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Addendum: More Rebuttals of Walls from Pharaoh’s Magicians’ “Bag of Tricks”!

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Abstract: This web article is an addendum to the four main arguments presented in our article, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus: A Response to Jerry Walls on Christian Compatibilism” (*Philosophia Christi* 17:1 [Summer 2015]). We have developed fourteen additional arguments that rebut the case Walls made against compatibilism in “Why No Classical Theist, Let Alone Orthodox Christian, Should Ever Be a Compatibilist” (*Philosophia Christi* 13:1 [Summer 2011]: 75-104). Since there’s no stopping the dark arts, here they are.

Argument 1: “Not a more difficult challenge”

Walls says that, “Whereas libertarians face the puzzle of explaining why God allows the sort of moral evil just noted, compatibilists have the more difficult challenge of explaining why he *causes or determines* it to happen and in so doing, they seem to be endorsing moral consequentialism” (p. 91). Why is this a “more difficult challenge”? Indeed, how is it any different from the challenge posed by (EMP)? If compatibilists can defuse the (EMP) challenge, perhaps by undercutting or rebutting (EMP), then the two views are on a par with respect to the morality of God. On libertarianism, God allows what he could prevent, and on compatibilism God causes what he could prevent. As long as God’s causing the event is no more morally problematic than God’s allowing the event, what is this “more difficult challenge”?

Argument 2: "Permission not morally superior to causation"

Walls says that, "The problem is that permission language does not make much sense on compatibilist premises.... If he [i.e., God] does not wish a given action to be taken, he can determine things so it will not be" (pp. 91-92). But on libertarianism it is *also* the case that if God "does not wish a given action to be taken, he can determine things so it will not be," by not creating the creature who does the action, or by not putting him in the relevant situation where the action is open to him. If God puts a creature in a situation in which he knows exactly what the creature will choose, and apart from God's actualizing that situation the choice will not be made, then God is willing the choice to be, and not *merely* permitting it.

Indeed, God's *knowledge* that the choice would be made if the creature were created and placed in specific circumstances, combined with God's *decision* to create and place the creature in those circumstances, is sufficient to ensure that the creaturely choice comes to be. How is that any different, morally speaking, from the compatibilist perspective that is being criticized? On one view, *God's knowledge and action ensures the outcome*, and it was up to God to act that way. On the other view, *God's decree ensures the outcome*, and it was up to God to decree that way. On both views, then, God ordains the action, ensuring that it comes to pass.¹

Argument 3: "libertarians are saddled with consequentialism too"

Walls says that, "While their [i.e., libertarians] view is not without its own difficulties, to be sure, they are not saddled with consequentialism since on their view God does not cause or determine such horrors to occur" (p. 92). But on libertarianism, God acts in such a way that his action *ensures* the outcome, including the divine act of deciding not to intervene and prevent foreseen consequences. Now, either God has a reason for acting in this way, or not. Even if God's reason is only tied to the value of pursuing a general policy with respect to creation (e.g., permitting libertarian acts in general, due to their intrinsic value), rather than tied to a particularism with respect to specific evils as means to higher-order goods, God's non-intervention *is* ensuring the

¹ In the article referenced earlier in our "Pharaoh's Magicians" article, Cowan pursues a very similar parity argument, showing that there is no *moral* difference between libertarianism and compatibilism (cf. "Compatibilism and the Sinlessness of the Redeemed in Heaven," *Faith and Philosophy* 28:4 (October 2011): 416-31). The libertarian is no better off on the problem of evil, because compatibilists and libertarians are actually committed to formal principles that admit of no real moral difference (what Cowan calls the Libertarian Greater Good Thesis, and the Compatibilist Greater Good Thesis).

existence of the evil so that he can realize the good of that general policy. So libertarians are “saddled with consequentialism” after all.

Argument 4: “double-effect doctrine helps Calvinists as well as Molinists”

Walls says that, “It is more doubtful that the compatibilist [as opposed to the Molinist] can appeal to the doctrine of double effect for, again, God can determine people ‘freely’ to choose exactly as he wishes” (p. 92 fn. 31). Walls seems to misunderstand his own explanation of the principle of double effect. According to his illustration (earlier in this footnote), in doing X (“instantiating free beings in certain situations”) God intends P (“He intends the positive uses of free will”), but he does not intend N (“God does not intend negative uses of free will”), even though he knows that N is “an unavoidable consequence of” X. This is because intentions are not closed under (known) entailment. If S intends that p, and S knows that p implies q, it does not follow that S thereby intends q. As Walls himself puts it in *Hell: The Logic of Eternal Damnation*, “If an agent performs some action for the sake of a sufficiently important good, and if bad secondary effects are unavoidably entailed by the action, the agent is not blameworthy for those effects if he does not intend them.”²

