

# Does the Free Will Defense Truly Answer the Problem of Evil?

By Jason Dulle

The logical problem of evil (POE) argues that the existence of a God who is both omnipotent and omnibenevolent is logically incompatible with the existence of evil. One or the other can exist, but the two cannot coexist. Since it's obvious that evil exists, it follows that a theistic God does not.

This argument fails for a number of reasons, including the fact that it falsely assumes an all-loving and all-good God would *want* to prevent evil. This is not necessarily true. Indeed, God could have a morally sufficient reason for permitting evil in the world. Perhaps the presence of evil and suffering may be necessary to bring about some greater good, similar to the way we inoculate our children (causing them suffering) for the greater good of future health. Exploring possible reasons for which God permits evil is the task of theodicy.

## The Free Will Defense

Christians have offered a number of theodicies, but the most popular theodicy in modern times is the Free Will Defense (FWD), developed by Christian philosopher, Alvin Plantinga. The FWD suggests that the greater good for which God permits evil is human freedom. God created us with free will so we could make free and meaningful choices rather than having our choices determined or coerced by some external force or agent. We have a basic intuition that the freedom to make choices is an intrinsic moral good while coercion and determinism are not. God's choice to endow us with freedom, then, was morally good. But as is the case with many goods, there is a tradeoff: Freedom entails the ability to choose good, but also the ability to choose evil. It's logically impossible to *make* someone *freely* choose the good, so God could not create us with free will while also preventing us from abusing that freedom by choosing evil.

One can extend the FWD even further. Free will is not only good for its own sake, but also because it allows for the most meaningful choice of all: love.<sup>1</sup> Free will enables us to engage in loving relationships with God and others. The nature of love is such that it cannot be coerced or determined. It must be freely chosen to be genuine and meaningful, and yet, it is not possible to freely choose to love someone unless it is also possible to choose not to love them. True love requires free will, and free will requires at least the possibility of choosing evil rather than good; hate rather than love.

Could God use His power to prevent evil? Yes, but only by eliminating our freedom and, hence, our ability to love. The same freedom that makes love possible is the same freedom that makes evil

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<sup>1</sup>We should distinguish between two types of love. There are loving feelings (affections) and loving actions. The former are not chosen while the latter are. Loving feelings are not a function of our will. Such feelings form naturally in the right circumstances. That's why we speak of "falling in love" in the context of romantic relationships. It's not something that we choose per se, but something that happens to us. Or, consider the love we have for our children. We don't wake up one morning and decide that we will love our child. We simply experience love for them. Loving actions, however, must be chosen. Indeed, while romantic relationships often start with loving feelings, at some point those feelings diminish and one must choose to love their partner. The kind of love I am focused on here is loving actions. Loving actions are a function of the will and must be freely chosen.

possible, so eliminating freedom entails eliminating the possibility of both evil and love. God had a choice to make: permit the possibility of evil so humans could enjoy freedom and love, or eliminate the possibility of evil by eliminating freedom and love. In His infinite wisdom and foreknowledge, God knew the good of love and friendship outweighs the horrors of evil, so He created us as free creatures that could both love and hate; obey and rebel.

### **A Potential Problem with the FWD**

It would seem, then, that at least one morally sufficient reason for God to permit evil is that it is logically impossible to create free creatures who are able to do good and experience love but unable to choose evil and hate. As reasonable as this conclusion sounds, the example of God Himself calls into question the notion that true freedom requires the ability to choose both good and evil. Does God have free will? Yes. His choices are not determined or coerced by any external force/agent. Is God able to love? Yes. Love is essential to His nature. But is God able to sin? No.<sup>2</sup> Holiness is essential to God's nature. He cannot choose evil. If God's will can be free and yet lack the capacity to choose evil, then it's not true that free will logically entails the possibility of choosing evil. Likewise, if God can love without the possibility of choosing evil, then it's logically possible for a free agent to have the capacity for love but not the capacity for choosing evil. While love requires freedom, freedom doesn't seem to require the possibility of choosing evil.

Clearly there is more than one way for the will to be free, with God possessing one kind of freedom (maximal freedom)<sup>3</sup> and humans possessing another (libertarian freedom). Both forms of freedom provide conscious agents with real volitional powers that they are in control of – meaning their choices are not coerced by an external agent or determined by causal factors outside of their own volitional powers.<sup>4</sup> Free agents can originate new causal chains in the world as well as decide to terminate existing causal chains.

The two forms of freedom differ, however, with respect to *what* they can choose. A being with maximal freedom can choose any good but no evil. In contrast, a being with libertarian freedom can choose many goods as well as many evils.<sup>5</sup> God has maximal freedom because He is unable to choose evil (or more accurately, He is able to always choose the good).<sup>6</sup> Humans, however, have libertarian freedom because

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<sup>2</sup>J.P. Moreland explains the reason why God cannot sin: "The power to do a sinful act accrues to an agent in at least two cases: the agent mistakenly seeks what it takes to be good when, in fact, it is evil; or the agent needs some good that he lacks, cannot obtain it in a morally permissible way, and so obtains it in an impermissible way. The former option is ruled out by God's omniscience and the latter by God's complete sufficiency, so the power to do a sinful act is inconsistent with a being possessing these attributes." As found in "Miracles, Agency, and Theistic Science: A Reply to Steven B. Cowan," *Philosophia Christi* 4:1 (2002): 139-160, p. 157.

<sup>3</sup>Some have preferred to call this perfect freedom or freedom as excellence.

