

## The Four Views of Divine Foreknowledge

by Fred Chay

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The debate over what God knows has been steady and heated throughout Christian history. The views have become more defined and equally defended since their formations. The formations of these views, however, were not all chronologically similar. For example, even though the open view was in existence before the twentieth century, it was not as widely as accepted and pushed as it is today. Whereas, the classical (or the Augustinian-Calvinist) view has been accepted for many centuries. In recent years, the debate has not become any less controversial or diversified.

To understand why this debate has assumed the proportions it has within the contemporary evangelicalism, one must realize that the question is not simply about the nature of divine foreknowledge. Rather, for many this issue has become a theological lightning rod, largely due to the implications this question has for other areas of theology. At least three fundamental theological areas are involved in this debate. First, and most immediately, there is the question of the nature and mode of God's foreknowledge. Second, in the eyes of many, there are important implications for the question of the nature of divine sovereignty (i.e., whether God's sovereignty operates in a general or in a particular and meticulous fashion). Finally, there are direct implications for the question of the nature of human freedom (i.e., whether humans possess compatibilistic or libertarian freedom). Further, each of these theological questions plays an essential role in the articulation of a stance on the 'problem of evil'.<sup>2</sup>

The "problem of evil" is this—in God's creation of the world, did he play a role in the presence of evil, and did (and does) he cause man's sin. If God foreordained everything to happen, then it is more likely that God will receive the blame for man's sin, whereas if God did not know that man would sin, he cannot receive the blame. Even if God knows all, but did not foreordain everything, it is still hard to reconcile this problem<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is built on my theology notes and an independent study of one of my students at Southwestern, Justin Atwood. The main resource that Mr. Atwood utilized for this research was *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*; Edited by James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy—Presentations of views (in book) are as follows: Gregory A. Boyd—The Open View; David Hunt—The Simple-Foreknowledge View; William Lane Craig—The Middle-Knowledge View; Paul Helm—The Augustinian-Calvinist View. Other sources are included in the footnotes that follow. Mr Atwood has provided an excellent summary of the latest literature and conclusions that are housed in this debate concerning evangelical theology.

<sup>2</sup> "Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views" (DF), p.9

<sup>3</sup> Almost identical to, and also included in this study, is the dilemma between free will and God's sovereignty. "On the one hand, we believe that God made us morally responsible beings with the ability to make meaningful moral decisions. If we were not able to make meaningful decisions, then why would Scripture exhort us to turn from evil things or to lead godly lives? If we were not responsible for freely choosing our actions, then how could God justly reward or punish us for them? On the other hand, Christians also believe that God has sovereign control over all earthly affairs. He is the Lord of history and the Lord of our lives. We go to bed each night with the assurance that everything that occurs fits into his all-encompassing, preordained plan. Nothing can thwart God's plan; all that

None of the defenders of these views would deny either God's omniscience or the moral freedom and responsibility of man. Though all defenders would agree that God perfectly knows everything that is possible, "The debate over God's foreknowledge is rather a debate over the *content of reality* that God perfectly knows."<sup>4</sup>, and thus the debate becomes more focused more on what is possible for God to know than what God *does* know.

"These views agree that every detail of what shall transpire in creation has been settled from all eternity. [...] In these views God knows possibilities only as what *might have been*, never as *what might be*."<sup>5</sup>

## The Open View (or Process Theology)

### **Definition**

The open view believes that though God has perfect and complete knowledge, this knowledge only knows things that are settled (to make certain and inescapable). What this means is that "[...] the open view holds that the future is partly open to God, for God cannot foreknow the decisions that free agents shall make."<sup>6</sup> God cannot know these decisions, but he can predict most of them based on a person's behavior and other factors. God has settled certain events, and he thus knows these as facts and these are contained in his omniscience, whereas he has also left some of the future open and as a result cannot contain knowledge of the open future in his omniscience.

In the open view, God knows what is possible to know, and he learns the rest along the way.

### **Description**

The open view is mainly based on what Greg Boyd has labeled "the motif of future openness," or, in short, the open motif, which he believes is thoroughly found in Scripture. This motif shows a world that does not have exhaustively settled actions and plans in both the lives of humans and in the omniscience and omnipotence of God. God has chosen to settle certain events and people in history, but he must leave most of the future open in order to sustain the freedom of humans. The open view...

[...] holds that the reality that God perfectly knows not only excludes some possibilities as what might have been, but also includes other possibilities as what might be. Reality, in other words, is composed of both settled and open aspects. [...] In this view, the sovereign Creator settles whatever he wants to settle about the future, and hence he perfectly foreknows the future as settled *to*

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occurs is keeping with his will." *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (PFW), P.7

<sup>4</sup> DF, p.13

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p.13

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p.10

*this extent.* He leaves open whatever he wants to leave open, and hence he perfectly foreknows the future as possible *to this extent.*<sup>7</sup>

In the open view, God has no part in the ordination of evil. The freedom that he has given man allows for such actions to be chosen, but God does not choose, or foreordain, these actions to happen. Rather, God watches as man chooses which path he will take, and then God uses his abilities to try to bring good out of the situation. Boyd says;

It takes a God who is truly in control to be willing to give away some of his control, knowing that doing so might cause him incredible pain. It takes a truly wise and creative God to guarantee victory without having to control every detail of history. By contrast, to simply control others so that you always get your way is a sure sign of insecurity and weakness. [Open Theism] is the only model in which God wins by virtue of his wisdom, creativity and problem-solving intelligence, because it is the only model in which God has to genuinely think, plan and respond to other personal agents.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, in accordance with the open motif in Scripture, God can be surprised, grieved, frustrated, and his plans can be thwarted. God must then use his ingenuity to make his creation work together in order to achieve his purposes.

God's intentions are not absolute and invariant; he does not unilaterally and irrevocably decide what to do. When God deliberates, he evidently takes a variety of things into account, including human attitudes and responses. Once he formulates his plans, they are still open to revision.<sup>9</sup>

It is interesting that though many Christians would reject open theism, most Christians live as though it is somewhat true. Most Christians live, and think, as though the future is, at least, partially open. The most common expression of this would be through prayer. When one prays, it is usually in hopes of influencing God's decisions and influencing, or changing, the future. A person would not pray in such a way if he did not think that the future was open to some extent.

### ***Defense from the Bible***

The open view claims a considerable amount of evidence from Scripture<sup>10</sup>. This support falls under the open motif and usually has to do with God's own actions or feelings. Passages that describe God as being surprised, frustrated, or changing his mind are only a few that the open theist will provide in defense of God's openness.

