

Pharaoh's Magicians Foiled Again

Reply to Cowan and Welty

JERRY L. WALLS
Department of Philosophy
Houston Baptist University
Houston, Texas
dantejlw@gmail.com

I want to thank Steve Cowan and Greg Welty for their vigorous response to my article on compatibilism.¹ Taking up the mantle of Jannes and Jambres, they deploy the dark arts of magic in behalf of Pharaoh's determined effort to restrict the freedom of God's children.² In their attempt to rebut what they take to be my "dubious" arguments, I believe they have significantly advanced the dialectic. In the space I have been given for this reply, I cannot respond to all their arguments, so I shall focus on their main ones. We shall see, I think, that while they show themselves to be skillful magicians who have mastered the arts of distraction, misdirection, and sleight of hand, the force of their objections is mostly the product of clever illusion.

Before replying to them, I want to reiterate some key points of my earlier article because it is very important to keep clearly in mind just what I claimed and what I did not. First, I remind readers that I conceded that if libertarian freedom were defended on purely philosophical grounds that leave God out of the picture, the case for it is far from convincing.³ Second, what I argued is decisively clear is that determinism cannot be true *in our world* if God is perfectly good. This does not, however, rule out the possibility that determinism is true in other worlds.

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I respond to the central points of Steve Cowan and Greg Welty's response to my 2011 article in which I argued that theists, especially Christian theists, should not be compatibilists. I contend that their counterexamples fail to undermine my "provenance principle" as my "evil manipulator principle." Their counterexamples are not convincing cases of determinism, and thus tacitly rely on libertarian freedom to make moral sense. I also argue that their appeal to skeptical theism fails to undercut my argument from appalling moral evil. Finally, I argue that the resources provided by libertarian freedom better makes sense of damnation than does compatibilism.

1. 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.

2. For those who may not recognize the names Jannes and Jambres, see 2 Tim. 3:8.

3. Jerry L. Walls, "Why No Classical Theist, Let Alone Orthodox Christian, Should Ever Be a Compatibilist," *Philosophia Christi* 13 (2011): 77, cited hereafter as "Why No Classical Theist."

It is the actual world with which I am concerned, the world that is full of much sin, suffering, and horrific evil. Moreover, according to orthodox Christianity, our world is one in which some, perhaps many persons, will experience the worst possible fate for a human being, namely, eternal misery in hell. It is eternal damnation, I argued, that represents “the breaking point for any sort of plausibility compatibilism might hold for theists, especially orthodox Christian theists.”⁴

I also emphasized the critical importance of the personal character of theological determinism and the corresponding significance of distinguishing theological compatibilism from compatibilism simpliciter.⁵ “It is the difference between being determined by blind forces and being determined by the most perspicuous sight possible.”⁶

Theological determinism, I went on to suggest, is “the most metaphysically majestic account of manipulation ever devised, but all the more interesting because it is not put forward as a mere hypothetical example, but rather as a sober proposal believed by many philosophically sophisticated persons.”⁷ Cowan and Welty think I was up to mischief, attempting to “poison the well” by using the term “manipulation” in my argument.⁸ This is a curious charge since manipulation arguments are central to the contemporary debate on compatibilism, as my original argument made abundantly clear.

The upshot of all this is that any defense of compatibilism that does not keep squarely in view the theological determinism I was criticizing in my article will completely skirt the force of my argument. Moreover, any argument that does not forthrightly come to terms with the Calvinist claim that God determines some persons to eternal damnation will be one that does not begin to come to terms with the heart of my case against compatibilism. Unfortunately, as we shall see, Pharaoh’s magicians are guilty of just these things in their response to my article.

Junior, the Model Child

Cowan and Welty offer a number of examples of what they consider to be determined choices that undermine one of the central principles of my paper, what I called “the provenance principle.”

(PP) When the actions of a person are entirely determined by another intelligent being who intentionally determines (manipulates) the

4. *Ibid.*, 93.

