perfect agency is the ultimate in moral agency. When we aim as high as possible, what we bring into view is the notion of an agent whose conduct is ideal in every morally relevant respect (1994, pp. 819-20).

[17] Conee believes the status of moral perfection precludes any possibility of improvement, it is an extreme: "The standard of perfection is utterly unsparing. A state of perfection is an absolute extreme, exceeding in merit any condition which could possibly be improved. Wholly moral conduct, on the other hand, can be enacted by agents who are not morally best in every relevant way" (1994, p. 815).

Remember McGinn's comment about his definition: "How could one justify the charge that an agent is not morally perfect save by citing an instance in which the agent did not do right or did what was wrong? And surely if an agent conforms his actions to the moral norms that apply to him, there can be no room left for moral imperfection to creep in." Again, McGinn seems to believe that the only way to level moral blame at someone is in virtue of wrong acts (or through the lack of acting on something morally right) and as long as no moral blame can be appropriately applied to an agent, that agent must be perfect. I want to say again that this position seems plausible, as long as we assume that the only way to accurately evaluate an agent as morally perfect is through his actions. If actions were the only way to assess the moral status of an agent, perhaps this would be a good definition (I provide an objection against this below); however, there are many, I believe, that would reject this claim. And this takes us to the issue of what more may be needed for perfection.

Most virtue ethicists would likely reject McGinn's definition. The reason isn't hard to see. In addition to the actions an agent performs or refrains from performing, features of the actual agent (before he performs the act) seem relevant in assessing their moral status, even after they act. Many believe some element related to an agent's character should be considered in any assessment of the agent.[18] Conee also mentions this point.

> A third problem for [McGinn's definition] arises because even one whose acts are morally perfect may not be a morally perfect agent. A morally perfect agent would always perform a morally perfect act in a morally perfect frame of mind. If I act

[18] Here 'character' is used in a fairly broad manner to include any of those psychological traits we typically ascribe to agent's: beliefs, motives, desires, intentions, thoughts, hopes, and whatever else.

perfectly, but with concealed contempt or arrogance, while you act perfectly and with perfect compassion and humility, then I have a moral flaw that you lack (1994, p. 817).

Immanuel Kant, perhaps the most notorious of all duty-based proponents, also seems to affirm that actions are insufficient in moral evaluations of the agent; some assessment of character must be included. Many have recognized Kant as affirming some form of a virtue position based on his comments of the 'good will.' In a popular statement, Kant claims,

> It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a good will. Understanding, wit, judgment and the like, whatever such talents of minds may be called, or courage, resolution, and perseverance in one's plans, as qualities of temperament, are undoubtedly good and desirable for many purposes, but they can also be extremely evil and harmful if the will which is to make use of these gifts of nature, and whose distinctive constitution is therefore called character, is not good (1785/1997, *GMM,* Sec. 1).

This thing(s) that is 'unqualifiedly good' is not a reference to performing atomic or individuated actions but to the agent's character, that which is the foundation of all the agent's actions (Louden 1986, p. 477). With passages like the one above, many have affirmed that a good will is something that is hard to gain but endures once acquired.[19] One cannot possess a

[19] Marcia Baron says "Kant's ethics is particularly concerned with how to lead one's life: what to aim at, how to conduct oneself, what dispositions to cultivate, what impulses to discourage. It is concerned with conduct, but not with isolated actions, not, that is, with individual actions considered in isolation from the agent's character and, in particular, from the agent's maxims" (1997, p. 37).

good will at one moment and lose it in another; "Steadfastness of character must be demonstrated" (Louden 1986, p. 477).[20]

I'll say more about Kant's position on character and virtue below, but for now I think it's plausible to say that he believed actions are insufficient for a full evaluation of the moral quality of an agent, the determination of a good will is also necessary. As is well known, an agent with a good will for Kant is one that acts from duty for duty's sake; but the will itself must be cultivated and established and it must be something that entails particular beliefs, intentions, goals, and desires (I'll say more about this below) about the actual agent. It is for this reason that Robert Louden claims "that what is fundamentally important in his ethics is not acts but agents" (1986, p. 477) and "Virtue is the heart of the ethical for Kant, in the sense that it is the basis for all judgments of moral worth" (1986, p. 478).

So if we can accept Kant's position on the importance of character for moral evaluations of agents, I think we can say that McGinn's definition is insufficient for moral perfection in that it leaves out an evaluation of the agent in terms of admirable traits of character, or virtues; such features appear to be quite relevant in moral assessment, or so Kant thought.

Another problem for McGinn's view of moral perfection, which plagues other accounts of duty-based ethics, concerns the relationship between obligatory and supererogatory actions. As is known, supererogatory actions are those that go 'above and beyond the call of duty,' but specifically, these are actions that are morally relevant and permissible, but not obligatory. These are the run-into-the-burning-building-, jump-on-the-grenade-, give-all-available-money-

[20] "Nor can a human being be morally good in some parts, and at the same time evil in others" (1793/1998, *Rel.,* 6.24).

to-charity-type of actions; they are those that convey praise on the agent if performed, though not blame if not performed. Not all normative theories recognize the existence of such acts, but duty-based theories typically do. The main problem, at least to some, is that such acts shouldn't exist, even in a duty-based system, but should simply be categorized under obligatory actions. I don't think this is too big a problem for these systems, as the recognition that the non-performance of such actions don't usually indicate blame, which is enough to show a distinction between obligation and supererogation. However, for duty-based accounts that try to explain moral perfection, it does appear to run into some difficulties.

As I just mentioned, some duty-based accounts have been accused that the distinction between obligatory and supererogatory acts either doesn't exist or doesn't obviously exist. Ultimately this amounts to the claim that supererogatory acts don't exist, but what we call 'supererogatory' acts are just 'obligatory' acts. But duty theorists often stand their ground, claiming that such acts do exist, and this is clear since there are morally good (not necessarily 'right') acts which are not required of the agent. My goal is not to get too deep in this debate, but only to mention that this appears to be problem for any duty-based account of moral perfection, such as McGinn's. The reason is that any agent that is morally perfect is one that will always (and must always) do the best that is possible, which appears to imply that supererogatory actions do not exist for them.

McGinn seems to anticipate this sort of objection: "First, it is tempting to suppose that moral perfection requires me to perform large feats of heroism or self-sacrifice: giving up my present life to go and work with the poor, going to jail in the cause of animal liberation, offering

my vital organs to save the lives of several others" (1992, p. 33).[21] Conee is emphatic in his response, arguing that even if there are such things as supererogatory acts, such acts cease to be supererogatory for those morally perfect.

> Any morally perfect agent would do whatever is supererogatory at every opportunity, because this would be the morally best course of action and morally perfect conduct could not be improved on… Although taking supererogatory alternatives is not mandatory in order to do what is morally acceptable, no supererogatory alternative can be neglected by a morally perfect agent. Moral perfection is morally ultimate. Nothing less than the best is perfect (1994, pp. 815-16).

So, if a morally perfect agent is one that not only always does what is right and always avoids what is wrong, it also appears that this agent always does the best that is possible. Since supererogatory actions are better than mere obligatory actions, supererogatory actions become obligatory for a perfect agent. If this is true, it leads to two further problems with a duty-based theory, each of which are related.

The first issue says that any theory which claims an agent is morally required to do that which is the best to do, is not really a deontological theory, but a consequentialist one. Here the assumption is anytime we say 'doing the best is required,' we are also saying 'doing the act that has the best consequences is required.' This is what Garcia argues (in the context of God's moral perfection) concerning Conee's comments:

[21] T. J. Mawson also seems affirm this view regarding God's status of morally perfect: "God's perfect goodness then is his perfectly fulfilling his duties toward his creatures and, furthermore, whenever there is a logically possible best or joint best thing for him to do for them, his doing that too, his perfectly loving them" (2005, p. 59).

> Duty theories allow God a wider range of choices, as long as none of his actions violate any duties. But if God has a duty to do the best he can (as Conee suggests), then in the divine case the duty model collapses into the consequentialist model. That is, if God must choose the overall best action (the action producing the best consequences), assuming that such an action (in God's case) will never be one that violates a duty, the duty criterion can simply be omitted (2009, p. 228).

Though Garcia's comments are made in the context of divine moral perfection, which can be different than non-divine perfection in some ways, I still think they're relevant to non-divine agents. So, if we assume that Garcia is correct about the duty-based system reducing to a consequential-based system, then this creates another problem. This problem, and I will discuss it briefly here and in more detail later on, is a common one for consequentialist theories. If doing the best is required of an agent, which would be a maximizing form of consequentialism, then it would be almost impossible for any being to be morally perfect. For a contingently-existing agent, doing that which is best on every occasion would imply that all consequential states of affairs that are causally connected to the original consequences of the act in question must also be the best states of affairs that are actualized. For any agent that is not omniscient and has very little ability to foreknow events, let alone foreknow a large string of causally-connected events, such a requirement is surely impossible to meet. For divine agents, this is also a problem but for different reasons.[22] I will say more on this below, but for now I simply

[22] Garcia, responding to Conee's comments, says, "[According to Conee], *anticipated consequences* of one's actions clearly contribute in some way to the moral value of those actions, and that the value of these consequences has no intrinsic maximum…He concludes…that it is impossible for any being to exhibit moral perfection, since for any given value of an action's foreseen consequences, there could in principle be an action that yields a higher value. Hence the duty-plus-supererogation model of divine moral perfection succumbs to the same maximization problems that beset the consequentialist model" (2009, p. 226).

want to highlight the various objections related to McGinn's duty-based definition of moral perfection. If we accept that his account is insufficient for moral perfection, we must look for another option.

2.3 Virtue

As mentioned, action-evaluation alone is not enough for the determination of moral perfection, but a character element appears to also be needed; thus, we need to not only look at the actions of the agent, but also the agent himself. To do this, I want to examine and compare two forms of virtue ethics, Aristotle's and Kant's. The primary goal here is to provide an account of moral perfection from the standpoint of virtue ethics, then determine if either Aristotle's or Kant's version can solve the sufficiency problem mentioned above.

Before looking at Aristotle and Kant, we need to establish a new working definition of moral perfection. Given that the character component appears necessary in such a definition, we can use an adapted definition originally proposed by Shawn Graves:

> **Virtue**: An agent is morally perfect iff he (i) always does what is morally right, (ii) never does what is morally wrong, and (iii) *always acts from a thoroughly virtuous character* (2014, p. 127).

This seems to be a fairly basic description of moral perfection from a virtue ethics standpoint. Also, in what follows, I will be using the term 'virtue' in a very narrow (hopefully uncontroversial) way: a virtue is an admirable trait of character which is valuable to the agent and to others. Many would say a thoroughly virtuous character would, at the minimum, include all the relevant virtues for an upstanding moral agent, whatever those virtues are. According to

Michael Slote, “one can hold that ethical perfection, perfection with respect to the virtues, is possible” and that “such a person—someone combining all of the virtues—would be as ethically excellent as it is possible to be and count, in fact, as ethically perfect” (2011, p. 43). Garcia also provides a tentative definition of moral perfection that echoes Slote, but with regard to God: “Perhaps the most obvious definition of divine moral perfection in terms of virtues is to say that a morally perfect being perfectly exemplifies all the (standard) moral virtues” (2009, p. 230). So working from the proposed definition of Graves (which he actually rejects), we can now examine Aristotle and Kant.

Aristotle

We will begin with Aristotle’s account of virtue, examining first what he has to say about a virtuous person, and secondly what he says about a morally perfect person. Put simply, virtue for Aristotle is a feature or characteristic that puts a thing in a good condition and empowers it to fulfill its end or purpose (do its work) well; for a human being, it “would be that characteristic as a result of which a human being becomes good and as a result of which he causes his own work to be done well” (c. 4th BC/2011, *NE,* 1106a 22-24). For Aristotle, virtue involves the entire person, including one’s passions, emotions, and actions. In Book 2 of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, he says,

> For I mean moral virtue, for it is concerned with passions and actions, and it is in these that excess, deficiency, and the middle term reside. For example, it is possible to be afraid, to be confident, to desire, to be angry, to feel pity, and, in general, to feel pleasure and pain to a greater or lesser degree than one ought, and in both cases this is

not good. But to feel them when one ought and at the things one ought, in relation to those people whom one ought, for the sake of what and as one ought—all these constitute the middle as well as what is best, which is in fact what belongs to virtue. Similarly, in the case of actions too, there is an excess, a deficiency, and the middle term (c. 4th BC/2011, 1106b 16-24).[23]

Virtue is the mean between excesses, and a virtuous person must have a firm hold on this middle position, which results in an agent that is disposed to think, feel, and act in appropriate ways.[24] In terms of passions, shame and disgrace are completely inappropriate for such a person, for such emotions "occur in connection with base things (for one must not do such things…but the decent person will never voluntarily do base thing" (c. 4th BC/2011, *NE,* 1128b 22-32; see also 1100b 19-34, 1166a 27-9, *EE* 1228a 5-7).

To be good, and to be in a good position to fulfill one's purpose well, an agent needs both moral characteristics and intellectual characteristics; so, in addition to whatever moral qualities are necessary for virtue, an agent must also be wise (intellectual virtue). Of wisdom or prudence, Aristotle says, "It seems to belong to a prudent person to be able to deliberate nobly about things good and advantageous for himself, not in a partial way…but about the sorts of

[23] It is virtue as a characteristic that allows an agent to experience emotions properly: "But *characteristics* are those things in reference to which we are in a good or bad state in relation to the passions; for example, if we feel anger intensely or weakly, we are in a bad condition, but if in a measured way, we are in a good condition, and similiarly with the other passions as well" (c. 4th BC/2011, *NE,* 1105b 25-29).

[24] According to Badhwar, "A fully good or virtuous person, on Aristotle's view, is a person who is disposed to think, feel, choose, and act "at the right [appropriate] times, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way" (1106b2lff)'" (1996, p. 309).

things conducive to living well in general" and "prudence is a true characteristic that is bound up with action, accompanied with reason, and concerned with things good and bad for a human being" (c. 4th BC/2011, *NE,* 1140a25-b4-5).[25]

An inquiry into Aristotle's account of the virtues and morality would be an extensive enterprise, one that I don't have space for and one that is unnecessary for our purposes. We can see that at least one view of Aristotle is that a virtuous person is one that is disposed to think, feel, hope, desire, and act in particular (appropriate) ways, ways that lie in the mean between excesses. While many virtue ethicists can agree on this interpretation of Aristotle's virtuous person, there is still some disagreement on whether Aristotle is intending to describe an ideally (perfectly) virtuous person or a merely (non-perfect) virtuous person. According to Curzer, those that do take an ideal interpretation may describe a perfect agent as someone that fulfills the above description, but also fulfills it in all scenarios: "They take his virtuous person to be morally perfect, to act and feel exactly right in every situation. Of course, the flip side of this thesis is that anyone who acts and feels otherwise must be less than virtuous" (2005, p. 233).[26] Robert Adams says, "Some forms of Aristotelian virtue theory…with regard to temptations of fear and desire, [hold out] an ideal of courage and moderation in which fear and desire would be so tamed as never to compete with virtuous dispositions" (2006, p. 156).

[25] Badwar says, "A fully good or virtuous person must know which ends are worth striving for and how best to achieve them. And so a fully good or virtuous person must be practically wise. Conversely, a practically wise person must be virtuous" (1996, p. 309).

[26] Curzer also says this ideal interpretation is supported by "Aristotle's doctrine that the virtuous person is the standard for determining which actions and passions are truly right and pleasant (1113a 31-4, 1176a 15-18). Virtuous people can hardly deviate from what is right if the virtuous person is the standard of rightness" (2005, p. 234).

The idea here is that an ideally or perfectly virtuous person would be one that has all the relevant virtues for perfection and has them so strongly that wrong actions and inappropriate feelings become impossible, regardless of the circumstance. In other words, virtues such as courage would be so intrenched within an agent that he or she would never (perhaps could never) shy from courageous acts when such acts were called for in a situation. I believe most Aristotelian writers would acknowledge that Aristotle could accept the idea that a virtuous person (though not perfectly virtuous) could occasionally fail to act or feel in a virtuous manner without losing their status as virtuous. This is not so for the perfectly virtuous:

> In fact, virtuous people can end up reliably performing vicious acts in several ways…there are rare situations in which it is very hard, though not quite 'beyond human endurance,' to act according to virtue. These are situations where vicious action is inexcusable, yet expected, because almost everyone, even almost all virtuous people, perform vicious acts in these situations…For example, when Carl introduces his wife Dara to his mistress, it would not be surprising if Dara exhibits excessive rudeness. Yet if she acts according to virtue in all other situations, her predictably inappropriate behavior in this highly stressful situation should not disqualify Dara from being considered virtuous. A perfectly virtuous person would act perfectly when thrust into an emotionally wrenching situation. Yet although they are less than perfect, people who fail to act according to virtue only in such dramatic situations should not be deemed to be less than virtuous (Curzer 2005, pp. 240-41).

Here Curzer is defending the view that Aristotle recognizes a virtuous agent can be relied upon to perform vicious actions, depending on the difficultly of specific situations (that are

repeated). From the passage, we can see that Curzer understands that the Aristotelian perfectly virtuous agent would be impervious or immune to such difficult situations. So even if a typical or normal virtuous agent is allowed to perform vicious actions from time to time, especially if the situation would be particularly difficult for any agent to act virtuously in, a perfectly virtuous agent is never allowed to perform such vicious actions, regardless of the difficultly of the situation. "Incompletely virtuous people are virtuous, yet imperfect because their virtues do not cover a few temptations or situations. They reliably act wrongly *despite* their virtues" (Curzer 2005, p. 242).

Aristotle's morally perfect agent is one who is thoroughly virtuous; such an agent has all relevant virtues for perfection and has them so perfectly that it impossible for the agent to perform wrong acts, regardless of the circumstance. I'm sure there are many questions (perhaps objections) about this claim. However, I must put further clarification of this claim about Aristotle and his view of moral perfection to the side for now; more explanation will be forthcoming in the next chapter. For now, I'd like to turn to Kant and his view of virtue and moral perfection.

Kant

As mentioned above, Kant is typically the individual we think of when the topic of deontology is discussed. Kant is not, however, always imagined when we think of virtue ethics (even though he had a book titled *The Doctrine of Virtue*). Nevertheless, Kant did have much to say about what moral virtue is and how best to understand it in relation to his more popular duty-based theory.

One difference with Aristotle and Kant is Kant was not pluralistic about the virtues but confined his set of virtues to one: fortitude or strength of will. “Now the capacity and considered resolve to withstand a strong but unjust opponent is *fortitude (fortitude)* and, with respect to what opposes the moral disposition *with in us*, virtue (*virtus, fortitude moralis*)” (1797/1991, *MM,* 380). Since adherence to and respect for the moral law is primary for Kant’s ethics, virtue has its place as an admirable trait through the strength it gives the agent to remain committed to that law, regardless of any temptation to do otherwise.

> The Kantian virtuous agent is thus one who, because of his ‘fortitude’, is able to resist urges and inclinations opposed to the moral law. Kantian fortitude is strength (*Starke*) or force (*Kraft*) of will, not in the sense of being able to accomplish the goals one sets out to achieve, but rather in the sense of mastery over one’s inclinations and constancy of purpose (Louden 1986, p. 477).

While emotions, feelings, and hopes may be relevant to virtue, it seems that one’s moral character is defined according to the agent’s strength of will to commit to his duty. The agent’s moral character, therefore, is not so much about his personality, habits, temperament, or feelings; the agent’s character has much more to do with his commitment to morality above anything else, along with his fortitude to act on that commitment (Cureton & Hill 2015, p. 104).

One area of agreement with Aristotle and Kant is their belief that virtues produce some level of regularity, repetition, or consistency. Since a virtue is character trait, it must be strong enough to withstand temptations to do wrong that might occur regularly.

> For unless this aptitude [long-standing habit of morally good actions acquired by practice] results from considered, firm, and continually purified principles, then, like any

other mechanism of technically practical reason, it is neither armed for all situations nor adequately secured against the changes that new temptations could bring about (1797/1991, *MM,* 383-4).[27]

When focusing on Kant's view of moral perfection it becomes a little difficult to nail down his position. Kant recognized that the word *perfect* can have various definitions, though he adopts a view of perfection "as a concept belonging to *teleology*…taken to mean the harmony of a thing's properties with an *end"* (1797/1991, *MM,* 386). Thus the more a thing fulfills its purpose or function, the more perfect it is. Such an understanding of perfection clearly lines up with his view of virtue: the more one's will is resolved and devoted to the moral law, the more perfect they are since their will is strong enough (virtuous) to maintain such devotion, even in the face of temptation and trials. This is a trait of character that enables an agent to regularly act according to duty for the sake of duty. If this is how Kant understands perfection, an agent has a duty to pursue and bring about such a character.

> At the same time this duty [to make perfection one's own end] includes the cultivation of one's *will* (moral cast of mind), so as to satisfy all the requirements of duty…Man has a duty to carry the cultivation of his *will* up to the purest virtuous disposition, in which *law* becomes also the incentive to his actions that conform with duty and he obeys the law from duty. This disposition is inner morally practical perfection…it is a moral

[27] "Both [Aristotle and Kant] sought to present accounts of virtue as *reliable*, that is, as traits of character that are equipped for unusual situations. Aristotle viewed practical wisdom as the regulator of virtue; Kant viewed the sense of duty as the regulator" (Driver 2001, p. 47).

perfection, by which one makes one's object every particular end that is also a duty (1797/1991, *MM,* 387).

So there is a view that says Kant understands a morally perfect agent as one whose character is such that he or she is fully and firmly resolved to doing their duty for the sake of duty. Such an agent can still feel temptations to do wrong here or there, but their will is strong enough on each occasion to withstand such temptations. Even with this position, it appears as Kant still did not think it impossible that such an agent could fail to act according to duty. The reason for this has to with his position on free will and moral obligation. For Kant, nothing can necessitate an agent's will to conform to the moral law without removing the agent's freedom.

> A perfectly good will would, therefore, equally stand under objective laws (of the good), but it could not on this account be represented as *necessitated* to actions in conformity with law since of itself, by its subjective constitution, it can be determined only through the representation of the good (1785/1997, *GMM,* 414).

Further, since obligations, and therefore duties, are only relevant for free agents, an agent whose will is necessarily in line with reason and the moral law is not free and so has no duties to maintain. Thus, the virtue of fortitude is totally irrelevant for such a will. This is what Kant called a 'holy will.'

> Hence no imperatives hold for the divine will and in general for a holy will: the "ought" is out of place here, because volition is of itself necessarily in accord with the law. Therefore imperatives are only formulae expressing the relation of objective laws of volition in general to the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being, for example, of the human will (1785/1997, *GMM,* 414).

And this brings us to the difficulty of defining a morally perfect agent. It appears Kant may have thought of someone with a holy will as someone who is morally perfect, and according to Cureton and Hill, Kant had a clear distinction in mind when it came to the holy will and the mere good will.

> Kant contrasts a good will with a *holy will*, or an absolutely good will in a being that lacks inclinations contrary to duty and necessarily wills in accord with reason. Unlike imperfect human wills, a holy will could not be morally weak, or even tempted, and so would also not be subject to moral imperatives, duty, and obligation (2015, p. 88-89).

Now if Kant thinks of moral perfection in terms of having a holy will, which precludes any temptations or inclinations to immorality, then attaining this will is something we humans should attempt, even though we will never realize it (at least in this life).

> It is a man's duty to *strive* for this perfection, but not to *reach* it (in this life), and his compliance with this duty can, accordingly, consist only in continual progress. Hence, while this duty is indeed narrow and perfect *with regard to* its object (the idea that one should make it one's end to realize), *with regard to* the subject it is only a wide and imperfect duty to himself (1797/1991, *MM,* 446).

From the context of this passage, we know the imperfection of this duty is based on epistemological deficiencies within man,[28] but to speculate, another reason why our duty to pursue a holy will may only be an imperfect duty is that attaining it would result in or indicate

[28] "The depths of the human heart are unfathomable. Who knows himself well enough to say, when he feels the incentive to fulfill his duty, whether it proceeds entirely from the representation of the law or whether there are not many other sensible impulses contributing to it that look to one's advantage (or to avoiding what is detrimental) and that, in other circumstances, could just as well serve vice?" (1797/1991, *MM,* 447).

that we were no longer human. If it is an essential part of human nature to have freedom of choice, i.e., the ability to adopt maxims of good or evil, then an agent with a nature that is of necessity inclined to act only on those maxims that correspond to good (or only to evil) would be deprived of free choice and would not be human (1793/1998, *Religion,* 6:21-22).

Further, inclinations are natural for Kant and not states an agent can choose to have and are thus not responsible for having. Inclinations, however, can lead to dispositions or propensities toward good or evil actions, and so while humans are not responsible for the natural inclinations they find themselves with, they are responsible for these propensities toward good or evil since an inclination cannot of necessity give rise to a particular propensity (1793/1998, *Religion,* 6:32-36). So again, the inclinations that give rise to desires and temptations for immorality should not themselves be thought of as items we must remove. Cureton and Hill say it like this:

> When Kant claims, in the *Groundwork*, that 'it must rather be the universal wish of every rational being to be wholly free' of inclinations, he does not mean that we should actually take steps to do so, for our inclinations are part of our nature and not evil in themselves, even though they can tempt us to immorality. His point may instead be that the ideal of a holy will, which necessarily conforms to reason without any inclinations to the contrary, is nonetheless unattainable for human beings who are always subject to impure motives (2015, p. 96).

Now if a holy will is what is meant by moral perfection, or even is just a necessary feature of perfection, then I can't say much more than I already have of what this perfection

entails.[29] It is a will that has no inclinations, desires, or goals towards immorality, and also has no duties to fulfill the moral law since it is necessarily conformed to it. According to Cureton and Hill, Kant may have believed that such perfect virtue may also entail perfect happiness, but this will not be realized in this life. Kant believed this was the highest good.

> The highest good consists of perfect virtue and well-deserved happiness together. Kant concedes that this cannot be achieved in this life, but claims that we have reason to have faith or hope that achieving it is nevertheless possible in ways that we cannot comprehend (Cureton & Hill 2015, p. 88).

We can now get back to Graves' definition and say what a *thoroughly virtuous character* involves. According to the Aristotelian position, a morally perfect agent is one who has all the relevant virtues for perfection and has them so perfectly that it is impossible for the agent to feel, desire, or act contrary to those virtues. Following a Kantian view, one way we might think of a morally perfect agent is one whose character is such that he or she is fully and firmly resolved to doing their duty for the sake of duty. It is unclear whether this implies the impossibility of acting contrary to duty or not. I want to say that this definition doesn't remove

[29] According to Cureton and Hill, "When we attempt to imagine a morally perfect human being, therefore, it is impossible for us to say whether she is conforming to duty only from the motive of duty or whether her inclinations are moving her as well. A further reason Kant gives for why we can never fully attain moral perfection is that it is impossible for us to imagine, in any concrete way, what it consists in, so we can never be sure that any set of specific virtues is complete and free from traits that are not virtues. For all we can know, there may be virtues we have not considered, we may be mistaken in regarding certain characteristics as virtues, and we may not understand how the virtues cohere with one another. By analogy with perfect happiness, which is an end that we all have even though we can 'never say definitely and self-consistently what it really is that they wish and will,' the ideal of moral perfection is an end we must set for ourselves but it is not a fully determinate goal and the best we can do is strive ever closer to moral perfection" (2015, p. 95). Both problems w/ the idea of humans attaining perfection appear to stem from epistemic constraints: (1) We can never really know if someone is morally perfect because of the difficulty of determining an agent's intentions (acting out of duty or inclination); (2) we can never know what full virtue consists in (how many virtues, which virtues, how do such virtues cohere w/ one another, etc.).

the possibility of occasionally giving into immorality, since the impossibility of it seems to imply a necessitation of the will to reason and the moral law, which Kant says only applies to the holy will. And this is the other way Kant may have thought of a morally perfect agent, one that has no inclinations, desires, or goals towards immorality, and thus experiences no conflict between their passions and doing their duty; however, it also seems as though this agent doesn't actually have any duties or obligations to fulfill the moral law since the will is necessarily conformed to it. It appears as Aristotle's definition is consistent with the definition of moral perfection Graves gives us, though I'm not sure if either of the Kantian options is.

Remember, the definition we're working from is an agent is morally perfect if and only if he (i) always does what is morally right, (ii) never does what is morally wrong, and (iii) always acts from a *thoroughly virtuous character*. To be fair to Aristotle and Kant, this definition is vague with regard to the 'thoroughness' of the agent's character. Perhaps Aristotle and Kant's understanding of a perfect agent could satisfy this definition. This definition also doesn't say anything of the modal status of (i), (ii), or (iii). It could be merely a contingent fact that a morally perfect agent fulfills each of these conditions. Here, it is matter of fact that the agent meets these conditions, though it is possible that he might fail to. Or we could take it as a necessary fact that a perfect agent always meets these conditions. It seems to me that the idealization view of virtue from Aristotle would understand each of the above conditions as being necessarily true, whereas Kant can't say this, unless we take it that Kant understood a morally perfect agent to have a holy will. But it's hard to say that the above definition could apply to the holy will either, since the holy will is necessarily conformed to the moral law. If morality is at least partially concerned with duty and obligation, then is it really appropriate to

apply moral descriptions like 'morally perfect' or 'thoroughly virtuous' to an agent, since the will that is holy experiences no obligations or duties? This problem is compounded due to Kant's inability or unwillingness to say more about the holy will.