So let’s say that God intends the world he creates in virtue of some property p that applies to the whole: its overall intrinsic value, or the fact that it tends to his glory, or manifests the full range of his attributes. God intends the world in virtue of *this* property p, even though he knows that his creation of such a world implies the existence of sinful human activities q. Since intentions are not closed under known entailment, it does not follow that God thereby intends q. As Aquinas puts it when talking about killing in self-defense, “Nothing hinders one act from having two effects, only one of which is intended, while the other is beside the intention.... Accordingly the act of self-defense may have two effects, one is the saving of one’s life, the other is the slaying of the aggressor.”³ So if Molinists get the doctrine of double effect, so do Calvinists.

Of course, as Walls points out, if compatibilism is true, then “God can determine people ‘freely’ to choose exactly as he wishes” (p. 92), but this does not remove the applicability of double intent. Let’s say that God intends the good of redemption, and God knows that securing the good of redemption ensures that human sin comes to pass. It does not follow that God thereby intends human sin. And this is the case, *even if* God does something that

² Jerry Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. 34.

³ *Summa Theologica* II.ii, q. 64, a. 7 *respondeo*.

ensures human sin comes to pass. After all, the man who acts in self-defense does something that *ensures* the slaying of the aggressor, but it is nevertheless the case that he didn't intend this, but something else (the saving of one's life). Walls appears to be assuming that God's being a sufficient cause of x and God's intending x amount to the same thing. We take it that Aquinas's position is different: I am the sufficient cause *both* of saving my life *and* the slaying of the aggressor, but I only intend the former *and not the latter*. The doctrine of double effect gets invoked precisely in those contexts in which one *is* the sufficient cause, since one would hardly need a culpability-dissolver in other contexts.

Argument 5: "don't libertarians intensify the problem of evil too?"

Walls says that, "So the problem of evil is intensified to the point that it is all but insuperable if the only freedom we have is of the compatibilist variety. Compatibilism strengthens the skeptics' hand in making the case that God could have made the world in such a way that it would be free of at least much of the horrific evil that scars our world" (p. 92). We find this characterization terribly misleading. Why aren't libertarians also faced with intensifying the problem of evil? Walls is simply *assuming* that the libertarian's value judgment (freedom makes all the evils worth it) is more plausible than the compatibilist's value judgment (higher-order goods make all the evils worth it). Where has he given the argument for this? As William Alston puts it:

Theodocists often confidently assert, as something obvious on the face of it, that a world with free creatures, even free creatures who often misuse their freedom, is better than a world with no free creatures. But it seems to me that it is fearsomely difficult to make this comparison and that we should not be so airily confident that we can do so.⁴

In addition, don't libertarians like Walls believe "that God could have made the world in such a way that it would be free of at least much of the horrific evil that scars our world"? All God has to do is *remove* libertarian free will, and you don't get any horrific evil, and certainly God could have done that. The inevitable retort, "But now you don't get a valuable world," just highlights the

⁴ William Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," in *Philosophical Perspectives*, 5, *Philosophy of Religion*, 1991 edited by James E. Tomberlin (copyright by Ridgeview Publishing Co., Atascadero, CA). Reprinted in (ed.) Daniel Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument From Evil* (Indiana University Press, 1996): 97-125. The quotation is from 124 fn37 in the latter reprint. Again, consider the Cowan article referenced in fn1 above, on why it's implausible to think that the value of free will could trump all the abuses of free will in the world.

centrality of the value judgment to any libertarian theodicy. One side says that removing indeterminism would remove the value of free will ensured by such indeterminism. The other side says that removing determinism would remove the higher-order goods ensured by such determinism. It's not clear that one side, *rather than the other*, is "intensifying the problem of evil."

Argument 6: "isn't evil just as avoidable on a libertarian view as well?"

Walls says, "And it makes altogether understandable why skeptics would be completely dubious of the notion that any God could be good, let alone perfectly good, who would create a world full of misery and intense suffering when he could just as easily have made one relatively, if not altogether, free of evil" (p. 93). Again, the same point applies here as before. Forget compatibilists—*Walls* thinks that God has created "a world full of misery and intense suffering when he could just as easily have made one relatively, if not altogether, free of evil." Just don't create libertarian free will; mission accomplished.

