AGATHEOS – European Journal for Philosophy of Religion
Vol 1 No 2, 2024 pp. 76–97
ISSN: 2004-9331
DOI: 10.69574/aejpr.v1i2.22930

HEAVENLY OVERPOPULATION: RETHINKING THE ETHICS OF PROCREATION

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ABSTRACT: Many theists believe both (1) that Heaven will be infinitely or maximally good for its residents and (2) that most humans will, eventually, reside in Heaven. Further, most theists believe (3) that human procreation is often all-things-considered morally permissible. I defend three novel arguments for the impermissibility of procreation predicated on the possibility of heavenly overpopulation. First, we shouldn't be rude to hosts by bringing more people to a party than were invited, which we do if we continue to procreate. Second, justice requires that the goods of Heaven be supremely good for those for whom heavenly existence is (even partially) compensatory, but if Heaven has a fixed and finite number of goods, each successful act (or enough acts) of procreation lowers the expected goodness for those persons and threatens to undermine justice. Third, we should choose the course of action with the least-worst outcome, and it would be worse to overpopulate Heaven than underpopulate it.

KEYWORDS: heaven, overpopulation, procreation, heavenly finitism, heavenly infinitism

Two Views of Heaven

Our planet faces a population problem: We have too few resources and too many people who need them. While partly a problem of equitable distribution, the ethical problem isn't strictly political (Stanbury, 2022). In 1920, the world population was approximately 1.5 billion. One hundred years later, it's 7.9 billion. Among other things, exponential human growth has facilitated anthropogenic climate change (Stanbury, 2024). As many scientists (Wynes & Nicholas, 2017) and ethicists (Bognar, 2019; Kates,

2004) have observed, the best way to curb your carbon footprint is to curb your procreation.

Those of us who believe in an afterlife hope it will be better. That is, we hope not to face food shortages, plagues, and overpopulation. But what if we're *wrong* about this? More precisely: What if we're right that Heaven is *better*, but wrong that it's *infinitely* better? What if Heaven *can* be overpopulated? Perhaps Heaven is free of famine and disease, but that's consistent with its being only finitely good.[1] Let's call these two views *Heavenly Infinitism* and *Heavenly Finitism*, respectively:

Heavenly Infinitism: Heaven is an infinitely good place for all its residents.

Heavenly Finitism: Heaven is a finitely good place for all its residents.

The former claims that the residents of Heaven enjoy infinitely good lives, either in quality or duration. The latter claims Heaven's residents enjoy only finitely good lives in either quality or duration. Before continuing, I'd like to carve out two versions of Heavenly Finitism.[2] The first is

Capacity Finitism: Heaven can accommodate only a finite number of residents.

On this version of Heavenly Finitism, Heaven is finitely good because it's *limited in capacity*. That is, only a finite number of people can reside in Heaven.[3] The second version of Heavenly Finitism is

Supply Finitism: Heaven's goods can be experienced only to a finite extent.

In contrast to Capacity Finitism, Supply Finitism says nothing about the *number* of people who can enjoy Heaven's goods.[4] Rather, it says Heaven's good experiences *are in finite supply*.[5] That is, each person can enjoy Heaven only so much; or, alternatively, for each good experience had, there's one fewer good experience for everyone else.[6]

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[1] What if Heaven is infinitely good but doesn't last forever for some occupants, as some (Matheson, 2014) have argued? (For a reply to Matheson's original argument, see Buckareff & Plug, 2015.) That's a distinct problem from the one discussed herein, but I discuss it more thoroughly below in footnote 21.

[2] I'm grateful to my father-in-law, Bruce Kowalchuk, for a conversation that clarified this distinction.

[3] This leaves open the possibility of heavenly *visitors* (i.e., temporary residents of Heaven), but I'll set that aside as even temporary residents consume space and other resources.

[4] As compossible theses, Capacity Finitism and Supply Finitism might *both* be true.

[5] A reviewer objects that the true good of Heaven is the Beatific Vision, or union with an unlimited and inexhaustible God. Even if the real good of Heaven is union with an unlimited and inexhaustible God, it doesn't follow that other goods are unnecessary or unimportant. For example, suppose that while everyone in Heaven enjoys perfect union with God, they are starving and homeless. Plausibly, a perfect God wouldn't permit this. So, plausibly, Heaven's residents either *don't need* goods beyond the Beatific Vision, or *they possess* those goods.

[6] Various things might cause a scarcity problem in Heaven, including God deciding to create only a finite number of resources for Heaven's occupants to enjoy. While God's omnipotence *could* solve the

To picture the difference, imagine two grocery stores: Store A has finite space and infinite groceries, whereas Store B has infinite space and finite groceries. Only a finite number of people can enter Store A, but they can consume as many groceries as they wish without emptying the shelves. By contrast, an infinite number of people can enter Store B, but they will someday empty the shelves. Store A and Store B represent Capacity Finitism and Supply Finitism, respectively.

Because all my arguments will factor in epistemic uncertainty, I shall say two things about the role and nature of epistemic uncertainty in my arguments. First, the success of my arguments depends on varying degrees of epistemic uncertainty. That is, some of the arguments require us to be epistemically uncertain, to some extent or other, about whether Heavenly Infinitism or Heavenly Finitism is true. Second, these levels can be approximated thusly:

No Uncertainty: Our epistemically justified credences for believing either Heavenly Finitism or Heavenly Infinitism are at or near 100%.

Moderate Uncertainty: Our epistemically justified credences for believing either Heavenly Finitism or Heavenly Infinitism are between 30–70%.