<sup>4</sup>This doesn't mean there are no restrictions on their freedom. Causal factors both inside and outside may influence their choices, or even limit their range of choices, but ultimately, the choices that the agent makes are his own choices. They were decided by an internal source (the will), not determined or coerced by external sources.

<sup>5</sup>Philosophers often consider the "the ability to do otherwise" (ADO) to be the *sine qua non* of libertarian freedom: A free act requires that one be able to choose A or -A. So long as both A and -A are moral goods, God could satisfy the ADO requirement. If, however, A or -A is a moral evil, then God cannot satisfy the ADO requirement. For example, God has the freedom to create (A) or not to create (-A). Both options are morally good. However, God does not have the ability to tell the truth (A) or not tell the truth (-A). Since God cannot always satisfy the ADO requirement, God does not have libertarian freedom.

<sup>6</sup>Maximal freedom is superior to libertarian freedom because the "ability" to choose evil is not a moral *perfection*, but a moral *defect*. It's a deficient form of freedom. It's not even an ability. It's a disability. True freedom is the ability to always and only choose the good. If that were not the case, then we would be freer than God since He cannot choose evil. Yet surely, God

we are able to choose both good and evil. Both forms of freedom allow for love, but only libertarian freedom allows for evil. Put differently, while it's true that love requires freedom, the kind of freedom required for love is not the same as the kind of freedom required to choose evil. Both libertarian and maximal freedom allow for love, but only libertarian freedom allows for evil.

### **Why Didn't God Create us with Maximal Freedom?**

The million dollar question, then, is why God chose to create us with libertarian freedom rather than maximal freedom. Why did God create us with the kind of freedom that allows for moral evil (libertarian freedom) instead of creating us with maximal freedom (like His) if His purpose was merely to create free creatures who could engage in loving relationships? If God had created us with maximal freedom, we would be able to enjoy the upside of love without the downside of possibly choosing evil.

Maybe the reason God did not create us with maximal freedom is that while it was logically possible to do so, it was not metaphysically possible to do so. Perhaps maximal freedom is unique to God because it's a property of His uniquely divine nature. Think about it. Why is it that God cannot sin? It's because of His morally perfect nature. He is not just good by accident. Moral goodness is an essential property of His being. He does not just *do* good, but *is* the good. He is the paradigm of moral goodness itself. As a perfect being, it's metaphysically impossible for God to choose evil. The reason He always chooses the good is because His choices are guided by His nature. Since His nature is perfect moral goodness, His choices are always morally good.

This attribute of moral perfection is unique to God. It is not communicable to humans. While God could and did create us morally innocent (without a sinful nature), He could not create us with moral perfection any more than He could create us with omniscience, omnipresence, or omnipotence. Our human nature is necessarily inferior to God's, and thus the exercise of our moral choices are not constrained by perfect moral goodness. This makes it possible for us to choose evil. So while there is a kind of freedom that allows for love but not evil, that kind of freedom is only able to be enjoyed by God because it is a unique property of His unique divine nature. By metaphysical necessity, the highest form of freedom that created beings can enjoy is libertarian freedom. Since libertarian freedom entails the possibility of choosing evil, and it's logically impossible to make free creatures choose the good, the FWD stands.

### **Is God's Moral Perfection an Incommunicable Property?**

Perhaps it is too soon to put the period at the end of this discussion. Why should we think God's moral perfection is an incommunicable property of the divine nature? After all, we are made in the image of God and share in certain divine attributes (God's creativity, rationality, moral awareness, consciousness, etc.). Why think it's impossible for us to share in God moral perfection? Of course it's true that God did not, in fact, communicate that property to us at creation, but the question is not what God did do, but rather what God could have done. Could He have communicated His moral perfection to us, and thus created us with maximal freedom rather than libertarian freedom? Is there any reason to think we lack this property due to metaphysical necessity rather than by divine choice? For example, it's obvious that it is metaphysically impossible for God to communicate His omnipresence to us. As finite beings, we are

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is the most free of all. The ability to choose evil actually makes us less free, not more free. We become slaves to evil, and our freedom to choose the good is diminished. Indeed, we no longer possess the freedom not to choose evil. In contrast, the inability to choose evil allows one to be maximally free. God's inability to sin is not a limitation, but a perfection of His will.

– by necessity – spatially located. But what is it about moral perfection that would make it metaphysically impossible for us to share in that property? I am not aware of any good argument for thinking it is an incommunicable property.

I am aware, however, of at least one reason to think it is a communicable property, and thus one reason to think it was metaphysically possible for God to create us with maximal freedom at creation: There will be no sin in heaven. How will this be achieved? It will be achieved by glorification. In glorification, God will change our nature in such a way that it becomes metaphysically impossible for us to sin. If God's moral perfection is what makes it metaphysically impossible for Him to choose sin, then we must be made morally perfect as well to achieve the same result. How else could that effect be achieved if not by communicating His property of moral perfection to us? If God will communicate His moral perfection to us in the future to ensure there is no sin in heaven, then God's moral perfection is a communicable property of the divine nature. But if God's moral perfection is a communicable property, and God will communicate that property to us in the future, why didn't He do so when He created us in the first place? Why didn't He just create us with a glorified human nature endowed with maximal freedom so we could experience the joys of love without the possibility of choosing sin? Why create us with libertarian freedom and only give us maximal freedom later? If God could have created us like Him to experience both volitional freedom and love without the possibility of evil, then the FWD fails.