One last reason we might prefer an Aristotelian conception of virtue to a Kantian one lies in what each has to say about the passions, emotions, and desires. For Aristotle, feelings, passions, desires, and thoughts all must be in line with virtue. A virtuous agent is not only one that acts the right way, but also feels, desires, thinks, and is motivated the right way. There is no internal conflict within the agent when it comes to acting according to virtue. A virtuous person experiences pleasure when they are confronted with opportunities to practice virtue. Again, there is no conflict within the agent. On the other hand, Kant's system seems to embrace the idea of conflict.[30]

For these reasons, I lean more towards adopting an Aristotelian conception of virtue. When we think of evaluating an agent as moral, and we do that by looking at their actions *and* their character, the character element seems to involve a more comprehensive picture of the agent than just the agent's strength of will. Again, it appears as though the agent's pleasures, desires, and feelings are relevant as well in such an evaluation.[31] Baron makes this point:

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[30] According to Baron "Aristotle…holds that part of acting virtuously is that one does not feel inner conflict, whereas on Kant's view one can be acting virtuously (and can be virtuous) even if one has strong opposing desires" (1997, p. 42-3).

[31] It would be incorrect here to say that Kant believed emotions and the like were irrelevant to a virtuous character. In his *Doctrine of Virtue*, he compares the virtuous Stoic to the virtuous Epicurean, preferring the Epicurean because of the pleasure the agent experiences when living a life of virtue: '"*Stoic* saying: Accustom yourself *to put up with* the misfortunes of life that may happen and *to do without* it superfluous pleasures. This is a kind of *regimen* for keeping a man healthy. But *health* is only a negative kind of well-being: It cannot itself be felt. Something must be added to it, something which , though it is only moral, affords an agreeable enjoyment to life. This is the ever-cheerful heart, according to the idea of the virtuous *Epicurus*. For who should have more reason for being of a cheerful spirit, and not even finding it a duty to put himself in a cheerful frame of mind and make it habitual, than one who is aware of no intentional transgression in himself and is secured against falling into any?" (1797/1991, *MM,* 484-85). In other places Kant seems to say that doing one's duty simply for duty's sake, and

> It is part of being virtuous that one feels as one should, not only that one acts, aims, thinks, and reflects as one should…Someone who has tremendous strength in resisting temptations to act contrary to duty and resists these temptations because she is deeply committed to acting morally would, it seems, count as virtuous on Kant's view. Yet most of us would be inclined to say, depending on the nature of the temptations, that the very fact that she feels such temptations (and feels them so strongly) shows her not to be very virtuous (1997, pp. 42-3).

To sum up, a morally perfect agent is one that always does what is right, never does what is wrong, and always acts from a thoroughly virtuous character. Having a *thoroughly* virtuous character includes, but may not be limited to, having all the virtues relevant for perfection, and having them to such a strong degree that it is impossible that the agent feel, think, desire, or act in ways that are contrary to virtue or that are morally wrong. With this clarification, we can look to some problems with Graves' definition with an Aristotelian conception of virtue.

Problems

In looking at issues w/ the present conception of moral perfection, it's tempting to examine various problems specific to virtue ethics as a normative theory. Though there are many, just as there are w/ any normative theory, I want leave discussion of these objections out of the

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without any love or pleasure for fulfilling that duty, provides no internal value for the agent. "But what is not done with pleasure but merely as compulsory service has no inner worth for one who attends to his duty in this way and such service is not loved by him; instead, he shirks as much as possible occasions for practicing virtue" (1797/1991, p. 273, *MM,* 484). Louden confirms this view of Kant: "Here and elsewhere Kant addresses the need to cultivate an 'habitual cheerful heart', in order that the *feeling* of joy accompanies (but does not constitute or determine) our virtue (1986, p. 488)."

present issue. Priority problems, practicality issues, and tragic dilemmas are relevant for evaluating virtue theory as a plausible view of morality, but it's not too relevant for our examination of a proper understanding of moral perfection. For this reason, I want to focus on one problem that Graves' definition of perfection shares with the previous deontological definition.

While Graves' definition is clearly more robust than McGinn's, it has been argued that it still suffers from the same problem. Just as McGinn's definition was insufficient in providing necessary conditions for perfection, so too, it is argued, does Graves'. According to Conee,

> Being a morally perfect person requires being a morally perfect agent, as well as being morally perfect in any other respect in which persons can vary in moral value…there is more to morally perfect agency than its internal component. Again, being a morally perfect agent is an ultimate moral status. Anything counts that affects the moral quality of the agency. Agency is constituted by acts, and the overall moral quality of the agency is determined by all of the morally relevant characteristics of those acts (1994, p. 824).

For Conee, perfection requires the absolute best in any possible area that is relevant for increasing moral value. Graves seems to support this point with his idea of a *moral resume*: "a comprehensive, exceedingly detailed account of every morally relevant feature about [an agent], concerning both his actions and his internal states, throughout his life" (2014, p. 132). And for Graves, "If an agent A's moral résumé is not perfect, then A herself is not morally perfect" (2014, p. 136).

So while Conee believes moral character is relevant to perfection, he doesn't think it is sufficient, even if having a 'thoroughly virtuous' character necessitates doing only virtuous

(right) actions. The value of actions, and the value that actions produce, are also relevant. Not only do you need to have the highest or most virtuous character, but you also need to have produced the most value from your actions.

> It seems untenable to deny that, other pertinent things being equal, the value of an act's forseen effects plays some role in determining the moral value of the act and has no necessarily maximum amount. It also seems untenable to deny that, other pertinent things being equal, the moral value achieved during a lifetime plays some role in determining the specifically moral worth of the agent. And it seems untenable to deny that a morally perfect agent would possess unsurpassable moral worth. These considerations combine to argue that every possible moral agent falls short of morally perfect agency (1994, p. 820).

In this passage, Conee appears to affirm the following points: first, the accurately expected consequences of an act confer some moral value on the act; second, the total amount of value (goodness?) produced by an agent's actions in his lifetime is relevant to determining the agent's actual moral worth; and finally, moral perfection requires an agent to have unsurpassable moral worth. I think Conee believes that morally perfect agents can be on par with one another (i.e., same amount of moral worth), but agent 1 cannot be morally perfect if there is another agent 2 that has a higher moral worth than agent 1.

The reason, according to Conee, that Graves' definition of moral perfection is insufficient is that it says nothing about what the agent actually produces in his/her lifetime. An agent might have an immaculate character and might always do the right thing, but if his actions don't produce much good, then the moral value of the agent is meager. It's great that

the agent always does the right thing, it's commendable that he has a virtuous character, but if he hasn't produced much good with his actions it's hard to see how he is perfect. And for this reason, the present definition of perfection is insufficient in that it lacks relevant conditions for increasing in moral value, which according to Conee and Graves, is obviously required for perfection.

2.4 Consequentialism

If we take Conee's argument seriously, it looks like we need to incorporate an additional component to our definition of perfection. In addition to action and virtue, we also need to add any other area of morality that is relevant in conferring moral value upon the agent. For Conee, this means including a statement about the consequences of the agent's actions; a morally perfect agent is one that also produces good effects with their actions.[32] To solve this problem we can once again look to Graves to supply us with a new possible definition of perfection.

> **Consequence**: An agent is morally perfect iff he (i) always does what is maximally morally good, (ii) never does what is morally wrong, (iii) always acts from a thoroughly virtuous character, and (iv) *never brings about or knowingly and intentionally allows any intrinsically bad state* (2014, p. 137).

[32] Garcia also entertains the possible relevance of consequences in a definition of perfection: "Perhaps the focus of a morally perfect being should be on maximizing the amount of moral good in the universe, where moral good is a result of the morally right actions of free agents" (2009, pp. 222-23).

This definition certainly includes statements about the necessity of a perfect agent producing positive effects with their actions, and it tries to do this without removing any of the earlier components. Before evaluating this definition, we need to unpack it a little.

First, (i) says the agent always does what is maximally morally good. This is different from the earlier definitions we evaluated in that it doesn't reference the agent doing the right action, but producing good. It's interesting that it's worded this way since (ii) keeps the verbiage of right/wrong actions (never does what is wrong). In his article, it looks like Graves is wording (i) this way to accommodate the earlier objection to McGinn's duty-based definition that concerned supererogation. Since, in Graves' mind, a morally perfect agent always does what it is best, they would always perform acts of supererogation when they could.

This is interesting because of the objection Garcia made earlier when she claims that if supererogation is anything like an obligation for a morally perfect agent, then we have moved from a duty-based system to a consequentialist one, which is what it appears that Graves is doing by adjusting the definition from 'does what is right' to 'does what is maximally good.' Further, if he is changing from a non-consequentialist system to a consequentialist one, I don't know why he just didn't keep the verbiage of 'always does what is right' but with the clarification that 'right' is understood from a consequentialist's account of right action. So here, 'right' in (i) would refer to action that maximizes goodness, and 'wrong' in (ii) would refer to any act that fails to maximize goodness. But if this is what he is doing, it seems redundant to add (ii) in the definition since (i) already implies it.

It's possible that there is some inconsistency in this definition's view of 'right action,' and that (i) does not imply (ii). If this is the case, and (ii) shouldn't be understood as 'never fails

to maximize goodness,' then 'never does anything wrong' probably just refers to those actions we have a basic intuition about regarding wrongness: murder, child abuse, breaking promises, theft, etc. Conee argues that even under a consequentialist framework, these are types of actions that a morally perfect agent could not perform due to the resulting regret:

> In contrast to what is required of morally perfect agents, the morally righteous may engage in conduct which is in some respects regrettable. An agent doing what is right may have no choice but to violate a prima facie duty. For instance, suppose that I innocently make a promise which I must break in order to help in an emergency… We can suppose that by breaking my promise I have disappointed a friend who was entitled to count on me. This makes it particularly clear that I have done something regrettable, albeit justified. Conduct which is somehow regrettable is not morally impeccable. A life with nothing to regret would be more exemplary, and a morally perfect agent would provide the ultimate model of moral conduct. Moral perfection may be unavailable in an imperfect world where significant violations of prima facie duties are unavoidable, while unswerving moral rectitude remains available (1994, pp. 816-817).[33]

Second, in changing to a form of consequentialism, it should be noted that this is a maximizing form of consequentialism. Thus, the agent doesn't only produce good with each of his/her actions, but he/she always does what is optimific. The act doesn't just produce more good than bad, but produces the greatest net amount of good over bad than any other action available. For every scenario, the agent will always perform that act that produces the greatest

[33] Graves (2014) also seems to believe something like this when it comes to acts that result in regret. See pp. 132-34.

net balance of good over evil that is possible in that scenario. Nothing less than the best is appropriate for a morally perfect agent.

Third, (iv) is derived from Graves' belief that a perfect agent will have a flawless *moral résumé*. An agent with a flawless *résumé* will not only always do what is best, but will also never have any reason to feel regret, remorse, or grief for any unintended negative consequences that come from his actions. Sometimes, even doing the best in a situation will still produce undesired side effects. In such circumstances, the agent's actions may still have led or allowed events that included misery or sadness. Not experiencing regret or remorse is better than experiencing regret or remorse, so an agent that experiences such feelings can't be perfect given that their *résumé* has this flaw.

Fourth, (iii) keeps the previous condition that the agent always acts from a thoroughly virtuous character. While this condition seems appropriate to retain in the new definition, it's not exactly clear what is meant by 'virtuous character' under this new consequentialist definition. There are a couple different ways to understand 'virtuous character' from a consequentialist framework. While consequentialism isn't a form of virtue ethics, it's well known that many consequentialists care about the virtues.[34] What we have to decide is how we understand the term 'virtue' from a consequentialist perspective.

One way to understand virtue here is very similar to a traditional view of virtue. It is an admirable trait of character; it is an internal quality of the agent that is worth revering, respecting, or praising. So, an agent can count as virtuous here if their motives and desires are

[34] According to Bentham, "It is with dispositions as with everything else: it will be good or bad according to its effects: according to the effects it has on augmenting or diminishing the happiness of the community…" (Bentham 1789/1948, p. 131).

aimed at maximizing goodness with their actions. Their hopes are to make the world a better place, and they are willing to endure hardships to fulfill that end. They are joyful when the effects of their acts produce good and are grieved at any misery that follows from an act. These are all internal features of the agent, and they're ones that Aristotle might agree would be present in a virtuous agent. The difference with this view of virtue and Aristotle's view is the emphasis Aristotle puts on practical wisdom. An Aristotelian agent must be wise enough to recognize which virtues are relevant to each situation. A virtuous agent, for Aristotle, must be a wise agent. For a consequentialist, wisdom (the ability to use reason to work out (calculate) which action will maximize goodness) is admirable, but it doesn't seem to be necessary for the agent to be virtuous. For an agent could be utterly foolish about calculating goodness, or of goodness itself, and yet still get lucky in maximizing goodness, which was his aim. Someone would never be accepted as virtuous on an Aristotelian account if their actions always accidently conformed to what virtue requires.[35]

Of course, it could be the case that the 'thoroughness' in 'virtuous character' entails that the agent does have an extensively strong sense of moral wisdom. If so, the consequentialist could use the traditional form of virtue, and virtuous character, but just add that it must include moral or practical wisdom.

[35] According to Driver: "Virtue must be accessible – to those who are not wise but kind; to those who had the misfortune to grow up in repressive environments that warped their understanding, yet who are capable of showing the appropriate compassionate responses to human suffering; to those who, like most of us, possess some intellectual or moral flaw" (2001, p. 54). "Any theory of virtue that defines virtue in terms of some particular kind of psychological state is doomed. I am not denying that *some* psychology is necessary. The agent must have a mental life in order to have a psychology and thus have character traits. I merely argue that no specific psychological state that has been historically identified with virtue is *necessary* for virtue" (2001, p. 46; See also chapter 2).

Another way to understand virtue from a consequentialist stance is by way of trait consequentialism. According to trait consequentialism, a character trait is recognized as a virtue based on the positive value of the consequences that are either directly or indirectly related to the trait. Thus, a virtuous person is one whose character tends to produce the right form of consequences.

There are various forms of trait consequentialism, just as there are of consequentialist views. There are a couple popular ones that I'd like to examine. The first is motive utilitarianism and comes from Robert Adams. Utilitarianism is typically recognized as a maximizing form of consequentialism in that the test for moral evaluation is the utility produced by the act, rule, or whatever. For Adams, "the test of utility is to be applied directly…to motives" (1976, p. 469). When we are evaluating the moral quality of an agent's motives, an agent's "perfect motivation is identified with an all-controlling desire to maximize utility"(p. 468).[36] So according to Adams, "one pattern of motivation is morally better than another to the extent that the former has more utility than the latter" (p. 470). Evaluating what is meant by 'right action' under this view, Julia Driver says,

> On [Adams'] view the moral quality of the action will depend upon the consequences generated by the motive behind the action. If the motive is such that acting on that motive generally produces good effects, then the action performed on the basis of that motive is the right action (2001, p. 91).

[36] An obvious objection to this claim about 'perfect motivation' is that having the motivation to maximize utility might lead to actions that do not maximize utility. If my desire to maximize utility leads to a suppression of utility, it's hard to see how that desire could be a virtue.

If we are to evaluate what is meant by a 'good' or 'virtuous' person on this view, Adams says, "The morally perfect person…would have the most useful desires, and have them in exactly the most useful strengths; he or she would have the most useful among the patterns of motivation that are causally possible for human beings" (1976, p. 470).[37]

Another form of trait consequentialism comes from Driver. For Driver, "a virtue is a character trait (a disposition or cluster of dispositions) that, generally speaking, produces good consequences for others" (2001, p. 60). Driver says that moral virtue is a *character trait*, one that is best described as follows:

> It is a complex *psychological* disposition (or disposition cluster) to feel, behave, and/or act well. Specifically, the account that I want to propose is an *objective consequentialist* account of the virtues, which would define moral virtues as character traits that systematically produce more actual good than not (p. 68).

On her account, virtues are better or worse than other virtues by their tendency to produce more or less good; the best virtues are those that tend to produce more good (p. 74).

There are a few differences between Adams' account and Driver's. The first has do with maximization. Adams' utilitarian view requires the 'good' generated from the trait be maximized, whereas Driver's account does not. Driver makes no claim on the range of the good that is produced, but only that the trait produce more good than bad (Driver 2001, p. 91). Driver also doesn't endorse a hedonistic view of value. Rather than pleasure, the good that a

[37] Driver says, "On Adams' view the best sort of person is characterized as the person who has the most useful, or utility-producing, sets of motivations that he or she can have. What makes a motivational set a good one is that it is the set that has a tendency to good production, even if, in my particular circumstances, it does not produce the good" (2001, p. 91).

virtue is to produce is cashed out in more Aristotelian terms as flourishing of social creatures (p. 91). Finally, Driver believes that motives, desires, and intentions can be traits we call virtues, but they don't have to be. Any psychological/mental property can serve as a virtue for Driver (p. 91). Thus, Adams' view is narrower than Driver's.

With these views in mind, we can now go back to Graves' definition. Modifying the definition a bit to fit a trait consequentialist view, a morally perfect agent (i) always maximizes moral good, (ii) never does anything wrong, (iii) always acts or is disposed from a character that is composed of traits that maximize good, and (iv) never brings about or knowingly and intentionally allows any intrinsically bad state.

Just a few clarifications are needed about this new representation of Graves' definition. (i) keeps the maximizing requirement, (ii) keeps the same verbiage, though I should make clear that 'wrong' can refer to either *prima facie* wrong actions, or actions that fail to maximize goodness. (iii) adds the point that the good which is maximized can come either directly or indirectly from the agent's virtuous character. There are trait consequentialists that argue a virtue is a trait that leads to actions that maximize goodness, and there are others that say a virtue is simply a trait that maximizes goodness, whether actions are performed by the agent or not. (iv) is left untouched. We can now evaluate this new conception of moral perfection.

Problems

There are numerous problems with this new definition. The first couple of problems are based on the maximization principle. Recall Graves' definition: An agent is morally perfect iff he (i) always does what is maximally morally good, (ii) never does what is morally wrong, (iii) always

acts from a thoroughly virtuous character, and (iv) never brings about or knowingly and intentionally allows any intrinsically bad state.

In coming up with a consequentialist conception of moral perfection, Graves adds a maximizing condition (greatest net value of goodness), but also requires that no badness come into existence from the agent (nor that the agent allow any badness come into existence). With this extra condition, the maximization requirement looks a little odd. Typically we understand a maximizing act to be the one among possible alternatives that produces the greatest amount of goodness once any badness is removed or subtracted. With the new condition in (iv), there is no 'NET' to catch and remove any badness that is produced. So, the morally perfect agent must perform the act that produces the greatest amount of goodness w/o producing any badness. This seems all well and good as a definition of perfection, but it has an intuitively backwards result as a consequentialist requirement. Imagine a scenario in which an agent 'M' must make a choice between two possible actions, a_1 and a_2. Now if M chooses to perform a_1, he will be performing an act that produces 50 units of goodness but also 20 units of badness, resulting in a net value of 30 units of goodness. If he decides to perform a_2, he will be performing an act that produces 5 units of goodness and 0 units of badness, resulting in a net value of 5 units of goodness. In this example, a_1 is the act that produces the most goodness and the greatest net value of goodness, but a_2 is the better choice as it doesn't produce any badness. In this example, the only option for M, assuming he is morally perfect, would be a_2, which seems strange. [38] Thus, examples like this show that a morally perfect agent would always have to

[38] A possible example could go like this: Suppose Mike has to make one of two choices regarding his future. Option A is to go into the military. The possible good for this option might be: fight for your country, save people, help impoverished societies, set a good example, make parents proud; the possible bad might be: kill many people.

choose (or would have to be disposed towards) actions that don't result in any badness, even if those actions produce very little good in comparison to other possible alternative choices. This appears inconsistent with the maximization principle in particular, and consequentialism in general.

Another issue with the current definition of moral perfection is also related to the maximization principle. If moral perfection does require an agent to maximize goodness with each of his acts, then the idea of a perfect agent runs into the same problems that any consequentialist theory that adopts the maximization principle. The problem with this principle is that no candidate for moral perfection can ever accomplish it.

We can understand how a normal (non-perfect) agent can perform maximizing acts. Of all the available choices or actions, the normal agent chooses the act that is best, that produces the most good once any badness is subtracted. This appears possible and likely occurs every day. For a possibly-perfect agent, however, it doesn't appear that such actions are possible. According to Conee, perfection implies some limit in which all perfect agents hit and go no further.

> If someone is perfect in some way, then that person cannot get any better in that way. Nor can anyone else. And no one who is worse is perfect. People who are morally perfect are all on a moral par…[And], If two people are morally perfect, then neither is morally better than the other (1994, p. 816).

Option B is don't go into military but stay home. The good produced here might be that Mike will help his dad run his (dad's) hardware store (which, honestly, his dad could do on his own); the bad produced by this option would be so minimal as to be none. If Mike is to be morally perfect, the only actual option for him would be B, which seems wrong.

Conee, as well as Graves, appear to believe that any evaluation of a possibly-perfect agent must also include modal considerations. If an agent is morally perfect in the actual world, then there can be no other possible world in which an agent is morally better. However, this produces a problem. To see this, we need to recognize that the 'goodness' the consequentialist is interested in can be either moral goodness or non-moral. For non-moral goodness, such as happiness, knowledge, wealth, or fame, it appears that there is no possible upper limit for the perfect agent to reach; he or she will be forever climbing towards perfection without ever attaining it. Conee makes this point:

> For instance, however great is the value of a certain act or combination of acts because of its accomplishing the relief from undeserved suffering of many individuals, any number more might have been relieved of undeserved suffering. And the foreseen relief of enough more would have had a still greater morally relevant value, other morally relevant things being equal. [Thus, resulting in] infinite possibilities (1994, p. 823).

For any actual agent that rescues 10 people from a burning building, there is always a logically possible agent that could have rescued 11. Garcia points out this problem also occurs at the divine level.

> Unfortunately, the task of maximizing non-moral value is not logically possible and so is not one that even God can perform. For any amount of such value, i.e. for any number of creatures and their pleasures or satisfactions, there could always be more—more creatures, more pleasures, or more varieties of pleasure (2009, p. 222).

According to Hoffman and Rosenkrantz, in order for God to be morally perfect from a consequentialist position, he would have to be able to bring about a world with more

aggregated, intrinsic goodness than any infinite number; since the existence of concrete things is typically required in order for there to be intrinsic goodness (happiness, pleasure, etc.), God would also have to be able to bring about more concrete things than any infinite number. "The possibility of there being more concrete entities than any infinite number is truly mind-boggling" (2002, p. 152).[39]

A final problem with the maximization principle is that it removes the concept of supererogation. As hinted at above, if the maximization principle is correct, then supererogatory actions become obligatory. The problem with this is that supererogatory acts seem to occur all the time. Driver argues that removing supererogation from our moral evaluations runs counter to our moral intuitions.

> And things get even worse when it comes to matching common-sense moral intuitions when we consider that the relevant alternatives are probably more likely to be things like: manning the phones at Greenpeace, writing a check to Oxfam, helping at the local

[39] Hoffman and Rosenkrantz elaborate on this point: "Assuming it's not possible to bring about more concrete entities than any infinite number, and assuming it's not possible to bring about an infinite number of concrete entities, we run into our current problem: In that case, God could not bring about a state of affairs that involves an infinity of concrete entities. Thus, God could not create a universe in which the amount of created pleasure, satisfaction, happiness, etc., reached infinity. Suppose, further, that consequentialism is true, so that a perfectly good God would strive to bring about a universe which contained a greater amount of overall or aggregated intrinsic good, that is, intrinsic goodness less intrinsic evil, than any other universe which he could bring about. This combination leads to paradox… Suppose that God were to create a universe in which the aggregated amount of create good is *n*, where *n* is a positive finite number. Let us call this universe *U*1. Since a universe in which the aggregated amount of created good is greater than *n*, yet is still finite, is possible, and since God is omnipotent and omniscient, God could create a universe, *U*2, in which the aggregated amount of created good is greater than *n*, say *n* + *m*. But since *n* + *m* is a finite number, and since a universe in which the aggregated amount of created good is greater than *n* + *m*, yet still finite, is possible, God could create a universe that contained a finite amount of aggregated, created good greater than *n* + *m*. No matter how much aggregated, created good a universe contained, so long as the total is finite, God could create a universe with a greater finite aggregated amount of created good… In this situation, it is not possible for God to create a universe *in which the aggregated amount of created intrinsic goodness exceeded the amount in any other universe that he could create*. This is, God could not conform his actions the consequentialist supreme moral principle. Since God could not conform his actions to the requirements of morality, he could not exhibit perfect goodness in such a situation" (2002, pp. 149-50).

> soup kitchen, and so forth. If those are the actions that maximize the good, then those are the actions I ought to be performing. They are not 'supererogatory', they are obligatory. But to many it seems absurd to say that someone is morally bad, or has done something morally bad, when she buys a bagel for breakfast when she could have eaten cereal more cheaply and sent the balance of money to Oxfam (2012, pp. 39-40).

To avoid these problems, it appears that a consequentialist about moral perfection would need to drop the maximization principle such as in Driver's account. Based on the earlier arguments, this move would be unacceptable in that it would allow a morally perfect agent to do less than the best. So, removing the maximization requirement from our definition would once again confront us with the insufficiency objection. Our project of discovering a fitting definition of moral perfect has led us, therefore, to a dead end. A basic duty-model of perfection was found to be insufficient, as was a duty-plus-virtue-model. Our final attempt at including those additional necessary features to our definition resulted in adopting a consequentialist (or mostly-consequentialist) theory, which as we just found out is an unacceptable moral system for explaining moral perfection. Thus, it appears we must side with Conee, Graves, and others in affirming the impossibility of moral perfection.[40] But before we resolve our inquiry to this conclusion, one more point about the nature of perfection needs to be mentioned.

[40] See Slote (2011) as well.

2.5 Perfection: Internal vs External, Qualitative vs Quantitative

Our goal in this chapter is to determine what makes an *agent* morally perfect. We can do this by evaluating either the internal components of the agent or the external ones, or both. According to an internal evaluation, we call an agent morally perfect primarily due to factors internal to the agent: beliefs, desires, intentions, emotions, motives, thoughts, etc. In essence, an agent is morally perfect based on the psychological elements that make up their character. An external evaluation of the agent examines the actions the agent performs and/or the consequences that follow from those actions. Conee and Graves appear to believe that a morally perfect agent must meet both internal and external conditions of evaluation. Thus, not only does the agent have to have the right character, the agent must also perform the right actions and produce the right effects. It seems to me that the reason we are led to the conclusion that moral perfection is impossible is based on the assumption that perfection requires an external component of evaluation. The problem with the duty-based definition above is that it evaluated the agent based on the agent's actions, which led us to the conclusion that the agent must always do the best (supererogation). The requirement of 'doing the best' led us to a consequentialist definition of perfection, which required a maximizing view of value. Both duty- and results-based definitions required an external evaluation of the agent. An internal evaluation of the agent comes from a virtue-based system. Here, an agent is morally perfect based on the state of their character along with any other relevant internal features. While actions and results of actions and/or traits are relevant to virtue ethics, they are not what is primarily important, and they are not the means by which we evaluate the moral status of the agent. On an internal evaluative account, it would be irrelevant to evaluate an agent based

on his actions, or the consequences of his actions, since his actions are mostly the by-product of his character. The actions are important, but important as an indicator of the internal state. In other words, an internal account would say if an agent is good, the actions will, for the most part, also be good (or right), but an externalist will say that if the actions are good, then we can confirm that the agent is good.

Again, it appears as though the final definition we evaluated required that both internal and external conditions of the agent be met. But I'm not sure why both are needed. It seems that with an external requirement, we will inevitably be forced to deal with problems associated with supererogation and maximization. And as we've seen, if moral perfection requires an agent to always do his best, or to always maximize goodness, then moral perfection is an impossibility. But perhaps our problem isn't with the concept of moral perfection, but rather with conceiving of moral perfection according to externalist requirements.[41]

Another way to think about this issue is through the quantitative/qualitative distinction. When it comes to evaluating goodness, internal accounts are more apt to use qualitative methods whereas external accounts, specifically consequentialism, uses quantitative ones. This can be illustrated through the somewhat ridiculous idea of a 'perfect ice-cream cone eater.' To attain this title according to a quantitative view of value, one may merely need to be able to eat the most amount of ice-cream cones.[42] Surely the individual who can eat the most ice-cream cones would be the best ice-cream cone eater. But while the amount of ice-cream cones eaten

[41] According to Hoffman and Rosenkrantz, it is the problems produced by maximization and 'always doing one's best' that "creates considerable doubt about whether or not God's moral perfection can be understood in terms of a consequentialist moral theory' (2002, p. 152).

