

Won't Get Foiled Again

A Rejoinder to Jerry Walls

GREG A. WELTY

Philosophy Department

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

Wake Forest, North Carolina

gwelty@sebts.edu

STEVEN B. COWAN

Department of Humanities and Fine Arts

Lincoln Memorial University

Harrogate, Tennessee

steven.cowan@lmunet.edu

Jerry Walls has attempted to make the case that no orthodox Christian should embrace compatibilism, that is, the view that determinism is consistent with free will.¹ We responded to his arguments, challenging four key premises, namely his principles (EMP) and (PP), and propositions (9) and (12).² In his most recent response, Walls argues that none of our rebuttals to these premises succeed.³ Here we clarify aspects of our previous arguments and show that Walls has not in fact foiled “Pharaoh’s magicians.” Instead, his case against Christian compatibilism is based on false assertions, unwarranted assumptions, and misconstruals of our arguments.

ABSTRACT: Jerry Walls has attempted to make the case that no orthodox Christian should embrace compatibilism. We responded to his arguments, challenging four key premises. In his most recent response, Walls argues that none of our rebuttals to these premises succeed. Here we clarify aspects of our previous arguments and show that Walls has not in fact undermined our defense of Christian compatibilism.

1. Jerry L. Walls, “Why No Classical Theist, Let Alone Orthodox Christian, Should Ever Be a Compatibilist,” *Philosophia Christi* 13 (2011): 75–104.

2. Steven B. Cowan and Greg A. Welty, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus: A Response to Jerry Walls on Christian Compatibilism,” *Philosophia Christi* 17 (2015): 151–73. See also our “Addendum: More Rebuttals of Walls from Pharaoh’s Magicians’ ‘Bag of Tricks!’” (Evangelical Philosophical Society website, September 16, 2015, 1–12, [http://www.epociety.org/user-files/Cowen-Welty%20\(PC%20Addendum%20Reply%20to%20Walls-Final\).pdf](http://www.epociety.org/user-files/Cowen-Welty%20(PC%20Addendum%20Reply%20to%20Walls-Final).pdf)).

3. Jerry L. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again: Reply to Cowan and Welty,” *Philosophia Christi* 17 (2015): 411–26. The four principles/premises are restated on pp. 412–13, 415, 417, 418.

Walls's Introductory Remarks

Walls notes that “Cowan and Welty think I was up to mischief, attempting to ‘poison the well’ by using the term ‘manipulation’ in my argument. This is a curious charge since manipulation arguments are central to the contemporary debate on compatibilism, as my original argument made abundantly clear.”⁴ Well, no doubt manipulation arguments *are* central to the contemporary debate on compatibilism. No one denies this. But what we noted in our reply is that “The term ‘manipulation’ is highly charged with negative connotations, implying or suggesting evil intent and/or coercion.”⁵ Given the fact that it is *Walls* who lays great stress on “the critical importance of the personal character of theological determinism”⁶—as opposed to the “compatibilism simpliciter” at stake in “the contemporary debate”—we continue to think that pointing out the negative connotations of “manipulation” is quite relevant.

Walls on Junior the Model Child

Walls complains that our counterexample to Walls’s (PP)—Smith’s raising Junior in the nurture and admonition of the Lord—is not a genuine counterexample to (PP), for although “Junior is morally responsible,” Walls doesn’t think our “case begins to capture the sort of control required for determinism.”⁷ But we already anticipated this objection in our reply, predicting that “Walls might contend that what is really different and unique about the ordinary character formation case is just that the ‘manipulator’ does not *entirely* determine the person’s character and actions.”⁸ We went on to offer at least three distinct responses to this contention: (i) its question-begging insistence on libertarianism, (ii) Mele’s argument for the irrelevance of determinism for intuitions about manipulation cases, and (iii) our ordinary practices of child character development strongly suggesting compatibilist intuitions about that development. As far as we can see in Walls’s reply, he doesn’t interact with a single one. (On (iii), he merely says, “I simply disagree”!⁹)

And because it is so germane to this debate, let us reiterate an aspect of this last point. What if, as we hypothesized previously, Smith (or any parent) were “to act in such ways as to *guarantee* that their child developed a virtuous character, so long as those actions did not involve those kinds [of

4. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 412.

5. Cowan and Welty, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus,” 155.

6. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 412.

7. *Ibid.*, 413.

8. Cowan and Welty, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus,” 158.

9. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 414.

activities that all agree inhibit moral responsibility]”¹⁰ In other words, what if Junior’s character were compatibilistically determined and left intact his deliberative faculties, critical thinking skills, and moral conscience? Should we balk at this kind of character development? Apparently, Walls thinks we should, but why? Why would any virtuous parent not want child character development to be like this? Maybe Walls just thinks it *can’t* be like this, but that would take us to the purely philosophical dispute between libertarians and compatibilists that he is laying aside for the sake of argument.

