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Article

The “Heaven Ab Initio” Argument from Evil

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Abstract: Logical and evidential arguments from evil are generally thought to have been rebutted by various refutations, defenses, and theodicies. While disparate, these responses employ similar strategies to show that God has morally sufficient reasons to permit evil and suffering in the world, either to preserve human freedom, for the sake of the moral growth of human souls, or to train humans to be able to act freely without sinning once in heaven. In this paper, I defend the heaven ab initio argument from evil (HAIAFE), which demonstrates that God could have accomplished all these goals, without the need for evil and suffering, by creating human beings directly as spiritual beings in a non-physical state of eternal bliss. Moreover, I will argue that the HAIAFE is both a logical argument from evil and a “deodicy”, i.e., a vindication of a deistic god.

Keywords: Alvin Plantinga; John Mackie; James Sterba; evil; deism; heaven

1. Introduction

The existence of evil and suffering in the world poses a serious theological problem for those religions that regard God as a perfect being. Philosophers have formulated the problem in two distinct forms, the logical and the evidential. The logical attempts to show a logical impossibility in the concomitance of God and evil; the evidential defends the humbler claim that extreme instances of evil and suffering in the world constitute strong evidence against God’s existence. Theists have addressed this problem by proposing various refutations, defenses, and theodicies. Perhaps, a common theistic strategy has been to show that God has morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil.

In this paper, I present the heaven ab initio argument from evil (HAIAFE). My argument demonstrates that a perfect God could and would want to create his children directly (ab initio) as spiritual beings in heaven,¹ thereby rendering evil and suffering unnecessary. However, while the HAIAFE demonstrates that God does not exist, when used in a cumulative case alongside other arguments, it is consistent with the existence of a deistic god. A deistic god is a transcendent entity that brings the universe into existence, but, unlike the God of monotheism, it is not a person or a moral being such that it is aware of humans and wishes to have a relationship with them. It might be beyond existence, like the Plotinian One that has a generative power but lacks awareness. Such a god, therefore, would not be affected in the way that the theistic God is by the problem of allowing horrendous evil and suffering. A deistic god can answer the question of why there is something rather than nothing, the existence of the universe from nothing, cosmic fine-tuning, and the anthropic principle. However, the main grounds for affirming the existence of such a deity lies elsewhere.² The point is that because such a god is not a divine person like that of the theistic God, the existence of a deistic god that is not aware of the world explains why horrendous evil and suffering exist.

2. Some Preliminary Remarks

Evil is a philosophical problem that just will not go away. The classic problem of evil has been formulated as a logical and an evidential problem. Without going back to



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Epicurus, the most notable contemporary logical formulation is Mackie's, who explains it as follows:

In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false (Mackie 1955, p. 200).

Therefore, Mackie concludes, "not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational..." (p. 200). Similarly, H.J. McCloskey frames the problem as follows: "Evil is a problem for the theist in that a contradiction is involved in the fact of evil, on the one hand, and the belief in the omnipotence and perfection of God on the other." (McCloskey 1960, p. 97). The idea is that a logical consideration of God's attributes, especially omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence, in concomitance with the fact that evil exists in the world, form a logically inconsistent set of propositions. In short, the logical formulation of the problem of evil purports to show that God's attributes and the existence of evil constitute a direct logical contradiction.

Alvin Plantinga simply notes that such a formulation does not show a direct contradiction. God, after all, might have morally sufficient reasons (reasons beyond our ken) for allowing evil. Plantinga explains this in his now famous defense, the Free-Will Defense (a version of which, by the way, is already used by St. Augustine). Plantinga argues as follows:

"A world containing creatures who are sometimes significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all." (Plantinga 1974, p. 166).

Thus, the point is that free will is so important that, as C. S. Lewis observes, God "thought it worth the risk." It was so important for God to create free-willed creatures that he was willing to run the risk of people's freely choosing to do evil. The only possibility, according to Plantinga, Augustine, and other likeminded theologians, was for God to see that evil-doing would not occur. However, in order to accomplish such a state of affairs, God would have to determine humans to always choose to be moral and avoid doing evil, which would deprive them from freely choosing how to live. Therefore, God allows humans to freely sin.

Since Plantinga's defense appeared, many philosophers have acknowledged that Plantinga's argument successfully refuted the logical problem of evil. However, the scope of this article is not to assess the merits or demerits of Plantinga's defense or those of other theodicies and defenses or their objections. Many, including the very Mackie, state that Plantinga successfully solved the *logical* problem of evil. However, Mackie seems to doubt that Plantinga's defense conclusively eliminates the problem. He writes,

Since this defense is formally possible, and its principle involves no real abandonment of our ordinary view of the opposition between good and evil, we can concede that the problem of evil does not, after all, show that the central doctrines of theism are logically inconsistent with one another. But whether this offers a real solution of the problem is another question (Mackie 1982, p. 154).

Although the success of Plantinga's defense is arguable, it certainly redirected philosophers to a less totalizing approach that is known as the evidential problem of evil (See Rowe 1979; Tooley 2021). Evidential formulations do not claim that the existence of evil logically disproves God's existence; rather, evidential approaches attempt to demonstrate that evil and suffering constitute strong inductive evidence against God's existence.³

In recent years, however, Sterba (2019) has breathed new life into the logical formulation of the problem of evil. Erik J. Wielenberg summarizes Sterba's logical argument as follows:

1. Necessarily, if God exists, then God does not intentionally permit horrendous evils caused by immoral actions.

2. Necessarily, if God exists and there are horrendous evils caused by immoral actions, then God intentionally permits horrendous evils caused by immoral actions.
3. So: necessarily, if God exists, then there are no horrendous evils caused by immoral actions.
4. However, there are horrendous evils caused by immoral actions.
5. Therefore, God does not exist (Wielenberg 2022, p. 2).