Strong Uncertainty: Our epistemically justified credences for believing either Heavenly Finitism or Heavenly Infinitism are at or below 20%.

These levels aren't logically exhaustive. For instance, there's space for a Moderate–Strong Uncertainty level that covers the gap between 21–29%. Rather, these levels are meant to provide rough approximations of our justified epistemic credences regarding the plenitude of Heavenly goods. Moreover, these levels entail corollaries about epistemically justified beliefs: Beliefs about Heavenly Finitism/Infinitism are strongly justified under No Uncertainty, moderately-to-weakly justified under Moderate Uncertainty, and unjustified under Strong Uncertainty.

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scarcity problem, it does not follow that it *does* solve the moral problem. First, the mere logical possibility of God's omnipotence solving the scarcity problem would not itself be enough to justify procreating under certain degrees of epistemic uncertainty. For example, suppose I live in a 'food desert' and struggle to acquire enough food for myself and my partner, and I am considering procreating with my partner. Suppose, further, that the local government *might* – in the broadly logical and epistemic senses – provide additional food for my community, which would be necessary to feed my (hypothetical) future child. This mere possibility would not justify procreating. Second, even if we had reason to believe that God's omnipotence *will* (or *would*) solve any heavenly scarcity problem, it would not follow that it is all-things-considered permissible for human persons to procreate. For as the Rudeness Argument maintains, even if a host – human or divine – will meet the needs of however many guests show up to the party, it may still be impermissible for some (e.g., uninvited) guests to show up and claim those resources.

Herein, I'll defend the claim that, *for all we know*, Heaven can be overpopulated and that continued human procreation – at least premortem[7] – risks overpopulating Heaven. So, I'll offer a skeptical defense of Heavenly Finitism, albeit one that assumes neither Capacity Finitism nor Supply Finitism exclusively. In sections 2–4, I'll defend three arguments against continued human procreation based on this possibility: the *Presumptuous Argument*, the *Finite Goods Argument*, and the *Risk Argument*. These arguments operate best under No Uncertainty, Moderate Uncertainty, and Strong Uncertainty, respectively. Then, in section 5, I'll respond to anticipated objections.

The Presumptuous Argument (No Uncertainty)

Kenneth Einar Himma (2016; 2010) has argued – convincingly, in my view – that it's morally impermissible to procreate if there's a risk one's offspring will end up in Hell. For the sake of argument, let's imagine things are relatively optimistic: that the vast majority of people will eventually end up in Heaven, not Hell (or Limbo, Purgatory, or some other place). Call this view "Optimism."[8] Thus, let's assume the average act of successful procreation has a >0.8 probability of creating another permanent Heaven resident.

What's the problem with procreating under this optimistic scenario? In short, the problem is that it's *rudely presumptuous*. Heaven is the place where God resides. As such, Heaven is God's home. When we procreate under optimistic conditions, we are, in effect, shoveling guests into God's home. While better than shoveling guests into *Hell*, it's still short of obviously permissible. Most of us think it's impermissible, or at least rude, to invite people to others' homes without an invitation. Call this the

Rudeness Principle: We shouldn't be rude to hosts by bringing more people to a party than were invited.

I'll offer a defense of the Rudeness Principle momentarily. But first, here's the argument:

The Presumptuous Argument

1. We shouldn't be rude to hosts by bringing more people to a party than were invited. [Rudeness Principle]
2. If we continue to procreate and Optimism is true, then we bring more people to a party (i.e., Heaven) than were invited. [Assumption]
3. So, if we continue to procreate and Optimism is true, then we are rude to some host (i.e., God). [From 1–2]

[7] Elsewhere (Hereth, 2022), I argue for the possibility of procreation in Heaven. My assumption, which I justify neither in that essay nor the present one, is that our epistemic situatedness will be far improved in Heaven.

[8] Gillham (2020) considers the possibility that Hell exists but will remain wholly unpopulated.

Let's first consider premise (1), which is just a restatement of the Rudeness Principle. Why should we accept it? First, because contrary to what is often supposed, rudeness isn't *amoral*. Rather, as Confucian philosopher Amy Olberding explains, etiquette is deeply moral:

> [O]ur sociality positions us to care, to celebrate relations that sustain us and regret when they do not. This, for the Confucians, is why manners are so important. Their passionate devotion to manners is, at root, a passionate devotion to our relations with other people, an awareness that is neither good nor desirable to separate thriving as individuals from thriving with others. We live, in ways both basic and profound, in dependency on other people. Motivation to practice good manners will find increase the more we appreciate the depth and reach of this dependency. (Olberding, 2019, p. 52)

Etiquette, then, is a way of *communicating* our recognition of social dependency and valuing others. Like grammar, Olberding writes that if she "is well-disposed toward others and want them to *know that*, I require a kind of behavioral grammar – I require etiquette" (2019, p. 95). Rudeness, by contrast, communicates and accomplishes just the opposite: It harms relationships, signals to others that we don't value them or their perspective, and results in a degree of social isolation.[9] Both Olberding and Confucius recognize that rudeness can sometimes be justified (Olberding, 2019, p. 134), but that even righteous incivility "remarks realities we would, as social creatures, powerfully wish otherwise" (Olberding, 2019, p. 151) and thus justifies a sense of moral loss.