[42] It could be an indication of a poor example here that I'm not sure how to cash out what it means to be a maximizer when it comes to being a good ice-cream cone eater. Perhaps a rather crass option would 'he who eats the most while vomiting the least'?

is relevant to being the best, according to a qualitative view of perfection, it's not what's most important. What's most important is the *way* the individual eats their ice-cream cone: Do they eat fast or slow? Do they devour it immediately or take time to savor it? Do they eat as much as is possible in each sitting or do they only eat a particular amount based on the consideration of other factors (weight, cost, appearance, etc.)? Is each bite taken without concern for the various flavors or toppings, or are the cookie dough clumps eaten first?

In a quote above, Kant made this distinction about defining the term 'perfection.' "Perfection can be understood as quantitative (material), and thus refers to the *totality* of a thing, or it can be understood as qualitative (formal), referencing 'the harmony of a thing's properties with an *end"* (1797/1991, *MM,* 386). While both Aristotle and Kant were very concerned about actions, in terms of the moral evaluation of the agent, it seems that both preferred a qualitative view. Kant says as much later in the above quote, and we can see it in his view of the good will. While acting according to duty is important and a fitting indicator of right action, acting according to duty without the right intention (that it is what duty requires) results in an action that has no positive moral worth.

It is likely that Aristotle also had this qualitative view of perfection. Paraphrasing Aristotle's discussion of happiness and the function of man, Anthony Kenny says it like this:

> What then is happiness?... It must be a life of reason concerned with action: the activity of the soul in accordance with reason. So the good of man will be his good functioning:

the activity of soul in accordance with virtue. If there are several virtues, it will be in accordance with the best and most perfect virtue (1992, p. 6, *NE,* 1097b22–1098a18).[43]

A man's goodness is determined and recognized through his functioning, and the proper function of man is a life of happiness that is in accord with virtue (the most perfect virtue being something like 'contemplation' or 'understanding'). "If happiness is an activity in accord with virtue, it is reasonable that it would accord with the most excellent virtue, and this would be the virtue belonging to what is best" (c. 4th BC/2011, *NE,* 1177a12–13). A good human is a human that functions as it ought to as a human, just as a good toaster is a toaster that functions as it ought as a toaster. Thus, while quantitative factors matter to Aristotle, it is the quality of life that matters more. For these reasons I have elected to proceed in this thesis under a qualitative and internalist view of moral perfection. This is not to argue that a qualitative and internal view of moral evaluation is superior to a quantitative and/or externalist one, but just that it appears more fitting for a discussion of moral perfection.

If an internalist account of moral evaluation is sufficient for moral perfection, then it appears that either Kant's or Aristotle' view is better fit to explain perfection than a mere duty theory, or a consequentialist one. And as mentioned above, it does seem as Aristotle's view of virtue, in terms of perfection, is superior to Kant's. Thus, I will be moving forward by assuming

[43] It is true that in the context of this passage Aristotle discusses value in quantitative terms: "But, in addition, in a complete life. For one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day. And in this way, one day or a short time does not make someone blessed and happy either" (c. 4th BC/2011, *NE,* 1098a 18-19). The word *complete* here, however, should not be understood necessarily in numerical terms, as in the 'complete number of actions', but rather as Anthony Kenny says, a "…complete life as opposed to a partial or interrupted one" (1992, p. 17). Further, if the context is a good indicator, then the 'perfect' or 'complete' life here should be understood in the more teleological sense of 'final' or 'supreme' (Kenny 1992, p. 17). Further, if 'contemplation' is understood as the most perfect virtue associated with the perfect life, then it too should be understood in terms of 'finality'. Of Aristotle's comments in Book 10 of *NE*, Kenny says of 'contemplation': "it is the best activity, most continuous and durable, the pleasantest; the most self-sufficient; it is loved for its own sake, and therefore perfect in the sense of final" (1992, p. 19, *NE,* 1177a19–b24).

an Aristotelian, or neo-Aristotelian, view of perfection. I'm not saying at this point that an Aristotelian virtue account can explain moral perfection, but only that it appears to be the only possible candidate. It could be the case that there are problems related to virtue ethics as a system that prevent it from being able to explain moral perfection. I'll take up these issues in the next chapter.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided various proposals for a definition of moral perfection. I determined that a duty-based proposal is unfit to explain moral perfection in that it doesn't provide enough conditions or requirements for moral evaluation. A consequentialist explanation of perfection also fails to give a plausible explanation of a morally perfect agent since issues with the maximization principle seem especially problematic for an explanation of moral perfection. I have concluded that only from a virtue ethics viewpoint can we have a possibility of pursuing a satisfactory account of moral perfection. I have further elected to follow a more Aristotelian conception of virtue, rather than a Kantian one. In the following chapter I will elaborate a bit more on this conception of virtue and what it entails. I will also attempt to determine if such of view of perfection is possible, and if not, examine if there is an alternative view that preserves the doctrine of heaven.

Chapter 3. The Possibility of Perfection

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I evaluated various ways we might think of moral perfection. I attempted to show that mere deontic and consequentialist accounts were ill-equipped to explain moral perfection, but that Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian views provide a plausible normative framework for perfection. In addition to this task, the previous chapter also examined various arguments for the impossibility of moral perfection. Ultimately, I tried to show that these problems disappear if perfection is seen from a virtue ethics position. In the current chapter I would like to examine one further argument for the impossibility of moral perfection. First, I need to clarify what I mean by 'moral perfection,' along with specifying its relationship to the notions of 'impeccability' and 'perfect virtue.'

The doctrine of impeccability has either been explicitly or implicitly affirmed by theists through history; more specifically, the doctrine that human agents in heaven are impeccable has been a staple of Christian orthodoxy. Whatever else a theory of impeccability assumes about the moral life of heavenly agents, it seems to assume something about the type of actions possible for such agents, and as I will argue below, the quality of their moral characters. I tried to show in chapter 1 that the characters of heavenly agents must be in some way very similar to Christ's own. Now if we say that the status of 'impeccable' must be attained by heavenly agents, and if being impeccable implies having a character similar or identical to that of Christ's, and Christ had/has a morally perfect character, then it follows that heavenly (impeccable) agents must also have morally perfect characters. Having a morally perfect

character implies being a perfectly virtuous agent (I will be using these interchangeably). Michael Slote, however, has recently developed an argument that he believes demonstrates the impossibility of perfect virtue (2011). Assuming Slote's argument is successful, a theory of impeccability that relies on the possibility of perfect virtue would be greatly harmed, even to the point of incoherence. However, it may be the case that having an impeccable character does not entail a perfectly virtuous one; if so, then even if moral perfection is impossible, impeccability may not be. In what follows, I will elaborate on a few necessary features of the doctrine of impeccability, then attempt to define moral perfection while providing an analysis of Slote's argument, and finally offer various responses I believe are available to the theist.

3.2 Deontic and virtue conditions

A common theme among authors who have written about the moral lives of heavenly agents is to confine such discussions to the topic of right actions. This focus on the right, appropriate, or moral acts of those in heaven makes sense given the basic biblical and theological agreement in the history of Christendom that heaven is an environment in which there is no sin or evil, and that an at least partial explanation for this lack of evil is that heavenly agents cannot sin. Recall from chapter 1 Augustine's argument that, in contrast to Adam and Eve's ability to sin in the garden, heavenly agents will have an inability to sin in heaven: "For the first free will which was given to humanity when it was created upright, gave not just the ability not to sin, but also the ability to sin. This new freedom is all the more powerful precisely because it will not have power to sin" (c. 5th AD/1998, *CG,* XXII.xxx.3). And again, Gaine claims "the traditional Christian answer is that the blessed cannot sin, cannot want to sin, but instead are impeccable" (2003, p.

2).[44] Now there may be some that are slightly bewildered by Gaine's use of the term 'impeccable' here, and this bewilderment is likely motivated by the fact that 'impeccability' usually appears in the literature in the context of God's nature, and thus, understood as a property, is something like 'essential sinlessness' (Morris 1983; Carter 1985). Given that the context of this paper concerns the moral character of contingently-existing agents that have all had 'sinful natures' at one point in their existence, the modality attached to 'sinlessness' here is not going to be the same. Therefore, the *cannot* in 'cannot sin' should be understood in a causal or temporal sense of modality, rather than a metaphysical sense. The property of 'impeccability' is a contingently accessed property (for contingent agents) that, once attained, renders acts of sin/immorality impossible.[45]

Also mentioned in chapter 1, it appears to be a point of orthodoxy (or perhaps tradition) to affirm that no heavenly agent will ever be removed from heaven as a result of 'unheavenly acts.'[46] If this is so, it is natural to assume from Christian tradition that no heavenly agent will

[44] Also see Rev. 21:4, NASB.

[45] The sense of 'impeccability' that I am assuming here is something like a psychological constraint that, given the character of the agent, makes certain actions impossible for him/her.
This sense of impeccability is actually very similar to the sense that Nelson Pike attributes to God. According to Pike, "'God cannot sin' might mean that although the individual that is God (Yahweh) has the ability (i.e., the creative power necessary) to bring about states of affairs the production of which would be morally reprehensible, His nature or character is such as to provide material assurance that He will not act in this way … the individual that is God (Yahweh) is of such character that he cannot bring himself to act in a morally reprehensible way. God is strongly disposed to perform only morally acceptable actions" (Pike 1969, p. 215).

[46] Someone may object to this conception of heavenly agents (that they cannot sin and/or be removed from heaven) given the position in Christian history that a number of angelic agents once sinned and were therefore expelled from heaven. In response to this objection, it's important to note the many conceptions of 'heaven' that occur both within the Bible and in Christian theology (new heaven and new earth, throne room, beatific vision, the sky, etc.); with this in mind, I want to say that this objection equivocates in its comparison of the initial *state* of the angels who sinned, and the *state* that redeemed humans will one day experience. In other words, I don't think it is a violation of Christian orthodoxy to claim that there was a point in angelic history in which the angels were not impeccable, even if those angels that did not 'fall' are now appropriately described as impeccable. For an account on how/why the impeccable angels presently 'in heaven' (assuming they are impeccable) have not always been impeccable, see Anselm (1998), p. 177, p. 203. Also, for a minority position concerning the possibility of being removed from heaven, see Donnelly (1985).

ever sin or perform a morally blameworthy act that qualifies as 'sin.' Since the status of 'impeccable' refers to the moral feature of heavenly agents, and since heavenly agents will remain in heaven perpetually, we can say that to be an impeccable agent requires a deontic component that once attained, remains necessarily. Thus, only those actions deemed right or permissible are possible for such agents; acts that are deemed wrong or impermissible are impossible for such agents.

I would like, at this point, to propose the notion that impeccability has more than just a deontic component. Typically, definitions of 'impeccability' are exhausted by the modal descriptions I mentioned above ('an inability to sin' or 'essential sinlessness') and are thus confined to discussions of obligation, permissibility, and forbidden acts. However, I want to argue that impeccability implies a virtue component along with the deontic.

One reason I think a character component is implied by impeccability is that we are applying it to rational, intelligent agents that have the capacity for empathy. To be sure, the term 'impeccable' can refer to things that are not sentient or biological. My toaster *functions* impeccably in that it never malfunctions; though when it begins to function improperly, it no longer functions impeccably. So, while we could speak of my toaster as having various virtues (as a toaster), it is still not an agent, and therefore *character* virtues don't apply. But to talk of a rational agent that is impeccable, it seems we are also, perhaps indirectly, saying something about the agent's character. For assuming the agent has a cognitive mechanism that functions at least moderately well, and assuming the agent is in some way free to make his own choices, being impeccable seems to require some type of explanation—it seems conceivable that at

least a partial explanation for this inability to sin is that his character constrains him in some way.

Another reason why I think virtue is relevant for impeccability is derived from the fact that numerous biblical figures appeared to believe that character was just as relevant to an agent's moral life as were his or her actions. Christ makes the point that actions are not the only litmus test for praise or blame, but character is also important.[4] Hating someone confers just as much blame as actually committing the act of murder, and lusting after someone that is not your spouse is just as bad as going through with the act of adultery. Here Christ seems to be implying that one can be guilty of sin without performing any overt actions, and that the guilt is based on one's internal disposition, or character. Also, in many of Paul's letters, the apostle seems to be arguing that a successful or godly moral life requires growth in virtue (Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 4:2-3; Col. 3:12-13, NASB). While Christ's point doesn't give explicit consent to the inference from 'having an inability to sin' to 'having a virtuous character,' his point does seem to allow the inference from 'having an inability to sin' to 'having an inability to be disposed to sin.' And while Paul does not explicitly state that heavenly agents will be admirably virtuous agents, he does imply that a godly or holy individual will also be a virtuous one.

A final reason I have for believing that impeccability implies a virtue component is that church history seems to support the idea. There are some within Christendom that have argued that there will be a 'maturing' or 'completing' in heaven of what is lacking in the characters of the human agents. Aquinas, for instance, seemed to argue that once man experiences the divine light or vision (in heaven), his desire to manage his lower self according to reason is truly fulfilled, enabling the agent to live completely according to virtue.

> Indeed, this desire is chiefly for this end, that the entire life of man may be arranged in accord with reason, for this is to live in accord with virtue. For the end of the activity of every virtuous man is the good appropriate to his virtue, just as, for the brave man, it is to act bravely. Now, this desire will then be completely fulfilled, since reason will be at its peak strength, having been enlightened by the divine light, so that it cannot swerve away from what is right (c. 13th/1956, *SCG,* 3.63.3).

Augustine also appeared to support the idea that heavenly agents will be virtuous, arguing that virtue will finally have success or victory over vice once the redeemed enter the final beatitude: "the virtues will not be called upon to strive against any vice or evil whatsoever. Rather, they will possess the prize of victory: the eternal peace which no adversary can disturb. This is our final happiness, our last perfection, a consummation which will have no end" (c. 5th AD/1998, *CG,* XIX.x).

Thus, while the term 'impeccability' may not explicitly say anything about the virtue component of morality, as it has typically been used, I do think I have warrant to treat the term as though it implicitly involves a virtue feature. And while it is fairly straightforward to say what the deontic condition amounts to (an inability to sin), the virtue or 'heavenly character' component may be a bit more difficult. The reason for the difficulty lies in certain tensions among virtue theorists as to the appropriate way to understand the 'virtues,' and how such virtues are attained and then expressed in actions. In what follows I would like to continue my description of the Aristotelian conception of virtue I began in the previous chapter.

3.3 Virtue, Character, and Perfection

It is a staple of Aristotelian ethics that agents *become* virtuous through education, practice, and habituation; if an agent is to have a morally virtuous character, he needs to develop that character through education and repetition of right actions. Becoming a virtuous agent takes discipline, effort, and more importantly, time.

With regard to the nature of an agent's character, I follow Robert Audi in defining a moral character as "an interconnected set of traits, such as honesty, fairness, and fidelity, which, in turn, are largely deep-seated dispositions to do certain things for an appropriate range of reasons" (1997, p. 160).[47] An agent's character is understood as the particular traits the agent possesses, and the relationship that those traits stand in to one another. A trait of character is "like a state of being, something that both persists over time and does not entail change, at least not in the way the occurrence of events does" (1997, p. 160). Traits can be attained, retained, and/or lost, and as Audi says, the traits act like dispositional states that orient the agent to particular actions when the agent is in relevant scenarios. Traits, it seems, can also range in the 'deepness' of the character of the agent as a whole. Those traits that are deepest raise the probability that the agent will act according to the trait when the agent has the opportunities; less deep traits lower the probability of whether the agent will act according to the trait when given the opportunity. Someone who has an especially deep-seated trait of honesty will find it very difficult to lie when he is given the opportunity, whereas someone with a slightly deep- or moderately-seated trait of honesty will find it much easier to deceive if given the opportunity. It does seem as though Audi agrees with Aristotle and Kant that traits must be

[47] While Audi doesn't explicitly claim an Aristotelian position on virtue, his positions is consistent with Aristotle's.

fairly stable, meaning that once a trait or disposition is acquired into one's character, that trait will persist there for some time. Audi says "it is useful to think of the relevant traits as constituted by fairly stable and normally long-standing wants and beliefs – or at least by beliefs, provided they carry sufficient motivation…If it is a trait, it must have a measure of stability" (1997, p. 162).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, an agent can count as 'virtuous' even if they fail to act according to virtue in particular situations. And while character traits can range in deepness, the agent can still truly be said to possess the trait of honesty, even if the trait is only moderately deep; however, it is the deep-seated traits that ultimately determine what kind of 'person' the agent is. Those traits which are more deep-seated are those that are more closely identified with the actual person, for the actions the agent performs will more often match up with ones of the corresponding deep-seated traits. Further, it is through actions that an agent raises or lowers the depth of their traits, and thus become more honest or kind or whatever. It is through this process that an agent can modify or 'reconstruct' their character.

> A normal goal of such moral self-reconstruction as there is, is to retain some trait, say benevolence, and seek to strengthen it and to subordinate certain new traits to it. This subordination is largely a matter of becoming such that one does not tend to act from the subordinate traits unless the actions in question are consonant with maintaining the governing trait. Such subordination would be required for successful, morally motivated self-reconstruction(1997, p. 160).[48]

[48] It is not clear here how complex the hierarchy of particular traits needs to be for any character, whether there are many levels of possible depth, or just two: the first (governing) and the second (subordinate). For what follows, I will assume there are only these two.

So with regard to the governance of traits, those deepest situated into the character of the individual will likely have subordinate traits which also influence actions. These subordinate traits, it seems, will be harder for the agent to act from if the subordinate trait is inconsistent with the governing trait. If I have a governing trait of honesty and a subordinate trait of fidelity, it will not be difficult for me to treat people fairly in ways that don't require deception. However, say my subordinate trait is selfishness rather than fidelity, and I am in a scenario in which I can further my own goals at the expense of someone else simply by telling a lie: in such a scenario I will likely have to forgo my own selfish ends by acting in a way that is not deceptive. It also seems possible that an agent could have governing traits which influence the agent in two seemingly contradictory directions. Perhaps the agent has the governing traits of selfishness and fortitude; such a combination would likely produce indecision in the agent who is presented with a choice to perform an action which requires great courage but would also cause the agent a sizable amount of personal harm.

Now assuming someone desires to become a moral personal overall, such development would require that all the agent's governing traits be (i) consistent with each other, and (ii) all of the virtuous nature. I am not sure if becoming an overall moral person would require that all subordinate traits be of the virtuous nature, since the governing trait is that which is more a part of the agent, and thus provides the strongest influence over their desires, beliefs, and actions. However, I will assume for what follows that a moral person overall is one with only virtuous traits at the governing and subordinate levels. To produce such a character, the agent would have to repetitively act according to their virtuous traits, while abstaining from actions that accord with their more vicious traits. The idea is that the actions that correspond to a trait

become easier the more the agent acts according to the trait rather than contrary to it. Thus, in theory, the more the agent acts according to her virtue, the more virtuous the agent will become.

With this view of the virtues in mind, there are two relevant issues for the purpose of this chapter concerning the proper conception of a perfectly virtuous character: (i) the broadness of the virtues, and (ii) the relationship between virtues and action. Each of these issues concern the character of the morally perfect agent and the necessary level of depth that perfection requires. Now there has been much controversy among virtue theorists as to whether or not the virtues should be understood as 'broad' or 'narrow.'[49] A broad conception of the virtues implies that for any given virtue, if an agent has the virtue, then the virtue is relevant or applicable *cross-situationally*. In other words, if the agent has the virtue 'courage,' then the agent has the ability to act courageously across any and all situations the agent could possibly find himself in. A narrow conception, on the other hand, implies less applicability of virtue exemplification. To have the virtue 'courage' narrowly, typically implies the application or expression of courage in a certain set of circumstances; this 'set' is usually understood as the circumstances that the agent is well acquainted with, or at least not far off from the agent's 'normal' array of circumstances.

[49] On the issue of 'broadness' vs 'narrowness,' see Harman (1999), Doris (2002), and Kamtekar (2004). According to Kamtekar, broad-based dispositions are "dispositions to behave in distinctive ways across a range of situations", whereas narrow-based dispositions are those that are "quite stable, since behavior in situations that are very like one another is quite consistent." A notable difference here is the behavior that issues from narrow-based dispositions in contrast to the behavior that issues from broad-based dispositions; such behavior "is consistent in very similar situations but not across the range of what would be thought to be trait-relevant-behavior-eliciting situations" (Kamtekar 2004, p. 460 & 468).

The other relevant issue concerns the relationship between the virtues as traits, and the actions that follow from those traits. The important question is, for any acquired virtue, what is the likelihood of expressing that virtue in action, assuming the expression of the virtue is appropriate in the particular circumstance? If Mike has the virtue 'courage' and he is in a situation in which acting courageously is appropriate, how confident can we be that Mike will act courageously?[50] Again, there are two relevant positions a virtue theorist may take on the question. Those who have a particularly robust conception of the virtues will say that if Mike has the virtue 'courage', and Mike is in a situation in which acting courageously is appropriate, then necessarily, Mike will act courageously (assuming nothing external to Mike prevents him).[51] A more moderate position will say that if Mike has the virtue courage, and he is in a courage-appropriate scenario, then Mike will *probably* or *likely* act courageously (assuming nothing external prevents him). Thus, the issue is whether virtuous action necessarily follows from a virtue trait, or whether it probabilistically follows from a virtue trait.

[50] This idea of the relationship between virtuous traits and the actions that should follow from such traits is hinted at in a series of question by Robert Adams: "We can certainly agree that virtues must be pretty effective in shaping the way one lives, and pretty durable, apt to last, in normal conditions, for quite a period of time. But how robust, how effective and how durable must they be? Must their strength be so great as to put them beyond the reach of luck and render them invincible in confrontation with temptation or adversity? Must their operation be uninfluenced by morally irrelevant contingencies? And how versatile, how adaptable, must they be? Must they fit a person for living admirably in every possible situation?" (Adams 2008, p. 156).

[51] Thanks to Iain Law for reminding me that while this position may be adopted by some writers, it is still something like a minority position in virtue ethics. Among those who allude to this conception of the virtues, even if they themselves do not endorse it, see Doris (2002) and McDowell (1979). For instance, Doris claims this conception of virtue understands that "genuinely virtuous action proceeds from 'firm and unchangeable character' rather than from transient motives" and that the "presence of virtue is supposed to provide assurance as to what will get done as well as what won't" (Doris 2002, p. 17). Also, McDowell claims that "a genuine virtue is to produce nothing but right conduct" (McDowell 1979, p. 333). This 'nothing but' seems to preclude the possibility of wrong conduct.

I will be assuming that moral perfection implies a strong conception of the virtues: the virtues should be understood broadly, and virtuous action should be understood to follow necessarily from virtuous traits. For any agent that has all the relevant virtues for a heavenly character (whichever virtues those may be) and has them strongly according to broadness and action-necessitation, such an agent should be understood as 'perfectly virtuous' or 'morally perfect.'

This conception of moral perfection appears to be consistent with that of Aristotle's that I mentioned in the previous chapter. Being perfectly moral or virtuous implies that the agent has all relevant virtues for perfection and has them so strongly or deeply that acting contrary to virtue becomes impossible. This view of perfection also seems to be adopted by numerous theistic philosophers in their own defense or explanation of the heavenly character of an impeccable agent, and while these authors don't use the terminology of 'broad vs narrow' and 'strong vs moderate' in reference to heavenly characters, I do think it's clear that they support the moral perfection of heavenly agents, and thus the strong conception I am assuming here. For instance, some authors abstain from articulating the particulars of the heavenly character, but yet still refer to such agents as 'morally perfect' (Wall 1977, p. 353; Brown 1985, p. 447). Others, however, are a bit clearer on the implications of being morally perfect. Sennett, for instance, provides an explanation of moral perfection that coheres well with my description.

> In theistic circles life on earth is often viewed as a proving and training ground for life in heaven. The choices made for good or evil are directly relevant to the eternal destinies they determine for us. As we form our characters, we set our spiritual compass for that location in which the lives we desire for ourselves are most fully

> and naturally realized. Furthermore, for those who 'choose life,' earthly living is a time of training and honing of our benevolent and aretaic skills, so that upon entering heaven we are prepared for a life of compatibilist moral perfection, where our very natures compel us to choose only the good – infallibly and freely. Such a state is attainable, but only if we choose, free from any compulsion, to develop that character that will guarantee such a state (1999, p. 78).

Notice that it is the virtuous skills or character, determined freely by agents prior to heaven, that preclude the possibility of acting (or desiring) contrary to the good. Also, since such a character is formed prior to heaven, it seems to imply that the dispositions for virtue should be understood broadly; that is, such an agent should behave virtuously in any context. Swinburne argues in a similar way when he claims that God sends agents to heaven *because* they have already fitted themselves for such an environment: "For heaven is the community of those who live in the right way and get happiness out of it because they want to live in the right way. By pursuit of the good they have so molded themselves that they desire to do the good. So the answer why God would send the men of natural good will and true belief to heaven is that they are fitted for it" (Swinburne 1983, p. 45).[52]

Given that there are at least some that seem to endorse the notion of 'perfection' as a description of the heavenly agent, I would like to begin my assessment of moral perfection by

[52] For other authors that appear to support my conception of 'perfect virtue', see Walls (2002), and Pawl and Timpe (2009). For instance, Jerry Walls speaks of a complete 'holiness' or 'sanctification' that must take place in order for heavenly agents to be fittingly prepared for the glory of heaven; further, this 'completeness' seems to preclude the possibility of any sin: "This transformation, when it is complete, will be so thorough that we will know with full clarity and profound certainty that God is the source of happiness and sin is the source of misery. Through numerous experiences of progressive trust and obedience, this truth will have so worked through our character that sin will have lost all appeal for us. The illusory notion that we can promote our well being by disobeying God will be so entirely shattered that sin will be a psychological impossibility for us" (Walls 2002, p. 61).

assuming that an impeccable agent must also be a perfect agent. So, under the virtue condition for impeccability, the agent not only will be unable to perform acts of sin or evil, the agent's character will be so virtuous that he or she will be unable to form the desire, motivation, and intention to perform acts of sin or evil.

3.4 Moral Perfection is Impossible

Obviously, if it could be shown that the virtue condition was impossible to attain, it would be a major problem for the doctrine of impeccability. Michael Slote has recently attempted to provide an argument that aims at demonstrating this exact end, that perfect virtue is an impossibility (2011). Slote's primary reason for claiming that perfect virtue is impossible is that the relevant virtues for perfection, or at least some of them, are actually partial virtues. However, so the argument goes, if even some of the relevant virtues for perfection are partial virtues, then the status of 'perfectly virtuous' is impossible to attain. In what follows, I will elaborate on Slote's argument, then finish with a few responses.

Whatever else is implied by a perfectly virtuous agent, Slote appears to assume the bare minimum for perfection entails that the agent:

1) Has all the virtues, whether independently or dependently, and,
2) None of the virtues are partial virtues.[53]

[53] For clarity's sake, it's important to highlight the distinctions between the conditions of perfect virtue that I mentioned earlier, and those that Slote discusses. The conception of perfect virtue I'm working from implies 'broadness' and 'action-necessitation' whereas Slote doesn't mention either of these qualities. However, once the notion of 'partial virtues' is defined below, I think it will be clearer that his conception and mine are both assumed by the other.

Given that the first claim implies a weighty and lengthy discussion into the area of the 'unity thesis,' Slote spends very little time discussing it; the bulk of his book is spent on arguing for the second claim. Whether Slote is successful or not at proving his second claim, I don't think his assumption that the first claim is necessary for perfect virtue is problematic, even if it's somewhat controversial. It's obvious that philosophers have disagreed about a number of issues related to this claim: *How many virtues are there? Which virtues should be understood as moral rather than intellectual? Does the acquisition of one virtue assume or entail the acquisition of more virtues (or all the virtues)?* I don't think, however, that these questions need to be answered decisively for the purpose of determining the possibility of perfection. Slote avoids the controversy of the unity thesis given his position on 'dependency' in the first claim; this just leaves the issue of the number and particulars of the actual virtues. This also doesn't seem to be a problem for Slote, for he could easily amend his first claim to say: 'Has all the *relevant* virtues for *perfection*, whether independently or dependently.' Such a modification seems innocent enough, and it also makes the claim much less controversial. Therefore, I will spend the rest of my analysis of Slote by focusing on what he says about his second claim.

Partial virtues for Slote are virtues that are naturally opposed to one another; such opposition implies that acting on one virtue, in some scenarios, would entail compromising or acting contrary to another virtue (2011, pp. 28-35). Further, acting contrary to, or failing to express a virtue (in action) *when that virtue's expression is appropriate*, confers some amount of moral blame upon the agent (2011, p. 31). So if there is an agent out there who is thought to have all the virtues, and to have them as completely as possible, and assuming that some of these virtues are partial virtues, we get the conclusion that there is always the possibility that

this agent would find himself in a scenario in which acting rightly or appropriately in accordance with one virtue would entail the acting against or contrary to another virtue that is also appropriate or right for that scenario. In such an event, it is impossible for the agent to emerge morally unscathed; it would be necessarily *appropriate* that the agent have some moral regret (even if he doesn't), regardless of the virtue according to which he acts.

