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Jerry L. Walls, HELL: THE LOGIC OF DAMNATION

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body. Such a view makes a relation logically prior to the terms which it relates: the terms of the relation derive their being from standing in the relation. This view gets things backwards. It is intuitively plausible to view a relation as dependent for its obtaining on its ontologically independent terms. Hence, for a soul to exist in relation to its body, each one's existence must be independent of the relation in which it stands to the other.

Braine will respond that viewing the human being as a substantial soul in relation to a substantial body destroys the unity of the human being. To preserve this unity, there must be no question of a substantial soul being incarnated or re-incarnated with a separately originating body. In defending this view, however, he is simply at odds with what the ordinary human being can conceive. For the very reasons he so ably sets forth (e.g., the simplicity of the 'I', the phenomenology of perception), the ordinary person is able to conceive of incarnation and re-incarnation. And this indicates that the ordinary person does not think of himself as unified with his body in the way that Braine asserts. This is important, because in reading a book such as Braine's, one often comes away with the impression that dualism is the invention of a philosopher such as Descartes. But it isn't. Descartes philosophized about dualism; he did not invent it. Where Descartes' view conflicts with the ordinary person's view of the human being is not with regard to the soul's existence but with respect to its spatiality. When the ordinary person thinks of the soul, he thinks of it as an ethereal or ghostly entity with a shape like that of a human body. This lends support to Braine's position that the ordinary person thinks of himself as a bodily being. Descartes argued that the soul cannot be in space because anything which is in space is extended and, thereby, divisible into parts. Perhaps, what is needed is a serious reconsideration of whether or not a substantial soul could both be a bodily being in space and indivisible. This would involve the soul being a body in a different sense than its being a physical body, but perhaps such a concept should not be too readily dismissed.

In conclusion, while Braine's holistic view of the human being is not without its problems, there is much in *The Human Person* from which one can learn. It is a book well worth reading.

Hell: The Logic of Damnation, by **Jerry L. Walls**. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992. Pp. 182. \$26.95 (cloth).

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As he expresses it himself, Jerry Walls' purpose in writing his book "is to show that some recognizably traditional views of hell are compatible with both the divine nature and human nature" (p. 14). He defends a two-fold thesis: first that, for all we know, God had good reasons to create persons

with libertarian free will, and second that, for all we know, some of these persons will freely make a decisive decision for evil and thus against God. The book is honest, clearly written, and in general free from partisan polemics. It might serve very well as a text for an undergraduate or seminary course dealing with the topic of hell.

Walls divides his book into an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion. In his introduction, he distinguishes between several possible views, ranging from *the traditional popular view*, as he calls it, to *the convinced universalist view*; he also suggests that “hell [in the sense of everlasting separation from God] cannot be easily extricated from other theistic beliefs” (p. 7) or from a fully Christian understanding of salvation (pp. 6-7). He then launches into a wide-ranging discussion. In “Hell and Human Belief,” he asks whether the origin of the belief in hell “has any bearing on whether or not the doctrine is true” (p. 17); and he concludes that the historical origin of this belief could, but in fact does not, have such a bearing. Three chapters follow in which he discusses hell in relation to some of the divine attributes: In “Hell and Divine Knowledge,” he tries to illustrate the point that “one’s views on hell cannot be isolated from one’s views on foreknowledge” (p. 55); in “Hell and Divine Power,” he criticizes both Calvinism and universalism, arguing that they “share an important similarity in that both assume God can save anyone he will” (p. 80); and in “Hell and Divine Goodness,” he argues that “hell is compatible with God’s perfect goodness,” provided that God “is willing to do whatever he can, short of overriding freedom, to give happiness to all” (pp. 110-111). The centerpiece of his defense, however, is a chapter entitled “Hell and Human Freedom,” where he argues for the possibility of “a decisive choice of evil” (p. 117ff) and criticizes my own view that the very idea of such a choice is deeply incoherent. That is followed by a final chapter, “Hell and Human Misery,” in which he explores the nature of the suffering in hell. He then concludes his discussion with this observation: When properly understood, the doctrine of hell “has positive moral value,” he says, because it “underwrites in a way which perhaps nothing else can the claim that we are accountable for our actions and cannot escape responsibility for them” (p. 157).