Argument 7: "infallible foreknowledge and the freeness of divine creation generates similar interpretive problems for libertarians"

Walls cites passages "in which God warns his people, urges them to repent, expresses frustration for their hardness of heart, and pronounces judgment on them for their persistent refusal to heed his word." He then says, "The obvious question demanding an answer here is how to make sense of these large stretches of scripture if one assumes compatibilism" (p. 94). But how do we make sense of these Scriptures if one assumes infallible foreknowledge? Why does God warn people whom he infallibly knows will not heed the warning? Why does God urge people to repent when he infallibly knows they will not? Why is God frustrated that there are people with hard hearts, when he infallibly knew from eternity that they would have such hearts, and yet he went ahead and created them anyway?

Thus, both compatibilists and libertarians are *already* faced with a tension generated by these passages. So, why would compatibilism create an *extra* problem not already had on an orthodox view of foreknowledge? Do we get to count these passages *twice*?

Argument 8: "basic theistic orthodoxy, not compatibilism, generates these interpretive challenges"

Again, in light of these biblical passages, Walls says the texts "seem to fly directly in the face of a compatibilist reading. Remember, on compatibilist assumptions, God could have determined his people to have repented freely

and heartily at the preaching of any of his prophets and faithfully obeyed and worshiped him thereafter. Or perhaps better yet, he could have determined them to have been faithful all along” (p. 95).

But on libertarian assumptions, God could have refrained from making these people. But rather than refraining, God created them, *knowing* they would do exactly what they are doing, and *knowing* they would not respond to his warnings and commands to repent. Imagine someone who creates a shed in the backyard *knowing perfectly well* it will be flawed and collapse into a heap within ten minutes of construction. Does it make sense to just proceed with the project, and then display all sorts of complaints about the outcome, when one was perfectly free not to proceed with the project?

So, the problems to which Walls alludes are generated by *basic theistic orthodoxy* with respect to foreknowledge and providence, an orthodoxy shared by both libertarians and compatibilists. Walls is not raising anything new, or distinctive to just one side of the discussion.

Argument 9: “If God could have determined things otherwise on compatibilism, then surely he could have created things otherwise on libertarianism”

Walls says, “The notion that God is angry at sins he himself determines, when he could have determined things otherwise, and then pours out his wrath on those same actions is puzzling in the extreme, to say the least” (p. 95). But the notion that God is angry at sins he knew would come to pass subsequent to his creation, when he could have simply refrained from creating these people, “is puzzling in the extreme, to say the least.” In addition, if our previous critique of Walls’s (PP) and (EMP) principles is correct, then we can at least mitigate the puzzling nature of compatibilism because determined agents *can* be morally responsible and blameworthy.

Argument 10: “it’s not clear God gives all persons ‘optimal grace’”

Walls says: “Indeed, it is my view that God gives all persons ‘optimal grace,’ which means they have every opportunity to accept the gospel and be saved” (p. 98). Except they don’t, since clearly God declines to bring the gospel to multitudes on earth, when he could easily have done so. So, he doesn’t give them *every* opportunity to accept the gospel and be saved. Even if one were to agree with Walls that all persons have *an* opportunity to be saved (once we bring in the postmortem divine activity), it is still the case that the premortem divine activity seems to be *lacking* ‘optimality’.

Could Walls respond by saying that, according to his book on purgatory, even in hell God continues (*forever* if necessary) to extend the gospel to the

damned and uses the pains of hell and promise of heaven as prompts?⁵ Isn't that "optimal grace"? Well, we suppose that on this view the gospel opportunity afforded to unbelievers in hell is at least potentially infinite. But here we advert to our main empirical argument against Walls's (12): If God doesn't get the gospel to all in this life, "doesn't this trivialize the good of a lifetime of Christian service and worship?... Why would God preclude that flourishing for some?... Is it that God *didn't really want* any of the people who in fact fail to hear the gospel on earth, to ever be converted on earth, to live a Christian life on earth, to impact others for Christ on earth? Is *that* compatible with the love of God as understood in (12)?" And so on. So either "optimal grace" is descriptive of the premortem state, or it is only descriptive of the postmortem state. It can't be the former, since that is empirically falsified. But if the latter, then (12) doesn't capture the nature of divine love for the *entirety* of earth's history prior to the eschaton. No one in this life could rely on (12) as a description of divine love to them. Why would the nature of divine love fluctuate over time?

Argument 11: "divine justice manifested by reprobation is not a distinctively Calvinistic doctrine"

Walls refers to Aquinas's doctrine of reprobation as a means to manifesting God's justice (p. 99). We think it is important to cite Aquinas in full here, just to show that this is not a distinctively "Calvinist" doctrine, but rather an application of the clear teaching of Scripture in Romans 9:21-23.