It would be premature to end the discussion, here, however, because there is debate over how God will ensure there is no sin in heaven. While all Christians agree that humans will not sin in heaven, and all agree that this result is ensured, in part, by our glorification, not all agree that God will make it metaphysically impossible for us to sin (*non posse non peccare*; i.e. not able to sin) by communicating His moral perfection and maximal freedom to us in glorification. Some Christians think glorification only entails the removal of our sin nature, resetting us back to our original Adamic state of moral innocence and regaining the original Adamic ability not to sin (*posse non peccare*; i.e. able not to sin). We'll still have libertarian free will, and thus it will still be metaphysically possible for us to sin, but as a matter of fact, we will never use our libertarian freedom to do so.

To traverse this impasse, then, we need to determine the nature of glorification and decide whether sin will be metaphysically possible or metaphysically impossible in heaven. Does glorification merely remove our sinful nature such that we retain our libertarian freedom and sin remains a metaphysically possibility throughout eternity, or does glorification entail both the removal of our sinful nature and the impartation of God's moral perfection such that we acquire a new kind of freedom (maximal freedom) that makes it metaphysically impossible for us to choose evil? In other words, does God merely *fix* our nature at glorification, or does God *perfect* our nature at glorification?

Ultimately, the debate over the nature of glorification comes down to whether sin will be metaphysically possible in heaven. If we have better reasons for thinking God will ensure a sinless heaven by making sin metaphysically impossible, then we should understand glorification as entailing the communication of God's moral perfection to us. With moral perfection comes maximal freedom. But if humans will be both free and unable to sin in the future, that is good reason to think God could have created us that way from the start. If God could have created us both free and unable to sin, the FWD fails.

*Sin is metaphysically impossible in heaven > glorification entails moral perfection > endowed with maximal freedom > FWD fails.*

If there are better reasons for thinking God can only preserve human freedom by still allowing for at least the metaphysical possibility of sin, then we should understand glorification to entail the mere removal of our sin nature. Humans are only capable of libertarian freedom, then the FWD succeeds. It was not logically possible for God to create us both free and unable to sin.

*Sin is metaphysically possible in heaven > glorification entails removal of sin nature > retain libertarian freedom > FWD succeeds.*

Let's examine the case for each position.

### **Sin is Metaphysically Possible in Heaven**

Those who think sin will be metaphysically possible in heaven – though never actualized – do so primarily because of their understanding of freedom. They suppose that the ability to choose evil is a *logically necessary* precondition for genuine freedom of the will, even if one never – in fact – chooses evil. As noted earlier, however, the example of God proves this assumption to be false. God is both free and unable to sin, so it's logically possible to have volitional freedom without the ability to sin.

But perhaps it is not metaphysically possible for humans to enjoy the same maximal freedom God enjoys, even after our glorification. Perhaps freedom requires that one be able to choose among options (between A and -A, or between A and B). If, however, one is only presented with A, then one must choose A even if one does not want to choose A. There is no other option, however, so A must be chosen. But the act of "choosing" A is not a free act. It's the only possible outcome. The outcome is determined by constraint of options. In the way of illustration, imagine being placed in a room and then commanded to leave the room. If the room has three doors, you can meaningfully choose which way you'll exit the room. If, however, there is only one door (or the other doors are bolted shut), then the act of "choosing" that door is not a free choice. It was the only possible exit, and you had no choice but to exit the room. Freedom requires that we have more than one option to choose from.

God's acts are always free because He always has multiple goods to choose from. He never faces a circumstance in which there is only one good to choose from. Humans, however, do not always have the ability to choose between multiple goods, and thus cannot enjoy maximal freedom like God. While we may typically have multiple goods to choose from, there is at least one circumstance in which humans are presented with only one good to choose from. If we had maximal freedom, we would be required to choose that singular good (A), and thus our choice would not be free and meaningful. The only way to make our choice free and meaningful is to provide us with a second option. Since there is only one morally good option, any additional options would necessarily be morally evil options. In other words, we must have the freedom to do both good (A) and evil (-A). This requires libertarian freedom. We are metaphysically incapable of experiencing maximal freedom.

The circumstance of which I speak is the command to love God. A person whom God commands to love Him has but one morally good option to choose from: love God (A). A person with maximal freedom would have to choose that good, and thus would love God out of necessity, not by choice. For a person to freely obey the command to love God, they must also have the option not to love God (-A). That option is evil, however, because loving God is the highest moral good. To make our choice meaningful, then, God must give us the ability to love Him or not to love Him – the choice to do good or evil. Only by having the ability to choose evil (not loving God) can we meaningfully and freely choose the good (loving God), and thus it follows that God had to create us with libertarian freedom so we could freely love Him.

Given the fact that the command to love God will continue into eternity, we must continue to have libertarian freedom in heaven. If the only form of freedom humans can ever enjoy is libertarian freedom, then the FWD succeeds as a theodicy.

Another reason to think sin will remain a metaphysical possibility in heaven is that moral perfection is a unique property of the divine nature. It cannot be communicated to humans. God can create creatures that are morally innocent (not inclined to sin, sin is not inevitable) but not creatures that are morally perfect (incapable of sin). If moral perfection is metaphysically impossible for humans, the next best thing would be for God to remove the sinful nature that gives us a propensity toward sin and put us in an environment where we will be so overwhelmed with the beauty and holiness of God (beatific vision of God) that we will not want to sin, and thus will not sin.

We have, then, two reasons for thinking sin will be metaphysically impossible in heaven:

1. Our love for God can only be meaningful if we have the ability not to love God. This requires libertarian freedom, and libertarian freedom requires that we be able to choose evil (i.e. it requires that evil be metaphysically possible). Since the command to love God will apply in heaven, we must have libertarian freedom in heaven. It's metaphysically impossible for humans to enjoy maximal freedom.
2. Moral perfection is an incommunicable property of the divine nature, and thus we can never experience maximal freedom. We will have libertarian freedom in heaven, but we will never choose evil due to the removal of our sin nature and the beatific vision of God.