In this motif, God asks questions about the future, speaks of the future in conditional terms, regrets the outcome of decisions he has made, changes his mind in response to changing situations, and so on. I call this 'the motif of future

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p.14

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p.44-45

<sup>9</sup> *The Openness of God*, pp.29-30

<sup>10</sup> Much of this evidence is found in the OT, though some can be found in the NT as well.

openness,' and it pervades Scripture [...] and should be interpreted as describing what God and creation are really like. Thus it arrives at the balanced conclusion that the future is settled to the extent that Scripture suggests it is settled and open to the extent that Scripture suggests that it is open.<sup>11</sup>

The open theist believes that the future is only partly settled, whereas the classical theist believes that it is mostly, or totally, settled.

Given the particular examples [Isaiah 46:9-11,48:3-5; Genesis 15:13] where the Lord decrees that certain things shall come to pass, must one conclude that the future is exhaustively settled in God's mind? [...] It only implies that *some* of the future is settled. People tend to assume that if some of the future is settled, that all of it must be settled.<sup>12</sup>

One may ask though, "If certain actions and events are settled, and it was not God that settled them, then how will they come to pass?" This is important since the open theist will try as hard as he can to save human free will, and to dissolve God's foreordination. Thus, he might say as Boyd has said;

Future actions might also be settled not only because the Lord has decided them beforehand, but also because a person's character settles them. [...] Hence, generally speaking, the range of viable options we are capable of diminishes over time. [...] This does not mean that our every move is predictable, for our present character doesn't exhaustively determine our future behavior. But it does mean that our future behavior is predictable to the extent that our present character is solidified.<sup>13</sup>

This argument is only valid if the open motif is true, because, if God does know all actual and possible reality, then the open motif disintegrates and man is fully predictable, or knowable.

Here are six proofs for God's openness as presented by Boyd in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*

1. God confronts the unexpected  
"Passages that describe God's response to unexpected behavior suggest that while the Lord can never be caught off guard—for he anticipates all possibilities—he is nevertheless occasionally surprised at the improbable behavior of people."<sup>14</sup> [Is. 5:4; Jer. 3:6-7, 3:19-20, 19:5]
2. God experiences regret  
"God sometimes expresses in Scripture disappointment with the results of decisions *he himself made*."<sup>15</sup> [Gen. 6:6; 1 Sam. 15:10, 35]
3. God expresses frustration  
"In the Bible we find many occasions when God expresses frustration toward people who stubbornly resist his plans for their lives. [...] In the openness view, when God creates

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<sup>11</sup> DF, p.23-24

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p.17

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p.20

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p.24

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p.26

people, he knows the possibility (but not the certainty) that they will become citizens of the eternal kingdom. He genuinely strives to win them because he hopes that they will surrender to him. When they refuse, he is genuinely grieved, for he knows that their loss was not inevitable."<sup>16</sup> [Ezek. 22:30-31; 2 Peter 3:9; Is. 63:10; Matt. 26:24]

4. God speaks in conditional terms

"If everything were settled in God's mind from all eternity, as the classical view holds, we would expect God to speak of the future in terms of what *will* and *will not* happen. Remarkably, however, throughout Scripture God often speaks of the future in terms of what *might* or *might not* happen."<sup>17</sup> [Ex. 4:8, 13:17; Ezekiel 12:3; Matt. 26:39]

5. God tests people "to know" their character<sup>18</sup>

"God often tests his covenant partners to discover whether or not they will choose to follow him. [...] If read in context, there is no difficulty reconciling the testing passages with God's knowledge of all present realities; future decisions are *not* present realities."<sup>19</sup> [2 Chron. 32:31; Deut. 8:2; Judges 3:4]

6. God changes his mind<sup>20</sup>

"Scripture contains many examples of God's changing his mind in response to events that transpire in history. By definition, one cannot change what is permanently fixed. Hence, every time the Bible describes God's change of mind, it suggests that God's knowledge and intentions are not eternally settled."<sup>21</sup> [Jer. 18:4-10, 26:2-3; Jonah 4:2]

Much of the support for open theism comes from a literal interpretation of Scripture. The open theist believes that passages describing God as human-like (as above), or as the God of open theism, should not be interpreted as anthropomorphisms. If such passages, like one that claims God changes his mind, were taken to be anthropomorphic, what would be the truth told through such claims? If Scripture says that God changes his mind, should not the believer accept that claim as truth? If God does not change his mind and if the Bible says that he does, what then are we to believe? Wouldn't the Scripture be lying to us? Not all descriptions of God are taken literally by the open theist. Passages with truth claims, such as God's feelings or actions, are interpreted literally, whereas passages expressing no such claims, such as God as having arms or legs, are interpreted anthropomorphically.<sup>22</sup>

Various passages reveal a God who is deeply involved in human experience. The failings of his human children disappoint him and their sufferings bring him grief, but he seeks their companionship and rejoice when they return his love. These

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, pp.28-30

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p.30

<sup>18</sup> Many theologians (most likely holding to the classical view) respond that God's tests, given to reveal peoples hearts, were not given so that God could gain that knowledge, for he already had it. He gave these tests in order for the people to know their own hearts. It was God's way of showing man his own character.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, pp.31-33

<sup>20</sup> Many theologians are also quick to raise the contradiction they see between open theism and Numbers 23:19 which says, "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind". But Boyd's response to this that, "God's mind is unchanging in every way in which it is virtuous to be unchanging [unlike man's], but it is open to change in every way in which it is virtuous to be open to change." (DF, p.42)

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.33

<sup>22</sup> Take the example from Scripture [Jeremiah 26:13] which says, "the Lord will change his mind". "Suppose, for the sake of the argument, that God in fact wanted to tell us, 'I may change my mind.' How could he do so more clearly and convincingly than he did here? If his saying 'I may change my mind' in Scripture isn't enough to convince us that God may in fact change his mind, then nothing would be." (DF, pp. 34-35)

passages also reveal a God who is active within human history, patiently pursuing his objectives for his creatures, while taking into account their decisions and actions. They show that God adjusts and alters his plans to accommodate changes in human behaviour.<sup>23</sup>

### **Deficiencies**

One of the main deficiencies with the open view is that it seems to limit God's omniscience. The open theist defends that God is omniscient of everything possible to know. However, it seems contradictory, taken the definition of omniscience, that God could not know anything at all, even if it were a future decision made by a free agent. Also, "[Omniscience] requires that God hold no false beliefs. But on Boyd's account God does appear to hold many false beliefs, since God believes and expects that certain things will happen and is sometimes disappointed and even regretful about how things turn out."<sup>24</sup> The God of open theism, though sure of the achievement of his overall plan, is not sure of the details on how he *will* achieve it. He is not the author of evil, and he is not even sure what evil will take place in the world. He is surprised at evil actions.