Walls claims that we “affirm PP when it applies to cases of positive character development, but apparently want to sidestep cases where persons form evil characters and perform actions deserving of punishment.”¹¹ This isn’t the case at all. Although we noted “that the role Smith played in Junior’s character development is parallel in significant ways to the role played by the teacher-judge in Walls’s hypothetical case,” we then pointed out (rather than “sidestepped”!) that “the most obvious difference, of course, is that Smith worked to instill in Junior a *virtuous* character while the teacher-judge worked to instill a *vicious* character in her subject.”¹² “But,” we wondered, “is that difference morally relevant? Why is Walls inclined, like many of us, to assert that the teacher-judge’s subject is *not* morally responsible?”¹³

To that question—which is *the* question to ask when wondering about the relevance of Junior’s case—Walls says nothing. Is it because the “case of ordinary character development is to be distinguished from the kind of manipulation used by the teacher in the teacher-judge case”?¹⁴ Walls doesn’t say. Is it that the teacher undermines rather than leaves intact “deliberative faculties, critical thinking skills, and moral conscience”?¹⁵ Again, Walls doesn’t say. He simply assumes that we “want to sidestep cases where persons form evil characters and perform actions deserving of punishment,”¹⁶ despite our extended treatment of one such case: Joseph’s brothers.¹⁷ It is no part of our view that it is “divine determinism for people with good characters, but libertarian freedom for everyone else.”¹⁸ Why would Walls think this?

Walls on Sam the Volatile Thug

Walls is unconvinced by our ‘Sam the murderer’ counterexample to (EMP), since this is not “an instance of determinism, let alone an example

10. Cowan and Welty, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus,” 159.

11. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 414.

12. Cowan and Welty, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus,” 157 (emphasis added).

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 414.

17. Cowan and Welty, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus,” 162–3, and footnote 15.

18. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 414.

that approximates theological determinism.”¹⁹ No doubt, but why is that relevant? Our case is of someone *manipulating* another being to perform evil actions. Walls agrees that “Manny is justified in what he did, and in no way should be blamed since he clearly acted for the greater good in triggering Sam’s abusive outburst.”²⁰ But (EMP) is an *ethical* principle that insists that such manipulators must be *evil*.²¹ If (as Walls agrees) Manny’s being the manipulator here *doesn’t* make him evil, why would elevating him into a *deterministic* manipulator suddenly make him evil? In each case Manny is manipulating Sam into doing an evil action, and Manny *intentionally* does this. Why would the degree of control exercised by Manny in his manipulations be ethically relevant for assessing *Manny’s* character? Manny’s off the hook because he was a good guesser of what Sam would do, because he took risks here? Manny would instead be evil if he could *ensure* the manipulated outcome? On the contrary, by removing the element of risk, a Manny who could ensure his intended outcome would be more praiseworthy than a Manny who took unknown risks with the safety of children like Vic. Far from undermining our counterexample, inserting determinism as Walls suggests would only strengthen it.

Walls prefers instead to shift attention to a more global version of the Manny and Sam case, despite the fact that his (EMP) is not about global determinism, but is instead about the alleged evil of manipulating into existence *any* individual evil action. Walls suggests that “to approximate theological determinism more accurately, suppose that Manny had covertly molded Sam . . . to form his violent criminal character, and moreover, had orchestrated things so Sam and Sofia would take him and Vic hostage.”²² On this “larger story” Walls insists that our counterexample falls flat. Again, though, our argument was directed at (EMP), and our example is well-suited to refuting it. This “larger story” goes beyond the claims of (EMP).

Be that as it may, globalizing the case just takes us back to the earlier refuted principle, (PP). Walls hasn’t given us any reason for thinking that such manipulated persons “cannot rightly be held accountable and punished for their actions.”²³ And he hasn’t given us any reason for thinking that while an *occasional* manipulator can be justified in manipulating evil actions into existence, a *global* manipulator cannot be so justified. If Walls wishes to articulate and defend a “global” version of (EMP), he needs to do more than simply state it and move on. If an occasional manipulator like Manny “is justified in what he did, and in no way should be blamed since he clearly acted for the greater good,”²⁴ why not for a global manipulator? This is what

19. *Ibid.*, 415–16.

20. *Ibid.*, 415.

21. Cf. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 415.

22. *Ibid.*, 416.

23. Walls, “Why No Classical Theist,” 155.

24. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 415.

is suggested in the arguments we provided from Patrick Todd and in our example involving Joseph and his brothers,²⁵ but Walls completely overlooks these aspects of our case.

