

FOREKNOWLEDGE AND FREEDOM IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL:
ANOTHER LOOK AT “OPEN THEISM”

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INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of John reveals that the suffering and death of Jesus occurred according to a (divinely) predetermined plan and time table (John 7:6-8, 30; 17:1; 18:11). On the other hand, Jesus, of his own volition, willingly submitted to that plan (John 10:17-18). In Classical Theism, God knew of the events of the cross before they happened. But, when they happened, they apparently were consequential to the free choices of the human agents involved. Is such dialectic not at best a pious paradox or at worst an irreconcilable contradiction?

In recent years, a debate about this very question has raged in the evangelical academy, in the professional journals and in many pulpits.¹ What does God know? And, when did he know it? “Open Theists” (as they prefer to be called) answer that God can only know that which is logically possible to know.² He knows the past and the present omnisciently. But, they believe, God does not—or cannot—know exhaustively future contingencies, the choices of personal agents. The future is therefore “open.”

¹ Norman Geisler and Wayne House are of the opinion that this is a serious theological conflict (though the term they use to describe the newer posture is considered pejorative by some): “Evangelicalism has faced several crucial battles in the past two generations...none is more important, however, than the battle that now must be faced—the battle for God,” in Geisler, Norman L. Geisler and H. Wayne House, *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), 7.

Moreover, in citing R. K. McGregor Wright, Paul Helseth reminds us of the potential impact this debate may have on theology proper. “*To change the attributes [of God] is to change the definition of God.* To change the definition of God is to have a different god entirely. Any two gods are only distinguishable after all, by their contrasting attributes (‘A Brief Response to John Sanders,’ Wheaton Philosophy Conference, October 27, 2000),” in Paul Kjos Helseth, “On Divine Ambivalence: Open Theism and the Problem of Particular Evils,” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (September 2001): 498, n. 15.

² William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 53.

Traditional theists have long maintained that God can, and indeed does, know all future human choices. Those from the Augustinian-Reformed background say that God is able to know all such choices, since ultimately he himself has determined those very choices of his own sovereign will, from all eternity. Those of the classical “Arminian”¹ tradition likewise argue that God knows all such choices. Nevertheless, those choices were *not* foreordained of God, and in fact remain authentically free at the time they are made.

The discussion continues. This research will not solve all the problems before us. But, it proposes modestly that significant light may be shed from the Fourth Gospel on some of the major issues, and that a brief survey of the relevant themes and sub-themes addressed in this Gospel may tilt the balance to one side in the current debate.

The plan of this paper is, first, to examine fairly (if tersely) all sides of the discussion along with their major arguments. It will then move to canvass carefully the Fourth Gospel for possible themes that could impinge on the issues involved in the current debate (even if only by implication). Finally, the aim will be to evaluate more thoroughly and critically, both from a theological and philosophical² standpoint, the open theist’s posture with respect to divine foreknowledge, human freedom and predictive prophecy.³

¹ This term is used broadly here as roughly synonymous with “non-Augustinian,” or as the antithesis of Calvinism, particularly with respect to divine prescience and human freedom.

² This focus will be necessary insofar as “philosophy” has to do with giving a logical, consistent answer to the kinds of questions that naturally arise out of the text (e.g., how can God be timeless, as when Jesus said “before Abraham was, I am,” and yet interact with humans within time?)

³ In fact, a more narrow purpose of this research is to challenge the prevailing (if ancient) assumption of “logical determinism” and to defend the doctrine of exhaustive divine prescience as essential for the Biblical view of prophecy and its fulfillment. For instance, it will look at the truth value of predictive prophecy and will then show prophecy’s relation to free will.

It may be asked, why this format? Is this Biblical Theology, Systematic Theology, or the Philosophy of Religion? While cognizant of the conventional usage of such terminology, this investigator is convinced that such a neat compartmentalization of the disciplines does not always work. The approach here is not purely descriptive, but is partly inductive and partly confessional.¹ It frankly stems from this researcher's basic theological commitments, reflecting his presuppositions about Scripture and his slight dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the philosophical side of the current discussion.²

Why John? The Fourth Gospel is but one possible Biblical source among several. Other books also speak to the point of the current controversy. But, John is particularly rich in its handling of the more overt theological themes of relevance.³ A careful analysis of these themes can afford greater clarity in the current dialogue.

¹ In fact, in any inductive study of the themes of a text, the exegete really cannot help but focus on those issues of recent controversy or concern as they seem to be treated in the text itself. According to Gerhard Hasel's typology of methodology, we are probably following a thematic or cross-sectional approach to the theology of John, but are doing so with a *specific objective* in mind. We come to the text with a series of questions about God, foreknowledge, free will, predictive prophecies, etc., and attempt to find out if it has anything relevant to say on these issues, even if only by implication. Most other books of the Bible also touch on the major questions before us. But there are especially instructive examples of divine prescience of human decisions in John that make this book worthy of special consideration in the current debate. For our approach, see Gerhard F. Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 73-82, 132-133.

James Barr, whose overall views are not congenial with those of the author of this work, has yet stated the problem well when he argues that Biblical Theology is not as descriptive as it often claims to be, and that it in fact often borrows from the categories of doctrinal theology which it ostensibly eschews. See James Barr, "The Theological Case Against Biblical Theology," in *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen, and Robert R. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 12.

² It should be stated that the present work is written from a non-Augustinian Reformed and a non-Reformation Arminian point of view. Technically, this researcher is a semi-Pelagian. For a helpful definition of this viewpoint, see Henry Bettenson, ed. *Documents of the Christian Church*. 2nd Edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 52-53. But, for the sake of concision and clarity, he probably could throw in with the Arminians on the major points at issue in this discussion and not highlight the subtle distinctions. (He enters the dialogue with a commitment to Biblical inspiration and inerrancy.)

³ As has been commented, "It is unashamedly a theological history," in G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), viii.

THE MAJOR ISSUES INVOLVED WITH OPEN THEISM

Definitions. Stated succinctly, the real issue is, “How are we to understand God to be sovereign and humans to be free?”¹ Such questioning has spawned an important theological movement known as “open theism.” This posture answers by saying that the sovereignty of God does not extend to God’s having foreknown free human choices or actions.

As a typically Arminian position, open theism puts a premium on *libertarian* freedom. Its proponents thus sometimes call themselves “free-will theists.”² Gregory Boyd explains this point of view to be saying that “the future is, to some degree at least, open-ended and that God knows it as such.” This is therefore the “open view” of God.³

The movement is sometimes dubbed “relational theism.” The term emphasizes that, “God, though ontologically distinct from creation (contra process theology), enters into genuine give-and-take relations with his creatures.”⁴ Some authors seem to use this designation in a sort of “pastoral” sense, while others preserve its initial theological ramifications for God in his *relation* to the spacio-temporal order.

At the same time, “classical theists” hold to the notion of God as both *transcendent*⁵ to, and *immanent*⁶ in, his creation. God is omniscient (knowing all that is logically possible to know). And this omniscience extends even to genuine predictions of

¹ Duane Warden, “Openness of God,” in *Restoration Quarterly* (46: 2004): 65.

² *Ibid.*

³ Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 8.

⁴ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*. 2nd Edition (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 1998, 2007), 163-171.

⁵ Beyond the space-time continuum of the material cosmos.