The open theist's God, despite his precognitive impairment, has perfect knowledge of what is going on now; in the case of Boyd's kidnapped child [in which the child's parents must either accept God's foreknowledge of the horrible event or accept God's grievance of the unexpected event as purported by the open view], he has sufficient knowledge (and power) to stop a crime in progress, to rescue the victim and so on. Why doesn't he? I just don't see how Boyd's answer would differ from the 'he has a 'good and sovereign reason'' answer that Boyd thinks is so unsatisfactory when it comes from a classical theist. (Boyd does suggest that God refrains from intervening *out of respect for the kidnappers free will*, but this strikes me as much more disturbing than the 'good sovereign reason' answer.)<sup>25</sup>

Boyd's limited deity makes the problem of evil worse, not easier, for it becomes inexplicable why God just sits by, wringing his hands, while letting evils go unchecked without any morally sufficient reason for not stopping them.<sup>26</sup>

This is only part of the problem, though, because the open theist claims that *God settles some of the future*. Therefore, God has determined certain events to take place, and thus he must make sure that they do. "Ironically, open theology is forced to revert to Calvinistic determinism to account for God's providence and thus actually winds up destroying human freedom."<sup>27</sup> The open theist claims total freedom for man, but it is clear in Scripture that God has knowingly settled certain events, and he must use his control in order to guarantee the success of his plan. This does not work well with the open view.

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<sup>23</sup> *The Openness of God*, p.58

<sup>24</sup> DF, p.55-56

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p.53

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p.59 footnote

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 58

Though the open theist is admirable in his attempts to use a literal hermeneutic, he must be very careful not to take his interpretations to a destructive level.

“Not only are there the obvious anthropomorphisms, like God’s having arms and legs, but the unconscious anthropomorphisms, such as God’s ‘seeing’ the distress of his people or ‘hearing’ their prayer or ‘striking’ his enemies. Contrary to Boyd, we have every reason to be suspicious of a literal interpretation of passages that portray God as finite or limited. [...] In general, the truth communicated to us by these passages is that God’s sovereignty does not consist of blind decrees operating irrespective of free human responses; rather, God’s decrees take into account and are conditioned by the free acts of creatures.”<sup>28</sup>

### ***Defenders***

Gregory A. Boyd

Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views

God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God

God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict

Is God to Blame?: Moving Beyond Pat Answers to the Problem of Evil

Seeing is Believing: Experience Jesus Through Imaginative Prayer

Clark H. Pinnock

The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God

Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness (The Didsbury Lectures)

A Wideness in God’s Mercy

The Grace of God and the Will of Man

Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists

William Hasker (though he does believe in middle-knowledge)

Providence, Evil, and the Openness of God

God, Time, and Knowledge

The Openness of God

David Basinger

The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment

The Openness of God

John Sanders

The God who Risks: A Theology of Providence

The Openness of God

Richard Rice

God’s Foreknowledge and Man’s Free Will

The Openness of God

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.59

## The Simple-Foreknowledge View (Arminian)

### ***Definition***

The simple-foreknowledge (sf) view is just that; simple. In this view, God knows what will happen in the future and there is nothing that he can change, and no other possibilities other than what he knows to be true exist. "Those who believe in simple foreknowledge maintain that God 'simply' knows what is going to come to pass."<sup>29</sup>

### ***Description***

The sf theist believes that God is sovereign and that man does have freedom. God does know, though, exactly how man will use his freedom, and therefore God's foreknowledge encompasses all reality making the future exhaustively settled. The description that the sf theist presents of God is very basic and "simple". The sf theist believes that foreknowledge can be best understood in this "simple" way.

By 'simple' foreknowledge, then, I shall mean that the *simple* affirmation of [God has complete and infallible knowledge of the future] –uncomplicated by exceptions, additions, qualifications et cetera—is by itself wholly compatible with human freedom, divine agency, and enhanced providential control.<sup>30</sup>

It might seem, though, that if the future were settled in such a way that not even God could change a thing, then human free agency would not be valid. If man does not have any possible alternatives to an action, is he truly free to do what he wants?

We have seen that God's beliefs about the future may settle the question of what will happen, thereby eliminating alternatives to what he believes; but we have also seen that this need not disrupt the actual exercise of agency (whether human or divine). [...] because divine foreknowledge neither causes nor explains what it knows, it does not require us to adopt an attenuated understanding of free agency under which an agent may be 'free' even when his actions are causally determined by a force outside himself, whether God or the universe.<sup>31</sup>

God knows what man will freely do, and God knows this wholly and perfectly making it settled. All other possibilities become nonexistent due to God's foreknowledge.

What God knows is the event itself. Thus God will know the event if and only if the event occurs. That is, God will have a certain belief about an event occurring if and only if that event occurs. It is because (in a noncausal sense having to do with our knowledge) the event occurs that God believes it occurs. But then one

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p.10

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, pp.66-67

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p.102

cannot turn around and make the event depend on God's knowledge of the event, as the objector does when he says that God's foreknowledge determines, for the foreknowledge depends upon the event, and not vice versa.<sup>32</sup>

Though he knows all truths, including truths about what free persons choose, he does not know what free persons would choose were conditions different from what they are or about the choices which would be made by possible but never-existing individuals. The reason for this is that statements about what persons would have chosen to do under certain conditions which never came about (what are called counterfactual conditionals of free will) are not true. [...] Since these choices will never be made by actually existing individuals, nor with respect to possible people will such individuals ever exist in order to make these choices, they are not simple matters of God's foreknowledge, Neither are they true in that they follow necessarily from certain conditions, for this is inconsistent with their being about possible free choices or actions.<sup>33</sup>

### ***Defense from the Bible***

Since the sf view does not present much in the form of debatable ideas, it mainly seeks to prove God's foreknowledge from Scripture. The rest of the view, just as with any of the others, is at the discretion of the reader. But if God's foreknowledge is complete and infallible, then the sf view has proven its main support.

Here is affirmation of God's divine foreknowledge as presented by David Hunt in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*

1. "[...] there is considerable biblical evidence for divine foreknowledge."<sup>34</sup> [Is. 41:22-23; Matt.26; Ps. 139:4]
2. "The central Christian understanding of God as a supreme and perfect being arguably requires [complete and infallible knowledge of the future] [...] Unless we affirm [complete and infallible knowledge of the future], we can't say (as we surely want to say) that God is as great a being can possibly be"<sup>35</sup>
3. "[...] divine sovereignty and providence require God to be supremely knowledgeable as well as supremely powerful. [...] If he has so much as the ability, however, he needs the knowledge, since power without knowledge is blind."<sup>36</sup>

Even though the sf view's God is completely omniscient and omnipotent, he has not foreordained or causally determined everything to happen.