The two virtues that Slote believes are the best candidates for partial virtues are frankness (honesty) and tactfulness (kindness). Slote's thought experiment involves friend *A* asking friend *B* for advice about a personal matter in *A*'s life. In the example, being a good friend to *A* entails that *B* respond with either frankness (honesty) or tactfulness (kindness):

> Imagine that you have a friend who is always getting himself into abusive relationships that eventually turn sour and become intolerable for him … So imagine further that your friend comes to you after his latest relationship has broken up and deplores the awful bad luck (as he puts it) that has led him once again into an unhappy and unsuccessful relationship. But he has no idea how abusively he has been treated (in this relationship or the others) and simply asks you, implores you, to tell him why you think this sort of thing is always happening to him … Well, since he is imploring you to tell him what you think, you might (once again) be frank with him and explain the role he himself plays in bringing about these disasters (e.g., by accepting abuse, from the start, in the relationships he enters into) … But you have every reason to believe (let's assume) that if you say this to him, it won't really register with him or make any difference to his future behavior; whereas, *if you just commiserate with him and say that you don't understand how he can be so unlucky,* he will feel much relieved or consoled by what he

takes (or would like to take) to be your understandingness and what is clearly your sympathy vis-à-vis his situation (2011, p. 30).

In this scenario, responding with frankness would probably be good for *A* in the long term, but will just as likely cause *A* to experience emotional pain in the short term. Responding with tactfulness will likely cause *A* a small amount temporary peace but will probably be bad for him in long run. According to Slote, in such a scenario, acting according to honesty or kindness would be ethically problematic for *B*. As Slote says, "these two qualities are paired opposites, and in some situations where they clash [such as this one], acting on either one of them will be ethically less than ideal" (2011, p. 31).

Now if these two virtues, or any other pair, are naturally opposed to one another, such that there exist possible scenarios in which acting kindly would entail being dishonest, or vice versa, then it seems as though no agent (even God) could possess both virtues perfectly. Now if impeccability entails a perfectly virtuous character (and at this point, I'm not saying it does), and assuming that heavenly agents are also impeccable agents, then the impossibility of a perfectly virtuous character would necessarily lead to the incoherence of the notion of a heavenly agent. We can state the problem more formally as follows:

1) A heavenly agent is an impeccable agent.
2) Impeccable agents are agents that (i) cannot sin, and (ii) have a heavenly character.
3) A heavenly character entails a perfectly virtuous character.
4) A perfectly virtuous character is possible iff (i) all the relevant virtues are acquired, and (ii) none of relevant virtues are partial virtues.
5) But some of the relevant virtues for a perfectly virtuous character are partial virtues.

6) Thus, a perfectly virtuous character is impossible.

7) Thus, a heavenly-type character is impossible.

8) Thus, impeccable agents cannot exist.

9) Thus, a heavenly agent cannot exist.

Premises (1) and (2) appear to be uncontroversial, for as I mentioned in the introduction, it seems a widely embraced feature of Christian orthodoxy that the agents in heaven will be impeccable; further, the property *impeccableness* implies (if not entails) that an agent with the property cannot sin (deontic condition) and will have a fairly virtuous character. I have chosen to leave the term 'heavenly character' vague for premise (2), for the purpose of keeping (2) uncontroversial. That is, I want to leave the question of the degree or kind of 'virtuousness' of character for an impeccable agent open until premise (3). Premises (3) – (5) are those I take to be more controversial. Up to this point, I have not really argued for (3) beyond mentioning that other theists have argued that heavenly agents should be understood as perfectly virtuous. Together, (4) and (5) are Slote's basic thesis, a thesis at this point that is far from obvious.

3.5 Moral Perfection is Possible

As far as I can see, the theist who wants to affirm the impeccability of the saints in heaven has three options for responding to the previous argument. First, one might attempt to undercut premise (5) by arguing that Slote has not sufficiently demonstrated that the relevant virtues for the notion of perfection are actually partial virtues. Second, one may argue that (4) is false by showing that a perfectly virtuous character is possible even if some of the relevant virtues conflict. One way to do this would be to acknowledge that such scenarios as Slote

envisions are possible, but to deny that an agent in such a scenario would be required to act in a way that confers moral blame, guilt, or sin. Finally, one might take the more extreme route and argue that (3) is false, that a heavenly character does not entail a perfectly virtuous character. This final option amounts to the admission that scenarios such as Slote's are possible, that partial virtues may exist and that an agent in such a circumstance might be required to act in a way that confers moral blame on him or her, but deny that the possibility of such scenarios (and the possibility of moral blame that accompanies it) causing any problems for the notion of impeccability or the heavenly character of the saints in heaven. I will discuss each of these options in turn.

Option 1

The first option open to the theist is to deny that partial virtues exist by arguing that Slote has not been fully successful at showing that circumstances in which virtues necessarily conflict are possible. Slote himself acknowledges that most Aristotelian virtue theorists would reject his claim that the tact/truth scenario involves more than one appropriate response to A. According to Slote, "Aristotelians want to say that whenever there is a choice between tact and frankness, there is a *right* choice in the matter, a choice not open to moral or ethical criticism. On their view (and speaking rather roughly), frankness and tact never clash *as virtues*" (2011, p. 41). One way to do this, for the Aristotelian, is to argue that in scenarios in which apparent conflict occurs among virtues, there is always one virtue that takes priority over the other; thus, acting from one virtue over the other would not produce any moral reproach, blame, or criticism. So, for instance, if there is a scenario in which acting mercifully and acting justly cannot both occur,

acting justly may trump showing mercy. If so, then acting justly does not show that one is not perfectly merciful, and it does not indicate one is acting contrary to mercy; acting justly simply means showing mercy is not *appropriate* in that scenario (Slote 2011, p. 42).

Slote's response to this point is that "putative virtues like tact and frankness are not as well behaved as the Aristotelian picture of the virtues assumes" (2011, p. 42) and that the scenario involving an apparent conflict between justice and mercy is not like the scenario he describes between tact and honesty. So Slote is willing to acknowledge that in a situation involving other virtues, say justice and mercy, claiming that justice 'trumps' mercy is not the same as claiming that acting justly requires acting unmercifully, and thus there is no real conflict between the two virtues. In the scenario with tact and honesty, however, Slote claims there is no-one right response, no-one path required by virtue; thus, necessarily, whichever path is chosen, the agent will come away 'morally compromised.'

In his response to Aristotelians, it seems that Slote assumes that there is a fundamental difference in quality or value between the virtues of mercy and justice on the one hand, and honesty and kindness on the other. The distinction seems evident based on his faith that scenarios like that with honesty and kindness are possibly not duplicatable for the virtues of mercy and justice.[54] Perhaps it's not the quality or value between mercy/justice and honesty/kindness that Slote believes produces the significant difference, but the nature of the relation between mercy and justice and the relation between honesty and kindness. Either way,

[54] Slote does mention in a footnote that scenarios like that of the tact/truth example may be conceivable for the virtues of mercy and justice; however, he is hesitant to qualify mercy and justice as partial virtues since he has been unable as yet to think of a situation involving conflict between mercy and justice that is sufficiently similar to the situation involving tactfulness and truthfulness.

it does seem that Slote needs to demonstrate why the virtues of justice and mercy, or the relation between them, are so different than the virtues of honesty and kindness, or the relation between them. If Slote can't showcase such a meaningful and relevant distinction, then it seems an Aristotelian can simply ignore his objection as unproven. The Aristotelian can do this by arguing that, just as there is a trump card in conflicting situations between justice and mercy (sometimes it's justice, sometimes it's mercy), perhaps seeming conflicts with honesty and kindness function in the same way.

It is possible, however, that the Aristotelian will feel differently here about who has the burden of proof in demonstrating meaningful distinctions about the relationship between the mentioned virtues. It may be that Slote would simply respond that his example of the tact/honesty scenario is sufficient to show a meaningful difference, and that any claim otherwise needs to be followed with an argument. Though I disagree that Slote's objector has the burden of proof here, let's assume that Slote is right, and thus the theist needs to look elsewhere for a response to the earlier argument; perhaps Option 2 will provide a stronger reply to Slote.

Option 2

It's important at this point to remember the implications of partial virtues; they are a duet of virtues whose natural opposition to each other leads to the possibility of circumstances in which acting from both virtues is appropriate (or called for) but impossible, and that acting contrary to one of the virtues in such a circumstance produces moral blame for the agent. With this in mind, the next option for the theist is to acknowledge that Slote is correct, that there is

an actual conflict and no one-right option available to the agent in question, but deny that acting contrary to honesty or kindness (or any other virtue) should confer moral blame on the agent. According to A.D.M. Walker, it may be true that scenarios like Slote's which involve apparent conflict between tact and honesty, actually are occasions in which there is not only one appropriate response. Perhaps, there are scenarios that call for truthful and tactful responses, and one must choose which virtue to respond with, or act according to whichever virtue is dominant. In cases such as these, Walker believes that the tactful can act kindly while regretting the evasion of being completely honest, and the frank agent can be truthful while regretting causing pain, and both will be morally admirable and not criticizable (2006).

Slote, however, is not willing to permit the emotional response of regret into the inventory of responses for a perfectly virtuous agent (putting him in agreement with Conee and Graves). Or as he says, "the fact that Walker thinks the tactful person has reason to regret not having been frank or open and the open person reason to regret having to cause distress should give us pause with Walker's conclusions" (2011, p. 58). Perhaps the occurrence of regret, in and of itself, is not a reason to qualify an agent as being less than admirable; however, Slote's point is that if the occurrence of regret 'rises to an explicitly ethical level,' then there is reason to think the agent experiencing such regret has acted less than ethically optimal. Slote believes his example of tact/truthfulness is such an example.

So again, Walker does not seem to be denying that such scenarios in which Slote describes are possible, that there are possible scenarios in which virtues conflict; further, Walker agrees that such scenarios may require the agent to act in a way that is regrettable. However, Walker does not agree that such scenarios require the virtuous agent to act in a way

that confers moral blame when they are forced to act contrary to a given virtue, even though the agent does have regret for acting contrary to the particular virtue. So, Walker does not think such scenarios demonstrate that an agent is acting in a less than perfectly virtuous way. Slote, on the other hand, seems to think regret implies blame, and that the occurrence of regret as a response indicates that the agent is blameworthy and thus less than perfectly virtuous.

I find myself wanting to agree with Slote, that if the agent feels regret in his or her choice to perform a given action, then the agent is blameworthy or criticizable in some morally relevant way. This seems plausible to me, but only under a couple conditions. First, as Slote seems to affirm, the 'regret' that the agent experiences must have *risen* to the ethical level of 'remorse' or 'self-reproach' (Williams 2006, p. 196). In other words, the agent who feels regret, must also have remorse for failing to perform an obligatory act; he must 'blame' himself for his failure. This is important to point out because the emotional response or attitude of regret, by itself, is not really a moral attitude (Williams 2006, p. 196). It's possible to regret a host of occurrences without any of them having much to do with the moral notion of obligation. I can regret the temperature level, the truth of the current president, or the fact that I've had few opportunities to increase the aesthetics of my home; however, none of these have much moral significance for particular actions I ought to have performed. Further, Slote does not actually specify here what conditions must be in place for a response of regret to rise to an explicitly ethical level, though perhaps he does elsewhere. The point is that a defender of moral perfection, Walker perhaps, could argue that the regret the agent experiences is not the type that rises to an ethical level, even though the regret is experienced in response to a morally

related choice. Perhaps the agent doesn't regret the choice that is made but the circumstance that required him to make the choice.

Second, the regret that has risen to the ethical level of remorse or guilt must be the *appropriate* emotional response to the agent's choice. Simply experiencing regret or remorse about a particular action, or the results of an action, doesn't mean such feelings *should* be experienced in any kind of moral sense. So a theist might respond to both Slote and Walker that an agent who has to choose tactfulness over honesty may have nothing to regret. Robert Adams speaks about the importance of discretion, tact, and even keeping secrets as being an "unrivaled value in human communication" (2008, pp. 128-129); because such things as discretion and secret keeping are so important for healthy social living, it may be appropriate and perhaps morally obligatory to tell lies or withhold facts at times. Adams feels like this is a commonly accepted feature of human experience that few would contradict. "Secrets are important. Most of us believe it is occasionally right even to tell a lie, and often imperative to avoid mentioning secrets or facts whose utterance would give offense or affect inappropriately the social dynamics of the situation" (2008, p. 129). If there are occasions in which discretion and withholding of the 'complete' truth are appropriate, it seems strange that we would hold someone morally suspect in such situations. In such scenarios, we might even say that such an individual was acting admirably, in which case regret or remorse would be inappropriate. So Adams' response is directed more to Walker than Slote, in that he claims that such situations as Slote envisions should not necessarily evoke a remorse or regret in the agent who has to sacrifice acting according to one virtue in order to act according to the other.

Now let's assume the agent didn't feel regret after the choice; if so, Slote would need to argue that the agent *should* feel regret, and that the regret is the kind that rises to an ethical level of remorse/guilt since he acted immorally (contrary to virtue). However, this response won't do since it begs the question against Slote: "we know the agent acted immorally because of the appropriateness of remorse from the action, and the remorse was appropriate because the agent acted immorally." Thus, I don't think Slote has been entirely successful here in showing that perfect virtue is impossible because of the presence of regret in the agent. There could be many reasons for the occurrence of these emotions in response to a decision made, without these emotions being the appropriate responses to the decision.

These responses seem to be enough to show that Slote has been unsuccessful in his argument against perfection. Nevertheless, I'd like to overlook the responses to Slote just mentioned and assume that Slote can show that the feeling of regret is the appropriate response to a choice in the situation he envisions, and that he can show this without circular reasoning. Further, let's assume that the presence of regret in response to a choice in the tact/frank scenario is the type that rises to an ethical level. Again, I'm in no way convinced that Slote is correct, but I'd like to assume that he is in order to propose an additional strategy for the theist. We turn to this point next.

Option 3

The last option for the theist who wants to affirm the doctrine of impeccability is to concede defeat to Slote, to acknowledge the existence of partial virtues and the possibilities of difficult scenarios such virtues produce, but to argue that the existence of such virtues causes no

problem for the doctrine of impeccability. To pursue this option, a theist might say that impeccability may only entail being *significantly* virtuous, rather than perfectly virtuous. Let's say an agent can be significantly virtuous in one of two ways:

SV1: An agent is significantly virtuous if they have all the relevant virtues for a heavenly character, they have such virtues broadly, but the actions that follow from such virtues only follow probabilistically.

or

SV2: An agent is significantly virtuous if they have all the relevant virtues for a heavenly character, they have such virtues narrowly, and the actions that follow from such virtues follow necessarily.

So, for the significantly perfect agent under SV1, a trait, say courage, will be applicable across all possible scenarios, those that the agent is familiar with, and those he isn't. However, in situations in which courageous action is appropriate, it is not impossible that the agent could fail to act courageously; it is only probable that he will act courageously in each scenario in which such actions are appropriate. For significant virtue under SV2, an agent with the virtue courage can be guaranteed to act courageously in each situation that calls for courageous action. However, the 'situations' that the agent can be guaranteed to act courageously in should not be understood as all possible situations; rather, the situations that courageous action can be guaranteed are only those that the agent is already conditioned to handle (situations not far beyond his normal experiences).

To posit that impeccability merely implies an agent be significantly virtuous appears to solve, or at least aid, two of the theist's largest problems. First, Slote's argument appears

irrelevant to the claim that significant virtue is possible. If partial virtues exist, the scenarios they make possible (in which two virtues conflict) would cause no problem for either sense of significant virtue. For SV1, the theist can claim that there is no guarantee that the veracious and kind agent will always act honestly and tactfully in all possible scenarios; the situation Slote envisions may simply be one of those situations in which the virtuous agent fails to act truthfully (or kindly). For SV2, the theist can claim that while the veracious and kind agent will always act honestly and kindly in each situation in which such virtues are called for, the extent in which virtuous action can be guaranteed only extends within a limited sphere. Thus, the scenario Slote envisions may simply be a situation outside the sphere the virtuous agent is capable of handling.

Secondly, the conditions for impeccability are not damaged if impeccability merely implies significant virtue rather than entails perfect virtue. Keep in mind, my conception of impeccability has two features: the agent cannot perform sinful or morally wrong actions, and the agent must have a heavenly character; it is the 'heavenly character' that I was intentionally vague about in my introduction, and it is this feature that the options of 'perfect virtue' and 'significant virtue' have tried to describe. The perfect virtue option explained the first feature of impeccability (deontic condition) by positing the second feature: the impeccable agent will never sin because their strongly perfect character makes such acts impossible (it is this form that Slote's argument caused a problem for). The SV2 option is similar to the perfect virtue option here in that it claims the impeccable agent will never sin because their significantly

virtuous character makes such acts impossible.[55] Thus the theist that wants to affirm that impeccability merely implies significant virtue, like the theist that wants to affirm that impeccability entails perfect virtue, can claim that it's the impeccable agent's character that entails the inability to perform sinful actions. The only difference between the two positions is that the perfection advocate will argue the impeccable agent's character needs to entail the inability of sinning in all possible situations; the significant virtue advocate will argue the impeccable agent's character merely needs to entail the inability of sinning with a limited sphere of possible of experiences, and this limited sphere of experiences is simply those possible experiences that make up heaven. He'll add that a character that precludes sinful actions in all possible situations is unnecessary for the heavenly agent; it is sufficient that the heavenly character merely preclude sin while in heaven.

The SV1 option is a little different in this regard than the SV2 and the perfect virtue options. While still affirming that the impeccable agent cannot sin, it does not affirm that the impossibility of sin is to be solely explained by the agent's virtuous character; the impeccable agent's character merely makes it unlikely that the agent will sin or fail to act virtuously in a situation in which virtuous action is appropriate. Thus, this form of significant virtue has the problem of finding some other explanation for why the impeccable agent is necessarily unable to sin. This apparent hurdle, however, has not historically been a problem for theists; many

[55] Obviously, the SV2 option is different in that it claims that the impeccable agent will never sin within a narrow field of situations, because their significantly virtuous character makes such acts impossible while the agent is within that field.

have argued that the explanatory factor that prevents heavenly agents from sinning is simply God himself.[56]

Now even if the issues raised by Slote's argument are solved for the theist by the claim that a heavenly character merely implies a significantly virtuous character, the idea that heavenly agents are merely significantly virtuous does have its own problems. Someone might object, for instance, that what I call a significantly virtuous agent, really doesn't look all that different from a really virtuous agent outside of heaven, and that what I'm calling a 'heavenly character' is not really distinct from a 'really virtuous non-heavenly character.' History has recognized a considerable number of really virtuous and saintly men and women; surely some of these moral individuals qualify for SV1 or SV2.[57] Others may simply object based on the intuition that heavenly agents are supposed to be morally superior to non-heavenly agents; if non-heavenly agents can have heavenly characters, it appears that this intuition is misplaced. Therefore, these objections can be summed up as follows: First, the title 'heavenly character' appears to be a misnomer; agents outside of heaven seem to be able to have heavenly characters, and thus such descriptions are ultimately unhelpful. Secondly, the intuition that those agents fitted for heaven are morally superior to agents outside of heaven appears to be false; whatever relevant distinctions exist between heavenly and non-heavenly agents, moral character does not appear to be among them.

[56] This is, arguably, the position of many notable mediaeval philosophers; See Gaine (2003) for an analysis of the views of Suarez, Scotus, Ockham, and Aquinas.

[57] I'm imagining such historical figures as St. Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King, Jr. See Wolf (1982) and Adams (1984) for an analysis on these 'Moral Saints'.

In response to the first problem, I'm not sure why it is problematic if a minority of agents outside of heaven have possibly had heavenly characters. If there are agents outside heaven who have characters indicative of SV1 or SV2, I think it's wrong to say they have 'really virtuous non-heavenly characters'; rather, it seems more helpful, and more accurate, to say they are just non-heavenly agents with 'heavenly characters.' I don't think it's a misnomer to refer to the characters of such agents' as 'heavenly' since that term would correctly describe the entirety of characters for those human agents in heaven. Whereas I think it would be incorrect to say either that some human agents in heaven have less than 'heavenly characters,' or that the majority of human agents outside of heaven have or had 'heavenly characters'; if either of these were true then I think it would probably be incorrect or unhelpful to use the term 'heavenly characters' for agents in or out of heaven.

Also, I am sympathetic to the intuition that heavenly agents are morally superior, in some way, to non-heavenly agents. But I don't think much is lost to say that heavenly agents are morally superior to the *majority* of non-heavenly agents, or perhaps to say that a minority of non-heavenly agents are morally superior to the majority of non-heavenly agents, such that the minority is sufficiently fit for heaven.

Some may not be satisfied with this response. Some may think there is something about both forms of significant virtue that imply, perhaps subtly, the line separating heavenly characters from non-heavenly characters is way too thin. Take the example from Tim Pawl and Kevin Timpe about an especially vicious husband who is somewhat quarantined by his wife in order to preclude opportunities for sin:

> Suppose that Smith is prone to adultery, or some other vicious action. But Smith's wife knows this about him. Suppose she knows the precise circumstances he would have to be in to commit adultery, or even freely will to commit adultery. Now suppose she is very good at keeping him out of these circumstances such that he is never again in adultery-prone circumstances. Extend the example a bit more and suppose that she knows what circumstances he would have to be in to perform any other sins as well. She also knows what circumstances he would have to be in to steal, for instance, and she keeps him out of those circumstances that would lead him to will freely to steal. So now Smith is in a pretty good state. No matter where he finds himself, provided that his wife is watching over him, he won't sin. But, we must ask, would it be right to consider him perfected? It seems not. He isn't transformed into a morally perfect individual in virtue of his being kept in sin-free circumstances, any more than a coward is rendered courageous by being kept away from the front lines (2009, p. 403).

An objector may say that this example highlights an important problem for both forms of significant virtue, in that the story seems to indicate a large amount of commonality between someone with an especially vicious character (Smith) and someone with an allegedly heavenly character. In the example, the reason for Smith's inability to sin appears to have more to do with the situation or circumstance Smith finds himself in (his wife's supervision), rather than with the actual virtuous character that Smith has (or doesn't have). In other words, Smith's inability to sin is better explained by his situation than his actual character. An objector might say that this appears to be true for the heavenly agent under SV1 and SV2 also.

For the SV1 agent whose dispositions for virtue are broad-based, and thus cross-situational, the lack of sinful behavior is based on probability rather than necessity; thus, if the SV1 agent is guaranteed to not sin in heaven, an at least partial explanation for the lack of sin must have something to do with events or circumstances external to the actual agent. This also seems to be the case for Smith. For the SV2 agent in heaven, his dispositions for virtue are narrow-based, indicating that the agent is never guaranteed to not sin whenever he is outside his normal array of circumstances. An objector might claim the same could be said of Smith. Let Smith wander outside his wife's supervision, or let the SV2 agent outside heaven, then there is no guarantee that either won't sin.

I think it's important to point out here, in response, that even if a significant explanatory factor for the absence of sin in heaven is the situation or circumstance which is somewhat external to the agent, there still appears to be an important difference between Smith and the SV1 or SV2 agent: virtue! To qualify for an impeccable or heavenly character, the agent must have all the relevant virtues, whether those virtues are understood broadly or narrowly, and whether they are dependently or independently related. For both SV1 and SV2, the agent is assumed to have a sufficiently adequate virtuous character, at least as to qualify for traditional virtue ethics.[58] This can't be said of Smith.

Also, I'm not sure why it's such a problem to say that, in addition to the SV1 or SV2 agent's character, a significant explanatory factor for the absence of sin in heaven is the

[58] Aristotelians, neo-Aristotelians, or scholars of Aristotle, appear to be divided over whether or not his *Nicomachean Ethics* describes moral virtue in broad terms or narrow. For an assessment of Aristotelian virtue in broad terms, see Doris (2002); for Aristotelian virtue in narrow terms, see Kamtekar (2004).

situations or circumstances in heaven.[59] This does not appear to be a completely foreign position in Christian tradition; most Christians would not only acknowledge, but emphatically affirm that there are certain properties or facts about God that are in some way causally relevant to the disposition, and therefore behavior, of the heavenly agent. Take the following passage from Jerry Walls as an example; here Walls is reiterating a point made by Augustine about the very nature of the heaven:

> Notice that the very essence of heaven … is a relationship with God characterized from the human perspective by endless fascination, love, and gratitude. Clearly such a relationship with God could only be experienced by one who had certain attitudes, desires, and beliefs. For instance, it would be ruled out for one who did not believe God was worthy of praise or who felt no desire to be united to him (2002, p. 37).

Here we see the idea that a proper relationship with God, in a proper environment, allows one to respond to various features of God (his nature, his presence, his acts of power and grace, etc.) with fascination, love, and gratitude. Obviously, a certain type of character is necessary to be properly related to God (certain attitudes, desires, and beliefs), but I see no reason why the agent's character has to be the sufficient explanation for the lack of sin. Surely being in God's presence and being so aware of his divine majesty, glory, and love, will be a factor causally

[59] The idea that a virtuous agent's actions are at least partially explained by external features of the agent's situation or scenario is not completely bizarre to Christian virtue ethics. Robert Adams argues: "If there are moral excellences that we have reason to admire in actual human lives, it can hardly be on the assumption that they are invincible or not situationally conditioned. In practice, and especially in one's own case, it seems wise to assume that people's best moral qualities are in some ways and to some degree frail" (Adams 2008, p. 156).

relevant enough so as to preclude the possibility of ever turning away from or rejecting such a being (i.e., sin).[60]

Perhaps someone may feel that if a position like SV1 or SV2 is adopted, all notions of libertarian freedom and moral responsibility are lost for those in heaven. Under SV1, since the agent's character merely makes it probable that the agent won't sin, there is still the need for God, like Smith's wife, to ensure that the heavenly agents are never in situations in which their character is insufficiently strong enough to withstand sin. Under SV2, it seems as though, even if it is one's character that precludes the possibility of sin, it still could be said that a necessary condition for the state of one's character are external features from his or her environment (i.e., God's presence or nature). Thus, under both SV1 and SV2, it appears as though something external to the agents (God) plays a causally significant role in the actions of the agents to engender doubt that they are actually free and responsible in a libertarian sense.

Though I understand why someone may be motivated to make this objection, I don't think it is very strong. If one is concerned about maintaining a libertarian stance, an adoption of a source incompatibilist position of agency provides resources to ensure that both the SV1 and SV2 agent in heaven are free and responsible. According to source incompatibilism, to be free and responsible for a given action, two things must be the case: (a) determinism must be false, and (b) nothing external to the agent in the causal history of a given act can be the sufficient

[60] According to Aquinas: "in regard to the intellectual substance that see God there cannot be a failure of the ability to see God: either because it might cease to exist, for it exists in perpetuity, … or because of a failure of the light whereby it sees God, since the light is received incorruptible both in regard to the condition of the receiver and of the giver. Nor can it lack the will to enjoy such a vision, because it perceives that its ultimate felicity lies in this vision, just as it cannot fail to will to be happy. Nor, indeed, may it cease to see because of a removal of the object, for the object, which is God, is always existing in the same way; nor is He far removed from us, unless by virtue of our removal from Him. So it is impossible for the vision of God, which makes men happy, ever to fail" (c. 13th/1956, *SCG,* 3.62.6).

cause of the act (i.e., the agent must be the ultimate source of the act).[61] Both of these conditions can be met for both SV1 and SV2. A theist can simply affirm that causal determinism is false, and that there is nothing external to the agent prior to heaven that sufficiently caused the agent to trust in Christ or cultivate a virtuous character; the theist could even say that, prior to heaven, the agent had access to alternative possibilities when he or she made a choice to go to heaven (i.e., trust in Christ) and also to cultivate a virtuous character. If a necessary condition for entering heaven is that the agent must trust in Christ and allow God to cultivate a virtuous character in him, and do both according to libertarian conditions, and these conditions are met, then it is somewhat irrelevant what causal features are in place in heaven that constrain the agent's actions (whether it's the agent's character or God himself).[62] Even if the agent in heaven is constrained in his or her acts by something external (God) to them, they are still rightly deemed free and responsible for the actions there given that the causal history of the acts in heaven can be traced back to a point prior to heaven in which nothing external to the agent was the sufficient cause of the choices and actions that led to the acts the agent performs in heaven (Sennett 1999; Walls 2002; Pawl and Timpe 2009). I take up this issue in more detail in Chapter 5.

A final problem with the proposal of significant virtue is that, simply put, we've lost moral perfection, which is what we really want. It is true that if significant virtue is the 'most

[61] Also, for source incompatibilism, see Kane (1996), McKenna (2001), Pereboom (2001), Rogers (2008), and Timpe (2013). It does seem as though a libertarian who does not endorse source incompatibilism may have a more difficult time responding to this particular objection; this fact, however, doesn't appear too significant given that the source position isn't a minority or controversial position among incompatibilist proponents.