1: Now, although the man who sins puts an impediment in the way of grace, and as far as the order of things requires he ought not to receive grace, yet, since God can act apart from the order implanted in things, as He does when He gives sight to the blind or life to the dead – at times, out of the abundance of His goodness, He offers His help in advance, even to those who put an impediment in the way of grace, turning them away from evil and toward the good. *And just as He does not enlighten all the blind, or heal all who are infirm, in order that the working of His power may be evident in the case of those whom He heals, and in the case of the others the order of nature may be observed, so also, He does not assist with His help all who impede grace, so that they may be turned away from evil and toward the good, but only some, in whom He desires His mercy to appear, so that the order of justice may be manifested in the other cases.* Hence, the Apostle says, in Romans (9:22-23):

⁵ Jerry Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

“What if God, willing to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction, that He might show the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy which He has prepared unto glory?”

2: However, *while God does indeed, in regard to men who are held back by the same sins, come to the assistance of and convert some, while He suffers others or permits them to go ahead in accord with the order of things*—there is no reason to ask why He converts the former and not the latter. *For this depends on His will alone; just as it resulted from His simple will that, while all things were made from nothing, some were made of higher degree than others; and also, just as it depends on the simple will of the artisan that, from the same material uniformly disposed, he forms some vessels for noble uses and others for ignoble purposes.* Hence, the Apostle says, in Romans (9:21): “Or does not the potter have power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor?”

3: By this we set aside the error of Origen, who said that certain men are converted to God, and not others, because of some works that their souls had done before being united to their bodies. In fact, this view has been carefully disproved in our Book Two.⁶

Argument 12: “compatibilists can call the libertarian’s bluff as well”

Walls says:

So I call their bluff with a test. If I am wrong, let them openly and without equivocation declare that it is the need to manifest God’s very justice that requires, or at least makes it fitting, that he determine some, perhaps many, to resist him forever, and then punish them with eternal misery, persons he could otherwise determine to freely accept his grace and joyfully worship him forever. Let them forthrightly say... (etc.) (p. 101)

But can’t we compatibilists call the libertarian’s bluff just as easily? “Let libertarians openly and without equivocation declare that it is the need to

⁶ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 3, Question 161, 1 (our italics). Walls refers to this passage but immediately goes on to critique reprobation as a “compatibilist” doctrine. It is an open question as to whether Aquinas is a compatibilist. We think his view is simply representative of broader Christian orthodoxy on this point, following Romans 9:21-23.

permit the rapist's libertarian free will that requires, or at least makes it fitting, that he allows the five-year-old girl to be raped and strangled by her mother's boyfriend, when he could easily and imperceptibly have suspended the rapist's free will *for just a moment*, so that the girl could enjoy a *lifetime* of free will." Or again: "Let libertarians openly and without equivocation declare that it is the need for *other* people to have stable laws of nature and therefore intelligible exercise of free will, that he permits hundreds of thousands to perish in a tsunami when he could have easily sent it off course without denying anyone's free will."⁷

And why *does* God create people whom he infallibly knows will never come to him, and will instead perish eternally? Does he "secure their true flourishing" by creating them, knowing their destiny, when he could have easily declined to create them? Or is it *necessary* for God to create hopeless people? And if universalism is false, isn't it ultimately *because of God* that it is false? He decided to go forward with the creation project, knowing that hell would be populated. Who forced him to do this? No one. Or should we agree with some Molinists that God created people whom he knew would suffer eternally in hell, so that *other people* could go to heaven (given the counterfactuals)? Is this any morally different from the view Walls is critiquing?

Perhaps if Walls didn't assume that all compatibilists are "bluffing" and engaging in "misleading rhetoric," rather than wrestling with the same extraordinarily difficult issues that he himself faces as a libertarian, he might see that it is because of the *theological orthodoxy that all parties have in common* that we are wrestling with this issue within the Christian community.

Argument 13: "Scripture seems to indicate that (12) doesn't accurately capture what is required by the love of God."

First, consider 1 Peter 1:7-8 "So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.' *They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do*" (emphasis ours). What claim is being made about "those who do not believe"? Well, "they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do." Isn't that in tension with Walls's (11) and (12) put together? If God "destines" "those who do not

⁷ In "Evil for Freedom's Sake?", David Lewis offers up "God's answer to a prayer from the Gulag," in which God declares the value of Stalin's free will as the reason for God's not delivering a prisoner from Stalin's hands when God could easily do so (*Philosophical Papers* Vol. XXII (1993), No. 3, 153, 154-55).

believe” to “disobey the word,” then is he doing all he can do to promote their flourishing?