[...] it is clear from Scripture that God sovereignly chooses not to meticulously control *everything*. He wants people to love him by choice, not necessity, and so he limits the scope of his sovereign control. [...] Beginning in the Garden of Eden and extending through the New Testament, we find that God gives people the

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p.110

<sup>33</sup> PFW, pp. 111-112

<sup>34</sup> DF, p.68

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p. 69

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p. 69

ability and the obligation to make morally responsible choices (e.g., Gen. 2:16-17; John 3:16-18).<sup>37</sup>

### ***Deficiencies***

In the sf view, though God is strongly sovereign, he is almost made into the god of deism. The sf God is very similar to that of the watchmaker, in that he cannot (or does not) interfere spontaneously with his creation. "In the simple-foreknowledge view, God cannot alter what is going to come to pass, for it is eternally settled."<sup>38</sup> In this view, as opposed to deism, God does interact with his creation, but every action, including his own, was already settled, and therefore he cannot be spontaneous or surprised.

[...] the world operates on its own volitional rules. God may fiddle with it here and there to try to get his programs accomplished, but it is essentially an autonomous system. Divine foreknowledge of human decisions is the key for the Arminian to give God a foot in the back door. God foresees that someone will exercise his or her autonomous will, without any divine interference, and God responds by choosing and predestining that one. We have seen that God's role in our lives is more active, formative, and personal.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Defenders***

David Hunt

Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views  
Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views

Bruce Reichenbach

Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom  
Evil and a Good God

### **The Middle-Knowledge View (or Neo-Molinism)**

#### ***Definition***

According to the middle-knowledge (mk) view, before God's decree to create the world, he knew every possible world and every possible person and circumstance. He then chose to make the actual world, according to his wisdom and purpose, which he foreknew exhaustively in its entirety.

"In the middle-knowledge view, God knows not only what shall come to pass, he knows what would have come to pass if he had chosen to create any other world—this is his 'middle' knowledge."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Across the Spectrum*, p.30

<sup>38</sup> DF, p.107

<sup>39</sup> *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, p.199

<sup>40</sup> DF, p.11

The mk view makes an attempt to reconcile unaltered free will with the foreknowledge of God in a way that would seem attractive to both ends of the [foreknowledge] theological spectrum. The mk theist claims total freedom on the part of humans while claiming total control and foreknowledge on the behalf of God.

Theologically, middle knowledge enables us to explain both the compatibility of divine foreknowledge with future contingents as well as the basis of divine foreknowledge and, more importantly, to provide an intelligible account of God's providence over a world of free creatures.<sup>41</sup>

### **Description**

According to the mk view, before God created the world, he had knowledge of everything that could be. He chose one of the possibilities to become reality, but he still knew what was counterfactually possible.

Counterfactuals are conditional statements [...] because the antecedent or consequent clauses are typically contrary to fact: [...] Nevertheless, sometimes the antecedent and/or consequent is true. [...] Christian theologians have typically affirmed that in virtue of his omniscience, God possesses counterfactual knowledge. [...] What theologians did dispute, however, was, so to speak, *when* God has such counterfactual knowledge. [...] For whether God is timeless or everlasting throughout time, in neither case are there truths that are unknown to God until some moment at which he discovers them. As an omniscient being, God must know every truth there is and so can never exist in a state of ignorance. Rather the 'when' mentioned above refers to the point in the *logical* order concerning God's creative decree at which God has counterfactual knowledge. [...] Everybody agreed that logically prior to God's decree to create a world, God has knowledge of all necessary truths, including all the possible worlds he might create, This was called God's *natural knowledge*. It gives him knowledge of what *could* be. Moreover, everyone agreed that logically subsequent to his decree to create a particular world, God knows all the contingent truths about the actual world, including its past present and future. This was called God's *free knowledge*. It involves knowledge of what *will* be. The disputed question was where one should place God's counterfactual knowledge of what *would* be. Is it logically prior to or posterior to the divine decree? [...] On the Molinist view, there are two logical moments prior to the divine decree: first, the moment at which he has natural knowledge of the range of possible worlds, and second, the moment at which he has knowledge of the proper subset of possible worlds that, given the counterfactuals true at that moment, are feasible for him to create. [...] Since God's counterfactual knowledge lies logically in between his natural knowledge and his free knowledge, Molinists called it God's *middle knowledge*.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p.143

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, pp.120-122

God's middle-knowledge does not imply that when he chose which world he would create that humans did not then have free will or counterfactual possibilities. But God knew what they *would* do in the circumstances in which he created, so the future *was* exhaustively settled.

Divine foreknowledge is based on God's middle knowledge of what every creature would freely do under any circumstances and on his knowledge of the divine decree to create certain sets of circumstances and to place certain creatures in them. Given middle knowledge and the divine decree, foreknowledge follows automatically as a result.<sup>43</sup>

Knowing all the possible circumstances, persons and permutations of these circumstances and persons, God decreed to create just those circumstances and just those people who would freely do what God willed to happen.<sup>44</sup>

God is, therefore, then able to choose the world in which he knows, for instance, Jesus will be denied by Peter three times and then crucified. And this will not happen because God has forced it to happen, rather because the world, which God has created, will make it happen. But God has perfect knowledge of every other possibility as well, and this is part of his middle knowledge. "[...] without middle knowledge, God cannot know prior to the creative decree what the world would be like."<sup>45</sup>

### ***Defense from the Bible***

The mk theist believes that the Bible contains many examples of God having counterfactual knowledge. This means that God knows what could be, as well as what will be. He knows actuality as reality, and knows possibility as counterfactual. God includes such counterfactual knowledge in his Word. Old Testament prophecies are an example of counterfactual knowledge.

Indeed, when we construe certain prophecies as counterfactual warnings, rather than as categorical declarations of simple foreknowledge, we can explain how it is that in Israel the test of a true prophet is the fulfillment of his predictions (Deut 18:22) and yet some predictions given by true prophets do not actually come to pass because the people forewarned responded in an appropriate way (Is 38:1-5; Amos 7:1-6; Jon 3:1-10).<sup>46</sup>

The prophecies that were given were not lies, however, for they were counterfactually true. Even Jesus himself spoke using his counterfactual knowledge.<sup>47</sup>

Matthew 12:7 "**If you** had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' **you would not have** condemned the innocent"

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p.133

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p.134

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p.136

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p.124

<sup>47</sup> These are only two of very many instances in which Jesus speaks of counterfactuals. See also John 15:22-24, 18:36; Matthew 26:24.

Luke 10:13 ""Woe to **you**, Korazin! Woe to **you**, Bethsaida! For **if** the miracles that were performed in **you** had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they **would have** repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes."

Of course Jesus knew that those counterfactuals were only possibilities. What Jesus is showing, though, is that these people did have freedom and possibility. He knew their actuality, but he frequently tells people about other possibilities. "[...] it must be the case that divine foreknowledge and future contingents (in particular, human free acts) are compatible for the simple reason that Scripture teaches both."<sup>48</sup>

### ***Deficiencies***

The mk theist faces a big problem in regards to God's providence. When God chose a world to create out of his endless possibilities, he essentially condemned our world's agents to live according to the plan of that world. If God knows that Jones will cheat on his wife in world A, and that he will remain faithful in world B, and then God chooses to create world A does that not make Jones' sin inescapable. If this is true, then it seems that God is ultimately the cause of everything including sin.

