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NAME: John M. DePoe
DEGREE: Masters of Arts in Religion DATE OF DEGREE: May 2004
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HUMAN FREEDOM AND DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM AND SELECTED SOLUTIONS

John M. DePoe

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APPROVED:

APPROVED:

Dean of Graduate Studies

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While this thesis is an attempt to address some serious academic issues, I have also found that my studies have drawn me closer in my devotion to God. More than ever I realize that both praise and thanks are due to my sovereign Lord for creating me with these gifts (Ps. 139:14). By studying God's providence and omniscience, my adoration for God has grown richly. Of course, I also believe this thesis provides some cogent and resourceful responses to academic issues. The main goal of this project is to explain the problem of foreknowledge and freedom and to critique selected solutions to that problem. Insofar as I have executed this task honestly and soundly, I thank God for giving me the gifts and resources to accomplish this project and share that with others so that they may join me in worshipping God for his unsurpassable omniscience and inscrutable providence. May God be glorified through the good in this thesis, and may he be gracious when it falls short. "To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 16:27).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

JP *The Journal of Philosophy*

PP *Philosophical Perspectives*

PR *The Philosophical Review*

PS *Philosophical Studies*

ST *Summa Theologiae*

INTRODUCTION

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Most people in the Western world who believe in a personal God understand that he possesses the attributes of omniscience and omnipotence. Furthermore, most of these people believe that God, out of genuine love and wisdom, providentially ordains all the events that transpire throughout the history of the world. On the other hand, most of these people also tend to think of themselves as significantly free to do what they will. Yet, an apparent incongruity precipitates from these beliefs. Can humans be blameworthy or praiseworthy in a world providentially ordered by God? Can God be genuinely omnipotent or omniscient in a world where humans have indeterminate free will?

I have heard several preachers affirm both human freedom and divine sovereignty in their sermons. If they should ever broach the difficult questions that follow from the combination of these two beliefs, often they share a story like this:

When we go to Heaven we will see its pearly gates, and written on the outside we will read, "Whosoever will may come." After we pass through those gates, we will see inscribed on the inside, "I have chosen you from the foundation of the world." From God's view we have been chosen, although from our perspective we were free to choose.

Unfortunately this kind of story does not offer any kind of resolution to the problem of divine sovereignty and human freedom. In fact, it seems only to highlight the difficulties it is attempting to resolve! Will a similar inscription adorn the gates of Hell?

Ultimately the question must be faced: whose perspective is correct, God's or ours?

How can people both choose to place their faith in God and be chosen by God before the foundation of the world?

Many tensions in theology exist that seem to imply logical contradictions for theists, but ultimately they are not explicit contradictions in thinking. Some tensions can legitimately be referred to as "mysteries" or "antinomies." In fact, the dilemma at hand concerning freedom and foreknowledge has been called an "antinomy" by some theologians because it seems that theists must affirm two truths which are irreconcilable from a human perspective.¹ Appealing to mystery can be a reasonable resolution to many theological problems. The appeal to mystery, however, can sometimes be a disingenuous escape tactic utilized by theists to avoid answering difficult challenges to their beliefs. Furthermore, if a formal contradiction lies among the theist's beliefs, it becomes questionable whether the word "mystery" is, as Clark Pinnock aptly put it, "just a euphemism for nonsense."² So, the appeal to mystery should be invoked only after all other defenses have been attempted and no evident formal contradiction entails affirming the mystery. Before the problem of human freedom and divine sovereignty can be addressed, it needs to be articulated more precisely. In order to do that certain philosophical terms and arguments need to be defined.

¹ For example, J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1961), ch. 2.

² Clark H. Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 115.

Defining the Terms

In order to proceed in an accurate and thorough depiction of the problem, I will need to define the terms and theories necessary for understanding it. First, I will define theological attributes which are central to understanding the problem. Next, I will survey different theories of human freedom. After discussing these subjects, I will be able to give an informed description of the problem.

Theological Attributes

The problem essentially consists of joining two seemingly unfitting subjects: a sovereign God and a free humanity. Thus, it seems reasonable to understand each of these subjects, insofar as it is necessary and possible to do so, in order to reach a clear depiction of the problem. Here I will briefly discuss the characteristics of God that are relevant for understanding the problem.

Theism

For the purposes of this paper, “theism” is understood as the belief that one God exists who is personally related to the world, separate from the world, and ontologically independent from the world. I am intentionally using this term in order to distinguish it from other models of belief in God. For example, deism is the belief that one God exists who is separate from the created world and who does not personally relate or interact with the created world. Panentheism refers to a personal God who is involved with the world but is not separable or independent from the world. Pantheism is the belief that the world and God are all one substance, which consequently eliminates the personhood and independence of God. These (and other) models of God are not discussed here because

they do not describe the accepted picture of God given by mainstream Christianity. Simply because I am discarding these other views beforehand does not mean that they offer no insights or solutions to the problem at hand. Theism is the model I am interested in because it is the accepted view of Christian orthodoxy.

Omniscience

God, according to the traditional understanding of theism, is omniscient.

Omniscience denotes the divine attribute of perfectly knowing all propositions that are logically possible to be known.³ As will be shown later, what qualifies as logically possible to be known is a matter of contention in current scholarship. Psalm 139:1-6⁴ is a classic text which portrays God's omniscience:

O Lord, You have searched me and known me.
 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
 You understand my thought from afar.
 You scrutinize my path and my lying down,
 And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.

³ A similar definition, one which all theists should be able to accept, is proposed by William Hasker in his "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The Openness of God*, 136. This definition is disputed by William Lane Craig, however, who believes that omniscience should be defined as 'For any agent x , x is omniscient_{def.} For every statement s , if s is true, then x knows that s and does not believe that non- s ' [William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 251]. Craig argues that a definition of omniscience, such as the one proffered by Hasker and the one I accept here, has at least three flaws: (1) it is *ad hoc*; (2) the definition is modal, although omniscience is not a modal concept; and (3) it relies on the difference between truths that can and cannot logically be known (see *ibid.*, 251-56). I have sided with Hasker on this issue because it seems best to work with definitions that do not eliminate critical discussion before it can begin. Craig makes excellent points, but I do not see the need to dispute the precise definition of omniscience in this project. Accepting Craig's definition would beg the question of a number of issues (such as God's knowledge of the future and counterfactuals of freedom), which need to be *argued for*, not simply defined away.

⁴ All scripture references to the Old and New Testaments are from the updated New American Standard. References to the Apocrypha come from the New Revised Standard Version.

Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O Lord, You know it all.
 You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.
 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it.

Traditionally, texts like this one serve as evidence that God's knowledge covers all knowable propositions including those about the past, present, and future (although the current debate questions whether propositions about the future and claims concerning counterfactuals of freedom are logically possible to exist or to be known). The Apocrypha also affirms this divine attribute in Judith's prayer:

For you have done these things and those that went before and those that followed. You have designed the things that are now, and those that are to come. What you had in mind has happened; the things you decided on presented themselves and said, "Here we are!" For all your ways are prepared in advance, and your judgment is with foreknowledge (Jth. 9:5-6).

Omniscience also entails infallibility. An omniscient God cannot hold false beliefs. So, omniscience includes knowing all facts that are logically knowable and knowing all these facts with utter accuracy.

Omnipotence

The quality that describes God's ability to do whatever is logically possible is known as "omnipotence." The qualification *whatever is logically possible* is included to rule out God's ability to make five-sided triangles, married bachelors, and other nonsensical acts.⁵ Various passages from Scripture affirm God's powerful ability to act in marvelous ways. For example, Jeremiah 32:17 describes God's power saying, "Ah Lord God! Behold, You have made the Heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You."

⁵ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae (ST)*, 1a, 25, 3.

Providence

In a theistic model, God is not disinterested in his creation. Instead, God is concerned with his creation and reveals himself in it. Typically, the way God acts in the world to bring about his desired ends is called “providence.” Although Christians hold a variety of views as to how God exercises his providence, all models of divine providence affirm that God is able to use his omniscience and omnipotence to bring about his providential ends. Naturally this leads to questions concerning the existence of evil. Although the problem of evil is fundamentally tied to one’s view of providence, it remains outside the main focus of this paper. Nonetheless, it should be noted that one’s model of providence will directly shape part of one’s theodicy.

Providence is affirmed by the Bible in a number of ways. Texts like Psalm 37:23, which reads, “The steps of a man are established by the Lord, and He delights in his way,” affirm the notion that divine providence includes personal aspects of life. Likewise, the New Testament says, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Divine providence, according to scripture, includes God’s cunning ability to work out what is good for individuals, especially those who love him.

The Bible also describes God’s providence as the sustainer of all things. As Colossians 1:16-17 declares, “For by Him all things were created, both in the Heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” God did not simply set the cosmos into

mechanical motion and leave it to run without him. God's providence encompasses his role as a perpetual sustainer of all his creation.

In addition to understanding divine providence as personal provision and as a cosmic sustainer, theists also believe God's providence applies to the overall movement of history. Isaiah describes God's providence in this sense when he writes:

Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it. (Isa. 46:10-11)

The beginning and the end of the world have been providentially ordained by God. So, the providence of God applies at least to these three domains: personal guidance, cosmic sustenance, and the movement of history to God's desired end.

Theories of Human Freedom

After covering God's attributes which pertain to the problem of foreknowledge and freedom, the human side of the problem shall be addressed. If God's foreknowledge is supposed to be irreconcilable with human freedom, the task is to know what *kind* of human freedom is being presumed by this claim. There are three basic theories of human freedom: libertarianism, determinism, and compatibilism.

Libertarian Freedom

The theory of action which gives the strongest reckoning of human freedom is known as "libertarian" or "indeterministic freedom." Libertarian freedom is often defined as the ability to refrain from an action or the capability of acting differently than one did. While this may serve as a sufficient condition for libertarian freedom, it is not a

necessary one. Harry Frankfurt has given counterexamples that demonstrate why this is so.⁶ Frankfurt imagines that a person named Jones has had a brain operation, of which he is unaware. The brain surgeon places electrodes in Jones's brain so he can control certain actions of Jones. Now suppose that the surgeon wants Jones to perform action *A*. If Jones chooses to do *A*, then the surgeon will not manipulate Jones's actions in any way. If Jones chooses not to do *A*, however, then the surgeon will make Jones do *A* via his surgical modification on Jones. Furthermore, suppose Jones does, in fact, freely choose to do *A*. By the aforementioned definition of libertarian freedom, he is not free, since he could not have acted otherwise. Nonetheless, it seems that his action would count as an act of libertarian freedom. So, there must be more to libertarian freedom than just the possibility of acting otherwise.

Perhaps a better way to think of libertarian freedom is to focus on the notion that the will is undetermined by any causal factors besides one's own will. While one's physical make-up, external environment, spiritual conditions, personality, and other peripheral factors may have some influence on a person's will, ultimately a person's will can decide indeterministically what he or she will do. Hence, on the view of indeterminism, a person could hypothetically be given the exact choice in the exact situation and still choose differently.

⁶ Harry Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* (*JP*) 66 (1969): 829-39; idem, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *JP* 68 (1971): 5-20.

Determinism

The most restrictive account of human freedom is “determinism,” also referred to as “hard determinism.” Freedom, according to determinists, is an illusion.⁷ Determinism teaches that all decisions are decided by causal factors outside of the will. These causal factors can include a variety of different sources. A materialistic form of determinism might argue that physical, law-like interactions of atoms or brain chemicals actually determine what appears to be free choice to humans. Theistic forms of determinism also exist, which suppose that God is the determinate cause of human choices. This is commonly referred to as “theological determinism.” Traditional interpretations of theologians like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards represent theological determinism.

Historically, determinism has not been a very popular belief among philosophers. More recently, however, one of the attractions of materialistic determinism is the rising trust that science can, or eventually will, explain everything. Social psychologists like B. F. Skinner argue that human choice can be entirely determined by genetic and behaviorist data placed in the right formula. Although science and psychology currently are not able to account for human choices and consciousness, materialistic determinists trust that eventually they will.

Determinism has some appealing points in its theological form as well. For under a deterministic model, God is in absolute control of the world. Nothing happens that God does not will to occur. All events are planned, arranged, and executed by an all-

⁷ See Tomis Kapitan, “The Non-Reality of Free Will,” *Noûs* 28, no. 1 (1994): 90-95; Richard Double, *The Non-Reality of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

powerful, all-wise, and all-good deity. For theological determinists, this provides an assurance for the fate of all things. Nothing is beyond God's control, even human choices, which means God always gets exactly what he wants on the model of theological determinism.

Despite its attractive scientific and theological benefits, determinism does entail serious problems. First, if human behavior has causes external to the will, then the notions of blame and praise are no longer clearly applicable to the determined agents. How can one punish others for doing something which they did not choose to do and could not help from doing otherwise? Secondly, for the materialistic determinists the scientific data has become more difficult, not more lucid, to use in predicting human behavior with certainty. Theories like Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, chaos theory, and other theories in quantum mechanics have called into question the plausibility of the natural world operating under a strictly mechanically determined character. Finally, if determinism is true, then no justification can be given for believing it.⁸ Either determinism is accepted because of the good arguments in favor of it, or determinism is embraced because this conclusion has been determined. If determinism is accepted on the basis of good arguments, then determinism has been proven false by freely choosing it. If determinism must be accepted because it has been determined, then no justification exists for knowing that it is true, since a determinate force, not sound reasoning, is the basis for this decision.⁹

⁸ William Hasker, *Metaphysics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 47-49.

⁹ Even if people are determined to believe sound arguments in favor of determinism, it would be an accidental feature to their knowledge of it. In such a case they would have true belief, but would still lack justification or warrant. This is

So, determinism in its many forms limits or eradicates human freedom. Furthermore, should determinism be true, the practical consequences for human responsibility are called into question, as well as the justification for believing the theory itself. Yet the appeal of determinism, whether theological or materialistic, has been difficult for many to escape. Consequently, some have tried to defend “soft determinism” or “compatibilism.”

Compatibilism

As the name suggests, compatibilism is the theory of freedom that affirms the compatibility of both libertarianism and determinism. Thomas Hobbes and David Hume are classic examples of materialistic compatibilists. Theological compatibilists include John Martin Fischer and Paul Helm. Theologians that have affirmed God’s absolute sovereign control over the universe must resort to a compatibilist model of freedom. Otherwise, humans are not culpable for their sin, which would make God unjust for punishing them as if they were. Also, God would be the cause of evil and sin, if he is absolutely sovereign as hard determinism dictates.

Unfortunately for compatibilists, there seems no obvious way around the explicit contradiction which is the theory itself. How can something be absolutely determined and genuinely free at the same time? Some compatibilists appeal to Thomas Aquinas’s distinction between primary and secondary causes for their way out.¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas argues that a primary cause can arrange intermediate causes in order to produce its

comparable to the problems introduced into epistemology by Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge,” *Analysis* 23 (1963): 121-23.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, 1a, 116, 1-4.

desired result. So God would be the primary cause organizing the secondary causes, his creation, to bring about his will. Consequently, God can be credited with the creation of the world, which is good, and the world is responsible for creating evil. As any Sunday School teacher knows, however, it does not take long to realize that this solution fails to solve the problem. Even though some attempt is made to place the blame of sin on humanity, God would still be its primary cause. Furthermore, under this model of providence, humans could not act otherwise than God has decreed, and as a result, upholding human freedom becomes a mystery.

Compatibilism is considered a philosophically suspect theory due to the powerful arguments offered against it.¹¹ Although I do not have the space to give a thorough discussion of the incoherence of compatibilism, I will assume that compatibilism is not a desirable solution to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge. On the face of it, any form of compatibilism seems incoherent. Alvin Plantinga claims that compatibilism ‘seems utterly implausible. One might as well assume that being in jail doesn’t really limit one’s freedom on the grounds that if one were *not* in jail, he would be free to come

¹¹ Peter van Inwagen is probably the most influential critic against compatibilism. See his ‘The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism,’ *Philosophical Studies (PS)* 27 (1975): 185-99; idem, ‘Ability and Responsibility.’ *The Philosophical Review (PR)* 87 (April 1978): 201-24; idem, *An Essay on Free Will* (New York: Oxford, 1983), ch. 3; idem, ‘When is the Will Free?’ *Philosophical Perspectives (PP)* 3 (1989): 399-422. See also James W. Lamb, ‘On a Proof of Incompatibilism,’ *PR* 86 (January 1977): 20-35; Ted Warfield, ‘Causal Determinism and Human Freedom are Incompatible: A New Argument for Incompatibilism,’ *PP* 14 (2000): 167-80. Leading defenses of compatibilism in contemporary literature include the previously cited Frankfurt, ‘Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility;’ idem, ‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person;’ and more recently, John Martin Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994). There are a number of books which contain a collection of essays that cover the compatibilist-incompatibilist debate such as Gary Watson, ed., *Free Will* (New York: Oxford, 1982); John Martin Fischer, ed., *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); Robert Kane, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (New York: Oxford, 2002).

and go as he pleased.”¹² Likewise, William James calls compatibilism “a quagmire of evasion” that avoids the real issues it should address.¹³

Therefore, having assessed the major theories of human freedom, this conclusion has been reached: libertarian freedom is required to uphold personal responsibility and to allow significant personal choices. Although a thorough refutation of determinism and compatibilism has not been presented here, I shall proceed under the assumption that libertarian freedom is the most cogent notion of freedom and that determinism and compatibilism provide weaker accounts of human freedom.

The Problem

Saint Augustine struggled with the problem of freedom and foreknowledge in book three of his dialogue *On Free Choice of the Will*. Augustine asks Evodius, his inquiring pupil, an insightful question: “Why do you think that our free choice is inconsistent with God’s foreknowledge? Because it’s foreknowledge, or because it’s *God’s* foreknowledge?”¹⁴ I think looking at the problem of freedom and foreknowledge from both perspectives will be profitable. I shall proceed by first examining the problem of freedom and non-divine foreknowledge. Then, I shall articulate the problem with God’s foreknowledge.