Finally, Walls thinks the plausibility of our example is due to readers' thinking that Sam "acquired his bad character by a long series of libertarian choices for which he is responsible since he was not determined to make those choices and could have done otherwise."²⁶ But (EMP) isn't about Sam; it's about *Manny*. Is *Manny*—the being who manipulates Sam to perform evil actions—himself evil? That's the question. Since Walls agrees that Manny is good in this situation, Walls bringing up the relevance of Sam's libertarianly formed character seems to indicate that, on Walls's view, Manny would be *good* to manipulate a libertarianly free agent but *evil* to manipulate a compatibilistically free agent! That ethical distinction seems to make little sense. But without it, Walls's focus on Sam's character acquisition as relevant for assessing Manny's goodness in his manipulation efforts seems misdirected at best.

Walls on Compatibilism and Appalling Moral Evil

Walls defends his premise (9), which says "Our world contains much appalling moral evil that could not plausibly be thought necessary for creatures properly to appreciate good (or similar purposes)." With respect to these "similar purposes" which God might have for the world—that is, with respect to "possible other reasons God may have [for evil] that we simply cannot see"—Walls says: "I am happy to concede that I have no idea what those reasons might be. I do, however, think it might advance the discussion if skeptical theists of the compatibilist variety proposed some options we might at least consider."²⁷ No, this wouldn't "advance the discussion" at all. As we noted in connection with similar phrasing in premise (12):

[Walls] seems to think the burden of proof is on the *compatibilist* to supply such purposes and goods. But he who affirms must prove, and it is *Walls* who is asking us to accept (12) and (19), replete with the claim about what God can "properly" do. So, *he* must make the case for these premises. . . . Walls says, "Such incomprehensible goals, obviously, are hard to address or assess." That might be true, but that's his problem, not ours.²⁸

Let us be clear. According to (9), Walls holds that it is *not plausible* to think that the existence of many appalling moral evils are necessary to fulfill any divine purposes. But then he must hold that it is *plausible* that God can

25. Cowan and Welty, "Pharaoh's Magicians Redivivus," 161–3.

26. Walls, "Pharaoh's Magicians Foiled Again," 416.

27. *Ibid.*, 417.

28. Cowan and Welty, "Pharaoh's Magicians Redivivus," 170.

fulfill all of his divine purposes quite apart from the appalling moral evils we see in the world. In that case, he needs to specify the full range of divine purposes at work in the actual world, and then sketch out how God could accomplish them apart from the evils in question. We highly doubt he can do either, and he certainly doesn't do this in his reply. We are not the ones arguing from the evils in the world to the falsity of compatibilism. Walls is. We are not the ones deploying (9) for this purpose. Walls is.

Walls offers (STP) as enshrining divine reasons "God could not possibly have":

(STP) It is possible God might have sufficient reasons for saving only persons who graduated from the University of Notre Dame (and for giving special rewards to devoted fans of the Fighting Irish), and damning everyone else, despite the apparently clear teaching of Scripture that all who have faith in Christ will be saved, reasons that would be entirely inscrutable to our limited perspective and understanding.²⁹

Walls's forwarding this principle is puzzling in three ways. First, the insertion of the phrase "despite the apparently clear teaching of Scripture that all who have faith in Christ will be saved" seems wholly out of place. Why would being a UND graduate be incompatible with having faith in Christ, as if the former being saved would preclude the latter being saved? What if the groups are coextensive in the providence of God?

But second, perhaps Walls is envisioning a situation in which quite a few *nongraduates* of UND have faith in Christ, God has promised that *all* who have faith in Christ will be saved, but despite promising this, God will *only* save UND graduates. But that would involve God *lying* to us, and God cannot lie (good reasons or not). We're happy to refrain from attributing to God reasons for evil that contradict God's attributes, and perhaps this removes us from the camp of "those who place no limits whatsoever on this [skeptical theist] maneuver."³⁰

Or third, perhaps Walls thinks it is the brute *particularity* of the idea that God might save only UND graduates, that precludes God from having sufficient reasons for doing just this. But we live in a world thoroughly suffused with particularities with respect to creation and providence; it stands to reason that God has a right to particularities with respect to redemption and damnation as well. Romans 9 strongly seems to suggest this, as many commentators have noted. Or is Walls really convinced that, say, God "could not possibly have" sufficient reason for calling Abram out of Chaldea, rather than his brother Nahor? Setting such limits upon God seems most unwise, given the particularities of the biblical narrative.