A second reason for embracing the Rudeness Principle is more straightforward. For those skeptical that rudeness is itself morally significant, it's wildly implausible to

[9] Is the moral importance of politeness (and avoiding rudeness) *merely* communicative or epistemic? On this view, polite behavior is morally good only because it *conveys* or *communicates* that we value others. If that is true, then because God is omniscient, then God knows that we value God or others even before or without polite behavior. So, the value of polite behavior is nil in the human-divine relationship since it is unnecessary in conveying our intentions to God. (My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this objection.) I offer two replies to this objection: one that denies the epistemic view of etiquette and another that is consistent with it. First, the epistemic view of etiquette is false because (a) if a person truly values another, they will also *act* like it, or at least not act in ways inconsistent with their intention; and (b) behaviors are *themselves* ways of valuing others, as opposed to being mere *indicators* of value. In defense of (a), imagine that you are psychic and I desire to show you that I value your time, so I send you a mental note (e.g., "I value your time!") before blowing off our scheduled meeting. Here, my action is prima facie inconsistent with my (purported) intention to value your time. Similar examples work in defense of (b): Some behaviors are utterly inconsistent with valuing others, regardless of intent. For example, if I decide to decline your every phone call in order to convey how much I value you, I have failed to value you. Second, even if the epistemic view of etiquette were true, acting in a conventionally rude manner would suggest *to other humans* that you either presume to know God's preferences and plans (which itself is rude) *or* that you are indifferent to those preferences and plans (which itself is rude).

insist that all rude *behaviors* are permissible. After all, some rude behaviors aren't merely rude; they're also cruel, invasive, or pernicious. To take one relevant example, *trespassing* is rude (in that it communicates disrespect) and presumptively impermissible (in that it violates the owner's property rights). Other things being equal, it's impermissible to enter someone's home without their consent – typically, in the form of an invitation. Thus, we should accept the Rudeness Principle.[10]

Moving on, then, to premise (2). The biggest question here is: *Are people invited into Heaven?* Most theistic traditions, while stipulating conditions for entry, answer affirmatively. For example, in the Christian tradition, Jesus says to his Twelve Disciples: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."[11] However, it's a stretch to assume Jesus had *all of humanity* in mind in this passage, as he's speaking directly to his Twelve Disciples.[12] Here's the scriptural evidence that comes closest to showing that all are invited to Heaven, and there really isn't much of it:

Christianity:

> Being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:7)
>
> Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)
>
> I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. (John 11:24–25)
>
> For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Corinthians 5:1–2)

Islam:

> But those who have faith and work righteousness, they are companions of the garden. Therein shall they abide forever. (Qur'an 2:82)

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[10] Here's one further argument for the Rudeness Principle. In her seminal essay "A Defense of Abortion," Judith Jarvis Thomson remarks that a pregnant woman who can carry her fetus to term at zero inconvenience to herself "is self-centered, callous, indecent, but not unjust, if she refuses" (Thomson, 1971, p. 61). However, I've long found this claim puzzling: How is it possible for someone to have acted in a self-centered, callous, and indecent way – actions that would presumably justify us in blaming or looking down upon them – while having done nothing impermissible? More likely, these are *wrong-making properties* of the action, such that the action is impermissible. The same can be said of rude behavior.

[11] *The Gospel According to Saint John*, chapter 14, verses 1–2.

[12] By analogy, it would be presumptuous of you to assume you were invited to a party at my house merely because you read a transcript of texts to my twelve closest friends inviting them to my party.

> For such the reward is forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens with rivers flowing underneath—an eternal dwelling. How excellent a recompense for those who work (and strive)! (Qur'an 3:136)
> Allah will say: This is a day in which the truthful will profit from their truth. Theirs are gardens, with rivers flowing beneath—their eternal Home. Allah is well-pleased with them, and they with Allah. That is the great salvation. (Qur'an 5:119)
> Gardens of perpetual bliss: they shall enter there, as well as the righteous among their fathers, their spouses, and their offspring. Angels shall enter from every gate: "Peace be with you, that you persevered in patience! Now how excellent is the final home!" (Qur'an 13:23–24)

Judaism:

> On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food or marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever. (Isaiah 25:6–7)
> But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. (Isaiah 26:19)
> But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:1–3)
> You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in Heaven but You? (Psalm 73:24–26)

These passages strongly encourage living a moral life pleasing to God with the promise of eternal, heavenly reward. Universalists like myself might even see in these passages hope for the salvation of all humanity and beyond.[13] What these passages *don't* say or imply, however, is an invitation to (pro)create more Heaven-bound people. That is, although the passages invite the righteous to Heaven, they never invite the creation of more righteous people. If it were true that all are invited, we'd expect to see more persuasive scriptural evidence of this.

To see the difference, imagine that I invite all my well-behaved friends to my house party. You infer from this that I would also welcome *clones* of all my well-behaved friends which you then create, invite, and bring to my house party. The people we procreate aren't clones. But they *are*, like clones, *new people*. And nothing about

[13] As a soteriological universalist, I am persuaded that God would indeed extend to everyone an invitation (conditional or otherwise) to Heaven. However, the question concerns the scope of "everyone." If this means "all actual, concrete persons," then I agree. But if it means "all persons, actual or nonactual," then I am skeptical.

welcoming good people to my home implies an invitation to make more of them. Thus, nor does God's welcoming good people into Heaven imply an invitation to procreate.

Another strategy to object to premise (2) is to borrow theological support for pro-natalism. For instance, in Genesis, God commands Eve and Adam to "be fruitful and multiply" (1:28; cf. 9:7). The Psalmist claims "the fruit of the womb [is] a reward" from God (Psalms 127:3), and the *Qur'an* says that "wealth and progeny are adornments for the life of this world" (18:46).[14] But again, these passages don't imply a 'blank check' permission to procreate and fill Heaven's halls. My approval of your procreative activities can't be reasonably construed as an invitation for your offspring to attend my house party. Thus, nor can God's apparent approval of human procreation be reasonably construed as an invitation for our offspring to occupy God's home, i.e., Heaven.