⁶ Able to act within the space-time continuum, and even to interact with his earthly creatures.

future human actions. For Calvinists, such actions were foreordained.¹ For “Arminians,”² such actions occur freely (and autonomously) apart from extraneous causes. The latter posture therefore rejects theological determinism.

History of the Debate. The question of God’s providential foreknowledge and human free will was a source of one of the earliest confusions in the church. “God’s foreknowledge was taken to entail an exclusive causal determination of all events in human or natural history.”³ As we will see, lively discussion of the philosophical issues involved in the questions of providence and foreknowledge goes back much further than the early church, at least to the time of the pre-Socratics in ancient Greece.

¹ As a Calvinist, John Frame agrees with those open theists who argue that divine foreknowledge equals foreordination, in John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing Co., 2001), 39-40. Compare this to an inference drawn by another researcher in this field, “If God foreknows all, we are driven to the conclusion that every future event has somehow been determined,” in Duane Warden, “Openness of God,” 73. Dr. Warden adds in n. 38, “Calvinists tend to see this clearly,” *ibid.*

But, this researcher would like to respond respectfully that, first, Calvinists merely *allege* this point. It is part of their polemic against traditional Arminianism, and thus non-Calvinists should probably not buy into it so quickly. Secondly, more careful Calvinists (and strict Augustinians), not in the heat of debate, do make a distinction between foreknowledge and foreordination (or predestination). See Steven M. Studebaker, “The Mode of Divine Knowledge in Reformation Arminianism and Open Theism,” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (September 2004): 473, n. 13: “On the contrary, Calvinists do not conceive foreknowledge and predestination as synonymous concepts nor do they attribute causality to foreknowledge. In Calvinism, foreknowledge is the product of the divine decree and predestination and, therefore, foreknowledge is a distinct theological concept.” He explains later that, in the Calvinist order of God’s knowing, God 1) wills, then 2) knows, and 3) finally it happens in time, *ibid.*, 477. So, Calvinists are not always consistent on this point. Yes, foreordination implies foreknowledge, but foreknowledge does not imply foreordination. This paper will seek to demonstrate precisely this point in a subsequent discussion.

² As the term is currently used in popular parlance, though technically classical or “Reformation Arminianism” also holds to God’s predestinating individual human persons for salvation based on their faith foreseen. See Robert E. Picirilli, “Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future,” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (June 2000): 259.

³ C. E. Hubert, “A Philosophical View of Providence,” in *The Caring God: Perspectives on Providence*, ed. Carl S. Meyer, and Herbert T. Mayer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 68-69.

Gregory Boyd affirms that the open view in the church “it seems was espoused [first] by Calsidius, a fifth-century theologian.”¹ He adds that the view “appears to have been fairly widespread among nineteenth-century Methodists.”²

Calvinist critic John Frame, after a lengthy discussion of the historical antecedents of such ideas, writes: “The ideas of open theism are not new, therefore, nor have the open theists been particularly creative in rethinking the older perspectives.”³ Frame avers frankly that open theism is just more or less warmed over Socinianism.⁴ C. W. Hodge confirms such identification, at least in terms of the Socinians’ denial of divine foreknowledge.⁵

Among heirs of the Anglo-American Restoration Movement, the magisterial work of Dr. T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, was probably the epitome of the nineteenth-century approach to “openness” as a polemic against Calvinism.⁶ Duane Warden has noted that Brents’ work “has proven to be widely influential among Churches of Christ.”⁷

Another wide exposure to the alleged difficulty with classical theism’s view of foreknowledge among Churches of Christ may have come in 1977 in the celebrated Warren-Flew Debate in Denton, Texas. The atheist, A. G. N. Flew, objected that if God could know beforehand how a certain free creature would behave, there would be no

¹ Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 115.

² Ibid.

³ John Frame, *No Other God*, 38.

⁴ Ibid., 33-34.

⁵ In *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1974 ed., s.v. “Foreknow, Foreknowledge,” by Caspar Wistar Hodge.

⁶ See T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1874, 1973), 92-108.

⁷ Duane Warden, “Openness of God,” 71-72. This researcher must admit that Dr. Brents’ work was his first real exposure to the ideas of open theism and their denial of exhaustive divine foreknowledge. He had read this work carefully but critically back in his late adolescence and is now amused to find the many marginal notes from his youth that interact with Dr. Brents and that clutter nearly every page in the chapter!

need for having “a proving ground,” and there would be “gigantic wastage involved in these proceedings.”¹ Despite such examples, even openness champion Gregory Boyd has to concede that “the open view has been relatively rare in church history.”²

Some contemporary proponents. A number of thinkers have espoused openness views in recent years. Yet, certain representatives stand out for special mention. Among them are theologians Clark H. Pinnock, Richard Rice,³ John Sanders,⁴ Gregory A. Boyd,⁵ Boyd,⁵ and philosophers William A. Hasker⁶ and David Basinger.⁷ Many others, of course, have written on these issues, but these are some of the standard works to which this investigator has had access and with whom he will interact in this work.

Some contemporary opponents. Numerous are those who have taken in hand to critique open theism. Such works come in two standard varieties: 1) from the Calvinists who oppose the openness view of the future and divine foreknowledge (as well as its concept of libertarian freedom) and 2) from non-Calvinists, especially fellow Arminians, who share the open theists’ concern for protecting libertarian freedom but who reject their idea of *dynamic omniscience*⁸ (or limited foreknowledge). A few sources worthy of note are, first, the writings of the “Reformation Arminian” Robert E. Picirilli.⁹ In this

¹ Thomas B. Warren and Antony G. N. Flew, *The Warren-Flew Debate on the Existence of God* (Jonesboro, Ark.: National Christian Press, 1977), 144.

² Ibid.

³ See, for example, Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, et. al. *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

⁴ See again, for example, John Sanders. *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*. 2nd Edition. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 1998, 2007.

⁵ See again Gregory A. Boyd. *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000.

⁶ See again William Hasker. *God, Time and Knowledge*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989.

⁷ See his contribution, “Practical Implications,” in Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, et. al., *The Openness of God*, 155-176. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

⁸ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 15-16.

⁹ Robert E. Picirilli, “An Arminian Response to John Sanders’ *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*,” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (September 2001): 467-491, and also in

investigator's opinion, Picirilli's critiques of the openness proposal about divine foreknowledge are among the most cogent to be found.

Secondly, there are a number of Reformed theologians who take on the challenge of open theism at different levels. One of the problems (from the libertarian perspective) is the Calvinist's tendency to throw out the proverbial baby of free will with the bath water of open theism. But, a number of Calvinist critiques are appropriate and can be used even by Arminians, for example, their evaluation of the openness view of omniscience and predictive prophecy. Bruce Ware¹ may be included in the number of such latter thinkers, along with John Frame² and Norman L. Geisler.³

Brief synopsis of the basic points of open theism. The premise considered most worthy of protection is that of *libertarian* freedom. In this respect, open theism is basically an Arminian position, at least with respect to the nature of human volition. In fact, this researcher believes that this aspect of the openness proposal is its most commendable feature. Open theists are quick to demonstrate the *inconsistency*⁴ in the Reformed theologian's attempted harmonization of human freedom and divine sovereignty (*compatibilism*). Open theists attempt to present both doctrines in a way that is coherent, believing that the Calvinists cannot do so on their own terms.⁵

"Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (June 2000): 259-271.