I think both reasons are flawed. I'll offer a critique of the first in the next section. For now, I want to focus on the second. I find a number of problems with this line of reasoning. First, why think God's moral perfection is an incommunicable property? One can't cite the fact that we do not currently possess that property, for this assumes that God must communicate all communicable properties to us at creation. Why think that is the case? Why couldn't God communicate some of His properties to us at creation and additional properties to us at our glorification?

Second, why think the beatific vision of God would necessarily prevent people from wanting to sin or from choosing sin? Presumably, the angels also existed in the beatific presence of God and yet many angels chose to rebel against God anyway. This alone, then, cannot explain why humans will not sin in heaven.

Third, why think that removing our sinful nature would prevent us from sinning? It would merely revert our nature back to the condition of Adam's nature at creation. But it was precisely in that state that Adam sinned, so why think we won't sin in that same state in heaven? Presumably, the angels were created with a morally innocent nature like ours, and yet they sinned in such a state as well.

Perhaps it's not one or the other that ensures we will never sin in heaven, but the coupling of the beatific vision of God with the removal of our sin nature that does so. But if seeing the beatific vision of God did not prevent the angels from sinning, and having a morally innocent nature did not prevent the angels or Adam from sinning, why think a combination of the two will be enough to prevent us from sinning in heaven?

Fourth, even if a combination of a morally innocent nature plus the beatific vision of God were able to ensure that we never choose evil in heaven, this just goes to show that God could have created us in a way that we would not use our freedom to choose evil. If – in the future – God is able, through

glorification, to make human beings in such a way that they have free will and yet do not use that freedom to choose evil, then why didn't He do so at creation? Why didn't He just start with a heavenly state rather than ending with a heavenly state? The FWD alone cannot answer this problem.

Some defenders of the sin-is-metaphysically-possible-in-heaven view ("metaphysically possible" for short) have answered this objection by proposing that a world where free creatures will not choose to sin is only possible if it is first preceded by a world in which free creatures did choose sin.<sup>7</sup> We still might have chosen to sin even if God had created us both morally innocent and in the beatific vision of God. It's only after we have experienced the horrors of sin that moral innocence coupled with the beatific vision of God will be sufficient to ensure we will not choose evil in heaven. Our experience of evil in this life is necessary to create the kind of free creatures who can exercise their free will without choosing evil in the next life. Let me explain.

God is using evil in this life as an inoculation of sorts. Our experience of evil causes us to develop a hatred for evil to the extent that, if our fallen nature were removed at some point in the future, we would always and freely choose the good. A future world in which free creatures do not sin is only possible because it was preceded by a world in which free creatures did sin. God is using the actuality of evil as a teaching tool in this world to prepare us for the next world. He is teaching us about the horrors of sin so that when we regain the ability to only choose the good, we will, in fact, only choose the good (despite evil remaining a metaphysical possibility).

Regenerate Christians who are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit in this life have the desire to only do good, but our fallen nature prevents us from actualizing that desire (Romans 7:14-23). In the next world, however, God will restore our nature to its original state – removing our natural propensity to evil – so that we can always choose the good (*posse non peccare*). Evil is necessary in this life to exercise our moral faculties to the point of maturity so that in the next life we will only choose the good (and will do so freely). The purpose of glorification is not to remove the possibility of choosing evil, but to remove the barrier that is currently preventing us from being able to choose what we want to choose (the good alone). And since those who populate heaven will be limited to those who have demonstrated their willingness to submit to God and their desire for goodness in this life, once the barrier of our sin nature is removed, everyone will always and only freely choose the good. William Lane Craig has suggested something along these same lines. In his debate with Ray Bradley, Craig said:

Heaven may not be a possible world when you take it in isolation by itself. It may be that the only way in which God could actualize a heaven of free creatures all worshipping Him and not falling into sin would be by having, so to speak, this run-up to it, this advance life during which there is a veil of decision-making in which some people choose for God and some people against God. ... [I]t may not be feasible for God to actualize heaven in isolation from such an antecedent world.<sup>8</sup>

While it will be metaphysically possible for us to sin in heaven, no one will ever choose to do so. J. P. Moreland illustrated this concept in a crude but powerful way. He remarked that while he currently possesses the freedom to eat his dog's feces, he would never choose to do so no matter how long he lives. Why? Because it is disgusting! He does not want to do it now, or ever. Clay Jones made a similar

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<sup>7</sup>Two examples include Clay Jones and William Lane Craig.

<sup>8</sup>The debate transcript available from Reasonable Faith at <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/debates/can-a-loving-god-send-people-to-hell-the-craig-bradley-debate>; Internet; accessed 06 January 2017. The 1994 debate audio is available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-EP6LVhYOc>.

point using a comparable illustration.<sup>9</sup> He noted that while he has the freedom to jab a pencil into his eye, he will never choose to do so because such an act “would be stupid.” Knowing the consequences of such an act, no one would willingly choose to do it. And so it will be in heaven. You might say that we will be too smart to use our freedom to sin. Our experience of sin in this life will create in us such a disgust of and hatred for sin that none of us will ever want to choose sin in the next life.

Babies, however, offer a poignant counter-argument to this “inoculation view.” Presuming that preborn (and born children who die before they are morally accountable) go to heaven – as most Protestant Christians do – there would be a significant population of people in heaven who have never consciously experienced the horrors of sin to be inoculated against it. What would prevent them from sinning in heaven? Since they were not inoculated against evil through experience, what’s to stop them from choosing evil in the heavenly state?