Sterba proposes an argument according to which if God existed, then horrendous evil consequences of immoral actions would not exist (Sterba 2019, pp. 126–28). Sterba therefore concludes that the God of classical theism does not exist. An important aspect of my argument is that unlike Mackie and Sterba, both of whom are atheists and use their arguments to disprove the existence of God, I propose that, if successful, arguments from evil do not disprove the existence of all deities. Rather, when supplemented with other arguments for the existence of a creator, an argument from evil can be used in a cumulative case that leads to the existence of a deistic god (see for example, Alvaro 2021). Here, I would like to present such a novel approach to the problem of evil.

Before I present my argument, I need to make a few clarifications. My argument does not undermine all forms of theism, but only specific definitions of God and particular theologies and eschatologies, such as the God of the so-called “Perfect Being Theology”. As just mentioned, I believe that the conclusion to my argument can point to the existence of a deistic god. With regard to the concept of God, I am referring to the classical claim of monotheism according to which God possesses all possible perfections, i.e., omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, omnipresence, aseity, eternity, and more. Additionally, I am referring to the particular theological view that God is a God of love who created human beings for their benefit, that is, God’s ultimate goal is to bring as many of his creatures as possible to an eternal loving relationship with their creator (to be clear, I am not referring to erotic love but to *agapē*).

The important aspect is that God’s creatures must freely accept God, which entails the possibility that such creatures can freely choose to sin and reject their creator. The notion that God endowed human beings with free will is essential to my argument. As many theists have argued, and I agree with them, without free will, humans would be God’s puppets. God does not want puppets, but rational beings who are capable of freely accepting God’s eternal love and friendship. Additionally, God is a just but merciful judge who punishes and rewards humans accordingly: roughly, good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell. Or bad people are separated from god or tortured in hell or obliterated. My view is open to all of those possibilities.

Thus, I agree that, following Augustine and Plantinga, freedom is the key to understanding the existence of evil. Specifically, I will assume that, in the free exercise of their wills, some human beings choose to sin and disobey God. God could prevent evil, but preventing it would deprive humans from their freedom to sin. Additionally, since free will is such an important aspect of God’s creation, God ought to allow humans the freedom to choose whether to be good or to be evil.

Furthermore, the specific eschatological aspect that is relevant to my argument is that God creates the physical world where humans freely decide whether to accept or reject God and, in the end, those who accept God will go to heaven, which is a non-physical state of eternal bliss devoid of all evil and suffering. Thus, the function of the physical world is claimed to provide humans with a place that enables them to hone their moral skills so that if and when they go to heaven, once in heaven, they will have learned to act freely without ever choosing to sin.

The theistic model that I assume is broad enough to accommodate the notion that God allows evil or even that God might purposefully introduce evil into the world as an expedient for promoting the process of soul-making. In this quasi-utilitarian sense, evil is necessary for the greater good. An example is John Hick’s soul-making theodicy. He writes,

... one who has attained to goodness by meeting and eventually mastering temptations, and thus by rightly making responsible choices in concrete situations, is good in a richer and more valuable sense than would be one created ab initio in a state either of innocence or of virtue. ... I suggest, then, that it is an ethically reasonable judgment. . . that human goodness slowly built up through personal histories of moral effort has a value in the eyes of the Creator which justifies even the long travail of the soul-making process (Hick 1977, pp. 255–56).

In short, Hick suggests that while evil is emotionally difficult to understand, it has a valuable function. God created humans in the physical world first so that they could acquire a richer moral character and a moral understanding. Hick seems to suggest that it would be possible for God to create creatures ab initio, “in a state of innocence or virtue”, without experiencing evil. However, for Hick, in a state of innocence, God’s children would not be able to achieve the significant moral growth that they can achieve in a world full of evils. This view has an intuitive ring to it as we all believe that it is more valuable for us to face adversities and learn to overcome them than to live privileged and spoiled lives—God does not want spoiled children. God created us in this world so that we learn to roll up our sleeves and deal with problems because facing problems builds strength and resilience.

Having established a specific theological framework, I now turn to the HAIAFE. Note that philosophers differentiate between natural evil, such as disease or natural catastrophes, and moral evil, such as war or slavery. As it will emerge from my discussion, my argument shows that moral and natural evil are unnecessary for God in order to accomplish his ultimate goal and, therefore, there are no morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil and suffering. That is the crux of the problem. Henceforth I will refer especially to moral evil. According to the Perfect Being Theology, there can be at least two explanations for the existence of moral evil in the world. One is that God purposefully allows moral evil because it promotes the soul-making process as, e.g., Hick suggests. According to this model, God needs to create a physical arena where his free-willed creatures develop and hone their moral character and skills, which are necessary once in heaven. Additionally, the idea is that only the individuals who have learned to freely avoid sin will go to heaven.

The other option is that God does not want or like moral evil, but, regrettably, moral evil exists because humans freely choose it. Based on this view, it is totally up to humans whether they want to use their freedom to sin or to obey God’s moral law. Theists might use the following analogy. Suppose that I lend you my hammer because you need it to build furniture; instead, you choose to use it to murder your neighbor. It would be incorrect to blame me for the murder because I lent you the hammer. I did not lend it to you to murder people but to build furniture. Analogously, the theist can argue that God gave us free will to be good and not to do evil. Thus, if we misuse our freedom and exercise it to do evil, it is not God’s fault that evil exists but ours. The goal of the HAIAFE is to show that we can hold God accountable for the evil in the world in a way that disproves the existence of God. As I shall demonstrate, because he is omniscient, God knows in advance what you are going to do with the hammer; because he is omnipotent, God can avoid creating hammers in the first place and can create us in a state where we would not need hammers (or furniture), and because he is omnibenevolent, God would want to create us in a state of joy that is devoid of evil.

