

and use for the good of humanity and creation and a subduing of Earth.

As I pointed out in my article, there does seem to be an arc from garden to city in the biblical story. The ills highlighted do not mandate a cessation of industrial agriculture, but rather, industrial solutions that correct the problems, such as nitrogen pollution, soil damage, and water management. Like it or not, the planet has already been terra-formed by human activity. Ecomodernists are fond of pointing out that intensification of the human impact in cities and industrial agriculture actually can lead to more “wilding,” restoring once-used agricultural areas to their former pre-agricultural state.

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On the Dilemma of Heavenly Freedom and the Historical Adam

In an interesting recent article (“Theodicy and the Historical Adam: Questioning a Central Assumption Motivating Historicist Readings,” *PSCF* 74, no. 1 [2022]: 39–53), Patrick Franklin raised questions about a traditional belief in the Fall by asking six similar questions, which are largely summarized by the first one:

If it is possible for us to be made fully free and yet totally incapable of sinning, as our future glorified state revealed in scripture suggests, then *why did God not create us in this state to begin with?*¹

This is surely an important question, well worthy of our attention. And by repeating a very similar question five more times, Franklin seems to be suggesting that God’s behavior is inexplicable. But perhaps we need to reexamine the premise that led to these seemingly inexplicable expectations. Perhaps scripture does not suggest that it is possible for us to be made “fully free and yet totally incapable of sinning” in the way that Franklin assumes. Indeed, this issue is well known in the theological-philosophical literature, where it has been extensively debated.² For example, James Sennett called it the “dilemma of heavenly freedom.”³

The Dilemma of Heavenly Freedom

From a philosophical point of view, the state of humans being completely sinless seems incompatible with their exercise of free will. Therefore, attempts to solve the dilemma of heavenly freedom generally involve some kind of limitation on being fully free or fully sinless. Of these alternatives, the least satisfactory seems to be a limitation on heavenly sinlessness,

which has been called the “strategy of concession.”⁴ The problem, as Franklin asserts, is that if the glorified redeemed are capable of sinning, “the pattern of fall and redemption could go on infinitely and Christ would have to be crucified and risen repeatedly.”⁵ However, the other alternatives require some limitation on heavenly freedom, which also seems problematical, based on the text quoted by Franklin:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (2 Cor. 3:17)

The inference is that where God’s Spirit is completely revealed, there will be complete freedom. For example, Franklin argues that the capacity to sin limits freedom, and therefore the absence of sin is a *gain* in freedom. And something similar was proposed by Augustine:

Neither are we to suppose that because sin shall have no power to delight them, free will must be withdrawn. It will, on the contrary, be all the more truly free, because set free from delight in sinning to take unfailing delight in not sinning.⁶

Anselm of Canterbury made a similar claim:

I do not think free will is the power to sin or not to sin. Indeed if this were its definition, neither God nor the angels, who are unable to sin, would have free will, which it is impious to say.⁷

But Anselm qualifies this assertion later in his dialogue. Firstly, he recognizes that the free will of God is different from that of angels and of humans, since the former is intrinsic, whereas the latter is given by God. Secondly, he recognizes that the angels “did” have the free will to do evil, because the fallen angels exercised that freedom:

The apostate angel and the first man sinned through free will, because they sinned through a judgment that is so free that it cannot be coerced to sin by anything else.⁸

Anselm’s point is that while Lucifer and Adam had a free choice not to sin, no subsequent person except Jesus had a free choice not to sin. But having *not* sinned with Lucifer, the good angels preserve their free will not to sin for the rest of eternity:

Since the divine free will and that of the good angels cannot sin, to be able to sin does not belong in the definition of free will.⁹

In subsequent philosophical thinking, this affirmation has been called compatibilism.¹⁰ It avoids the dilemma of heavenly freedom by claiming that this free will is “deterministic,” as opposed to what most people think of free will, which is “libertarian”

(undetermined free will). However, this narrower definition of free will has a price. Deterministic free will undermines what philosophers call the “free will defense,” which holds that libertarian free will is such a great virtue that it justifies the existence of evil in the world, even though God could otherwise remove that evil.¹¹ So, as Franklin implies by his repeated questions, if the “good” of libertarian free will in heaven is to be abandoned as unnecessary, why not abandon it on Earth as well? But if libertarian free will is not necessary on Earth, God would be allowing evil on Earth for no good reason.