"While this description does not entail that God is the author of sin [...], it does entail that God decreed all sinful acts to happen and decreed them precisely as they have happened. If this is so, the God of Molina and Arminius seems to be as implicated in the fact of evil as much (or as little) as the God of the Augustinian-Calvinist perspective."<sup>49</sup>

"For it appears [...] that God cannot, by employing his middle knowledge, decree the world in which Peter denies Christ without ensuring that Peter denies Christ, thus compromising Peter's indeterministic freedom so vital to the Molinist and Arminian scheme of things."<sup>50</sup>

"If one accepts the distinction between God's free knowledge, natural knowledge and middle knowledge, then there are, [...], two principal areas of concern with Molinism. The first is whether the idea of divine middle knowledge of free human actions is possible (a doubt raised by Robert Adams, among others); the second is how God performs the feat of actualizing possible worlds that include libertarian actions without thereby infringing such freedom."<sup>51</sup>

It seems that the middle-knowledge view is in essence fatalistic. Man cannot escape, or even choose, his destiny because God had chosen it for him before the creation of the world. God knew all possibilities, but did not let man have those possibilities, except for in his own imaginative worlds. Thus, man is still responsible for everything which he is destined to do.

[...] the picture which portrays God as sitting in the heavens, knowing not only what will happen but also how everything would turn out if people chose in other

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p.126

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p.159

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 156

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p.175

ways or had other people existed, is mistaken. In granting us freedom God has given us the ability to react to different possibilities and knows what will occur. But he does not and cannot know what would have happened if we had acted differently than we did. This means that God does not know what choices you would have made tomorrow if you had done things differently today. This is not because God is limited, but because there is no way of determining what would have happened. Its truth cannot be ascertained.<sup>52</sup>

### ***Defenders***

Luis De Molina

On Divine Foreknowledge

William Lane Craig

Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views

The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will

Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time

Norman Geisler

Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom

Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election

The Roots of Evil

William Hasker (also defender of the openness view)

Middle Knowledge: Theory and Applications (Contributions to Philosophical Theology)

God, Time, and Knowledge

### **The Augustinian-Calvinist View (or Classical View)**

#### ***Definition***

The Augustinian-Calvinist (classical) view says that God not only knows everything, but that everything is foreordained. "In this view, God knows all that shall come to pass because he preordains all that shall come to pass."<sup>53</sup>

This view is the most distinctly opposed to the Open View because it claims an exhaustively settled future.

#### ***Description***

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<sup>52</sup> PFW, p.112

<sup>53</sup> DF, p.11

The classical theist believes that God has complete foreknowledge and that God has completely foreordained human history. The classical theist must be careful at this point not to deny human free will or moral responsibility, and most don't. The compatibilist theory that many classical theists hold to says that human freedom is compatible with either God's foreknowledge or with causal determinism. The compatibilist claims that God's foreknowledge of the future does not mean that God has forced that fate on mankind.

Just as your memory does not force the past to have happened, God's foreknowledge does not force the future to happen. And just as you remember some things that you have done but did not do everything that you remember, God foreknows everything that he causes but does not cause everything that he foreknows...Let us rather confess that nothing in the future is hidden from God's foreknowledge, and that no sin is left unpunished by his justice, for sin is committed by the will, not coerced by God's foreknowledge. (footnote 32)

Augustine's point here is this: if God causes, forces or coerces Adam to sin, Adam would indeed be blameless; but God's merely foreknowing what Adam will do does not cause, force or coerce him. It is true that God's foreknowing Adam's action, like his causing Adam's action, leaves Adam with no alternatives—Adam can no more escape divine omniscience than he can resist divine omnipotence. [...] Causing, forcing or coercing someone interferes with that person's agency; simply knowing what the person will do is not an interference of any sort, and its implications for free agency are benign.<sup>54</sup>

Let us suppose, to be more precise, that God foreknew yesterday that Jones will freely eat a tuna sandwich tomorrow. (For the present we are waiving consideration of issues relating to God and time and for the moment are supposing that God is in time.) God's foreknowledge of what Jones will do tomorrow is something that is now past, for he foreknew yesterday what Jones will do. And if that foreknowledge is now past, then it is necessary. It is not logically necessary, since God need never have known about Jones since Jones himself need not have existed. But it is what is sometimes called accidentally or historically necessary. Given that God knew yesterday what Jones will do tomorrow, then God cannot not know. This is because, and on the assumption that, time is linear and what has happened cannot now not have happened.<sup>55</sup>

It is very important that one recognizes, according to the compatibilist theory, that man is still responsible and accountable for his sin. God does not cause sin to happen, though he may cause circumstances in which he knows a person will sin. God's knowledge does not force an event to happen, it only means that the event *will* happen because God knows it will. "To say that each particular action is providentially governed by God is not to say that everything is efficaciously determined by God, though it may be to say that everything that occurs is endorsed by God."<sup>56</sup> Man is still responsible for his actions because he was not eternally caused to sin, only eternally known to sin.

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<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p.88

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p.185

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p.181

Although God is not the cause of evil actions, nevertheless evil actions have causes that God can know of and if he is strongly omniscient, does know of. So God is essentially strongly omniscient with respect both to those acts that he brings about and to all other events the bringing about of which is inconsistent with his essential righteousness. [...] For God to permit some event to occur does not entail that he brings that event about, but it is consistent with his foreknowledge of such events.<sup>57</sup>

God knows all future actions and positively governs all acts that are not evil. [...] He governs all other acts, evil acts, by permitting them, since he cannot positively govern them. [...] One may, therefore, make sense of the idea of divine permission in a way that is consistent with both upholding the divine righteousness and recognizing the existence of evil if one is prepared to maintain that there are types of actions which God can prevent but which he nevertheless cannot cause, even though he may be willing for them to occur and even though those actions have causes that are sufficient for their occurrence in the compatibilist sense.<sup>58</sup>

According to the classical theist, God's plan is set eternally. He also believes that there is nothing that man can do to thwart God's plan, unlike the open theist that says man thwarts God's plans frequently. Whether or not man has the power to do so is very crucial when it comes to matters of God's grace and salvation. The classical theist strongly defends the efficacious and irresistible grace of God as means for man's salvation.