In his discussion with Augustine in *De Libero Arbitrio Voluntatis*, Augustine’s interlocutor, Evodius, asks a very important question to Augustine: “Now if possible, explain to me *why* God gave human beings free choice of the will. If we had not received it, we surely would not be able to sin.” (Augustine 2.I.I.I). Augustine proceeds to explain to Evodius that God ought to give humans free will because without it, justice and morality would not be possible (2.I.3.5–2.I.3.7). Apparently, Evodius is satisfied by Augustine’s answer and is convinced that free will, which enables humans to sin, is such a precious good that God ought to give to us. Throughout his conversation with Augustine, never did it occur to Evodius to ask a very obvious question—“Why did not God give us free choice of the will

and create us directly in heaven?'. After all, the point or final goal is to bring humans to freely accept God and forever exist in heaven as free-willed beings alongside God.

As we have seen, some theologians have observed that all the pain and suffering and adversities that humans endure throughout their lifetimes is a sort of necessary moral training that will eventually render humans able to exercise their free will in heaven without sinning. Indeed, Augustine could answer that question simply by saying that God could have created us directly in heaven, but he gave humans the opportunity to acquire a good moral character and learn not to sin prior to their eternal stay in heaven. It is one thing to freely overcome the temptation to sin, but it is quite another to remove the possibility to sin. Namely, we all believe that there is something especially meritorious about an individual's ability to freely choose the right path in life. For example, we praise people who earn college degrees by working hard and not those whose rich parents buy their degrees. That is why God needs to create a physical state, first, where humans undergo moral growth, followed by a non-physical state after their deaths.

Thus, the theist can defend the position that if God creates humans directly in heaven, it might not be guaranteed that humans will cooperate and freely accept God. If created directly in heaven, it is possible that they might freely go against God's plan by *freely* choosing to reject God and to sin. Or the theist might defend the position that God allows evil in the world because evil teaches us moral lessons and makes us stronger. However, I do not think that either of these positions provides a satisfactory answer. Indeed, we praise diligent students, and we condemn cheaters. However, if God creates us in a world where college degrees do not exist because they are irrelevant, then the theist's argument is simply a false dichotomy.

Among other things, if colleges, competition, jobs, money, and other things of that nature exist, arguably hard work and various adversities can contribute to teaching the student valuable lessons. However, in the first place, unless colleges, competition, jobs, and money existed in heaven, the moral lessons that one could learn from them would seem to be useless and irrelevant for beings that God created directly in heaven. Additionally, in the second place, there does not seem to be anything intrinsically valuable or indispensable about colleges, society, competition, jobs, and money, or any other worldly practice and objects that might require God to create the world in the way we know it. There is a rather simple solution available to God, that is, God can create free-willed and spiritual creatures directly in a harmonious state of concord and joy that does not necessitate pain, evil, and suffering of any sort. Again, when I fall down, I learn to be strong. I pick myself up, dust myself off, and start all over again. However, if falling down and dusting oneself do not exist in the first place, such a lesson is irrelevant.

Concerning the argument that if God created us directly in heaven, some of us could freely choose to sin, it suggests that in a spiritual state, it would be possible for free-willed creatures to sin and disobey God. I argue that in a spiritual world, humans would not run the same risk of sinning as in a physical world because in a spiritual realm there would not be any reasons for humans to sin and there would be all the reasons for them not to sin. Therefore, unless the theist can present some valid reason why God ought to create the physical world, I argue that an omnibenevolent God ought to create humans directly in heaven or in a spiritual world—a world where free-willed humans exist in a blissful state that is devoid of evil and suffering. Before I unpack these contentions, I will present the HAIAFE.

3. HAIAFE Outline and Exposition of the Premises

Put formally, we have the HAIAFE:

1. As a perfect being, God's goal is to create free-willed creatures that choose to love God and forever exist with him in a state of eternal bliss.
2. An omnibenevolent God would want to create free-willed beings in a state of eternal bliss devoid of evil if he could and if evil and suffering were unnecessary.

3. An omnipotent God can create free-willed beings directly in a spiritual state of eternal bliss devoid of evil.
4. However, God created physical creatures in a physical world that is full of unnecessary evil and suffering.
5. Therefore, God is either not omnipotent, not omniscient, or not perfectly good. (A possible extended conclusion: 6. Therefore, there exists a deistic god that created the universe, but this god is not a person who willfully created the world or that has a relationship with humans. Hence, god cannot prevent or eliminate evil and suffering).

Clearly, the strength of the HAIAFE depends on the likelihood that the premises are true. Consider premise 1—God’s goal is to create free-willed creatures that choose to forever exist with God in a state of eternal bliss. While I acknowledge that not all theists agree upon God’s goal, this is what classical theism has been teaching all along. Why else would God create the universe? It seems evident that, in classical theism, God’s goal is to create free-willed creatures. Without free will, God’s creatures would be automata. Therefore, God creates and endows his creatures with free will and reason so that they can come to know and love their creator. Moreover, God gives his creatures the opportunity to choose to unite with their creator and live an eternal life of joy and delight in heaven or to reject God.

One might point out that one reason why God created humans is for his own pleasure. As, an example from the Bible, Colossians 1:16, states that “All things were created by him and for him.” However, being created for God’s pleasure does not mean that God created humanity as toys for his amusement. Rather, the idea is that God is a God of love and, as such, he desired to create other beings with whom he could have a loving and friendly relationship.

