

Ad Walls

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Professor Walls asks whether "Plantinga must be committed to libertarian freedom, given his view of God's goodness."¹ Here 'libertarian freedom' has approximately the following meaning: a person has libertarian freedom with respect to a given action if and only if he is free with respect to that action, and furthermore it is not possible both that he is free with respect to that action and that all of his actions are determined. (To assert that someone has libertarian freedom with respect to some action, therefore, is to deny compatibilism.) And the question at issue is not whether Walls presents a good argument for the conclusion that human beings have libertarian freedom, but whether I am committed to the view that they do. More exactly, the question is whether my view that God is essentially or necessarily good, together with what I have said about the free will defense, commits me to the view that human beings have libertarian freedom.

Walls proposes an argument for the conclusion that I *am* so committed; a central premise of his argument is

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

(Here 'properly eliminate' is as in Walls' paper; and moral evil is evil due to the free activity of significantly free creatures.) But if the conclusion of Walls' argument is that I am committed to human beings having libertarian freedom, then what his argument really seems to require is not just the *truth* of (2) but the proposition that *I am committed to* (2).

There is an initial difficulty here: I am inclined to think the notion of moral evil implies the notion of libertarian freedom; that is, it is necessary, I think, that anyone who commits moral evil, has or has had libertarian freedom with respect to at least one action. If that is so, then (2) is vacuously

¹ Jerry L. Walls, "Why Plantinga Must Move from Defense to Theodicy," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51 (June, 1991), p. 375.

true: there *aren't* any possible worlds in which persons are not free or are free only in the compatibilist sense, and in which there is moral evil. For purposes of argument, however, suppose we ignore this caveat and consider it possible that there be moral evil even if there is no (creaturely) libertarian freedom.

Now I have never, so far as I know, affirmed (2)—for the reason that I am not at all sure it is true. But then how could it be that I am committed to it? Under what conditions is someone who has never affirmed a given proposition, nevertheless *committed* to it? This is a question of considerable interest and great delicacy.² It isn't enough, of course, that (2) be true, or even necessarily true. Realism with respect to universals is (I believe) necessarily true; it doesn't follow that nominalists are committed to realism about universals. (And if I am wrong and it is nominalism that is necessarily true, it doesn't follow that realists are committed to nominalism.) Still, it is clear that you *can* be committed to a proposition to which you have never assented. Suppose, for example, I propose the theory that there are two uniquely tallest men. You point out that according to my theory, there is more than one uniquely tallest man; I demur, replying that on my theory, it is not true that two is greater than one. What I have said nonetheless commits me, I think, to the proposition that there is more than one uniquely tallest human being.

So you can be committed to a proposition *p* even if you never assert it; and you can be committed to a proposition *q* that follows from what you explicitly say only with the help of another premiss *r*, even if you do not assert *r* and indeed reject it. Perhaps it is sufficient that *r* be utterly obvious to every normal human being, in the way in which it is utterly obvious to every normal human being that two is greater than one.

But of course Walls' (2) is not like that: it isn't utterly obvious to any normal human being who thinks about it. At least it isn't utterly obvious to me. For all I can see, (2) might be true; but also, for all I can see, it might be false. According to (2) it is necessarily true that if human beings do not have libertarian freedom, then God could properly eliminate every case of moral evil; so necessarily, if God is necessarily good and human beings do not have libertarian freedom, there is no moral evil. Equivalently, the claim is that there is no possible world a good God would actualize in which there is moral evil but no libertarian freedom. (So if God is necessarily good, it follows that there are no possible worlds at all in which there is moral evil but no libertarian freedom.) But is this really obvious? Maybe a certain amount of evil is necessary to every really good possible world. Perhaps among the

² See my "Two Concepts of Modality: Modal Realism and Modal Reductionism" in *Philosophical Perspectives, I, Metaphysics, 1987*, ed. by James Tomberlin (Atascadero, California: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1987), pp. 221 ff.

really good possible worlds, there are some in which there is no creaturely freedom, but there are creatures capable of knowledge. Perhaps it is a good thing that those creatures be able to appreciate the great value of the world in question; but perhaps they couldn't appreciate its great value unless there were some evil with respect to which to contrast that value; and perhaps that evil could be of several kinds, including evil due to the free (in the compatibilist sense) activity of creatures. If all this is so, and for all I know, it *is* so, then (2) would be false.

Accordingly, I am not committed to (2). Furthermore, in arguing that the existence of a wholly good, omniscient and omnipotent God is compatible with evil *simpliciter*, I am not committed to our actually having libertarian freedom, although, of course, I do believe that we do.

When it comes to some of the terrible evils that in fact disfigure our world, however, things are different. It might be plausible to hold that *some* evil is necessary for creatures properly to appreciate good; it isn't plausible, however, to think that the appalling evils we do in fact find are necessary for us to appreciate the world's good, and it isn't clear that those evils wouldn't in any event be too heavy a price to pay for the value involved in creatures' being able to appreciate that good. Perhaps *some* evil is organically required by some great goods; but it is certainly hard to see what goods might organically require some of the horrifying evils the world in fact displays. With respect to those appalling evils, therefore, I am inclined to agree with Walls (more exactly, I think it likely that the analogues of (2) involving reference to those horrifying evils are true). The only reasons God could have for *those* evils, one is inclined to think, must involve creaturely freedom of one sort or another.

To put this in terms of the free will defense: the free will defender argues that

- (1) God is omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good

is compatible with the existence of evil (where, following the tradition, we think of evil as including pain and suffering). He does this by finding some proposition *r* that is compatible with (1) and together with (1) entails that there is evil. Where the effort is just to argue that (1) is compatible with the existence of evil *simpliciter* (nevermind how much or of what kinds) then it seems to me that a large variety of *r*'s can plausibly play this role. But the free will defender may also try to rebut the claim that the *quantity* of evil (however one tries to specify it) the world displays is inconsistent with (1), by arguing that the quantity of evil we find is in fact consistent with (1). And he may also try to argue for the consistency of (1) with a proposition specifying that there is some special *kind* of evil: natural evil, for example,

or suffering on the part of children, or the sort of evil involved in particularly vicious examples of human cruelty. And with respect to some of the evils of this kind, the only plausible *r*'s I can think of involve creaturely freedom. Some of the evils the world displays are such that I can't see how God could have any reason for permitting them, that did not involve the sort of goods that depend upon there being libertarian creaturely freedom. And if in fact you *asserted* both that (1) is compatible with the existence of these evils, *and* that the only propositions that can plausibly play the role of *r* with respect to these evils involve libertarian creaturely freedom, then perhaps you would be committed to libertarian creaturely freedom.

As for me, however, I'm only *inclined* to think that the only plausible *r*'s involve libertarian creaturely freedom. I can't see any other kind of reason God could have for permitting some of the appalling evils we do in fact find; but there is a big difference between failing to see that something is possible and seeing that it is impossible. So even here I resist being committed to the relevant versions of (2), and (*qua* free will defender) to libertarian creaturely freedom.