5. *Ibid.*, 80.

6. *Ibid.*, 82.

7. *Ibid.*, 84.

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

person to act exactly as the other being wishes, then the person cannot be rightly be held accountable and punished for his actions.⁹

The most interesting of their cases is that of “Junior,” who is raised by Smith, his father, “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” because it represents a “more global scenario in which a person’s character” as well as his actions are the result of “intentional determinism.”¹⁰

This case is intended to approximate my case of the psychologically savvy preschool teacher who conditioned all her students to behave exactly as she wished, some of whom she conditioned to behave virtuously, while others she conditioned to become rapists and child molesters. Later, she becomes a judge, and in that role, she sentences one of her subjects to life in prison, eloquently condemning his behavior as a menace to society.¹¹ While serving his sentence, he comes to the ironic realization that the judge who condemned his behavior and sentenced him to prison was the same person who conditioned him to the very behavior she later denounced. Moreover, she could just as easily have conditioned him to have a good character and to behave in a morally exemplary way. In light of this, it seems clear to me that he is not responsible for his actions, and that it is profoundly unjust for him to be held accountable and punished for those actions, particularly by the very person who determined him to perform those actions. It is this intuition that lies behind the provenance principle that Cowan and Welty seek to undermine.

While Cowan and Welty’s case is global in a sense similar to mine, it is also markedly different because Junior is molded positively by his loving and attentive father who graciously and consistently nurtures Junior in moral and spiritual truth. Smith not only patiently and faithfully teaches the truth, but also models it in his own life, and thereby successfully instills in Junior a truly virtuous character.

Cowan and Welty are confident that most persons will think Junior is morally responsible, and I am happy to concur. Unfortunately, however, I do not think their case begins to capture the sort of control required for determinism. Any human analogy, of course, including mine, will fall short of the all-encompassing sort of control involved in theological determinism. Still, in the case as they described it, while Smith encouraged, nurtured, elicited and molded Junior’s positive development as a virtuous person, he did not by any means determine it, which is a much stronger claim.

Indeed, the case as described is perfectly compatible with Junior making lots of libertarian free choices along the way in responding to his father’s guidance and instruction. He could perfectly well have resisted his father’s instruction, as many children in fact do. These libertarian free choices, I

9. Walls, “Why No Classical Theist,” 87.

10. Cowan and Welty, “Pharaoh’s Magicians Redivivus,” 156.

11. Walls, “Why No Classical Theist,” 87.

would contend, played an essential role in producing Junior's admirable character. So I simply disagree with Cowan and Welty when they claim that our ordinary practices of child character development suggest that "we all have compatibilist intuitions about character development," that we think there is a "deterministic connection between moral instruction and virtuous character."¹²

There is to be sure a connection, but it is not best described in causal terms. So I also disagree with their reading of Proverbs 22:6, which admonishes us to "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old *he will not depart from it.*" They italicized that last phrase as quoted as if to emphasize the deterministic, causal connection between training and moral character. But again, while positive nurture and guidance can predispose children to become virtuous, they are hardly sufficient to assure, let alone determine, them to develop a good character.

But as important as these differences are, the main problem with Cowan and Welty's case is that it is simply innocuous as a counterexample to (PP). For recall that the principle explicitly states that when the actions of a person are entirely determined by another intelligent being, that person "cannot rightly be held accountable and punished for his actions." Now Cowan and Welty argue that God is the ultimate virtuous parent who knows how to mold virtuous character. They 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.

How then do Cowan and Welty account for rapists, child molesters, and other unsavory characters? Do they believe that these persons formed their vicious characters by choices that were free in the libertarian sense? Does God only determine good characters but not evil ones in their view? Could not God have determined such persons to have good characters, as the preschool teacher could have determined all her children to have good characters? Is it divine determinism for people with good characters, but libertarian freedom for everyone else? And how does this work?