¹ See, for example, Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000.

² See again John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing Co., 2001. As an opinion, this investigator holds that Frame can be a little more iconoclastic with his Calvinistic convictions than are some of his counterparts.

³ See again Norman L. Geisler and H. Wayne House. *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001.

⁴ As perceived by Arminians and other non-Augustinian thinkers.

⁵ William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The Openness of God*, ed. Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, et. al., 136-138.

As a corollary, open theists posit that God is “time bound.” He is in some sense limited by the sequence of moments in time, as are his material creatures. Pinnock says plainly, “The God of the Bible is not timeless.”¹ Yet, Pinnock’s subsequent explanation appears somewhat confused. He seems to want it both ways. He concurs, of course, that there has never been a time when God did not exist; there will never be a time when he does exist. But, God “can enter into time and relation to sequence and history.”² The inference therefore is that, in some sense, Pinnock must hold to the “eternality” of time (with all its philosophical problems and difficulties for modern physics). This concept is sometimes called “presentism.”³ God can know with certainty the present and the past, but not the future of contingent happenings.

Third, God cannot *know* the future of contingent events (authentically free choices of human agents, for example). One version of this concept says that God selectively wills to exclude from his omniscience the actions of free agents in order to preserve the liberty of their choices.⁴ Another, more popular, articulation of this general point asserts that God cannot *logically* know the future. There is yet no future to be known. That which has not yet occurred is inherently non-existent and unknowable. There is literally *nothing* to be known.⁵

Thus, rather than conceiving of God as an “aloof monarch,” relational theism wants to emphasize God’s role as a “caring parent.”⁶ Open theists have trouble

¹ Clark Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in *The Openness of God*, ed. Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, et. al., 121.

² Ibid. But, it should be asked, from what sphere God “enters into time” if not from that which is *not* time, or timelessness? It does not seem that Pinnock has thought through this issue very carefully.

³ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 139.

⁴ T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, 96-97.

⁵ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 16.

⁶ Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in Pinnock, Rice, et. al., 103. In passing, one wonders why Pinnock thinks these are the only two alternatives. One could suspect that this is an instance of the fallacy

conceiving of how God could possibly be such a “caring parent” if the doctrine of divine *aseity* were true, and if God has already determined (or fixed) the future by his having peered into it to know all things that will happen.

CROSS SECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN FOR THEMES RELEVANT TO THE OPEN THEIST DEBATE

An inductive study of the Fourth Gospel yields several passages and themes that seem to have important implications for the dialogue between open theists and their detractors. As intimated, this reviewer believes that these teachings probably incline the discussion to the side of classical theism and the traditional view of divine omniscience. But every effort will be made to be as objective and fair as possible in the handling of these materials and in assessing their pertinence to the current discussion.

To this researcher, there appear to be at minimum eight major themes and sub-themes in John which bear directly or indirectly on the questions raised by open theism. These are 1) predictive prophecy and its fulfillment, 2) Jesus’ and/or the Father’s superhuman knowledge and prescience, 3) God’s predetermined plan and providence, 4) human free will, 5) epistemology (especially the nature of truth, and the truth-value of predictive prophecy), 6) divine eternity or *atemporality*, 7) the incarnation as relevant to relational theism, and 8) the Scripture’s use of rhetorical questions or accommodative language.

These topics will be treated roughly in their order in the above listing, and the respective citations will for the most part be adduced diachronically as they appear in the text, but with some overlap in the use of a few of the passages in question and the points that they seem to uphold. For the sake of brevity, this paper will in several cases simply

of “black and white thinking.” Many students of God have conceived of him as both an infinite sovereign and as a “loving father” (and without hesitancy to come down on the Biblical side of the gender equation).

list the pertinent points along with the citations from John which seem to support them. Later, these findings will be assembled and paraphrased in propositions which appear to provide the answers for the impasse between open theism and classical theism.

Predictive prophecy and its fulfillment. John cites several prophecies of the Old Testament. Of some, he affirms (or implies) their fulfillment¹ in the life and ministry of Jesus (cf. John 1:23;² John 1:45; 2:17; 5:39, 46; 8:56; 12:12-16, 37-41; 19:23-25, 28, 31-36, 37; 20:9).

Other OT prophecies were fulfilled in certain persons and events surrounding the ministry of Jesus. In John 12:37-41, the unbelief of many, despite the signs, happened to fulfill the Scripture (cf. Isa. 53:1). Verse 39 in particular emphasizes this aspect of their unbelief (cf. Isa. 6:9, 10; John 15:22-25).³ In John 13:18-19 and in 17:12, the son of perdition perished “so that the Scripture would be fulfilled” (cf. Psalms 109:8; Acts 1:20; Matt. 1:22-23; 2:5-6, 17).⁴

¹ By this term, some intentionality and inherent foresight is implied. Given a conservative evangelical view of Scripture, the Holy Spirit had intended in some fashion for the events identified to be “fulfillments” of the words given, from the very time the prophecies were uttered, even if there were possibly other, more immediate, “fulfillments” in different contexts.

² *Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible*, © Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

³ It is only candid to ask, does this suggest that the reason these could not believe is that prophecy had already been made concerning their unbelief and that therefore the “decree” was somehow irrevocable? Was this preordination through prophecy? This particular point will be taken up a little later in detail under the discussion of logical determinism. Suffice it to say here that such an interpretation, though possible, is not demanded by these statements in context. It is possible to understand them as meaning, not that the events occurred to make the prediction true, but rather, that the prediction itself was true because the events occurred, of the participants’ own free will, and had been foreseen by God at the time that the prediction was made.

⁴ In addition to OT predictions, some acts of prognostication were performed even in the course of the events narrated in the text. In John 11:49-52, Caiaphas unwittingly uttered a “prophecy” about Jesus’ dying on behalf of the nation, but this prediction originated “not of his own initiative.” Was it somehow “inspired?” Or did providential circumstances simply conspire to impel him to say it?

Open theists have no problems with predictions *per se*, but view them either as statements of divine intent, conditional prophecies, or extrapolations based on the present known data about a person’s life and character of what most likely will happen under future circumstances. (More on this below.)

Thus, prophecy in general, with an accent on the elements of prediction and fulfillment, appears as a major assumption in John's overall theology. It was natural for him to see the divine intent in the very wording of certain OT utterances as they were originally given and their actual correspondence with events in the life and circumstances of Jesus of Nazareth.¹

Jesus' and/or the Father's superhuman knowledge and prescience. Bruce Ware has discovered an amazing nexus between how Jesus' wisdom is portrayed in John and the wisdom of God in Isaiah. "In several places in John we find Jesus appealing to his knowledge of the future as the reason why people should believe, as Jesus puts it, that 'I am He.'"2

First, there are affirmations of Jesus' superhuman knowledge in general (John 1:48-49; 2:24-25; 4:16-19, 24; 12:37-41;³ 16:30;⁴ 21:17; cf. 1 John 3:20). Such statements support a *prima facie* case on behalf of omniscience both in God incarnate and in God in his continuing transcendence.

Second, there are specific affirmations about Jesus' prescience (John 6:64; 13:11; 18:4, *passim*). Jesus had superhuman knowledge. He had superhuman knowledge of future events, including the free decisions of human beings. Thus, the only question remaining is, did he have exhaustive knowledge of the future?⁵

¹ As will be demonstrated, some of these predictions had to do with the free choices of particular individuals. It may be difficult to explain the uncanny accuracy of these prophecies upon the assumption of mere divine inference or extrapolation from events contemporaneous with the original utterances.

² Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 127.

³ Concerning this example, Ware urges the reader: "remember John 12:37-41, where John identifies Jesus with the God of Isaiah's vision," in Ware, 127.

⁴ But, this statement is probably to be taken as hyperbole, since Mark 13:32 places at least one limitation on Jesus' knowledge, at least during his earthly ministry.

⁵ Apparently, there were some self-imposed constraints on Christ's divine abilities while in the flesh. Nevertheless, God the Father is portrayed as knowing all things that are subject to knowledge. His

Third, John relates concrete examples of Jesus' predictions. In John 2:19-21, Jesus predicted his death, implied something about the manner of his death (namely, at their hands, in *lusate*, "destroy"), and alluded to the three days in the interval between his death and resurrection¹ (cf. 3:14; 7:34-36; 8:28;² 12:7, 33; 18:31-32).

More to the point, Jesus predicted that Judas Iscariot would betray him (John 6:64, 70-71; 13:18-19; cf. Matt. 26:21-25). Whether Jesus foreknew this from the beginning of his ministry, or from the beginning of all time, is not totally relevant. The very fact that a free choice could actually be foreseen *prior* to its being made is significant.³

knowledge of some future contingencies (human choices and actions) shows that such choices are subject to knowledge. Whether they thus remained authentically "free" choices remains to be seen.

¹ The disciples later remembered this utterance as a prediction of the events of the crucifixion and resurrection. The fact that Jesus yielded to this "destruction" of his body suggests his own volition in the crucifixion process. It was foreknown, but it still occurred by free will (cf. John 10:17-18).

² This was also a prediction of *their* future choices and actions ("when you lift up the Son of man, then you will know").

³ Duane Warden notes: "Judas is another case at hand. Judas seems to be appointed to his deed...If God respects human freedom, is it not reasonable to expect him to respect the freedom of every person in every circumstance?" in Warden, 76. Jesus knew Judas "was going to betray him." This is an important observation. If foreknowledge is logically equivalent to foreordination, then given an Arminian perspective, God could *not* have known it. But God *did* know it. Therefore, foreknowledge is not identical to foreordination. (Why it is not will be explained in detail in a subsection of this paper.)

On the other hand, Boyd argues, "While Scripture portrays the crucifixion as a predestined event, it never suggests that the individuals who participated in this event were predestined to do so or foreknown as doing so. It was certain that Jesus would be crucified, but it was not certain from eternity that Pilot, Herod, or Caiaphas would play the roles they played in the crucifixion. They participated in Christ's death of their own free wills," in Boyd, 45. With the latter point, we agree. But, their free participation was foreknown (cf. Acts 4:25-28).

The point here being made is that it does not make one whit of difference, from a logical standpoint, whether the prescience and concomitant prediction of an authentic human choice was made one day or one million years before its occurrence. Even Aristotle, who opted for a view about the truth-value of predicted contingencies that was virtually identical to that of open theism today, admits our point. He writes that, in principle, it would make no difference even "...if the prediction dates back ten thousand years or any other space of time," in Aristotle, "On Interpretation, 9, 18b, [35]," in *The Works of Aristotle*, Vol. I. Great Books of the Western World Series, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1952), 29.

In John 6:64, the future active participle, *paradoson*, is translated, "that would betray him." Daniel Wallace explains that "the *future* participle denotes *subsequent* time," in Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 614. But in n. 3, Wallace warns (citing John 6:64) that this grammatical construction does not always represent future time, since from John's standpoint these events (including the predictions about them) all happened in the past, though the event

Moreover, Jesus predicted persecution (by free agents acting against his disciples) *before* it happened so they would remember it *when* it happened (16:1-4). They would be scattered (as a result of free will and fear, 16:32).

More importantly, Jesus predicted Peter's denial of him three times before the crowing of the cock (13:38; cf. 18:15-18, 25-27). Boyd replies, "contrary to the assumption of many, we do not need to believe that the future is exhaustively settled to explain this prediction."¹ And David Hunt, who is sympathetic to our argument here, still warns about the fallacy of "hasty generalization" in jumping to the conclusion, from one or a few such examples, that God knows everything in advance.²

succeeded the prediction. But, the important point seems to be that from Jesus' standpoint, at the time *when* he knew it, Judas' betrayal would take place subsequently.

Boyd objects that the phrase "from the first" (*ek archon*) "does not imply that Jesus knew who would betray him from a time before the person decided in his heart to betray him," in Boyd, 37. But Boyd seems to overlook *edei* ("already") and to misconstrue the significance of *ek archon* here. (See every instance of *archei* in John, cf. 1:1, 2; 2:11; *6:64; 8:25, 44; 15:27; 16:4). The expression is used eight times in John in differing contexts. First, it can mean "from the beginning of creation" (cf. 1:1, 2; 8:44). Second, it may mean "from the beginning of Jesus' ministry" (cf. 2:11; 8:25; 15:27; 16:4). Either sense would seem to fit *John 6:64. The foreknowledge of Judas' act of betrayal clearly took place before the event occurred. Pyne and Spencer, though Calvinists, have a cogent response to Boyd's objection: "Boyd rightly observes that the text does not say when Jesus first knew it would be Judas, but that does not ultimately help his argument. The issue, it seems, is not how long Jesus knew His betrayer would be Judas, but whether Jesus knew with certainty that His betrayer would be Judas before Judas actually betrayed Him," in Robert A. Pyne and Stephen R. Spencer, "A Critique of Free-Will Theism: Part One," in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July/September 2001): 280. Unfortunately, they seem to vitiate their argument here in the follow-up question: "If Jesus knew Judas's future free actions with certainty, then how could those actions remain truly free (as Boyd would define freedom, in a libertarian sense)?" *ibid.* Yet, as will be explored later, *certain* foreknowledge does not negate libertarian freedom—Arminians should not too readily concede this point to the Calvinists! The most important response to Boyd seems to be that, even if Jesus only perceived Judas' intent in the (present) time when it was first conceived in his heart, given our shared premise of libertarian freedom, there could have been no certainty that Judas would indeed eventually go through with it. Judas could have changed his mind before he did it. But, his deed is not portrayed in the prediction in such a contingent manner. Jesus *knew* that Judas would actually do it.

Boyd also overlooks the evidential value John places upon this prediction. Jesus was telling them before it happened so that they would believe when it did happen (cf. 13:2-27, esp. 18-19). If Jesus simply perceived an intent in Judas (in that present moment), there would have been little evidential value in such perception (cf. 14:29).

¹ Boyd, 35.

² David Hunt, "The Simple-Foreknowledge View," in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby & Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 70.

But both Boyd and Hunt seem to miss the force of our argument. All it takes is *one* clear example of God’s having foreknown an authentically free human choice to refute the premise that prescience is equivalent to determinism.¹ If that can be demonstrated, then the entire open theist project becomes superfluous. We seem to have such a clear example here.²

God’s predetermined plan and providence. In John 1:29, John the Baptist uses the significant description of Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Robert Picirilli, in reacting to John Sander’s handling of Revelation 13:8, explains that the identification of Jesus as “the lamb” is pregnant with meaning. It implies that Jesus was “the sacrificial Lamb (cf. Rev. 5:6, 12 for examples, along with John 1:29).”³

¹ Or, the assumption that foreknowledge equals foreordination, i.e., the philosophical concept of “logical determinism.”