¹² Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 32 (emphasis his).

¹³ William James, “The Dilemma of Determinism,” in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover, 1956), 149.

¹⁴ Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, bk. III, sec. 4 (emphasis mine).

The Problem of Foreknowledge *Simpliciter*

Is human libertarian freedom threatened by non-divine foreknowledge? Initially it seems so. For if a fixed truth exists about what humans will choose to do in the future, then it appears as if there really is no choice to be made. For, concerning some future act *B*, if humans have libertarian freedom, then it is within their power to will in the future whether to do *B* or not-*B*. If there presently is a truth value for the future proposition about decision *B*, however, then humans are not free to choose between *B* and not-*B*. Instead the only option available to them is to perform the action that will consummate the fixed truth concerning *B*. Below I will assess how Aristotle and William of Ockham have attempted to reconcile freedom and foreknowledge *simpliciter*.

Aristotle

Aristotle struggled with this same problem in chapter nine of *De Interpretatione*. “But if it is always true to say a thing is or will be, it is not possible that it should not be or not about to be,” writes Aristotle, “and when a thing cannot come to be, it is impossible that it should not come to be, and when it is impossible that it should not come to be, it must come to be.”¹⁵ Aristotle concludes that if this is true, “All, then, that is about to be must of necessity take place.”¹⁶ He demonstrates the problem with his famous sea battle illustration: “A sea-fight must either take place tomorrow or not, but it is not necessary that it should take place tomorrow, neither is it necessary that it should

¹⁵ Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, ch. 9, 18b11-14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18b15.

not take place tomorrow, yet it is necessary that it either should or should not take place tomorrow.”¹⁷

Notice that Aristotle’s dilemma does not concern a type of physical determinism. His quandary is with the determination of actions by some type of analytic or logical necessity. As Aristotle sees it, tomorrow it necessarily is true that either a sea battle will or will not take place. If the sea battle will (or will not) occur by necessity, however, then it does not happen freely, nor could it occur any other way than it will.

In order to avoid this type of logical fatalism, Aristotle suggests that propositions about the future do not have a truth value until they transpire. Aristotle concludes, “One of the two propositions in such instances must be true and the other false, but we cannot say determinately that this or that is false, but must leave the alternative undecided.”¹⁸

So, it seems that Aristotle denies that future propositions that are contingent on the decisions of free creatures have a truth value until those free creatures actually make them true by acting or not acting in accordance with them.¹⁹ Yet, this proposal seems entirely *ad hoc* in order to preserve human freedom. Simply because assigning truth values to future propositions causes problems for Aristotle does not mean that he is warranted in doctoring the truth value of these statements to fit his desired theories.

Furthermore, no reason has been given to deny that future propositions have a truth value

¹⁷ Ibid., 19a30-33.

¹⁸ Ibid., 19a36-39.

¹⁹ Richard Sorabji *Necessity, Cause, and Blame: Perspectives on Aristotle’s Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), ch. 5. Sorabji agrees that the view I have presented is the “classical” interpretation of Aristotle, although it has not been the *only* way to understand Aristotle on this point. For more details on Aristotle’s commentators and how they handle this dilemma, I direct those interested in these matters to Sorabji’s fine work.

before they transpire. The logical axiom of bivalence does not require the referent of the true statement to exist in order to possess value. As William Lane Craig argues, to say a proposition is true

does *not* mean that the things or events which a true statement is about must exist. Indeed, it is only in the case of true present-tense statements that the things or events referred to must exist. For a past-tense statement to be true it is not required that what it describes exists, but only that it *have* existed. For a future-tense statement to be true it is not required that what it describes exist, but that it *will* exist. In order for a future-tense statement to be true, all that is required is that when the moment described arrives, the present-tense version of the statement will be true at the moment. *The idea that the concept of truth as correspondence requires that the things or events described by the statement must exist at the time the statement is true is a complete misunderstanding.*²⁰

Even though Aristotle's escape is at best questionable, a second look at the problem he is facing may show that he is overreacting. If a future-tense proposition has a set truth value, then all that follows is that it will come to pass. By affirming that statements about the future are either true or false, all that follows is the trivial tautological truth that what will be will be. No necessity that is damaging to libertarian freedom ensues by affirming this statement. A necessity that either the fact will be true or false exists and that what will be true will be true, but these facts are hardly worth worrying about. Aristotle's solution is not useful in resolving this dilemma because he fails to capture the impasse of non-divine foreknowledge and libertarian freedom accurately.

William of Ockham

Although many philosophers have dealt with this issue between Aristotle and William of Ockham, I will skip ahead to Ockham who has inspired some of the best

²⁰ William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity*, 251 (emphasis mine).

strategies for dealing with the problem at hand. Ockham was working under the assumption that God is the one who has foreknowledge. It does not make any difference for Ockham's argument, however, if "God" is substituted with anyone else who has exhaustive and infallible knowledge of the past, present, and future, such as an omniscient penguin. Even though God is the catalyst for Ockham's discussion, the exact same problem would follow if some other creature had knowledge of the future. Furthermore, should Ockham's solution work, it only succeeds as a solution to the problem of non-divine foreknowledge. The problem of divine foreknowledge, however, is more complicated than Ockham's answer supposes.

Ockham proffers an inspirational observation in *Predestination, God's*

Foreknowledge and Future Contingents:

Some propositions are about the present as regards both their wording and their subject matter (*secundum vocem et secundum rem*). Where such [propositions] are concerned, it is universally true that every true proposition about the present has [corresponding to it] a necessary one about the past: – e.g., 'Socrates is seated,' 'Socrates is walking,' 'Socrates is just,' and the like.

Other propositions are about the present as regards their wording only and are equivalently about the future, since their truth depends on the truth of propositions about the future. Where such [propositions] are concerned, the rule that every true proposition about the present has [corresponding to it] a necessary proposition about the past is not true.²¹

From this passage, Ockham has been historically recognized for discerning an asymmetrical conception of facts about the past contrasted with those pertaining to the future. The facts about the past are necessary in the sense that they cannot be changed. So, in some sense the fact that Luther nailed the ninety-five theses in 1517 is necessary since nothing can be done now to change this fact after it happened. A causal closedness

²¹ William of Ockham, *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, trans. and intro. Marilyn Adams and Norman Kretzmann (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 46-47 (bracketed words included in the translation).

or inalterability about the veracity of past propositions like this one seems to exist, which gives it some type of necessity.

Ockham called this necessity *per accidens*, which contemporary philosophers have appropriated as “accidental necessity.”²² For propositions about past facts are not necessary in the strictest sense, since numerous possible worlds exist where Martin Luther does not post the ninety-five theses in 1517. Defining the necessary and sufficient conditions for what qualifies as accidentally necessary has been notoriously difficult.²³ Nonetheless certain qualifications that apply generally to propositions that are accidentally necessary can be given. These include: (1) the event described by the proposition could have occurred otherwise in some possible world; (2) the proposition is true or accurate; and (3) the truth value of the proposition cannot be altered after the event it depicts has transpired. The example given above about Martin Luther satisfies these conditions, so I will use it to demonstrate the Ockhamist argument from the necessity of the past.

As I have already suggested, certain facts about the past are accidentally necessary, such as Martin Luther’s posting of the ninety-five theses in 1517. I also

²² The contemporary interest in Ockham’s solution and accidental necessity has stemmed from Marilyn Adams article, “Is the Existence of God a ‘Hard’ Fact?,” *PR* 76 (1966): 492-503. Sophisticated defenses of accidental necessity include Alfred J. Freddoso, “Accidental Necessity and Logical Determinism,” *JP* 80, no. 5 (1983): 257-78; idem, “Accidental Necessity and Power over the Past,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (1982): 54-68.

²³ Some critical arguments against accidental necessity and Ockhamist solutions include: William Hasker, “Hard Facts and Theological Fatalism,” *Noûs* 22, no. 3 (1988): 419-36; John Martin Fischer, “Hard-Type Soft Facts,” *PR* 95, no. 4 (1986): 591-601; idem, “Ockhamism,” *PR* 94, no. 1 (1985): 81-100; idem, “Freedom and Foreknowledge,” *PR* 92, no. 1 (1983): 69-79. For an Ockhamist response see In-Kyu Song, *Divine Foreknowledge and Necessity* (New York: University Press of America, 2002), chs. 2-3.

suggested that accidental necessity is not absolutely necessary, since possible worlds exist where Martin Luther does not post the theses in 1517. Rather, this event is accidentally necessary because it occurred in the past and its truth value is irrevocable. The future is different than the past because it remains causally open. Many possibilities about the future exist that could be true.

Alvin Plantinga has defined causally closed facts pertaining to the past that are accidentally necessary as “hard facts.”²⁴ Propositions in the past that are about the future he calls “soft facts,” because they are in the past but not causally closed until some time in the future. For example, suppose an omniscient penguin believed in 1467 that Martin Luther would post the theses in fifty years. While the penguin’s belief is true, it is not hardened in 1467 because it remains revocable or open. After the episode in Wittenberg occurred in 1517, then the penguin’s belief becomes a hard fact.

By employing Plantinga’s interpretation of Ockham’s necessity *per accidens*, a solution to the problem of foreknowledge *simpliciter* can be formulated. The fact that an omniscient penguin would know in 1467 that Luther would post in 1517 does not limit Luther’s ability to decide how to act. For such knowledge is only soft. Only after the event transpires is it a hard fact and accidentally necessary because at that point the choice is irrevocable. This commonsensical notion is captured in the colloquial maxim, “There’s no use crying over spilt milk.” The differentiation between hard facts and soft facts recognizes something most people intuitively understand about the asymmetry of time. The past is determined insofar as it can no longer be changed, while the future is causally open until it occurs.

²⁴ Alvin Plantinga, “On Ockham’s Way Out,” reprinted in *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, ed. James Sennett (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 271.

Nonetheless, it appears as if the distinction between hard and soft facts does not absolutely satisfy the problem of freedom and non-divine foreknowledge. For claiming that propositions concerning free decisions in the future are soft facts does not do away with the fact that some truths presently correspond to future actions. And the cynic may think that this is all that is needed to deny human freedom. Perhaps an illustration will demonstrate why this is not so.

Imagine that a computer programmer who studies philosophy in his spare time invents a computer that can ascertain whether any meaningful proposition is true or false. Furthermore, for the sake of argument, assume that propositions concerning future free acts are indeed meaningful, and that no omniscient entities exist besides this computer. Suppose that a group of fundamentalist Aristotelian students discover the scientist's invention and believe that its advent has destroyed human free will. The Aristotelian fundamentalists secretly conspire to destroy the computer and succeed in doing so. They must believe that prior to the computer being built they were indeterministically free and then after the computer was built that their actions were determined. Subsequent to the destruction of the computer, they once again seem to gain their free will. Yet, most people are inclined to think that human free will could not be affected by building and destroying a computer. This intuition seems accurate to me. So if adding and subtracting an all-knowing computer does not threaten libertarian freedom, then likewise adding any form of foreknowledge *simpliciter* is not a threat to free will either.

The reason Ockham's way out and the computer example can provide a model for saving freedom in the face of foreknowledge is that in both instances the foreknowledge is contingent on the future choices of the responsible agents. Rather than the future

actions conforming with foreknowledge, the foreknowledge conforms with future free actions. Thus, even though propositions that correspond to my future choices hold a truth value, the veracity of these propositions is contingently related on my choice. In other words, although these propositions capture what will happen in the future, they would be different, if I chose to act differently. This is why the distinction between hard and soft facts works to save freedom from simple foreknowledge.

The Problem of God's Foreknowledge

The problem of God's foreknowledge poses a distinct problem compared to the problem of foreknowledge *simpliciter*. This is due to the nature of God. For the principal adherents of theism do not understand God's foreknowledge simply in terms of omniscience. In addition to omniscience, theists believe God is providentially in control of the way the world turns out. Alfred Freddoso has suggested that the doctrine of providence is what makes the problem of divine foreknowledge more complex than merely grappling with simple foreknowledge.²⁵ In fact, good reasons can be given to show God has acted in such a way that he has foreordained a specific plan that he has in mind for his creation. Ephesians 1:4-5 tells us that God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." This verse seems to imply that God exercised his foreknowledge in order to achieve his will, which includes the salvation of certain people.

²⁵ Alfred J. Freddoso, "Introduction," in *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*, trans. and intro. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 2-5.

The book of Jeremiah records God calling the prophet in these words: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations” (1:5). Although other explanations of this passage are warranted, the most straightforward interpretation indicates God’s foreknowledge played a significant role in bringing about Jeremiah’s call to be a prophet.

As mentioned above, that God should ordain the world such that he brings about what is good for his creation is not surprising. In order to reach this goal, God is at liberty to use his omniscience, omnipotence, and whatever else is within his means to do so. This is the main difference between foreknowledge *simpliciter* and divine foreknowledge. In a theistic model, God is not merely a passive receptacle of knowledge, which could be the case for a disinterested omniscient being such as a computer or penguin. According to theism, God has an active role in bringing about what he wants from his creation. This makes reconciling human freedom with divine foreknowledge more problematic than doing so with foreknowledge *simpliciter*.

From here the task is to find a model of divine providence and foreknowledge that can satisfactorily answer certain questions such as: How can God accomplish his will without diminishing human freedom? How do the various descriptions of God’s foreknowledge and providence in scripture fit a single model, if this is possible? What role do human choices have in God’s plan for the future? Does God have a specific plan for the future? In what ways does a model of understanding God’s foreknowledge and providence apply to daily life? The rest of this project will be devoted to answering questions such as these.

CHAPTER 1

A PLETHORA OF SOLUTIONS

Although a solution to foreknowledge *simpliciter* can readily be produced, the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom is not easily surmounted. The difficulty, however, of assembling a number of possible answers to the dilemma presently being considered does not exist. I shall attempt to survey the major solutions, although not every solution, to this problem. I will critique the weaknesses of each view in order to demonstrate that the solution I endorse, Molinism, is a preferable choice over the others. In this chapter I will first examine atheism, a simple answer to the problem. I shall proceed to evaluate the timelessness solution, which will be followed by looking at the classical position that also is referred to as Augustinianism.¹ I shall also assess a recently developed approach known as open theism and I will critique it in the subsequent chapter. In the chapter following open theism I will consider Molinism.

Atheism

Atheism, the denial of the existence of God, is the first option I shall explore for resolving the problems of maintaining human freedom and divine foreknowledge. In

¹ I am following the lead that William Hasker makes in ‘The Antinomies of Divine Providence,’ *Philosophia Christi* 2, no. 2 (2002): 363. This avoids the denominationalism that can follow from calling the view Thomist or Calvinist. Plus, it seems that this view goes back at least as far to Augustine who influenced those in this tradition. Similar terminology is used in James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

many ways it is the easiest solution, but its simplicity comes with a price. Two forms of atheism need to be addressed because of their different conceptions of human freedom, and they will be referred to by the leading proponents of each view, Antony Flew and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Support for Flew's Atheism

A simple solution to the problem of human freedom and divine foreknowledge is to deny the existence of a divine being who knows and plans the future. The classical conception of God given by Augustinianism maintains that God's will absolutely determines human actions. Given this account of God's providence, some atheists follow Flew's argument against theism. Flew reasons that if God is sovereign as the Augustinian view suggests, then human actions are analogous to those of a hypnotized person under the charms of a Great Hypnotist.

Predestination seems to make out that all of us, all the time, whether we know it or not, *both* when by ordinary standards we are acting freely and could help doing what we choose to do *and* when we are acting under compulsion or when we are not acting at all but are asleep or paralyzed – all of us are, really and ultimately, as it were, acting out the irresistible suggestions of the Great Hypnotist. This idea is incompatible with that of our being free agents, properly accountable for what we do.²

The problem for Flew is not just that humans would lose significant freedom, but that God would still hold them to be morally accountable for their actions. Furthermore, God's ultimate reward and punishment—Heaven and Hell—are supposed to be based on people's choices in life. But if God has determined these choices, then Heaven and Hell become the abhorrent result of the seemingly arbitrary will of God. Based on this

² Antony Flew, "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom," in *Critiques of God*, ed. Peter Angeles (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1976), 234 (emphasis his).

theology Flew poignantly suggests, ‘Suppose now we learn that we are all, all the time, in all things, creatures of a Great Manipulator.’ He concludes, ‘We can no longer take it for granted that it would be right to punish [us]; and certainly not that it would be right for [the] Creator to become the Great Justiciar!’³

How cogent is this argument for atheism? For if Flew’s argument is sound, then it provides a successful solution to the problem of human freedom and divine foreknowledge. If no divine being exists who providentially oversees the created order, then no real dilemma exists! Two assumptions in Flew’s argument, however, may expose a weakness in his line of reasoning.

First, his argument succeeds only if it assumes that God absolutely determines all occurrences, including human choices. While it cannot be denied that some theologies explicitly and implicitly confirm this, it equally cannot be denied that many other views of God’s providence have been maintained by theists that uphold a higher opinion of human freedom than is proffered by Augustinianism.⁴ Additionally, Flew’s argument may rely on a caricature of Augustinian theology. Whether this is so will be assessed in my critique of Augustinianism. A limitation on Flew’s argument to recognize for now is that if it is successful, it only refutes one form of divine foreknowledge.

The second assumption implicit in Flew’s argument is that the ability to choose otherwise is a necessary and sufficient prerequisite for libertarian freedom. Fifty years

³ Antony Flew, *The Presumption of Atheism* (London: Barnes & Noble, 1976), 96.