[62] For those theists, especially Protestant theists, that are uncomfortable with the claim that a necessary condition for entry into heaven is the cultivation of a virtuous character, I encourage you to examine Brown (1985) and Walls (2012).

virtuous' a contingently-existing agent can be, then perfection is out of the cards for heavenly agents. However, mere significant virtue still saves the doctrine of impeccability, and supports the coherence of the doctrine of heaven. Thus, Christian theology and tradition is not damaged if significant virtue is the highest moral status contingent agents can reach. But assuming a theist believes that perfection is still necessary for a coherent picture of heaven, it still seems they can retain this belief given that the arguments above from Slote for the impossibility of perfect were inadequate. For Slote's arguments to be successful, he needs to show why his example of tact and honesty is unique from other examples involving apparent discord between virtues; or, he needs to show why not acting according to partial virtues, in the type of situations he envisions, represent occasions in which the appropriate emotional response is remorse or guilt. Until he does this, it appears that his argument for the impossibility of moral perfection is unsuccessful.

3.6 Conclusion

I have attempted to describe and defend the notion of moral perfection, along with its relationship to the theistic doctrine of impeccability, and especially the impeccability of human agents in heaven. I argued that at the very least, the doctrine seems to imply that impeccable agents cannot perform sinful actions, and that such agents have heavenly characters. I then examined the nature of a 'heavenly character,' attempting to determine if such a character entails a perfectly virtuous character, or merely a significantly virtuous one. Michael Slote's recent book seems to cause problems for the notion of a perfectly virtuous agent, and by extension, that a heavenly character entails perfect virtue. I argued that the theist has various

plausible responses to Slote's argument. The first option is Aristotelian in nature, though the second is less so; the final option is to concede that perfection may be impossible, but that this wouldn't cause a problem for the Christian doctrine of heaven. In the next chapter I will further examine the virtue component of moral perfection and its connection to the process of perfecting agents.

CHAPTER 4. Perfecting Agents

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I attempted to defend the view that moral perfection is possible. This still leaves us with the question of how one becomes morally perfect, and what conditions are necessary for the process to occur. Historically, Christians have disagreed about these conditions, and specifically, the condition of time and how much of it is required for an agent to change from imperfect to perfect. The two prominent camps are those that argue very little time, perhaps only a second, is necessary for God to complete the process; the other camp argues that much more time is required, that is if God is concerned about maintaining survival conditions for the agent's identity through the change. In the following chapter I will survey each of these positions, ultimately arguing that some form of temporal extension is required for the perfection process.

4.2 Support for Instantaneous View

If we can accept that moral perfection is possible, a natural next question is to ask 'what is required for an imperfect agent to become perfect?' This is a huge question, and could be answered from many different angles, but I want to focus on one possible requirement: time. There has been much disagreement over the perfection process and how much time is required to complete this process. The controversy over the time and duration of the perfection process has led to two competing views: the instantaneous view and the gradual view.

History indicates that the instantaneous, or 'zap' view as Jerry Walls calls it, has had many proponents. This position says that it is possible for God to change an agent from morally imperfect to perfect in a very small increment of time, perhaps a second (or less). Much of the support for an immediate change from morally imperfect to perfect comes from a particular passage from the New Testament. In one of his epistles to the Corinthians, Paul provides insight concerning the resurrection process:

> Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this moral must put on immortality (1 Cor. 15.51-53, NASB).

This passage appears to be the closest thing to an explicit reference of an immediate change from moral imperfection to perfection after death (or while still alive). While there are other passages that are used to support an immediate change, they merely imply such a change.[63] Many in Christian history appear to support the immediate view based on this passage. According to Tertullian,

[63] For instance, some will use Luke 23:46 as support for an immediate change. Here, while on the cusp of death, Jesus tells the thief on the cross, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." Many will put emphasis on Jesus' reference to 'today' to indicate that he had in mind a very quick change from imperfect to perfect. Others might use 1 John 3:2 to support the immediate view. Here John claims that "We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is." Some see this emergence of Jesus in his return as causative for the saints' transformation, and if Jesus' return is an immediate event, their change must be also. Nevertheless, the passages, along with others, are far from an explicit indication of an immediate change.

> After its thousand years are over, within which period is completed the resurrection of the saints…there will ensue the destruction of the world and the conflagration of all things at the judgment: we shall then be changed in a moment into the substance of angels, even by the investiture of an incorruptible nature and so be removed to that kingdom in heaven (c. 3rd AD/1994, *Against Marcion,* III.xxv).

Calvin is fairly explicit in his use of the above passage:

> This is still of a general nature; that is, it includes all. For in all the change will be sudden and instantaneous, because Christ's advent will be sudden. And to convey the idea of a *moment*, he afterwards makes use of the phrase *twinkling* (or jerk) of the eye, for in the Greek manuscripts there is a twofold, reading — *ῥοπῷ* (*jerk,)* or *ῥιπῷ (twinkling.)* It matters nothing, however, as to the sense. Paul has selected a movement of the body, that surpasses all others in quickness; for nothing is more rapid than a movement of the eye, though at the same time he has made an allusion to *sleep*, with which *twinkling of the eye* is contrasted (1546/1848, p. 59).

Many modern commentators of the passage also appear to adopt the view that Paul had in mind an immediate change. Referencing the descriptions of the immediacy of the change ('in a moment (flash)' and 'in the twinkling of an eye'), Taylor points out that there is a uniqueness about the terms used which supports an immediate change:

> Neither the expression "in a flash" nor "in the twinkling of an eye" occurs elsewhere in the New Testament or in the Septuagint. Both phrases imply an instantaneous transformation rather than a process, which is consistent with the Old Testament

emphasis on God's sudden eschatological intervention to judge and to save (2014, p. 505).

In step with Taylor, Thiselton argues that the transformation will be instantaneous. The Greek 'ἐν ἀτόμῳ' (moment) implies something that is indivisible: "in an instant, *the smallest conceivable moment of time."* The use of the phrase 'in the twinkling of an eye' (ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ) "indicates very rapid eye movement. Most frequently it denotes a rapid, darting glance out of the corner of one's eye" (2000, p. 1295). Passages like 1 Cor. 15, along with others, have encouraged a strong reception for the immediate view. I will expand on these arguments for the immediate view below.

4.3 Support for the Gradual View

The gradual or temporally extended view is the position that an instantaneous change from imperfection to perfection is impossible or implausible; a much more extended, gradual process must be performed, one that likely takes quite a bit of time. This position is most commonly associated with the doctrine of purgatory, which has had its share of supporters. According to Catechism of the Catholic Church,

> All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven (1030).
>
> The Church gives the name *Purgatory* to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned (1031).

It is commonly held that purgatory is a place of temporal punishment or purging; the punishment is justified and necessary in light of humanity's venial sins before death:

> Venial sin weakens charity; it manifests a disordered affection for created goods; it impedes the soul's progress in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of the moral good; it merits temporal punishment (1863).

The texts that are typically used to support the purgatorial view are 1 Cor. 3:12-15 and 1 Pet. 1:5-9, each describing a testing or purging by fire:

> 1 Cor.13-15 (NASB): the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work…If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

and

> 1 Pet. 1:6-7 (NASB): In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Of the myriad of supporters for this view, Gregory the Great is perhaps the most recognized: "Yet, there must be a cleansing fire before judgment, because of some minor faults that may remain to be purged away" (593 AD/2002, *Dialogues,* 4.41). The Council of Trent further emphasizes this need for a purging or sacrifice: "there is a purgatory and that souls there detained are helped by the intercessions of the faithful, but most of all by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar" (c. 16th/1999, p. 280).

According to most Roman Catholic views of purgatory, some form of distributive justice is at play when we consider the need for such purging or sacrifice. It is in fact the demands of justice that require such a sacrifice. According to Aquinas,

> From the conclusions we have drawn above…it is sufficiently clear that there is a Purgatory after this life. For if the debt of punishment is not paid in full after the stain of sin has been washed away by contrition, nor again are venial sins always removed when moral sins are remitted, and if justice demands that sin be set in order by due punishment, it follows that one who after contrition before making due satisfaction, is punished after this life (c. 13th/1981, *ST,* App. II, Art. 1).

Elaborating on this point from Aquinas, modern philosopher Thurow argues that unfulfilled moral debt implies a moral guilt. If the agent responsible for the wrong, and thus the moral debt, declines to 'make up' for that debt to the wronged, moral guilt for the wrongdoer remains. "As long as one continues to fail to fulfil the duty to fulfil one's moral debts, one remains morally guilty for having failed to fulfil a duty" (2017, p. 221).

Because moral guilt exists after death as a result of moral debt, the satisfying or fulfilling of such moral debt cannot be removed immediately. "The argument does imply that some true believers will have moral debt that cannot be fulfilled immediately following their death; their debts are too serious to be atoned for in ways that can be done nearly instantaneously after death" (Thurow 2017, p. 224).

As mentioned in chapter 1, one of the essential elements of heaven is the all-encompassing presence of God. Being in the presence of God assumes an absence of moral

guilt. Catherine of Genoa points out that it is the 'rust of sin' which remains that prevents believers from beholding God:

> there is nothing to stand between God and [the souls in purgatory] except the punishment which keeps them back, and prevents this [instinctive tendency to find its blessedness in God] from attaining its perfection; and from their keenly perceiving of what moment it is to be hindered even in the least degree, and yet that justice most strictly demands a hindrance, there springs up within them a fire like that of hell. They have not the guilt of sin (c. 15th/1858, p. 11); …the rust of sin alone is left, and this they get rid of by the punishment of fire. Cleansed thus from all sin, and united in will to God, they see God clearly according to the degree of light He imparts to them" (pg. 16).

Traditionally, purgatory was understood to be an intermediary station that those destined for heaven go to in order to have the sins not related to salvation purged away; this purging is typically described as a painful process, perhaps similar to being burned. Catherine goes so far as to say the process may be so intense that it becomes comparable to the experience of hell.

The doctrine of purgatory certainly has intuitive support. The references just mentioned all have a conception of purgatory as a place which removes the guilt from past sins by some form of punishment, and once the required debt for the guilt is satisfied, agents are then prepared to enter heaven. There are, however, others that recognize the need for purgatory, not because there remains any guilt to be dealt with upon death, but because agents destined for heaven have not yet attained that purified, Christ-likeness state of character, that those in

heaven must have; here purgatory becomes a place in which those going to heaven can complete the sanctification process so that they will be 'fit' for heaven.

Those that recognize an enormous gulf between the moral state of those imperfect and those fit for heaven might find the doctrine of purgatory appealing. The fact that purgatory is a progressive process, one similar to our regular temporal experience, helps such support. With this view of the purpose of purgatory, even those that support the traditional view that purgatory is a place of pain or punishment can recognize the sanctifying effect of that pain. Drawing support from life experience and Scripture, John Stott puts this point about pain and purification well:

> Biblical teaching and personal experience thus combine to teach that suffering is the path to holiness or maturity. There is always an indefinable something about people who have suffered. They have a fragrance that others lack. They exhibit the meekness and gentleness of Christ. One of the most remarkable statements Peter makes in his first letter is that 'he who has suffered in his body is done with sin' (1 Pet 4:1). Physical affliction, he seems to be saying, actually has the effect of making us stop sinning. This being so, I sometimes wonder if the real test of our hunger for holiness is our willingness to experience any degree of suffering if only thereby God will make us holy (2006, p. 311).

In addition to the various ways that Thurow mentions about how 'true believers' can satisfy the demands of justice that a traditional view of purgatory requires, he also mentions how a gradual purgatorial state, one that does not need to exist only for satisfying past debt

and guilt, can also be a place of sanctification. Each of the ways or reasons that he mentions require a temporally extended state.

> One that says that sanctification is the purpose of purgatory, but that some people need to fulfil their outstanding moral debts in order to be sanctified. On this model, fulfilling moral debts – by acts of service, act-reinforced apologies, reparation, restitution, or suffering punishment – isn't an independent and fundamental purpose of purgatory. Rather, it is a necessary means to becoming sanctified, which is the fundamental purpose of purgatory (Thurow 2017, p. 225).

4.4 The Gradual View and Heaven

While it's clear that many have supported the view that there must be a temporally extended process of either purging past sin or completing the moral purification process, there has been much disagreement about the environment and nature of purgatory. While a traditional view of purgatory recognizes it as a state or location separate from hell, heaven, and life on earth prior to death, there are some that argue that purgatory, or whatever we want to call it, can and should be thought of as a part of heaven. Working from the assumption that at least one purpose of purgatory is to fit, train, or prepare agents for the full reality of God's presence, there is the view that such preparation can occur in heaven, and so suggest it can occur in a district of heaven.

Peter Kreeft (1990) has argued that heaven should be understood as a three-part sequence in which agents experience (i) purgatory, (ii) the communion of the saints, and finally (iii) the beatific vision; while the communion of saints and the beatific vision have traditionally

been accepted as features of heaven, Kreeft argues that purgatory should be as well. According to Kreeft, "Purgatory turns out to be part of Heaven rather than a distinct place" and one of the purposes of purgatory is "moral re-education rather than mere punishment, rehabilitation rather than retribution" (1990, p. 53).

For Kreeft, growth in knowledge is primary for each of his stages.[64] Stage (i) consists of agents learning about themselves, stage (ii) is a process of learning about one's self in relation to others, and stage (iii) is the vision in which we learn of God's nature. According to Kreeft, in purgatory, sin is purged by sharing in our destiny as light. We see the meaning and the effects of all our sins in purgatory and their effects on others as well as ourselves, through chains of influence presently invisible, chains so long and effectual that we would be overwhelmed with responsibility if we saw them now.

So, in addition to growing in knowledge of ourselves, being part of 'Heaven's Kindergarten' as Kreeft puts it, there are a couple other purposes or features of purgatory as a part of heaven. First, purgatory should not be understood as a sad, gloomy, or tormenting type of environment, but rather a state of happiness and rejoicing as we learn and prepare for the beatific vision. If there is any suffering in purgatory, it will be the result of learning/remembering/experiencing all the harm one has caused on earth; but according to Kreeft, such suffering will be momentary.[65]

[64] "Since in Purgatory we do not make different choices but only see and understand clearly all our past choices, the only virtue there is knowledge, and education there does cure all moral ills" (Kreeft 1990, p. 64).
[65] "But I will experience it also with the compassion and forgiveness of God, forgiving myself as God forgives me. If we are to believe the resuscitated, we even align ourselves with God's laughter at our repented and forgiven sins. After we remember sin, we can forget it; after we take it seriously, we can laugh at it" (Kreeft 1990, p. 69).

Secondly, purgatory is needed for sanctification of the agent, rather than satisfying the need for cleaning one's self of past guilt on earth. So, on this view, there is no remaining guilt for any agent entering heaven; Christ's death and resurrection has fully removed all guilt for humans. Of the need for sanctification, Kreeft compares the process in purgatory to the process of a premature baby in an incubator:

> A premature baby is put into an incubator to finish outside the womb the growing that should have been done in the womb. At death our fetal souls are born into Heaven in an immature state. Before they are strong enough to survive the heavenly light, they need a "thickening process" (1990, p. 63).

While there is more to Kreeft's view of purgatory, such as his view of time in heaven,[66] the point to remember is that purgatory is a place for sanctification and growth, and that it is a part of heaven.

Another view of purgatory as a part of heaven comes from Adam Green. According to Green, we can think about purgatory in way similar to being jet-lagged from a flight that passes through different time zones. Just like a passenger passing through numerous time zones needs time to acclimate to his new destination with its time zone, so humans need time to acclimate to heaven. However, suggesting that we need a distinct location to become acclimated is unnecessary. According to Green,

[66] It appears that Kreeft shares the view the experience of time in heaven will be comparable to that of God eternal experience of time. "Although the stages are in a sense sequential, there is not a single common time measure to date them, for the nature of time itself changes as we move from one stage to another. None of the stages is measurable in clock time" (pp. 56-7).

> In order to posit a need for acclimation to the goodness of heaven, one need not posit an undischarged debt that must be paid or a need to put in the blood and sweat necessary to form the moral dispositions one did not form on earth. One need only posit that there is a significant difference between the mode of being that is available on earth and that available in heaven, and that when someone enters the afterlife, her own mode of being is continuous enough with that had on earth to require a time of adjustment (2015, pp.148-9).

As Green says, purgatory could be seen as an 'acclimation process' for those entering heaven.[67] He uses various examples to illustrate what purgatory might be like, such as the visual experience of transitioning from a dark room to a bright room. Just as it takes time for one's eyes to be acclimated to a bright room after coming from a dark room, so it will take humans time to acclimate to heaven's glory and majesty. As Green say, this change "need not be the result of any defect in one's eyes. Rather, it is the result of moving from a suboptimal context into an optimal one" (Green 2015, p. 148).[68]

Purgatory for Green, like Kreeft, need not be a distinct location outside of heaven. It is a place one goes to experience sanctification and preparation for a full vision of heaven. Like Kreeft, Green also doesn't see purgatory as a place where guilt must be atoned for. However,

[67] "One enters immediately and all at once into a state of blessedness. The only caveat is that one's final blessedness awaits full acclimatization to one's new surroundings" (Green 2015, pp. 156-7).
[68] He also compares purgatory to a detox center. "If this is painful, it is the pain of recovering from the trauma of living in a fallen world and not that of being punished for sins that should already have been atoned for or making the choices necessary to train into oneself dispositions to act rightly. It is over as soon as one has acclimated to one's new context" (2015, p. 151).

whereas Kreeft puts an emphasis on growth in knowledge as the means of sanctification, Green emphasis a proper relation between God and man that serves as the method of sanctification.

There are many things to like about the 'purgatory as part of heaven' position. For instance, it provides a way for protestants to accept the doctrine of purgatory, and thus partially repair a long-standing conflict with their Catholic siblings. It also allows Christians to remove a possibly unnecessary step in the transition process between death and heaven by doing away with the idea that the purgation process requires an additional location or state prior to heaven.

Nevertheless, there is a significant problem that this position has, a problem that can come from either Catholics or Protestants. The problem is that it seems to interfere with the traditional view that heaven is a place in which there is no guilt or moral failing. As I mentioned in chapter 1, there is an overwhelming consensus in historical Christianity that those in heaven are morally perfected, and that no morally imperfect agent can exist in such a state.

For Kreeft, purgatory cannot be a part of heaven, even as an outer ring, for their lack of necessary knowledge allows the possibility of sin. Further, if they do lack such necessary knowledge while in heaven, it implies that they can have false beliefs there about important ideas; in terms of beliefs about value, it's at least possible that such heaven initiates can have false beliefs about the goodness of things, which in reality, are significantly bad.

For Green, the acclimation process implies the need to acclimate. According to the traditional view of heaven, the experience of entering heaven is not like the experience of letting one's eyes acclimate to a new environment; moral acclimation must have already

occurred prior to entrance into heaven. Again, according to traditional Christian theology, those entering the beatific vision must be prepared to see it.

I think there is much to like about both Green and Kreeft's views of purgatory, but to avoid this problem I think they should modify their positions to exclude what occurs in purgatory from that which occurs in heaven. Perhaps they could simply say that, while in purgatory, God allows a significant development to begin in his relation to humans, though a full realization of this relation will not occur until purgatory is finished. For Kreeft, in purgatory God could again reveal himself in a much more significant way so that humans there could grow in knowledge of their past sin or its effects on others. However, any modifications such as these would remove their support of purgatory as a part of heaven.

4.5 Problems with the Instantaneous View

While both instantaneous and gradual views have had plenty of supporters historically, there have likewise been many arguments against the plausibility of both. In what follows I will canvas these arguments, focusing on the instantaneous view first.

One argument against the instantaneous view comes from Justin Barnard (2007). Barnard utilizes Alvin Plantinga's notion of *proper elimination* to argue that God's ability to immediately perfect agents at death would result in new worries for the problem of evil. According to Plantinga, "a being *properly eliminates* an evil state of affairs if it eliminates that evil without either eliminating an outweighing good or bringing about a greater evil" (1974, p. 20). Barnard argues as follows: If God is able to properly eliminate the capacity for evil of the

'lapsable' at death, there's no reason why God cannot do so now for the lapsable. If this is true, God's inability or unwillingness to do so now "impugns his perfect goodness" (2007, p. 319).[69]

The strength of this argument hangs on the claim that God could properly eliminate the capacity for evil in the lapsable without eliminating an outweighing good or bringing about a greater evil. But if we take it that God's policy is to perfect the lapsable at the time of saving faith, do we really have a good enough picture of that world to say that some outweighing good is not removed by God's policy there? I don't think so.

There are two reasons for my skepticism about Barnard's claim, both of which are based on differences between a world in which God perfects people before death (BD), and one in which he does so after death (AD). First, what is the practical difference between BD and AD? Take AD. What practical significance does God perfecting people at their death (or resurrection) have for those still alive? I would say relatively little. Sure, prayers of the living to the perfected deceased can possibly have some impact, but whatever impact such prayers have, this is impact that has been recognizable for the last 2000 years. So again, I'm not sure what type of significant impact perfecting the deceased would have on the living, beyond what we're already aware of. Now examine BD. What kind of impact would perfecting agents prior to death have for everyone still alive? I don't think this is clear at all. I think it could go in a myriad of ways. I can't imagine what a world full of both imperfect and perfect people would be like. What kind of impact would a significantly large amount of perfect people in the world produce for politics,

[69] 'Lapsable' refers to those with 'saving faith' who have not died and have not been fully sanctified yet (2007, p. 317).

entertainment, the economy, and higher offices in the government? I have no idea. Would those perfected be the majority? Not sure.

Secondly, there is an important theological difference between BD and AD. As mentioned in chapter 1, it is a traditional view of Christianity that the perfected in heaven exist with an unmediated accessibility to God. Humans will be with God in a way that surpasses even Adam and Eve's access to him; further, in virtue of their immediate access to him, along with the clarity that comes from directly beholding the divine essence, humanity's epistemic growth will be considerable. Some would say that a significant reason for the existence of the perfected qualities those in heaven acquire is causally based on factors related to their proximity to God; thus, at least a partial explanation for heavenly agents' perfected character is that they are in the direct presence of God, a fact that would not appear to be true if God perfected those prior to death. So, if God perfects agents prior to their death, it's hard to imagine how they would have such access. If those perfected in heaven are the way they are, even partially because of the new relation they have to the divine presence, I'm not sure if it's possible for those prior to death to be perfected while still existing in a world full of evil and sin.

But perhaps it is possible for those still alive to be perfected while still in a world full of sin and evil, and at the same time, somehow, have unmediated access to the divine presence. After all, Jesus was in an evil world while he was morally perfect and had full access to God; perhaps everyone else with saving faith would be similar to Jesus. So let's say it's possible. If this is the argument we're using, then everyone alive with saving faith is perfected and they would be sufficiently like Jesus in terms of moral qualities. From a statistical standpoint, which is not at all conclusive, if one Jesus had the impact on the world he did, what would hundreds

have? What about thousands? Millions? Billions? Would not the entire world be converted? Who knows! It seems to me that we're back to the previous problem in that we cannot, plausibly, estimate what a world like this would look like; thus my position of skepticism.

To move past issues related to the problem of evil, another argument against the instantaneous view has to do with the need of further sanctification upon death for most, if not all, believers; this need for further sanctifying, and particularly the incredible 'amount' of sanctifying, appears to cause a problem for maintaining one's personal identity from a state preceding death to a heavenly state. The problem is based on the idea that real character change requires time. John Hick makes this point in *Death and Eternal Life:* "If salvation in its fullness involves the actual transformation of human character, it is an observable fact that this does not usually take place in the course of our present earthly life. There must, then be further time beyond death in which the process of perfecting can continue" (1994, p. 455).

Given the significant changes required for one's character in the perfection process, some argue that an instantaneous change from imperfect to perfect would produce an entirely new person, causally disconnected from the prior imperfect counterpart. According to Hick:

> The only alternative would seem to be that in the moment of death the individual is instantaneously transformed into a perfected person, the stages of his further personal development being all concentrated into an instant. But if X, in the very incomplete and imperfect state in which he is at the time of his death, is suddenly perfected by divine fiat, in a momentary transformation, the resulting perfect being will no longer be X. God would have de-created X and created a new and very different person in his place (1994, pp. 239-40).

In Hick's estimation, to instantaneously perfect an agent, God would actually have to destroy the imperfect agent, then re-create him or her in perfected form. For many, such a re-creation would entail the emergence of a completely new agent without relevant causal ties to any other agent that existed prior; such re-creation would imply that the agent's identity was not maintained.[70]

When philosophers cover the issue of personal identity and survival through a particularly dramatic transition, they will typically make a distinction between qualitative and numerical change. For instance, in Derek Parfit's (1984) classic teleportation example, we can imagine an agent on earth using a teleportation device to travel to Mars. The device is meant to scan and record all relevant psychological and physical characteristics of the agent, then transmit all that data to the receiving teleportation device on Mars, while also destroying the agent's body on earth. According to Parfit and others, the new agent on Mars would be qualitative identical to the agent previously on earth; all the parts are in the same place and for all appearance, it is the same agent. More importantly, however, the prior agent on earth and the subsequent agent on Mars maintain a psychological continuity; all psychological and mental properties/states remain sufficiently stable through the process. Now even though the agent on Mars appears to be qualitatively identical to the previous agent on earth, it is also clear that the two agents are not numerically identical. The actual parts of the agent on Mars may be in the

[70] Justin Barnard provides the following analogy in effort to support the intuition here: "There are cases in which medical patients with ordinary curable conditions cannot be cured. This occurs most frequently in situations where the cure requires an operation, but the patient's general health is such that she could not survive the operation. Thus, while the condition itself is ordinarily curable by means of the operation in question, such a cure is not available to a patient who could not endure the operation. Quite simply, it would kill her…Similarly, it seems reasonable to imagine that God's instantaneous and unilateral transmutation of a lapsable [imperfect] individual into a sanctified [perfected] one is an operation that simply could not be endured" (2007, p. 318).

same place as those of the agent on earth, but they are not the *same* parts. We know this for two reasons: first, because the initial parts of the agent on earth were destroyed; second, because of the possibility that the agent on earth may not be destroyed after it is scanned, and so if its information is transmitted to Mars, the result would be two agents with their own set of parts, each identical to the initial agent that entered the teletransportation device.

However, suppose that the agent remains numerically intact through the teleportation event. It seems as though the agent might remain numerically, or close to numerically identical, at least as much as any living agent is able to given the regular process of cell replacement in the body. If so, it seems like God could utilize the same parts of the imperfect agent at death through a reordering and restoration process, even so far as to 'reorganize' the agent's neurological system so that all relevant mental properties would be changed to resemble a perfect agent's system. However, if numerical identity requires not only the same parts (or substances and properties), but also the same 'arrangement' of such parts, then numerical identity seems to be out; this seems clear given that any reorganizing of an agent's relevant cognitive elements so that they change from morally imperfect to perfect would require serious modifications.

But assuming the agent could maintain their numerical identity, it doesn't seem as though the agent remains qualitatively identical. For such an instantaneous 're-creation' process would produce a completely different agent, psychologically speaking. Beliefs, desires, hopes, passions, emotions, and the like would all be substantially modified. In fact, the quality of such a change would likely result in the agent not recognizing themselves. So even if the new agent is numerically identical to the previous agent, there are still qualitative conditions for

identity not being met, along with epistemological worries concerning the new agent's ability to 'identify' with their previous self.

This point seems be in line with what Leibniz believed in his view of personal identity. In his example of the King of China, Leibniz appears to believe that while the agent must persist as the same substance, he must also retain various psychological features, such as memory and/or knowledge of themselves.

> Further, the immortality which is demanded in morals and in religion does not consist in this perpetual subsistence alone, for without the memory of what one had been it would not be in any way desirable. Let us suppose that some individual were to become the King of China at one stroke, but on condition of forgetting what he had been, as if he had been born anew, is it not as much in practice, or as regards the effects which one can perceive, as if he were to be annihilated and a King of China to be created in his place at the same instant? Which this individual has no reason to desire (1686/1953, p. 58).

Locke also seemed to support the view that if the agent is to remain the same through such a dramatic change, it is necessary that he retain particular psychological features.

> Let anyone reflect upon himself, and conclude that he has in himself an immaterial spirit…let him also suppose it to be the same soul that was in Nestor or Thersites at the siege of Troy…but he now having no consciousness of any of the actions either of Nestor or Thersites, does or can he conceive himself the same person with either of them (1690/1964, *Essay* II.xxvii.14)?

