that God is morally blameworthy for causing evil. In this sense, *Excusing Sinners and Blaming God* is a defensive book. What reasons are there for thinking theological determinism is true? Bignon mentions both biblical grounds and philosophical grounds (229). The biblical issues aren’t discussed at great length, and when they are, I think the treatment is overly confident (see, e.g., 176–177). The philosophical grounds all proceed from objections to libertarianism. And, as Bignon notes elsewhere, the falsity of libertarianism doesn’t entail theological determinism.

It’s not always clear what primary audience Bignon’s book is intended for. The level of rigor and care in discussing distinctions and different versions of arguments often suggests its primary audience is professional philosophers. But at other times it considers versions of arguments or claims that one simply doesn’t—and shouldn’t—find in the philosophical literature. Here see, for instance, the discussion of whether determinism necessarily entails manipulation in chapter 3 or the discussion in chapter 4 of whether determinism entails mental illness. At times, Bignon’s definitions and treatment of historical issues are perplexing, especially if he intends theologians and not just philosophers to be among his audience. As an instance here, see the claim that “all theologians who affirm libertarian free will” are “Arminians” (10). I suspect Anselm, for instance, would be surprised to learn that he is an Arminian. One final criticism: the press that puts out a book such as this fails if does not require it to have an index.

Despite the limitations I’ve noted, *Excusing Sinners and Blaming God* is worth reading. As Paul Helm says in the volume’s forward, this book is “as thorough defense [of theological determinism and compatibilism] as you’ll find” (ix). As such, it should be read both by philosophers of religion interested in various models of divine providence and by those philosophers interested in the compatibilism/incompatibilism debates.


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*Paradise Understood* is a collection of philosophical reflections on Heaven that is impressively diverse both in its authorship and its subject matter. As we learn in the introduction, eight of the seventeen essays in this volume were invited contributions by established scholars, an additional seven essays were selected from a competition, and the remaining two
come from the editors themselves. Twelve of the seventeen contributors then presented versions of their papers at a conference together. As a result, quite a lot of the contributors directly address concerns or challenges raised elsewhere in this volume, lending the work a degree of cohesiveness not always possible in an anthology. As is often the case in a collection of essays, the quality of the chapters is a bit uneven, but here the weaker papers are the outliers. On the whole, this is an excellent, incisive, challenging collection of essays with material that should be of interest to just about anyone who works in the philosophy of religion.

One note of clarification is in order with respect to the diversity of this volume. The driving question behind this collection is not whether any notion of paradise is philosophically defensible, but whether the Christian conception of Heaven can withstand rigorous inquiry. This is not a criticism. An argument could be made that the concept of Heaven—as distinct from, say, broad notions of an afterlife—is inextricably tied to the particulars of the religion in which it is posited. In this volume, for example, most of the contributors draw from Christian scriptures, the writings of the early Church fathers, or other foundational Christian thinkers in advancing their arguments. I offer this point of clarification only because the introduction and first chapter are exceptions to this general rule. As a result, a reader might get the impression that the volume applies equally to Islamic, Judaic, or even polytheistic scholarship as it does to Christian scholarship, and for the most part this is not the case. The questions raised in this work are significant and far-reaching, but they are raised primarily within the tradition of Christianity.

The seventeen essays in this volume are divided into eight parts: I. The Basic Nature of Paradise; II. The Epistemology of Paradise; III. Virtue in Paradise; IV. Paradise and Responding to Evil; V. The Social and Political Philosophy of Paradise; VI. Resurrection and Paradise; VII. Freedom in Paradise; VIII. The Desirability of Paradise. That said, there is a significant amount of interesting overlap among the sections. One cannot do justice to The Desirability of Paradise without also addressing The Basic Nature of Paradise. Likewise, questions about Virtue in Paradise must be considered alongside those of Paradise and Responding to Evil and Freedom in Paradise. In what follows, I will give a brief overview of each of the seventeen chapters that comprise these eight parts. Out of necessity, I will restrict my own response to the occasional comment or concern.