Therefore, according to classical theism, God made humans for their benefit. God endowed humans with the freedom of will so that they can acquire knowledge of the world and know God and build a loving relationship with God. However, God did not create human beings because he needs them. After all, the theistic God is believed to be a perfect being that needs nothing. It would seem wrong to say, for example, that God is incomplete without creation or that he felt loneliness, boredom, hunger, or fear. God loves humans but, presumably, considering that God is perfect, if we or the physical world had never existed, God would still be perfect and satisfied with his eternal existence.

The point of the foregoing analysis of God’s nature is that God’s goal for creating the world is to create creatures that are endowed with freedom of will and will benefit from knowing God and living in his presence. The important attribute is God’s omnibenevolence. This means that God is, so to speak, pure love, which means that his nature is devoid of evil. Since God is omnibenevolent, it follows that God created humans in his image as free, good, and loving creatures. As such, it is plausible to argue that an omnibenevolent God would want his creatures to have pleasant lives in the absence of violence, evil, pain, and suffering. Therefore, we have excellent reasons to accept premise 1.

Accepting premise 1 makes it easy to accept premise 2—God would want to create free-willed beings in a spiritual state of eternal bliss that is devoid of evil (moral and natural) if he could. Presumably, since God is wholly good, God’s nature is devoid of evil. It follows that God does not need or like evil; God would want to make sure that his children (or friends) would avoid all evil. Consequently, the best option for God is to create his children directly in a spiritual form in a state that will enable them to exercise their freedom without thereby causing and experiencing evil and suffering. Obviously, moral and natural evils are problems for embodied creatures that live in a physical realm with car accidents, death, violence, envy, tornadoes, earthquakes, disease, etc. However, these evils do not exist in heaven. Therefore, if God could, he would want to create his children in a non-physical realm as unembodied or spiritual beings in the first place. The only way for the theist to reject this argument is to show that it is impossible for God to create free-willed beings that can worship God directly in heaven. The theist, then, must demonstrate that in order to accomplish his goal, God is required to create physical beings in a world that contains

horrendous evil and suffering, which is what I deny in the third premise. Therefore, this supports the truth of premise 2.

The question is whether premise 3—God can create free-willed beings directly in a spiritual state of eternal bliss devoid of evil—is true. I think that virtually all theists would accept this premise, which is a direct inference from God’s omnipotence. It is often argued that God’s omnipotence should be viewed in the sense that God can do whatever is logically possible. For example, omnipotence does not mean that God can create another God. If “God” is defined as an eternal and uncreated being, it would be impossible for God to create an uncreated being. However, the fact that God cannot create an uncreated being does not undermine God’s omnipotence. Similarly, God cannot create a married bachelor or a square circle or a triangle with more or fewer than three sides. Nevertheless, it still follows that God is omnipotent. In short, omnipotence does not entail that God can bring about something self-contradictory. However, there is nothing intrinsically incoherent or impossible about God’s creating a non-physical realm inhabited by free-willed spirits that will directly experience God and freely choose to enter into a loving and friendly relationship with their father and creator. Consequently, if God is omnipotent (and heaven is not an impossible state of affairs) it follows that God can create spiritual beings directly in such a realm. Therefore, unless the theist can show that it is impossible for God to create free-willed beings directly in heaven, and that God must create humans in the physical world where humans experience evil and suffering before they go to heaven, it must be concluded that premise 3 is also true.

Premise 4 cannot be denied, God created a physical world, and the world is full of horrendous evil and suffering and natural evil. The conclusion then follows that God is either not omnipotent, not omniscient, or not perfectly good or, at any rate, not willing to avoid moral evil and human suffering. Therefore, God does not exist. Regarding the extended conclusion, the HAIAFE is consistent with the existence of a deistic god, a transcendent source or reality that does not create by willful action and is completely removed from the world. Such an entity, therefore, is not aware of humans and their suffering or joy. The important point here is that God can and would want to avoid all the unnecessary, horrendous evil and suffering that humans experience without jeopardizing his goal of bringing human beings to freely choose to unite with their creator. God can create spiritual, free-willed beings directly, in a non-physical realm that is devoid of evils and suffering.

Naturally, I now have to deal with the assertion that, if God exists, evil and suffering are unnecessary and avoidable. The fundamental question is whether God requires a physical world in order to accomplish his goal. As already mentioned, many theists observe that evil and suffering can be instrumentally good or that, at any rate, God has morally sufficient reasons for permitting evil and suffering. Furthermore, the theist might avail himself of two lines of argument, the first is the one already mentioned above in the quote by Hick according to which if God creates free spiritual beings directly in heaven, these beings would not be exposed to terrible, but important, character-building evils and, thereby, they would not be able to develop a deep moral character. Therefore, even if God can create spiritual beings in a non-physical state, he chooses to create physical beings in a physical world. The other is that God can create spiritual beings directly in heaven but doing so might run the risk that some of these beings will disobey or reject God.

Consider first the notion that the creation of physical beings in an evil-and-suffering-filled physical world leads humans to acquire richer and more valuable moral characters than what they would acquire if created *ab initio* in a world devoid of evil and suffering. Consider an argument that might support such a view. The theist could argue that evil and suffering are emotionally difficult to understand, but they are instrumentally good for people’s lives. The suffering and evils that we face in our lives generate wisdom, resilience, compassion, and thereby build a rich and moral character. Moreover, when we suffer, we are reminded of our fragility and finiteness.