In short, I am puzzled as to whether Cowan and Welty are really determinists, and if so how they understand determinism. I was very clear in my paper how I understand determinism: "By theological determinism I mean the view that everything that occurs happens exactly as God intends because he has ordered all things in such a way that there are sufficient determining causes for everything, including human actions."¹³ This is the view of many classical Calvinists, and it is an essential component of the compatibilism I was attacking in my article. If Cowan and Welty do not share this view of determinism, it is not apparent how their objections even pertain to my paper. In any case, their own view of determinism is far from clear.

12. Cowan and Welty, "Pharaoh's Magicians Redivivus," 159.

13. Walls, "Why No Classical Theist," 80.

Sam, the Volatile Thug

Perhaps this perplexity will be relieved by Cowan and Welty's next example, one they offer to show that my Evil Manipulator Principle is false. Here is that principle.

(EMP) A being who determines (manipulates) another being to perform evil actions is himself evil. It is even more perverse if a being determines a being to perform evil actions and then holds him accountable, and punishes him for those actions.¹⁴

My preschool programmer, again, is a paradigmatic instance of such an evil manipulator, and I think this principle accurately expresses the intuition many of us share.

Cowan and Welty, however, complain that I do not specify her intentions, and this unfairly leads us to assume those intentions must be evil. Well, let me specify what might be considered a noble intention. Let us say she wants to put on an impressive display of retributive punishment in order to vividly demonstrate the nature of justice and her commitment to the rule of law. Would this help? I think not. She would still be evil, regardless of such a seemingly noble intention.

But let us now consider Cowan and Welty's case that they think shows that "EMP is clearly false" and "cannot be used to question the goodness of God."¹⁵ They tell a story of a convicted murderer named Sam, and his wife Sofia, his reluctant partner in crime, who invade the rural home of Manny and his young son Vic while fleeing the police. Manny is convinced Sam wants to kill him and Vic, and also comes to realize Sofia would likely help them escape if she came to realize her husband's plan. Manny has observed that Sam has an explosive temper, and this helps him come up with a clever way to expose Sam's treacherous intentions. One evening, while Vic is clearing dirty dishes from the table, Manny subtly trips him, causing his young son to drop the dishes in Sam's lap. Here is the rest of the story.

Enraged, Sam threw Vic across the room, rushed over to him and slapped him repeatedly, and screamed, 'You clumsy brat! I ought to kill you now and get it over with!' Sure enough, that night, while Sam was sleeping, Sofia helped them make their escape.¹⁶

Most everyone will agree, I think, 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.

However, readers will not be surprised to hear that once again, I do not see this as an instance of determinism, let alone an example that approxi-

14. *Ibid.*, 88.

15. Cowan and Welty, "Pharaoh's Magicians Redivivus," 161.

16. *Ibid.*

mates theological determinism. Manny does not determine Sam's action, though he does "push his buttons" to get the reaction he wanted in a given situation, not unlike many of us know how to "push the buttons" of people we know fairly well.

Indeed, the plausibility of this example is largely due, I suspect, to the fact that most readers will think of Sam as someone who has 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. Since he already has an evil character by his own choosing, and Manny in no way caused or determined him to have that character, we judge that Manny is in no way to blame for making the best of a bad situation (one he did not in any way determine or cause) by triggering Sam's abusive behavior in order to save both Vic and himself.

But this way of thinking about the story totally isolates it from its larger context if theological determinism is true. To approximate theological determinism more accurately, suppose that Manny had covertly molded Sam (by employing various agents) to form his violent criminal character, and moreover, had orchestrated things so Sam and Sofia would take him and Vic hostage. Then to bring things to a dramatic climax, he triggers Sam's abusive outburst to accomplish their narrow escape. And later, he determines things so Sam is captured, convicted and condemned to spend the rest of his miserable days in prison.

If this were the larger story, would we see it as a compelling counterexample to (EMP) that shows it is "clearly false" and cannot be used to show that theological determinism cannot be true in our world if God is perfectly good and loving? To the contrary, I think it is obvious that their example loses whatever intuitive appeal it has if the larger context of theological determinism is kept squarely in view.