According to David Brown, any model that assumes an instantaneous perfecting of character will have to provide an explanation of how the imperfect agent prior to the change can identify with his or her subsequent perfected self; in other words, Brown's worry is that the agent's sense of self cannot be sustained if such an abrupt change occurs as is affirmed in the instantaneous model. Keeping in mind the vastness of the gulf between the character of an imperfect agent and a perfected agent, the changes necessary for the transformation of a perfected agent are the kind of changes that rarely, if ever, occur immediately or even in short periods of normal temporal experience. In conceiving of the necessary habits (traits, virtues, or excellences) the perfected agent must posses, Brown says, "the very notion of such a habit suggests practice, and practice implies time, time in which to practice overcoming the opposing habit, time in which to practice reinforcing the new" (1985, p. 450). It is for this reason that Brown believes an agent who endured such a process as the instantaneous view suggests would have a hard time recognizing or identifying with the 'self' that existed prior to death.[71] According to Brown, "unless there is an intermediate stage between earth and Heaven, the

[71] Of course, Hume would say that we never have a recognition of the 'self', given that all we do have, when we recall experiences, are various sensations, wrapped up and bundled. "Unluckily all these positive assertions are contrary to that very experience, which is pleaded for them, nor have we any idea of self, after the manner it is here explain'd. For from what impression cou'd this idea be deriv'd? This question 'tis impossible to answer without a manifest contradiction and absurdity; and yet 'tis a question, which must necessarily be answer'd, if we wou'd have the idea of self pass for clear and intelligible. It must be some one impression, that gives rise to every real idea. But self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are suppos'd to have a reference. If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, thro' the whole course of our lives; since self is suppos'd to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is deriv'd; and consequently there is no such idea" (1739/2007, *Treatise,* 1.4.6.2). Nevertheless, I tend to agree with Swinburne concerning Hume's position; when Hume claims that what he recalls are instances of sensations or 'impressions', he is not recalling mere sensations, "but simultaneous coinstantiations of 'perceptions', or successions of overlapping 'perceptions' experienced by *a common subject himself*" (*my italics*, 2013, p. 161, fn. 26).

resurrected individual could have no reasonable grounds for believing himself to be the same person as the person to whose earthly existence he allegedly corresponds" (1985, p. 451).

It's important to point out that Brown is not assuming a memory condition for personal identity. According to Brown, the only sufficiency condition he is implying in his argument is a psychological (mental) continuity condition (which includes proper causal connections between psychological states). If so, Brown can avoid the many objections to the memory condition, while still arguing that memory is helpful or relevant in the particular case of perfecting agents.[72] To show that's he not assuming a memory condition, he argues the perfected agent may actually remember his past and the psychological states that corresponded to that past self; however, even with access to the memories of the imperfect version of him, the perfected version would likely still *feel* as if he has no connection to that past self (if he is perfected instantly). "Certainly these' memories' will provide me with access to apparent knowledge of what a [imperfect] body like mine has once done. But I cannot reasonably be required to acknowledge the body as mine until I see sufficient connexion between the past actions of that [imperfect] body and my present [perfected] character" (Brown 1985, p. 452).

One response Brown considers is the possibility that God, after the perfecting, could merely explain to the perfected agent all that occurred (1985, p. 452). If so, any epistemic worries—how does the perfected agent recognize or identity with the imperfect counterpart?—are resolved by a simple explanation by God to the perfected about what precisely occurred in the perfecting process. Thus, for the newly perfected agent who is having

[72] While the psychological continuity position is a popular one among philosophers, it still has many problems (the case of fission, for example), though I'm not aware of any proposed criteria of personal identity that doesn't.

a hard time understanding where he or she came from, or what his or her past amounted to, God could simply fill in the knowledge gap by informing the agent, "you were imperfect a minute ago, but don't worry, I just perfected you, which is why you're having a hard time relating to your past."

Leibniz says something very similar to this objection in his *New Essay on Understanding*:

> And if I forgot my whole past, and needed to have myself taught all over again, even my name and how to read and write, I could still learn from others about my life during my preceding state; and, similarly, I would have retained my rights without having to be divided into two persons and made to inherit from myself. All this is enough to maintain the moral identity which makes the same person (1704/1996, 237).[73]

The problem with this response, according to Brown, is that it still seems improbable that such an explanation, even from God, would suffice to cause the agent to recognize or identify with his or her past self. The problem for Brown goes back to the issues involving character-development: "But it is extremely hard to see how one could personally identify with an announcement that much of what one had not even regarded as wrong was now to be seen as a heinous crime" (1985, p. 452). Because the perfected agent's character is so radically modified from the prior imperfect character, many important psychological features are radically different also. One such feature is the agent's desires. Many would agree that desires are deep and ingrained qualities of the character and are thus not the type of qualities that are modified or changed instantly or even quickly. Even if the imperfect agent is eagerly

[73] Of course, these comments appear to conflict with the example of the King of China that Leibniz made earlier in this chapter. Harold Noonan, however, believes the distinctions in the two passages are not as radically different as they appear (Noonan 2019, p. 50).

anticipating the change from his/her present vicious or perverse desires to virtuous and holy desires, he or she is still the agent that has 'worked' to procure those viscous desires through past effort, and thus such desires are a significant part of that character. Brown points out that if the replacing of these vicious desires for virtuous ones are "to be part of one's identity, it surely has to be in some sense a personal discovery, and that takes time" (1985, p. 452).

Walls tries to strengthen this particular response that Brown considers by giving the agent a bit more control or activity in the perfection process. "Now let's alter the scenario slightly, and suppose that a believer, who is on his deathbed, but is far from perfect, sincerely asks God to perfect his character…He dies an hour later, and wakes up in heaven with a flawless character, filled with perfect love for God and his fellow human beings" (2012, p. 119). This response to Brown's argument seems to be stronger than the response Brown considers because the agent in the scenario is much more involved or interested in the perfection process than the completely passive agent in Brown's scenario. This response is somewhat analogous to the purchasing of a specially tailored suit. A man with an old, ratty suit goes into a suit-store, gives his dimensions and preferences to the tailor, then allows the tailor to create his new suit. After taking off the old suit and putting on the new suit, the man is surely cognizant of the old suit he just removed, just as much as he is aware of the new and improved suit he presently wears.

There are, however, problems with this response. According to Walls, "the real issue raised by this scenario is whether such a broad prayer for perfection can be answered while maintaining personal continuity and identity, and effecting what would be recognized as genuine transformation" (2012, p. 120). So while this response may seem stronger than the

earlier one considered by Brown, it seems to fail for the same reasons: the gulf between imperfect and perfect characters is too vast to be bridged so quickly.

I find the arguments from Hick, Brown, and Walls very intuitive. First, each of their arguments draw from our normal experience about change and improvement. We understand change according to our experience, and our experience implies some sense of temporal extension. However, we don't regularly experience instantaneous changes so dramatic as that from morally imperfect to perfect. I doubt anyone has experienced this. So, to rebut this view, we would need strong reason to suppose an instantaneous change of the sort we're considering is possible, even if such a change doesn't typically occur according to our experience. Second, an instantaneous change from imperfect to perfect clearly violates the psychological continuity condition. In such a change, it seems there are few causal connections between the states, except perhaps for memory. However, the only reason memory would be relevant in a change from imperfect to perfect would be if the agent *remembered changing*, which it seems he would not since it occurred instantly.

4.6 Problems with Gradual View

The best argument I've come across in defense of the instantaneous view comes from James Turner (2017). Turner's argument seems to do well at encompassing the various hesitations many have with the plausibility of the gradual view.

As mentioned above, some who affirm the gradual view do so because they claim it is impossible or implausible for God to instantaneously perfect imperfect people; God simply can't do this, or it is incredibly unlikely that he could do this. According to Turner, this claim is

false. If one takes a 'high view of Scripture', along with an appreciation for traditional Christian theology, one will accept that Christ's *parousia* (return) will prompt the consummation of the New Creation of God (which is either identical to heaven, or occurs simultaneously with the beginning of heaven); further, one will also accept the position that at Christ's return those who have saving faith in Christ (both the living and the dead) will be made perfect. Turner's argument (with his original numbering) is as follows:

> 2. Essential to the definition of Heaven is that human beings are in a state of complete moral perfection.
>
> 7. Christ's *parousia* (return) marks the consummation of New Creation, a cosmos for which its inhabitants must be fit for Heaven.
>
> 8. So, those human beings who inhabit the New Creation must be completely morally perfect.
>
> 9. Christ's *parousia* (return) is at some fixed time in the future.
>
> 10. So, at some fixed time in the future, those human beings who inhabit the New Creation must be completely morally perfect.
>
> 11. During the second before Christ returns, there will be [morally imperfect humans] living on earth that, upon Christ's *parousia*, instantaneously inhabit the New Creation.
>
> 12. So, the [morally imperfect humans] living on earth during the second before Christ returns instantaneously will be made completely morally perfect at the time of Christ's *parousia*.
>
> 13. If an event E will happen, it's possible that it will happen.

14. Therefore, it's possible that morally imperfect persons instantaneously will be made completely morally perfect (2017, pp. 201-202).

According to Turner, Scripture claims that upon Christ's return, God will instantaneously make perfect any destined for heaven that are imperfect, both dead and living. There will be some alive that are imperfect just prior to Christ's return, and so there will be some alive just prior to Christ's return that God will instantaneously perfect at Christ's return. Further, Scripture claims that God will instantaneously perfect some that are imperfect. If something will happen, it's possible that it can happen. Thus, it's false that it is impossible that God cannot instantaneously perfect the imperfect.

My first issue with his argument concerns premise 7. This premise states that the event of Christ's return and the consummation of the New Creation apparently occur simultaneously. Further, at the New Creation, whomever is going to heaven must be ready or fit to go there.

Someone might argue against Turner's claim that at the commencement of the New Creation, all those going to heaven will be fit to enter heaven. The 'fit' or 'ready' here is the real issue. It could be argued that while 2 is true, and even 7 is true, nevertheless 8 does not follow based on the ambiguity of 'fit' in 7. It appears to be implied that 'fit' or 'ready' in 7 means 'fit in every way' for heaven. Perhaps it could be said that those going to heaven are ready or fit in some way at that point, but not every way, and that one way they are not 'completely' fit for heaven is related to their moral status. It's clear from Turner's paper, and the rest of his argument, that certain texts, specifically 1 Cor. 15:51-53, claim that 'fitness' implies 'moral fitness.' Again, according to 1 Cor. 15: 51-53,

> we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality (NASB).

It seems that Turner understands this text as implying a moral component with the term 'perishability' (or 'corruptibility'). So, if someone is changed from perishable to imperishable, they are changed from all forms of perishability (including moral perishability). Further, Turner's claim that this sort of interpretation of the text is not a minority view among contemporary scholars is also true. What I want to say in response is that this type of interpretation is nevertheless inconclusive. In other words, based on the context of this passage, it's not obvious that the author is including a moral element in his usage of the term 'perishable'. There are at least some contemporary scholars of this text that understand this term to simply reference a 'mortal' component; if so, the author is merely attempting to claim that all will be changed in a moment from something 'mortal' to something 'immortal.'

According to Thiselton, the term 'incorruption' could refer to a "dynamic process of *ethical*, aesthetic, and *psychological* flourishing, purpose, and abundance" but that this interpretation is not explicit in the text. What is explicit is that the body "will be raised without degenerating decay at the very least" (2000, pp. 1296-97). According to Fee, the term 'corruptible' or 'perishable' merely refers to that "which in its present form is subject to decay, which in itself rules out its possibility for eternal longevity" (1987, p. 798). Some may argue the author of the passage's claim that 'flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom' and his contrast of 'flesh and spirit' in the larger context, indicate that the 'flesh nature' (or sin nature) cannot

enter the Kingdom. It is true that 'flesh' and 'body' convey moral implications elsewhere in the NT, but it's not obvious that the author is using the term 'flesh' (σὰρξ) in this way in this text. According to Fee "Most likely [flesh and blood] refers simply to the body in its present form, composed of flesh and blood, to be sure, but subject to weakness, decay, and death, and as such ill-suited for the life of the future…The perishable body, either dead or alive, cannot inherit the imperishable life of the future" (1987, p. 799). The point is that, according to the context, the author may merely be referring to the organic properties that constitute the present perishable (mortal) body; these components must be changed into new components that won't perish or decay, and thus will be prepared for immortality. If this is the author's intent, then this particular passage is poor to use in arguing that those agents going to heaven will be changed instantaneously (in a twinkling) from morally imperfect to morally perfect.

I suppose someone could argue that both in this text and elsewhere, concepts of mortality and morality are inextricably linked, so that a reference to an agent's immortality implies their perfect morality. But this can't be true in all cases, for it would assume that for any agent that is immortal, they are also morally perfect. And we know this is false, given the existence of fallen angels who are both immortal and imperfect.

Now someone may object to the previous argument by saying I have simply practiced bad hermeneutics in my use of the texts and the references to contemporary scholarship. In other words, I have failed to do any real exegetical work with the passages mentioned, nor have I interacted with the actual Greek; further, my use of quotes from contemporary scholars could simply be proof texting to make my point. Thus, my responses to Turner lack proper scholarly merit. Let's say this is true, partly for the sake of argument, and partly because it may be true

(even if I don't think it is). There is still another problem with Turner's argument. In his attempt to defend the view that it is possible for God to immediately perfect imperfect people without any temporally extended process, he seems to have missed the point of those arguments that he is objecting to.

We have already looked at various positions that argue that a temporally extended period is necessary for perfecting imperfect agents. Turner's claim is that these authors have failed to show that such a perfecting process is impossible without temporal extension since Christian Scripture and theology show that God will perform such a process. What I want to argue is that Turner has missed the point of these author's position.

Throughout his paper, Turner's use of time is spelled out in terms of units of temporal measurement, along with the rate of passing of those units, which occur in the normal objective world that we all experience. His primary unit of measurement is the 'second'; when he uses 'second' it seems he means a normal conception of a second as most humans experience it and most clocks display. So, when he says 'a second before Christ returns,' he means to imply that if anyone is alive prior to that second, he or she likely would only have enough time to scratch an itch before Christ returns. Thus, his argument is that there will be imperfect agents alive a second before Christ returns, and after that second when Christ returns, those imperfect will have become perfect in that literal secondary interval of time. However, I don't think that any supporters of a temporarily extended period of change would contradict this point of Turner's, and if they do, I don't think they should.

What seems to matter to those like Walls, Brown, and the rest, is not that there be a literal, objective period of temporal extension for the agent to undergo the necessary change,

but rather that the agent *experiences* a temporally extended period in which they undergo change. Turner mentions that a defender of a temporally extended view would likely say that a single second, or two or three, is not enough time to complete the perfection process; I'm sure he's right about this, but defenders of this view don't appear to be arguing that the temporal extension must occur in a literal, objective conception of a second. It seems to me that all they are arguing is that the agent have a subjectively 'real-feeling' experience of temporal extension.

Again, if pushed, such defenders of temporal extension would likely make a distinction between a subjective experience of time and an objective flow of time. An objective flow of time refers to the normal rate of change in the world which passes regardless of how humans experience that passage. A subjective experience of time is the rate of change as perceived by the agent—the agent's conscious awareness of time.

Recent work from Rutledge (2018), and Baggett and Pruitt (2017), provide numerous examples of a subjective experience of time not matching an objective flow of time. Rutledge considers the experience of 'switching on autopilot' when one is driving a long distance, perhaps on a highway, when the driver's conscious awareness is almost completely directed to his own internal thoughts. "Sometimes we arrive at a destination or travel many miles before we realize that we cannot recall any of the geography or possible obstacles we have clearly avoided. Indeed, it will seem to us as if only a few minutes have passed whereas in reality an hour has eluded us. That is, our conscious awareness of the passage of time—i.e. our experience of the passage of time—does not match the actual passage of time" (2018, p. 158).

Baggett and Pruitt provide similar examples, such as emergency situations, or other experiences in which one's life 'flashes before their eyes.' Each case, according to Baggett and

Pruitt, we can recognize the "relativity of our subjective responses to time" (2017, pp. 60-61). Rutledge also considers the experience of lucid dreaming. Lucid dreams are dreams in which the dreamer is aware that she is dreaming, and in some cases the dreamer may also be able to control the dream in various ways. More importantly, lucid dreamers commonly claim that a lengthy period has passed in their dream when a much shorter time has passed in reality. Whatever we want to say about the nature of these types of dreams, it is evident that there is a strict distinction between one's subjective experience of the passage of time (while in the dream state) and the actual passage of time (outside of the dream state) (Rutledge 2018, p. 158).

Walls' example of Charles Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge would fall under this category (2012, pp. 84-85). While the process of Scrooge's character change seems to occur over a long course of time, at least to him, in reality very little time passes while he sleeps. Further, as Walls is right to point out, it seems perfectly acceptable to most acquainted with the story that the experiences of Scrooge while he slept are sufficient to explain the incredible character modification which produced the 'new' Scrooge when he awoke. Thus, while in actual objective time, little time had passed, though the subjective experience of Scrooge was much more protracted.

Each of these examples are meant to indicate that we can experience more than what actual time allows us. It's well known that in addition to vividness, lucid dreams can sometimes feel quite extended for the agent dreaming. Many events could occur while dreaming that would typically require days or more, though in reality only a few hours have passed. Further, lucid dreams can change the agent once they awake. I'm sure many women can empathize with

the experience of dreaming that their husband performs various lude acts with other women, then upon waking, is not only immediately angry, sad, and dejected, but remains in this state throughout the day (even if she really knows her husband would never do such things).[74] Even after days go by and she becomes less angry, those images and that worry could take a very long time to leave her.

The point is that it's not only possible that in a short interval of time people can undergo a change in mental states that typically take much longer, it actually occurs all the time. Given this realization, we don't really need to choose between an immediate change (twinkling of an eye) at death and a gradual change after death. According to Rutledge,

> [If the distinction between a subjective flow of time and the actual (objective) flow of time is correct], then no model of Purgatory would require adherence to a temporally extended purgatory, but rather, an apparently temporally extended purgatory (i.e. from the subject's point of view) (2018, p. 159).

If such experiences as lucid dreaming actually occur as Rutledge mentions, then it doesn't seem too hard to imagine how God could utilize such phenomenon to sanctify those deceased (or living) who are destined for heaven. And the real take away from this is that one can agree with Turner about a *prima facie* reading of texts like 1 Cor. 15: 52 and say that, in reality, a change from imperfection (or corruption) to perfection can occur instantly (in a second), while also holding firm to the claim that real change from imperfection to perfection requires much time, effort, and practice.

[74] I thank my wife for this point.

For the remainder of this chapter, I would like to, perhaps, offer a little further support for Turner's position. Let's say that Turner does not agree with the previous argument about subjective experience of temporal extension, and that he still affirms that it is possible for God to instantaneously perfect agents, regardless of their subjective or objective experience of time. So even if the imperfect agent doesn't have some experience of temporal extension, it is still possible that God can instantaneously perfect the agent.

In a recent article, David Chalmers (2014) argues that if mankind is to keep up with the speed and capacity of nonbiological systems, humanity will likely have to dispense with their biological core and replace it with a nonbiological system, likely a computational system. Chalmers mentions various ways this may happen, but all such changes exist in the context of an uploading procedure, "a process of migration from brain to computer" (2014, p. 102). Of each of the uploading options, Chalmers spends the most time considering a 'gradual uploading':

> One or more nanotechnology devices (perhaps tiny robots) are inserted into the brain and each attaches itself to a single neuron, learning to simulate the behavior of the associated neuron and also learning about its connectivity. Once it simulates the neuron's behavior well enough, it takes the place of the original neuron, perhaps leaving receptors and effectors in place and uploading the relevant processing to a computer via radio transmitters. It then moves to other neurons and repeats the procedure, until

eventually every neuron has been replaced by an emulation, and perhaps all processing has been uploaded to a computer (2014, p. 103).[75]

According to Chalmers, if we imagine the gradual uploading of each component of the brain over the course of time, then perhaps we can also understand the replacing of entire sections of the brain, each neuron at a time (p. 105). Chalmers says this process could replace organic components with silicon ones, and maybe this happens over the course of months or years. In this process, each new silicon component will perfectly emulate the previous biological ones, implying that each new component will perfectly function towards biological and nonbiological components. If this is the case, then the conscious agent need not know or recognize any of the changes that occur. The result is an agent with a completely nonbiological system, which maintained psychological continuity (consciousness) throughout the entire process. According to Chalmers, it seems as the original agent survived, though their entire cognitive system has been replaced. Chalmers' argument for survival goes as follows:

1. Consciousness can be continuous through the entire process.

2. If consciousness is continuous from moment to moment, it will be continuous throughout the process.

3. If consciousness is continuous throughout the process, there will be a single stream of consciousness throughout.

[75] Elsewhere in the article, Chalmers provides a little more detail of this gradual process: "The computational elements are connected to input and output devices (artificial eyes and ears, limbs, and bodies), perhaps in an ordinary physical environment or perhaps in a virtual environment. On receiving a visual input, say, the upload goes through processing isomorphic to what goes on in the original brain. First artificial analogs of eyes and the optic nerve are activated, then computational analogs of lateral geniculate nucleus and the visual cortex, then analogs of later brain areas, ultimately resulting in a (physical or virtual) action analogous to one produced by the original brain" (p. 105).

4. If there is a single stream of consciousness throughout, then the original person survives throughout (p. 113).

Chalmers seems to think the most obvious way to imagine this process is by a gradual uploading/replacing of 1% of the brain each month over 100 months. Further, if we can accept that the same agent survives the upload process over the course of 100 months, surely we could speed up the process, perhaps over minutes, or even seconds.[76]

So how can someone like Turner make use of such an argument from uploading to strengthen his position? First, I think both instantaneous and gradual views of change can make use of this argument. Why? Chalmers offers a way to imagine how a mortal agent can possibly survive a process of change that converts all properties relevant to one's mortality into new properties or components that allow for immortality. Both sides say this is important. Further, if Chalmers is right, then there is no logical problem with the idea that it occurs in a matter of seconds, or even one second.

But specific to Turner's position, Chalmers provides a possible way for Turner to explain how God can possibly perform an instantaneous moral change in an agent, while also preserving conditions for survival or personal identity. Chalmers briefly explores the idea of cognitive enhancement, and asks if an agent can survive a gradual upload in which the agent's cognitive system is 'enhanced to the point that they use a wholly different cognitive architecture.' Chalmers affirms that as long as the process is gradual, there's no reason to believe that the agent's cognitive system can't be enhanced. "If my cognitive system is

[76] The idea of gradual replacement of brain parts is not a new one. See Swinburne (2013, pp. 155-57) for an account that does not involve uploading or computational elements.

overhauled one component at a time, and if at every stage there is reasonable psychological continuity with the previous stage, then I think it is reasonable to hold that the original person survives" (p. 116).

Outside of the context of uploading, we know that such changes occur regularly. We might think of the subjective experience of a gradual upload as similar to the experience of gradually losing and gaining moral beliefs or desires, along with the gradual losing and gaining of emotional responses to those beliefs and desires.

Consider Allen: Suppose Allen is strongly pro-life, even in rape cases. Because of his beliefs, he becomes happy when hearing of a woman that was considering abortion but decides to deliver; also, he becomes angry and frustrated when he hears of cases about women choosing to have an abortion. Now we must ask the question: Is it possible for Allen to change his view from strongly pro-life to strongly pro-choice? To say 'no' to this question would amount to saying that it is impossible for anyone, over time, to lose a belief B while also gradually adopting a belief A which is seemingly incompatible with B. This claim seems unlikely. So, if it's possible for Allen to change from pro-life to pro-choice, what type of subjective experience would this be like for Allen? I believe many of us have had the experience of gradually, over time, losing a belief that something is true, then becoming unsure about the issue that the belief is about, then gradually adopting a new belief that stands in opposition to the initial belief. In situations like this, our emotions 'follow' our beliefs through the process. If so, then the gradual upload process would be consistent with our regular experiences of change.

If such an 'enhancement' includes components of the brain related to one's moral character, then it appears it may be possible for God to gradually, morally, enhance an agent in a matter of seconds without compromising their personal identity. Thus, Turner's position that it is possible for God to perfect (enhance) those imperfect in a short duration, can be maintained.

My own view is that Chalmer's view is incredibly inciteful, and I find myself agreeing with most of what he says. It seems to me that someone who affirms a psychological continuity condition for survival should also affirm that a gradual upload of brain components to silicon components (which perform the same function) allows for the survival of the agent. What I am less sure of is his claim that cognitive enhancements can occur while maintaining personal identity. I am particularly skeptical that the survival conditions for personal identity will remain intact when considering the replacement of those biological components that are relevant to one's moral character. Perhaps this can be done if performed gradually enough, though it's not obvious to me. Chalmers' original argument relied on the intuition that a single component can be replaced with another if the new component performs the *same* function. However, in an enhancement process, biological components are replaced with nonbiological ones that perform *different* functions. Because the functions are different in the 'component swap,' along with all the implied changes to neural connections, it's not clear to me that an instantaneous change can occur. I think the change could occur while maintaining survival conditions, though it still appears that more time would be required for the agent to get 'comfortable' with each of the changes, as Brown et al. would likely also argue. Thus, it's not clear to me that an

instantaneous change could occur with gradual uploading in the context of moral enhancement, which is what Turner needs.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have surveyed a couple positions concerning how God might perfect the imperfect prior to their arrival in heaven. Specifically, I have evaluated what temporal condition is necessary for God to perform the perfection process. The two views I examined are the instantaneous or immediate view, in which God needs very little time to complete the process, and the gradual view, which claims God needs a much more protracted period of time. Between these two views, I have argued the gradual view is much more plausible, especially given the immense gap which exists between the imperfect and perfect status' that most agents must traverse. In the next chapter I will further evaluate the need for temporal extension and the implications this condition has for the Aristotelian need of character development in the agent's process of maturing in virtue. More specifically, I assess how necessary is the Aristotelian character development process for free will and responsibility in heaven.

CHAPTER 5. Moral Development and Growth

5.1 Introduction

To this point I have tried to defend the view that moral perfection is possible if it is understood from a broadly Aristotelian virtue standpoint. In the previous chapter I argued that the process of perfecting agents requires some form of temporal extension, at least with regard to the agent's subjective experience. In this final chapter I want to further elaborate on this perfection process.

First, as I have already argued, many have affirmed that Christian orthodoxy requires that the eventual human inhabitants of heaven will exist there perpetually and perfectly (morally); they will exist there forever and will be unable to perform blameworthy or sinful actions. However, it is another question whether Christian orthodoxy requires that humans will have free will and/or be morally responsible for their choices or actions in heaven. In chapter 1 I briefly mentioned my position, which coheres well with Augustine's: "This new freedom is all the more powerful precisely because it will not have power to sin." In chapter 3 I argued that if the theist understands free will from a source incompatibilist position, then it appears entirely plausible that agents in heaven can be free. While many philosophers and theologians have agreed that humans will be free and responsible in heaven, many have likewise disagreed as to *how* or *why* these agents will be free and responsible. Numerous philosophers in recent decades have argued that, perhaps, a partial explanation for how agents are free and responsible is that they have cultivated or developed such virtuous characters prior to heaven

(when they were able to sin) that once in heaven they are incapable of acting contrary to their virtuously cultivated characters. Further, because the agents are at least partially responsible for the construction of their characters, they can be considered free and responsible for the choices or actions such virtuous characters allow. In what follows I will argue that heavenly agents' status as free and morally perfect does not require a character development process performed by the agents themselves.

Secondly, some have argued that even if humans can be free and responsible in heaven while also being morally perfect, any development that has occurred is stalled once they're in heaven. So even if they're free in heaven, that freedom can't assist these agents in developing morally. I think this belief is mistaken. So, for this chapter, while I want to argue that moral development is not necessary for the agents themselves to become free and perfect, I also want to argue that once becoming perfect in heaven, moral development is still possible for these agents.

5.2 Character Development and Heaven

That humans can grow morally is uncontroversial. As the human brain grows and develops from infancy, the recognition of the value and rights of others' increases, along with the realization of good reasons why respecting such value and rights is appropriate; finally, and hopefully, as our recognition of those good reasons increase, the control necessary to act according to those reasons improves as well. As this development is occurring, for a particular individual, we might say that this person is growing morally. Now, it is possible, for fully functioning adults, to halt such moral development. We can ignore good reasons to treat others as if they are valuable

and have various rights; we can also *put ourselves* in positions in which we don't have control to act according to good reasons to treat others as if they have various rights. Regardless, moral development is clearly something that occurs in the lives of humans. Further, it might also be said that such development is a natural part of human life.

In chapter 3 I covered various features of an Aristotelian form of virtue ethics. Again, I follow Audi in describing a moral character as "an interconnected set of traits… [which] are largely deep-seated dispositions to do certain things for an appropriate range of reasons" (Audi 1997, p. 160). These traits can be gained, kept, or lost; they function like dispositional states that orient the agent to particular actions when the agent is in relevant scenarios. I also mentioned that traits can range in depth of the character for the agent as a whole. Those traits that are deepest raise the probability that the agent will act according to the trait when the agent has the opportunities; less-deep traits lower the probability of whether the agent will act according to the trait when given the opportunity. It is generally accepted that these traits must be fairly stable, consistent with each other, and all of a virtuous nature, obviously. Further, the production of such a character requires the agent to repetitively act according to their virtuous traits, while abstaining from actions that accord with their more vicious traits. And again, the actions that correspond to a virtuous trait become easier the more the agent acts according to the trait rather than contrary to it. So in theory, an agent develops a virtuous character by consistently acting according to virtue until the performance of such actions are the result of a virtuous character, and are thus habitual.

I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter that many writers in recent decades have attempted to employ the idea of character development to explain how the heavenly agents'

status of perfection is consistent with their status as free and responsibility.[77] So what is this apparent inconsistency between an agent being perfect while also retaining their free will?