That is why God chooses to create us as physical beings that experience suffering and evil existing in a physical world, because God knows that our experience of adversities is beneficial to us for our wisdom and moral characters. God could create spiritual beings directly in heaven where evil and suffering do not exist, but if God did so, such beings would miss out on the opportunity to learn compassion, resilience, and other moral qualities that suffering can generate. Consequently, God ought to create us the way that he did. Furthermore, as Aristotle suggests in the *Metaphysics*, and Socrates in *Theaetetus*, philosophy begins in wonder. However, if humans faced no suffering and adversities, they would not be able to create philosophy and science through which they acquire knowledge and truth. In short, good moral character and scientific and philosophical knowledge cannot be developed in a state of eternal naivete and bliss. Suffering teaches us to be compassionate and creative. Compassion is a deep awareness of the suffering of others with the wish to relieve suffering and promote well-being. So, in order to be compassionate, we must experience suffering.

Is all this true? Even if it is, why would compassion, resilience, and other virtues matter if God created us directly in heaven? After all, God is regarded as a wholly loving, eternal being that (presumably) never experienced pain and suffering. Therefore, if humans were created *ab initio* in heaven, perhaps they might never learn compassion from experiencing suffering, but what good is compassion if no one is suffering? The benefits we gain and the lessons we learn from suffering are understandable because we are physical beings that face problems inherent to our physical existence. Failing an exam, losing a loved one in a war, a broken heart, and more, can teach us to be strong, to persevere, to be resilient, and other such values. However, for spiritual beings that exist in a state of eternal bliss, those values would be useless. Furthermore, it does not seem to be true that spiritual beings created directly in heaven could not acquire knowledge and other moral qualities. Spiritual beings would have to learn a different set of virtues that are appropriate in the world they inhabit and useful for their particular nature.

The bottom line is this. Theism claims that, in the end, some human beings will unite with God and exist in a state of eternal bliss in heaven. Arguably, in heaven, human beings will not have jobs or cars or drugs or schools or weapons or any other earthly objects and practices. However, then, whichever moral lessons or practical skills that humans might learn from such objects and practices in the physical world, will be utterly irrelevant for them in heaven. According to theism, our final destination is our union with our creator in heaven. In Isaiah 65:16, the Bible says that in heaven, "... the past troubles will be forgotten and hidden from my eyes." So, if the purpose of our existence is to unite with our creator and forever live in a state of eternal bliss where we do not recall our "past troubles", then our past troubles, i.e., evil and suffering, are unnecessary and irrelevant in heaven. Consequently, God can and would want to create us directly in heaven.

Consider the analogy that, as much as they love their children, parents try to prepare them to deal with adversities and disappointment, both of which life is full of. Arguably, however, all parents wish that their children live joyful lives. Additionally, if it were possible, would we not all wish that our children lived in a world devoid of evils, violence, adversities, competition, and disappointments? Now, if God creates spiritual creatures directly in heaven, it does not mean that, necessarily, such beings would be a bunch of naïve souls. It seems plausible that they would have an eternity to learn what God knows and who he is. Therefore, I do not find the notion that suffering is character-building to be a viable justification for God's creating us as physical beings in a physical world. Evil and suffering can teach us valuable lessons if and only if we are embodied beings, but such lessons would be unnecessary and irrelevant for unembodied beings. A car accident, the loss of a loved one, the Holocaust, slavery, child labor, war, and so on, might teach us something (whatever that might be) but what good are the lessons learned from such evils in heaven where, presumably, such events do not occur?

I now turn to the argument that God can create spiritual beings directly in heaven, but he does not do so because these beings might disobey and reject God. In the first place, it is

necessary to consider the nature of sin. Theists typically regard sin as any human act that violates God's moral law. For example, St. Augustine argues that evil is the privation of good as darkness is the privation of light. According to this view, sinners turn away from God's goodness and, thereby, experience evil in a way that is analogous to our experience of darkness by moving away from light. However, what is evil? Augustine provides a helpful definition of it: evil is due to sin and sin stems from inordinate desire, which Augustine equates to lust (or "cupidity" in some translations) (1. 4. 9. 22). As examples of sin, Augustine mentions sacrilege and adultery and argues that what makes such acts sinful is the fact that they stem from a person's lust: "all evildoings are evil precisely because they come about from lust, that is, from a blameworthy desire." (1. 4. 10. 34–35). Later, Augustine notes something very important, i.e., that good people are those who turn

[T]heir love away from things that cannot be possessed without the risk of losing them. Evil people, on the other hand, try to remove hindrances so that they may securely attach themselves to these things to be enjoyed. The end result is that they lead a life full of crime and wickedness, a life which is better called death (1. 4. 10. 32–36).

In the quote above, Augustine argues that evildoers attach themselves to carnal pleasures (earthly desires, such as wealth, success, food, sex, and other examples of carnal pleasure) and turn away from eternal, higher goods, such as virtue, truth, and God. It is cupidity, therefore, which is a lustful attachment to lower goods; furthermore, it is one's desire for pleasure that leads people to sin. Thus, Augustine's examples of sins are instances of lustful behaviors. He argues that sinners fear losing certain goods against their will. However, if we go by Augustine's analysis of evil, what sorts of things can spiritual beings created directly in heaven lose against their wills in heaven? As just observed, people can lose material things against their wills, things such as properties, money, a lover, and so on. They can have an inordinate desire for sex, food, success, power, and more.

Note that these are not inherently bad things. Rather, it is a person's lustful attachment to such things that causes evil. So, evildoing stems from an inordinate desire that places temporal objects above eternal ones. By eternal objects, Augustine includes wisdom, truth, virtue, the will itself, and, of course, above all, God. Now, the point that I am trying to make here is that it would seem possible for a being to sin or turn away from God if, and only if, that being has a physical body. As humans are embodied beings, they have a number of physical and psychological needs that they typically satisfy by eating, having sex, buying objects, and so on. So, it is possible for humans to attach themselves in a lustful way to material goods.