It seems clear that this line of thinking is very unpalatable. But is it logical? I suggest not, because it fails to see the whole picture. God apparently *did* give libertarian free will to both angels and humans, as Anselm affirms:

The former was the case with all the angels before the good were confirmed and the evil fell, and with all men prior to death who have this rectitude.¹²

Anselm did not explain how this works, but James Sennett expressed it as what he called the “proximate conception” of freedom, which

holds that actions may be free though determined, but only if they have in their causal history some undetermined free actions by the same agent.¹³

For the angels, this “causal history” was their irrevocable decision to become either good or bad angels, a choice which is then eternally “determined.” For humans, this “causal history” is established on Earth as a choice for or against God, and apparently becomes irrevocable after death, so that those who chose God are “determined” to always will good. This proposal leads to perfect free will and complete sinlessness in heaven, while saving the free will defense on Earth. Put another way, freedom on Earth is libertarian, but freedom in heaven is compatibilist. However, there is no reason to think that this arrangement is an accident. Surely God planned that humans would have an opportunity to decide for or against him, but in a way that did not simply repeat the choice given to the angels.

The Historical Adam

The above argument shows that the proximate conception of freedom satisfies the free will defense. This, therefore, supports the traditional view that Adam and Eve, under the influence of the serpent, were the originators of human sin. Further, since the serpent is traditionally identified as the manifestation of the apostate angel, it follows that he, not God, is the source of evil in the world. This represents a

valid justification (theodicy) that God is not the originator of evil.

But is the Fall really Adam’s principal role or attribute in biblical history? I suggest not. Adam’s principal attribute is that he was “the man” – the first man to experience the immanent presence of God. This suggestion that the Fall is not Adam’s principal attribute is validated by the *Priestly Source*, which has no Fall, but does have “the man,” also named Adam, who is the first of God’s elect people. So, Adam can be defined apart from his role in the Fall. And in the latter role, Franklin, following Enns, argues that Paul’s emphasis on Adam as the first sinner is driven by the need for comparison with the second Adam¹⁴; hence, Paul’s omission of Eve, who according to Genesis was actually the first sinner.

Scientific evidence that Adam was not the first human being may weaken Augustine’s interpretation of original sin, but it does not weaken Adam’s role as the first recipient of manifest revelation. It was this revelation, rather than Adam’s status as a member of the human species, that made him spiritually perfect until the Fall. And, however virtuous the first recipient of this revelation (presumably God chose a virtuous man), he was bound to fall. However, Adam’s Fall is no less cosmic in its significance just because we infer that we are individually presented with a similar (but not identical) choice: accept or reject God’s offer of redemption. Adam was still the first man to fall from spiritual perfection, and a template that all humanity was doomed to follow.

Notes

¹Patrick S. Franklin, “Theodicy and the Historical Adam: Questioning a Central Assumption Motivating Historicist Readings,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 74, no. 1 (2022): 42.

²Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe, “Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven,” *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 4 (2009): 398–419, <https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil200926437>.

³James F. Sennett, “Is There Freedom in Heaven?,” *Faith and Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (1999): 69–82, <https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil19991617>.

⁴Pawl and Timpe, “Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven.”

⁵Franklin, “Theodicy and the Historical Adam,” 41.

⁶Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1872), Book 22, chapter 30.

⁷Anselm, *On Free Will*, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and Gill R. Evans (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 175–92.

⁸*Ibid.*, chapter 2.

⁹*Ibid.*, chapter 1.

¹⁰Sennett, “Is There Freedom in Heaven?,” 71.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 69.

¹²Anselm, *On Free Will*, chapter 14.

¹³Sennett, “Is There Freedom in Heaven?,” 69.