Now as I have said, Walls’ main purpose is to articulate and defend a “recognizably traditional” conception of hell. But I doubt that his own conception would fit such a description. For according to the tradition, hell has two crucial features: (a) It is a place of terrifying punishment for sin, and (b) the punishment will literally last forever. So if one believes, as I do, that the idea of everlasting *punishment* is riddled with confusion and incoherence,¹ one must, at the very least, revise the tradition in one of two ways: One might deny that hell is literally a place of punishment, or, if one continues to think of it as a place of punishment, one might deny that the punishment will literally last forever. Whereas many universalists opt for the second

alternative, Walls *apparently* opts for the first. For he insists, in the first place, that “the misery of hell is not so much a penalty imposed by God to make the sinner pay for his sin, as it is the necessary outcome of living a sinful life” (p. 150); and he insists, secondly, that those in hell will choose to remain there of their own free will. Indeed, omnipotent love can do nothing, short of removing their freedom, to change their minds. But why, one might ask, would anyone freely choose to remain in hell forever? Because, Walls in effect replies, from the perspective of the damned hell is really not that bad a place to be; as Walls sees it, “hell may afford its inhabitants a kind of gratification which motivates the choice to go there” (p. 128). More than that, the damned will even have a kind of illusory happiness.

Those in hell may be almost happy, and this may explain why they insist on staying there. They do not, of course, experience even a shred of genuine happiness. But perhaps they experience a certain perverse sense of satisfaction, a distorted sort of pleasure (p. 126).

Though Walls here denies that the damned are *genuinely* happy, he does not deny that they *believe* themselves to be happy; to the contrary, he insists that, for some lost souls, the illusion of happiness may endure forever and with sufficient conviction to explain why they never leave their preferred abode in hell.

Those who prefer hell to heaven have convinced themselves that it is better. In their desire to justify their choice of evil, they have persuaded themselves that whatever satisfaction they experience from evil is superior to the joy which God offers (p. 129).

This line of thought leads naturally, I would suggest, to the following conclusion: Because God knows that he can do nothing, short of removing their freedom, to induce the damned to repent, he simply employs his omnipotent power to make them as comfortable as possible and to prevent them from harming others. Walls does not, it is true, explicitly embrace this idea, and he may even distance himself from it—somewhat inconsistently—in his chapter on the misery of hell. But in any event, his own conception seems far removed from the New Testament picture of a “furnace of fire” in which people will “weep and gnash their teeth” (Matt. 13:42) and pray for the mountains to fall upon them (Rev. 6:16). It also seems far removed from Jesus’ understanding of the *nature* of hell. In the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31-46), for example, Jesus alludes to a form of *punishment* that is neither freely chosen nor expected; and in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:16-31), the rich man wants to warn his five brothers “lest they also come into this place of torment” (16:28). As depicted in the New Testament, in other words, hell is not the kind of place that even the wicked would freely choose to inhabit forever. For it really is a place of unbearable suffering and torment.

We can appreciate, of course, why Walls might want to water down the New Testament picture of hell as a place of unbearable suffering; an eternity of such suffering would be, after all, utterly pointless, and a god who would actually inflict such suffering would be unspeakably barbaric. It seems to me, however, that a universalist such as John Hick, who regards hell as a continuation of the purgatorial sufferings of this life, is in the end more faithful to the New Testament picture than Walls is. For a universalist can regard hell as a genuine form of punishment or correction, rather than a freely embraced condition; hence, a universalist has no need to water down the New Testament image of unbearable suffering. Perhaps a period of such suffering is just what a Hitler or a Goebbels needs; and for that matter, perhaps it is just what they endured during the final days of their earthly life. But though the New Testament picture *clearly* includes unbearable suffering, it arguably does not include *unending* suffering at all. For in the New Testament, the Greek adjective, “ἄϊώνιος,” which our English Bibles translate as “eternal” or “everlasting,” probably signifies divine causality rather than unending temporal duration.²

Be all of that as it may, Walls’ own conception is that hell is a freely embraced condition and one which, for all we know, some may continue to embrace forever. Essential to such a conception is this idea: God neither keeps the damned in hell against their will nor undermines completely their freedom to want to stay there. Walls thus rejects my own view that in the universe as God has actually created it no illusion can endure forever. He writes:

Now I am inclined to agree with Talbott that universalism follows if we grant his claim that no illusion can endure forever. But if he is correct in his account of why this is so, then it is apparent that God forces some persons to give up their sinful illusions. For if God causes those persons who continue to rebel against him to grow ever more miserable and tormented, then it seems that God is imposing on those persons the clear knowledge that he is the source of happiness, and sin the cause of misery. . . . So in the end, the knowledge which makes impossible the choice of damnation is not acquired through free choice, but is itself impossible to avoid (p. 132).

Against the idea that God must finally achieve a complete victory over sin, Walls thus reasons as follows: For the sake of sustaining human freedom throughout eternity, God severely limits the misery of hell and makes sure that he never provides the damned with too clear a revelation of himself.