However, having considered that lower goods do not exist in heaven, then it would seem to be impossible that spiritual beings might turn away from God and attach themselves to lower goods because there are not any. For what could possibly cause them to do so? Because heaven is a state of eternal bliss, one is already completely satisfied. Since human beings have a physical body, and the body is imperfect and craves many things, it is understandable how some people become lustful and desire material things, things that produce carnal pleasures and turn one away from truth, wisdom, and God. However, a spiritual being, it would seem, would not become attached to material things because, by definition, there are no material goods in a spiritual reality. Additionally, if God creates his children directly in heaven, and the physical world never exists, then God's children would not even have the knowledge or recollection of material things but would know only eternal goods.

Furthermore, consider the following example. According to classical theism, some people earn a place in heaven while others will (again, depending on the particular religion and interpretation thereof) either go to hell or will be temporarily or permanently separated from God or possibly brought out of existence. However, think about those who go to heaven whose loved ones are separated from God or destroyed. It would be difficult for them to remember their loved ones and at the same time live a joyful existence in heaven. However, if God creates spiritual beings directly in heaven, then such problems would

never exist. If we were created directly in heaven, we would not experience the death of our loved ones.

What sort of spiritual objects could possibly be there in heaven that spiritual creatures could lose against their wills? Are we to believe that adultery, murder, theft, grave desecration, money, drugs, food and other cupidity-inducing acts and objects could exist in heaven? Presumably, spiritual beings do not require food or properties or money or drugs or jobs or sexual intercourse. So, what could possibly be the reason for sinning or turning away from God in heaven? Could souls inflict pain to other souls? Additionally, if yes, then over what? Is not heaven supposed to be an evil-free place? Therefore, if God creates his children directly in heaven, there is no reason to believe that God's children would turn away from God because there is nothing in heaven that God's children might desire. If by definition heaven is a state of eternal bliss, then nothing could be more desirable than existing in heaven.

The theist's objection, however, is that if God creates his children directly in a spiritual world, then his children may freely disobey and reject God. Consequently, in order to make sure that the creatures that end up in heaven are only those who have learned not to sin and accept God, God creates a physical world where these creatures rehearse, so to speak, before going to heaven. However, what if God creates humans directly in heaven? Why could not humans learn not to sin in a non-physical world? In other words, this would suggest that the problem of disobeying and sinning might exist both in a physical and a non-physical world. However, then, assuming that it were possible for free-willed creatures created directly in heaven to disobey God, then creating human beings in the physical world first would not help. In fact, the physical world is detrimental for humans who endure pain and suffering and for God who watches his beloved children travail through evil and adversities.

Therefore, the question is what there could be in heaven that is better than a state of eternal bliss, such that heavenly creatures might reject and turn away from God and sin, instead. Additionally, even if they rejected God, where could these creatures possibly go? Now, let us grant for the sake of the argument that, after all, the inhabitants of a spiritual world (created directly in such a world) reject God. If they did, God could simply try to correct and rehabilitate them. What is important to note is that in the case that God created only heaven and free-willed beings that inhabit it, even if some of the inhabitants of heaven were to sin, they would not have to undergo the evil and suffering that embodied creatures experience in a physical world would. Arguably, adultery, racism, alcoholism, drugs addiction, terrorism, slavery, corruption, discrimination, war, and other such sinful behaviors and events would not exist in heaven. Therefore, if God's creation of a state of eternal bliss in the first place would not guarantee that creatures freely love God, there is no reason to believe that those humans who existed in a pre-mortem realm and then ascended to heaven would cooperate and freely accept to enter into a relationship with God, either.

Quite to the contrary, if God creates free-willed creatures directly in a spiritual world, these creatures will not experience evil and suffering, and it is more likely that they will cooperate and will not turn away from God. The reason for this is that, as just observed, there is nothing in heaven that could possibly interest heavenly creatures more than existing freely in a state of eternal bliss with God free from evil and suffering. I submit that we have no good reasons for contemplating the possibility that in a state of eternal bliss, heavenly creatures would freely choose to separate themselves irrevocably from God. Even if we assume the possibility that if God created only heaven and free-willed creatures born directly in heaven some of those creatures would exercise their freedom to turn away from God, they will never experience the unnecessary evil and suffering that we humans undergo in the actual world. Additionally, God could rehabilitate them or in extreme cases separate them from God. Again, it is hard to believe that between the options of eternal bliss and damnation, separation, or destruction, any rational being would freely choose anything other than an eternal existence with God in a state of bliss.

What follows from all this is that by creating spiritual, free-willed creatures directly in heaven, God can avoid not only unnecessary horrendous moral evil and suffering but also natural evil. In sum, the theist's defense is this: God can do it, but he avoids creating humans directly in a heaven devoid of evil because in such a world, God's creatures might disobey God. I found this argument unconvincing for two reasons: (a) in a state of eternal bliss there is no reason for humans to sin or turn away from God. Additionally, (b) even if creatures that were created directly in heaven could rebel against God or turn away from God, God could simply discipline and rehabilitate the naughty and the insubordinate. Moreover, the advantage of creating human beings directly in heaven is obvious—they would never experience horrendous evil and suffering. As demonstrated, such evils and suffering might teach us important values and lessons because we are embodied beings, but they are irrelevant for a spiritual being created *ab initio* in a state of eternal joy. At the same time, it is possible that these beings would freely learn valuable moral lessons; they could contemplate God, their relationship with others, mathematical objects, and more.