Walls seems to think that if we simply acknowledge there are any limits at all to skeptical theism, then "those very limits should lead us to con-

29. Walls, "Pharaoh's Magicians Foiled Again," 417–18.

30. *Ibid.*, 418.

clude that at least much of the appalling moral evil we witness in our world can only be rationally accounted for on libertarian terms.”³¹ That strikes us as quite the *non sequitur*. There being limits on divine reasons for evil doesn’t—by itself—indicate anything in the direction of one kind of freedom over another. And as we argued in our reply, there are quite a few reasons for thinking that *libertarian* free will can’t bear the theodical weight Walls wishes to place upon it.

Walls on “Restricted Free Will” and the True Value of Freedom

Walls thinks our endorsing Peter Geach’s conception of “restricted free will” as genuinely possible is a dubious move. For God “to ‘wire’ us so that we could not think of evil actions . . . is a restriction imposed on thoughts that are well within the reach of our normally functioning capacities.”³² No doubt. “Our normally functioning capacities” are what they are, by the creative will of God. But Geach’s thesis involves a possible *restriction* of what are at present “our normally functioning capacities.” One can’t successfully argue against this possibility by noting that it is not actual.

Walls pushes back against our premise (2), arguing that he does not find “Cowan and Welty’s (2) at all plausible.”³³ This is the idea that God could hardwire us so that “thoughts of evil actions . . . wouldn’t occur to us.” As a matter of fact, though, nothing he says makes this implausible. And, indeed, (2) is perfectly true as it stands. After all, God has created bunnies, sheep, and wasps in such a way that thoughts of evil actions don’t occur to *them*. He could do the same with us.

What Walls is really arguing is not that creatures *couldn’t* have restricted free will, but that we are mistaken in thinking that *we could freely enter into loving relationships with God* if we only have restricted free will. And *that’s* because if we are going to love, trust, obey, and worship God, we have to have “the capacity not only of *conceiving* of evil actions, but also of *performing* them.”³⁴ According to Walls, at least two things are presupposed in God’s calling any creature to be in relationship with him:³⁵

- (P1) “To understand the command to obey is to understand the possibility of disobedience.”
- (P2) “The freedom to trust, love and obey is also the freedom to doubt God’s goodwill toward us, to disobey and thereby to fracture the relationship of love.”

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*, 419.

33. *Ibid.*, 420.

34. *Ibid.*, 419.

35. *Ibid.*

So P1 implies something about our *conceivings* while P2 implies something about our *freedoms*. According to Walls, both P1 and P2 are needed if we are to be in a loving relationship with God, but both are excluded by our conception of restricted free will. The latter “undercuts any substantive account of moral freedom.”³⁶ So, unfortunately, genuine relationship with God can’t be had on restricted free will, and we are mistaken in thinking so.

But it seems to us that our critique is easily salvaged from this reply. Regarding P1, we can slightly revise our account of “restricted free will.” It need not require that *thoughts of evil* actions wouldn’t occur to us. Perhaps Walls is right—perhaps we can’t adequately understand the command to obey without understanding what it would mean to disobey that command. Rather, on restricted free will *thoughts of doing* evil actions wouldn’t occur to us (perhaps because, like the redeemed in heaven, we perfectly love God and hate evil). On this view, we are wired such that we can perfectly well *conceive* what it would mean to disobey God’s command, to distrust God, to hate God. But the thought of *our doing* these evil actions, of our disobeying, distrusting, and hating, wouldn’t occur to us. When it comes time for us to consider what *we* would do, thoughts of doing *these things* wouldn’t occur to us because we could simply never want to do such things. How would this preclude our understanding God’s command to obey him, and so forth?

Regarding P2, we think it best to continue to deny this. The freedom to trust, love, and obey God is *not* also “the freedom to doubt God’s goodwill toward us, to disobey and thereby to fracture the relationship of love.” After all, Jesus perfectly trusted, loved, and obeyed God, and this did not involve the freedom to undermine God’s infallible purpose of salvation (by failing to do these things). The Persons of the Trinity *don’t* have the freedom to sin, and therefore no Person has the freedom to doubt the goodwill of the other Persons toward him. Are they not in genuine, loving relationship with each other? When the Father sent the Son into the world, did the Son have “the freedom . . . to disobey and thereby to fracture the relationship of love”? We don’t think so. The love of the Father for the Son (and vice versa) is not some strange, embarrassing anomaly to be explained away. It is *paradigmatic* of the love we ought to have toward God (John 15:9–10; 17:22–24, 26). Indeed, in entering into a loving relationship with us, *Jesus* doesn’t have the freedom to sin against us in any way. And yet Jesus’s love for us is the standard for the love we ought to have for one another (John 13:34–35; 2 Cor. 8:8–9; Phil. 2:1–8).