At this point, however, I begin to suspect a problem of incoherence. I have no objection to Wall’s claim that, on my view, “God forces some persons to give up their sinful illusions,” for that is an accurate description of my view. As I see it, God does this all the time. A man who, upon entering into an adulterous affair, makes a total mess of his life may in time learn a hard lesson, one that he in no way *chose* to learn; and having learned his lesson,

he may be utterly unwilling to repeat the experiment. And similarly for St. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus: As I read the account in *Acts*, Paul in no way *chose* to have his illusions shattered; and neither did he choose to receive a revelation that would in a very brief time transform this "chief of sinners" into a Christian missionary. But here I would ask: Are not ignorance, deception, and illusion—which God sometimes does remove against our will—also obstacles to free choice of the relevant kind? If I am ignorant of, or deceived about, the true consequences of my choices, then I am in no position to embrace those consequences freely; and similarly, if I suffer from an illusion that conceals from me the true nature of God, or the true import of union with God, then I am again in no position to reject God freely. I may reject a caricature of God, or a false conception, but I would be in no position to reject the true God himself. Nor does it help to say, as Walls does, that the illusions of the damned are "self-inflicted" (p. 129). For insofar as we can make sense of self-deception at all, it seems to be a protective device that itself arises only in contexts of ambiguity, ignorance, and confusion; and besides, a self-inflicted deception is no less an obstacle to free choice than a self-inflicted addiction to alcohol or cocaine. When God shatters our illusions and forces us to see the truth, therefore, he precisely removes an obstacle to the very freedom Walls claims we have: the freedom to reject not merely a faulty conception of God, but the true God himself.

But in fact there can be no freedom to reject God forever; the very idea of such a freedom is incoherent. And the irony is that the above quotation, though intended as a criticism, merely repeats part of my own argument for this very conclusion. If God should shatter all of my illusions, correct all of my misconceptions, and provide me with a clear vision of what union with him entails, he would thereby remove every conceivable motive I might have to reject him and also provide me with the strongest conceivable motive to unite with him. In the face of such a clear vision, I would be incapable, Walls concedes, of rejecting God *freely*. But that is only half the argument; the other half, which Walls ignores, is the argument of the previous paragraph. Accordingly, we might put the full argument in the form of a dilemma. Either I am fully informed concerning who God is and the consequences of rejecting him, or I am not. If I am not fully informed, then (as we saw in the previous paragraph) I am in no position to reject the true God at all; and if I am fully informed, then (as Walls himself concedes) I am incapable of rejecting God *freely*. So in neither case am I free to reject the true God. And neither, according to Paul, do any of us choose our own destiny, which "depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16). The importance of freedom, I would therefore suggest, lies elsewhere, namely in this: Free choice—not choosing rightly as opposed to wrongly, but the reality of free choice itself—is an essential part of the process whereby God reveals

his true nature to us and teaches us the (occasionally hard) lessons we need to learn as we travel the road to redemption.

For these reasons (and others), I find Wall's conception of hell un compelling. But I am pleased to recommend his book nonetheless. For it is a thoughtful discussion of a difficult topic, a valuable review of some important arguments, and a genuine source of insight.

NOTES

1. I have set forth my reasons for believing this in "Punishment, Forgiveness, and Divine Justice," *Religious Studies*, vol. 29 (June, 1993), pp. 151-68.

2. I defend this claim in an unpublished paper, "Three Pictures of God in Western Theology," *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 12 (1995), pp. 77-94.

Speaking of A Personal God: An Essay in Philosophical Theology, by **Vincent Brummer**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Pp. ix and 160. \$44.95 (Cloth), \$14.95 (Paper).

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The main thesis of Vincent Brummer's book is that philosophical theology has an essential contribution to make to the theological quest of faith seeking understanding. In the first two chapters of the book Brummer clarifies this thesis and defends it against the objection that philosophical methodology is inappropriate for the subject matter of theology. In the remaining chapters Brummer attempts to illustrate the merits of philosophical theology via an investigation of the conceptually thorny claim that human beings can be in a personal relationship with God. In these chapters Brummer investigates the Reformed doctrine of grace, the ability of God to do evil, the intelligibility of double agency, and the possibility of a consoling and morally sensitive theodicy. The book ends with an epilogue in which Brummer summarizes his conclusions regarding the relationship between philosophy and theology. The book is persuasively argued, and almost always a model of clarity. Whether one is interested in the methodological or the substantive issues treated here, Brummer's book will be found interesting and worthwhile.

As I have said Brummer treats a wide range of material, but in this review I will restrict myself to two main issues. First, I will discuss Brummer's view of the nature of philosophical theology and its relation to theological inquiry in general, and I will try to resolve what might seem to be an inconsistency in Brummer's view of what philosophical theology is. Second, I will briefly summarize Brummer's conclusions regarding talk about a personal God, and I will argue that Brummer's attempt to provide a morally sensitive theodicy fails.