⁴ See David Basinger and Randall Basinger, eds., *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986); Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* (Downers Grove, IL: 2000); James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*.

ago, this assumption would likely have passed without question. Harry Frankfurt, however, has demonstrated that this claim is more complicated than previously supposed.⁵ In fact, Linda Zagzebski endorses a position that assumes a strong conception of God's sovereignty, but she attempts to save human freedom by using Frankfurt-style counterexamples to demonstrate libertarian freedom.⁶ Zagzebski's model of Thomistic-Ockhamism argues that human choices are not simply determined by God's foreknowledge, but they are "overdetermined" by it. On this view, God determines every free choice, yet these free decisions would have obtained even without God's determinate guidance. This sort of defense assumes that compatibilism, or soft determinism, is coherent, and its plausibility will be assessed when Augustinianism is considered. Until then, the fact that a defense of strong forms of God's sovereignty can be articulated and sophisticated should slow down hasty conclusions that treat Augustinianism as a fairly simple position. If this is so, then the simple answer given by atheism may become more complicated than first perceived.

For now, though, suppose that these two assumptions in Flew's argument are not problematic. Does atheism provide the best solution to the problem at hand? How does atheism cash out as a theory for human freedom? A critical assessment of Flew's atheism may reveal further difficulties with his solution.

⁵ Harry Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy (JP)* 66 (1969): 829-39; idem, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *JP* 68 (1971): 5-20. This was explained in the introduction.

⁶ Linda Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 154-62.

Critique of Flew's Atheism

The main problem with the solution given by this form of atheism is that it does not significantly improve the situation for human freedom. For Flew's own view of human freedom, which follows in the same vein as other atheists such as Thomas Hobbes and David Hume, entails a form of compatibilism. Under this view, human free will is determined by physical, social, and psychological forces. Now Flew does not think this type of determinism is incompatible with significant free will.⁷ But if these theories of determinism can be harmonized with a notion of free will that allows praise and blame, why cannot theological determinism do so as well? Furthermore, Flew's solution is simply moving from one type of compatibilism to another, which does not improve the situation for the advocate of libertarian freedom. So, the explanatory scope and force of Flew's atheism is lacking insofar as it is supposed to offer an advantageous view of human free will.

Is it possible that a compatibilist form of atheism could offer a better account of human freedom than theism? Some theists, such as J. P. Moreland, find it unlikely that a compatibilist type of atheism will ever be able to give an account of free will that is preferable to theism. Moreland assumes, as I do, that compatibilist accounts of freedom are incoherent. Moreover, since many of the more defensible models of atheism are essentially tied to some form of compatibilism, they rely on something like materialistic evolution to account for the entire makeup of human beings. If this is so, then Paul Churchland, an atheist and physical reductionist, is correct when he states, "There is neither need, nor room, to fit any nonphysical substances or properties into our

⁷ Flew, "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom," 231-32.

theoretical account of ourselves. We are creatures of matter.”⁸ Based on this line of reasoning Moreland argues that theism can give a stronger account of freedom:

Things are worse for Flew. He desires to preserve libertarian freedom, but such freedom is actually more compatible with theism than with the more defensible versions of atheism—versions that are physicalistic or scientistic in orientation. To see this, one must realize that the existence of full-blown freedom in certain creatures has metaphysical implications that are “danglers” for most versions of atheism. Freedom presupposes agent causation—agents that have the capacity to exercise their causal powers spontaneously for various reasons. But agent causation seems to presuppose dualism, and it is precisely the existence of finite, substantial souls or minds that is hard to explain if scientistic/physicalistic versions of atheism are true.⁹

Since theists can offer a better explanation for the origin of a self or will which seems to be implied for libertarian free will to exist and atheism cannot, it follows that Moreland’s argument demonstrates that atheism fails to account for significant human freedom when compared with theism. The atheist may question Moreland’s appropriation of substance dualism,¹⁰ but his point remains. Theism more naturally fits with libertarian freedom than Flew’s atheism. If Moreland’s contention that theism dovetails with free will better than atheism is correct, then theism is going to be preferred to those who find libertarianism to be a basic attribute of humans. Even if Moreland is wrong, Flew’s atheism does not promise much improvement, since it only offers a change from theological compatibilism to some type of physicalistic compatibilism. This

⁸ Paul Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 21.

⁹ J. P. Moreland, “Atheism & Leaky Buckets,” in *Does God Exist?: The Debate Between Atheists and Theists*, by J. P. Moreland and Kai Nielsen (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1993), 237-38.

¹⁰ Of course, not all theists are substance dualists. See the variety of opinions found in Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, and H. Newton Maloney, eds., *Whatever Happened to the Soul?: Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

difference will likely only impress those who already have strong convictions for theism or atheism. Consequently, Flew's atheism is not a satisfactory solution to the problem at hand.

Support for Sartre's Atheism

Sartre presents a different account of human freedom from an atheist's perspective. While the subtle nuances of his understanding of freedom are beyond the bounds of this project, I will proceed on the assumption that Sartre believes that humans can be indeterministically free. Sartre represents a strand of atheism that is usually referred to as "existentialism." Existentialism is the philosophy that is founded on the claim that existence precedes essence. In other words, existence precedes a knowable purpose, design, or end for what exists.

Now freedom for Sartre is inherently tied to human existence. Sartre says this when he writes:

My freedom is perpetually in question in my being; it is not a quality added on or a *property* of my nature. It is very exactly the stuff of my being; and as in my being, my being is in question, I must necessarily possess a certain comprehension of freedom.¹¹

One reason why Sartre opposes theism is that human freedom, on his view, is inconsistent with people having a designed end, purpose, or essence. In his own words, "The being which is what it is can not be free."¹² Sartre's argument is that if humans have been created by a God with a specific end or purpose, then their freedom is restrained by the limits of their created essence. In order to be truly free, Sartre contends

¹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 439 (emphasis his).

¹² *Ibid.*, 440.

that humans must be free to choose and fulfill their own purposes. This is the point he makes in the following passage:

What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means that, first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is indefinable, it is because first he is nothing. Only afterwards will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. Thus, there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence. Man is nothing else but what he makes himself.¹³

The upshot of Sartre's atheism, unlike Flew's, is that it can offer a stronger account of human freedom than theism. In fact, human freedom according to atheistic existentialism will always be stronger than theistic accounts of freedom, which fundamentally describe humans as beings created with purpose or essence. Consequently, Sartre's atheism escapes the two assumptions implicit in Flew's argument, while positing a seemingly better alternative to freedom than theism can. Does this vision of freedom really give a superior account of libertarian freedom? Next the disadvantages of Sartre's understanding of human freedom will be explored.

Critique of Sartre's Atheism

The strongest objection to Sartre's proposal is that it does not achieve what it intends to do, namely, provide a more meaningful account of human freedom. Humans can have a radical type of freedom to become what they will on his view, but no choice is actually better than another. For Sartre, humans cannot and must not have an essential purpose to fulfill that is ontologically preeminent to existence. C. Stephen Evans, an

¹³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and the Human Emotions*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1957), 15.

expert on existentialism, explains the deficiencies of Sartre's philosophy in light of the theistic alternative:

God created humans to be responsible choosers. The choices are not indifferent; to choose to turn away from God and his ways is to choose not to become my true self. However, the fact that this true self is given, and not invented by me out of nothing, does not negate my freedom. It is, in fact, what makes my freedom meaningful. The freedom Sartre believes humans possess seems more arbitrary and meaningless. There can be no concern for making good choices unless some choices are really good.¹⁴

Furthermore, Moreland's objection to Flew's atheism may still have some import for Sartre's version. Sartre contends that absolute freedom is a basic fact of human beings. A soul or some type of immaterial self, however, is still needed to make free choices even if freedom is assumed to be a basic component to existence. Is there room in Sartre's philosophy to account for this aspect of human freedom? On the one hand, if humans are composed of physical matter alone, then no room for a soul, and consequently libertarian freedom, remains. On the other hand, if humans have an immaterial self that is needed to make indeterministic choices, from where did this part of human beings come? Theism can give a full account of this freedom by maintaining that God created humans with an immaterial self for the purpose of bestowing them with free will. Sartre's atheism cannot explain this brute fact about human beings. If Sartre is right, then how people can exercise freedom remains unexplained.

So, Sartre's atheism may provide a philosophy that advocates humans have unfettered freedom, but at least two difficulties follow this view of freedom. First, free will without essential purpose or meaning for choices does not give a more meaningful account of libertarian freedom. Second, how humans could have such a free will

¹⁴ C. Stephen Evans, *Søren Kierkegaard's Christian Psychology* (Vancouver: Regent, 1990), 55.

according to atheism still remains inexplicable. I conclude that Sartre's atheism is not going to be persuasive to anyone who is not already committed to some extreme form of existentialism.

So, on the one hand, the atheistic solutions proved to be simple answers to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge. On the other hand, atheism also demonstrated complications in providing a beneficial solution to this problem. On Flew's account atheism trades one form of compatibilism for another; on Sartre's rationale human existence entails the principle that all choices can be absolutely free, but in turn it makes all choices meaningless. But the universe does not seem to be meaningless; rather, it seems to be richly meaningful.¹⁵ Therefore, atheism is not going to offer a plausible solution unless one already has vested interests in atheism.

Divine Timelessness

After atheism, perhaps the next view to provide a *prima facie* simple solution is the view that God exists in a timeless state apart from the world. Similar to the atheist answers, this simple solution comes with significant complications.

Support for Divine Timelessness

The model of divine timelessness is often invoked as a quick and easy answer to the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. This is because the advantages of this view are lucid and pertinent to the problem being considered.

¹⁵ See Nancey Murphy and George Ellis, *On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Theology, Cosmology, and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). They argue that meaning deeply penetrates a variety of aspects of existence.

Timelessness Means No *Foreknowledge*

Divine timelessness is a simple solution to the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge because it denies that God has *foreknowledge* in the strictest sense of the term. If God is outside of temporal boundaries, then saying he has knowledge *before* an event transpires is a misnomer. For no events occur before or after God knows them. He simply knows all things in a timeless present. Augustine describes this state when he writes “that in eternity nothing passes but all is present, whereas time cannot be present all at once.”¹⁶ Writing less than a hundred years after Augustine, Boethius capitalizes on Augustine’s doctrine of timelessness to solve the problem of freedom and foreknowledge:

Since every judgment grasps the things that are subject to it in accordance with its own nature, and since God has an ever-eternal and ever-present-moment condition, his knowledge as well has passed beyond all the motion of time and is stable in the simplicity of its own present; it embraces the infinite reaches of what has passed and what is to come, and in its own simple perception, it looks at all things as if they are being carried out *now*. And so, should you want to ponder the foresight by which God distinguishes all things, you will more accurately determine that it is not foreknowledge as of something that is to come, but rather knowledge of a never-failing present. From these considerations, it is not named Providence (foresight) but Providence (looking out), because, established far from the bottommost things, it looks out at all things as if some lofty head of things.¹⁷

So, divine timelessness dispenses with foreknowledge and consequently resolves the crisis of human freedom and divine foreknowledge. Since God does not have foreknowledge, it cannot impede human free will.

¹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. 11, ch. 11.

¹⁷ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, bk. 5, prose 6, 15-18 (translator’s emphasis). See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae (ST)*, 1a, 14, 13.

Timelessness Accords with Perfect Being Theology

An additional advantage of divine timelessness is that it corresponds with the aptly named ‘perfect being theology’ of Medieval Scholasticism. Scholastics like Anselm believed that God must be timeless if he is a perfect being.¹⁸ For if God experiences temporal change, then he must change for better or worse. If God changes for the better, then he was not perfect. If God changes for the worse, then he no longer would be perfect.¹⁹ Thus, the scholastics concluded that God must be absolutely immutable, which would entail that God is timeless. So, claiming God is timeless has an additional advantage to solving the dilemma of divine foreknowledge, for it also coheres with God being perfect in the classical sense.

Critique of Divine Timelessness

Advocates of divine timelessness seem to provide a solution that is simple and cogent. Nonetheless, I shall argue that accepting divine timelessness as a solution to the problem actually creates more problems than it solves. The prime disadvantages include the problem it introduces of God’s timeless knowledge and the growing criticism of perfect being theology.

The Problem of God’s Timeless Knowledge

The timelessness solution does resolve the problem of God’s foreknowledge. What does this mean, though, for people’s actions and apparent future? Are my future decisions in any better position to be free under the model of divine timelessness?

¹⁸ Anselm, *Monologion*, chs. 20-24.

¹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, 1a, 9, 1.

Zagzebski argues that divine timelessness would make all choices unalterable before God just as past knowledge is to humans. “The intuition that there is nothing I can do now about God’s eternal immutable beliefs about my future acts is about as strong as the intuition that there is nothing I can do now about God’s past immutable beliefs about my future acts.” She concludes, “It seems as if there is nothing I can do about those beliefs that are now irrevocable, and eternal beliefs seem to be just as irrevocable as past ones.”²⁰ Similar, although different, claims have been made by Alvin Plantinga²¹ and William Hasker.²² The main point is that divine timelessness does not solve the problem for human freedom. Rather, divine timelessness only exchanges the problem of foreknowledge for the problem of immutable eternal knowledge. Zagzebski’s epigrammatic words express this clearly: “If there is no use crying over spilt milk, there is no use crying over timelessly spilling milk either.”²³

In addition to failing to provide a beneficial solution to the problem of freedom, other complications with divine timeless knowledge exist that make it an unsatisfactory theistic solution. How can a timelessly immutable being relate with beings in time? Thomas Aquinas suggests that God’s existence would be like a fixed pillar, which does

²⁰ Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge*, 61. She thinks, however, there is a solution to this new problem. See 154-72.

²¹ Alvin Plantinga, “On Ockham’s Way Out,” in *The Analytic Theist*, ed. James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 262-63.

²² William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 172-77.

²³ Linda Zagzebski, “Recent Work on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (New York: Oxford, 2002), 52.

not change although relations to it can change.²⁴ This analogy shows that God does not relate to his creation through a model of interaction such as listening followed by responding. If God is timeless, then his personal interaction with creation cannot be conceived in terms of temporal relations. Consequently, understanding what it means for God to be relational becomes difficult to comprehend, if not altogether mysterious. Although it does not follow from this that the doctrine of divine timelessness is clearly incoherent or contradictory, this criticism makes rendering the intelligibility of God's timeless relationship with the temporal world difficult to grasp.²⁵

Perfect Being Theology – Not So Perfect

Another disadvantage of divine timelessness is the growing opposition to “perfect being theology,” which typically accompanies such a view. Many people have not found it intuitively obvious that a perfect being would be timeless.²⁶ Why would it not be better for God to experience the passage of time? Perhaps there is an aesthetic beauty that can only be experienced with the passage of time, like enjoying a musical masterpiece. Some philosophers have also argued that a timeless God could not be an omniscient God. For a timeless God would not be able to know propositions that essentially involve knowledge

²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, bk. 3, q. 7, art. 10; idem, *ST*, 1a, 13, 7.

²⁵ See Hasker, *God, Freedom and Knowledge*, ch. 8. Hasker is no friend to divine timelessness, but he persuasively contends that it is an intelligible notion.

²⁶ An article representative of this position is Nicholas Wolterstorff's essay, “God Everlasting,” in *God and the Good: Essays in Honor of Henry Stob*, ed. Clifton Orlebeke and Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 181-203. Reprinted in *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 77-98.

of what is happening *now*.²⁷ Although this project cannot assess these claims, it should be noted that the supposed benefits of divine timelessness have been brought into considerable doubt.

So, the doctrine of divine timelessness is not, *per se*, a helpful solution to the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Divine timelessness provides a simple solution, but it creates more complications than it solves. Although divine timelessness on its own does not resolve the problem, perhaps it may be combined with another view such as Augustinianism and Molinism to forge a solution to the problem.

Augustinianism

The classical solution that has historically satisfied many theists' qualms regarding the problem of human freedom and divine foreknowledge is a view I will call Augustinianism. As the name suggests, this theology originates at least as far back to Augustine and since then has remained prominent among Christians. The essentials of this view have also been attributed to Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and other renowned thinkers. First, the essential features of this theology that pertain to the problem will be studied. Next, how this view intends to solve the problem will be explained. In the final section the shortcomings of this model of providence will be considered.

²⁷ Representative works include Robert C. Coburn, "Professor Malcolm on God," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 41 (1963): 143-62; Norman Kretzmann, "Omniscience and Immutability," *JP* 63 (1966): 409-21; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting"; Richard A. Creel, *Divine Impassability* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 92-96; Quentin Smith, *Language and Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 58-60; William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 97-109.

Main Tenets of Augustinianism

The theological model presented by Augustinianism is prevalent among many Christians. In contemporary literature, this view is often referred to as the “classical position.” Of particular interest to the problem presently under consideration are the Augustinian doctrines of omniscience, human freedom, and sovereignty.

Simple Foreknowledge

Augustinianism claims that God’s omniscience includes exact knowledge of the future. According to this theology, God has simple foreknowledge, but he does not have “middle knowledge,” which will be explained later in the discussion of Molinism.

Augustinians maintain that God knows perfectly the past, present, and future in all of its entirety. Moreover, God cannot be mistaken in any of his beliefs about the past, present, and future.

Compatibilism

In addition to affirming God’s foreknowledge, Augustinians claim that humans in some sense possess free will. Augustine makes this clear when he writes, “We assert both that God knows all things before they come to pass and that we do by our free will whatsoever we know and feel to be done by us only because we will it.”²⁸ Furthermore, Augustinian theology claims God is providentially in control of all that happens in the world. “God,” Augustine maintains, “can never be believed to have left the kingdoms of men, their dominations and servitudes, outside of the laws of his providence.”²⁹ So,

²⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, bk. 5, ch. 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, bk. 5, ch. 11.

regarding human freedom Augustinianism is committed to some model of compatibilism or soft determinism.³⁰

How do Augustinians explain compatibilism? Thomas Aquinas's distinction between primary and secondary causes is traditionally considered by Augustinians to be the starting point for the compatibilist explanation.³¹ Paul Helm, a prominent philosopher and defender of Augustinianism, explains how compatibilism is to be understood according to this model:

There is a long and honourable tradition according to which there are both *primary* and *secondary* causes. The primary cause (or causes) is the divine upholding; the secondary causes are the causal powers of created things; the power of the seed to germinate, of a person to be angry or walk down the street, and so on. This distinction is helpful provided that two points are borne in mind. The first is that these two sorts of cause are not in competition with each other. The primary cause is an enabling and sustaining cause, making possible secondary causes and setting bounds to them. The second point is that the primary cause is not an event in time, as the secondary causes are, but is an eternal cause which has the whole of creation as its effect.³²

Whether this move is intelligible or affords Augustinians the amount of human freedom and divine sovereignty they desire depends on the plausibility of compatibilism, which remains questionable.

