

19. A volition is an effective desire. A first-order volition is an effective first-order desire, a second-order volition is an effective second-order desire. A person has the first-order volition she has because of the second-order volition she has. A deeply divided person lacks a single, integrated second-order desire, *a fortiori*, she lacks an *effective* second-order desire.

20. "Augustine and Free Will," p. 142.

21. Such an action would violate (L1) and (L3) of Stump's definition of libertarian freedom (see footnote 5 above), because the act would be ultimately caused by something external to the agent since the agent's own intellect and will stand against any operation moving the agent's will from its quiescent state.

22. *Aquinas*, p. 400.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 401.

24. One might wonder whether we've veered into Pelagianism. Stump insists that we've not crossed over into Pelagian territory here because an ineffective second-order desire isn't an act of will and because one who merely wishes ineffectively for a will she doesn't have isn't thereby willing something good. She's better off than she would be if she lacked such a second-order desire, but as Stump reminds us "comparative do not suppose positives"—"one thing can be better than another and yet not be good" (*Aquinas*, p. 402).

25. I want to thank Eleonore Stump for comments that helped me to improve this paper and avoid many errors. Any errors that remain are of course my own. I am also grateful for comments from participants in the Eastern Division meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers at Messiah College, where I read an earlier version of this paper.

## IS GOD FREE? REPLY TO WIERENGA

Wes Morriston

In a recent paper, Edward Wierenga argues that God is both morally free and that when there is a best option God cannot fail to choose it. Since God is not determined by external causes, he is free in all that he does. In this paper, I present a thought experiment to show that the mere absence of external causes is not sufficient for divine freedom. The reader is invited to imagine an uncaused finite being who is "good by nature." I claim that such a being would lack moral freedom, so that (by analogy) an uncaused God who is "good by nature" would lack it as well. Various attempts to find a relevant dissimilarity between the two cases are briefly considered.

Many theists believe that God is a "perfect being" who cannot fail to choose the best. There may be circumstances in which there is not a single best alternative, but sometimes there is a best and when there is God's perfect nature guarantees that he cannot fail to choose it. *A fortiori* God's nature would not permit him to choose to do anything morally wrong. He is *necessarily* good in all that he does. It will be convenient to refer to this as the "necessary goodness doctrine," or NGD for short.

On NGD, it seems that God is never free to choose evil, and, more generally, is never free to choose to do less than what he sees as the best. Of course, if God were to choose less than the best he would succeed in actualizing it; and some compatibilists may think that this is as much freedom as anyone can have. But many theists who accept NGD are libertarian *incompatibilists*. They believe that there is a more robust sense in which we humans are free. Unlike God, we can—and often do—choose to do less than the best. Sometimes we even choose to do what we know we ought not to do. We are morally accountable because we *could* have chosen differently, and it is in this power of choice that our freedom consists. We are *morally* free precisely because we have the two-way power *both* to choose what we know we ought to do *and* to choose what we know we ought not to do.<sup>1</sup>

For such theists—incompatibilists who also accept NGD—there is a serious question about the nature of God's freedom. How can God be acting *freely* when he chooses the best if he is unable to choose less than the best? How can he have genuine moral freedom if the goodness of his nature prevents him from choosing what he knows to be wrong?

In a recent paper, Edward Wierenga proposes an interesting solution to this problem.<sup>2</sup> Wierenga borrows part of his solution from a traditional compatibilist account of freedom, but he thinks that a certain kind of *incompatibilist* can also avail himself of a key compatibilist insight.



According to traditional compatibilism, an action is done freely if it is done willingly, and it is done willingly if its antecedent causes are *internal* ones of the right sort—ones that arise “in the right manner.” In the typical case, the internal causes of a person’s voluntary actions are her own desires and beliefs, and when these arise “in the right way,” she is said to be “acting freely.”

But what is it for them to arise “in the right way?” Most compatibilists want to rule out cases in which drugs or hypnosis or “nefarious neurosurgeons manipulating their brains” are the source of the desires and beliefs that move a person to act. So they need to say (and do say) a lot more about what it is for one’s desires and beliefs to arise *in the right way*.

The details of these compatibilist proposals need not detain us here. What matters is that on any of them, NGD will be perfectly compatible with divine freedom. If God chooses the best because of the perfection of his nature, then the ultimate cause of *his* choice is suitably internal.