² Ware has a splendid reply to Boyd’s handling of Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s denial, in Ware, 138. It is simply incredible the number of free choices that had to be made for it to happen in just the way Jesus said it would. It is also important to remember that Jesus knew that Peter would exercise his libertarian freedom and repent after his denial (cf. Luke 22:31-32).

To this prediction may be added another of the manner of death by which Peter would die (21:18). Mike Stallard quotes Boyd’s website and an article wherein the latter conceded that Jesus predicted Peter’s death. He then queries, “...when he affirms that Peter’s death is an insured result by God’s prediction, does he take into account the free-will actions of the Romans who, according to tradition, later killed Peter?” in Mike Stallard, “The Open View of God and Prophecy,” as posted at http://faculty.bbc.edu/mstallard/Biblical_Studies/Theology%20Proper/OpenProphecy.doc as posted on 07-12-07.

In addition to Jesus’ prescience, John 9:1 *passim*, affords an example of the Father’s foreknowledge of future contingencies. In the case of the man born blind, it did not happen due to sin (v. 34). But, God knew beforehand that at that particular juncture in history, at that precise moment, a meeting would occur between Jesus and the man born blind. It appeared a mere chance or contingent encounter, but had actually been planned in advance. The man’s whole life of blindness had this one purpose, this one (seemingly chance) rendezvous. But, the contingencies of the man electing of his own volition to be at that very place and time, along with the choices made by others, perhaps, would have assisted him in getting there, must all be factored into our understanding of this uncanny encounter at just the right moment for Jesus to manifest his power by healing him of his blindness. How could it have been planned if not foreseen?

³ Robert E. Picirilli, “An Arminian Response,” 482. Yet, Sanders, as an open theist, “clearly recognizes that his view of foreknowledge will not allow for the crucifixion of Jesus to have been in any sense taken into account in the plan of God before the world was created,” *ibid.*, 481. (See Sanders, “*The God Who Risks*,” 103-105.) However, if the full implications of Biblical typology are taken into consideration, all the millennia in which myriad of animal sacrifices were made, under both the Patriarchal (Noahide) and Mosaic economies, are eloquent testimony to God’s prescience of the cross. Picirilli has an

Throughout John's narrative, Jesus is represented as being constantly cognizant of "his hour" (2:4; 7:6-8, 30; cf. 16:21; 12:23, 27). But, finally, his hour did come (17:1; 18:11). This cognizance on Christ's part seems to imply a predetermined plan and time table for his suffering and death. And yet, such events necessitated the willing participation of a number of free-will agents in the process.

Human free will. The first category of texts in John which speak to this point paradoxically teach that humans are unable to respond in faith without God's help (5:19; 6:44-45, 65; 15:4, 16). Calvinists sometimes camp out on such texts and see them as supporting their idea of theological determinism.¹ Yet, such passages can also be explained on Arminian or even semi-Pelagian terms.

The second category of texts appear to imply that Jesus and others clearly exercised (libertarian) free will (8:44; 10:11, 15; 10:17-18). In John 11:53, the Jewish authorities planned (willed) to kill Jesus.²

Other texts are important. Judas "was intending to betray Him" (12:4).³ Those who love Christ keep his word (14:23-24), suggesting their free will in the matter (cf. 15:4, 10).

excellent discussion of Sander's unusual interpretation here. After looking also at 1 Peter 1:18-20, Picirilli concludes: "The Christ 'foreknown' here is very clearly the Christ whose blood—like that of the sacrificial lamb—redeems us," in Picirilli, 488.

¹ Warden, 76.

² One might argue that John 11:53 suggests some sort of *synergism*, since the Jewish authorities planned to kill Jesus from that day. Yet their decision was really according to (foreseen and interwoven in) God's master plan. The Augustinian understanding of such collaboration between libertarian choices and divine determinations is not demanded. God's having foreseen (simple foreknowledge) such choices to be freely made could have figured into his cosmic calculus from the very foundation of the world.

³ However, this interpretation partly turns on the exact translation of *mello* ("intending," NASV). The term has a wide range of meanings, from "to have to" if "compelled by the gods, fate or some law," to the nuance of "to be about to," "to be on the point of," to "intend, propose, have in mind," etc., in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 1971 ed., s.v. "μελλω," by W. Schneider. If Occam's razor is applied here, it seems that either "intending to" or "about to" would suffice for this verse. But then, that is said from a libertarian perspective.

More importantly, Jesus willingly went to the cross (10:17-18; 15:13). Unless the language is vacuous here, Jesus must have meant he had the real liberty of action to lay down his life without constraint. Yet, this free choice was foreknown from the beginning.

Epistemology/Truth. The concept of truth is invoked fairly frequently in John (3:33; 7:28; 8:14, 16, 26, 32, 40, 45-47). The irony of Pilate's question, "what is truth?" (18:37-38), is underlined by the broader context of the evidential signs which may lead one to believe (4:42) and know the truth (8:32). Truth is especially seen as the correspondence of a proposition to reality,¹ though by way of extension a Person might also be thought of as "truth" (who always tells the truth, 14:6).

God's word is truth, since it always corresponds to the way things really are (17:17).² God can *know* the future, taking "knowledge" as a "justified true belief."¹

¹ For a thorough discussion of this posture, see Norman L. Geisler, "The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate," in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (October/December 1980): 327-339. Note especially how Geisler deduces that "the first corollary of a correspondence view of truth is that a statement is true even if the speaker (or writer) intended not to say it, provided that the statement itself correctly describes a state of affairs," *ibid.*, 328-329.

² In John 11:49-52, Caiaphas uttered a *true* prediction without intending to do so (negating the *intentionality* theory of truth and confirming the correspondence view, as in Geisler, *ibid.*, 328-329). This "prediction" was "not of his own initiative." Apparently, either he was unwittingly inspired at the moment, à la Balaam's donkey, or certain providential events had conspired to cause him to say it. If the latter, how was it extrapolate-able from earlier data in Caiaphas' character that he would utter these very words in this circumstance? Or, was this remark mere rhetorical suggestion and not a true prophecy?

It may be instructive here to study Wellum's dialogue with open theists on the question of inerrancy and the *concurrent* theory of inspiration (in Stephen J. Wellum, "Divine Sovereignty-Omniscience, Inerrancy, and Open Theism: An Evaluation," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (June 2002): 267). Open theists sometimes allege that it would violate free will for God to override the Biblical writers' authorial decisions. So, for libertarians, inerrancy is hard to maintain. "But even though it is logically possible to affirm libertarianism and inerrancy, it must be acknowledged that it is highly improbable," *ibid.*, 268.