4. The Satan Objection

There is an objection that the theist may raise, call it the Satan Objection. According to the Old Testament, the devil used to go by the name of Lucifer when he was still an angel. Some suggest that Lucifer was God's favorite angel and was very high in the ranking of all the angels. Furthermore, some believe that Lucifer was not satisfied with his state in heaven and at one point he decided to become God himself. According to the Old Testament, God was not happy about this, resulting in God's removal of Lucifer from heaven (Isaiah 14:15; Ezekiel 28:16–17). This is what many would recognize as the story of Satan's fall from heaven. The fact is that exactly whatever happened in heaven between God and Lucifer we might never know. Some theists interpret this metaphorically, others believe it literally. However, the bottom line is that Lucifer was created directly in heaven, and yet he sinned and forever separated himself from God. Additionally, if that happened to Lucifer, why cannot it happen to humans?

I have a three-pronged reply. In the first place, assume that the story of Satan's fall is not a metaphor but a fact. How would things differ in our case? If it is true that a creature that was created directly in heaven, as in the case of Lucifer, can rebel against God, then even if this creature is created in a physical world and then admitted in heaven, it seems that such a creature could still freely disobey God. If that were the case, then it would not really matter insofar as obeying God whether a creature begins its existence in a physical or in a spiritual world. An omniscient God would know prior to creating an individual whether that particular individual will sin. Moreover, an omnipotent God has the power—and literally an eternity—to morally rehabilitate a creature in heaven. In other words, whatever can be accomplished in terms of moral character building in a world that includes a physical realm first and a non-physical realm later can be accomplished in a non-physical world that does not encompass a pre-mortem, physical realm, as well. Additionally, the obvious advantage of starting from a non-physical world is the avoidance of many horrendous evils that are characteristic of physical existence.

In the second place, according to some stories, Lucifer was an angel with certain powers that no human being has. According to various interpretation of the story, Lucifer rebelled against God because he was jealous of what humans had or because, despite his high rank, he wanted more—he wanted to be God. Now, if God creates all creatures to be equal directly in heaven, instead of creating an army of angels with extraordinary power, then rank and jealousy would not be issues. Additionally, if all of God's creatures are created equal, then no creature will be jealous of any other because they will have the same lot, the same attention from their creator, and the same amount of fatherly love.

In the third place, if all of God's children were equal and created directly in a state of eternal bliss in the presence of God, there does not seem to be any reason for God's creatures to turn away from God. As already discussed, jealousy, greed, envy, and lust are problems that afflict embodied beings. Moreover, in the physical world we often experience

injustice and what we might call bad luck: good people suffer, bad people prosper, many people are born and live in extreme poverty while others are born in wealth and live in opulence. Additionally, there are natural disaster, mental and physical illnesses, aging, death, and other painful aspects that are inherent to a physical existence. However, these should not be problems that exist in heaven. Presumably, in heaven, souls do not need money or cars or food or a houses or any other material goods. Therefore, there does not seem to be a reason (or reasons) for heaven's spiritual inhabitants to turn away from God.

Furthermore, heaven's inhabitants will be completely satisfied. To give an illustration of this, in his "The Makropoulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality", Bernard Williams argues that mortality is a good thing for human beings because immortality would eventually be intolerable and boring. Using heaven as a perfect example, Williams writes,

...heaven's prospects are tedious and the devil has the best tunes... serves to show up a real and (I suspect) a profound difficulty of providing a model of an unending, supposedly satisfying, state or activity that would not rightly prove boring to anyone who remained conscious of himself... boredom... would not just be a tiresome effect but a reaction almost perceptual in character to the poverty of one's relation to the environment (Williams 1973, pp. 94–95).

I am not going to give an in-depth response to Williams' argument—many philosophers have already done so. The main problem with William's argument is that it seems to look at the issue of immortality through the lenses of finiteness. Williams is right that eternity would be boring if we imagine ourselves—the way we are now with our current knowledge, experience, and thoughts—living forever. However, it is necessary to consider that immortality would be different for a spiritual being. Furthermore, consider the nature of God. If God is the being that theists have attempted to describe for millennia, he is so majestic that our finite brains cannot even begin to comprehend. Arguably, if God exists, living in his presence and learning about it and contemplating him would render every moment of eternity captivating and beautiful. Therefore, no one would turn away from God because there would be no better existence than that.

5. The Freedom Objection

A strong objection to God's creating free creatures directly in heaven concerns freedom of choice. Namely, one might concede that God can create free-willed creatures directly in heaven and even that many of them might live happy lives in heaven. However, if God created his children directly in heaven, essentially, he would force them to accept such an eternal life without giving them a choice. The problem is that relationships do not work so well when people are compelled to be friends. Thus, the argument goes, God does not wish to force his creatures to accept the only option available, i.e., eternal life in heaven. Therefore, God creates a physical, pre-mortem world and invites people to believe and come to appreciate God, but at the same time allows people to freely reject God's friendship.

This objection can be addressed fairly easily. In the first place, as things stand, our choices are already limited. Human beings do not choose to be born in the physical world where they experience horrendous evil and suffering. Moreover, the creation of a physical world where humans can freely decide whether to accept or reject God does not change the fact that, in the end, one must choose between an eternal, joyful existence in the company of God, or either a separation from God and a joyless and somber existence or the termination of his or her existence. However, the same choice is available to spiritual beings that are created directly in heaven. They can decide during their existence in heaven whether or not they want to continue to be there. In fact, God could even create his children in a pre-heaven reality where they can freely choose whether they wish to transition into heaven or to be obliterated. The bottom line is that the physical world is not necessary in order to allow one to choose. Furthermore, by creating his children directly in heaven, God can better accomplish his goal of bringing his creatures to a friendly relationship with their creator than he would by creating them in a physical world first. Many of God's

children might resent God due to their experiences of evil and suffering. If created *ab initio* in heaven, there would be no atheists or scoffers or rebels. Everyone would know that God exists and exactly what he requires of us, thereby avoiding unnecessary religious wars and disagreements.