If we say babies<sup>10</sup> will not choose evil in the heavenly state because they are glorified and in the beatific presence of God, this is merely an admission that 1) this earthly state was not necessary to ensure that people wouldn’t choose evil in a heavenly state and 2) that God could have ensured we would not have chosen evil simply by creating us in a heavenly state in which we were glorified and in his beatific presence.

Clay Jones answers this objection by arguing that babies will witness the judgment of all people, and this will be “an amazing education on the stupidity of sin.”<sup>11</sup> According to Jones, “What we didn’t learn about the horror of sin in this life will be declared to everyone at the Judgment. Every evil intent and rank rebellion, even those cloaked with goodness, will be exposed for exactly what it is to all the redeemed and angels. They will all be unmistakable because the Judgment will reveal them for what they really are.”<sup>12</sup> Since babies will be present for the judgment, babies will learn by observation what they did not learn by personal experience.

Three counter-objections can be raised against Jones’ explanation. First, the final judgment will not take place until the end of time. Babies that go to heaven could be in heaven for thousands of years before that event. Is it reasonable to think that of the hundreds of millions (if not billions) of babies living for thousands of years in heaven, not one of them will choose evil prior to their education about the consequences of evil at the final judgment?

Second, there are good Biblical reasons to think the angels rebelled more than once (perhaps three times). It’s beyond the scope of this paper to argue for this position, but let’s assume it’s true for the sake of argument.<sup>13</sup> God judged the first group of angels that sinned by kicking them out of heaven. The

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<sup>9</sup>Clay Jones, “Ehrman’s Problem 4: Why Won’t We Abuse Free Will in Heaven?”; available from <http://www.clayjones.net/2012/01/ehrman%E2%80%99s-problem-4-why-won%E2%80%99t-we-abuse-free-will-in-heaven/>; Internet; accessed 06 January 2017.

<sup>10</sup>While they were babies when they went to heaven, it’s almost certain that they do not appear as or function like babies in heaven. We can’t know for certain, but it seems reasonable to believe that they enter heaven in a mature state.

<sup>11</sup>Clay Jones (interviewed by Natasha Crain), “8 Tough Questions Kids Ask About Evil and Suffering...and the Answers You Wish You Had When They Asked”; available from <https://natashacrain.com/8-tough-questions-kids-ask-about-evil-and-suffering-and-the-answers-you-wish-you-had-when-they-asked/>; Internet; accessed 06 September 2017.

<sup>12</sup>Clay Jones (interviewed by Natasha Crain), “8 Tough Questions Kids Ask About Evil and Suffering...and the Answers You Wish You Had When They Asked”; available from <https://natashacrain.com/8-tough-questions-kids-ask-about-evil-and-suffering-and-the-answers-you-wish-you-had-when-they-asked/>; Internet; accessed 06 September 2017.

<sup>13</sup>Satan rebelled against God at some point prior to humanity’s rebellion. God cast Satan out of heaven and to the Earth (Ezekiel 28:16–17). Then, at some later point in time certain spiritual beings mated with human women to produce the



other angels witnessed this judgment, and yet they chose to sin in the future anyway. It would not seem, then, that witnessing God's judgment is enough to dissuade free creatures from choosing evil in the future.

Third, if all it takes to inoculate us against choosing evil is to witness God's judgment on others' sins, then our present world of sin and suffering seems unnecessary. Rather than judging Satan and his angels prior to humanity's creation or rebellion, God could have waited until after humanity's creation and judged them in a way that humans could observe. Adam and Eve would have witnessed the severity of God's punishment, thus inoculating them from the making the same mistake the angels did. If it will work for the babies, it could have worked for Adam and Eve, and humans could have avoided ever choosing evil.<sup>14</sup>

### **Sin is Metaphysically Impossible in Heaven**

Since we are dealing with a binary question (sin is either metaphysically possible or metaphysically impossible in heaven), evidence against one view is evidence for the other. The argument for the view that it will be metaphysically impossible for us to sin in heaven consists largely (but not exclusively) of arguments against the view that sin will be metaphysically possible in heaven.

I've already offered some critiques against the "metaphysically possible" view, but here are a few others to consider. Heaven is the final state of things. It is the culmination of redemption history and the final vindication of good over evil. Too much is at stake for God to allow even the *possibility* of sin. The inoculation theory is simply not robust enough to guarantee that free creatures will not sin in the future. Our past experience of the horrors of evil, coupled with the removal of our sin nature and the beatific vision of God, are simply not enough to guarantee that we will never choose evil in the future.

Secondly, the "metaphysically possible" view means we will have an inferior form of freedom for time everlasting. The freedom not to sin is morally superior to the freedom to sin. To experience the highest form of freedom, God would need to change us in such a way that we can only choose the good – not merely in such a way that we will simply not choose evil.

Thirdly, the "metaphysically possible" view implies that glorified humans could still experience a desire to commit sin or even the temptation to sin (just as Adam and Eve did). Even if every human has a much greater desire for good rather than evil – and always chooses the good at each temptation – a future in which we still experience any desire for sin or any temptation to do evil is not as preferable to a future in which even the desire for evil and the temptation to sin are eliminated entirely.