Maybe a *combined* strategy will prove more successful. The conjunction of a divine permission to procreate limitlessly and a divine promise to welcome all the righteous into Heaven implies a divine permission to bring to Heaven as many people as we please. More modestly, God's foreknowledge that humans will procreate to the extent that they do entails God is *aware* of all future heavenly guests at the time God promises to bring all the righteous to Heaven. As an analogy, imagine that I invite you and all your well-behaved children to my house party next year, knowing that between now and then you will adopt two well-behaved children. That seems like a tacit invitation for your two adopted children. Thus, God's approval and foreknowledge of human procreation is a tacit invitation for (righteous) human offspring to reside in Heaven.

The combined strategy becomes less plausible if God lacks exhaustive, definite foreknowledge, as some have claimed (Hasker, 1985). But let's assume God possesses it. The general principle behind the combined strategy is roughly this: *If (at time T) S1 invites S2 to P, foreknowing at T that S2 will also bring S3 to P, then S1 tacitly invites S3 to P*. But contrary to this principle, consent isn't transitive, and thus nor are invitations which presume consent. Here's a counterexample: I invite all my friends to my partner's surprise birthday party foreknowing some of them will arrive late and potentially ruin the surprise, yet I don't *consent* to them ruining the surprise (or *invite* them to ruin it). As a second reply, God's (supposed) approval of human procreation is limited, as *some* human procreation remains immoral. Thus, if one's children are produced immorally, one can't infer a tacit invitation on the combined basis that *God approves of your procreative act* and *God promises to bring all the righteous to Heaven*, as the former claim doesn't apply to *your* specific procreative act. Minimally, this reveals that the combined strategy has limited scope of application in cases where procreation is impermissible.

One final objection merits consideration. Returning to the example above in which I host a party at my home, imagine now that I am an exceptionally magnanimous host. I invite you and a few friends, and in turn you bring people I didn't invite. However,

[14] Cf. Al-Bar & Chamsi-Pasha (2015).

I'm unbothered by this; the more, the merrier! I quickly and efficiently fetch additional chairs for the additional guests, and I never complain – introspectively or to others – about the extra company. In that scenario, it's implausible to suppose I would think it's morally wrong for the uninvited guests to show up. Given that God is omnibenevolent and omnipotent, we can reasonably anticipate that God is a maximally generous host and maximally efficient at hosting. If that's true, then we can reasonably infer that *God* wouldn't think poorly of the uninvited guests, either. Thus, the uninvited guests don't wrong God.[15] By way of reply, I will first draw the reader's attention to the fact that the objection relies on a bad inference: If the host *is unbothered* by the arrival of uninvited guests, then the host *has no moral objection* to the arrival of uninvited guests. We should be careful to distinguish between the affective state of *finding someone's behavior unbothersome* and the moral judgment of *regarding someone's behavior as morally unobjectionable*. With this distinction in place, we can concede that a maximally efficient and accommodating host would arrange seating for, and perhaps even be unbothered by, uninvited guests; however, it does not follow that a maximally efficient and accommodating host would regard uninvited guests' showing up to a party as morally unobjectionable or consistent with the rules of etiquette. Indeed, my own intuition is that the uninvited guests are taking advantage of the host's good nature in the described case! Secondly, a maximally perfect God would also be *self-respecting*, a trait that constrains the extent to which they are an uncomplaining, unobjecting, doormat of a host. Indeed, a minimally self-respecting God would disapprove of others taking advantage of God by arriving uninvited.

The Finite Goods Argument (Moderate Uncertainty)

Evil and suffering abound in our universe. Among others, they victimize individuals who neither deserve them, nor are morally liable to them, nor consent to them – in short, *innocent* individuals. When God permits innocent individuals to suffer, an *injustice* occurs. To avoid culpable wrongdoing, God must repair the injustice.[16]

Unsurprisingly, several philosophers have suggested God might accomplish this by providing a supremely good afterlife for innocent victims of evil as compensation. While the strategy has been applied generally (Peterson, 2007), it has been further

[15] My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this objection.

[16] A reviewer raises the interesting objection that my position *worsens* the problem of evil by condemning premortem human procreation. I reply that it worsens the problem of evil insofar as it condemns a widespread practice, yet the same is true of other positions in applied ethics such as ethical vegetarianism (most people eat meat, yet doing so is immoral; the problem of evil would be less severe if ethical vegetarianism were false) and ethical gun control (many people own semi-automatic weapons, yet doing so is immoral; the problem of evil would be less severe if ethical gun control were false). But this is hardly reason to reject such views. Indeed, my view worsens the problem of evil only indirectly: The true cause of the worsened problem of evil is *immoral procreation*, not *the fact that procreation is generally immoral*.

applied to innocent animals (Hereth, 2018; Murray, 2008, p. 125), trans people (Hereth, 2020), and children (Timpe, 2015). Furthermore, it has played a major role in theodicies (Cobb & Timpe, 2017). A shared feature of all compensatory arguments for populating Heaven is their insistence that *Heaven is a supremely good place*. Elsewhere, I argued that Heaven must be infinitely good (Hereth, 2018), though some are skeptical of this claim (Crummett, 2020). So, let's assume the more minimal thesis that Heaven must be at least very good for those for whom it's a compensation. Call this the

Compensation Principle: Heaven must be very good for those for whom existence in Heaven is (partially or wholly) compensatory.