A variant of the freedom objection is that if God created us directly in heaven, then we would be deprived from lots of choices and goods that are available only to embodied beings. It is true that many evils exist in the world, the argument goes, but let us not forget all the goods—carnal pleasures. Therefore, if God created us directly in heaven, he would not only deprive us of carnal pleasures but also, more important, from our freedom to choose carnal pleasure. My reply: This objection begs the question. It is only with hindsight that we appreciate the value of carnal pleasure. However, in point of fact, it is God that decides what reality is and what it is supposed to encompass. Thus, if created directly in heaven, it would be incorrect to say that God has deprived us from carnal pleasures. One would have to demonstrate that carnal pleasures are intrinsically good and so important that God ought to create us as embodied beings first; but I doubt that anyone could demonstrate such a conclusion.

Furthermore, consider an analogy. Imagine two little fish born and raised in a fish tank. If they were able to think like us, and if life in the tank was the only reality they knew, they would not be able to complain about the fact that life in the ocean offers more freedom and options than their life in the tank, because they would not know what a life in the ocean would be like. Similarly, spiritual beings would only know a spiritual existence and have the freedom appropriate for such an existence. The main goal that my argument attempts to accomplish is to demonstrate that a perfect God can and ought to create us directly in heaven. I concede that souls can undergo eternal moral growth in a way that is appropriate to the sort of environment they inhabit and in accordance with their nature. God can and would want to accomplish this goal without creating a world that includes horrendous evil and suffering.

6. The “Morally Good Reason” and the “Resurrection of the Body” Objections

Consider two possible objections. First, the theist can reply that even if the HAIAFE is valid, in the end, it is not possible to know God’s mind. Additionally, for all we know, it might turn out that God has morally good reasons for creating humans the way he did. Perhaps, when time comes and we meet him, God will explain to us why he did not create us directly in heaven. However, how powerful is this objection? Not very, I submit. Theists must confront the HAIAFE head-on and put forth some convincing argument—“for all we know” is not one.

Concerning our resurrecting in heaven with a physical body, not all theists believe that this is true. Even if it is assumed that it is, it does not undermine the HAIAFE. Theists who argue that God will resurrect our physical bodies in heaven still agree that evil does not exist in heaven and that humans will be free of sin. This does not affect my argument because if heaven is a place inhabited by free-willed, physical beings that never sin, a place where evil does not exist, then God could have directly created just that world. Theists, however, are left with bigger problems. If in heaven we get back our physical bodies, but evil and suffering do not exist (let alone hunger and other bodily functions), (a) what is the point of our having a physical body in heaven, (b) how can the physical body be unchanged and unscathed by external factors, (c) how can a physical body exist in a non-physical realm, and (d) if this is not metaphysically impossible, then God could just do that in the first place.

7. Conclusions

I end with three remarks. First, in this paper, I have defended the HAIAFE. The thrust of the argument is that it poses a problem for the various refutations, defenses, and theodicies that try to show that God has morally good reasons for allowing evil. Theists have argued that either evil is necessary for our moral growth or that in order to prevent

evil, God would have to reduce our freedom or that experiencing evil now prepares us to be able to freely avoid sin in heaven. As Eleonor Stump observes, in order to show that the existence of evil is logically inconsistent with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God, "... one would need at least to demonstrate that this claim must be true: There is no morally sufficient reason for God to allow instances of evil." (Stump 1985, p. 392). The HAIAFE provides an option available to God that demonstrates that there is a way for God to create free-willed beings that can grow morally without ever experiencing evil. The option is for God to create free-willed beings directly in a spiritual form in a non-physical state of eternal bliss. In such a state, there are no objects of temptation, and by directly creating spiritual beings, God can eliminate carnal pleasure, which is the root of lust and evil and suffering. This, therefore, precisely demonstrates that "There is no morally sufficient reason for God to allow instances of evil" and, a fortiori, it shows that the God of classical theism does not exist.

Second, the HAIAFE can, in effect, be both an argument from evil and a "deodicy", in that it is a vindication of a deistic god. That is to say, that the HAIAFE disproves the existence of a theistic God who has a plan and is involved in human affairs. However, it does not disprove the existence of other gods. As part of a cumulative case alongside other arguments, the HAIAFE supports the existence of a deistic creator that does not interact with humans. However, the main grounds for affirming the existence of such a deistic god is not germane to the main purpose of the present study.

Third, I do not want to give the impression that I am declaring victory. I doubt that arguments from evil will cause theists to lose faith in God. It is always possible that God, if he exists, might have some morally sufficient reasons, which we might not yet or might never fully understand, for allowing evil and suffering and not creating us in heaven in the first place. Thus, I conclude by saying that while arguments from evil can be very powerful, I think that a more profitable way to disprove the existence of God is to rely on a holistic approach, such as the cumulative strength of many different arguments.

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Notes

- ¹ Here, I use the term "heaven" and "non-physical state" and other such cognates interchangeably to refer to a spiritual dimension inhabited by God and God's creatures.
- ² In this paper, I can only gesture toward the main grounds for a deistic god. As examples of the grounds for a creator, see (Collins 2009; Craig and Sinclair 2009; Tipler 1988).
- ³ For a history of the problem of evil see (Neiman 2002; Sherry 2022; Tooley 2021). For forceful refutations of the evidential formulation see (Wykstra 1984; Alston 1991).

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