Compatibilism and Appalling Moral Evil

This brings us to the problem of evil, particularly moral evil, and my argument that such evil is far more difficult to account for on compatibilist assumptions than libertarian ones. My argument was a revised version of one I had previously directed at Alvin Plantinga, a key premise of which was the following:

- (2) In all possible worlds in which persons are not free or are only free in the compatibilist sense, God could properly eliminate all moral evil.¹⁷

17. Walls, "Why No Classical Theist," 90. This argument was originally published in my article, "Why Plantinga Must Move from Defense to Theodicy," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51 (1991): 375–8. Numbers of premises are the same as in the original article.

Plantinga challenged this premise by suggesting that even in worlds without libertarian freedom, it might be the case that creatures could not properly appreciate the value of good without experiencing evil. So for the sake of their gaining that sort of knowledge, God might determine a certain amount of moral evil even in worlds without libertarian freedom. However, when it comes to the appalling evils that afflict the actual world, Plantinga agreed that the only reasons he could think of to account for those involve libertarian creaturely freedom. But even with this concession, he still made the skeptical theist move and argued that God could have other reasons he could not imagine.

In my revised version of the argument, I accordingly restated the premise above as follows.

- (7) In all possible worlds in which persons are not free or are free only in the compatibilist sense, God could properly eliminate all moral evil except that evil necessary for creatures properly to appreciate good (or similar purposes).¹⁸

Cowan and Welty attack this revised argument, focusing particularly on the following premise.

- (9) Our world contains much appalling moral evil that could not plausibly be thought necessary for creatures properly to appreciate good (or similar purposes).

In their view, my argument is severely undermined since I do not specify those “similar purposes.” In response, I emphasize that I added that parenthetical phrase because of Plantinga’s appeal to possible other reasons God may have that we simply cannot see. I myself am altogether dubious about this strategy, and 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.

In any case, I do not brook any fond illusions that committed compatibilists who employ the skeptical theist gambit can be decisively refuted, as I acknowledged in my original paper.¹⁹ However, for those who are still undecided, it is worth pressing the question of whether skeptical theism has any limits, and if so, where those limits lie. Consider the following proposition.

- (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,

18. Walls, “Why No Classical Theist,” 90.

19. *Ibid.*, 91.

reasons that would be entirely inscrutable to our limited perspective and understanding.

It seems clear to me that God could not possibly have such reasons, but I will not presume to guess what Cowan and Welty and their fellow committed compatibilists would make of this scenario. In any case, while it is always possible in principle to reply with skepticism, it seems clear that there are wildly implausible consequences for those who place no limits whatsoever on this maneuver. By contrast, for those inclined to agree that skeptical theism has its limits, I think those very limits should lead us to conclude that at least much of the appalling moral evil we witness in our world can only be rationally accounted for on libertarian terms.

“Restricted Free Will” and the True Value of Freedom

This brings me to a crucial issue in Cowan and Welty’s critique. They mount an argument to demonstrate that God could eliminate all moral evil in a world with libertarian freedom, and they aim thereby to show that the problems facing compatibilism are no greater than those faced by libertarians. One of the fundamental principles of my article that I argued poses serious problems for compatibilism was what I called the compatibilist implication.

(CI) If freedom and determinism are compatible, God could have created a world in which all persons freely did only the good at all times.²⁰

Cowan and Welty offer a “parity argument” that they think shows that a similar principle can be generated that poses equivalent problems for libertarians.

The key to these claims is their defense of “restricted free will.” They point out that we are wired in such a way that certain thoughts that would otherwise be thinkable by us are not in fact thinkable, perhaps because they are simply too complex or too large for us to grasp. Now in light of this, they spell out the second premise of their argument.