Entertaining the conservative assumption that Heaven is only *finitely* good doesn't commit us to much. All Heavenly Finitism commits us to thinking is that the goods of Heaven are, at least in principle, *exhaustible*. Even finite goods can be enormous, and thus a finitely good Heaven could be profoundly good. To assume Heaven's goods are exhaustible implies nothing about the likelihood of exhausting them. By analogy, to assume there are a finite number of stars implies nothing about the likelihood of counting them all or using all of them for energy.

Let's contribute another ingredient: Universalism or Near-Universalism. The former claims *everyone* eventually resides in Heaven forever. The latter claims *almost* everyone does. In conjunction with Heavenly Finitism, Universalism and Near-Universalism raise the probability that Heaven's finite goods will someday be exhausted. Or at least they do this relative to more pessimistic eschatological views where a non-trivial percentage of people never make it to Heaven. If all or nearly all become residents of Heaven, then procreation contributes to the rolodex of Heaven's residents. Assuming Heaven is supremely good for everyone, we can infer that procreation *subtracts from* the finite number of Heaven's goods. To see why this problematizes procreation, consider the following argument:

The Finite Goods Argument

1. Justice requires that the goods of Heaven be *supremely good* for those for whom heavenly existence is (even partially) compensatory. [Compensation Principle]
2. If Heaven has a fixed and finite number of goods and Universalism or Near-Universalism is true, then each procreative act lowers the expected goodness for each heavenly resident. [Assumption]
3. If each procreative act lowers the expected goodness for each heavenly resident, then each procreative act lowers the expected goodness for those for whom heavenly existence is (even partially) compensatory and threatens a requirement of justice. [Assumption from 2]
4. So, justice requires that we refrain from each procreative act (or enough of them). [From 1–3]

Granting premise (1) and (2) for argument's sake, we can examine premise (3).[17] Initially, skepticism towards this premise is understandable. For instance, we might argue that although our planet has finite food and we eat every day, we don't thereby threaten (at least not unjustifiably) the requirement of justice that the hungriest among us take priority.

But there's a big justificatory gap between *not feeding ourselves* and *not procreating*. The former costs us everything: our lives. The latter may not cost us nothing, but nor does it cost us everything. Nor do we violate or threaten to undermine the requirements of justice by not procreating.[18] Justifying the latter, then, is far easier than justifying the former. Furthermore, the conclusion (4) forbids not *all* procreation, but *just enough* procreation to avert a 'sufficiently' high risk of subtracting enough of Heaven's goods that the compensatory requirements of justice won't (or are unlikely to be) satisfied.[19]

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[17] In regard to premise (2), some might point out the distinction between having a *finite* number of goods and having a *fixed* number of goods. There is a finite number of people in the world, but that number changes often and thus isn't fixed. Similarly, even if the goods of Heaven are finite, it doesn't follow that they are fixed. I am assuming the goods of Heaven are *both* finite and fixed. However, for those thinking Heaven's goods *aren't* fixed, here's a justice-based argument against effectively forcing God to generate more heavenly goods:

1. Other things being equal, we should avoid forcing others to devote more of their time, efforts, or resources to satisfying their ethical obligations than is otherwise necessary. [Assumption]
2. If the goods of Heaven are finite but must expand when more individuals are created, then by procreating we force God to devote more of their time, efforts, or resources to satisfy their ethical obligations to victims of horrendous evils than is otherwise necessary. [Assumption]
3. So, if the goods of Heaven are finite but must expand when more individuals are created, then (other things being equal) we should avoid procreating. [From 1–2]

We should accept (1) because just as it's wrong to prevent people from satisfying their obligations, it's also wrong to make it *harder* for them. The duty-bound person has a right against us that we not make their moral success more burdensome or less likely, and the person to whom the duty is owed has a right against us that we not jeopardize their rightful compensation. We should accept (2) because if Heaven's goods expand as needed, then presumably God is the one who causes their expansion. So, God must use their causal powers (i.e., efforts) to bring about more heavenly goods. The conclusion (3) follows from (1–2). So, we should accept (3).

[18] Otherwise, procreation would be a moral *requirement*, a conclusion nearly all pro-natalists reject. Cf. Hereth (2023), and Gheaus (2015) for more on this.

[19] This argument was partly inspired by Michael Blake's argument against open borders. Blake argues that liberal states are justified in limiting migration in cases where a further influx of migrants would seriously weaken or threaten a minimal level of social welfare provisions (Blake, 2001, p. 293). In a recent paper, Blake uses the example of Sweden, a liberal social welfare state, as an example of why liberal states can justify limiting an *outflux* of citizens: "The existence of Sweden – or, rather, Sweden's pattern of governance – depends upon people being willing to stay, in Sweden, and fund the institutions that guarantee these welfare rights" (Blake, 2020, p. 393). While I disagree with Blake about limiting migration, our disagreement turns on empirical facts about the capacity of liberal states' welfare institutions. Such facts are irrelevant in the current context, where my concern is with procreation under greater epistemic uncertainty.

Are the risks sufficiently high?[20] I'll offer two arguments in defense of premise (3). The first takes its starting point our *high degree of uncertainty* about *how* finitely good Heaven is. I'll start by stating the argument and then defend it:

The High Uncertainty Argument (for Premise 3)

1. We don't know how finitely good Heaven is. [Assumption]
2. If 1, then we don't know whether Heaven is sufficiently flush with finite goods that our procreative acts carry an acceptably low risk. [Assumption; from 1]
3. So, we don't know whether Heaven is sufficiently flush with finite goods that our procreative acts carry an acceptably low risk. [From 1–2]

The argument's conclusion is epistemically modest. In effect, it says that we can't *rule out* that our procreative acts carry an acceptably low risk. Thus, it falls short of claiming that our procreative acts *do* carry an unacceptably high risk. But notice that premise (3) of the *Finite Goods Argument* does not say the risk is unacceptably high. Arguably, we need something like this to connect premise (3)'s antecedent to its consequent. Call this the connection the *Resource Depletion Principle*:

Resource Depletion Principle: Other things being equal, it's impermissible to (i) subtract exponentially or without limit from finite resources (ii) when others are reasonably expected to need some of those resources (iii) unless you can reasonably expect your subtractions won't prevent others from receiving what they need.