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Nephilim (Genesis 6:1-4). The spiritual beings who committed this sin were imprisoned in Tartarus (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6). They are not free to roam the Earth like Satan and his fallen angels. The great flood was intended, in part, to wipe out the Nephilim. And yet, we see the Nephilim re-emerge after the flood (Numbers 13:33; There were also giants that were called "Rephaim." The Rephaim are linked to the Anakim (Deuteronomy 2:10-11), and the Anakim are linked to the Nephilim (Numbers 13:33). See Genesis 14:5; 15:20; Deuteronomy 2:20-21; 3:11,13; Joshua 12:4; 13:12; 17:15), raising the real possibility that another group of spiritual beings mated with human women again. This would mean there were at least three separate rebellions in the spiritual realm. For further reading, see Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, pages 184-189.

<sup>14</sup>Jones might respond that God's judgment of the angels immediately after man's creation may have been enough to dissuade Adam and Eve from choosing evil, but their progeny may still choose evil since they were not present to witness the angelic judgment. But if we are talking about what God could have done to prevent evil, He could have created all human beings at one time rather than relying on sexual reproduction for the propagation of our kind (just like God will do in the final state of human existence). As such, all humans would witness the angelic judgment and be inoculated against evil.

Given the deficiencies in the “metaphysically possible” view, we should conclude that it will be metaphysically impossible for us to sin in heaven. God will perfect our nature, not merely fix it. If the only conceivable means to achieve that result is for God to impart His moral perfection and maximal freedom to us at glorification, then these must be communicable properties of the divine nature.<sup>15</sup>

### **Does Maximal Freedom Rule out Meaningful Love for God?**

One problem remains. Earlier, the “metaphysically possible” advocate argued that humans are only capable of libertarian freedom – both in this life and in the next – because we will always be subject to the command to love God. Such a command presents us with only one morally good option. If we can only choose the good, and there is only one morally good option to choose from, our “choice” to love God would not be free or meaningful. It would be coerced or determined. We would cease to be free. To love God forever, we must retain our libertarian freedom in heaven. Humans are simply incapable of enjoying maximal freedom, and thus glorification cannot entail the impartation of God’s moral perfection and maximal freedom. We will always have libertarian freedom, and thus sin will always be a metaphysical possibility (although, that possibility will never be actualized).

I think this reasoning fails in at least two ways. First, it falsely assumes that necessity = coercion. It does not follow that if there is only one moral good to choose from (necessity), the agent who chooses that good is coerced into doing so. A choice can be necessary without being coerced. Consider God. God necessarily chooses the good, but He is not compelled to do so by any external force/agent. He chooses the good because His nature is good. Since His choices come from an internal source (God’s nature) rather than being dictated to God by an external force/agent, God’s choices are free. God does not refrain from evil because He lacks permission or ability, but because He has no desire to do evil – because His nature is essentially good. God necessarily chooses the good, but this necessity flows from his maximal freedom, not coercion. Or, to provide an example from the human realm, imagine a loving spouse who, after 40 years of faithful marriage, is psychologically incapable of cheating on his spouse. He isn’t coerced into fidelity because his choice is constrained by an external source that is frustrating his will. His inability to cheat on his spouse is a moral necessity arising from his character.

Indeed, what makes a choice free or coerced is not the number of options one has to choose from, but the source from which the choice is made. Choices that are imposed on an agent from the outside are coerced/determined, while choices that arise from sources internal to the agent are free. Even in situations where there is only one moral good to choose from, an agent can *freely* choose that singular good so long as the source of his choice is internal rather than external. Let me explain.

If the reason an agent chooses *X* is due to sources external to the agent, the choice is coerced. For example, when a robber puts a gun to your head and demands that you give him all of your money, your “choice” to give him your money is coerced because it is being caused solely by an external agent (the robber) – not by an exercise of your own free will. However, in different circumstances, you might choose to give the same amount of money to the same person and it would be a free act of charity. For example, you notice the man is in shabby clothing and appears to be homeless and, out of sympathy,

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<sup>15</sup>What about the angels? They have libertarian freedom like human beings as well. Will God impart His moral perfection to them as well to ensure that they do not sin again? Scripture does not address this issue, so we can only speculate, but it stands to reason that if humans must receive God’s moral perfection to guarantee there will be no sin in heaven, the angels will experience the same.

decide to give him all of your money. In the latter case, the agent's choice is due to his own internal resources (reasons, desires, goals, character, values, his nature, etc.), and thus his choice is free.

This leads me to my second criticism: The argument falsely assumes that humans cannot freely love God with maximal freedom. While I agree that God could not endow humans with maximal freedom at initial creation without undermining our freedom to meaningfully choose to love God, that does not mean God cannot – in the future – endow those who have used their libertarian free will to choose to love God with moral perfection and maximal freedom such that they become metaphysically unable to reject Him in the future (while remaining free). Humans simply can't start off that way. Humans can freely love God with maximal freedom only if they first came to freely love God with libertarian freedom. Said another way, humans endowed with maximal freedom can be metaphysically unable to reject God in heaven and yet remain free, but only if they first had libertarian freedom to freely love God when they had the opportunity to reject Him. We can freely love God with maximal freedom so long as we first loved God with libertarian freedom. Let me explain.