(2) Therefore it is plausible to think that it was open to an omnipotent God to hardwire us in *other* ways, so that other kinds of thoughts wouldn’t occur to us as well: thoughts of evil actions.²¹

Cowan and Welty go on to contend that if God were to so wire us, there would be no moral evil, but that we could still satisfy both the source and leeway conditions on libertarian freedom. We could be the ultimate source of our free actions and also have the ability to other than we do in such choices. Indeed, they even insist that we could freely enter into loving relationships

20. *Ibid.*, 82.

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

with God. The only thing missing, they insist, is that we would lack the ability to think thoughts of evil actions.

Given all this, Cowan and Welty propose their alternatives to my (9) and (CI). The latter they call the “Incompatibilist Implication.”

(9') Our world contains much appalling moral evil the possibility of which could not plausibly be thought necessary for the great value of libertarian free will.

(II) If restricted free will is possible, God could have created a world in which all persons freely did the good at all times.²²

If we dispute this, or question the value of such “restricted” freedom, Pharaoh’s magicians insist that “the value of free will must be, *specifically*, the opportunity it gives us *to do moral evil*. That is what its value consists in.”²³

Here I think Cowan and Welty are not only wrong about the very nature of moral freedom, but they also misrepresent the true values that are at stake. It is not at all clear how, given the sort of restricted freedom they describe, we could freely enter into loving relationships either with God or with each other.

It is one thing to say we cannot think certain thoughts because they are too “big” or too complicated for our minds to grasp, but to “wire” us so that we could not think of evil actions is another matter altogether. While the former is simply an entailment of our finitude, in particular our limited mental capabilities, the latter is a restriction imposed on thoughts that are well within the reach of our normally functioning capacities. But the more crucial point is that such a limit undercuts any substantive account of moral freedom. Indeed, the capacity not only of *conceiving* of evil actions, but also of *performing* them is built into the very nature of God’s relationship to us when he invites us to freely love him, trust him, and obey him. Going all the way back to Eden, the call to obey God requires us to trust that he wants what is good for us, and that eating the forbidden fruit will not in fact lead to our true flourishing and happiness. To understand the command to obey is to understand the possibility of disobedience. 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.²⁴

It is apparent from this that the Magicians’ sleight of hand and misdirection subtly, but profoundly, misrepresents the goods that are really at stake in libertarian freedom. What is at stake are the goods of love, trust, obedience, and worship that we can give to God (and others) without being determined

22. *Ibid.*, 167.

23. *Ibid.*

24. This does not entail that we shall be tempted by evil, or be able to perform evil actions in heaven, however. See Kevin Timpe, *Free Will in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 83–101.

by God Himself to do so. Joshua Rasmussen has recently argued that just these sorts of goods are what are at stake in the freedom to do evil.

Thus, to permit the desired love from His creatures, God must not make His creatures love him, which in turn implies that God cannot simply make His creatures essentially morally perfect; they must be morally free if God and His creatures are to enjoy unforced love. Therefore, moral freedom has this value: it allows there to be a situation in which a being, such as God, is the object of loving acts without causally determining those very acts.²⁵

In short then, the freedom to do evil is *not* the value that is at stake. Rather, it is merely entailed in the leeway condition of the freedom to offer God undetermined love, worship and obedience. So I do not find Cowan and Welty's (2) at all plausible, and accordingly, their analogues to my (9) and (CI) are also undermined. The efforts of Pharaoh's magicians to imitate libertarian freedom fall flat.

Damnation and God's Many Purposes

Now we come to the matter of eternal damnation, which I consider the decisive breaking point in the contest between libertarian freedom and compatibilist magicians. There is no morally credible way to make sense of this traditional Christian doctrine if theological determinism is true and God is perfectly loving and good. In my original article, I offer an argument that compatibilism leads to universal salvation if God truly loves all persons. Cowan and Welty focus their attack on this premise of my argument.

(12) If God truly loves all persons, then he does all he can properly do to secure their true flourishing.