However, Caiaphas' utterance was exactly what God wanted him to say, while being exactly the kind of thing he could freely elect to say anyway. But how? Was Caiaphas miraculously inspired? Not necessarily (though we cannot rule it out completely in view of Balaam and Balaam's donkey). If God could *sometimes* use dictation without violating free will in principle, he could also use the concurrent method of inspiration. Speaking out of the Reformed tradition, Wellum wants to know how the openness proposal (with its libertarianism) can give a "rational accounting for the *guarantee* that seems to underpin the doctrine of inerrancy?" *ibid.*, 270. But this is not an inherent problem for libertarianism, as Wellum insinuates, because God is able to guide the writer in a way that does not diminish the writer's ability to choose obedience or disobedience. God could theoretically speak to the writer, for example, and say something like, "this is wrong, correct that," etc. Sadly, some compatibilists seem to be opportunists in this

Thus, God does not merely guess with a high degree of probability about what may happen, given the present known data from which to extrapolate. Thus, a predictive prophecy can be “true” only if it accurately corresponds with the facts that were to have occurred.

Divine Atemporality. John 1:1-2 speaks of Christ’s role as the Logos in the beginning. To speak of God’s existence in the beginning is to suggest that He himself had no beginning in time. In John 8:58, Jesus said, “before Abraham was born, I am.” The implications of this verse are truly staggering. (The issue of divine timelessness will be addressed again in a subsequent discussion.)

Rhetorical questions/accommodative language. Space will not permit notice of the many Biblical arguments adduced in support of open theism. But, in summary, many of their objections to classical theism come from OT passages which seem to speak of God’s not knowing certain things, or of his learning new things. When it is replied that such language may be simple anthropomorphisms and that the Bible does at times use language about God that is accommodative to human understanding, the response from the other side can sometimes be excoriating.² But, there are examples in John of when Jesus himself knew certain things already. Nonetheless, he asked rhetorical questions for the disciples’ benefit (6:5-6; 18:4; 20:15). So, the concept as applied to the OT Scripture is not totally out of the question, based on such examples in John.

The incarnation. The incarnation may serve as a paradigm for the transcendence/immanence polarity found throughout Scripture. The divine Logos

internecine struggle within the Arminian camp. They seem to use this important discussion as a soapbox for promulgating Calvinism. This researcher feels that we can appreciate many of their critiques of the openness proposal, but that we really do not need their help on this point.

¹ Wellum, 257-271, n. 55.

² See especially Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, 98.

became flesh (1:14). Though he was the author of time itself, Jesus, while in the body, willingly submitted to the limitations of time (11:6-16). Scripture seems to recognize the classical theist's distinction between God as he is in his transcendence (timeless) and God as he relates to his earthly creatures in his immanence.

The above themes may not exhaust all there is to know in John with relevance to the current controversy. But, at least these themes seem to have a more or less direct bearing on many of the issues being discussed.¹

THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL EVALUATION OF OPEN THEISM

A careful assemblage of the foregoing themes finds them condensing into at least three major sticking points for theology: 1) libertarian freedom, 2) divine omniscience (with prescience), and 3) predictive prophecy. The issues also seem to reduce to at least two principal philosophical concerns: 1) the assumption of "logical determinism," and 2) the issue of divine atemporality.

Theological issues. This paper will first explore the key theological questions before turning more fully to the crux of this whole discussion, "logical determinism." Thus, the whole debate may be seen to be at root *philosophical* (epistemological) more than anything else.

Libertarian freedom. For this writer, there is not much at issue here, since he basically accepts the open theists' premise of libertarian freedom. We share also a mutual suspicion of the doctrine of compatibilism. It is cogent to demonstrate that the affirmation of the propositions a) "the human person is ultimately free to choose right and

¹ Other passages which seem to support the viewpoints of classical theism are: Isa. 44:7-8, 25-28; Jer. 1:5 (cf. Isa. 49:1); Psa. 139:16; Matt. 10:23-31; 26:45; Mark 8:31; Lk. 12:40-46; 22:22; Acts 2:23; 4:28; 26:22-23; 1 Thess. 2:13; Rom. 8:39; 11:2; Gal. 1:15; Eph. 1:4-5; Heb. 11:40; 1 Pet. 1:2, 20; and 2 Pet. 3:17.

wrong” and b) “the human person is *not* ultimately free to choose right and wrong” entails a logical contradiction. The Calvinist’s view of free will and foreordination may in fact be translated into such propositions, though it is far from our purpose to argue the point here.

Divine omniscience. Simply stated, God knows all that is *possible* to know (Psa. 147:5). Obviously, God does not “know” trite, human gibberish, as “round squares” or “married bachelors.” Yet, “...God knows everything that is knowable and is able to effect anything that is congruous with his nature.”¹ We argue that the future contingencies of free choices is in fact knowable, as sufficiently illustrated in the Johannine examples cited above.

Open theists deny that it is possible for God to know future contingencies. Pyne and Spencer point out that they use two basic arguments: “Scriptures in which God appears not to know the future, and Scriptures in which God repents or changes His plans.”² One classical example of such texts as used by open theists is Genesis 22:12 (“now I know”).³ Yet this is apparently another instance of accommodative language.

Gordon Clark elaborates about omniscience: “This knowledge includes the minutest details....”⁴ More importantly, “Volitional and purposeful action (Eph. 1:11),

¹ H. P. Owen, *The Christian Knowledge of God* (London: The Athlone Press, 1969), 3.

² Pyne & Spencer, 271.

³ Sanders says, for example, “God’s statement, ‘now I know,’ raises serious theological problems regarding divine immutability and foreknowledge....If one presupposes that God already ‘knew’ the results of the test beforehand, then there was, in fact, no test and God put Abraham through unnecessary suffering,” in Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 51. T. W. Brents made virtually the same argument years before Sanders, in Brents, 100. Pyne & Spencer note: “Sanders seems to be saying that God learned what was in Abraham’s heart. But did he not know that already? Does not God know the hearts of people (1 Sam. 16:7; Jer. 17:10; Acts 1:24; 15:8; Rom. 8:27)?” in Pyne & Spencer, 274. See Ware also for an excellent refutation of this objection from the offering up of Isaac, in Ware, 67 *passim*. Moreover, Abraham had to pass the test for God to have foreseen his passing the test. If God did not put him through the test, he would not have foreseen his passing the test.

⁴ In *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, 1985 ed., s.v. “God,” by Gordon H. Clark.

since it initiates a series of concatenated events, requires a knowledge of the future.”¹ It is vital to establish firmly this sense of “omniscience” for due consideration of the next issue.²

Predictive prophecy. By far, the biggest problem many traditional theists may have with open theism is its implication of a diminished view of predictive prophecy. Open theists claim that God can make predictions in three ways: 1) he may predict what he intends to do, 2) he may make conditional statements about what could happen, given a certain set of choices, and 3) he can make infinitely wise extrapolations or inferences (deductions, guesses) of what can happen in a long series of cause-and-effect events from the time of his predictions.³

But, while God could be certain of his present divine intentions, how does open theism fit in the human free-will factor with its relational view of God and time? If God responds to human choices, it would seem that he would have to know what those choices will be in order to make concrete plans for his own course of action.⁴

Moreover, undeniably many prophecies were conditional in nature. However, this category does not do justice to all prognostications in Scripture. The truth-value of a predictive prophecy lies in its actually coming to pass, precisely *as* it was predicted and for the *time* at which it was predicted (Deut. 18:21-22). The openness proposal leaves “open” the very real possibility that God’s guesses could be thwarted by certain

¹ Ibid.

² As Anderson says, “Divine foreknowledge, then, is the presupposition of the prophetic message about things to come, both in the OT and in the NT,” in *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962 ed., s.v. “Foreknow, Foreknowledge,” by B. W. Anderson.