Total Sovereignty

In Augustinian theologies, God's sovereignty over his creation is emphasized. God's sovereign will ordains all that transpires in history. 'Thus also the durations of

³⁰ Traditionally, Augustine is recognized as having two polarities in thought. In his early writings, Augustine comes across as a libertarian, while his later writings portray him as a soft determinist.

³¹ Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, 1a, 116, 1-4.

³² Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 86 (emphasis his).

wars are determined by Him as He may see meet,” declares Augustine, “according to His righteous will, and pleasure, and mercy, to afflict or to console the human race, so that they are sometimes of longer, sometimes of shorter duration.”³³ Furthermore,

Augustinianism claims that God has a purpose for all that occurs, even for evil.

Augustinians draw upon biblical examples of instances when evil was turned for good and reason that these are normative cases for all occurrences of evil. One classic example includes Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers (Gen. 37), which Joseph later explains, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result” (Gen. 50:20). The purpose of a specific evil occurrence may not be able to be understood from a human perspective, but Augustinians trust that God has a reason for willing all things both good and bad to happen in the world.

Support for Augustinianism

Augustinianism has been an influential theological model in the history of the church. Support for Augustinianism is sustained for many alleged reasons, including its confident claims for biblical harmony, God’s control, and God’s guidance.

Biblical Harmony

The first strength of Augustinianism is the way it seems to reflect an accurate interpretation of the Bible. The Bible makes reference to God’s foreknowledge in several passages, verifying a major tenet of Augustinianism (Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:29, 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:2, 20). Furthermore, Augustinians would maintain that the Bible authenticates their claim that God is in absolute control of history. In the Old Testament it is written,

³³ Augustine, *City of God*, bk. 5, ch. 22.

“Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is” (Ecc. 6:10). In the New Testament Jesus encourages his disciples with these words: “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:29-31). The sovereignty of God is described in Isaiah 45:9, “Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker – an earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’ Or the thing you are making say, ‘He has no hands?’” This comparison of the Potter’s rights to mold the clay as he likes fits the theology of Augustinianism. So, on the surface, passages like these seem to confirm the Augustinian picture of God.

God is in Control

Another alleged benefit of Augustinian theology is the assurance that God has determined all things, so everything has a purpose whether for good or evil. In terms of the current literature, Augustinianism has the benefit of being a “risk-free” model of providence. Paul Helm clearly understands this to be a helpful aspect of a theodicy when he writes, “Belief in providence enables Christians to put their pain in a different setting.” He continues:

How? By recognizing that *the evil they and others experience has been sent*. It is not the result of a free-action of human beings who are temporarily outside the sovereign control of God; it is not the result of a basic dualism between God and evil that afflicts the universe, as the Manichees and other dualists believed. *The evil that is being experienced is the result of the sovereign will of God.*³⁴

³⁴ Helm, *Providence of God*, 231 (emphasis mine).

With the belief that God has a final purpose for all things, Augustinians can find comfort that all the events, including those that are evil, proceed from the sovereign will of God.

God's Guidance

A final benefit of Augustinianism that I will identify is that God's foreknowledge gives a framework to make God's guidance and response to personal requests and petitions. Since God knows the future, and he is absolutely sovereign, then God is in an auspicious position to respond to prayers and bring about what is best for his creation.

Critique of Augustinianism

Despite its historical dominance, the classical theology of Augustinianism has its disadvantages. I will argue that these criticisms are strong enough to compel us to look elsewhere for an explanation of the coexistence of divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

Unacceptable Compatibilism

The first weakness of Augustinianism is its unabashed acceptance of the theory of compatibilism for human freedom. To believe that human actions are both determined by God and indeterministically free is incoherent. I find the unequivocal affirmation of compatibilism to be simply irreconcilable. "What is at stake here, of course," explains Hasker, "is whether logical contradictions must be expunged from theology." I concur with his concluding sentiment, "If logical contradiction does not constitute a sufficient reason for rejecting a position, then I will turn in my philosopher's union card; I no longer know any way of practicing my trade."³⁵ In my estimation, compatibilism is a

³⁵ Hasker, "The Antinomies of Divine Providence," 362.

logical contradiction, and consequently, any view that relies on the cogency of compatibilism will be unacceptable compared to any view that does not.

Biblical Disharmony

Further difficulties with the Augustinian solution exist. Some have challenged the biblical basis for its justification. Open theists claim that the Bible supports a picture of God who does not know the future and who is sometimes surprised by what occurs. The merits of their position will be assessed in due time, but for now note that some believe Augustinian theology has hijacked a handful of scripture passages to demonstrate its theology, while ignoring others that support other positions. Furthermore, some scripture passages indicate that creation can act in a fashion contrary to God's sovereign will. Isaiah 5:1-4 depicts Israel as a vine that God planted and intended to produce good fruit. Instead of producing good grapes, the vine, which has been taken care of and ought to produce good fruit, yields worthless fruit. God reacts by saying, "Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?" (Isa. 5:4). Texts like this support a view contrary to Augustinianism's God who exercises absolute sovereignty. The point is that many texts do not support Augustinian theology, thus undermining the claim that it has the complete support of scripture.

Flew's Objection

Another difficulty with Augustinianism is that it seems to fall prey to the objection raised earlier by Flew. For if God is supposed to be understood as a determiner of human will, then human choices are analogous to Flew's picture of the Great Puppeteer who makes his puppets move as he likes. Augustinians claim this is a

caricature of their view, but the analogy seems accurate. If this is so, then Flew's objection stands, and Augustinianism makes God a morally reprehensible being. For God would condemn some of his creation because it disobeyed him, although they were actually caused to behave that way by him. In other words, people would be condemned to Hell for not choosing to believe in God, which they could not choose to do anyway. John Calvin advocates this position in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* where he writes, "Our salvation flows from the wellspring of God's free mercy. . . which illumines God's grace by this contrast: that he does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies of others."³⁶ John Piper, a contemporary Augustinian, makes essentially the same claim:

Conversion does indeed include an act of the will by which we renounce sin and submit ourselves to the authority of Christ and put our hope and trust in him. *We are responsible to do this, and will be condemned if we don't.* But just as clearly the Bible teaches that, owing to our hard heart and willful blindness and spiritual insensitivity, *we cannot do this.*³⁷

Most people would find a God who holds people responsible for acting in a way that they are unable to act to be an unacceptable deity. Imagine if someone designed and built a robot such that the designer programmed the robot's every move. Next, suppose the designer castigated the robot for acting as it was programmed. Most people would likely say the designer in this scenario is either crazy or evil, but this is roughly what God would be doing for punishing his creation that could not resist his sovereign will. If

³⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II:921. Bk. 3, ch. 21, sec. 1.

³⁷ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, 2d ed. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1996), 62 (emphases mine).

Augustinianism makes God out to be an unjust judge, then the solution it proffers for the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge is unacceptable on moral grounds.

Problem of Two Wills

Augustinianism encounters another difficulty because it claims that God's sovereign will determines all things. Yet scripture identifies some things God wills but does not get. For example, 1 Timothy 2:4 teaches that God desires all people to be saved, but all people are not saved. If this is God's will, and it does not occur, then Augustinianism needs to explain this discrepancy. Calvin suggests that God's will is actually "one and simple," although it appears manifold to us because of humanity's "mental incapacity" to understand it.³⁸ Helm contends that all views of divine providence will have a tension like this, so this criticism is not damning for Augustinianism.³⁹ Rather than following Calvin, most Augustinians, in order to account for this, contend that God has two wills. By "two wills," they mean that God has a secret will and a revealed will. The secret will of God, for Augustinians, is his will that determines things to transpire as they actually do. If God is provident, then whatever takes place must be allowed or caused in accordance with his secret will. God's revealed will includes what he has revealed to us in the Bible, typically in the form of commands. Martin Luther makes this distinction in *The Bondage of the Will*:

God does many things which he does not show us in his Word, and he wills many things which he does not in his Word show us that he wills. Thus, he does not will the death of a sinner – that is, in his Word; but he wills it by his inscrutable will. At present, however, we must keep in view of his Word and leave alone his inscrutable will; for it is by his Word, and not by his inscrutable will, that we must

³⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, I:234. Bk. 1, ch. 18, sec. 3.

³⁹ Helm, *Providence of God*, 131-33.

be guided. In any case, who can direct himself according to a will that is inscrutable and incomprehensible? It is enough to know that there is in God an inscrutable will; what, why, and within what limits It wills, it is wholly unlawful to inquire, or wish to know, or be concerned about, or touch upon; we may only fear and adore!⁴⁰

The problem for Augustinian theology is that while positing two divine wills can make sense for other views of providence, this remains an insurmountable difficulty for Augustinians to explain. Other views of providence can explain that God's revealed will expresses what God intends to occur, such as the salvation of all people, and God's secret will is what he actually gets given a limitation of some kind on his will that God permits, such as the free choices of people. But Augustinians claim no states of affairs exist that God could will that he could not have. If God wanted all people to be saved, then the possibility for him to save all of them exists. In fact, according to Augustinianism, for God not to get exactly what he wills is impossible. Luther acknowledges this point and when he considers those who may question it, he responds that about such things, it 'is not lawful to ask.'⁴¹ Moreover, Helm declares that 'God can so order the events of a person's life as to ensure that he or she becomes a Christian.'⁴² What remains to be explained by Augustinians is why God does not save all people, if that is what he desires and is able to do.

Other models of providence can claim that God's revealed will does not always obtain because he allows humans to have indeterministic free will. Augustinianism, however, is not afforded this way out because it maintains that God sovereignly

⁴⁰ Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), 170-71.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 171

⁴² Helm, *Providence of God*, 120.

determines the wills of human beings, so human free will cannot impede God's desires in any way. It follows that Augustinianism cannot give a helpful response to this implicit problem besides Luther's order that to ask such questions is impious.

Difficult Theodicy

A related criticism of Augustinianism has to do with the existence of evil, sin, and Hell. Why does God's will determine a world where people are lost and go to Hell, when he could determine a world where all people are saved? Why does God's secret will contain the natural evils from which people needlessly suffer? If the world with all of its evils is an unmistakable reflection of God's secret will, then it seems that the moral purity of God's will is questionable. Augustinianism must take on the difficult task of upholding a theodicy that includes a view of providence which Michael Peterson dubs "meticulous providence."⁴³ The term "meticulous providence" is used in contemporary philosophy when discussing the evidential problem of evil to denote a model of providence that must deny the existence of any pointless or gratuitous acts of evil. Under Augustinianism, God is all-good, omnipotent, and omniscient, so it must follow that if he wills any evil to exist, then it must exist for some purpose or reason. Pointless evils, such as those mentioned in Ivan Karamazov's famous "Grand Inquisitor" speech in Fyoder Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, however, could conceivably exist.⁴⁴ Furthermore, I am inclined to accept the claim that instances of pointless evil could exist, which would be difficult, if not altogether impossible, to reconcile with Augustinianism.

⁴³ Michael Peterson first introduced this term in his book *Evil and the Christian God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 76.

⁴⁴ Fyoder Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, pt.2, bk. 5, chs. 4-5.

If defending meticulous providence was not enough, the Augustinian must do this without appealing to human free will. After all, under a compatibilist conception of freedom, God's will cannot be impeded by human choices. Most theists are inclined to attribute many evils, especially those which are most abominable, to human free will. In some models of theism it could even be maintained that apparently pointless evils exist in order to preserve human freedom. Yet none of these escapes are available to Augustinianism because human freedom cannot be deemed incompatible with God's determinate will. Without the free will defense, Augustinianism shoulders an exceptionally difficult theodicy.

Simple Foreknowledge Not Helpful

The final criticism of Augustinianism is that simple foreknowledge is of no real benefit for God's providential interaction with his creation. Hasker has articulately demonstrated this point by pointing out that if God only has simple foreknowledge, then it is ontologically "too late" for God (or anyone else) to do anything about the future.⁴⁵ Hasker illustrates the uselessness of simple foreknowledge with an example. He supposes that a girl, Susan, prays to God inquiring whether she should marry Kenneth. With simple foreknowledge God would know whether or not she does marry Kenneth, as well as all the exact details of that future decision. Yet, it would be impossible for God to do anything to change that decision. Suppose God foreknows that Kenneth will not be a good husband for Susan. If he foreknows that she will marry Kenneth in a year, then it is "too late" for him to do anything about it. If he could do something about her decision,

⁴⁵ Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 59-63; idem, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: 1994), 147-50.

then he would have a more complex type of foreknowledge, like middle knowledge. Hasker concludes, “*It is impossible that God should use a foreknowledge derived from the actual occurrence of the future events to determine his own prior actions in the providential guidance of the world.* If simple foreknowledge did exist, it would be useless.”⁴⁶

My final assessment is that Augustinianism is not a desirable solution to the problem of human freedom and divine foreknowledge. Rather than providing an answer that removes difficulties, it multiplies them. Modesty dictates that I note I have not demonstrated that Augustinianism is incoherent or irrational. What I have shown is that Augustinianism is very difficult to defend. Consequently, a less cumbersome solution will be sought after to answer the problem at hand.

⁴⁶ Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 63 (emphasis his).

CHAPTER 2

OPEN THEISM

In the past couple of decades, open theism, an innovative approach to the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom, has been hotly debated. Advocates of this view find Augustinianism dissatisfying, and they contend that the Bible supports an exceptionally different model of providence than the ones which have been traditionally accepted. I shall proceed by first explaining the main claims of open theism. Following that, I shall discuss the support for and critique of this view regarding its ability to resolve the problem at hand.

Main Tenets of Open Theism

The name “open theism” refers to the central characteristic of this model of providence—namely, that God is open to the possibilities of the future. It has also been referred to as “freewill theism” by other supporters and pejoratively as “neotheism” by some detractors.¹ Throughout this project, I will refer to this position as “open theism.” The main tenets of open theism include a commitment to libertarianism, limited foreknowledge, and a dynamic understanding of God’s character.

¹ Norman Geisler is a prominent backer of the label “neotheism.” See Norman Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man?: The New “Open” View of God—Neotheism’s Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997), especially ch. 4.

Human Libertarian Free Will

Regarding human free will, open theists are incompatibilists who reject determinism. Consequently, they are left with a commitment to libertarian free will. Theologically, they are obliged to think that libertarian free will is an essential part of God's creating humans to have a genuine relationship with him. As Clark Pinnock explains: "The relation of God and creation is asymmetrical. The Creator gives life and freedom to the creature and voluntarily limits the exercise of his power in relation to it."² Any commitment to libertarian incompatibilism requires that God's sovereignty over human choices is significantly limited. David Basinger makes this clear when he argues:

Free will theists, though, sharply disagree with those incompatibilists who, as theological determinists, contend that God can still somehow bring it about that the voluntary decisions individuals make will always be the exact decisions he would have them make. As freewill theists see it, this contention is not simply an *apparent contradiction* that must nevertheless be accepted as true. They see it as an actual contradiction that must for that reason be rejected. Consequently, it should not be surprising that, unlike theological determinists and limited compatibilists, freewill theists maintain that *to the extent that God grants individuals freedom, he gives up complete control over the decisions that are made.*³

An upshot of this strong commitment to human libertarian freedom is that God's will alone does not determine the fate of each human life or of the whole world. God must work with human free will in bringing about his desires. According to Richard Rice: "The course of history is not the product of divine action alone. God's will is not the ultimate explanation for everything that happens; human decisions and actions make

² Clark Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 112.

³ David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 32-33 (emphases his).

an important contribution too.” Pursuing this train of thought Rice concludes, “Thus, *history is the combined result of what God and his creatures decide to do.*”⁴

Some open theists contend that God could exercise his sovereign power to override the will of free agents. God might even implement this type of sovereignty on rare occasions.⁵ This use of God’s omnipotence, however, ought to be regarded as an unusual activity that would be warranted only in extremely rare circumstances. Otherwise, open theists proudly proclaim human libertarian freedom.

Limited Foreknowledge

Perhaps the most radical tenet of open theism is its unequivocal claim that God does not have absolute knowledge of the future. This is a consequence of its inflexible doctrine that divine foreknowledge and human freedom are irreconcilable. Thus, God must not know the future choices of free creatures according to open theism. Pinnock expounds on this point:

Philosophically speaking, if choices are real and freedom significant, future decisions cannot be exhaustively foreknown. This is because the future is not determinate but shaped in part by human choices. The future is not fixed like the past, which can be known completely. The future does not yet exist and therefore cannot be infallibly anticipated, even by God. Future decisions cannot in every way be foreknown, because they have not yet been made. God knows everything that can be known – but God’s foreknowledge does not include the undecided.⁶

Notice that the description of omniscience given by open theists does not contradict the definition given earlier in the introductory chapter. God does perfectly

⁴ Richard Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” in *Openness of God*, 15-16 (emphasis mine).

⁵ For example, see Basinger, *Case for Freewill Theism*, 33-36.

⁶ Clark Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” 123.

know all things that are logically knowable according to open theism. Since certain aspects of the future logically cannot be known, no real limitation is given on God's omniscience. Just as God's inability to make a married bachelor or six-sided triangle is not an impediment to his omnipotence, open theists argue that ignorance of future free choices is no real limitation on God's omniscience. Furthermore, open theists do not deny that God knows some facts about the future. Gregory Boyd explains the type of foreknowledge God could have with open theism:

Open theists maintain that God can and does predetermine and foreknow *whatever he wants to* about the future. Indeed, God is so confident in his sovereignty, we hold, that he does not need to micromanage everything. He could if he wanted to, but this would demean his sovereignty. So he chooses to leave some of the future open to possibilities, allowing them to be resolved by the decisions of free agents.⁷

Thus, open theism radically reinterprets God's omniscience by claiming a large portion of the future is not known by God. Although God could know the future completely, open theists maintain that God chose to limit his knowledge out of his love for humans and to preserve their libertarian freedom. Nonetheless, open theists still affirm God's perfect knowledge of the past, present, and some of the future.