Let us suppose, with all evangelical Protestants, that faith in Christ is the instrumental cause of a person's salvation. Then on an incompatibilist view of freedom, God's grace can only ever be causally necessary, not causally sufficient, for the production of such faith. For otherwise faith in Christ would not be a free act. [...] With such freedom, God's saving grace is always resistible, and so saving grace can never ensure its intended effect.<sup>59</sup>

[...] all that is implied in divine rescuing and bringing to life is the establishing of a relationship, the key to which is not incompatibilistic human freedom but the unilateral establishing of a loving relationship that will not let go until it has secured reciprocal love by recreating it. According to Augustinianism, God in grace establishes a genuinely personal relationship with people who are incapable of establishing it for themselves. And God does this by an act of condescension and power—condescension because he is the infinite Creator and has no obligation to do what he does, and power because our plight is such that without that power the relationship could be neither established nor continued.<sup>60</sup>

As for God's omnipotence and omniscience, the classical theist tends to give God as much power and knowledge as he can. This is because the classical theist has a very great and

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<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p.176

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p.178-179

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p.170

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p.172

unlimited concept of God, whereas the tendency of the open theist seems to limit God or deprive him of certain powers or knowledge.

[...] it seems a reasonable principle, in reflection upon the concept of God in philosophical fashion, that *the connotation of 'omni-' terms—such as 'omnipotent' and 'omniscient'—should, when applied to God, be as wide in their connotation as possible.*[...] one should interpret the term *omniscience* when applied to God as generously as possible, pushing its connotation as far as one can, unless there are overriding reasons not to do so.<sup>61</sup>

It is very common, though, when attributing so much power and knowledge to God, especially in the case of compatibilism vs. incompatibilism, the classical theist must defend his God from many different allegations. One of the main allegations raised against the classical theist God is that he becomes an overruling power labeled such as a “puppeteer” or a “magician”.

When faced with the Scriptural claim that the actions leading up to and including the crucifixion were in accordance with the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, it is tempting to infer that in the crucifixion God ‘manipulated’ the crucifiers or that they were his ‘puppets.’ To say such a thing would be to apply to God concepts derived from (let us say) the behavior of a magician or an entertainer. And this is to forget that those factors which distinguish God from humanity are at least as great as those factors which they have in common. We must therefore resist the temptation to say that in all cases in which one person acts as a result of the set purpose of another intelligent agent, that person is thereby being tricked or made into a puppet.<sup>62</sup>

[...] although my [John Calvin’s] doctrine is that the will of God is the first and supreme cause of all things, yet I everywhere teach that wheresoever in His counsels and works the cause does not plainly appear, yet that there is a cause which lies hidden in Himself, and that according to it He has decreed nothing but that which is wise and holy and just. Therefore, with reference to the sentiments of the schoolmen concerning the absolute, or tyrannical, will of God, I not only repudiate, but abhor them all, because they separate the justice of God from His ruling power.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Defense from the Bible***

The main support that the classical theist finds in Scripture is the instances in which God has predestined certain things to happen<sup>64</sup>. The Bible assures us that certain events, people,

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<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p.173

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p.168

<sup>63</sup> *Calvin’s Calvinism: A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God*, p.266

<sup>64</sup> Millard J. Erickson labels three types of such passages. “didactic, narrative, and prophetic” passages support the classical view. The *didactic* passages are those “which make statements about God’s knowledge of the future,” such as Psalm 139:4 which says, “Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord”. “By ‘narrative’ here, we are referring to a particular type of narrative, namely a prophetic narrative, or one written before the occurrence of the events described.” Such an example of a *narrative* is the naming of Josiah in 1 Kings 13:2; “A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David”. There are numerous *prophecies* throughout all of Scripture, but

and actions have been exhaustively settled and are causally necessary. Granted, as the open theist is quick to point out, this does not mean that *all* events, people, and actions have been eternally settled. But it does not mean that all events, people, and actions have *not* been eternally settled either.

Consider these passages:

Isaiah 46:9-11 "[...] I am God, and there is no one like Me, 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 [...] Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.'"

Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose"

In this view, God will accomplish his goal in all certainty, and in order to do so, he must work all things together. The history of the world and the future of the world is so intricate and detailed, that God must use, or has used, his power and providence in order to accomplish his "good pleasure". This cannot be accomplished, and is illogical, through an open future.

If the future is exhaustively settled, how do we reconcile moral responsibility with providence? Given divine permission, God's plan included those actions, but he did not cause them. Rather, God used, and possibly set up, those actions for his own purposes while retaining the moral responsibility of man.

From this text [Acts 2:23] it is possible to draw the conclusion that there are at least some occasions when the action of a wicked person [...] is the result of the set purpose and foreknowledge of God, for one such occasion was the crucifixion of Christ, the focal event of the Christian faith.<sup>65</sup>

As mentioned above [in the description], the classical theist likes to give God as much power and knowledge as he can. In a more specific example, the classical theist believes in the irresistible and efficacious grace of God. He believes that God is the only one who has the power to be able to save man, and God must be able to use his power in whatever way he chooses to achieve his will. Man must also not be able to refuse this saving power of God.

Only the efficacious grace of God can ensure the salvation of a person in a bondslavery to sin. And for God's grace to be efficacious, God needs to be able to work all things after the counsel of his own will. And in order to do that, he has to be the God of classical theism.<sup>66</sup>

Ephesians 1:11 "also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to his purpose who works all things after the counsel of his will"

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one very obvious prophecy was made by Jesus to Peter. "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times," Matthew 26:34. [*What does God Know And When Does he Know it?*, pp. 39, 49, 51]

<sup>65</sup> DF, p.167

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, p.64

## **Deficiencies**

Though the classical theist tries to maintain human responsibility through compatibilism, it is very hard to produce a convincing argument to prove this theory. The theory states that man is free, and morally responsible, in conjunction with God's foreknowledge.

[...] Augustine emphatically rejects such 'compatibilism': it is because the stone falls by 'natural necessity' that it does not fall by free choice and is not blameworthy for falling. If Adam's fall, like the stone's fall, were determined by 'natural necessity,' Adam too would be neither free nor blameworthy for sinning.<sup>67</sup>

[...] if we *were* subject to universal causal determinism, why wouldn't God then be the ultimate cause of *all* our actions (and not just of our good actions)? After all, he created the initial state of the universe and the causal rules by which one state is succeeded by another state, and he foreknew just what would result from his setting things up this way. Unless he created *something* with the power to make an undetermined contribution to reality, God is the sufficient cause of absolutely everything—including our sins.<sup>68</sup>

The classical theist also purports that because God acts a certain way in one instance, he must act that way in every instance. This idea is extended to the future of man. God has settled certain events, people, and actions. Does this mean that *all* future has been settled? In the same way, since the future is settled, the classical theist does not believe that God can be surprised, frustrated, or that he changes his mind.

The two passages that are most frequently cited in support of the classical view that God cannot change his mind (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29) do not suggest that God *cannot* recant or change his mind, only that he *will not* do so (cf. Jer 15:6; Ezek 24:14; Zech 8:14).<sup>69</sup>

There is not enough evidence for the overarching claims of the classical theist.