It follows from this that unrestricted libertarian free will is not needed so that we could “understand” God’s commands to us, since we can have that on restricted free will. Nor is unrestricted libertarian free will needed in order to be in a genuine, loving relationship, since (i) God needs no such freedom in order to be in genuine, loving relationship with us, and (ii) the Persons of the

36. Ibid.

Trinity need no such freedom in order to be in genuine, loving relationship with each other—and this includes the Son’s trust in, love for, and obedience to the Father. So it seems that the value of *unrestricted* libertarian free will *does* lie specifically in the freedom to do evil, just as we argued in our reply. And it seems hard to hang all the pain and misery in the world on *that*.

Walls cites Rasmussen as claiming that evil must be possible “if God and His creatures are to enjoy unforced love.”³⁷ But if “unforced” means “undetermined,” then we enjoy “unforced love” from God, and the divine Persons enjoy “unforced love” from one another, without the possibility of moral evil on the part of the one who loves. Jesus, in his incarnate state as fully human, has an “unforced,” genuine love for the Father and for us that *in no way* lacks the value of “the goods of love, trust, obedience, and worship that we can give to God”!³⁸ Jesus therefore provides a striking counterexample to Rasmussen and to Walls’s appeal to Rasmussen’s argument. But if “unforced” means “determined,” well, we were describing a restricted *libertarian* free will that satisfies “both the source and leeway conditions on libertarian free will.”³⁹ This isn’t deterministic at all, which is why Rasmussen’s definition of “*x* makes *y* do *z*” doesn’t apply to it. *No* expression of creaturely love toward God would be an action that God *made us* perform. The deterministic free will Rasmussen argues against is quite different from the restricted *libertarian* free will that we were describing. Finally, Rasmussen’s paradigm case of “forced love” involves a man being determined by a “love potion” such that the resulting act of love was *not* the result of his deliberative processes. Not only is this disanalogous to restricted libertarian free will, it is awfully reminiscent of Walls’s (PP), a principle we have already argued against at length here and previously.⁴⁰

Walls on Damnation and God’s Many Purposes

Walls says, “I heartily agree that God has multiple purposes, and I have no idea what I said that gave them the idea that I think the flourishing of human persons is God’s *only* purpose in creation.”⁴¹ Just to be clear, we don’t think and never thought that Walls holds that God has only one purpose in creation: the flourishing of human persons. In fact, we go so far as to say that, in his footnote, Walls “recognizes that there are more goods, *other* goods, to

37. *Ibid.*, 420.

38. *Ibid.*, 419.

39. Cowan and Welty, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus,” 166.

40. As Derk Pereboom puts it (in discussing the love potion example): “It would seem that what is unacceptable is not being determined by the other party *per se*, but rather how one is determined, and that there are varieties of determination by the other party that are not objectionable” (“Theological Determinism and Divine Providence,” in *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate*, ed. Ken Perszyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 273).

41. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 421.

be had in creation, than the true flourishing of human persons.”⁴² Our point was simply that *Walls’s argument* requires this restriction, since otherwise—for all Walls knows—“(12) is consistent with quite substantive limitations on what God ‘can properly do.’”⁴³

Walls considers “whether God has purposes that are incompatible with doing all he can to promote the true flourishing of all persons.”⁴⁴ Having considered it, Walls declares: “I think there are no such purposes, and that promoting the flourishing of all persons flows necessarily from his nature as a perfectly good and loving God, and any other purposes that may be higher are perfectly compatible with his showing genuine love to all persons.”⁴⁵ Unfortunately, it’s going to take more than hearing what Walls “thinks” to make plausible the view that God can compatibilistically accomplish the full range of his purposes while determining all to freely accept his love and be saved. For instance, *what is* the full range of divine purposes at work in the world? Can Walls share with us what he *knows* here (as opposed to what he thinks)? (And if no argument is needed to support what Walls “thinks,” well, then *we* think that God has whatever purposes will make our argument work, and leave it at that!)

Beyond this, as we indicated in our reply, we have already falsified Walls’s view here.⁴⁶ Clearly God *does* have purposes which “are incompatible with doing all he can to promote the true flourishing of all persons.” God created people whom he knew would end up damned. For some reason, God thought this decision on his part was “worth it,” even though he could have done something that would have *avoided* their genuine and eternal ruin: not create them. As Walls rightly emphasizes, universalism is false, and this seems to disprove Walls’s account of the love of God. Is it doing all you can to promote the true flourishing of someone, to ensure a ruin for them that you could have easily precluded for them, by not creating them?