As I've already mentioned, moral perfection includes the claim that whoever is perfect is unable to sin or perform blameworthy actions. This claim causes an apparent problem for proponents of libertarian free will since this view of free will is supposed to entail a particular level of control which requires an agent to have access to alternative possibilities of the robust sort.[78] Libertarians, however, will disagree about why an agent must have access to alternative possibilities: some argue that access to alternative possibilities is part of the actual definition of free will, while others argue that access to alternative possibilities is only important because it indicates that nothing external to the agent is sufficient to produce the action the agent performs. Most of the writers I am responding to in this essay affirm the latter understanding of alternative possibilities, or so it appears. Thus, a theory of moral perfection apparently precludes an affirmation of libertarian free will since a perfect agent does not have access to alternative possibilities of the robust sort. So, humans can be perfect in heaven, but only at the cost of their free will. How does the idea of character development allow these libertarians to bypass this problem?

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[77] See Swinburne (1983), Sennett (1999), Walls (2002, pp. 60-1), and Pawl and Timpe (2009). I do want to mention here that nowhere in any of these accounts do these writers assume or argue that an agent is capable of earning her way into heaven, or making herself virtuous enough *on her own* to enter heaven. All of these accounts leave room for God's grace to play a necessary part in the heavenly character the agents participate in forming.

[78] Incompatibilists will disagree as to the proper understanding of 'robust' here, but many understand it to refer to making choices between an action that will confer moral blame and an action that will not. For instance, Derk Pereboom's condition for robustness is as follows: "For an alternative possibility to be relevant to explaining why an agent is morally responsible for an action, it must satisfy the following characterization: she could have willed something different from what she actually willed such that she understood that by willing it she would thereby be precluded from moral responsibility for the action" (2001, p. 26). For more on the 'robustness' requirement, see Allen (2004), and Moya (2011).

First, they will argue that while access to alternative possibilities is necessary for an agent to be considered free, such access is not necessary for every action or choice. An agent who is acting freely need not have access to alternative possibilities in a given scenario as long as the agent is in some way responsible for the reason she lacks that access. Second, they will argue that while agents do not have access to alternative possibilities in heaven, they can still be considered free and responsible in heaven because they are responsible, in some way, for the reason they lack such access. The reason is, prior to entering heaven, humans utilized their access to alternative possibilities to perform actions that would cultivate or develop a character that would eventually be perfect, and thus lack access to alternative possibilities. Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe argue thus:

> We argue that one can be free in heaven but be unable to sin in virtue of having a moral character that one has previously freely formed. On our view, while an agent must have alternative possibilities open to her at some time in order to be free, the agent need not always have alternative possibilities open to her. She may freely form her character such that she can't choose not to perform some particular action at a later time, and nevertheless do the latter action freely (2009, pp. 397-8).

Richard Swinburne echoes Pawl and Timpe by arguing that repeated acts of virtue only reinforce the agent's character, causing the probability of vicious actions to reduce:

> Now those who (by yielding to such a bad desire) resist a good desire will have such good desires again. But if they systematically resist desires of a certain kind, they will gradually become the kind of person to whom such desires do not occur with any force. Those who refuse to give to charity once may have a fit of conscience and give more

> next time. But those who systematically refuse to give come no longer to regard it seriously as a good thing to give. Giving passes out of the range of their possible choice. A man who never resists his desires, trying to do the action which he perceives overall to be the best, gradually allows what he does to be determined entirely by the strength of his desires (as measured by the difficulty of resisting them) (1983, p. 48).

Getting back to the conception of character development, it may seem obvious how such an idea could be employed to explain how agents have perfect characters. Prior to heaven, the agent consistently acts in ways to deepen those traits which accord with moral virtue. Given that perfection entails the inability to sin or act morally blameworthy, humans reconstruct themselves through the process of character development, to the point in which the performance of any sinful act becomes impossible. In this way, the agent acts to deepen those traits of character prior to heaven, which contribute to a certain constraint on what types of actions are possible in heaven.

Before moving on to my critique, one further point needs to be mentioned about the relationship between the idea of character development and the type of constraint a theory of perfection assumes for the agent. When we think of agents who are in some way constrained in their range of actions or choices in virtue of their character dispositions, we typically think of individuals with severe genetic or behavioral disorders. A kleptomaniac may have constraints on their psyche when in contexts conducive to theft that most other humans do not have. Individuals raised in abusive or traumatic households may have psychological disorders that will constrain what actions they are able to perform when they become adults. For such cases, the kleptomaniac for instance, the source of his thievery would be the combination of genes,

environment, a strong desire to steal, and repeated acts of giving into that desire. Thus, through repeatedly choosing to steal, perhaps at instances when he was still capable of refusing such a desire, he has reached a state in which, when he has the option to steal, he does not have the control necessary to act contrary to his desire to steal.

For humans who have cultivated a character fit for heaven, a psychological constraint would amount to having only desires and beliefs for that which is virtuous, praiseworthy, good, or at the very least, morally neutral. They could never desire or form desires for anything vicious, blameworthy, or evil. Thus, what actions or choices that are possible for humanity are only those that their desires and beliefs will permit. Just as the kleptomaniac performed many acts of thievery that led to his eventual incapacity to avoid stealing, the humans performed many acts of virtue prior to heaven, when they could have performed vicious acts, which will eventually lead to their own incapacity to perform vicious acts in heaven. This is consistent with how I've defined moral perfection up to this point and it appears to be the way others understand a perfectly cultivated character. Recall Pawl and Timpe's example of Smith, a husband who desires adulterous activity but is constrained by the presence of his wife. Smith is someone who appears to have a deep-seated desire for this particular vice; however, as long as Smith is never in a circumstance to act on such a desire, he will never have the opportunity to perform the vicious act. So, if Smith is in heaven, God would need to ensure somehow that Smith is never in circumstances amenable to adulterous activity. This won't do, say Pawl and Timpe, for agents in heaven must be better than Smith. The problem with Smith is that he has any sort of vicious desire at all. The perfected individual will be like the completely moral person mentioned earlier: he will have no vicious traits whatsoever, governing or subordinate,

and thus it will not be necessary that God micro-manage every circumstance the perfected individual finds himself in to prevent vicious activity; the perfected agent's character will preclude the possibility of vicious activity, regardless of the situation. At the very least, an agent who has perfected himself will have psychological limits on the range of actions or choices he can perform.

5.3 Character Development is Unnecessary

To this point I have attempted to present the view of recent incompatibilists who have argued that the humans in heaven can have perfect characters, while also being free and responsible, given that they were responsible for cultivating a character fit for heaven prior to arriving there. In what follows I will provide a critique of this position; I will do this by arguing that the idea of character development is unnecessary and insufficient to explain the compatibility between humans in heaven having perfect characters while also being free and responsible.

First, regarding their characters, it is more plausible to suppose that the heavenly agents' inability to perform sinful actions is in virtue of God's activity in heaven rather than their persistent activity prior to heaven. Many of the medieval theologians and philosophers who considered these issues also seemed to affirm that heavenly agents would be perpetually detained in their perfect states by God's activity in heaven.[79] Some thought that God somehow directly caused agents to be perpetually perfect; some thought that God indirectly caused the agents to be perpetually perfect by producing an internal devotion or love or happiness that

[79] See Gaine (2003) for an account of the views of Suarez, Scotus, Ockham, and Aquinas. Also see Cross (1999) for an account of Scotus, and Adams (1999) for an account of Ockham.

becomes impossible to ignore or reject. This second thought is perhaps nearest to the idea that agents in heaven are psychologically constrained in which actions or choices they perform in heaven. However, unlike the position I have chosen to focus on in this chapter, the psychological constraint here has nothing to do with the characters humans were able to cultivate prior to heaven; the constraint is brought about by their relation to God once they see him or are properly related to him in heaven or purgatory. The medieval theologians thought that such an awareness of God was sufficient to produce an instantaneous devotion or affection for the Almighty in the heavenly agent. If something like this relation between God and humans is accurate, it seems as though the idea of character-development prior to heaven is wholly irrelevant to the issue of perfection. For God is going to incite the same response from all those who eventually see him or sufficiently behold him, regardless of where they are in their own personal character construction.

Second, regarding humans being free and responsible in heaven, it does not appear that these writers need to rely on the idea of character development to explain how humans can be free and responsible in a libertarian sense, while also lacking access to alternative possibilities in heaven. Recall that these writers have argued that the heavenly agents were able to develop characters such that they did not have access to robust alternatives in heaven because they had access to robust alternatives in regular and repetitive scenarios prior to heaven; humans used these scenarios to develop a virtuous character fit for heaven. What seems unnecessary here is the claim that agents needed to develop their characters at all prior to heaven to hold some responsibility for the state of their perfected characters in heaven. As I argued in chapter 3, I see no reason why the human could not have made one decision that would have allowed God

to perfect their character for them, whether prior to heaven or subsequent. Again, it seems plausible to say that the agent exercised his access to alternative possibilities in one scenario to choose to allow God to take responsibility for the perfection of their future characters. This would help explain how humans have perfect characters in heaven, even though so many were unable to sufficiently cultivate perfect characters prior to heaven.[80] This does not appear to be inconsistent with Christian orthodoxy, nor does it appear to be inconsistent with how many action theorists understand libertarian free will. As mentioned earlier, many believe a sufficient condition for libertarian free will is that the free agent be the primary or ultimate source of his or her choice in such a way that nothing external to the agent is sufficient for the agent's choice.[81] This requirement seems completely consistent with the claim that the humans only needed to make one choice to allow God himself to fit them for heaven.[82]

This position is also consistent with my argument in chapter 4 about the requirement of temporal extension in the perfection process. Making one choice to allow God to be the primary causal agent in the perfection process doesn't mean that God can perform that process instantaneously. It simply implies that if God is the primary agent responsible for performing the transformation, this wouldn't prevent the human agent from being relevantly responsible

[80] Examples of individuals failing to sufficiently cultivate perfect characters prior to heaven include those who begin the cultivation process late in life—e.g., the thief on the cross—and, those who never have the opportunity to begin the cultivation process—e.g., children who die in infancy.
[81] See McKenna (2001), Pereboom (2001, ch.1), Shabo (2010), and Timpe (2013).
[82] Other libertarians have made this very point about one choice being sufficient to allow the blessed responsibility for their eventual perfected characters. For instance, Katherin Rogers has argued that while such a scenario does not usually describe the actual situation humans come to be responsible for their characters, it is nonetheless possible that such a choice could confer responsibility: "In the course of a post-lapsarian human life it seems unlikely that a single choice should color the will so thoroughly for good or ill that its subsequent morally significant free choices would all be determined by that event—but unlikely is not impossible... In general it is probably the case that human choices work in a slow and cumulative way over time to build habits which may determine choice, but this seems an empirical point tied to the situations of actual agents, not a matter of metaphysical necessity for any created agent" (2008, pp. 95-6).

for the final perfected form. Prior to perfection, the agent desired God and desired the perfected character form that would allow a proper relationship with God; while free, the agent made the choice to allow God to perfect his character. Upon this request, before death or after, perhaps God performed some form of gradual uploading on the agent, such as Chalmer's discusses; or perhaps, God progressively granted relevant knowledge to the agent to quicken the perfection process, such as Kreeft suggested. Whichever way God chooses to perform the process, the point is that God can do it gradually enough, and with the 'permission/request' of the agent, to allow the survival of the agent through the process, and to allow him to remain free and responsible.

5.4 Character Development is Insufficient

Not only is the idea of character development unnecessary to explain how heavenly agents are free, responsible, and perfect, but the idea is also insufficient for such an explanation. The first reason why the idea of character development is insufficient to explain the human's inability to sin is that the process of character development prior to heaven does not guarantee the perpetuality of their perfect characters in heaven; an action or choice which is psychologically impossible at one particular time or instant does nothing to provide assurance that the same or similar action is psychologically impossible at all later times or instants, which is what perfection requires. The dispositions or traits of an agent that influence what range of actions he or she performs don't appear to be necessarily diachronic; that is, while the agent's internal disposition may entail the agent choose from a select range of actions (*A*-*C*) in a given scenario (*s*), that disposition at the time of *s* does not entail that only *A*-*C* are available to the agent in all

later scenarios similar to *s*. Peter van Inwagen makes this point, albeit reluctantly, in response to John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza:

> At t, my colleague suggests that I tell the lie about Smith. Because I regard the proposed course of action as morally reprehensible, I experience an upsurge of moral revulsion…Suddenly, however, "Sartrean" thoughts stir in my mind. I think of my long-standing desire to perform an *acte gratuity*, and it is borne in upon me that one way to satisfy this desire would be to do just what my colleague has proposed. Let us suppose that I thrust the desire to perform an *acte gratuity*, and the reflections concerning my present situation that accompanied it, out of my mind and indignantly refuse my colleague's suggestion. But suppose that if I had not cleared my mind of these things, the desire to perform an *acte gratuity*, together with the other features of my mental landscape at that moment, would shortly have issued in a desire to do A (1994, p. 102).[83]

What this argument signifies is that while a particular action may be psychologically impossible for an agent to perform at t_1, it remains metaphysically possible that that same action is performable for the agent at some later t_3. The fact that an agent with a cultivated character fit for heaven finds sinful actions deplorable in heaven does not guarantee, in itself, that the agent will always or perpetually find such sinful actions deplorable. But as mentioned above, perfection requires that the humans necessarily never perform sinful actions once in heaven.

[83] The argument van Inwagen is responding to can be found in Fischer and Ravizza (1992).

Now someone may object to this point about humans remaining perpetually perfect in heaven by arguing that it seems entirely possible, if not plausible, that they could cultivate characters prior to heaven that would remain perfect perpetually; for such individuals, there would be no chance that they would acquire new desires for that which is sinful or vicious, thus we would not have to worry about van Inwagen's Smith-scenario in which humans eventually come upon a belief or desire later in heaven that leads to an act or desire that is inconsistent with their perfect characters.

In response, we must ask 'why' it would be the case that the heavenly agent necessarily never come to have a belief or desire for something that leads them to desire or act contrary to their perfect characters. Recall in chapter 3 my argument for the *significantly* virtuous agent's inability to sin being dependent on external factors to the agent. If we can assume that humans in heaven have found complete satisfaction in God, in which case it would indeed seem strange for them to desire anything contrary to that satisfaction, then it seems as though they could only acquire a desire that leads them to act contrary to their characters if they acquired some false belief while in heaven, a belief about fulfilling or continuing to fulfill their already cultivated desire for the good or virtuous.[84] In other words, their desire for the good may perpetually continue, but they still may act contrary to the good in light of some false belief they acquire about how to fulfill their desire for the good. However, such a circumstance is hardly realistic for the heavenly agent. It is commonly believed that they will not be able to acquire such false beliefs in heaven, for their awareness and understanding of God will preclude

[84] It's also possible that the agent develop a desire for something vicious without acquiring a false belief, or a belief at all.

them from adopting or considering such false ideas. And while not omniscient, the blessed will have seen God in such a way that errant beliefs about God or what it means to love and obey him will not find purchase in their belief structure. But what is important to see about the above objection, is that it is in virtue of God's activity that humans never acquire a false belief or desire for that which is inconsistent with their character, not in virtue of their fully virtuous character that they cultivated prior to heaven. This issue is whether the human agent 'perpetually' remains perfect, and this seems to be dependent on God's activity, not their own. This claim is also consistent with our definition of moral perfection. In defining perfection in chapter 2 and 3, I said a morally perfect agent is one that does not have the ability to perform a wrong action, and the explanation for that inability is the state of their virtuous character; the state of their character makes sinful, evil, or wrong actions impossible. Claiming that God is a relevant explanation for the perpetuity of their perfected characters does not contradict this point. As mentioned above, an explanation for the type of actions that are available to heavenly agents could be an indirect causal influence from God. In other words, being in the presence of God, and everything that is entailed in that experience, may be sufficient to produce a state of perfection in the characters of those in heaven; further, as long as these agents remain in the presence of God, which is forever, they will remain perfect.

The second reason why character development is insufficient to explain how the agent in heaven can be free and responsible for their actions while remaining incapable of performing sinful actions is that such a position seems to entail self-causation. If an agent can perform actions such that she eventually constructs a character that causally determines the range of moral actions she can perform, such a fact seems to only be true if another general point is

true: that agents act the way they do because of the way they are, and agents are responsible for their acts because they are responsible for the way they are. However, such a position seems to entail the counterintuitive (if not impossible) truth of self-creation, that is, if agents are to be held morally responsible for their actions. The reason such a position leads to self-creation is that an agent can only be responsible for her actions if she is responsible for the character in which the actions originated, but to be responsible for that character, the agent must be responsible for the acts that led to her having that character, and on and on to the agent's very first character, a character that is implausible to think she formed or created.[85]

For those incompatibilists who argue that agents will be free and responsible in heaven because they are responsible for developing a character fit for heaven, this argument would imply that humans in heaven not only needed to be responsible for the character (c_5) they cultivated for heaven, but they also needed to be responsible for the prior character (c_4) they acted from to cultivate the character (c_5) fit for heaven. However, to be responsible for that character (c_4), the blessed would have had to be responsible for the prior character (c_3), and on and on.

While some incompatibilists have accepted the condition that agents are responsible for what they do because they are responsible for who they are, it seems the greater majority of incompatibilists have rejected it. They've argued that the link between an agent's character and her actions is fairly loose, such that a character can at most strongly influence a particular action from an agent, rather than causally determine a particular action. Audi, for instance,

[85] This is a version of Galen Strawson's Basic Argument (1994). For a recent defense of Strawson's Argument see Istvan Jr. (2011).

rejects the view that an agent's character determines her actions (though he does allow the reverse, that an agent's actions can determine her character):

> [C]ertainly if Jean can become honest, then, other things being equal, she is responsible for dishonest acts. But could she be incapable of becoming an honest person, yet still be responsible for an individual act of dishonesty? I think so. For even when an action manifests an inextirpable trait, it need not be such that one could not have done otherwise, nor need it be in any lesser way compelled. We can expect people to do better on individual occasions even if we cannot expect them to change their initial dispositions. The ineradicability of a trait does not imply the inevitability of actions that manifest it (1997, pp. 161-2).[86]

Now if such a condition is rejected, then it seems as though something more than their cultivated character is required to ensure that the humans remain in their perfected state perpetually. If one adopts the position of the medieval theologians mentioned earlier, this is not a problem; for God is the 'something more' that ensures heavenly agents remain in their perfected state. But without positing God for this requirement, it appears as though humans will have to be responsible for the creating or cultivating of themselves.

[86] See Clarke (2005) for another response to Strawson's Argument; in essence, Clarke argues that the incompatibilist should not feel obligated to adopt the claim that "When you do what you do because of the way you are, it is not possible for it to be up to you whether if you are that way, in certain crucial mental respects, then you perform that action" (p. 19), for Strawson has not done a sufficient job at defending this claim.

5.5 Character Development (growth) in Heaven – Intro

If there is no inconsistency with agents in heaven being free and perfect in heaven, a natural next question is what can they do with that freedom. This brings us to the second part of this chapter. Can perfected humans in heaven use their free will to develop their characters further? Is it possible for heavenly agents to grow morally? There are some that have argued that moral or character growth is impossible in heaven, based on the nature of heaven and the nature of moral perfection. In this section I will cover some of these arguments, while also evaluating responses to them.

5.6 Moral Change requires Pre-heavenly Conditions

The first problem with the idea of moral growth in heaven concerns a basic distinction in what we say about heaven versus what we say about pre-heaven earth; in other words, there is something that heaven lacks, but pre-heaven earth contains, that makes moral growth in heaven impossible. Thus, this objection claims that moral growth in heaven is impossible because moral growth implies change and moral change implies something that heaven necessarily lacks, specifically, the possibility of evil, suffering, or difficulty.

It is the segment prior to heaven that contains such possibilities of pain and suffering that allows humans to grow morally; however, in heaven, all such possibilities cease, or so says traditional accounts of heaven. This position is typically associated with John Hick; according to Hick's position, increase in love is necessary for moral growth, and love could not be developed in a world without evil and/or suffering.

> Perhaps most important of all, the capacity to love would never be developed, except in a very limited sense of the word, in a world in which there was no such thing as suffering…love perhaps expresses itself most fully in mutual giving and helping and sharing in times of difficulty. And it is hard to see how such love could ever be developed in human life, in this its deepest and most valuable form of mutual caring and sharing, except in an environment that has much in common with our own world. It is, in particular, difficult to see how it could ever grow to any extent in a paradise that excluded all suffering (Hick 1010, pp. 325-6).

According to Silverman, this objection affirms that "character building in earthly existence requires a dynamic existence in which goals, challenges, setbacks, pain, and suffering occur because paradise must not include such things" (2017, p. 16). If moral growth requires progressing in the love we have and express for others, and if Hick is right in saying that real and sincere expressions of love require the possibility of suffering, then it does appear as though moral progress would be impossible with a traditional conception of heaven, an environment in which pain and suffering are impossible. Nevertheless, I think Hick is wrong. Even if 'love' were the only quality or state that one needed to grow morally, and even if love expresses itself most fully when there are difficulties, it doesn't follow that someone couldn't grow morally at all without the existence of difficulties. Perhaps, without the occurrence of difficulties, an agent can only grow a little; even so, a little growth is still growth.[87] However, I think this response is irrelevant because it doesn't seem true that love expresses itself most

[87] We might also ask why a lack of 'difficulties' is a necessary feature of heaven. Perhaps significant problems and dangers would need to be missing, but I don't know why there couldn't be some meager or moderate difficulties. If so, this would provide an avenue to express love.

fully when there are difficulties. In fact, it seems that love can't only increase, but can increase substantially without any difficulties. As I covered in chapter 1, it is a popular view about heaven that the presence of God alone (his majesty, glory, goodness, love, etc.) is more than sufficient to produce an increase of love for those in proximity to him. If so, no difficulties, pain, or problems are necessary for growth. Thus it appears that Hick is in the minority here.

Christopher Brown mentions a different issue with moral growth in heaven, or the 'growing closer to God' in heaven, though his objection is closely related to Hicks'. To Brown, the value of human choices and actions prior to heaven would be significantly diminished if humans could make choices and perform actions in heaven that were efficient in moral growth or growing closer to God. The possibility of such growth "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*" (Brown 2015, p. 68). Brown's objection here, along with Hicks', both affirm that there is something about the context of pre-heavenly existence that makes human choices and actions different from those made in a heavenly existence.

Pawl and Timpe have pointed out that Brown's objection, if correct, would produce serious problems for theistic accounts that include a theology of purgatory, or a pre-heaven purging or developing. According to Pawl and Timpe, if Brown is right about the implication future growth in heaven has for present growth on earth, then the doctrine of purgatory has the same implication for purgatorial and pre-purgatorial growth (2017, p. 105). If purgatory is a state in which moral growth occurs, which I argued in chapter 4 is quite plausible, then Brown's claim implies that any growth prior to purgatory would lose value or importance. Most

Christians that affirm the existence of a purgatorial state after the present earthly state would likely reject this claim.

5.7 Moral Change requires Time

Another problem with the possibility of moral growth in heaven involves what some accounts of heaven say about time in the beatific realm. According to some accounts, God exists in a timeless state, and since God exists in a timeless state, to fully experience him (which is what heaven is supposed to entail), we must also be in a timeless state. The problem, however, is that in such a state, there is no place for moral change (or any other type of change); such change implies an existence of temporal progression. Silverman, linking this position to Ladislaus Boros, says,

> In heaven the blessed take on an eternal perspective in that they experience all of life in the eternal present. Accordingly, all their life is eternally and immediately present to them in a way that is incompatible with the temporal experience of sequential ordering. Since temporal sequential ordering is necessary for change, no change of any kind can occur in the timelessness of heaven (Silverman 2017, p. 17).

Brown traces this objection, or a form of it, to Aquinas. Associating moral growth with growth in one's relation to God, Brown claims that "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, 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" (2015, p. 73). It is

these 'other dimensions to human happiness' that *may* require time, but the beatific vision itself (essential beatitude) does not. According to Brown's interpretation of Aquinas, "essential beatitude itself is invariable, even immutable and timeless" (2015, p. 73). Thus, Brown concludes, "given St. Thomas's view that a saint's closeness to God in heaven is a function of the extent to which she participates 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 there follows that the saints in heaven can't get closer to God in heaven" (2015, pp. 73-74).

It's possible that Brown's claim that heaven will be immutable and timeless is derived from the claim that heaven simply is the beatific vision, an experience of 'seeing' that which is immutable and timeless; thus, since God is immutable and timeless, so the experience of seeing him will be immutable and timeless. Pawl and Timpe point out, however, that there are other features to God's nature that do not carry over to the experience of the vision: "God's nature is also immaterial and simple, but we won't be like him in those respects" (2017, p. 207). If we can 'gaze' at an immaterial and simple being without becoming immaterial and simple ourselves, why can't we gaze at a timeless being while remaining temporal?

5.8 Moral Growth is incompatible with Perfection

A third problem with moral growth in heaven has to do with the notion of perfection. Silverman puts it well:

> Classical theists such as St Anselm have thought God's existence as a 'perfect being' implies an unchanging immutability for God since any change could only be from

> perfection to imperfection. Following a similar line of thinking some theologians seem to intuit—though it is rarely actually argued—that the heavenly existence must also be perfect, and if heaven is perfect then no change is possible without introducing some defect into perfection (2017, p. 20).

If something is perfect (heaven), then change can only imply a less-than-perfect modification, moving from perfection (heaven) to imperfection (not heaven).[88] Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe state this objection in the context of growing in virtue:

> [A] person can't be in heaven and grow in virtue. For growing in virtue requires the lack of some perfection the person could have. But on the traditional view of the beatific vision, one which we share, the redeemed lack no perfections. They are, as their Father in heaven is, perfect. Thus, there is an inconsistency in holding both the traditional view of heaven and the claim that the redeemed grow in heaven (2017, pp. 102-3).

According to Pawl and Timpe, it is possible for an agent to be perfect (have all the relevant virtues for perfection and lack the ability to act viciously or possess mental states associated with vice) while lacking various mental states that are relevant to a virtuous character. Further, it's possible for a perfectly virtuous agent to acquire new mental states that are relevant to a virtuous character. They've described how such 'perfection' and 'growth' are possible using the Aristotelian terminology of 'holding firmer to the mean between extremes.'

> It seems to us at least possible that a person can cling to the mean to such an extent that he can't fall from it, but he could nevertheless still cling tighter. If that is possible, then the redeemed in heaven are such that they are perfected in the first sense, being

[88] This is very similar to Conee's argument in chapter 2.

> squarely on the mean, and perfected in the second sense insofar as they cling to the mean so tenaciously that they can't but remain there, but are nevertheless such that they could always cling tighter (2009, p. 416).

Regarding mental states, beliefs and desires appear to be the primary states Pawl and Timpe have in mind here, though I'm sure they don't mean to isolate these from other relevant mental states (intentions, hopes, etc.) or non-mental states. Take their example about the virtue of 'sobriety':

> Someone may well be solidly on the mean of sobriety such that she feels no pull at all towards intoxication. She may, in fact, be repulsed by the very idea. Suppose she is perfected in her sobriety, in the sense in which she couldn't bring herself to choose intoxication. Even in her state, though, she can gain new insights and new desires such that she feels her desire to remain sober even more forcefully, indeed, such that she more forcefully desires to remain sober. For instance, she may have kids and realize that were she to become intoxicated in their presence it would be harmful to them. Or she may note that her desire to be a good parent is antithetical to habitual drunkenness. In such a state, while she might have already been perfected in sobriety…she may still think to herself, truthfully, "I thought I couldn't desire sobriety any more than I already did; but now I see another reason, one I didn't perceive previously, which strengthens my conviction and desire to remain sober." Such a person has grown in virtue, in the sense we mean the phrase in this chapter, since she has come to cling more tenaciously to the mean of temperance (2017, p. 99).

The idea here is that an agent may have the virtue of 'soberness' but have a finite number (perhaps small number) of mental states relevant to that virtue (particularly 'beliefs'); thus, someone with this virtue may have only two or three beliefs for why soberness is good for her, but these few beliefs are sufficiently *weighty* for her to produce a strong enough desire for sobriety and a strong enough intention toward sobriety to make acting contrary to soberness (intoxication), or acquiring new mental states that are inconsistent with the goodness of soberness, impossible.[89] So, we might say that such an agent has the virtue of 'soberness' perfectly, in that the possession of the virtue makes acting contrary to it impossible. Further, it seems at least possible that such an individual could acquire new beliefs (perhaps many) for why soberness is admirable or good for her, and these new beliefs could perhaps produce an increase in the level of the already possessed desire for soberness, which will then have an impact on her intentionality towards acting sober.

In what follows, I want to provide an argument that moral perfection is incompatible with moral growth, and the primary reason for this incompatibility is that moral perfection requires the possession of all beliefs relevant to moral growth. Why is this the case? Suppose someone has an especially cognitive view of moral development (growth); if so, they may form the following argument:

1. Moral growth requires (i) the acquisition of new beliefs that are morally relevant, and (ii) such beliefs are efficient for the acquiring of new desires that are morally relevant, or for the strengthening of already-possessed desires that are morally relevant.

[89] This is not to say that her beliefs must be the mental state that causes other mental states to be what they are. It's possible that her beliefs about sobriety are somewhat irrelevant, but that she simply has a strong enough desire for sobriety that she has the virtue.