Second, consider 2 Peter 2:20 “For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. *For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness* than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them” (emphasis ours). Presumably, *God knows* that “it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness.” And yet knowing that, he created them and permitted them to know it, when he could have prevented it. Again, this seems in tension with (11) and (12). The obvious way out is to accept (11) but insist that (12) inaccurately captures the nature of divine love.

Argument 14: “compatibilists can construct a Plantinga-style ‘free will defense’ of the moral legitimacy of compatibilist worlds, using the libertarian’s premises”

Walls asks: “Is it plausible to think God would have determined *these* evils to occur, that he preferred a world with these crushing evils rather than a world with much less evil? Unless compatibilists think that God could not have determined things so there would have been less evil than there is, that is what they must be prepared forthrightly to affirm” (p. 103). The question of whether or not God could have done something “so there would have been less evil than there is,” is an interesting one, and it gives us occasion to develop one final argument in response to Walls. Walls argues from the “appalling moral evil” that “our world contains” to the conclusion that compatibilism is false. Presumably, these evils don’t similarly count against libertarian free will, because God judged that their possibility was “worth it,” given the great value of libertarian freedom.

But the value of libertarian freedom can’t underwrite the justifiability of permitting just *any* amount of evil. For all the libertarian knows, God’s options were creating a libertarian world that *exceeded* the threshold, or creating a compatibilist world that fell *under* the threshold, and given those options he chose the *latter*. And then we ask: what evidence does the libertarian theist have *against* this scenario? In effect, we can construct a Plantinga-style “free will defense” of the moral legitimacy of compatibilist worlds, using the *libertarian’s* premises. If so, Walls’s “logical argument” against compatibilism—that it is logically contradictory for a perfectly good God to create a compatibilist world with evil in it—can be refuted by providing a model we have no reason to think is implausible. Insofar as Walls is urging a claim of contradiction, he has to rule out this scenario, and he can’t. So he fails for

reasons analogous to the reasons Mackie's logical argument fails. Here's how to set it up⁸:

- (1) The value of libertarian free will (LFW) justifies God in creating a world with LFW, even if that world ends up having evil in it due to abuse of LFW.
- (2) However, the value of LFW will not justify God's permitting just *any* amount of evil. Some trade-offs are not worth it. (For instance, a world populated with creatures afflicted with super-transworld depravity, such that everyone always does what is wrong on every occasion.) There is a *threshold* of amounts of evil, beyond which not even the presence of LFW transforms the world into an outweighing good.
- (3) For all we know, God knows that any world populated by creatures made in God's image, created to flourish and to worship God, and given LFW, would be a world in which the amount of evil *exceeds* the permissible threshold.
- (4) But if God creates a world in which his image-bearers have *compatibilist* free will (CFW), his control over them would be such that there would only need to be the evils required to realize goods related to redemption, and to realize the full display of God's attributes (including his justice and grace).
- (5) For all we know, the CFW world with the least amount of evil that still secures these goods has just as much evil as the actual world.
- (6) Therefore, if God's options are between the LFW-world and the CFW-world, and if he decides to create, *then he would create the CFW-world* (rather than any world that would exceed the acceptable threshold of evil).
- (7) Therefore, the evils in this world do not indicate that this is a libertarian world rather than a compatibilist world.

For Walls to rule out as contradictory a perfectly good God's creation of a CFW-world with evil, he would have to have some evidence against (3) and (5). But since there is nothing we know that is inconsistent with (3) and (5), it looks like CFW-world creation doesn't contradict God's goodness. Indeed, God may have preferred CFW over LFW *because* of his goodness. (When there is a school shooting, sometimes there are blog posts by prominent Arminians that rail

⁸ We are indebted to Paul Manata for first bringing this line of argument to our attention.

against Calvinist theology in light of this tragic event. But perhaps the Calvinist can respond: “Be thankful we’re in a compatibilist world! For all you know, if this world were a libertarian one, we would have to multiply each school shooting by 10.”)

To summarize this final argument: a key libertarian strategy has been to say that “for all we know,” given libertarian free will this is the best world God can get, but the compatibilist God has no such excuse and so he’s blameworthy. In response, compatibilists can deploy that “for all we know” move in two directions: (i) for all we know, the world would be *worse* if God had created libertarian agents, and (ii) for all we know, the amount of evil in the actual world is *the minimum amount needed* on a compatibilist scheme to get the good of redemption and other goods. So, it is not logically contradictory for a perfectly good God to create a compatibilist world with evil in it.

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