¹⁴Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012), 120.

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Response to Alan Dickin by Patrick Franklin

I would like to express my gratitude to Alan Dickin for his thoughtful response to my article on theodicy and the historical Adam (Patrick Franklin, "Theodicy and the Historical Adam: Questioning a Central Assumption Motivating Historicist Readings," *PSCF* 74, no. 1 [2022]: 39–53). I have appreciated the opportunity to reflect more deeply on the issues, particularly on the nature and implications of freedom in relation to sin. Specifically, I have had opportunity to read the key article by James F. Sennett that Dickin cites,¹ as well as various articles in the journal *Faith and Philosophy* which engage Sennett and move the discussion forward.² This has been a stimulating and enriching exercise, for which I thank Alan. He rightly notes that the discussion of "the dilemma of heavenly freedom" has been extensively debated in theological-philosophical literature, though I think it's also important to point out that the debate is far from being settled.

Dickin's concern regarding human freedom is two-fold: first, he suggests that my account of heavenly freedom is inadequate; second, he worries that my argument threatens to undermine the freewill defence in theodicy. In response, I would like to concede—partly, at least—the first point: I do think my account of freedom could and should be improved (though I'm not sure anyone has yet offered a fully satisfactory response to the dilemma of heavenly freedom). However, I would like to reject or at least assuage the second concern.

Dickin draws on Sennett's article to endorse what Sennett calls the "*Proximate Conception* of freedom." Sennett puts forth this notion of freedom in order to avoid two problematic responses to the dilemma of heavenly freedom, that is, to reject either (a) the idea that human beings are sinless (and incapable of sin) in heaven or (b) the idea that humans lack freedom in heaven. His conception of freedom in heaven is "*proximate*" in the sense that the choices of perfected humans in heaven are proximately determined (since humans can no longer choose evil) but not remotely determined (i.e., determined *all the way down*, we might say). To give an illustration of how this works, my present (but predetermined) incapability to

choose the evil of brutally torturing an innocent child for five cents might be grounded in freely chosen decisions and acts that have shaped my character in the past in such a way that I am unable to make this choice in the present (thankfully). Sennett argues that freedom is forfeited only if heavenly choices are both proximately and remotely determined, that is, only if proximately determined choices in heaven do not point back in some way to previous nondetermined libertarian choices made during my life on Earth.

The upshot of Sennett's solution to the dilemma of heavenly freedom is that "there is a way to argue that heaven has only compatibilist freedom while Earth includes at least some libertarian freedom," leading to the conclusion that the lack of human capacity to sin in heaven does not diminish human freedom so long as present proximate determinism is grounded in past (i.e., historically, during one's life on Earth) libertarian choice(s). Hence, the more expanded terminology Sennett gives to his notion: the "*proximate conception of compatibilist freedom*." Dickin summarizes, "For humans, this 'causal history' is established on Earth as a choice for or against God, and *apparently becomes irrevocable after death*, so that those who chose God are 'determined' to always will good" (italics added). I have italicized part of this summary to indicate something that Dickin leaves out of his summary of Sennett, something which is crucial but which also raises puzzling theological questions.

Sennett goes on to clarify that it is possible to affirm heavenly freedom, even if it is proximately determined, if that freedom is grounded in the agent's freely chosen (in the libertarian sense) character formation during life on Earth. As he puts it, "a character that is libertarian freely chosen is the only kind of character that can determine compatibilist free actions."³ Expanding on this, he writes, "The dilemma of heavenly freedom is resolved if all libertarian free actions contributing to the characters of agents in heaven were performed while those agents were on Earth. That is, the characters are formed on Earth, but those characters determine only actions for good once the agents enter heaven."⁴ The advantage of this proposal is that it safeguards both the freedom of human beings in heaven (in a compatibilist sense) while also safeguarding the freewill defense to the theodicy problem (which requires that human beings possess—or possessed at some point—libertarian freedom).

For brevity, I will mention two theological problems with Sennett's proposal. The first is the charge