But Wierenga does not want to defend compatibilism. He wants to provide a solution to our problem that will be attractive to *incompatibilists*. So he needs to provide an incompatibilist account of divine freedom that can take advantage of the compatibilist’s supposed insight concerning the relation between freedom and internal causes.

This might seem to be impossible. A typical incompatibilist thinks that an agent is not acting freely unless—exactly as things were at the time—she could have done otherwise. For this kind of incompatibilist, determinism undermines freedom because it is inconsistent with a person’s ability to do otherwise. But then it seems that lacking that ability is *all by itself* incompatible with freedom, and this will be so even if all the causes of a person’s action are internal to her.

On NGD, that is exactly how it is with God. It matters not at all that the ultimate cause of God’s choices (his perfect nature) is internal to God. For the fact remains that God *necessarily* chooses the best (when there is a best). Since *he* could not have done otherwise he is not acting freely.

This is where things get interesting in Wierenga’s discussion. He develops the incompatibilist position in a way different from the one suggested above. The argument for the incompatibility of freedom and determinism starts out in the familiar way.

[I]f determinism is true, an agent’s beliefs and desires themselves have antecedent causes stretching back to before the agent even existed.

But, as we are about to see, Wierenga’s argument makes no use of the claim that a free agent is able to do otherwise. The passage just quoted continues as follows:

The relevant causal conditions are thus not really internal to the agent. The insight, to repeat, of the compatibilist is that the right antecedent conditions, internal to the agent, are compatible with the agent acting freely; on this interpretation, the compatibilist’s mistake is in taking the proffered conditions to be internal in this way.<sup>3</sup>

This is a bit confusing. At first glance, it looks as if Wierenga is saying that the desires and beliefs of the agent are “not really internal” because they have external causes. That would be a serious error. A desire or belief doesn’t fail to be internal just because it lies at the end of a chain of causes, some of which are external.

What Wierenga must mean, I think, is that desires and beliefs produced by a causal chain “stretching back to before the agent even existed” do not “arise in the right way.” Why so? Well, perhaps Wierenga thinks that the sufficient cause(s) (if any) of a free act must be *entirely* internal to the agent. This—all by itself—would render freedom incompatible with determinism, without reference to the existence of alternate possibilities. For even if the immediate causes of a person’s action—her desires and beliefs and so on—are internal, determinism entails that there are external causes further back in the causal chain. So it is in virtue of these further causes that the internal causes of a person’s action do not “arise in the right way.”

If this is the right way to read Wierenga, then the difference between his view and traditional compatibilism concerns what it is for an internal cause to arise in the right way. Traditional compatibilism wants to rule out only a subset of external causes (drugs and hypnosis and malicious scientists and Cartesian demons). But it is not easy to define the criteria for membership in the class of external causes that are incompatible with freedom, and this is one of the principal objections to traditional compatibilism. Wierenga, on the other hand, has no such problem. He thinks that desires and beliefs do not arise in the right way if they are produced by *any* causes external to the agent. And that, of course, makes him an incompatibilist.

On the basis of this understanding, it seems that we can construct a fully *incompatibilist* solution to the problem of reconciling God’s moral freedom with the NGD. If God’s desire for the good is determined entirely by *his own nature*, then his moral choices are wholly determined by factors that are internal to him. Even the incompatibilist will have no grounds for denying that they “arise in the right way,” since, as Wierenga puts it, there is not a “long chain of causes stretching back to things separate from him that give him this constellation of knowledge, desire, and ability.”<sup>4</sup>

It should be stressed that Wierenga’s defense of the compatibility of moral freedom and necessary goodness in God does *not* commit him to saying that they are compatible in human beings. Humans are the products of antecedent (and therefore external) causes. So if they were good by nature, there would be a chain of external causes that is (ultimately) responsible for their disposition to do the good; so, by Wierenga’s lights, they would not be acting freely when that disposition produces a good action. God, by contrast, is the Creator (the First Cause) of everything that could possibly function as a cause. There can be nothing external to God that causes there to be a person having his perfect nature. So God—unlike humans—can be wholly free in an incompatibilist sense even though he is unable to choose less than the best.

At first glance, this appears to be an attractive solution to our problem, but I believe the following objection has considerable weight. Even if, *per impossibile*, there were no external causes, an “essentially good” but *finite* person would be “stuck” with its nature, and would not therefore

be *free* with respect to those things that its nature determines it to do. To see this, imagine a finite person very much like a human being except for two things: (i) she comes into existence purely by chance and without any cause whatever; and (ii) her nature prevents her from ever choosing what she sees to be less than the best. Let's call her Bonnie Chance, or Bonnie for short.