God's Sovereignty

Instead of conceiving of God's sovereignty first in terms of control, open theists assert that God's sovereignty is motivated by God's love. This is based on 1 John 4:8, which declares that "God is love." Just as God grants free will out of his loving nature, so also his sovereign will works out of love, not sheer power. Pinnock explains that

⁷ Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 31 (emphasis his).

‘God neither surrenders power in order to love nor denies love in the need to rule, but combines love and power perfectly.’⁸

Consequently, God’s will is not always done. God has the ability to act naturally and supernaturally in the world, which he does in non-manipulative ways in order to bring about his will. Since God respects and does not overpower human free will, God takes a real risk in interacting with his creation in this way. This means that God does not have a set plan by which he knows history will unfold and to which it will correspond. Instead, God must work with free creatures to bring about what he wants. Moreover, these free creatures often act contrary to God’s intended desires. John Sanders describes this model of sovereignty in his book, *The God Who Risks*:

Because of God’s faithfulness, the goal of the project has never changed, but the means and specific paths God takes toward the achievement of the project can and do change, depending on what the divine wisdom deems best at the time. The particular path God takes to obtain his goal depends on the interaction between God and humanity in the course of the historical outworking of the project. Hence the goal of the project remains constant even as the means remain flexible.⁹

Open theists conclude that God’s providential plan takes a real risk. This is a result of genuine human free will and God’s incomplete knowledge of the future.

The Passibility of God

Open theists maintain that God is not absolutely immutable. Instead, they insist that biblical passages which indicate that God experiences change in emotions, decisions, and knowledge should be taken literally in certain circumstances. They do affirm, though, that God is essentially the same in his character. Moreover, they claim that

⁸ Pinnock, ‘Systematic Theology,’ 114.

⁹ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 170.

passages regarding God's changelessness refer only to his unchanging character. This leaves room for God to experience the wide range of emotions attributed to him in scripture. "Not aloof and impassive, God does not just imagine what it would be like to suffer," writes Pinnock, "he actually suffers because of his decision to love."¹⁰ God is affected emotionally and epistemically by the events that take place in the world. Consequently, God is to be understood as one who is changed by the free actions of his creation throughout time, while his character remains essentially the same.

Support for Open Theism

Open theists maintain that their view affords many benefits for a theistic model of providence. They argue that this view solves the freedom and foreknowledge dilemma and provides a better framework for interpreting the biblical portrayal of God's interaction with his creation.

A Solution to the Problem?

Open theism presents a plausible solution to the problem posed by human freedom and divine foreknowledge. This is achieved by upholding human freedom while rejecting that God has complete foreknowledge. This view may go at least as far back as to Cicero, although it is most likely that the contemporary proponents of open theism have formulated this view apart from the Stoic tradition.¹¹ William James proposed something akin to the open theist solution in his essay, "The Dilemma of Determinism." He writes:

¹⁰ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 119.

¹¹ See John Sanders, "Historical Considerations," in *Openness of God*, 68. Also see Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 2.5-8.

The belief in free-will is not in the least incompatible with the belief in Providence, provided you do not restrict the Providence to fulminating nothing but *fatal* decrees. If you allow him to provide possibilities as well as actualities to the universe, and to carry on his own thinking in those two categories just as we do ours, chances may be there, uncontrolled even by him, and the course of the universe is really ambiguous; and yet the end of all things may be just what he intended it to be from all eternity.¹²

Furthermore, the open theist position has been endorsed as a solution to the problem at hand by rigorous analytic philosophers such as Richard Swinburne¹³ and William Hasker.¹⁴ Compared with the views already surveyed, open theism seems to afford the simple move that atheism and divine timelessness attempted without the difficult metaphysical baggage of either views.

Biblical Harmony

Advocates of open theism claim that scriptural accord is very important, if not most important for any theological view. Rice minces no words when he writes:

Agreement with Scripture is the most important test for any theological proposal. By definition, the task of theology is to interpret the contents of the Bible. So, unless the perspective on God presented [by open theism] can claim biblical support, it has little to recommend it to believing Christians.¹⁵

Initially it may strike some people as odd that this view would uphold and even demand a high standard of biblical accuracy. It seems that the majority of scripture taken at face value, however, supports open theism's theology. For the Bible portrays God as

¹² William James, "The Dilemma of Determinism," in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover, 1956), 180-81 (emphasis his).

¹³ Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 172-78.

¹⁴ William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), ch. 10; idem, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *Openness of God*.

¹⁵ Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," 16.

experiencing a wide array of emotions. Numbers 22:20 says that “God was angry” with Balaam for doing what he did not want. Divine delight is described by God in Jeremiah 9:23-24, “I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the Lord.” On several occasions God is attributed the emotion of jealousy, sometimes by his own words (Exod. 20:5, 34:14; Num. 25:11; Deut. 4:24, 5:9, 6:15, 32:16, 32:21; Josh. 24:19; Ezek. 39:25; Nah. 1:2; Zech. 1:14; 8:2). The Lord is emotionally pleased when Solomon asked him for wisdom (1 Kings 3:10). Faced with the rampant rebellion and sin of Noah’s day, the Bible says, “The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart” (Gen. 6:6). And numerous other biblical examples could be cited that seem to teach God experiences emotions. Open theists argue that these various emotions are most consistently explicated with their theology. If God knows the future absolutely, then he could not genuinely express these emotions. But according to open theism, God does not know the future comprehensively, and things may go contrary to his will. Consequently, open theists believe they may accept scriptures that attribute emotional states to God without a difficult hermeneutic.

Open theism also finds biblical harmony with scriptures that indicate God changed his mind. As in the story of Jonah, God tells the people of Nineveh that they will be destroyed for their sins. Later in the story, the people repent, and it reads, “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it” (Jon. 3:10). In Genesis 18:23-33, the Bible records how Abraham convinced God to change his criteria for judging Sodom and Gomorrah. Likewise Exodus 32:11-14

describes Moses' negotiation with God to spare the Israelites. The passage concludes by saying, "So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people" (Exod. 32:14). Rice cites passages like Jonah 4:2 and Joel 2:13 as lists of God's essential characteristics. Both of these lists include the characteristic of divine repentance. "Formulations like these demonstrate that repentance is not an exceptional action on God's part, let alone something that is out of character for him. Accordingly," asserts Rice, "God does not repent in spite of the fact that he is God; he repents precisely *because he is God.*"¹⁶

Relational God

Advocates of open theism claim that God's relationship with his creation is best explained as fully dynamic as the Bible portrays it with their theological framework. Augustinianism can hardly claim to present a robust account of God's interaction with creation. Hasker explains that it is comparable "with a computer wizard who has assembled a lifelike robot and, through a thorough knowledge of the robot's programming, is able to anticipate and manipulate the robot's responses to an indefinitely large variety of situations."¹⁷ Any relationship analogous to that is not satisfactory and falls short of the dynamic interaction that the Bible ascribes to God.

Open theists argue that an important benefit of their theology is that it proffers a framework for maintaining a rich and meaningful relationship with God. Prayer can affect God and possibly even change his mind. Open theists can cry out with the Psalmist, "Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in

¹⁶ Ibid., 31 (emphasis his).

¹⁷ Hasker, "Philosophical Perspective," 143.

my distress; Be gracious to me and hear my prayer” (Ps. 4:1). Furthermore, they can affirm that God literally reacts and responds to this cry as the Psalmist records, “The Lord hears when I call to Him” (Ps. 4:3). A formidable list of scriptures can be given that represent God as hearing and responding to prayer, which open theists count as support for their view (1 Kings 8:44-50, 9:3; 2 Kings 20:5; 1 Chron. 5:20; 2 Chron. 6:34-39, 7:12; Ps. 5:2-3, 6:9, 66:19; Isa. 38:5; Lam. 3:55-57; Acts 10:31). Such free and genuine interaction between God and his creation would require God to be impressionable and susceptible to influence by others. Augustinianism does not allow this possibility, while open theism celebrates God having these qualities.

Another benefit open theists claim is that their view provides a superior framework for constructing a theodicy. Since God created a risky world where he does not control all things or know exactly how things will turn out, then the coexistence of evil and God is easier to explain. As noted in the last chapter, Augustinianism must present a difficult defense of meticulous providence without appeal to free will. Open theism, however, can capitalize on human free will as an explanation, so no rationale is required for open theists to argue that all evil fits into a meticulous providence. Hasker makes this point:

According to free will theism, on the other hand, God knows that evils will occur, but he has not for the most part specifically decreed or incorporated into his plan the individual instances of evil. Rather, God governs the world according to *general strategies* which are, as a whole, ordered for the good of the creation but whose detailed consequences are not foreseen or intended by God prior to the decision to adopt them. As a result, we are able to abandon the difficult doctrine of “meticulous providence” and to admit the presence in the world of particular evils God’s permission of which is not the means of bringing about any greater good or preventing any equal or greater evil.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ibid., 152 (emphasis his).

So open theists believe their innovative theology of God's providence provides a better account than Augustinianism. They contend that open theism more scrupulously answers the problem proposed by divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

Additionally, they believe that open theism more accurately reflects the image of God and his relationship with his creation given in the Bible. Next, a critique of open theism will be given to see if these strengths can be upheld.

Critique of Open Theism

Open theism has attracted many critics due to its radical departure from traditional theologies. One does not have to look into recent literature, however, to find words that criticize the core claims of open theism. Augustine boldly writes, 'For to confess that God exists, and at the same time to deny that he has foreknowledge of future things, is the most manifest folly.'¹⁹ More recently, the popularly acclaimed Christian writer C. S. Lewis declares, 'Everyone who believes in God at all believes that he knows what you and I are going to do tomorrow.'²⁰ Open theism defiantly presents a different model of God than that attested by these influential Christian thinkers. Below, open theism will be critiqued for two primary reasons: open theism's biblical disharmony and open theism's questionable model for God's relationship with his creation.

Biblical Disharmony

The reason Augustine and Lewis made such sweeping proclamations about God's foreknowledge was rooted in the accepted strength of the Bible's testimony about it.

¹⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, bk. 5, ch. 9.

²⁰ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 149.

First, the tough biblical teachings for open theism to harmonize with will be assessed. Then, the underlying problem of biblical exegesis employed by open theists will be examined.

Difficult Biblical Harmony

By denying God's precise knowledge of the future, open theists make a claim that stands against the majority of Christian tradition and even the *prima facie* understanding of many biblical texts. William Lane Craig explains the audacity of the open theists' claim:

The suggestion that the God described in the biblical tradition is ignorant of future contingents is on the face of it an extraordinary claim. For not only are the Scriptures replete with examples of precisely such knowledge on God's part, but they explicitly teach that God has foreknowledge of future events, even employing a specialist vocabulary to denominate such knowledge. The New Testament introduces a whole family of words associated with God's knowledge of the future, such as "foreknow" (*proginōskō*), "foreknowledge" (*prognōsis*), "foresee" (*prooraō*), "foreordain" (*proorizō*), and "foretell" (*promarturomai*, *prokatangellō*). Thus the claim that the biblical concept of omniscience does not comprise knowledge of the future seems frivolous.²¹

Not only does the Bible employ a myriad of words to describe God's knowledge of the future, also many passages specifically invoke God's foreknowledge as evidence of coming from the Almighty. For example, the test of a prophet was given in

Deuteronomy 18:21-22:

You may say in your heart, "How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?" When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

It would seem inconsistent for God to demand that his prophets accomplish that which he cannot do!

²¹ William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 244.

In Isaiah, God makes the case that what distinguishes him from lifeless idols is that he knows the future, while they do not (Isa. 41:21-29; 42:8-9; 43:8-13; 44:6-8, 24-28; 45:1-7, 18-25; 46:8-11; 48:3-8). This is most lucidly portrayed in Isaiah 41:23, where God challenges the followers of other gods with the following test: ‘Declare the things that are going to come afterward, that we may know that you are gods.’ Commenting on this passage, Bruce Ware, a declared opponent of open theism, writes:

Since God declares the criterion by which the question of his deity is to be evaluated and established, and since that criterion is the possession of a knowledge of the future that can be declared and its truthfulness verified (or falsified) by the unfolding of future events, how utterly impertinent and presumptuous to deny of God divine foreknowledge and so deny *the very basis by which God himself has declared that his claim to deity shall be vindicated and made known.*²²

Against this criticism, one open theist has claimed that these Isaiah passages contrast the living God with lifeless idols insofar as the true God is able to foretell events that he will unilaterally bring about.²³

Another difficult aspect of divine foreknowledge for open theists includes biblical passages that seem to indicate that Jesus Christ has foreknowledge of specific events. For example, Mark 13-14 shows Jesus predicting the destruction of the temple and the events that surround his own death and resurrection. Perhaps the most memorable passages include Jesus’ prediction that Judas will betray him (Mark 14:18-20) and the specific details of Peter’s denial of Christ (Mark 14:27-30). Some believe that the full

²² Bruce Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 104 (emphasis his).

²³ Gregory A. Boyd, ‘Christian Love and Academic Dialogue: A Reply to Bruce Ware,’ *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (2002): 239-40.

range of passages which show Jesus having foreknowledge demonstrate Jesus' divine mission and origin.²⁴

Open theism has an overwhelming biblical challenge to substantiate its claim that God does not exhaustively know the future. Open theists, however, have a defense against these passages. They claim God's predictive knowledge is compatible with their theology, if it can be based on one of the three following ways:²⁵ (1) God's prediction of the future is based on his unilateral decision to act in the future; (2) a divine prediction is foreseeable because given the present state of affairs it cannot be prevented; and (3) God's predictions implicitly (or explicitly) contain what will happen only if certain conditions transpire. The question is whether predictive prophecy can be understood along the lines open theists suggest.

Although room does not permit a meticulous survey of all the relevant passages on predictive prophecy, I will look at two passages that seem difficult, if not impossible, to fit the proposed model of predictive prophecy given by open theism. The first passage is Isaiah 44:28-45:1, where God predicts that Cyrus will act in such a way as to accomplish his desired ends. Open theists do not want this to be based on principle (1) above, for that would require God to take away Cyrus' free will to do what he wants. To use basis (3) without reducing to (1) or (2) would actually require God to have middle knowledge,²⁶ which would entail Molinism (and, *a fortiori*, absolute foreknowledge)

²⁴ William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 35-37.

²⁵ See Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," 50-53; Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 129-37.

²⁶ Craig, *Only Wise God*, 45.

which will be explained in the next chapter. So, open theists must claim that God's prediction that Cyrus will exist and act in such a way that fulfills God's ends must be based on (2), which means that based on present conditions God would know with a high degree of confidence that it would come to pass. It seems, however, that too many contingencies must go right for God's prophecy to obtain. Ware argues that it is remarkable that God predicted

a future king to whom God gave the name Cyrus nearly 200 years before his parents gave him that exact name. So, not only will God rebuild Jerusalem but he will use this pagan king whom God calls "My shepherd" who will "perform all My desire" (44:28). Again, consider the vast array of attending circumstances God must know about in advance for this prediction to be given. At the time Isaiah prophesies this, God must already know about the fall of Assyria, the rise and fall of Babylon, the rise of Medo-Persia, the fall of Israel, the fall of Judah, the birth and naming of Cyrus, the life and growth of this particular king, his ongoing life into adulthood, his selection as king, his willingness to consider helping the Israelites, his decision to assist in rebuilding Jerusalem, and on and on. This list hits a very few of the most significant items. Within each of these items is hidden a multitude of freewill choices that would affect everything about the outcome for that particular piece of human history.²⁷

A reasonable way open theists could solve this problem is to follow the majority of mainstream scholarship and claim that Isaiah 44 is the work of Deutero-Isaiah who lived much closer to the time of the prophecy or even concurrently with the events being described. Open theists, however, are unwilling to make this move. The impetus for this decision seems to be a stalwart commitment to a conservative evangelical approach to scripture. Thus, by their own presumptions, one of the most plausible and simple solutions for the problems this predictive prophecy raises is not a live option for open theists.

²⁷ Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 110.

What options do open theists have given their commitment to an early date on Isaiah 44? Boyd explains that individual prophecies, exemplified by the Lord's prediction concerning Cyrus in Isaiah 44, ought to be understood as instances where God established certain parameters prior to those events.²⁸ Consequently, Cyrus's parents would be restricted in their freedom as to what they would name their son, and Cyrus's freedom would be limited with regard to certain foreordained activities. For all other choices Cyrus and his parents would remain indeterministically free. According to Boyd, Cyrus is not a model of how God treats all people. Rather, Cyrus is an example that God is the Lord of history and will predetermine, and *a fortiori* know, whatever he pleases.

Boyd's response to this problem is logically valid and certainly permits a rational way out for open theists. Yet, this defense seems clearly contrived in an *ad hoc* fashion in order to maintain his theological position. If one imagines how many free decisions will have to take place between God's prophecy and its fulfillment, one realizes how much deterministic control God will have to exercise to prove his lordship over history. Unless someone is already convinced that open theism is true, Boyd's response will undoubtedly come across as an *ad hoc* fabrication. Therefore, as long as open theists are unrelenting in their commitment to an early date of Isaiah 44, the predictive prophecy of Cyrus presents a plausible objection to open theism.

The second problematic passage is Jesus' accurate prediction of Peter's denial. Jesus tells Peter, "Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times" (Mark 14:30). If this prediction is supposed to be

²⁸ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 34.

based on intimate knowledge of Peter's character, which open theists claim,²⁹ then it denudes the prediction of its Christological significance.