## **Defenders**

John Calvin

Institutes of the Christian Religion  
Calvin's Calvinism

St. Augustine

Confessions  
The City of God

Paul Helm

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<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p.87

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p.198

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p.192

Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views

The Providence of God (Contours of Christian Theology)

Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time

The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture

Calvin and the Calvinists

Bruce Ware

God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism

Their God is Too Small: Open Theism and the Undermining of Confidence in God

God's Greater Glory

The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will: Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism

Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace

Thomas R. Schreiner

Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace

The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will: Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism

D. A. Carson

Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension

Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God

How Long, O Lord?: Reflections on Suffering and Evil

J. I. Packer

Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God

## **Strengths of All Four Views**

### ***The Open View***

- The use of a literal hermeneutic is very advantageous and alluring strength of the open view.
- The open view presents many practical implications for the believer. Here are some as expressed by David Basinger in *The Openness of God*.
  - Petitionary Prayer  
"[...] the open model of God is one of the few in which petitionary prayer is efficacious in the manner still presupposed by most Christians: as an activity that can initiate unilateral divine activity that would not have taken place if we had not utilized our God-given power of choice to request his assistance<sup>70</sup>."
  - Divine Guidance

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<sup>70</sup> TOG, p.162

"[...] we must acknowledge that divine guidance, from our perspective, cannot be considered a means of discovering exactly what will be best in the long run—as a means of discovering the very best long-term option. Divine guidance, rather, must be viewed primarily as a means of determining what is best for us now."<sup>71</sup>

□ Human Suffering

"[...] we believe that God has chosen to create a world in which individuals possess significant freedom, and hence that God does not as a general rule unilaterally intervene in earthly affairs. And we [...] maintain that humanity not only can, but often does, choose less than the best option available. Thus we [...] believe that much of the pain and suffering we encounter may well be gratuitous—may well not lead to any greater good."<sup>72</sup>

□ Social Responsibility

"[...] humanity bears primary responsibility for much of what occurs in those contexts in which human decision-making is involved."<sup>73</sup>

□ Evangelistic Responsibility

"[...] we are clearly committed to the contention that a personal relationship with God is what gives this life its fullest meaning. Thus, given the open view, the fear that some will fail to enter fully into a relationship with God—that some might not avail themselves of the totality of God's transforming power—because of some negligence on our part can justifiably serve as an important basis for an evangelistic efforts."<sup>74</sup>

### ***The Simple-Foreknowledge View***

- God has a perfect plan for the world and he is completely omnipotent and omniscient.

"God's finale is an intricately woven tapestry produced by billions of hands. God knows the individual weavers—their abilities, shortcomings and in the end the little variegated, irregular patch they will sew. Out of a myriad of pieces he is creating a whole tapestry. Stained with every human imperfection and vice, beautified with every human perfection and virtue, the masterpiece slowly takes shape under his guiding hand, until that day when he has finished it, presenting it splendidly in his new heaven and new earth."<sup>75</sup>

- Love requires a choice, and so does sin

If we were not able to choose our own actions, then we would not be able to sincerely love God. The feelings that we would have would be artificial in that they did not form in the freedom of our will. In the same way, God lets man choose evil as well. God can have no part in evil, and he cannot will, or plan for, man to do evil. But with freedom of choice comes the ability to choose either love or sin. God cannot rightly be the author of evil, and he cannot choose love for us.

- Need for prayer

As with the open view, the sf view also finds urgency for prayer in the Scripture. If the future cannot be changed, then what is the point to prayer, besides obedience. But yet, Jesus tells us to pray and gave us responsibility for the outcome of events, therefore we must pray in order to help influence the path of the future.

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<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p.163

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, p.170

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p.172

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p.175

<sup>75</sup> PFW, p.124

### ***The Middle-Knowledge View***

- The middle-knowledge view provides a balanced perspective between the sovereignty of God and the free actions of humans  
"Molina's scheme is a doctrine of remarkable theological fecundity that resolves in a single stroke most of the traditional difficulties concerning divine providence and human freedom. [...] God has thus providentially arranged for everything that happens by either willing or permitting it, and he causes everything that does happen, yet in such a way as to preserve freedom and contingency."<sup>76</sup>

### ***The Augustinian-Calvinist View***

- Foreknowledge is implied in omniscience  
"If God is omniscient, he knows all true propositions as true and all false propositions as false."<sup>77</sup>
- Foreknowledge is implied in divine sovereignty  
"If God faces an open future, he cannot guarantee that his will shall be accomplished in any given instance or for world history as a whole."<sup>78</sup>
- The believer's confidence depends on foreknowledge  
"If God does not know some of what the future may bring, then believers cannot have the assurance that God has a purpose for their lives."<sup>79</sup>
- The world, and the future, is so intricately detailed and specific that God must be able to work everything together in order to accomplish his will in every situation. This means he must have total control—as he does as the God of classical theism.

## **Weaknesses of All Four Views**

### ***The Open View***

- This view seems to diminish to knowledge of God. If God doesn't know everything, including possibilities, then He is not fully omniscient. God is the greatest being. It is only fitting that the greatest being should have full complete knowledge of everything actual as well as everything possible.
- This view diminishes the confidence of the believer. The open view believes that God will *try* to work all things together for His good, but He does not have a specific plan for the occurrence of every event, and ultimately for the life of every person.

### ***The Simple-Foreknowledge View***

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<sup>76</sup> *Philosophical Foundations*, pp.562, 564

<sup>77</sup> ATS, p.41

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, pp.41-42

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p.42

- In the simple-foreknowledge view, God is not very active in the world. He knows what will happen and cannot therefore alter what will come to pass. He can only watch, though he does, from time to time, intervene in the world.

### ***The Middle-Knowledge View***

- This view is very close to becoming, if not already, fatalistic. It maintains that God preserved human freedom by knowing all possibilities, choosing a world to create, and then letting humans live out the choices that he foreknew. Here's the problem. God chose which world to create, thereby condemning the world to that particular fate. Yes, God does not force humans to do what he foreknew they would do, but in choosing to create that world, he made the choice at the beginning that humans would do what he knew they will do.

### ***The Augustinian-Calvinist View***

- This view takes away most, if not all, the free will of man. If our future is foreordained, then we cannot escape our own destiny. And further, we cannot be held responsible for what we were predestined to do and not to do.
- The love that we have for God cannot be real if he causes us to love him. Love must be chosen, not forced.
- Evangelism becomes less important since God's will cannot be thwarted. If God wants a person to receive salvation, there is nothing that can happen to stop that. Nevertheless, my witness to that person does not really matter since he will be saved no matter what.