Would we regard Bonnie Chance as morally free merely on account of the fact that there is no external chain of causes leading up to the wonderful choices she makes? The answer, surely, is that we would not. What we would say is that she can't help being good because she is "stuck" with a nature that prevents her from ever going wrong. Since it is Bonnie's nature—and not Bonnie herself—that is responsible for her good behavior, we can only conclude that she is not acting freely when she acts for the best.

The same, it seems to me, should be said of a God who is not able to choose less than the best because his moral nature determines him to choose the best. The mere absence of external causes is insufficient to guarantee his freedom, for the fact remains that he is just as determined by his moral nature as Bonnie is by her nature. Since God is simply "stuck" with his moral nature, he is not responsible either for it or for what follows from it, and is not therefore morally free.

In response to this objection, some philosophers may want to claim that the proposed counterexample is not truly possible. For example, many theists hold not only that God exists in every possible world, but that everything else that exists in any possible world is—in that world—wholly dependent on God for its existence. If that were so, then nothing like my imaginary Bonnie Chance would be possible. Any person other than God would of necessity have been (directly or indirectly) created by God, in which case it would not have come into existence without a cause.

Let's suppose that this is right, and that nothing like Bonnie Chance could exist. So what? "Well," the critic may reply, "legitimate counterexamples must be drawn from the realm of the possible—so we don't have to worry about the freedom of an imaginary person who comes into existence without cause."

If the critic thinks that we never have clear intuitions about metaphysically impossible cases, he is surely mistaken. Consider the following examples.

- If God were not essentially good, then he would be able to choose evil.
- If God were to choose less than the best, he would succeed to actualizing it.
- If God did not exist, then nothing would depend on him for its existence.
- If two plus two had been five, God would have known that two plus two is five.

The antecedents of all these propositions are believed by many theists to be metaphysically impossible. But can anyone seriously doubt that they

are non-trivially true?<sup>5</sup> Or that our intuitions about what would be true in these metaphysically impossible circumstances—the non-existence of God or God's having a different nature or two plus two's being five—are trustworthy? If this is right, then I see no reason why the imaginary situation in my counterexample must be *metaphysically* possible.

It is still true, of course, that any legitimate counterexample must be *conceptually coherent*. But there is no obvious conceptual incoherence—no explicit or implicit contradiction—in the supposition that Bonnie Chance exists. Consequently, it seems to me that our intuitions about what would be true of her if she did exist must be taken into account.

So let us suppose that my intuition about Bonnie Chance is correct. If—per impossibile—she existed, she would not be morally free. Since her moral choices are determined by her nature, she is not free with respect to those choices. Must we not say the same of a God who is morally perfect by nature?

In order to avoid this conclusion, we must find some relevant difference between the case of God and that of Bonnie Chance. What could it be?

Consider first the fact that, unlike Bonnie Chance, God *necessarily* exists. He doesn't just happen to exist—he exists in virtue of his very nature. So not only *are* there no external causes of his existence—there *could* be none.

I fail to see any reason to think that this difference between God and Bonnie Chance is relevant. Even though God's nature is necessarily instantiated, the fact remains that he is just as determined by his nature as Bonnie is by hers. So if *God's nature*—rather than *God*—is the ultimate determiner of his moral choices, then I do not see why we should think that he is making them freely.

Here is another suggestion—one that is more clearly relevant. "Theological activists" like Thomas Morris hold that God is causally responsible for all essences, including his own.<sup>6</sup> If God were—literally—the cause of his own nature, this would seem to mark a relevant distinction between God and Bonnie Chance. Bonnie's choices would be determined by a nature for which she is not responsible, but the same would not be true of a God who determines his own nature.

Without looking too closely into the details of Morris's proposal, I think we can see that it won't help us here. To see why, consider the following question. *Could God have given himself a different nature?* Could God, for example, have made himself other than perfectly good and unable to choose evil? Either answer will get us into trouble. If the answer is yes, then there must be possible worlds in which God makes himself less than perfectly good, in which case God is not *necessarily* good after all. But if (as Morris would surely want to say) the answer is no, then we will need to inquire as to *why* God cannot give himself some other nature. It's hard to see how we could appeal to his nature to explain why he couldn't have given himself some other nature. But we can't appeal to anything other than God's nature either, for this would make him depend on something external to himself. So it looks as if we have not escaped the conclusion that God is "stuck" with his nature in much the same way that Bonnie Chance is "stuck" with hers.