An agent can be unable to reject God in one of two ways: (1) God could prevent the agent from rejecting Him by overriding his will or enforcing compliance (external restriction), or (2) the agent's will could be self-formed such that he never wants to reject God (internal restriction). Coercion requires frustrated agency. If, in the next life, God were to prevent us from rejecting Him by overriding our will or enforcing compliance, then our decision to love God would be coerced. But if we willingly choose to love God of our own free will from our own internal resources, then our choice is not coerced – even if no other choice is metaphysically possible. Commands do not coerce unless they override resistance. If our will is already aligned with the command to love God, there is no resistance. That makes the command redundant – not coercive.<sup>16</sup> William Lane Craig offers a thought experiment demonstrating that one's inability to choose *B* does not make his choice of *A* determined and meaningless:

Imagine a man with electrodes secretly implanted in his brain who is presented with a choice of doing either *A* or *B*. The electrodes are inactive so long as the man chooses *A*; but if he were going to choose *B*, then the electrodes would switch on and force him to choose *A*. If the electrodes fire, causing him to choose *A*, his choice of *A* is clearly not a free choice. But suppose that the man really wants to do *A* and chooses it of his own volition. In that case his choosing *A* is entirely free, even though the man is literally unable to choose *B*, since the electrodes do not function at all and have no effect on his choice of *A*. What makes his choice free is the absence of any causally determining factors of his choosing *A*. This conception of libertarian freedom has the advantage of explaining how it is that God's choosing to do good is free, even though it is impossible for God to choose sin, namely, His choosing is undetermined by

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<sup>16</sup>What about babies? Doesn't the example of babies call the impartation view into question in the same way they call the inoculation view into question? Most Christians believe that babies who die before an age of moral accountability will go to heaven, but these babies never had a chance to develop their moral character or love God. When they enter heaven, however, God is going to glorify them such that it will be impossible for them to sin. Since they never experienced a developmental period prior to their glorified state, wouldn't this be coercion? Wouldn't they only love and obey God in heaven because God has made it impossible for them to do otherwise? They never had a chance to fix their will on loving God and doing good prior to God glorifying them and making it metaphysically certain that they'll never choose sin.

To clarify, what's required is not a long history of virtuous choices or gradual habituation toward the good over time. The human agent need only knowingly and non-coercively choose God (at least once) when rejection is metaphysically possible. There needs to be a decisive moment of choice. Classical Christian theology holds that in the beatific vision a person will come to know God directly, recognize God as the supreme good, and respond willingly and positively to that good. So the first moment of rational willing for the baby who enters heaven is not coerced, even if it is oriented toward God. Remember, coercion requires a frustration of one's will. The baby has no prior will to override. There is no earlier moment where the baby wanted to reject God but was prevented from doing so. In the baby's first exercise of personal agency, they will freely and willingly choose God. Only then will God glorify them.

causal constraints. Thus, libertarian freedom of the will does not require the ability to choose other than as one chooses.<sup>17</sup>

This explains why Jesus' temptations were meaningful, despite the fact that, as God, it was metaphysically impossible for Jesus to sin.<sup>18</sup> He truly experienced the force of each temptation via His human nature, and still chose the good over evil each time. He did so of His own accord, not because of some external constraint. Had Jesus ever willed to do evil, He would have been prevented from doing so, but this metaphysical impossibility does nothing to detract from the fact that Jesus freely chose the good each time. He was never coerced. His will was never frustrated by some external source. Similarly, if God were to perfect our nature in glorification by imparting His moral perfection to us and endowing us with maximal freedom, we would be metaphysically incapable of rejecting God in heaven. And yet, this would not make our choice to love God any less free or meaningful because our choice to love God would be derived from our own internal resources. We will naturally want to love and obey God. We will not be coerced into loving and obeying God. God will not frustrate our will by forcing us to do something we don't want to. Indeed, He is honoring our will by perfecting it.

Although God will remove the possibility of evil entirely at glorification, that change only happens after we have authored our own love for God in this earthly life. In other words, when we had libertarian free will and could choose to love God or reject Him, we freely and consistently chose to love God. Glorification merely confirms the choice we previously made with our libertarian free will, making it permanent. Once we are endowed with moral perfection and maximal freedom, rejecting God will no longer be metaphysically possible, but it will no longer be possible because God has internally grounded the decision we made to love Him (through glorification) when we had libertarian freedom. Remember, for the will to be free only requires that our choices be undetermined by causal factors outside our own volitional powers. That condition will be satisfied in heaven. We will continue to love God throughout eternity – not because God is forcing us to do so against our will – but because it is our own will to do so. Our will was so formed in our earthly life that we won't want to reject God in the next life. God merely confirms and "cements" that decision in glorification. In heaven, we will always do what we want: love God. So it's simply not true that humans must have libertarian freedom in heaven to freely and meaningfully love God forever.

This takes us back full circle to the question I raised earlier: If God can endow us with maximal freedom in the next life, why didn't God create us with maximal freedom from the start? Why create us with libertarian freedom, thereby making evil possible, and only later endow us with maximal freedom? The answer comes down to the necessity of moral development. For our choice to be free and meaningful, we must be able to reject God, at least initially. But after having freely chosen Him, God can then "cement" this choice forever by changing our natures such that we will never be able to reject Him in the future. The only way for humans to be both free and unable to sin in the next life is to first be capable of sin in this life, but choose the good anyway. This insight is similar to the inoculation view. Both hold that a future world in which free creatures do not sin is only possible because it was preceded by a world in which free creatures could sin.

If God created humans with maximal freedom, their "choice" to love God would be coerced because they have no moral character of their own to draw from. Their "choice" would be entirely explained by

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<sup>17</sup>William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Crossway Books: Wheaton, IL, 2001), 261-2. Craig attributes the analogy to philosopher Harry Frankfurt.

<sup>18</sup>See Jason Dulle, "Was it Possible for Jesus to Sin?"; available at <https://onenesspentecostal.com/temptationofchrist.htm>; Internet; accessed 28 December 2025.

the absence of alternative options. They would choose to love God by God's design, not by their own free choice. Only those agents whose moral character has been self-fixed by consistently choosing the good over evil can freely choose the good by their own internal resources in heaven.<sup>19</sup> That's why God had to create us with libertarian free will, but that does not mean He can never "upgrade" us to a higher form of freedom in the future. He can and will, but only after we have freely chosen to love Him when there was no metaphysical necessity that we do so.