This premise had a footnote that explains what I meant by the important qualifier, "properly," which they quote, adding their own emphasis to "not."

The "properly" is needed in case one faced a situation where one could promote the flourishing of a person P only by harming person Q, or diminishing her flourishing, or by losing some good of equal or greater value. In that case, one might love P but *not* promote her flourishing as much as one could. While this sort of limitation might hold for those with limited means or creativity, I doubt that it applies to God, at least in the long run.²⁶

25. Joshua Rasmussen, "On the Value of Freedom to Do Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 30 (2013): 426. See also Kevin Timpe, *Free Will in Philosophical Theology*, 103–18. For a defense of this point from a biblical and theological perspective, see John C. Peckham, *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 89–115; 257–63; 274–7.

26. Cowan and Welty, "Pharaoh's Magicians Redivivus," 168–9.

Cowan and Welty think there may indeed be reasons why God does not promote the flourishing of all persons. God “has *purposes*, and it is implausible in the extreme to think that God’s *only* purpose is to ‘secure the true flourishing’ of human beings.”²⁷ In view of this, they think my premise (19) is undercut.

(19) If freedom and determinism are compatible, then God can properly secure a right relationship with all persons by determining all freely to accept his love and be saved.

Now in response to this, 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. The question, however, is whether God has purposes that are incompatible with doing all he can to promote the true flourishing of all persons. 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.

Cowan and Welty propose one purpose that they think may be incompatible with God’s properly securing the flourishing of all persons, namely, the purpose of displaying his justice in the punishment of sin, including punishment in hell. They complain in this connection that God’s justice gets short shrift on my view. “Why do libertarians get a necessary connection between divine love and divine action, but compatibilists don’t get *any* necessary connection between divine justice and divine action? Walls is disturbed by the idea that ‘God must display his justice,’ but he wholly accepts the idea that God must display his love.”²⁸

This is a fair question, and here is my answer. I hardly meant to deny any necessary connection between divine justice and divine action. Indeed, I believe God is necessarily just in his actions, just as he is necessarily loving, and indeed, I think his justice is an aspect of his necessarily loving nature. What I specifically was challenging was 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*. 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. To insist that justice must be displayed in the form of wrath and punishment entails that evil must exist for God’s justice to be displayed. This has the dubious implication that God needs evil fully to display his glory.

Even more disturbing is the claim that God’s justice either *must* be displayed in the form of eternal damnation for him fully to be glorified, or that

27. *Ibid.*, 169.

28. *Ibid.*, 171.

he would sovereignly *prefer* that option. Here is how I put the point in my earlier article, and this is a question to which I would like to hear a forthright answer from Cowan and Welty.

But even if it is granted that God needs evil fully to glorify himself (which I do not grant), the question still remains why he must 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 worshiping him.²⁹

It is all the more puzzling given compatibilism, why God would or could not save everyone if one assumes the penal substitutionary view of the atonement, a theory which is popular among Calvinists. The question is why anyone needs to go to hell forever to display the justice of God if Christ bore the wrath of God on the cross that sinners deserved. Could not God have chosen for Christ to atone for the sins of all persons, and then determined all to receive his irresistible grace?

Recently, Oliver Crisp has answered this argument and has proposed reasons for why God may prefer a world in which some are damned over a world in which all are saved. In particular, Crisp suggests that damnation displays a form of justice that is not displayed in the atonement, namely, the right connection between sin and punishment. “Were Christ to be the only human person upon whom divine justice was visited, as a vicarious substitute for sinners (as per Augustinian universalism), this would not have the right connection to desert because Christ does not deserve to be punished—he acts vicariously (and sinlessly) on behalf of sinful human beings deserving punishment.”³⁰ Indeed, Crisp has suggested that perhaps only one person needs to be damned on this scenario, and it may not even be a human being. Maybe one recalcitrant demon would be enough to put God’s wrath on display for all eternity.³¹

It is important to emphasize that Crisp advances a relatively modest claim in behalf of his suggestion when he writes that “God has good reason to create a particularist world, and thus no obligation to create an Augustinian universalist world instead.”³² By putting the issue in terms of divine obligations, Crisp makes it a little easier to lend plausibility to his claim.