As human procreation has expanded exponentially (from 2 billion in 1900 to nearly 8 billion in 2021), so too have the resources needed to house, feed, clothe, educate, treat, and employ them. The same holds for whatever goods are on offer in Heaven.[21] That's

[20] A reviewer objects that the conjunction of God's perfect goodness and the lack of divine warnings about heavenly overpopulation render my position intrinsically unlikely. I reply that God's perfect goodness and the lack of divine warnings about *earthly* overpopulation have not jointly prevented earthly overpopulation. Thus, I see no reason to suppose they would prevent heavenly overpopulation either.

[21] A reviewer objects that my argument overgeneralizes: If Heaven isn't good enough to satisfy 100 billion people *if* others join Heaven, then Heaven isn't good enough to satisfy even 1 billion people *if* they live forever. That is, my argument would condemn not only *adding people* to Heaven, but also *ensuring infinite lifetimes* to Heaven's existing occupants. Similar worries have been raised about the prospect of life-extending technologies (Davoudpour & Davis, 2022; Cutas, 2008). I offer two replies, the first of which is quick: It may be that my arguments entail multiple conclusions: that procreation is generally impermissible *and* that heavenly existence isn't eternal! However, I recognize that the latter thesis is also controversial (at least among traditional Abrahamic theists), which brings me to my second reply: It is not merely the *amount* of goods that is relevant, but also the *rate* at which they are consumed. For example, consider a farm that produces finite amounts of food for 10 people over the course of their

(i). Compensatory arguments satisfy (ii) and our epistemic inability to reasonably expect our subtractions to make no meaningful difference to the goodness of heavenly life satisfies (iii). But why should we accept this principle? Consider the following case:

> *Cave*. A spelunking group of 1,000 people become trapped in a cave. They realize escape is impossible, so they resign themselves to exploring the cave to find food and clean water. They luck out and find a large room stretching into the distance with fruit trees, naturally grown vegetables and edible mushrooms, and a pool of clean water. Knowing their resources are finite and some are in greater need, they agree to prioritize the 100 diabetic spelunkers. However, some hungry, non-diabetic members of the group begin consuming the food at a rapid rate. When asked to slow down to preserve resources, they reply, "We know the cave's resources are finite and all we have. But we don't know *how* finite; this room might stretch for miles. So, we refuse to slow down."

My self-reported intuition is that the hungry, non-diabetic spelunkers act impermissibly. The large room *may* stretch for miles, but then again it may not. For them to consume the resources *as if* they are unlimited or nearly unlimited risks having enough resources for their needier diabetic companions. Should they *explore* the entirety of the room and determine that there are sufficient resources for people to eat and drink however much they like, ravenous consumption would be permissible. However, they *don't know* how many resources are available; they know they are finite and nothing else. So, the ravenous spelunkers act impermissibly, just as the Resource Depletion Principle implies.

Moving on, then, to the second argument supporting premise (3). Unlike the *High Uncertainty Argument*, this argument does not appeal to our high degree of uncertainty. Rather, it appeals to the *valence of the needs* for those for whom residence in Heaven is even partially compensatory. Here's the argument:

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lifetimes. New food is produced each year for the duration of the 10 farmers' lifetimes, but still in finite amounts. Now imagine that 100 neighboring farmers come to live on the farm, each of them consuming identical amounts of food as the original 10 farmers typically do. In such a case, the same amount of food used to feed only 10 farmers would now be split among 110 farmers, causing each farmer to be malnourished. Moreover, we might stipulate that even if all 110 farmers could *survive* this ordeal, they would nevertheless be extremely malnourished or harmed in other morally significant ways. Returning now to Reviewer A's hypothetical scenario, perhaps the same is true of Heaven's goods: They can adequately sustain N persons over an infinite time, given that they are indefinitely replaced at certain intervals, but they *cannot* adequately sustain N+ persons over the same period. Because this scenario is logically possible, the inference from "Heaven cannot sustain 100 billion people eternally" to "Heaven cannot sustain 1 billion people eternally" is a *non sequitur*.

The Great Needs Argument (for Premise 3)

1. The moral requirement to compensate some individuals for the horrendous evils they suffered is extremely strong. [From compensatory arguments]
2. The justificatory threshold for risking non-compensation is directly proportional to the strength of the moral requirement to compensate. [Assumption]
3. So, the justificatory threshold for risking non-compensation is extremely high for some individuals who suffered horrendous evils. [From 1–2]

Compensatory arguments for heavenly residency buttress (1). For illustrative purposes, imagine the strength of the duty to compensate survivors of the Nazi Holocaust (Adams, 1999). Premise (2) endorses a principle of permissible risk, which I'll simply call the

Proportionate Risk Principle: The stronger the duty to compensate someone, the harder to justify risking not compensating them.

This is closely connected to another intuitive principle: The moral severity of *what* is risked affects the acceptable *degree* of risk. For example, the justificatory threshold is necessarily lower for setting off a firecracker than a nuclear bomb. Even if we aren't the ones required to compensate people, we *are* required not to prevent their compensation.