Craig explains that this prophecy, as well as others given in the synoptic gospels, has a theological significance that is completely lost if it is based entirely on God's inferential guesses. "These events were remembered by the early church because they taught something about the Lord, namely, his mastery over and full awareness of all he was to undergo; but if these predictions were just inferences, then Jesus' giving them is devoid of significance." Craig additionally maintains that Jesus "is represented as possessing the same sort of foreknowledge as is ascribed in the Old Testament to God. The theology of the first three Gospels clearly presents Jesus as foreknowing events which were beyond the capacity of any human inference."³⁰ If Jesus could predict Peter's denials based on present knowledge, then any human who knew enough about the present could replicate his prediction. Jesus' prediction is regarded as a special sign of his deity, however, which makes best sense if he is exercising divine foreknowledge.

Questionable Hermeneutic

In addition to the problems posed by specific scriptural texts for open theism, the general method of biblical interpretation adopted by open theists is problematic. The problem for open theists is taking two similar texts and being too literal in one passage and too loose in the other. First, it seems open theists are too literal in their interpretation of passages that indicate God is ignorant of something or learns something new. This seems to be the case with Genesis 22:12, where open theists interpret the literal meaning

²⁹ See Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 136; Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 35-37.

³⁰ Craig, *Only Wise God*, 36.

of God's words, "how I know that you fear God," to mean that God learned something new about Abraham of which he previously was ignorant.³¹ Nonetheless, it seems inconsistent for open theists to reject the literal meaning of Genesis 3:8-13,³² where God is portrayed as lacking knowledge of the present and being spatially located. A similar problem is broached in Genesis 18:9-21, where God is crudely portrayed as having to go down and see what people are doing in order to learn what is true of the present. Ware points out, "Hermeneutical consistency, it would seem, requires that if Genesis 22:12 means that God learned something new, as open theists claim, then Genesis 18:21 means that God does not know all the past or the present and that he is spatially confined."³³ I agree with Ware that open theists are inconsistent in applying their literal hermeneutic.

An opposite difficulty, of being too loose, is also a problem in biblical interpretation for open theists. Passages that affirm *prima facie* God's foreknowledge and precise knowledge of free future actions are explained away by a difficult hermeneutic as made evident by the predictions about Cyrus and Peter. Thus, an apparent inconsistency in open theists' biblical interpretation exists that seems to be driven by an *ad hoc* requirement to fit scripture with their theology.

³¹ See Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 52-53. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 64.

³² Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 118-19.

³³ Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 77. Craig has suggested that the hermeneutics of open theism could support certain Mormon doctrines, such as divine corporeality. Consequently several open theists have been invited to speak at Brigham Young University to speak on biblical hermeneutics. See William Lane Craig, "A Middle-Knowledge Response," in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 58-59.

Questionable Model of God's Relationship

In addition to the problems open theism encounters with the Bible, many have found that the openness model of God's relationship is also unacceptable on the grounds that it does not give a favorable model of God's relationship with his creation. Does open theism present a meaningful theology by which people can understand God's relationship with his creation? I shall argue that open theism does not provide a satisfactory account of the relational nature of God.

God's Deficient Wisdom for Personal Guidance

Since open theism denies that God can know the future decisions of free creatures, it follows that God could actually give bad personal guidance. Basinger acknowledges this when he writes, "Since God does not necessarily know exactly what will happen in the future, it is always possible that even that which God in his unparalleled wisdom believes to be the best action at any given time may not produce the anticipated results in the long run."³⁴ Pinnock emphasizes that God's capacity to learn should comfort concerned believers when he declares, "God is the best learner of all because he is completely open to all the input of an unfolding world."³⁵ Consequently, the conclusion can be drawn that God, according to open theism, may not always give the infallibly correct guidance, although his guidance should be considered to be correct to the highest probable degree. Furthermore, as future guidance incorporates more actions of free creatures further in the future, God's direction loses accuracy. This has led at least one open theist to admit that his theology cannot allow for God to have accurate

³⁴ Basinger, "Practical Implications," 165.

³⁵ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 124.

long-term personal guidance.³⁶ Boyd presents a real encounter he had as a pastor with a woman who followed God's guidance to marry a man who turned out to be an abominable husband, which resulted in a divorce several years later. Boyd accepts that this woman followed God's guidance carefully but that God simply was unable to predict with accuracy how her husband would turn out. Boyd concludes, however, that God is still wise because he provides alternate plans when his initial ones do not pan out.³⁷

In reaction to this aspect of open theism, critics claim that this model compromises God's wisdom or "omniscience." Even if God is still omniscient by knowing all facts that are logically knowable, it still may be the case that God is not completely wise. For example, referring to the great flood narrative in Genesis 6-9 that ends with God making a covenant with Noah not to destroy the world again as he did in the flood, Sanders remarks: "It may be the case that although human evil caused God great pain, the destruction of what he had made caused him even greater suffering. Although his judgment was righteous, God decides to try different courses of action in the future."³⁸ In other words, God may realize that if he could do it all over again, he might do things differently because he learned that his course of action, while good, was not the wisest path to take.

Consequently, God's long-term guidance for us, which would include decisions concerning matrimony, vocation, residency, and other major decisions, are good guesses at best. "If God's direction is reliable for short-range and inconsequential decisions while

³⁶ Basinger, "Practical Implications," 163.

³⁷ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 103-106.

³⁸ Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 50.

increasingly unreliable for longer-range and weightier ones,” asks Ware, “what genuine confidence can we rightly place in God?”³⁹ This does not, however, undermine God’s ultimate ability to secure his purposes for the universe. James explains this with his famous grand chess master analogy:

Suppose two men [are] before a chessboard, —the one a novice, the other an expert player of the game. The expert intends to beat. But he cannot foresee exactly what any one actual move his adversary may be. He knows, however, all the *possible* moves of the latter; and he knows in advance how to meet each of them by a move of his own which leads in the direction of victory. And the victory infallibly arrives, after no matter how devious a course, in the one predestined form of check-mate to the novice’s king.⁴⁰

James intends for us to understand that God is the expert who will inevitably win the game, while those forces which work against God’s will are like the novice player. According to open theists, God will undoubtedly win the game, but humans can never be assured that their individual good is secure. As it may turn out, individual human goods may be like a pawn worth sacrificing in the eyes of God. Perhaps this is more palatable than the Augustinian suggestion that God sends evil into humanity for his glorification. Nonetheless, many would still agree that open theism gives a deficient theology of God’s wisdom, which will cause many Christians to look elsewhere for a model of God’s guidance and providence.

Difficult Theodicy

The second major difficulty that open theism presents with respect to God’s relationship with the world is the difficult theodicy that comes with its theology.

³⁹ Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory*, 183.

⁴⁰ James, “Dilemma of Determinism,” 181 (emphasis his).

Although open theists can avoid defending a theology that entails meticulous providence, it still presents shortcomings.

Many open theists argue that their view provides the most suitable answer for reconciling the existence of a good and powerful God with the co-existence of evil. This may be true, but the rationale for this claim is troubling. Under open theism, God and evil can co-exist because of God's ignorance of future free choices. Sanders explains that "the fall" was an "implausible possibility" given the situation in the garden of Eden, yet the implausible happened and introduced sin into the world. God did not plan, intend, or even expect sin to exist. Consequently, "God has to adjust his project in response to this horrible turn of events."⁴¹ So, according to open theists, one reason evil and God can coexist is because God did not expect it to exist.⁴² Furthermore, evil continues to exist because God does not override human free will.

Like all Arminians, I am willing to concede that God does not typically override libertarian human free will, which accounts for some of open theism's theodicy. It seems dubious to me, however, that God should be exonerated of all responsibility because evil arrived contrary to his best guesses. Although open theism presents a way to understand why the existence of evil is possible with an all-good and omnipotent God, I believe this answer entails that God is irresponsible or foolish. Should God be absolved from the

⁴¹ Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 48.

⁴² Certain Augustinians seem to have this same problem by affirming God gave Adam and Eve genuine free will in the Garden of Eden, although after the fall they affirm that God took deterministic control over the world. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II:955-58. Bk. 3, ch. 23, secs. 7-9.

responsibility of evil because his best calculations did not project that evil would likely exist? I find this explanation to be more disturbing than helpful.

So open theism can account for the existence of evil, but this comes with a weighty price. An unfortunate upshot for open theism's theodicy is that God is less culpable for the evil state of the world because he had no idea it would turn out to be so bad. In fact, it may be possible that if God had known how horrendously humans would act with free will, he would have refrained from creating free creatures.

Moreover, open theism still must face the same problems broached in traditional theodicies. R. Douglas Geivett explains:

Either God has the power to anticipate all specific horrendous evils in time to prevent their occurrence or he does not. If God has this power and he does not prevent their occurrence, then open theism is on a par with such alternatives as Molinism, Calvinism, and Thomism.⁴³

Although open theism can appeal to human freedom for the causes of horrific evils like the Holocaust and the tragic events of September 11, 2001, it is on common ground with other theologies that permit divine unilateral action. Why did God not miraculously intervene and stop the hijackers on September 11? While many answers to this question may exist, open theists are not in a better position than other traditional theologies to respond to this problem.

Evaluation of Open Theism

The greatest strength of open theism is that it provides a cogent answer to the philosophical problem of God's foreknowledge and human freedom. Open theism is a

⁴³ R. Douglas Geivett, "How Do We Reconcile the Existence of God and Suffering?" in *God Under Fire*, ed. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 185.

simple answer that has been adopted by prominent philosophers like William James, Richard Swinburne, and William Hasker because of its philosophical merits. This is indisputable. Open theism encounters numerous difficulties, however, when it is accepted as a *Christian* solution to the problem. Consequently, orthodox Christians will be inclined to look elsewhere for an answer that is more consistent with their tradition and theology.⁴⁴ Although I do not take open theism to be beyond the bounds of orthodox Christianity,⁴⁵ it certainly is near the edge. If all other Christian attempts to resolve the freedom and foreknowledge dilemma are found significantly wanting, I believe open theism can be reserved as a plausible alternative to abandoning Christianity. In fact, many may find open theism to be a superior solution to Augustinianism since it coheres closely with scripture and presents a more palatable theology. On the other hand, if a theological model can preserve God's foreknowledge and human libertarian freedom, then it will likely be preferred over open theism.

Evaluation of Unsatisfactory Solutions

Having looked at a range of solutions in the foregoing chapters including two forms of atheism, divine timelessness, Augustinianism, and open theism, a variety of advantages and disadvantages for each position has been assessed. Every response to the

⁴⁴ See Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 107.

⁴⁵ See John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth, eds., *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003); Bruce Ware, *Their God is Too Small: Open Theism and the Undermining of Confidence in God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003). Additionally, every article in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (2002) issue is devoted to the topic of whether open theism has surpassed the boundaries of being called Christian.

problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom does provide a coherent answer in some way. I have not questioned the cogency of these views in resolving this problem. Instead, I have argued that each view considered thus far is an unsatisfactory solution because they entail more difficult problems. These complications have led me to search for a more satisfactory answer. I believe one of the lessons to be learned by surveying these solutions with their advantages and disadvantages is to discover what some of the characteristics of a desirable solution to the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom might be.

So, based on the advantages and disadvantages of the views examined thus far, what qualities are going to be sought from a helpful solution? The first trait is that the solution ought to be a better alternative than the views it is arguing against. This is the lesson learned from the difficulties of Flew's atheism. Secondly, the solution should uphold both human freedom and divine foreknowledge. Views that denied God's foreknowledge had a steep price to pay theologically or philosophically. Furthermore, solutions that reject human libertarian freedom seem counterintuitive and come with their own philosophical and theological pitfalls. Finally, as a Christian I believe that a good solution must cohere with the complete testimony of the Bible. Both Augustinianism and open theism failed to represent the total record of scripture on their own. If possible, a Christian solution should be able to square with the entire picture given in the Bible. If the view I shall endorse, explain, and defend in the next chapter is sound, then it succeeds in the ways that the solutions considered in this chapter do not.

CHAPTER 3

MOLINISM

Although the Molinist view finds its origin and name from the sixteenth-century Jesuit theologian, Luis de Molina, recent interest in Molinism has been stimulated by Alvin Plantinga who accidentally reintroduced Molina's theory of middle knowledge.¹ If successful, Molinism is a promising theory that attempts to uphold a strong sense of God's sovereignty, human freedom, and teachings that are clearly consistent with the Bible. Moreover, Molinism provides a framework for understanding difficult theological issues like predestination, omniscience, providence, and the problem of evil. As William Lane Craig has observed, "Middle knowledge, if coherent, is one of the most fruitful theological ideas ever conceived."² The Molinist solution offers such a powerful explanation for problems which Christians and other theists face that one may be inclined to suggest that Molinism, if it is found even remotely defensible, ought to be embraced by all theists. Below, I shall proceed by first explaining the main tenets of Molinism, followed by its support and critiques.

¹ Plantinga reinvented Molina's teaching independent of any knowledge of Molina. It was not until Anthony Kenny pointed out the similarities in the two philosophies to Plantinga at a conference that he became aware of any connection. This story is recounted by Plantinga in his "Self-Profile," in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. James Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), 50.

² William Lane Craig, *Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 127.

Main Tenets of Molinism

A number of doctrines are important to Molinism. In the following subsections, I shall explain Molinism's commitment to libertarian freedom, middle knowledge, and prevenient grace.

Libertarian Freedom

One of Molinism's strengths is that it can affirm that humans have the strongest kind of freedom. Notice Molina's understanding of freedom: 'So too in order for there to be *merit* or for an act to be *morally* good—indeed, even in order for there to be a free act that is indifferent to moral good and evil—it is necessary that when the act is elicited by the faculty of choice, it be within the faculty's power to elicit it, given all the circumstances obtaining at that time.'³ Alfred Freddoso explains that 'Molina's conception of freedom is strongly indeterministic; in modern terms he is an unremitting libertarian.'⁴ Contemporary proponents of Molinism also affirm libertarian freedom.⁵

While postulating libertarianism is helpful, Molinism does not require this in order to be cogent. For example, Terrance Tiessen endorses a view of providence that is a blend of Molinism and Calvinism.⁶ On Tiessen's account, humans only have

³ Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*, trans. and intro. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 224-25 (translator's emphasis). Disputation 53, pt. 2, sec. 17.

⁴ Alfred J. Freddoso, 'Introduction,' in *Divine Foreknowledge*, 24.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 24-28; Craig, *Only Wise God*, 135-37; Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 22-34.

⁶ Terrance Tiessen, *Providence & Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), chs. 13-14.

compatibilistic freedom. Since Molinism can be used with indeterministic freedom, however, the most powerful appropriations of Molinism operate with libertarian freedom.

Middle Knowledge

The distinguishing mark of Molinism is its doctrine of middle knowledge. Molina spoke of God's middle knowledge, or *media scientia*, as that which mediates between his natural and free knowledge. God's *natural knowledge* includes his knowledge of all necessary truths. Natural knowledge is true independent of God's free will, according to Molinists. Truths of mathematics, logic, and all possibilities would represent the types of knowledge God knows through his natural knowledge. These facts are true in all possible worlds, and they could not be made any different even by God.

God's *free knowledge* is that 'by which, *after* the free act of His will, God knew *absolutely and determinately, without any condition or hypothesis*, which ones from all among the contingent states of affairs were *in fact* going to obtain and, likewise, which ones were not going to obtain."⁷ So, God's free knowledge encompasses all truths of the actual world that would obtain logically after his decision to create it. Moreover, God's free knowledge is contingent on his will, since its referents could not exist if God had decided to create a different world or not to create any world at all.

Between God's natural knowledge and free knowledge is *middle knowledge*.

Molina describes middle knowledge in the following passage:

Finally, the third type is *middle* knowledge, by which, in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each faculty would do with its innate

⁷ Molina, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 168 (translator's emphasis). Disputation 52, sec. 9.

freedom were it to be placed in this or in that or, indeed, in infinitely many orders of things—even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite.⁸

Molina’s description of middle knowledge comprises what contemporary philosophers call “counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.” This means that God, prior to his decision to create, would know how every free creature would actually choose to act in any possible situation. God’s middle knowledge stands between his natural and free knowledge because like his natural knowledge its facts are true prior to God’s decision to create and like his free knowledge it obtains contingently on God’s will to create.

For example, God, by means of his middle knowledge, knows whether tomorrow I will eat breakfast or not. He knows what I would choose to do were I put in different circumstances, such as if I were in Peter’s stead in Gethsemane during Passion Week. God knows by his middle knowledge whether I would use my turn signal to change lanes if I lived in New York. According to Molinists, these are all facts that God knows with certainty, not just with probability, because God possesses middle knowledge.

Prevenient Grace

Molinists understand that God’s saving grace is received on the model of synergism (as opposed to monergism or Pelagianism). Roger Olson explains, “Christian synergists believe that repentance and faith are not gifts of God effectually imparted to elect individuals.” Consequently, “They are genuinely free responses of persons whose depraved wills have been liberated by the prevenient grace of God through the proclamation of the word of God.”⁹ In other words, saving grace is not attained solely by

⁸ Ibid. (translator’s emphasis).

⁹ Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 281.

God's giving it or humans desiring it. Rather, such grace is the product of cooperation between humans and God. Molina clearly understood God's grace on a cooperative model.¹⁰ Freddoso concurs, explaining that Molina's position on grace claims that '[grace] is not *in itself* efficacious or inefficacious, but is instead efficacious or inefficacious only because of our free cooperation with it or freely chosen lack thereof.'¹¹ Anachronistically, Molina's position on saving grace could be called Arminian.