Walls clarifies that he is specifically challenging “the claim that it is necessary for God to display his justice in the form of wrath and punishment, *especially the punishment of eternal damnation.*”⁴⁷ For instance, “If there were no sin, God’s justice would still be on display in his treatment of human beings, but punishment would not be part of the equation. So my point is that if there is no sin in the first place, there is no occasion for wrath and punishment.”⁴⁸ Just to be clear: our line of reply to Walls does not depend upon the thesis that the display of divine wrath and punishment *is* both necessary for God to display and a divine purpose which is incompatible with

42. Cowan and Welty, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus,” 169.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 421.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Cowan and Welty, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus,” 171.

47. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 421 (emphasis in original).

48. *Ibid.*

God's doing all he can to promote the flourishing of all persons. We don't have to specify *any* divine purposes at all, in order to note that Walls hasn't met the burden of his particular proof.

Beyond that, the problem with Walls's statement is that it just pushes things back a step, without offering clarification as to why God would display wrath and punishment *at all*. (Not to mention eternal damnation!) After all, God's being just, fair, consistent, etc. in his dealings with humans will continue whether or not we sin. So why would God *add* to that ongoing display of his justice, by showing wrath and imposing punishment? Clearly, it's because God judged that *displaying his justice in response to sin* is something that is extremely important. (If it weren't, the world would simply be free from eternal damnation, and that would be that.)

It follows that while God will always display his justice toward humans *qua* humans, it is also important that God display his justice towards humans *qua* sinners. How important is this? We think it's safe to conclude that we haven't got a clue, and that of course works in our favor in reply to Walls, since his argument requires him to be more clued in to these things than he has actually argued. We'll simply say that "the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth'" (Rom. 9:17). Pharaoh's being *raised up* for this purpose is quite a different proposition than Pharaoh being merely *responded to* with wrath and punishment. These and numerous other passages teach us to at least pause before confidently declaring that the importance of God's *displaying his justice in response to sin* is something insignificant in God's purposes with respect to creation. The fact is that God is a God "desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power" (Rom. 9:22). We see no reason to think that the justice of *this* God is adequately displayed in the absence of wrath and punishment.

Walls wants "a forthright answer" to his question: why must God

punish anyone by eternal damnation. Could not God express his wrath in terrifying and striking ways, if necessary, by punishing those he has determined to sin with intense and spectacular misery for some finite duration? He could then determine them to repent in response to his punishment and glorify him by worshipping him.⁴⁹

Walls's request is all the more puzzling given that *he* believes in eternal damnation. Well, why must God do this, on his view? "Could not God express his wrath in terrifying and striking ways, if necessary, by punishing sinners with intense and spectacular misery for some finite duration?" What's keeping God from doing this?

Eternal damnation is such a sober, terrifying prospect, that the very idea of debating it in an academic journal is quite unsettling, and we are con-

49. *Ibid.*, 422, citing "Why No Classical Theist," 100.

vinced Walls feels the same. Nevertheless, we submit that God's imposing eternal damnation on all of the lost, *when he doesn't have to do this*, reveals something extraordinary about the value God places on displaying his wrath and punishment in this way (that is, to an unending degree). Eternal damnation seems to utterly outstrip the meagre resources of Walls's deep conviction that God "does all he can properly do to secure their true flourishing." How is eternal damnation possibly an example of this? Perhaps the idea is that God is hoping that they will repent, and so for God to annihilate them would be for God to give up on them, and thus *not* do all he can properly do to secure their true flourishing. But surely God knew whether or not they would repent, prior to creating them. So is hell *never* eternal? Or is God rolling the dice in creating them? Or what?

Our "forthright answer" to why God punishes anyone by eternal damnation is that only an eternal, ongoing display of God's justice in response to sin reveals some pretty deep truths about an infinitely holy God's worthiness of being worshipped, and about the absolute awfulness of sin. In any event, we find ourselves utterly perplexed in trying to justify or explain an eternal hell by way of Walls's suggestions about God's moral character.

Walls offers a suggestion by Oliver Crisp that might help us defend "eternal damnation in a compatibilist world."⁵⁰ Walls seems to be under the impression that we have need of proposing a "reason why (19) might be false."⁵¹ But we have no such need. Walls made an argument that included (19). So he has need of proposing a reason why (19) is *true*. (19) states that: "If freedom and determinism are compatible, then God can properly secure a right relationship with all persons by determining all to freely accept his love and be saved." As we argued, this:

inference is only valid if we have assurance that the divine purposes to secure other goods (purposes and goods tucked away under "properly secure") *don't* stand in the way of "determining all to freely accept his love and be saved." Leaving these goods and purposes unspecified, we simply don't know this. *This single issue pervades the entire argument*; once Walls introduces "properly" in premise (12), notice he must explicitly repeat it in premises (13), (15), (16), (17), (19), (20), (21), and (22). The whole argument rests upon something he hasn't bothered to specify: *what is it* that God can *properly* do?⁵²

We know we run the risk of appearing lazy by simply repeating this material. But as far as we can tell, Walls's reply doesn't adequately recognize the relevant burden of proof. His argument presupposes he has access to something he simply doesn't have access to.