Yet another way out of the problem should be mentioned briefly. In speaking of God and Bonnie Chance as being "stuck" with their respective natures, we have implicitly assumed that God (like Bonnie) is distinct from his nature. This is controversial. Some theists believe that God is a *simple* being, where this entails, among other things, that God is *identical* to God's nature. If that were right, then the case of God would indeed be relevantly different from that of Bonnie Chance. If God *is* God's nature, then being determined by that nature is the same as being determined by himself, and *that* can hardly be inconsistent with freedom.

Wierenga's published work does not lead one to expect *him* to take this line.<sup>7</sup> So I shall refrain from saying any more about the doctrine of divine simplicity here—except, of course, to note that in addition to its well known disadvantages the doctrine does have the advantage of offering a solution to our problem!<sup>8</sup>

To conclude then: An uncaused finite person who is unable to do less than the best because she is good by nature would lack moral freedom. So—unless a relevant dissimilarity can be found—an uncaused God who is unable to do less than the best because he is good by nature also lacks moral freedom. Apart from the doctrine of divine simplicity and its claim that God *is* God's nature, it is hard to see what *relevant* dissimilarity there could be. But simplicity is a lot to take on board, and those of us who are (on other grounds) suspicious of the doctrine will need to deal with the problem in some other way.

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#### NOTES

1. Theists who deal with the problem of evil by giving a free will defense are generally committed to this sort of incompatibilism.

2. "The Freedom of God," *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 19, No. 4 (2002), pp. 425–36).

3. Wierenga, p. 434.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Accounting for the non-trivial truth of per impossibile conditionals is well-known problem in the semantics of counterfactuals, and one to which there is no generally accepted solution. Here I am merely helping myself to the comparatively uncontroversial claim that there are such truths.

6. Thomas V. Morris, "Absolute Creation," in Thomas Morris, *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1987): pp. 161–78.

7. For example, in *The Nature of God* (Cornell Univ Press: Ithaca, 1989), Wierenga says only this about simplicity: "We shall not investigate the doctrine of divine simplicity; I have nothing constructive to say about it." (p. 173).

8. For a sympathetic discussion, see Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 2, No. 4 (1985), pp. 353–82.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*From Cells to Souls—and Beyond: Changing Portraits of Human Nature*, ed. Malcolm Jeeves. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004. Pp. xiv, 252. \$29.00 (paper); and *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person*, by Hud Hudson. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001. Pp. xii, 202. \$40.00.

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*From Cells to Souls—and Beyond: Changing Portraits of Human Nature* is a collection of engaging essays about the nature of a human being. The authors of the essays are professionals in diverse disciplines, including anatomy and structural biology, biblical studies, genetics, neurology, philosophy, psychiatry, psychology, and systematic theology. Though the authors are from diverse disciplines, they are all professing Christians who are united by the belief that mind/soul-body substance dualism (dualism, for short) is false and that the human person is best thought of as a single entity (monism) with two kinds of properties, namely, mental/soulish and physical. Simply stated, "[t]here is . . . an irreducible duality . . . , but it is not a duality that rightly calls for dualism" (p. 237). The contributors preferred way of explaining the existence of this duality of properties is in terms of emergence. In virtue of the increasing capacity and interactive complexity of the lower level complex physical systems that comprise the human biological entity, mental properties with their causal powers emerge at a higher (highest) level. The result is the capacity for genuine top-down causation from our mental lives to our physical lives (pp. 63–66).

Though the authors emphasize that their "nonreductive physicalism" (p. 64) makes mental-to-physical causation possible, they are equally emphatic that what recommends their view of the human person over the dualist's is the existence of intimate bottom-to-top causal links between what goes on in different regions of our brains and our mental lives. For example, the left of the two brain hemispheres is usually dominant for speech so that "[l]eft-sided brain lesions can cause a searching for words, a limitation of vocabulary, a shortening of sentences, or a jumble of meaningless words" (pp. 46–47). Early degeneration of neurons in the hippocampus of the brain (located in the right and left temporal lobes of the cerebral cortex) results in disturbances in "working memory" where persons may have increasing difficulty either remembering where they placed items,