In reaction to the new Calvinist movement, the Jesuits in the sixteenth century sought to give a clearer understanding of Thomas Aquinas's theology of grace and salvation, which was the impetus behind Molina's work.¹² The Dominicans, however, also were responding to the Calvinist movement for similar reasons, and their results were at odds with the Jesuits. In subsequent years, Molina's theology would be taken up (and slightly modified) by fellow Jesuits, Francisco Suarez and Robert Bellarmine. The Dominican theologian, Dominic Bañez, forcefully denounced Molinism as a type of Pelagianism and tried to brand it as heresy in the Catholic Church. Likewise, Molinists claimed that Bañez's position, which was representative of the view held by most Dominicans, was as erroneous as Calvinism. The controversy became so heated that Pope Clement VIII initiated the *Congregatio de auxiliis* (1598-1607) for both parties to present their respective cases. The final decision was that both views could remain orthodox as long as they did not call one another heretics. As Frederick Copleston explains, 'The Jesuits were forbidden to call the Dominicans Calvinists, while the

¹⁰ Molina, *Divine Foreknowledge*, 203, 237-38, 244-46. Disputation 53, pt. 1, sec. 8; disputation 53, pt. 2, secs. 30-31; disputation 53, pt. 3, secs. 7-8.

¹¹ Freddoso, 'Introduction,' 37 (emphasis his).

¹² See *ibid.*, 8.

Dominicans were told that they must not call the Jesuits Pelagians.”¹³ Thus, the Molinists along with their views of prevenient grace were deemed orthodox by the Catholic Church.

Support for Molinism

Contrary to other views surveyed thus far, Molinism, I argue, benefits from such strong support and broad explanatory scope that it should be accepted as a helpful solution to the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Moreover, as a Christian, I believe that Molinism most closely coheres with Scripture and aids in explaining difficult problems for theists such as the problem of evil and the doctrine of predestination.

A Solution to the Problem

Unlike the other solutions examined thus far, Molinism can maintain all of the following beliefs: (1) God exists; (2) God has complete foreknowledge; and (3) humans can exercise libertarian freedom. Moreover, Molinism makes this possible without creating unduly cumbersome problems in other fields. Molinism has its critics, but in my estimation no criticism is serious enough to reject Molinism or accept another solution in its place.

How does Molinism harmonize human freedom with divine foreknowledge and providence? By utilizing divine middle knowledge, Molinists can uniquely explain how these contrary notions coexist. As Thomas Flint explains:

The problems of foreknowledge and sovereignty are solved on this picture due to the fact that God’s foreknowledge of contingent events flows from a combination

¹³ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, *Ockham to Suarez* (Garden City, NY: Image, 1963), 344.

of knowledge beyond his control and decisions under his control. Because he has middle knowledge and makes free choices concerning which creatures will exist in which circumstances, God has both complete foreknowledge concerning how those creatures will act and great control over their actions, in the sense that any act they perform is either intended or permitted by him. Yet because the knowledge which generates this foresight and sovereignty is not itself a product of free divine activity, our actions remain genuinely free, not the robotic effects of divine causal determination.¹⁴

Molinists maintain that God's foreknowledge and providence are counseled by his middle knowledge, which informs him of what free creatures would indeterministically choose in any given circumstance. Therefore, God can choose to instantiate a world knowing how the choices of his free creatures will turn out prior to his decision to create. Even William Hasker, a prominent open theist, admits that Molinism is free from a variety of problems that plague other solutions to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge and that "middle knowledge provides the key to a uniquely powerful conception of the operation of divine providence, almost certainly the strongest view of providence that is short of complete theological determinism."¹⁵ Should Molinism remain intact after assessing its leading criticisms, then Molinism provides a helpful solution to the apparent dilemma of divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

Biblical Harmony

A number of biblical passages have been cited as confirmation of divine middle knowledge.¹⁶ One such passage is 1 Samuel 23:7-11:

¹⁴ Flint, *Divine Providence*, 44.

¹⁵ William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 19.

¹⁶ All of the examples cited below are used by Molina. See *Divine Providence*, 116-18. Disputation 49, sec. 9.

When it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars." So Saul summoned all the people for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." Then David said, "O Lord God of Israel, Your servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account. Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Your servant has heard? O Lord God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant." And the Lord said, "He will come down." Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the Lord said, "They will surrender you." Then David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the pursuit.

The support for middle knowledge comes from God's response to David's question. God tells David that Saul will come to Keilah and the men of Keilah will give him over to Saul. As it turns out, though, Saul does not go to Keilah and, *a fortiori*, the men of Keilah do not surrender David to Saul. Since God's prediction did not happen, his knowledge of the event could not be based on his simple foreknowledge, so on what basis does God know this will happen? The answer is clear for some Molinists. This is an example of divine middle knowledge where God tells what these free creatures *would* choose to do in a given circumstance.

Some Molinists also appeal to Jesus demonstrating middle knowledge in Matthew 11:21-24, where he apparently claims to know what other people would choose to do in different circumstances:

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred to you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to Heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.

In this passage, Jesus seems to demonstrate middle knowledge by revealing what he knows other free agents would choose to do, if they were placed in different circumstances. Supposing one does not suggest God created another world with the people of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom and that he performed these same miraculous works before them, some Molinists suggest the only way Jesus could have this knowledge is through middle knowledge.

Unfortunately for the Molinist, non-molinistic interpretations of these texts seem to be warranted. For example, Anthony Kenny suggests that Jesus' proclamations are merely rhetorical, and that the ephod David consulted probably only had a "yes" and "no" option for response, which could not designate the difference between counterfactual knowledge and the knowledge of material implication.¹⁷ Robert Adams suggests that God's advice to David, and presumably Jesus' scathing judgments, are based on what would *probably* occur had other circumstances obtained.¹⁸ Craig concedes that these alternate explanations are legitimate ways of interpreting these passages, "for the biblical passages are not unequivocal."¹⁹

One contemporary Molinist, Freddoso, remains unrelenting on the Molinist interpretation of these scripture passages. Freddoso concedes that Kenny is right in saying Jesus' words are rhetorical, but he does not believe this means they are *merely* rhetorical. "Often enough," writes Freddoso, "the plain truth has far greater rhetorical

¹⁷ Anthony Kenny, *God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 64.

¹⁸ Robert Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977): 115.

¹⁹ Craig, *Only Wise God*, 137.

force than an obvious exaggeration.”²⁰ Likewise, Freddoso believes God’s advice to David demonstrates middle knowledge. For even if David could not distinguish between counterfactual and material implication, certainly God knows the difference. Assuming God knows the difference in these types of truth-claims, Freddoso posits that God’s affirmative responses would be deceitful to David since God knows David’s questions assume material implication. Freddoso suggests, “At the very least, David would have every right to feel betrayed upon learning that yes was likewise an ‘appropriate’ answer to the alternative question, ‘If I stay in Keilah, will Saul refrain from invading?’”²¹

Freddoso’s contributions notwithstanding, the conclusion that middle knowledge is explicitly taught in scripture is without persuasive merit. Surely alternative explanations along the lines sketched out by Kenny and Adams seem admissible, which Craig rightly recognizes. Dismissing Freddoso’s comments wholesale, however, would be a mistake as well. Scripture clearly does not contradict the doctrine of middle knowledge. Moreover, middle knowledge may be beneficial in some instances, such as the 1 Samuel passage, to make the best sense of scripture. Although the aforementioned passages remain intelligible without postulating middle knowledge, positing middle knowledge makes a straightforward reading of these texts less strained.

The Problem of Evil

One of the most innovative contributions to philosophy of religion in the twentieth century has been Alvin Plantinga’s work on articulating the free will defense as

²⁰ Freddoso, “Introduction,” 63.

²¹ Ibid.

a solution to the logical problem of evil.²² Speaking of Plantinga's contribution, Robert Adams speaks for most philosophers when he affirms, "It is fair to say Plantinga has solved this problem."²³ In order to accomplish this amazing feat, Plantinga appealed to incompatibilist freedom, possible world semantics, and counterfactuals of freedom, which were implicit in the arguments given by the atheists he was engaging.²⁴ Consequently, academic dialogue on the problem of evil has shifted its focus from the logical problem of evil to the inductive or evidential problem of evil.²⁵

Molinism has not only proved fruitful for solving the logical problem of evil, but it also provides a promising framework for answering the evidential problem of evil. Molinists' commitment to a strong view of human libertarian freedom permits a simple way to ascribe moral praise and blame for human behavior, unlike the Augustinian approach of compatibilism that could imply God is actually the author of all human behavior, including sin. No matter how much moral evil exists in the world, Molinists can confidently say that all of it is brought about because humans willed to do evil.

²² Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967); idem, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); idem, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

²³ Robert Adams, "Plantinga on the Problem of Evil," in *Alvin Plantinga*, 226; cf. Michael Peterson, "The Problem of Evil," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 395: "The outcome of these and other debates have been so favorable to theists that it is reasonable to say that the logical problem has been laid to rest."

²⁴ See Plantinga, "Self-Profile," 45-52.

²⁵ See the tenor of the articles in Daniel Howard-Snyder ed., *The Evidential Problem of Evil* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996).

A helpful notion that is unique to Molinism in explicating the problem of evil is what Plantinga has called “transworld depravity.”²⁶ According to Molinists, if God wants to have genuinely free creatures, he cannot create any world whatsoever because those creatures may choose to act differently than he desires. Molinists also claim, however, that God knows with certainty how those free creatures will freely choose to act in any possible world. Yet it may be the case that a free creature may make the exact same decision in every world that could be actualized. For example, suppose some person, Frampton, in every actualizable world chooses not to turn right on red. This would mean that for any world God could actualize with Frampton having free will that he would not turn right on red. Molinists would recognize that Frampton is transworld depraved regarding his ability to turn right on red because in every world where he is actualized with free will, he chooses not to turn right on red.

Transworld depravity helps in the evidential problem of evil because it may be the case that all humans suffer from transworld depravity regarding sin. If this is the case, then no world exists that God could bring about where humans possess free will and do not sin. Moreover, there may be people who do not freely accept the gospel in any world that could be actualized. So God is not to blame for desiring all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 1 Pet. 3:8) and creating a world where some people never freely come to salvation. Likewise, it may be the case that in any world God creates with free creatures who perform any amount of good, there will be instances of surd or seemingly pointless evil. Thus, Molinism does not require a meticulous account of divine providence.

²⁶ Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, 184-89; idem, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 48-53.

In this sense, Molinism postulates that God takes a risk in creating a world with genuinely free creatures. Since God does not meticulously control the actions of his creation, these free creatures may act in a way contrary to his desires no matter what world he instantiates.²⁷ Unlike open theists, Molinists assert that God does not take this risk blindly. For, in another sense, God would take this risk fully aware of his “losses” because Molinists teach that God knows how these free creatures will choose to act. Therefore, the Molinist account of providence could be deemed as a knowledgeable risk, one where God knows with certainty his losses.

The Doctrine of Predestination

For theists, and particularly Christians, divine middle knowledge can be utilized to resolve some of the most difficult theological problems. One of the most fruitful demonstrations of using middle knowledge this way can be found in the perplexing doctrine of predestination. In addition to Ephesians 1:3-12 and 1 Peter 1:1-2, Romans 8:29-30 propounds divine predestination:

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

The problem of the doctrine of predestination is that it seems to teach that God arbitrarily selects those whom he will call to be saved based on his predestined decree.

²⁷ Tiessen could not agree with this statement, since he believes that God compatibilistically is in control of human freedom. Consequently, he is left with the same problems of Augustinianism, which is puzzling. Why does he posit divine middle knowledge in the first place if he is going to be committed to an essentially Calvinist position?

Not only does this call into question libertarian notions of freedom, but God himself seems to be morally responsible for those who are condemned to eternal damnation.

Middle knowledge can offer some significant insights for appreciating the doctrine of predestination. God through his middle knowledge would know how every possible person would respond to the drawing of his Spirit to receive his saving grace. Moreover, God desires all people to be saved. Hence, God is able and wise enough to provide ample grace and opportunity for all people to accept or reject his grace freely.

As Craig shows:

In [God's] middle knowledge, however, he knows who as circumstances vary, would freely accept and who would freely reject his initiatives. He knows, for example, under which circumstances Peter would freely accept and under which circumstances he would freely reject God's grace. Accordingly, the very act of selecting a world to be created is a sort of predestination. The persons in that world who God knew would respond most certainly will respond and be saved. Nonetheless, they are still free to reject God's grace. Of course, if they were to reject his grace, God's middle knowledge would have been different. Given that God's middle knowledge is correct, God, in creating certain persons who will freely accept his grace, thereby ensures that they will be saved. As for the unsaved, the only reason they are not predestined is that they freely reject God's grace.²⁸

Since Molinists affirm libertarian freedom, they can insist that whether one accepts God's grace and goes to Heaven or rejects God's grace and goes to Hell is the result of one's own choices rather than divine decrees. Thus, humans are responsible for choosing their own destinies. In this way, middle knowledge provides a basis for God predestining the world, and, *a fortiori*, those who are saved in that world, while upholding libertarian freedom and God's sovereignty.

In addition to giving insight to the doctrine of predestination, other Christian doctrines have been illuminated by incorporating middle knowledge such as the

²⁸ Craig, *Only Wise God*, 136.

inspiration of scripture,²⁹ apostasy,³⁰ the salvation of those who never hear the gospel,³¹ papal infallibility,³² unanswered prayer,³³ and praying for things to have happened.³⁴

Rather than encumbering Christianity, middle knowledge clearly enriches one's theological framework for understanding God's providence.

Critique of Molinism

Despite its usefulness in resolving theological difficulties, many have found the concept of middle knowledge to be problematic. Although a comprehensive survey and refutation of all pertinent objections to Molinism cannot be undertaken here, some of the most serious and relevant critiques of Molinism will be addressed. If these objections remain unconvincing, then Molinism will likely survive the other less pressing problems. The objections will be assessed by first surveying the so-called "grounding objection," followed by an objection against the relational nature of God, and then the criticism of "semi-Pelagianism" will close this brief look at the critiques of Molinism.

²⁹ William Lane Craig, "Men Moved by the Holy Spirit Spoke from God' (2 Peter 1:21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration," *Philosophia Christi* 1, no. 1 (1999): 45-82.

³⁰ William Lane Craig, "Lest Anyone Should Fall': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Perseverance and Apostolic Warnings," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 29 (1991): 65-74.

³¹ Craig, *Only Wise God*, 150-51; idem, "Middle Knowledge and Christian Exclusivism," *Sophia* 34 (1995): 120-39.

³² Flint, *Divine Providence*, ch. 8.

³³ *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. 12. Craig, *Only Wise God*, 87-88.

The Grounding Objection

Flint, a leading proponent of Molinism, has been advised by many philosophers that the grounding objection is the “principal obstacle to endorsing the Molinist picture.”³⁵ Hence, if the grounding objection can be dealt with, then Molinism is in much better shape than most non-Molinists suppose.

The grounding objection claims that counterfactuals of freedom are not true because there are no grounds for basing these facts. The two leading supporters of the grounding objection are Robert Adams and William Hasker.³⁶ Hasker captures the basic gist of the grounding objection when he writes, “The antinomy consists in the fact that *the counterfactuals of freedom are said to be true propositions, but there is no intelligible basis, reason, or ground for their being true.*”³⁷

In order to appreciate fully the grounding objection, one must consider what are the possibilities for the grounds of the facts that make up God’s middle knowledge. Could God himself be the grounds for the truths of middle knowledge? No, God cannot provide the grounds for middle knowledge because this would essentially reduce Molinism to a type of theological determinism.³⁸ Accordingly, this would compromise

³⁵ Flint, *Divine Providence*, 123, n. 3.

³⁶ Robert Adams, “Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,” 109-117; idem, “Plantinga and the Problem of Evil,” 225-55; idem, “An Anti-Molinist Argument,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 343-53; William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, ch. 2; idem, “Response to Thomas Flint,” *Philosophical Studies* 60 (1991): 117-26; idem, “A New Anti-Molinist Argument,” *Religious Studies* 35 (1999): 291-97; idem, “Antinomies of Divine Providence,” *Philosophia Christi* 4, no. 2 (2002): 361-75.

³⁷ William Hasker, “Antinomies of Divine Providence,” 366 (emphasis his).

³⁸ This is essentially Bañez’s position. Unlike contemporary objectors to Molinism who claim that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are not true, Bañez believed that God determined those truths just as God determined all truths to be true.

genuine libertarian freedom, which would remove the explanatory crux for Molinism to resolve the problem of foreknowledge and freedom. Thus, a consistent Molinist cannot claim that God grounds middle knowledge.

If God does not ground the facts of middle knowledge, the next candidate for the grounds of this knowledge would be the free choices of those free creatures. However, this does not seem to work either. For this seems to entail the irreparable notion of backward causation since the present choices of free agents would cause God's knowledge prior to their existence. Additionally, the scope of middle knowledge includes many facts of uninstantiated persons who do not exist and will never exist. The truth value of these counterfactuals of creaturely freedom cannot be brought about by free creatures because the people responsible for these facts do not (and will not ever) exist! If this is true of some counterfactual truths, then it may reveal the groundlessness of all such claims.

A final way to consider how free creatures can provide the grounds for the facts of middle knowledge would attempt to ground these facts in the character, rather than the actions, of the free creatures responsible for them. Thus, free creatures would not have to do anything to make their counterfactuals of freedom true. Contingent free actions would naturally flow from the free creatures' character. Yet this proposal is unsuccessful as well. For the character of a free creature is forged by the free acts that creature performs. Moreover, even if character alone did determine the actions of people, this would undermine the libertarian freedom the Molinist is trying to preserve. For example, if an honest person cannot tell a lie due to her honest character, then she is not truly free to perform a lie. So this attempt to ground middle knowledge in free creatures fails as well.