In chapter 1, Eric Silverman opens the volume with “Conceiving Heaven as a Dynamic Rather than Static Existence.” He argues that Heaven could be a place of “moral, aesthetic, epistemic, and relational progress” (13). The details of what this progress might involve become the focus of later chapters. Here, Silverman focuses on the advantages of a dynamic conception of Heaven, paying particular attention to the worry that Heaven—and a static Heaven in particular—might be “boring, tedious, and unsatisfying” (15).
Katherin Rogers continues this discussion in chapter 2, “Anselmian Meditations on Heaven.” In this well-crafted essay, Rogers carefully considers a number of ways in which Anselm’s philosophy might be of use in our contemporary attempts to understand Heaven. In the process, she raises some counterpoints to the dynamic view proposed by Silverman. Further, she offers Anselmian insight into questions and concerns raised by quite a lot of the chapters in this volume—concerns including, but not limited to, human freedom, Heavenly virtue, and resurrected personal identity.

Part II begins in chapter 3, where Ted Poston asks: “Will there be Skeptics in Heaven?” Poston’s response to this question is twofold: First, he maintains that Cartesian knowledge is impossible for embodied creatures and will remain impossible even in Heaven. Thus, a certain form of skepticism may be unavoidable. Second, he offers Eleonore Stump’s conception of knowledge de te as a better way of understanding perfect embodied knowledge. By appealing to knowledge de te—knowledge of persons, rather than propositional knowledge—we can make sense of perfect knowledge that is immune to the challenge of global skepticism. It is, perhaps, worth noting here that Poston’s first move rests upon the idea that the saints’ entry into Heaven is essentially a “change in location” (52). Those defending the traditional view of Heaven presumably believe that there is a great deal more to sanctification than relocation. Thus, it remains to be shown that no aspect of sanctification could help with the skeptic’s challenge.

In chapter 4, “The Cognitive Dimensions of Heavenly Bliss,” Jonathan L. Kvanvig continues the discussion of what Heavenly knowledge might be like. Drawing from the Thomistic account of the beatific vision and from 1 Corinthians 13, Kvanvig raises and rejects the possibility that a proper understanding of the Beatific Vision should lead us to expect infallibility or omniscience in Heaven. Like Poston, Kvanvig suggests that our understanding of perfect heavenly knowledge might best be construed as knowledge de te. Kvanvig, however, pushes back against the notion that de te knowledge ought to be construed as fundamentally nonpropositional. “Instead, what we should note is that there is no substitute for the experience itself, and no form of communication can take the place of the experience or awareness when the attitude in question goes beyond the de dicto” (76).

Part III, “Virtues in Paradise,” is a set of responses to the question—here raised by Cicero—as to whether there could be virtues in Heaven: “For we could not need courage, when we were faced with no toil or danger; . . . nor temperance, to control lusts that would not exist” (81). In chapter 5, “The Virtues in Heaven,” Rachel Lu considers two overlapping but importantly different responses to this challenge, those of Aquinas and Bonaventure. In explicating these two accounts, Lu notes the different implications that each account has for one’s conception of Heaven—in
particular, to borrow the language of chapter 1, whether Heavenly existence will be static or dynamic.

In chapter 6, Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe give explicit endorsement to, and defense of, a dynamic conception of Heaven. More specifically, Pawl and Timpe articulate and defend the claim that “in Heaven, the redeemed can grow in virtue” (97). This essay is rigorous and compelling, and it has clear ties to the questions raised in Parts I, IV, VII, and VIII. If Pawl and Timpe are correct that the kind of growth they describe could suffice for morally relevant freedom, then this account could serve prove quite fruitful.

Part IV, “Paradise and Responding to Evil,” begins in chapter 7 with Adam C. Pelser’s “Heavenly Sadness: On the Value of Negative Emotions in Paradise.” Here, Pelser explicates an interesting and rhetorically useful distinction between “morally negative” and “affectively negative” emotions. The former, “emotions such as envy, schadenfreude, and vicious anger,” are emotions that are themselves morally bad (119). The latter, however, might feel bad to the subject, but that is largely because they alert the experiencer to “legitimate badness in the world” (119). These include emotions such as compassion and empathy, but also guilt, anger, sadness. Armed with this distinction, and drawing from the works of Aquinas, C. S. Lewis, and N. T. Wright, Pelser suggests that Heavenly joy might be compatible with the presence of affectively negative emotions. That is, the saints might sometimes feel sad in Heaven. This chapter is insightful, challenging, and well-argued. Still, it is difficult to see past the tension between Heavenly joy and the kinds of sadness posited by Pelser. He asks:

How could a mother not be saddened by the irrevocable loss of her precious son, or a husband not be saddened by the irrevocable separation from his beloved wife, especially in light of the knowledge that the beloved is suffering away from the presence of the good and loving God for all eternity? (127)

The claim, of course, is that sadness in the face of such realities is morally better than a lack of sadness. This may be true, but the question remains: How could a mother experience any joy, let alone perfect Heavenly joy, alongside sadness of such magnitude? Is it conceivable that a spouse might mourn the eternal loss of his beloved and yet rejoice? In Pelser’s defense, this tension is not of his making. Nevertheless, it remains; the distinction between affectively negative and morally negative emotions, it seems, only goes so far.

T. Ryan Byerly continues this discussion in chapter 8 with “Virtues of Repair in Paradise.” Here, Byerly focuses on what he calls “a particularly challenging category of virtues . . . virtues that equip their possessors to respond excellently to moral wrongdoing” (136). Given the fact that “virtues of repair” aid in response to moral wrongdoing, and the fact that there will, presumably, not be any moral wrongdoing in Heaven, they seem at first glance ill-suited for paradise. Byerly, however, maintains that such
virtues “might be exercised in Heaven” (137). This chapter focuses largely on the virtue of forgivingness, but he suggests that it could be applied to other virtues of repair as well.

Part V, “The Social and Political Philosophy of Paradise,” contains two markedly different papers. In chapter 9, Shawn Graves, Blake Hereth, and Tyler M. John give a series of arguments “In Defense of Animal Universalism.” This is undoubtedly a timely topic. Universalism and a rejection of “speciesism” are positions that have gained a great deal of traction in recent years. Unfortunately, this chapter felt significantly less substantive than the rest. In contrast, Robert Audi’s “Personhood, Embodiment and Survival” offers no formal arguments, yet is a characteristically rich, insightful and careful series of reflections on personal identity and the resurrection. Audi concludes, “For those who take survival seriously . . . rational hope seems both possible and a potentially sustaining stance in a world where the bad often seems so increasingly threatening to the good” (209). The content of this chapter is directly relevant to questions raised in Parts I, VI, and VIII.

Part VI, “Resurrection and Paradise,” includes three very different responses to the “Problem of Personal Identity beyond Death,” or “PPID” (as per Brown). It begins with chapter 11, “Composition and the Will of God: Reconsidering Resurrection by Reassembly” by Eric T. Yang and Stephen T. Davis. Here, Yang and Davis articulate and defend a view of “resurrection by reassembly” (213). In doing so, they adopt “a version of restricted composition,” whereby some composite objects can be said to exist (219). The defining feature of this account is the particular ontological glue that holds their composite objects together—namely, the will of God. In response to the “Special Composition Question,” Yang and Davis maintain that a necessary (but not sufficient) condition of a composite object is that God will it to be so. Thus, at the resurrection, God must reassemble (all or most of) the parts that made up your original body, and then will that it be you. This paper is quite interesting, and has some epistemological consequences that are undoubtedly difficult to accept. Nevertheless, as Yang and Davis note, there are no simple and unproblematic accounts of personal identity beyond death. Their modest conclusion is that their account “should be considered as a competitor to the simulacrum, falling elevator, and anti-criterialist accounts. Or at least it should be regarded as no more puzzling and worrisome than these views” (225).

In chapter 12, Christopher Brown articulates and motivates PPID, considers four contemporary responses—compound substance dualism, resurrection by reassembly, Van Inwagen’s “Naked Kernel,” and Corcoran’s “Fission”—and, finally, offers Thomistic dualism as a preferable solution to the problem. In contrast to both Cartesian and compound substance dualism, Brown notes, on Thomistic dualism “the soul is not—never is—a substance” (254). Further, the Thomistic soul “is not—never is—identical to a human person” (256). Instead, it is “a metaphysical part of the person that is sufficient to preserve the existence, numerical identity, and
characteristic activity of that human person whose part it is during the interim state [between death and resurrection]” (256). In this way, Brown argues, Thomistic dualism offers a response to PPID “which shares the advantages of each of the contemporary views we’ve taken a look at, but without their disadvantages” (256). That something could exist in such a way as to preserve the existence of a human person and yet fail to be a substance is, to this reader at least, a difficult claim to process. Still, Brown offers a genuinely new response to an old challenge, and this paper is well worth a careful read.