2. Morally perfect agents cannot acquire new beliefs that are morally relevant and are efficient for the acquiring of new desires that are morally relevant, or for the strengthening of already-possessed desires that are morally relevant.
3. Thus, morally perfect agents cannot grow morally.

Premise 1 states that a minimal requirement for moral growth is that an agent must acquire new beliefs before moral growth is possible. Premise 2's truth might be seen by thinking about the relationship of potential new beliefs that an agent has yet to acquire, to those beliefs that have already been acquired or possessed by the agent. In other words, for any non-omniscient agent, there are beliefs not yet possessed by the agent (or, there are claims not yet adopted by the agent as true); of these not-yet-possessed beliefs, some of them are very close or similar to the beliefs the agent already possesses, and some of the not-yet-possessed beliefs are not very close or similar to the beliefs the agent already possesses. Further, it seems to me that only those not-yet-possessed beliefs that are not very close or similar to beliefs the agent already possesses can possibly be efficient in producing actual moral growth. However, according to the argument below, morally perfect agents cannot acquire new beliefs that are not very close or similar to those beliefs he or she already possesses. Let me illustrate with the following disjunction about potential new beliefs an agent has yet to acquire:

Disjunction: Either (i) a not-yet-acquired belief is too similar to an already-acquired belief to allow for moral growth, or (ii) a not-yet-acquired belief is not too similar to an already-acquired belief to allow for moral growth.

The first potential issue with this statement concerns the vagueness in the relational term 'too similar.' To say that belief *A* is too similar to belief *B* can mean many things. It may mean that *A* is implied by *B*, or that *A* is entailed by *B*, or that *A* contains terms that are in the same semantical category as the terms contained in *B*. While it may produce an objection later on, I do not believe that I need to specify what I mean by 'too similar' here. So, assuming I don't need to provide further elaboration for this relation, the second issue with this statement is how it is relevant for morally perfect agents. I want to argue that while it appears possible that morally perfect agents can acquire beliefs referenced in the first disjunct, they cannot acquire beliefs that are referenced in the second disjunct. In other words, it appears possible that morally perfect agents can acquire new beliefs, but those beliefs must be very similar to those beliefs already acquired by the agent. In what follows, I will argue for each disjunct, and by so doing, provide justification for Premise 2 in the argument above.

According to disjunct (i), of the potential new beliefs a perfected agent can acquire, some are very close or similar to already possessed beliefs. Let's consider the example of 'sobriety' again from Pawl and Timpe. The example was of an agent who possessed the virtue of sobriety perfectly; since the agent already possessed the virtue of sobriety, it's safe to say the agent already believed that *intoxication is incompatible with being a good person*. Further, the example attempted to show that the agent could grow in this virtue by learning new insights (gaining new beliefs), such as that *intoxication is incompatible with being a good parent*. Thus, we can say the perfected agent had the following old belief, while also acquiring the following new belief:

Old Belief: Intoxication is incompatible with being a good person.

New Belief: Intoxication is incompatible with being a good parent.

Here, the old belief, which the agent still possesses, appears to entail the new belief (which she is about to accept or just accepted). If intoxication is incompatible with being a good person, then it also appears to be incompatible with being a good parent (parents are persons, typically). It seems, in this case, that while the New Belief is different from the Old Belief, it is sufficiently similar to the old belief to discount the idea that the agent has 'grown' in any significant way. Why is this so?

It should be obvious that mental states don't typically happen (or are possessed) in isolation. Thus, we might assess the relevance of the New Belief, with regard to growth, by comparing the impact of it to those other mental states affected. Assume an agent already possessed the Old Belief, and the belief was weighty enough to her to preclude the desire for intoxication (or it is so weighty to produce the desire for only sobriety), and to ultimately create an intention to not act so to get intoxicated. There would have to be a lot of weight behind this belief to produce such desires and intentions; perhaps there are other possessed beliefs that act to bolster the Old Belief. Regardless, if such a belief is already so weighty to preclude the desire to EVER act contrary to sobriety, or EVER intend to get intoxicated, does it really make sense to say this New Belief, which is so similar to the Old Belief, would increase her desire or intentions significantly? I'm not sure why it would. Thus, if there is a new belief, a belief a perfected agent does not yet possess, and the belief is sufficiently similar to an already possessed belief, then it doesn't appear as though the acquisition of the New Belief would really produce any relevant growth in the agent.

Now according to disjunct (ii), some of the potential new beliefs for the perfected agent are not very close or similar to already possessed beliefs. So, let's assume that the intuition in the previous conclusion is wrong; thus, let's assume that these two beliefs (Old and New) are sufficiently different, such that the acquisition of the New Belief could produce relevant growth in the agent.[90] Further, let's make explicit what moral perfection about sobriety implies.

Perfect Sobriety Claim (PSC): There are no possible scenarios in which a perfected agent could act inconsistent with sobriety or acquire new mental states that affirmed (or are associated with) the goodness of intoxication.

PSC is implied by the definition of moral perfection I specified above, and so, if an agent is morally perfect, and sobriety is a virtue relevant for a morally perfect character, then PSC applies to such an agent. So, what is the problem with PSC and moral growth? The problem with the possibility or likelihood of a perfected agent acquiring a new belief that is not sufficiently close to an already possessed belief, if there are such claims, is that the existence of them implies that there are other claims that could also be adopted by the agent, but such other claims are obviously impossible for a morally perfect agent to adopt.

To see why this is so, let's reconsider the New Belief that the perfected agent is about to acquire: Intoxication is incompatible with being a good parent. Now, if this is a new belief for an already perfected agent, then there was a point prior to the acquisition of this belief when the

[90] Someone might say being good people in general and being good parents (or being good people with parental roles) are distinct even though a set of parents are a proper subset of the set of people.

agent was ignorant of the supposed veracity of the claim. Let call the time that the agent accepted the new belief 'T_2'. Let's call the time prior to the acquisition of the new belief 'T_1'. It seems that the perfected agent, if asked at T_1 if intoxication is compatible with being a good parent, would have to answer with the following ignorance claim:

Ignorance Claim (IC): *I don't know if intoxication is incompatible with being a good parent.*

If the agent doesn't already possess the New Belief, then she must be ignorant of the truthfulness of the claim. If she instantly realizes that intoxication is incompatible with being a good parent when asked, then the New Belief must be very similar to Old Belief (otherwise, she wouldn't have recognized the inconsistency), a situation we just examined above.

So, if IC would be uttered at T_1 by the perfected agent, it seems to be consistent with IC for the agent to also utter Possibility Claim 1:

Possibility Claim 1 (PC1) at T_1: *It's possible that intoxication is not incompatible with being a good parent.*

The reason for this is that PC1 appears entirely consistent with IC. Further, if the perfected agent can affirm PC1 at T_1, the agent could also consistently affirm Possibility Claim 2:

Possibility Claim 2 (PC2) at T_1: *It's possible that intoxication is compatible with being a good parent.*

And if the perfected agent can affirm PC2, then it seems the agent could also affirm Possibility Claim 3:

Possibility Claim 3 (PC3) at T_1: *It's possible that being a good parent requires intoxication.*

The only reason why the perfected agent would not affirm this claim (PC3) is if the agent already believed the claim in New Belief, and thus already believed that intoxication is incompatible with being a good parent. However, if this was true, then there would be no new belief that provides the opportunity for growth.

Now here's the problem: it appears that PC3 is inconsistent with PSC. In other words, it seems that the acquisition of the belief *It's possible that being a good parent requires intoxication* is a possible scenario in which an agent acquires a new mental state that affirmed the possible goodness of intoxication, which contradicts the PSC (There are no possible scenarios in which a perfected agent could act inconsistent with sobriety or acquire new mental states that affirmed the goodness of intoxication). So PC3 is a claim that a perfected agent cannot accept, i.e., it is a belief (mental state) that is not possible to acquire for an agent that is perfected in sobriety.

Now, someone might object that a perfected agent would not affirm PC3, even if she would affirm PC2. So, a perfected agent may say, "yeah, it is possible that intoxication is compatible with being a good parent. But, even if that's true, it's still not possible that intoxication is *required* to be a good parent."

If the perfected agent did respond this way, she might give the following reason: "While intoxication might be compatible with being a good parent, it can't be required in order to be a good parent. If it was required, and I became a parent, I would have to be intoxicated, at some point, if I wanted to be a good parent. But I wouldn't get intoxicated, since I believe intoxication is incompatible with being a good person (Old Belief). Thus, if being a 'good parent' entails

being a 'good person', and intoxication is incompatible with being a good person, then it must also be with being a good parent. Thus it can't be required."

As mentioned above, the only reason why the agent would respond in this way is if she *saw* or *recognized* at the moment, that PC3 was inconsistent with the Old Belief. But the only reason she would recognize this, assuming she's right, is if the New Belief was sufficiently close to the Old Belief (perhaps entailed). But if the Old Belief and the New Belief are so similar, I don't know why the New Belief would be significant enough to actually produce stronger desires or intentions towards sobriety.

Another objection might go like this: Even if a perfected agent affirmed PC3, it doesn't follow that there is a possible scenario in which the agent would fail to act according to sobriety in order to be virtuous. In other words, even if the agent accepted PC3, it doesn't follow that she's imperfect; it might be that PC1, PC2, and PC3 are just false, and the perfected agent just wrongly accepted (believed) each of them. And even if the perfected agent is wrong to accept each of the claims, that doesn't mean she's not perfect; perfection doesn't require omniscience.

In response, I want to say that whether perfection requires omniscience may end up being a controversial issue; nevertheless, even if perfection does not require omniscience, and thus perfected agents can acquire false beliefs or lack knowledge of all true claims, the acquisition of these beliefs (PC1-3) does cause a problem for our definition of moral perfection. Remember, according to the PSC, there are no possible scenarios in which a perfected agent could act inconsistent with sobriety or *acquire new mental states that affirmed the goodness of intoxication.* But the acceptance of PC3 clearly involves the acquiring of a new mental state

(belief) that affirms the goodness of intoxication, or at least the possibility of the goodness of intoxication. And thus, it seems as though PC3 (and perhaps PC1-2) is a claim that a perfected agent (in sobriety) could not accept; in other words, it is impossible that a perfected agent could accept it. But, if the agent is ignorant of 'New Belief,' then it does appear possible that she could accept them. Thus, it seems that the agent is not actually perfected in sobriety.

One might object to the actual sobriety example I provided. They might say that while this example, with this particular virtue (sobriety) and these particular beliefs (Old and New), may have the implications suggested, that doesn't mean that all the virtues relevant for perfection have the same implications. And perhaps, the virtue of sobriety isn't relevant for perfection.

To see if there is merit in this objection, let's consider another example Pawl and Timpe provide, that of the virtue 'charity': "Suppose that Beatrice loves God as fully as she is capable given her understanding of the richness that is the Divine Goodness. As Beatrice comes to know God more fully, she can also come to love Him more fully given that she now knows aspects of goodness about God that she previously didn't" (2017, p. 103). Let's try to envision this growth with the following Old Belief and New Belief:

Old Belief: God is good because he created the world.

New Belief: God is good because he loves humans, provides grace for humans, and will eventually remove all evil from the world.

Now if Beatrice already had the Old Belief, and that belief was sufficiently weighty to produce really strong desires and intentions of love towards God such that she was unable to act inconsistent with that love, it does seem entirely plausible that Beatrice could still acquire the

New Belief; such an acquisition would likely increase her loving desire and intentionality towards God. Further, it seems that there are many other claims about God that serve to showcase his goodness that Beatrice is probably unaware of, and the acquisition of these beliefs would likewise increase her affections towards God.

I have two responses to this objection. First, I'm not convinced that we couldn't draw out similar implications here as we did with the sobriety example; in fact, I think we could. But let's assume that we can't. Let's assume that whereas the sobriety example had the implications it did, the virtue of charity wouldn't have such implications. Further, it does seem that charity is the more significant virtue for heavenly life. So even if a heavenly agent didn't have the virtue of sobriety, that's fine since she had the very important virtue: charity.

Of course, and this is my second response, we might ask 'why' the virtue of sobriety is excluded from the heavenly life. It can't be merely that there won't be any taverns in heaven, and so the virtue is superfluous. Remember, that the agent is in heaven is somewhat irrelevant to the claim that the agent is perfected in virtue (morally perfect). In other words, to be perfectly virtuous means to have all relevant virtues for perfection, and have an inability to act viciously or acquire mental states associated with vice *in any possible situation*. Thus, while there may not be any taverns in heaven, there are in Texas. A perfectly virtuous agent is one that must be virtuous in *all* possible scenarios in which a virtue is called for.[91]

So far it appears that the objections against the main argument in this section have failed; however, there is a final objection that I believe does not. We might object by first,

[91] I have to admit that this is a weak response. It begs the question that all virtues are relevant for perfection (such as sobriety), and this seems far from obvious.

agreeing that the above argument seems to show that perfect agents cannot grow or develop their character, given the definition of moral growth above; but then we can ask why we should accept that definition of moral growth. It appears to place too much significance on cognitive conditions. Why should we accept that the only way we can grow morally is that we gain new beliefs?[92] Perhaps there are other models of moral growth and development that don't require that agents must gain new beliefs. For instance, maybe the agent doesn't gain the New Belief above about God, but that the New Belief is an old belief that simply becomes stronger. For an agent to grow in the confidence or strength of an already possessed belief, it is not necessary that they gain other new beliefs relevant to the already possessed belief. Perhaps the already possessed belief is strengthened by a new desire or an already possessed desire becoming stronger. It seems like this happens all the time. Perhaps I already believe that asparagus is good for me, though I've never desired to eat it. Isn't possible that one day I just want to eat it. Perhaps your new desire is based on your senses; you smell it, and all of sudden you want it. Or the new desire for asparagus may just occur without being based on your senses or some new belief. However, it also seems our already possessed desires can get stronger without the aid of a new belief. Take the desire and affection for my wife Lynn. It seems to happen often, thankfully, that my desire and affection for Lynn grows stronger, though I have learned nothing new about her.

If it's possible for agents to gain new desires or grow in already possessed desires without the gaining of new beliefs, perhaps this can happen in heaven in a way that allows moral growth. Take Pawl and Timpe's example above about Beatrice. In their example, Beatrice

[92] Thanks to an anonymous referee for this point.

loves God already, but comes to love him more because of new information she acquires about God's goodness. But maybe Beatrice just grows in her love for God without learning any new information about God. Just as my desire for my wife grows sometimes without me learning anything new about her, surely Beatrice's love and desire for God can grow even if she doesn't learn anything new about him. If so, then it does appear that Beatrice, already perfected in her love and desire for God, can grow morally.

5.9 Moral Growth is Possible in Heaven

At the beginning of this section, I asked whether or not it is possible for human agents to grow morally in heaven. Since then, the arguments I've covered have not been persuasive in showing that perfect agents cannot grow morally. For the remainder of this chapter, I would like to present an argument for the possibility of moral growth for those perfected in heaven.

Perhaps some may find one of the arguments against the possibility of moral growth for the perfected very persuasive, while finding all the responses to the arguments unsatisfying. However, they may still want to hang on to the view that perfection is compatible with moral growth. Thus, they might say that the problem isn't that perfected agents can't grow morally, the problem is in my definition of moral perfection. The definition of perfection that we've been using is overly strong. Recall from chapter 3 that I argued *if* moral perfection is not a possibility, this fact wouldn't cause a problem for the coherence of the Christian doctrine of heaven because that doctrine does not require the possibility of moral perfection, but only moral impeccability. If true, then heavenly inhabitants need only be *significantly* virtuous, rather than perfectly virtuous. While this claim is somewhat irrelevant to my primary thesis

(that moral perfection is possible), if it's true, it does allow us to salvage an important doctrine in Christianity.

But maybe we don't have to do away with the doctrine of 'perfection.' Perhaps perfection could be defined in a weaker way that only requires a perfect agent to be impeccable (significantly virtuous). It could be argued that what is important about the moral life of human agents in heaven, and what is important about what we say about that life, is that human agents in heaven are impeccable, not that human agents in heaven are strongly perfect ('perfect' as I have defined it in chapter 3). According to the view of 'impeccability' that was argued for in chapter 3, an agent in heaven is impeccable if he or she lacks the ability to sin (act viciously, wrongly, etc.) and has all the virtues relevant to a heavenly character; further, perhaps having a heavenly character does not entail having a strongly perfect character, but merely a weakly perfect one. If this is true, then it could be argued that as long as the impeccable agent's character is not strongly perfect, then there is always a possibility for the acquisition of new beliefs or new desires, or the strengthening of those already possessed beliefs/desires, that result in moral growth. To understand why this is so, it's important to look at the two components of impeccability.

The first component of impeccability concerns actions, and the second concerns character or virtue. So, the first component merely states that vicious, sinful, or immoral acts are impossible for the impeccable agent; the second components states that the character of the impeccable agent must be sufficiently virtuous to exist in heaven ('sufficiently virtuous' is left intentionally vague). Now, someone who claims that impeccability entails strong perfection is arguing the following about these two components of impeccability: first, they are arguing

that 'sufficiently virtuous' means 'strongly virtuous,' and second, they are arguing that the *reason* why vicious or sinful acts are impossible for impeccable agents is *because* of their strongly perfect character. To say it in another way, for an impeccable agent that is also strongly perfect, it is impossible for the agent to sin or act viciously in any situation *because* the agent's strongly virtuous character precludes such possibility. Thus, an impeccable agent in heaven in this sense would be an impeccable agent anywhere, whether inside heaven or out.

To say that impeccability does not entail strong perfection is to argue something different about the two components of impeccability: first, the agent's character is not necessarily strongly perfect, but perhaps just *really* or *significantly* virtuous (weakly perfect), and second, it is the combination of the agent's character along with other relevant external factors that preclude the possibility of sinful or vicious action. What is important to see is that if the agent's character is not strongly perfect, then there is room for him or her to become more virtuous.

Concerning 'external factors,' as I mentioned above and in previous chapters, we might simply recognize God as that factor which precludes the possibility of sinful or vicious activity. I think there are many ways that God could serve in this role for human agents in heaven, but one obvious way would be to use his omniscience to prevent the human agent from being a part of any situation or state of affairs in which they perform sinful/vicious acts (or adopting false beliefs or vicious desires). We can see this by examining the 'sobriety example' above. Recall the Old Belief and New Belief:

Old Belief: Intoxication is incompatible with being a good person.

New Belief: Intoxication is incompatible with being a good parent.

For a human agent in heaven that is weakly perfect, he or she could have the Old Belief in heaven, and acquire the New Belief in heaven, and thus grow morally. There are two reasons for this. First, assuming that the Old Belief and New Belief are not too similar, we can say that IC (Ignorance Claim) is a possible claim that the agent could adopt (before adopting New Belief). If IC is a possible claim that the agent could adopt, we know that the acquisition of New Belief would provide legitimate moral growth. Of course, this would also mean that the PSC does not apply to the agent, since it's possible that the agent could be moved from the adoption of IC to the adoption of PC3 (*It's possible that being a good parent requires intoxication*). Thus, there are situations in which it is possible, based on the state of the agent's weakly perfect character, that the agent gets intoxicated, or acquires beliefs/desires that affirm the goodness of intoxication. Does this possibility conflict with the claim that the agent is also impeccable? I don't think so.

The reason for this, and the second reason why a weakly perfect agent in heaven could have the Old Belief in heaven, and acquire the New Belief, and thus grow morally, is that while the possibility of the adoption of PC3 remains open for the impeccable agent (in virtue of the state of their character), God will never allow him or her in a situation in which they would adopt it. So, for instance, let's say an agent believes Old Belief, and has yet to adopt New Belief. Further, let's say the only way for the agent to adopt PC3 before they adopt New Belief is if some other agent approaches him or her and asks a serious of questions that leads the agent to adopting PC3. If there was nothing to prevent such a situation from occurring, then yes, the agent would fail the conditions for impeccability. However, in heaven, perhaps God would not allow such situations to occur before the agent adopted New Belief. If so, then there is a sense

in which it is not possible that the agent can adopt claims like PC3, and thus act sinfully or viciously (or adopt false belief or vicious desires); however, and this is important, the reason why it's not possible for the agent to violate the conditions of impeccability is based on the conjunctive factors of the agent's character *and* God acting to prevent situations in which the agent sinned. Understood in this way, we might say that human agents in heaven, while lacking the ability to sin, can grow in virtue, but only under God's leadership or providential guidance.

Now if I'm right, and there isn't a problem with the claim that some human agents in heaven are impeccable, weakly perfect, and capable of moral growth, there still may be other non-philosophical problems with my proposal. Some have argued or implied that a traditional/orthodox/historical view of Christianity is inconsistent with the claim that affirms that inhabitants of heaven are not strongly perfect (Pawl & Timpe 2017, pp. 102-3). According to this objection, my view, while perhaps solving the issue of how human agents in heaven can grow morally, would only do so by contradicting a major tenet of Christianity. I think there is some plausibility to this objection. For instance, there are various statements of faith, from both Catholics and non-Catholics, that seem to affirm that human agents in heaven are perfect in some way. According to the Westminster Confession,

> 32.1: The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies.[93]

[93] See also 13.2-3.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also seems to affirm that human agents in heaven are perfect in some way: "Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live for ever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they 'see him as he is,' face to face" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1.2.12, 267-68; See also 1026 and 1030).

The reasons why Christians, and Christian councils and creeds, have tended to affirm that the redeemed in heaven are morally perfect vary based on the particular tradition; Catholics will typically say the redeemed are morally perfect in virtue of their participation in the beatific vision, while non-Catholics may give other reasons. Again, under the Catholic response, such a vision of the essence of the divine is said to thoroughly sanctify any defect in the human agent, such that any further sanctification or purification is unnecessary. Of Aquinas, Simon Gaine says,

> According to Aquinas, the blessed may be said to have perfect charity in the sense that each one loves to the full extent that one can. As a consequence, the saint's 'whole heart is always actually borne towards God'. This unending act of charity does not involve further desire to reach God since he is now known just as he is, and the will is engaged in regard to God in a new way that is not such desire. The soul's search for its essential happiness is now fulfilled, and its desire has been brought to 'repose' or 'rest' in the dynamic acts of beatific knowing and loving. Since the will's desire has now come to rest in possession of the Supreme Good, the will is said to have perfect 'enjoyment' (*fruition*) of the divine essence known through the intellect (2015, p. 161).[94]

[94] Aquinas references: *ST*, 2a.2ae., q. 24, a. 9., and *ST*, 1a.2ae., q. 11.

For those of us that support the position that perfect agents can grow morally, I think we have the following options. First, we can say that traditional Christianity does affirm that human agents in heaven are strongly morally perfect, in which case we can say that it is possible for human agents in heaven to grow morally since the arguments mentioned above against that possibility proved unsuccessful. The second option is for those that have not been convinced that strong perfection is consistent with moral growth; they might say that the term 'perfect' that has been used traditionally is not according to strong perfection, but merely weak perfection. Now if my distinction between strong and weak perfection is wrong, and weak perfection is not perfection at all but mere impeccability, then this second option may be in full agreement with the position that morally perfect agents cannot grow morally.

To adopt the first option, as I've said, would allow us to keep the seeming traditional perspective that human agents in heaven are strongly perfect, and can still grow morally. There are, however, reasons we might adopt the second option. As we saw in chapter 3, there are those that claim the very idea of strong perfection (or strong perfect virtue) is either incoherent or refers to a state that is impossible to reach (Slote 2011). If these objections are correct, and strong perfection is not suitably coherent, we may find the second option to be the most attractive. Here, we would be saying that there is an equivocation in how tradition speaks about the moral perfection of human agents in heaven, and how 'moral perfection' is used thus far in this dissertation. Perhaps Christians have traditionally or historically used the term 'perfection' in a way other than how I have defined it, and perhaps they understand it in a way that is much more consistent with how I use the word 'impeccability' (weak perfection). This

option seems somewhat plausible to me, though to satisfactorily defend it, I think much hermeneutical work would be required, which is way beyond the scope of this thesis.

One obvious objection to this second option is to say that if human agents in heaven have access to the beatific vision, how could they not be strongly perfect. If engagement in the vision so purifies the agent that he or she loves God and others as much as possible, and thus hates evil or vice with the same intensity, how is it that he or she is not strongly perfect?

In response, I'm not sure that the scenario of the saints engaged in the vision is sufficient for strong moral perfection. According to how I defined it in chapter 3, a morally perfect agent is one that *would not* and *could not* act sinfully or viciously in any possible scenario, and this inability is based on the state of their virtuous character; their character is sufficiently strong/virtuous, in other words, to preclude the possibility of any sinful or vicious act in any possible situation. But as I've shown, many have affirmed that the virtuous character (or lack of sinful or vicious behavior) of the saint in heaven is partly explained by the continual engagement of the saint in the vision of God. If there is this dependency relation, then it seems to imply that if the saint, for whatever reason, ceased observing God (if that's even possible), then sinful or vicious behavior would be possible again. In other words, it's not true that the heavenly agent is one that *would not* and *could not* act sinfully or viciously in any possible scenario, but rather only those scenarios in which he or she happens to be engaged in the beatific vision.

Of course, someone could reply that once a human agent engages the beatific vision, it is no longer possible to cease such engagement.[95] If such an event does produce the type of character that precludes the possibility of vicious activity, and it is simply impossible that such an event can end once begun, then it does seem that the human agent has a character that makes it impossible to sin or act viciously in any situation, or at least, any situation or event that is possible for the agent to be a part of. Now if this is right, for the agent in heaven to be strongly perfect, it must be the case that the agent is capable of being a part of *any possible situation* that calls for virtuous behavior, while also engaged in the vision. In other words, it must in principle be possible for the human agent to both be engaged in the vision, which 'perfects the character,' while also retaining all cognitive features necessary for virtuous behavior in any situation that calls for virtue. So, for example, it must be possible for an agent engaged in the vision to function as a virtuous agent in those particularly cruel periods of human history. They must be able to gaze at the essence of God, while also having the ability to use practical wisdom in the context of messy, unfortunate, and frustrating situations, in order to determine which virtue is needed, and to follow through by acting according to that virtue.

Now this might be possible. As I mentioned in the last chapter, some would point to Christ's life on earth as an example of someone immersed in messy human affairs and acting virtuously in all situations that called for virtuous behavior, while also engaged in the beatific vision.[96] So perhaps doing both is possible. Further, Aquinas seemed to think that engagement

[95] According to Aquinas, "the nearer a thing is to God, who is entirely immutable, the less mutable it is and the more lasting…But no creature can come closer to God than the one who sees His substance. So, the intellectual creature that sees God's substance attains the highest immutability. Therefore, it is not possible for it ever to lapse from this vision" (c. 13th/1981, *ST*, 3.62.11). Also, see Gaine 2015, p. 11).

[96] If something did happen, then it's possible that it can happen.

in the vision didn't preclude the performance of various forms of normal human behavior. According to Gaine,

> Aquinas envisaged the blessed as engaged in a succession of further acts, as well as in the single immutable act of seeing the Father, which was measured by a participated eternity. For Aquinas there is no 'competition' between the beatified will's adhesion to God, clearly seen, and its choice of such acts as intercession, movement form place to place, appearing in some way to those still on earth according to divine providence, and observation of the new creation (2015, p. 163).[97]

So perhaps there is no equivocation with the use of the term 'perfection' here and traditionally, in which case the second option would be unnecessary. But the upside is that the first option remains viable.

5.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to show that a recent view about humans in heaven is inadequate to explain the nature of their character and the quality of their agency. I attempted to demonstrate that it is unnecessary and insufficient to posit that agents in heaven can be free and responsible in heaven, while having perfect characters, only because they are responsible for the cultivation of those perfect characters prior to heaven. This explanation is unnecessary because (i) it is more likely that it is in virtue of God's activity in heaven that they remain in their perfected state, and (ii) there are simpler libertarian accounts that do not require an agent to develop their character to explain how they are free and responsible without having access

[97] Gaine references for Aquinas: *ST*, 2a.2ae., q. 83, a. 11; *Compendium*, 1.171; *Super Sent.*, 4.45.1.1.3.

to robust alternative possibilities. The explanation is insufficient because (i) the process of character development is no guarantee that an agent will always act according to the character she cultivated, and (ii) the affirmation that actions determine one's character leads to self-creation. In addition, I have also attempted to argue that the numerous attempts to show that it is impossible for perfected agents to develop or grow morally are unsuccessful.

Conclusion

I had various goals for this thesis, all of which involved the clarifying of the term 'moral perfection.' My primary goal was to show that moral perfection is possible, or at the very least, show that arguments against the possibility of moral perfection have been unsuccessful. The secondary goals for the thesis included defining moral perfection, showing how agents become morally perfect in relation to temporal requirements, and arguing that character development and growth are possible for agents that have already been made perfect.

I believe the value of this thesis can be seen for the following reasons. First, it attempts to shed more light on an important concept in normative ethics that has been largely ignored, that of moral perfection. Secondly, I think I was able to provide some clarity for an important doctrine in Christianity. On this point, there has been a growing interest among philosophers in matters of 'heaven'; I believe this thesis is able to contribute to that literature. Finally, I was able to defend the doctrine of 'heaven' to those that have argued that an important feature of the doctrine (moral perfection of the saints) is impossible.

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