50. *Ibid.*, 422.

51. *Ibid.*, 423.

52. Cowan and Welty, "Pharaoh's Magicians Redivivus," 170.

Speaking of showing (19) false, Walls thinks we “propose a very different reason why (19) might be false,” namely, the “passage from David Lewis.”⁵³ But as we said, we were not proving (19) false there. We were only giving reason to think that it is not, as Walls boldly claims, a “clear conceptual truth that can hardly be denied.”⁵⁴ Beyond that, Walls seems to think that Lewis’s point has to do with *contingent* matters, such that, “in a world fully determined by a God who is both omnipotent and omniscient,” there are no “important variables God does not fully control.”⁵⁵ But as we noted, Lewis’s point has to do with *necessary* matters—“matters of logic”—not with any contingent matters that should be under God’s control. Since “the exercise of compatibilist freedom by billions of human agents couldn’t occur in a vacuum,” it needs “an environment stable enough to ensure the intelligibility of deliberation, guidance control, reasons-responsiveness, and so forth.”⁵⁶ Thus certain *conceptual* constraints must be imposed, for not just *anything* would count as deliberation, guidance control, and reasons-responsiveness. (In the final section of his reply, Walls avails himself of contingent counterfactuals over which God has no control. We think we are on ground at least as strong by refusing to rule out necessary truths over which God has no control. In fact, our ground seems stronger, since Molinists and non-Molinists hold the latter in common, Cartesian universal possibilists excepted.)

Walls on “Why Are Some Lost?”

Walls conjectures that since “God does not control the counterfactuals of freedom, perhaps there are no actualizable worlds in which he can save all free persons.”⁵⁷ He goes so far as to say that “God actualizes the world in which he can save many people while minimizing the number of the damned. Perhaps God was faced with the choice between this sort of world and none at all, and he judged it ‘worth it’ to create. I think this is not merely possible, but plausible.”⁵⁸ Walls finds it important to emphasize that on his view, “the damned are persons who would be damned in every actualizable world in which they exist.”⁵⁹

We find it important to emphasize the value judgment which God is making on this account. Some persons’ counterfactuals are such that they would never freely accept God’s grace no matter what—they are “transworldly damned.” So God is off the hook for not saving them. But then why is he off

53. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 421.

54. Cowan and Welty, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus,” 171, citing “Why No Classical Theist,” 97.

55. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 423.

56. Cowan and Welty, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus,” 172.

57. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 424.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*

the hook for creating them? Answer: like Roger Dorn in *Major League II*, they take a hit for the team, the “optimal world” team. If God didn’t create them, fewer people overall would be saved. “If it weren’t for you, *billions* wouldn’t have been saved. So, chin up!” (Alternatively, the unbeliever is the Sisyphean hero who rolls the boulder uphill for eternity, so that others may be free.) Doesn’t that strike Walls as just as ethically dubious as the compatibilist Calvinism he is rejecting? God creates these transworldly damned individuals because *he needs them in order to ensure* the salvation of *other* people. Their sinking in hell is the price God pays to rise others to heaven. Perhaps God wrings his hands and says, “Damned counterfactuals!” Perhaps the damned say this as well! (Perhaps those in *heaven* say this, when they learn the awful price of their own glorified state.)

Beyond this, God’s creating persons who are transworldly damned seems quite contrary to one of the central Scriptural proof texts for Molinism. In Matthew 11:20–24, Jesus denounces cities who didn’t repent at his preaching and miraculous works, upbraiding them for being worse than the paradigmatically wicked cities of old: “For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. . . . For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day” (vv. 21, 23). Here we have a case of God creating people (Tyre, Sidon, Sodom) with the knowledge that they not only could have but *would have* repented in different circumstances, and yet God didn’t bring those circumstances to pass. He let them perish in their unrepentance, and even judged them for it. So it is not the case that “the damned are persons who would be damned in every actualizable world in which they exist.”⁶⁰

We find it puzzling why it is acceptable to Walls that God creates people whom God knows will never be saved, as the price for the good of *other* people, but he finds it ethically dubious that God creates people as a means to *his own* glory. Walls thinks our view “has the dubious implication that God needs evil fully to display his glory.”⁶¹ But what of Walls’s view that God needs eternal damnation in order to populate heaven? The damned in hell are not twiddling their thumbs. They are cursing God, rebelling against God, and—even on Walls’s own view—continuing to refuse God’s call to repentance. These are all moral evils, and endlessly so. But on Walls’s view, the counterfactuals are such that God *needs* these moral evils if anyone is to get to heaven. He judged that these evils were “worth it,” despite the fact that all could be avoided. He sovereignly *prefers* that heaven be populated by the price of these evils, as opposed to not populated at all. Yes, the damned

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*, 421.