Part VI concludes with Hud Hudson’s contribution, “The Resurrection and Hypertime.” Here, as in an earlier work (Hudson, The Fall and Hypertime [Oxford University Press, 2013]), Hudson suggests “The Hypertime Solution” to the question that, he notes, could be raised by a five-year-old: “So, just where are heaven and hell?” (263). Very briefly stated, Hudson’s answer is this: in the hyperfuture! “Thus, the Hypertime Hypothesis, at first approximation, is something like a second temporal dimension” (268). This is a paper that resists summarization and really ought to be read in its entirety. In addition to offering a new way of making sense of the resurrection, Hudson notes that this solution has implications for the problem of evil as well, and perhaps even supports the potential compatibility of the existence of a (non-empty) Hell and universal salvation (269).

Part VII, “Freedom in Paradise,” asks whether the preferred solution to the problem of evil, the free will defense, might threaten traditional conceptions of Heaven. More succinctly, these chapters ask the following: If morally responsible freedom is so valuable, ought we not to have it in Heaven? In chapter 14, “Resting on Your Laurels,” Brian Boeninger and Robert K. Garcia formulate an aporia intended to demonstrate that “the commitments of Heaven and the Defense lead to a contradiction. Thus, it seems that Heaven and the Defense are incompatible” (282). This is a remarkable conclusion, and it is supported by a well-crafted essay. Indeed, the challenge raised here—in particular, the rejection of moral responsibility “tracing”—is explicitly addressed elsewhere in this volume and seems likely to generate further discussion (see Rogers [chap. 2] and Pawl and Timpe [chap. 6]).

In chapter 15, “The Possibility and Scope of Significant Heavenly Freedom,” Richard Tamburro pushes back against the claim that the Heavenly goods of freedom would require the possibility of sin. Instead, Tamburro writes: “I suggest that we abandon the idea that significant freedom has to do with moral significance” (319). In explicating his account, Tamburro asks how we might understand the beatific vision such that persons in Heaven could be both free and incapable of sin. He appeals to the infinite nature of God, the infinite nature of eternity, and the finite nature of our own minds to note that, in Heaven, finite creatures might face unlimited opportunities for good choices. In this chapter, Tamburro specifically addresses the challenge raised in chapter 1 of this volume—that Heaven might be boring—and he offers a response to Pawl and Timpe’s claim that
Heavenly freedom ought best to be construed as “growing in virtue” (319). Although he does not explicitly address Boeninger and Garcia’s aporia, the application of Tamburro’s argument to their challenge is self-evident. On the whole, this chapter is quite strong, with implications for a host of philosophical questions.

The final part of this anthology is VIII, “The Desirability of Paradise.” Here we find two quite different essays. In chapter 16, Jerry L. Walls considers the challenge raised by the life and death of Hume. Walls writes, “In short, the case of Hume suggests that we do not need God either to live a good life or to die a good death. It proposes that a man can be virtuous and he can die in peace, even cheerfully, with no prospect of immortality or any hope for goods beyond this life. Perhaps most unsettling is Hume’s utter lack of interest in immortality” (332). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Walls goes on to argue that this conclusion is false; God is necessary both for a good life and a good death.

In chapter 17, Richard Swinburne concludes the volume with “Why the Life of Heaven is Supremely Worth Living.” Swinburne’s goal is straightforward. He writes “I shall develop widely held intuitions about what makes a life a good life to live, and so what would make a life the best sort of life to live forever; and I shall then argue that the kind of after-life to be enjoyed by the Blessed as described in patristic thought, is just that sort of life” (350). This chapter includes some previously published material, but it nevertheless stands out as a highlight of this anthology. In response to the “boredom” problem, he notes: “Most earthly occupations indeed pall after a time, but the reason why they pall is that there are no new facets to them which are greatly worthwhile having. A person who desires only the good and its continuation would not, given the Christian doctrine of God, be bored in eternity” (356). Here and elsewhere, Swinburne brings both simplicity and seriousness to many of the challenges raised in this volume. This chapter is a fitting and worthy conclusion to this excellent anthology.