But if Cowan and Welty want to avail themselves of Crisp’s suggestion, I remind readers that the claim I advanced is that eternal damnation in a compatibilist world is inconsistent with God’s *perfect love and goodness*.

29. Walls, “Why No Classical Theist,” 100.

30. Oliver Crisp, “Is Universalism a Problem for Particularists?,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63 (2010): 22.

31. Oliver Crisp, “Augustinian Universalism,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 53 (2003): 132.

32. Crisp, “Is Universalism a Problem for Particularists?,” 23.

And indeed, Crisp's scenario is in my judgment utterly inconsistent with a God of perfect love. The notion that God would determine even one hapless person (even demon) to sin, and then damn him with eternal punishment to display his justice is to me clearly impossible. (Moreover, it is hard not to see such an unfortunate figure as playing some sort of a coredeemer role, a shadowy penal substitute who bore God's wrath as a "deserving" sinner, thereby, along with Christ, sparing other deserving sinners that terrible fate.)

Of course, modal judgments of moral impossibility (like many other modal judgments) are often controversial, and I can hardly claim to show my judgments here are true. Skeptical compatibilists under the spell of Pharaoh's magicians will surely judge otherwise, and will insist that perhaps there are other possible reasons as well God may have for determining persons to eternal damnation that none of us can even conceive, let alone articulate. Again, I suggest that the deepest differences I have with Calvinists pertain to fundamentally different moral intuitions about what is compatible with perfect love and goodness.

Now Cowan and Welty also propose a very different reason why (19) might be false, and God might not be able to determine all persons freely to accept his love and be saved. Citing a passage from David Lewis, they suggest that perhaps saving everyone might be a mathematical impossibility.

Surely the exercise of compatibilist freedom by billions of human agents couldn't occur in a vacuum, but rather needs an environment stable enough to ensure the intelligibility of deliberation, guidance control, reasons-responsiveness, and so forth. The requisite stability would impose constraints of some sort.³³

I must say, I found this a rather surprising line of argument to be advanced by philosophers who subscribe to a Calvinist view of sovereignty, including a deterministic view of human agency. I do not see how the sort of considerations they cite here could be obstacles to God's securing the salvation of all persons by determining all freely to accept his irresistible grace, and in fact I think I see that they could not be. Are they suggesting God does not have sufficient control of all the relevant variables, or that it might be too complicated an operation for him to secure the "free" assent of all persons to his grace? Now if persons are free in the libertarian sense, there are important variables God does not fully control, but there are no such variables in a world fully determined by a God who is both omnipotent and omniscient.

33. Cowan and Welty, "Pharaoh's Magicians Redivivus," 172.

So Why Are Some Lost?

Cowan and Welty rightly press the question of whether I believe God does all he properly can to avoid the eternal ruin of the damned. Not surprisingly, they think my view runs into difficulties here.

Surely God didn't *have* to create. So God must have made a value judgment: creating a world in which people end up in hell is 'worth it' either because of the value of free will, or the value of loving relationships, or the value of heaven for those who end up being there, etc. But if so, then we have a straightforward falsification of (12), for God *did not* do all he could do to avoid the reality of people ending up in hell.³⁴

Indeed, God did not have to create and in doing so he clearly thought it was "worth it." So if my view entails that God did not do all he could have done to prevent the damnation of the lost simply because he did not refrain from creating at all, I plead guilty. However, I do not believe God has any obligations of love for merely possible people who are never actualized; rather, he has such obligations only for actual persons. And for all of these I do believe God does all he can to secure their true flourishing.