Humans must develop their own moral character, but once that character has been developed, God can endow us with moral perfection and maximal freedom to "cement" that choice without removing our free will. While we will no longer be able to reject God in heaven, that impossibility is grounded in who we have chosen to become. Our will has been settled and we have endorsed the good of our own accord. At that point, the explanation for our love for God is not that "God made me this way" but rather "This is who I am." A glorified person with maximal freedom still acts for their own reasons, endorses the action from the inside, and identifies the act as their own. He loves God, not because rebellion is impossible (though it is), but because He has chosen to love God. He is good because He has chosen to be good. The metaphysical impossibility of sin explains why he is no longer tempted to evil – not why he chooses the good or loves God. The decisive factor is how the will became aligned with God, not whether it could do otherwise.

God did not create humans with maximal freedom because this would bypass the very process that makes us self-authored moral agents rather than mere artifacts. Libertarian freedom – which entails the possibility of evil – is not the highest form of freedom, but it is the only kind of freedom by which finite persons can *grow into* the highest form of freedom without losing their free will and personal agency in the process. Since God's goal was to create beings capable of genuine love, He had to allow for a stage of moral freedom in which evil (and rejection of God) was possible. God permitted evil – not because it is a logical precondition for genuine freedom and love – but because creaturely love must be *formed*, not merely instantiated by God. However, once creatures have freely formed their choice to love and obey God, God can upgrade them to a maximal form of freedom through glorification. That makes sin metaphysically impossible, but it does not undermine creaturely freedom because the necessity flows from our own internal resources. It is not imposed on us from the outside (by God). We want God to perfect our will. We want God to remove our sinful nature so that we are capable of doing what we want to do (the good) but are prevented from doing so consistently due to our sinful nature. We are freely embracing the good. The impossibility is grounded in our own perfected nature, not God's manipulation. We own the choice. The reason we'll only do good in heaven is because of who we have chosen to become, not because God is making us do good. God has merely allowed for us to become who we want to become: people who only do good. The impossibility of sin flows from our internal perfected character, not from any external source manipulating our will, and hence we will have genuine and meaningful freedom in heaven.

In summary, libertarian freedom is necessary at one stage of human existence, but this does not mean evil must remain a possibility forever. God will eliminate the possibility of evil in heaven via glorification. In glorification, God will upgrade us to His maximal form of freedom by endowing us with His moral perfection. Subsequently, we will only choose the good, but will do so freely based on our own internal sources rather than external constraints.

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<sup>19</sup>This only applies to creatures, not God. God does not experience moral or character development. He does not become good. He does not learn to love. His character does not improve. He is maximally perfect from eternity past, and thus can enjoy maximal freedom from eternity past.

All of this is vitally important to the success or failure of the FWD. Earlier, I argued that if humans are capable of experiencing moral perfection and maximal freedom in the future, then surely God could have done so in the past at creation. If true, the FWD is undermined because it was logically possible for God to create us with free will without the possibility of choosing evil. It is an error, however, to assume that because God will endow us with maximal freedom in the afterlife, He could have *created* us with maximal freedom, too. Humans can only enjoy maximal freedom after first experiencing libertarian freedom. It is true, then, that God could not *create* us both free and unable to choose evil, and thus the FWD stands.

### Conclusion

While the FWD answers the logical problem of evil, the key assumption of the FWD (that it is logically impossible for God to create human beings with free will but prevent them from choosing evil) has been called into question by the fact that God is free and able to love without the possibility of choosing evil.

This reveals that there are two forms of freedom: one which is capable of evil (libertarian) and one which is not (maximal). That invites the question: Why did God endow us with the kind of freedom that allows for evil (libertarian freedom) rather than the kind of freedom that does not (maximal freedom)? I suggested that perhaps it was metaphysically impossible for God to create us with maximal freedom because moral perfection is an incommunicable property of the divine nature. To test that theory, we turned our attention to the question of how God will ensure that we do not sin in heaven. He will do so by glorification; i.e. God will change something in our nature to ensure that we will only choose the good. But how does God change our nature? Does He merely fix it, or will He perfect it? If He just fixes our nature to be like Adam's prior to the Fall, then sin will always remain a metaphysical possibility in heaven, even though no one will ever, in fact, choose evil. But if God perfects our nature by communicating His moral perfection and maximal freedom to us, sin will be a metaphysical impossibility.

I argued that we have better reasons for thinking God will prevent sin in heaven by making it metaphysically impossible, and thus reason to think glorification entails the perfection of our nature. This can only be achieved by God communicating His moral perfection and maximal freedom to us, and thus these are communicable properties of the divine nature.

While it is metaphysically possible for humans to be endowed with maximal freedom to freely and meaningfully love and obey God without the possibility of choosing evil, we could not be *created* with maximal freedom. God could only endow us with maximal freedom after we first used a libertarian form of freedom to freely choose God when he had the option of rejecting Him. Humans had to be created with libertarian freedom, and thus the key assumption of the FWD stands: It was logically impossible for God to *create* free creatures who cannot choose evil. This conclusion holds regardless of one's view on the communicability of God's moral perfection and maximal freedom, regardless of one's view on the nature of glorification, and regardless of one's view on the metaphysical possibility of sin in heaven.

As always, these conclusions are provisional and open to correction as criticisms and counter-arguments are offered.