“have completely chosen their fate.”⁶² But they didn’t choose their *existence*. God did that, and did so after contemplating what their outcome would be.

In fact, Walls’s view parallels the standard Reformed view on reprobation, rather than being an improvement upon it.⁶³ In either case, God creates people whom he knows will go to hell, and he does so to advance his own purposes: either to display his grace (to others, on Walls’s Molinist view) or his justice (to them, on the Reformed view). In light of all this, we hope we are forgiven for thinking that Walls is simply confirming our central point: any reasonably orthodox view of God and the eschaton generates these conundrums—they are not the exclusive liability of compatibilist Calvinists. Off-loading the problem of eschatological evil onto the counterfactuals gives them more theodical weight than they can bear.

As a matter of epistemic possibility, it’s clear that Walls can always manipulate the counterfactuals so that the numbers end up absolving God in some sense. God’s hands were tied, and so to save any people he had to create those who would ultimately be damned people, and so on. But even if this strategy works, isn’t it at a terrible cost? This is *theodicy by sheer luck*. The truth values of the counterfactuals *have* to be such that God had no better options, and so God is off the hook by creating the ultimately damned. But then whether or not God’s ways are morally justified depends on how an infinite realm of brute factuality—the counterfactuals—work out. If the counterfactuals had been such that billions of people would be saved in a world with universal salvation, then God would be on the hook again for a nonempty hell. How plausible is it that whether or not God is morally justified depends on a realm over which God has no control?⁶⁴

Walls seems to misunderstand our charge that his proposal of “optimal grace” “trivializes the good of a lifetime of Christian service and worship.”⁶⁵ We weren’t talking about the service and worship of Christians who witness to others, who “are obedient” and who take up “the opportunity to share with God in the ministry of reconciliation and to advance his purposes.”⁶⁶ We were talking about those who end up needing postmortem calls to repentance, when God could have easily gotten them the gospel in their earthly life. Didn’t God *want* them to live a Christian life on earth? If so, why did he wait to get them the gospel until after they die, when they can no longer “share with God in the ministry of reconciliation and to advance his pur-

62. *Ibid.*, 425.

63. Cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith* 3.7.

64. For what it’s worth, one of us has argued the extent to which the Molinist God is dependent on luck in Steven B. Cowan, “Molinism, Meticulous Providence, and Luck,” *Philosophia Christi* 11 (2009): 156–69. See also Scott A. Davison, “Cowan on Molinism and Luck,” *Philosophia Christi* 11 (2009): 170–4; and Steven B. Cowan, “On Target with ‘Molinism, Meticulous Providence, and Luck’: A Rejoinder to Scott A. Davison,” *Philosophia Christi* 11 (2009): 175–80.

65. Cowan and Welty, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus,” 173.

66. Walls, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Foiled Again,” 425.

poses”)? Perhaps this is all luckily explained by the counterfactuals—they wouldn’t have believed the gospel on Earth even if it had come to them, but they would believe it after death, so no need for God to ensure that Christians invite them to faith.

We suppose this would do the trick. But it should at least be mentioned (despite being well-worn ground) that there is a price to be paid for positing counterfactuals of freedom that God does not control. This seems to eat away at divine sovereignty (his creative options are constrained), divine aseity (his omniscience depends on brute facts distinct from his nature or will), and make God subject to luck (what if *every* possible creaturely essence were transworldly damned? God shudders at what might have been . . .). God may have “refused . . . to let hell veto heaven,”⁶⁷ but he gets no vote whatsoever on whether the latter can be had without the former. God arrived at the polls too late, as it were, and the Fates won’t reopen them. He is left to building the blessedness of heaven on the flames of hell. We leave it to the reader to work out whether this alternative conception of providence is in fact superior to the one Walls criticizes.

In the end, we do not believe that Walls has foiled “Pharaoh’s magicians” and undermined Christian compatibilism, either in his original article or in his response to our critique. We continue to maintain that Christian compatibilism carries no theological burdens that are not shared by all orthodox Christians, and that Christian libertarianism is weighted down with problems no less severe than those Walls alleges for the compatibilist. Indeed, given all of the unanswered questions and dubious assumptions of Walls’s case that we have pointed out, one begins to wonder who it really is, Walls and his fellow libertarians or Christian compatibilists, who have “taken up the mantle” of Pharaoh’s magicians.

67. *Ibid.*, 426.