But the question can fairly be pressed, why does God create the persons he knows will be damned (assuming a traditional view of exhaustive foreknowledge)? Why not only create the ones whose free acceptance of his love can be secured? These are hard questions, and I readily admit that I struggled with them when I wrote my book on hell several years ago.³⁵

My answer, in brief, is this. Given that God does not control the counterfactuals of freedom, perhaps there are no actualizable worlds in which he can save all free persons. Indeed, if part of our freedom includes the freedom to choose whom to marry, and with whom to procreate, perhaps we play a significant role in determining which persons will be born, and thus which persons God can actualize. In that case, 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.

Now it is important to emphasize that on my view, the damned are persons who would be damned in every actualizable world in which they exist. All such persons receive what I call "optimal grace" and are given every opportunity to repent. Of course, there are possible worlds in which these persons are saved, but none of them are worlds that are actualizable.

Cowan and Welty think it poses problems for my view of optimal grace that I have to "go eschatological" to account for how God does all he proper-

34. *Ibid.*, 171.

35. Jerry Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*, (Notre Dame, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 100-5.

ly can to secure the flourishing of all persons since obviously, many persons do not hear the gospel at all in this life, let alone have an optimal chance to receive it. They suggest that the notion of postmortem grace may “trivialize the good of a lifetime of Christian service and worship.”³⁶

Quite to the contrary, I think my view underscores both the significance of our freedom, as well as its limits. The opportunity to share with God in the ministry of reconciliation and to advance his purposes is a wonderful privilege. When we are obedient, others are blessed (as well as ourselves) and when we fail live up to our calling others suffer by losing out on blessings they otherwise would have enjoyed. So optimal grace hardly means everybody enjoys equal opportunities and blessings in the short run. Indeed, it is precisely because they obviously do not that optimal grace requires post-mortem salvation.

In other words, our freedom plays a big role in deciding when people may hear the gospel, and how soon they may come to embrace or reject it. Our obedience can help usher people into the kingdom sooner rather than later, and our disobedience can delay and complicate the conversion of others. But our failures and disobedience can never be a decisive factor that leads to the damnation of others, who would have believed if given a more optimal chance to do so.

Optimal grace means that God can ask the damned, “what more could I have done for you than I have done?” (cf. Isa. 5:4) and no answer can be given.

The damned, then, should not be thought of as persons who comprise what is sometimes called “the sacrifices of war” in those terrible situations where a military commander knows he will unfortunately lose some men. These men would prefer to live, and would certainly choose to live if they could while achieving their military goals, but given the tragic situation, they cannot. The damned, however, have completely chosen their fate. “So if they are ‘sacrifices,’ they are sacrifices of an unusual sort. They willingly and persistently choose their role.”³⁷

So should God refrain from creating because any actualizable world with free creatures includes some who will persist in rejecting grace and be damned? I am reminded of the exchange in C. S. Lewis’s *The Great Divorce* after one of the characters from the grey town (hell) chooses to go back rather than repent of his sins so he can remain in heaven. The question is raised whether this should undermine the happiness of those in heaven. George MacDonald responds to the narrator by pointing out that while this sounds merciful, something more troubling lies behind it.

The demand of the loveless and the self-imprisoned that they should be allowed to blackmail the universe: that till they consent to be happy

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

37. Walls, *Hell*, 102.

(on their own terms) no one else shall taste joy; that theirs should be the final power; that Hell should be able to *veto* Heaven.³⁸

In choosing to create, God refused, as it were, to let hell veto heaven.

I conclude then, by noting once again, that the difference between the two views hinges crucially on profoundly different value judgments and assessments of what is entailed by perfect love and goodness. If persons freely choose hell even though they are given every chance to accept God's love, and this is the leeway condition of the freedom that is necessary for the goods of heaven, a God of perfect love could actualize such a world. However, a God of perfect love could not determine persons to choose evil and then damn them forever to display his "justice."

Here is a fundamental parting of the ways. And in my judgment, the efforts of Jannes and Jambres to restrict freedom, clever though they are, once again fall harmlessly to the ground.³⁹

38. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 135.

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