³ For elaboration of the open theists’ view of prophecy, see Boyd, 35; Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 130-133; and Rice, in Pinnock, Rice, et. al, 50-53.

⁴ Pyne & Spencer mention one simple example of this problem: “God told Abraham that the Egyptian bondage would surely take place, yet it was accomplished through a complicated web of human choices, most of which were sinful,” in Pyne & Spencer, 264.

libertarian choices of human agents.¹ Therefore, for God to have knowledge (“justified true belief”) of future contingencies, either 1) he deduces them infallibly (in which case, they are not actually contingencies after all, or 2) he actually *sees* them occurring in the future in some sense. Traditional theism opts for the latter.

Thus, while humans are endowed with libertarian freedom, our future choices and actions may clearly be the objects of God’s knowledge. Since God is omniscient, he is capable of exhaustive knowledge of all such choices. This attribute explains God’s ability infallibly to predict the future, including free choices and actions of human persons.²

Philosophical issues. The key issue is really epistemological, the fallacy of “logical determinism.” Studebaker states that epistemology is the crux that divides “Reformation Arminianism” and open theism.³ Related to the epistemological question is the problem of divine timelessness. If the first issue is resolved, the second would not seem to be as problematic for open theists as it now is.

Classical logical determinism. The underlying assumption of the entire discussion is that if God by simple foreknowledge perceives that a certain event will come to pass, that event inevitably *must* come to pass. Boyd compares such prescience to a “snapshot” of the reality that will obtain for a given person at a given time that could

¹ It would seem to this investigator that the only way God could infallibly infer how certain individuals would make choices far off into the future would be on the basis of some form of behaviorist determinism. God could be the “consummate social scientist” (as Sanders says, in *The God Who Risks*, 133), but only at the expense of the very libertarian freedom open theists set out to preserve.

² One wonders why the zeal on the part of many open theists to eschew God’s exhaustive knowledge of the future. Unless they are willing to allow that God coerces *some* future choices by his knowing them in advance, the very fact that God can foreknow *any* free choices of itself obviates the need to deny exhaustive foreknowledge of human choices to begin with.

³ M. Studebaker, “The Mode of Divine Knowledge in Reformation Arminianism and Open Theism,” 478.

never be changed.¹ Pinnock thinks that with exhaustive foreknowledge, “the future would be fixed and determined...it would also imply that human freedom is an illusion....”² Philosopher William Hasker, perhaps the most formidable proponent of open theism, explains that, “if God knows already what will happen in the future, then God’s knowing this is part of the past and is now fixed, impossible to change.”³

If a future event is predicted, is it thereby determined to occur? This problem in logic seems to go back as far as Aristotle. He argues that neither the affirmation nor the denial of a proposition predicating a future event could be true or false. It is neither.⁴ He reasons that if truth or falsity is attached to a proposition about the future, then the event must happen by “necessity” and there could be nothing “fortuitous” in its occurrence.⁵

Aristotle’s famous example of this point is that of a sea battle and the question of whether

¹ Boyd, 121. He had already asked, “For example, if every choice you’ve ever made was certain an eternity before you made it, were you really free when you made each choice?” *ibid.*, 10.

² Pinnock, in Pinnock, Rice, et. al., 121.

³ William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge*, 147. He continues on the next page, “It follows from this that if there *are* actions that are free in the libertarian sense, it is logically impossible for God to know in advance how such actions will turn out.” Hasker’s variation on this theme is that if God knows the future by simple foreknowledge, he could not enter into time to change anything in the future. “So it is nonsensical to suggest that God, knowing the actual future, could on the basis of this knowledge influence things so that this would *not* be the actual future...” *ibid.*, 149. This would lead us “into the philosophical morass of circular explanation and circular causation,” *ibid.*, 150.

But this investigator thinks that Hasker misses the point. God has *omniscient* simple foreknowledge. Thus if God acts now (in my present time) he knows what the effects of that action (A^1) will have on the future too (on $Z^1, Z^2, Z^3 \dots$). And God knew from all eternity what that act (A^1) will have on the future. He knew (transcendently) what his own (immanent) part in the drama of unfolding human freedom would be at any given time, just as he knows ours. And if it is not, after all, *that* action (A^1) that God performs now, but a counterfactual action (A^2), why then, that was in fact the very action that God had always foreknown and not any other. Hasker’s error is to assume an infinite number of counterfactuals, when in fact there would only be a very large yet *finite* number of possible acts and reactions in the set of spacio-temporal events. The set of temporal events ($Z^1, Z^2, Z^3 \dots$) is a finite set, and the set of divine acts is ($A^1, A^2, A^3 \dots$) is also a finite set, in terms of God’s immanent dealings with world history in its entirety. (Incidentally, despite the use of the term “counterfactuals,” this note carries no brief for Molinism or Middle Knowledge.)

⁴ Aristotle, “On Interpretation, 9.5,” in *The Works of Aristotle*, 28.

⁵ *Ibid.* We will attempt to show, respectfully, that this problem is only a semantic paradox or a *logical* necessity, a mere feature of language, and not a problem in ontology. It is sheer tautology to say, for example, that “if it is true that X will occur, then X *must* occur,” in which the predicate really adds no meaningful content to the subject. “Must” in this construction is an analytical or logical “must,” not an ontological necessity.

or not it is true *now* that it will take place tomorrow. He held that it is neither true nor false today that the battle will take place tomorrow.¹

But, the Stoics were ready to defend the dictum, *tertium non datur*, there is no middle truth-value to a given proposition.² Thus, it is either true or false that a given event will occur in the future.³ It could be asked, was it true yesterday to say that the sea battle which takes place today was going to take place?⁴

In this investigator's estimation, the writer who has most seriously come to grips with the importance of this issue for the current debate is the "Reformation Arminian," Robert Picirilli. He points out, for example, "The root of the error is found, specifically, in its denial of divine foreknowledge, based on a logical objection that turns foreknowledge on its head."⁵ He observes further, "If, then, our formulation of such issues seems to tie us in logical knots, it is our formulation that does it, not the real world itself."⁶

Furthermore, Picirilli explains that "everything that God knows about the future, he knows only because it will happen, not vice-versa."⁷ Picirilli warns us not to commit

¹ Ibid.

² In *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1967, ed. s.v. "Determinism," by Richard Taylor. The Stoics' motivation is a little suspect at this point, since their purpose was to argue the logical necessity of every human action and the fettered nature of the human will. But, we do feel not any compulsion to concede the success of this argument anymore than we can allow the success of the Calvinist's contention that foreknowledge is equivalent to foreordination.

³ Charles Hartshorne argued that the truth-value of a proposition about the future is always false. Aristotle believed that such a proposition is neither true nor false. *Op. Cit.* It would seem that a Biblical theist is obligated to defend the idea that propositions about the future can indeed be true or false (cf. Deut. 18:21-22).

⁴ This ancient conundrum about time and the truth or falsity of future propositions is somewhat reminiscent of Zeno's riddles and his paradox against the possibility of motion. See, for example, Reginald F. Allen, ed. *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 48. This investigator holds that, in the end, the problem of logical determinism may fall into a similar category of language games and mind benders as the ancients were fond of playing.

⁵ Robert E. Picirilli, "An Arminian Response to John Sanders," 491.

⁶ Ibid., 473.