If the truths of middle knowledge are not grounded in God or the free creatures, then should the conclusion that these facts have no grounds or basis for being true be made? Adams thinks this is the appropriate and absurd conclusion to draw:

Counterfactuals of freedom, as I have pointed out, are supposed to be contingent truths that are not caused to be true by God. Who or what does make them to be true? For instance, who would have caused (4)³⁹ to be true? Not p , for p may never exist. God is supposed to rely on His knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom in deciding whether to create the free creatures they are about; and therefore the truth of counterfactuals of freedom should be prior, in the order of explanation, to the existence of those creatures, and should not be caused by their choices.⁴⁰

How do Molinists respond to the grounding objection? In all fairness, every response cannot be visited,⁴¹ but a basic Molinist defense can be formulated. At the heart of the grounding objection is the presupposition that in order for something to be true, it must be grounded in a concurrently real state of affairs. Alvin Plantinga has articulated this point in one of the earliest responses to the grounding objection:

To investigate this question properly, we should have to investigate the implied suggestion that if a proposition is true, then something *grounds* its truth, or *causes* it to be true, or *makes* it true. Is this supposed to hold for all propositions? What

³⁹ Adams's claim (4) states, "if p were in c , p would freely do s " – where p refers to a free person, c refers to a circumstance and s is refraining from some sinful action.

⁴⁰ Adams, "Plantinga on the Problem of Evil," 232.

⁴¹ See Plantinga, "Replies," 372-82; Freddoso, "Introduction," 68-81; Richard Otte, "A Defense of Middle Knowledge," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 21 (1987): 161-69; David Basinger, "Middle Knowledge and Human Freedom: Some Clarifications," *Faith and Philosophy* 4, no. 3 (1987): 330-36; Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), ch. 5; Rod Bertolet, "Hasker on Middle Knowledge," *Faith and Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (1993): 3-17; Craig, *Only Wise God*, 138-45; idem, "Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the Grounding Objection," *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001): 337-52; idem, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 237-78; Thomas P. Flint, "Two Accounts of Divine Providence," in *Divine and Human Action*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 147-81; idem, "Hasker's *God, Time, and Knowledge*," *Philosophical Studies (PS)* 60 (1991): 103-15; idem, *Divine Providence*, ch. 5; idem, "A New Anti-Anti-Molinist Argument," *Religious Studies* 35 (1999): 299-305.

sorts of things are to be thought of as grounding a proposition, and what is it for a proposition to be grounded by a thing? What grounds the truth of such a proposition as *this piece of chalk is three inches long*?⁴²

The problem for the grounding objection is that many statements are said to be meaningful, such as propositions about the past and the future, that do not have any presently existing grounds for their truths. As Craig points out, “What Plantinga understands—and grounding objectors apparently by and large do not—is that behind the grounding objection lies a theory about the relationship of truth and reality which needs to be articulated, defended, and then applied to counterfactuals of freedom if the grounding objection is to carry any probative force.”⁴³

Following Freddoso, Flint proposes the following formulation for grounding propositions where *X* stands for the modal qualification (*e.g.*, “was,” “is,” “will be,” “might,” “would be,” etc.), *Y* makes temporal qualifications (*e.g.*, “two years ago,” “next week,” etc.), and *z* is any non-conditional present tense contingent proposition:

‘It *X* the case (*Y*) that *z*’ is now grounded iff “*z* is grounded” *X* the case (*Y*).⁴⁴

If some formula is needed for confirming the grounds of truth-claims, then something as broad as this must be conceded. For if the facts of middle knowledge are deemed ungrounded because they do not exist concurrently while they are true, then likewise facts about past and future propositions will be groundless. Thus, as it turns out, the grounding objection, in order to be effective, proves too much. Not only would the facts of middle knowledge be judged to be ungrounded but also truths that are generally

⁴² Plantinga, “Replies,” 374 (emphases his).

⁴³ William Lane Craig, “Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the Grounding Objection,” 337.

⁴⁴ Flint, *Divine Providence*, 134.

recognized as grounded, like propositions about the past and future, would be found to be groundless. Given this absurd consequence, the grounding objection can be dismissed as a faulty refutation of Molinism.

Molinists also note that if the grounding objection does work, imagine what this would mean for the truths of counterfactuals. Adams argues that this would mean that all counterfactuals of freedom are false.⁴⁵ Edward Wierenga has pointed out that this would entail that Adams would have to say such statements as, “If I were to ask a butcher for a pound of meat, he would sell it to me,” are *false*.⁴⁶ Many people, however, would find this conclusion patently absurd. Similarly, Craig has pointed out that many people who have never heard of middle knowledge take for granted that some counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true.⁴⁷ Therefore, given that the grounding objection rests on a faulty assumption and is contrary to the obvious intuitions many people hold about the truths of propositions, the following conclusion is warranted: the existence of counterfactuals of freedom is more plausible than the cogency of the grounding objection.

God’s Relationship with His Creation

Another criticism against Molinism is that it compromises God’s ability to have genuine interaction with his creation. This critique is primarily voiced by open theists. Hasker illustrates it with an analogy:

As has been noted, middle knowledge can afford God a very high degree of providential control over the world. But a price must be paid for this. The effect

⁴⁵ Adams, “Plantinga on the Problem of Evil,” 232.

⁴⁶ Wierenga, *Nature of God*, 164.

⁴⁷ Craig, *Only Wise God*, 137-38.

on our understanding of a personal relationship with God is similar to what we saw for Calvinism: God becomes the archmanipulator, knowing in every case exactly “which button to push” in order to elicit precisely the desired result from his creatures. The analogy of the cyberneticist and the robot applies here also, with one change: we must suppose that part of the programming of the robot was done by a third party. (This, of course, represents the counterfactuals of freedom.) But the robot-master still knows all about that part of the program and is able just as before to fine-tune the situations that the robot encounters so as to achieve just the desired result.⁴⁸

The complaint seems to be that if God knows exactly how people will react to any possible situation, his interaction with them is inherently manipulative. The weakness in this argument can be seen in the illustration that Hasker uses to mobilize it. By saying that God is an “archmanipulator” who pushes the right buttons to make his creation do whatever he wills, Hasker’s analogy no longer accurately resembles the Molinist view of providence. In the example Hasker’s “buttons” are supposed to represent the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, which God pushes “to elicit precisely the desired result from his creatures.”

This metaphor does not accurately capture what Molinists mean when they speak of counterfactuals of freedom. First, Molinists recognize that states of affairs exist that God could not produce because his creation may freely act contrary to what he exactly desires. Secondly, God cannot manipulate his creation to do whatever he likes, according to Molinism, because the acts of those creatures must always be freely performed. This means that God cannot manipulate his creation to do whatever he wills since free creatures may freely act contrary to those desires in all actualizable worlds. Moreover, whether God is a manipulator cannot be determined by how much he *knows* about people. Rather, this is decided by God’s *intentions* and *coercive control*. Molinism is not

⁴⁸ William Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” in *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 145-46.

stained by this detraction because God does not ever make humans act contrary to their own wills. So Hasker's analogy does not correctly parallel Molinism, which consequently means Molinism is not defeated by this objection.

Open theists have proposed another obstacle for Molinism providing a dynamic relationship with his creation. "If everything that happens is in accord with God's plan," Hasker inquires, "then why is God so powerfully affected by these events when they occur?"⁴⁹ Gregory Boyd finds this to be an unacceptable element in Molinism, as well, when he writes: "[Molinism] has to take as anthropomorphic all passages in which God changes his mind, expresses regret, experiences surprise or disappointment, speaks and thinks of the future in terms of what may or may not happen, and so on."⁵⁰

If this objection raised by Hasker and Boyd proves to be successful, then it not only testifies against Molinism, but it challenges any model of providence that claims God has absolute foreknowledge. This challenge, however, is not unanswerable. R. Douglas Geivett has proffered a four-point response that reasonably shows how God can foreknow the future and exhibit divine *pathos*, which is worth rehearsing at this juncture.⁵¹ First, Geivett argues that no reason exists to suppose that God's emotional response can only occur contemporaneously with the events to which God is responding. God's responsive attitude which is perceived in time could possibly be a temporal

⁴⁹ William Hasker, "Antinomies of Divine Providence," 369.

⁵⁰ Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 125.

⁵¹ R. Douglas Geivett, "Divine Providence and the Openness of God: A Response to William Hasker," *Philosophia Christi* 4, no. 2 (2002): 389-93.

manifestation of an eternal attitude God maintains towards these events that he always knows.

Geivett's second point is that a number of situations exist where people absolutely know the future and still respond with genuine emotions, so the same could be true of God. For example, a woman may know that her boyfriend will propose to her but she will not fully manifest her emotions until he is actually proposing to her. Another example would be of one who presently knows that a loved one has cancer and will die soon. This certain knowledge does not take away from one's emotional response when the loved one passes away. The third point in Geivett's rebuttal can be extracted from these examples as well, which claims that emotional response is not elicited by *knowledge* of an event, but by something more, perhaps the existential experience of the event.

Geivett's final point is that the arguments presented by Hasker, and presumably also by Boyd, are too ambiguous to be helpful. Do they mean (a) that God comes to have these emotive states when these events occur, or (b) that God's emotive states are revealed to us when they occur? Option (b) is clearly consistent with God's having middle knowledge. Even if open theists mean something like (a), this claim is not obviously incompatible with middle knowledge. If open theists insist on using this objection, they will need to clarify what they mean by it and how it specifically counts against divine foreknowledge or middle knowledge.

Semi-Pelagianism

A criticism against Molinism from the opposite end of the theological spectrum claims that Molinism smuggles in a form of semi-Pelagianism. This objection is

primarily voiced by traditional Catholic Thomists whose criticism more or less reiterates the original complaints raised by Bañez, although some Protestants who favor a strong form of divine sovereignty such as double-predestination also find Molinism suspect on similar grounds. According to Olson, semi-Pelagianism is the view that places ‘the initiative of salvation in the autonomous human will apart from any special, assisting and calling grace of God.’⁵² In short, this is tantamount to denying the prevenient nature of God’s grace.

This charge is leveled against Molinists because they teach that two people could be in identical situations receiving God’s grace in exactly the same way, but one person may accept that grace while the other rejects it. So, Molinism seems to hint at something like the Pelagian heresy. As Reginald Garrigou-Lagrance explains, ‘The true beginning of salvation appears to be only in the one who is converted.’⁵³

More evidently than the other criticisms visited thus far, this objection is clearly unfounded. Contrary to the Pelagians and semi-Pelagians, Molinists must affirm God’s prevenient grace is necessary for salvation to take place. ‘Molinists can insist just as heartily as do Thomists,’ writes Flint, ‘upon the necessity of prevenient grace, the gratuitous activity on God’s part which precedes and prepares the way for any salutary act we may perform.’⁵⁴ Since Molinists maintain salvation is not possible without either God’s prevenient grace or saving grace, they are not in danger of transgressing the error of semi-Pelagianism. Essentially, this is why the Jesuits were considered to be within the

⁵² Olson, *Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 273.

⁵³ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrance, *The One God*, trans. Bede Rose (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1944), 467.

⁵⁴ Flint, *Divine Providence*, 112.

bounds of orthodoxy at the *Congregatio de auxiliis* when they were accused of advocating Pelagianism in the sixteenth century by the Dominicans.

Evaluation of Molinism

Molinism is a promising model of God's providence that upholds a strong account of God's sovereignty and human freedom. By postulating divine middle knowledge, a beneficial solution to the problem of human freedom and divine foreknowledge can be appropriated. Furthermore, unlike the other solutions studied in this project, Molinism does not incur deeper difficulties that make it undesirable to maintain. In fact, divine middle knowledge serves to clarify other theological difficulties like the problem of evil and predestination. Finally, after surveying three of the most widely held objections to Molinism, none of them were found convincing. In light of the alternatives and the broad benefits of accepting Molinism, I conclude that Molinism is the most satisfying solution to the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this project has been to understand the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom as well as to assess prominent solutions that have been purported to reconcile this dilemma. Evaluating these positions has revealed that the real problem with divine foreknowledge and human freedom is not that there are no answers for it. Rather, so many cogent solutions are available, determining which solution one finds acceptable must be based on other criteria than just how well it solves the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge.

God's foreknowledge is particularly troublesome because of his providential work in the world. Hence, in the introduction, the problem was broken into foreknowledge *simpliciter* and divine foreknowledge. Contemporary appropriations of Ockhamism suggest beneficial ways by which it is possible to overcome the problem of reconciling freedom with non-divine foreknowledge. Ockham's solution, however, does not fully account for the providential nature of God's foreknowledge, so another model will need to be given in order to account for divine foreknowledge.

Atheism, by denying the existence of God, cogently solved the problem of human freedom and divine foreknowledge. Despite its simplicity in solving this vexing problem, atheism presents an unattractive solution on other grounds. In the case of Antony Flew's atheism, the exchange of theological compatibilism for materialistic compatibilism will be uninviting unless one has already decided that theism is not true. The move from one

type of compatibilism to another does not make significant progress. On the other hand, Sartre's atheism presented a radical form of libertarian freedom by denying humans have a divinely created essence. Perhaps Sartre even gives a stronger account of human freedom than theism. But this limitless freedom comes at the expense of devaluing all choices. Consequently, Sartre's attempt to make freedom more meaningful has in turn resulted in human freedom being more arbitrary. So, the two most promising conceptions of human freedom offered by atheism, while being cogent, do not present compelling solutions to the problem of human freedom and divine foreknowledge unless one is already committed to atheism.

The next solution assessed in this project was the doctrine of divine timelessness. If God is timeless, then his knowledge would not be prior or subsequent to the events he knows. Thus, by positing divine timelessness one can give a rational solution to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge—because God would not have foreknowledge. Rather, God's knowledge would be the timelessly present comprehension of all things. A discerning look at this solution reveals that this solution effectively exchanges the problem of God's foreknowledge for the problem of reconciling God's immutable, timeless knowledge and interaction with human freedom. Thus, divine timelessness will need to be combined with another solution (such as Molinism or Augustinianism) in order for it to be useful.

Augustinianism solves the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge by proposing that God determinately controls free creatures, which Augustinians suggest can be coherently defended with a model of soft determinism. Philosophically, the most obvious weakness of this position is that it hinges entirely on the plausibility of soft determinism,

which is dubious at best. Moreover, the difficulties Augustinianism entails theologically such as harmonizing with scripture, presenting a theodicy, reconciling the “two wills” of God, and other problems will prompt many Christians to look elsewhere for a solution to the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge.

On the opposite spectrum from Augustinianism is the answer of open theism. Like atheism and divine timelessness, open theism gives a cogent solution to the problem of God’s foreknowledge of human future free choices by denying that God knows future free choices. To its merit, open theism affords this simple solution without the difficult metaphysical baggage that encumbers the answers given in atheism and divine timelessness. From a purely philosophical perspective, open theism is arguably the most plausible solution to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge. Unfortunately for open theists, their view incurs difficulties in its being reconciled with Christian theism. Open theism has not been shown to cohere easily with scripture without giving *ad hoc* principles to do so. Moreover, the depiction of God’s relationship with his creation given by open theists leaves much to be desired by most theists. Perhaps many will find open theism more acceptable than Augustinianism, for God would not determinately control and cause all things to occur as they do. Nonetheless, if a view can be given that maintains God’s absolute foreknowledge, it will more likely find acceptance among most Christians.

The final solution surveyed in this project was the Molinist view. On this view, through his middle knowledge God both is able to know the future absolutely and allow his creation to be indeterministically free. Furthermore, God can providentially plan the future to meet his desired ends. Unlike other views, Molinism proved to be helpful when

exploring some of the most difficult aspects of Christian theism. Not only does Molinism provide a cogent answer to the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge, it also aids in understanding the problem of evil, the doctrine of predestination, and a number of other topics of interest to Christians. Additionally, after surveying some of the most serious charges against Molinism, it was shown that they are not overwhelmingly compelling critiques. Since Molinism demonstrated it could explain much without pressing reasons to find it suspect, I have found that it is the most advantageous solution to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge.

Having reached this end, have I merely gone through an academic exercise with no ramifications reaching beyond the concerns of dispassionate theologians and philosophers? I hope not, for I have found that my studies into the nature of God's knowledge and providence are profoundly spiritual. I concur wholeheartedly with William Lane Craig who penned these words at the end of his first major work on this same topic:

I have found that the more I reflect philosophically on the attributes of God, the more overwhelmed I become at his greatness and the more excited I become about Bible doctrine. Whereas easy appeals to mystery prematurely shut off reflection about God, rigorous and earnest effort to understand him is richly rewarded with deeper appreciation of who he is, more confidence in his reality and care, and a more intelligent and profound worship of his person.¹

Romans 11:3 exults: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" I recently re-read this familiar verse with a greater appreciation for the mystery and awe of God's knowledge. Some may object to any project that attempts to solve a theological

¹ William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 153-54.

problem because doing so would supposedly take away from the mystery of God's being. To the contrary, I have found that finding an acceptable answer to the vexing dilemma of God's foreknowledge and human freedom brings into focus what is mysterious and awesome about God. For how God possesses his omniscience, which I take to include the inscrutable facts of middle knowledge, is perplexing and humbling. Rather than God's omniscience being an amorphous mystery, now I understand more clearly what is ineffable about the depths of God's wisdom. As a result of my studies on God's omniscience, my appreciation and understanding of Romans 11:33 has increased.

Of course, my primary intention has been to give a convincing solution to an academic problem. Whether the Molinist solution is as promising as I suspect it to be, the closing words in Luis de Molina's fifty-second disputation of the *Concordia* are worth revisiting at the close of a study on the topic of divine foreknowledge:

Therefore, with not a worry at all about the divine foreknowledge, let us, in accord with the advice of St. Peter [2 Pet. 1:10], busy ourselves so that by good works we might do what we are called to do. For just as the devil, who has understood far better than we have that God foreknows all things, caring not a bit about the divine foreknowledge, leaves no stone unturned and carefully roams about and circles the earth, seeking whom he might devour, so too let us, freed from every care about the divine foreknowledge, diligently work out our salvation, relying on God's help; for in this way it will come to pass that without any doubt we will attain eternal happiness. And in this regard it should be sufficient for each of us to keep in mind that God is God, that is, infinite wisdom, goodness, etc., in order that in these matters, which are beyond the understanding of many, we might commit ourselves firmly to God's goodness and providence and busy ourselves to the extent of our power with those things that it is our responsibility, with God's help, to look after most diligently.²

² Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*, trans. and intro. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 195. Disputation 52, sec. 39.

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