The *Great Needs Argument* has two important implications for premise (3) of the *Finite Goods Argument*. First, it shows why the justificatory threshold is incredibly high for risking non-compensation. Second, it explains why such a high justificatory threshold undermines the permissibility of procreation even if we reasonably believe that Heaven's finite goods fall on the 'near-inexhaustible' end of spectrum. Procreating at our current exponential rate subtracts many, many resources from a finitely good Heaven, and we need *incredibly* strong evidence that enough resources will remain to compensate victims of horrendous evils. How much evidence do we need? Ask yourself: How much evidence do you need to justify risking non-compensation for a survivor of the Nazi Holocaust? The correct answer is clearly: "more than I have."

The Risk Argument (Strong Uncertainty)

The second argument against human procreation based on the epistemic possibility of Heavenly Finitism works best under Strong Uncertainty. That is, the argument is strongest if our epistemic position is such that we would be epistemically unjustified in believing either Heavenly Infinitism or Heavenly Finitism. For argument's sake,

then, I shall assume our epistemic position is highly uncertain with respect to these views of Heaven.

To begin, I'll explicate and defend a well-known principle of rational choice under epistemic uncertainty, which I shall simply call the

Least-Worst Principle: When strongly epistemically uncertain about whether *A* or *B* will be the case, where the choice is between acting as if *A* is true or acting as if *B* is true, and where the expected best and worst outcomes for acting as if *A* or *B* is true are (10, -10) and (5, -5) respectively, the uniquely practically rational choice is to act as if *B* is true (and not that *A* is true).

This principle is known by other names, such as the 'Maximin Principle' or the 'Difference Principle,' and has been applied in a variety of contexts. For instance, John Rawls famously applied the principle to social and economic inequalities in his 1971 book, *A Theory of Justice*:

> Assuming the framework of institutions required by equal liberty and fair equality of opportunity, the higher expectations of those better situated are just if and only if they work as part of a scheme which improves the expectations of the least advantaged members of society. The intuitive idea is that the social order is not to establish and secure the more attractive prospects of those better off and less doing so is to the advantage of those less fortunate. (Rawls, 1999, p. 65)

For Rawls, establishing the least-worst social minimum is a requirement of fairness (1999, pp. 252–253). The idea is that societies should be constructed in such a way that if things go badly, the least advantaged are better off than they would be under other economic constructions. In another context, Julian Savulescu has relied on the Least-Worst Principle as support for his Principle of Procreative Beneficence, according to which people "should select the child, of the possible children they could have, who is expected to have the best life" (Savulescu, 2001, p. 415). Savulescu offers the following example to illustrate the plausibility of the Least-Worst Principle:

> Imagine now you are invited to play the wheel of Fortune. A giant wheel exists with marks on it from 0–$1,000,000, in $100 increments. The wheel is spun in a secret room. It stops randomly on an amount. That amount is put into Box A. The wheel is spun again. The amount which comes up is put into Box B. You can choose Box A or B. You are also told that, in addition to the sum already put in the boxes, if you choose B, a dice will be thrown and you will lose $100 if it comes up 6. (Savulescu, 2001, p. 414)

Which box should you choose? Savulescu answers: Box A. The reason why is simple: The worst that could happen if you choose Box B is you will lose $100 (i.e., if the wheel lands on $0 and the dice lands on 6), whereas the worst that could happen if you choose Box A is that you lose nothing (i.e., if the wheel lands on $0 and the dice is never thrown). Even if you disagree with Savulescu's ultimate conclusions about permissible procreation (as I do), the Least-Worst Principle is very plausible and can be accepted independently. The same holds for David Benatar's appeal to something like the Least-Worst Principle when defending his Asymmetry Argument for the badness of coming into existence:

> Many writers agree that when applied to questions of population size, this would imply that there should be no people. This is because, as long as procreation continues, some of those people who are brought into being will lead lives that are not worth living (read 'worth continuing'). The only way to improve their position is not to bring such people into existence, and the only way to guarantee that such people are not brought into existence is not to bring anybody into existence. (Benatar, 2013, p. 180)

Benatar further notes that others, including Rivka Weinberg (2002), have defended the inference from the Least-Worst Principle to anti-natalism. The plausibility of these arguments notwithstanding, I'll defend a new route to antinatalism built off the Least-Worst Principle. For the next step of the argument, let's review some necessary truths that will later serve as premises:

NT1: Either (a) Heaven can be overpopulated or (b) Heaven can't be overpopulated.

NT2: Either (c) humans will continue procreating or (d) humans won't continue procreating.[22]

The truth of these claims is sufficiently obvious that I won't bother defending them further. Instead, I'll invite readers to compare the best and worst outcomes from each possible combination, beginning with

A&C: Heaven can be overpopulated and humans will continue procreating.

[22] By this, I have in mind *premortem* human procreation.

Under A&C, the best-case scenario is that Heaven has a finitely large population, with the worst-case scenario being that Heaven becomes overpopulated to the detriment of its residents. Next, consider

A&D: Heaven can be overpopulated and humans won't continue procreating.

Under A&D, the best-case scenario is that Heaven has a finitely large population, albeit one that's smaller than under A&C. The worst-case scenario is that some merely possible people won't be procreated and brought to Heaven. Next up is

B&C: Heaven can't be overpopulated and humans will continue procreating.

Under B&C, the most optimistic of the four possibilities, human procreation persists and Heaven never overfills or risks overfilling. Thus, the best-case scenario is realized: Heaven has anywhere between a finitely large and infinitely large population. By contrast, there's no worst-case scenario for B&C. Finally, then, we have

B&D: Heaven can't be overpopulated and humans won't continue procreating.