### **Verses to Consider<sup>80</sup>**

#### God changes his mind

- Jonah 3:10b; 4:2
- Exodus 32:14
- Numbers 11:1-2; 14:12-20; 16:20-35, 41-48
- Deuteronomy 9:13-14, 18-20
- Judges 10:13-16
- 2 Samuel 24:17-25
- 1 Kings 21:27-29
- 2 Kings 13:3-5; 20:1-6

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<sup>80</sup> Dr. Chay Systematic Theology 3

- 1 Chronicles 21:15
- Jeremiah 18:7-10; 26:2-3, 19

"Maybe," "Perhaps," and "If" passages

- Exodus 3:18-4:9; 13:17
- Ezekiel 12:3
- Jeremiah 26:2-3
- Matthew 26:39
- John 4:10
- 1 Samuel 23:10-13 (counterfactual condition)

Testing Scriptures

- Genesis 22:12
- Deuteronomy 8:2; 13:1-3
- Judges 3:4
- 2 Chronicles 32:31

The problem of evil and God's love for man

- Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11
- John 3:16
- 1 Tim 2:4; 4:10
- 2 Peter 3:9
- Proverbs 16:6

The urgency of prayer

- Exodus 32:14

- Numbers 11:1-2
- 2 Kings 20:1-6
- Jeremiah 18:7-10; 26:2-3, 19

God's naming of particular individuals

- Josiah—1 Kings 13:2-3; 2 Kings 22:1; 23:15-16
- Cyrus—Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-7

Divine predictions

- Matthew 26:34
- John 6:64, 70-71; 13:18-19; 17:12
- 1 Peter 1:20
- Matthew 16:21; 20:17-19
- Acts 2:23; 4:28
- Romans 8:29
- 2 Timothy 1:9

The predestining, choosing, and election of man

- Ephesians 1:4-6, 11
- Acts 4:28
- Romans 8:28-30
- 1 Peter 2:7-8
- Revelation 13:8
- Matthew 24:22, 24, 31
- Luke 18:7

- Deuteronomy 7:6
- Revelation 17:14
- 1 Peter 1:1, 20; 2:9; 5:13
- Jeremiah 1:5

Divine repentance

- Genesis 6:6
- Exodus 32:14
- 1 Samuel 15:35
- Jonah 3:10

**Additional Quotes Concerning Issues of the Relationship Between Freewill and Divine Sovereignty**

"Everyone who believes in God at all believes that He knows what you and I are going to do tomorrow"—C.S. Lewis; Mere Christianity

"Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in his works unless his omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil." Augustine

"God knows instantly and effortlessly all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all spirit and all spirits, all being and every being, all creaturehood and all creatures, every plurality and thoughts, all mysteries, all enigmas. All feeling, all desires, every unuttered secret, all thrones and dominions, all personalities, all things visible and invisible in heaven and in earth, motion, space, time, life, death, good, evil, heaven, and hell. Because God knows all things perfectly, He knows no thing better than any other thing, but all things equally well. He never discovers anything, he is never surprised, never amazed. He never wonders about anything nor (except when drawing men out for their own good) does He seek information or ask questions"—A.W. Tozer; The Knowledge of the Holy

Taken from Dr. Roger Nicole of the Reformed Theological Seminary:<sup>81</sup>

Biblical / Reformed View	Openness View
God is sovereign and controls everything in	God's sovereignty has been self-limited by

<sup>81</sup> Taken from [http://www.pilgrimcovenant.com/weeklyQA/wklyQA\_021124.html]; table included in issue 22 of the *Founder's Journal* (Fall 1995; see <http://www.founders.org/FJ22/reviews.html>).

the created world, including the actions of responsible agents.	virtue of the creation of free agents.
God's power embraces the whole universe, yet not so as to do "violence to the will of the creatures."	God's power stops where human will begins and God Himself has established this self-limitation.
God's knowledge embraces all things possible, and specifically all that comes to pass. It includes eternal knowledge of the future actions and decisions of free agents.	God's knowledge is self-limited, because foreknowledge of the actions of free agents would evidence that they are not free.
God has an eternal plan which will surely come to pass. For Him there is no surprise and no disappointment.	God's plan has a multitude of blanks due to the unforeseen actions or decisions of free agents, God's greatness is manifest in that He is able to cope with anything that turns up.
Predictive prophecy is based on God's exhaustive knowledge and will certainly be realized.	Prophecy is based on God's educated guesses as to what will happen, and it is often conditional upon some activities or decisions of free agents. This conditionality is not always expressed in connection with prophecy, promise or warning. Hence, the appearance of non-fulfillment. Cf. the history of Jonah and Nineveh.
God's plan is immutable even as God's nature. Therefore expressions that speak of God repenting must be seen as metaphorical.	Prayer is an effectual activity whereby angels and humans can function as God's counselors and change His mind.
God is impassable in the sense that He is not, as human beings, susceptible to the upheaval of emotions. He is not impassive, for the scripture represents Him as compassionate.	God's love is the supreme perfection of God and all other characterizations must be envisioned, and if necessary reinterpreted, in terms of our understanding of that love.
God's predestination is that gracious provision whereby, out of His goodness and mercy, he has chosen a multitude out of a sinful and rebellious race, and has appointed them to receive and accept the full benefits of His salvation, provided for them in the work of Christ and applied to them in due time by the Holy Spirit.	God's predestination does not relate to individuals: it is God's blessing upon those, whoever they might be, who repent and believe on their own initiative. It is also at times God's appointment for service.

### Final Questions

- Does God need to have knowledge of every possibility in order to be omniscient?

- Should certain passages of Scripture, describing God, be interpreted literally or anthropomorphically?
- Does God need to settle every event in order for Him to achieve His goal?
- If the future is open, should the believer trust fully in God?
- Has God set a certain plan for the future, or is His plan constantly changing according to the actions of man?
- Is God bound by His own foreknowledge of the future?
- Is the future bound by God's foreknowledge of the future?
- Can God's omniscience and man's free will be compatible?
- If God has settled the future, is man responsible for his actions?
- How can we reconcile the relationship between the presence of sin and God's foreknowledge?
- What implications do these views have for the lives of believers?

## Conclusion

The debate over God's foreknowledge, along with so many other theological issues, will never be settled here on earth. Though we may speculate and formulate ideas and opinions, they are only the opinions of fallen and finite man. It is not possible for the finite to fully comprehend the infinite. One cannot be certain exactly how God works. We do not know how his foreknowledge, omniscience, and omnipotence all work together within Him and in the lives of humans. Theologians, and those interested in such topics, must conclude with whatever insufficient evidence they find. How dogmatic one becomes over such an issue needs be checked carefully. The consequences of one's answer on this issue are enormous. "I would be prepared to argue that any Christian leader's handling of the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility will affect large areas of his theological understanding, evangelistic practices, and ecclesiastical methods."<sup>82</sup> As Calvin warned, we must go as far as scripture allows and no further. It appears the evangelical world may be about at the end of such an inquiry.

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<sup>82</sup> *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*, p.222

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