⁷ Ibid.

the fallacy of equivocation at this point. We should use carefully and consistently the terms “*certainty, contingency* and *necessity*,” for instance.¹ The fact that an event occurs, meant that it certainly occurred. This is a sheer tautology. It does not imply necessity.

To say that “everything that will happen will *certainly* happen” is simply to speak analytically.² *Contingency* is the quality of an event that could as easily have happened as not (somewhat of a simplification, of course). It is not “*inevitable* or *unavoidable*.”³ Such *contingency* is an apt description of the libertarian concept of freedom. *Necessity* should be understood to mean that events “can transpire in just one way because they are caused by some other force and therefore must inevitably be the way they are.”⁴

If God is in fact timeless, then God can foreknow the “factness” or the “certainty” of the events as they occur in the future. God can indeed know it, even a contingent event. “But that knowledge *per se*, even though it is *foreknowledge*, has no more causal effect on the facts than our knowledge of certain past facts has on them.”⁵

Therefore, God can and does know future contingencies, even the choices made by specific individuals.⁶ This knowledge is the source of his accurate prophetic

¹ Picirilli, “Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future,” 261.

² Ibid. As an elementary textbook in philosophy reminds us: “An analytic statement is one in which what is affirmed in the predicate is already contained in the concept of the subject,” in William H. Halverson, *A Concise Introduction to Philosophy*. Third Edition (New York: Random House, 1967, 1976), 44.

³ Ibid., 262.

⁴ Ibid. Open theists and others who get “hung up” over this conundrum seem to conceive of the mere prediction itself as the “force” that causes the event to happen, i.e., logical determinism.

⁵ Ibid., 263.

⁶ So this researcher might conclude, to say that it was true from all eternity that Peter had the free will either to deny Christ before the cock crew thrice or not to deny him is true. Further, it was true from all eternity that Peter would freely deny Christ twice before the cock crew thrice (and it was always true that he could have decided not to have denied Christ at that moment). To say, that “it was true that it was going to happen” is simply to say, “it was going to happen” (or that such happening was a subsequent, if ontologically *unrelated*, event to the proposition about its taking place). And it was going to happen, only because when the time came in the temporal order of events, it *did* happen—that is what Peter in fact *did* choose to do. The fact that it did happen is the *sine qua non* for saying “it was true that it was going to happen,” not the fact that a prediction itself was made about it.

predictions about such choices. This knowledge is accessible to God as he operates in the sphere of his transcendence and timelessness. Logical determinism is a straw man. It does not obviate the possibility of God's predicting future free choices.¹

Divine atemporality. Duane Warden points out that "...open theists maintain that God does not stand over time. He lives within time because there is no other way to live."² He then cites Hasker who alleges that the concept of the atemporality of God is "incoherent and unintelligible."³

But, this researcher strongly demurs. God's timelessness is not such an incoherent or obscurantist concept as Hasker says. It has been entertained seriously for millennia.

William Lane Craig deftly demonstrates the absurdity of process theology and its idea that God and time develop together.⁴ In this respect, open theism bears a resemblance to process theology. Sanders tries to distance his posture from the latter by saying, "...God, though ontologically distinct from creation (contra process theology),

But, the objector holds that if God knew Peter would choose to do what he did do at the precise moment when he did it, then Peter really had no choice in the matter. He *had* to choose to deny Christ. However, this "*had* to" is only a logical or analytical necessity, not synthetic or ontological. For, if God knew from all eternity that Peter would deny Christ, and then at the last moment, Peter decided that he would not deny Christ, then God did *not* know from all eternity that Peter would deny Christ, but that Peter would not deny Christ—that was the actual thing known. Whatever *did* happen or *does* happen or *will* happen is the very thing known by an omniscient God from all eternity. This assumes that events in the future have an actual ontological status and can be foreseen by an Intelligent Being not limited by time.

¹ Re: Abraham's passing the test, Picirilli observes: "We know both that he *could* have disobeyed God and that he *did* obey God and pass the test. The second we know only 'after the fact,' only because he did actually obey God when the time came. I would maintain that God's (fore)knowledge of the events bears exactly the same relationship to them, ontologically, as our (after)knowledge," in Picirilli, "An Arminian Response to John Sanders," 475. In other words, the fact that I know something happened in the past, and the fact that what I know about that event is *true*, no more means that the event inevitably had to have happened than God's knowledge of future events makes them inevitable.

As a simple example, suppose proposition T^d is true, "it is raining today." Suppose that yesterday someone had uttered the proposition T^m , "it will be raining tomorrow." Why would proposition T^m not have been true yesterday if T^d is true today?

² Warden, 66.

³ *Ibid.*, citing Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 144.

⁴ In William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1979, 2000), 170, n. 159.

enters into genuine give-and-take relations with his creatures....”¹ But, if Sanders recognizes that God is ontologically distinct from the spacio-temporal order, on what grounds can he object to the concept of atemporality?

C. W. Hodge explicates the doctrine in relation to the similar notion of the omnipresence of God. “Since He is free from all limits of space, His omniscience is frequently connected with His omnipresence.”² From my vantage point as a body occupying a geometric point in space, it is difficult to conceive of omnipresence. Likewise, it is difficult to conceive of existence outside of or beyond time. But, the difficulty has to do with our mental limitations.

Moreover, modern physics, relying upon Einstein’s theory of relativity, seems to make room for the conceptualization of a *timeless* reality. Time and space are not absolute. Speaking of the General Theory, physicist Brian Green notes, “It makes the strange claim that observers in relative motion will have different perceptions of distance and of time.”³ Also, “distances and durations” are “not experienced identically by everyone.”⁴ Why could this not easily apply to a nonmaterial being?

It seems that open theism ironically tries to limit God (for all its protests to the contrary). It refuses to concede that God, as the First Cause and the Ground of all Being, is so complex as to be both transcendent to time and space while fully capable of interacting within time and space (as in the incarnation). From this timeless point of view, God conceivably could *see* all events of the future in a “timeless now.” If this is

¹ Sanders, “Historical Considerations,” in Pinnock, Rice, et. al., 96-97.

² In *ISBE*, s.v., “Foreknow, Foreknowledge,” by Wistar.

³ Brian Green, *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions, and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*

the adequate explanation, predictive prophecy is more readily understood also, since events in the future do have ontological reality for God.

CONCLUSION

This research has tried to understand objectively the respective positions in the current debate. It has looked briefly at compatibilism (Calvinism), Reformation Arminianism, and Open Theism. It then engaged in a cross sectional analysis of the Fourth Gospel to ferret out any themes that might be of relevance to the debate. A number were found. Finally, looking at the issues both theologically and philosophically, it attempted a critical evaluation of the open theist's posture with respect to divine foreknowledge, human freedom and predictive prophecy.

The conclusion is that the principal problem with open theism is the age-old fallacious assumption of logical determinism. Once the weaknesses of this assumption are adequately exposed, the very reason for proposing open theism may vanish. God can foreknow the free choices of human agents. Yet those choices remain truly free when they are made.

Prophecy contains a number of examples where God has indeed made such predictions without encroaching upon the freedom of those choices when the time comes for the agent to "act out" his or her part in history. If the openness proposal is after all unnecessary, then one would wonder why it would need to be maintained at the real risk of portraying a God of diminished dignity and a view of prophecy that is highly problematic in terms of the defending the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy.

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