Under B&D, the best-case scenario is a mix of A&C and B&C: Heaven has a finitely large population that's never at risk of running short on Heaven's goods. The worst-case scenario is similar to A&D: Merely possible people who could have been procreated miss out on Heaven's goods. Thus, the tally for worst-case scenarios is as follows:

A&C: Heaven is overpopulated to the detriment of its residents.
A&D: Some merely possible people won't be procreated and brought to Heaven.
B&C: [*No worst-case scenario*]
B&D: Some merely possible people won't be procreated and brought to Heaven.

Each option is worse than B&C. Moreover, A&D and B&D are equivalently bad. The question, then, is whether A&D/B&D are better, worse, or equally bad as A&C.

Let's assume that although A&D/B&D aren't bad *for* merely possible people who aren't procreated and brought to Heaven (since *nothing* is bad or good for them), that this is bad for their potential procreators (who wanted children but never had them) or impersonally bad. How bad is that? The closest analogy is infertility, which can cause depression, anxiety, and decreased self-worth among the infertile (Lemoine & Ravitsky, 2015; McLeod & Ponesse, 2008; Daar & Merali, 2002).[23] By comparison, the

[23] If what I've argued elsewhere (Hereth, 2020) is right, some persons will be able, per a requirement of justice, to procreate in Heaven. If that's true, then the harms of premortem infertility are somewhat

worst harms of overpopulation in a given ecosystem, whether Heaven or elsewhere, are worse than the worst harms resulting directly from infertility: starvation, violent competition for scarce resources, mental health deterioration, premature death, rampant disease, etc. Of course, many deny that such things are possible in Heaven. However, under strong epistemic uncertainty, the sky is the limit regarding the extent to which Heaven's goods might be limited. Thus, it's very plausible that A&C is worse than A&D/B&D. Thus, we have our second argument:

The Risk Argument

1. Other things being equal, we should choose the course of action with the least-worst outcome to its alternatives. [Least-Worst Principle]
2. Either (A) Heaven can be overpopulated, or (B) it can't. [NT1]
3. Either (C) humans will continue procreating, or (D) they won't. [NT2]
4. The expected worst outcomes for (A&C) are worse than (A&D). [Assumption]
5. The expected worst outcomes for (B&D) are worse than (B&C). [Assumption]
6. The expected worst outcomes for (A&C) are worse than (B&D). [Assumption]
7. So, other things being equal, we should choose (A&D or B&D) over (A&C). [From 1–6]

Let's consider one final objection to the Risk Argument: If it *is* reasonably clear that there's a divine mandate (or even a divine permission) to procreate, then it is reasonable to infer that procreation isn't (unacceptably) risky. The objection falters for two reasons. First, the conditional's antecedent is disputed by my argument. So, assuming the truth of the antecedent would beg the question against me. Second, for reasons outlined by Himma (2010; 2016), this reply is unavailable to theists who believe an existence in Hell is a live possibility for many procreated persons.

At this point, it should be clear *why* the Risk Argument works best under strong epistemic uncertainty: To the extent we can be certain that Heaven can't be overpopulated, we can be correspondingly certain that continued human procreation poses no danger to Heaven's ecosystem. But where (enough) uncertainty is present regarding whether Heavenly Finitism or Heavenly Infinitism is true, as well as to what extent Heaven's resources are finite (if they are) and why, the permissibility of flooding Heaven with new migrants is in serious doubt.

overstated: The worst-case scenario is that some merely possible people won't be procreated *premortem* and brought to Heaven, which is compatible with those same possible people being procreated *in Heaven*.

Conclusion

Human overpopulation threatens Earth, but does it also threaten Heaven? Most theists assume not because they believe (1) Heaven is free of bad things and (2) overpopulation is a bad thing. That is, they assume Heavenly Infinitism, the view that Heaven is an infinitely good place for all its residents and can accommodate an infinite number of residents. By contrast, Heavenly Finitism is the view that Heaven is only a finitely good place for all its residents, either because Heaven lacks infinite space (Capacity Finitism) or because it lacks infinitely good experiences (Supply Finitism).

Despite the fact that most theists accept Heavenly Infinitism, their credences vary. Some are completely certain (that is, their justified credences are at or near 100%) whereas others are only moderately certain (that is, their justified or unjustified credences fall at or between 30–70%), and still others aren't at all certain (that is, their justified credences are 20% or less). In this paper, I have offered three arguments against continued human procreation based on these credence levels. Thus, my three arguments are relevant to the vast majority of theists.

The arguments run as follows. First, the Presumptuous Argument says that because our procreated offspring aren't unambiguously invited to Heaven by God, then under an optimistic scenario in which greater than 80% of our offspring enter Heaven, human procreators act rudely towards God by supplying uninvited guests to Heaven. Second, the Finite Goods Argument claims that because justice requires a portion of Heaven's goods be reserved for those for whom Heavenly existence is a moral compensation, human procreation risks depleting that supply and is therefore impermissible. The Finite Goods Argument is buttressed by the Proportionate Risk Principle, according to which the moral severity of what is risked affects the acceptable degree of risk, and the moral severity of some compensatory duties (e.g., to survivors of the Nazi Holocaust) is very strong. Third, the Risk Argument appeals to the Least-Worst Principle, according to which the uniquely rational action under strong uncertainty is to choose the option with the least-worst outcome. Because *over*populating Heaven is worse than *under*populating it, it follows that we should risk the former rather than the latter. In practice, that means foregoing procreation, at least premortem.

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How To Cite This Article
Hereth, Blake. (2024). "Heavenly overpopulated: Rethinking the Ethics of Procreation," *AGATHEOS: European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 76–97.