

Fort Bend Christian Academy – Honors Apologetics

**The Knowledge of God**

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the Teacher and Students of the Honors Apologetics Class

Department of Worldviews and Apologetics

by

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## Introduction

Traditionally, the beliefs among philosophers and theologians of theism could be divided into two main categories—Classical Theism and Process Theism, although historically, the more prevalent or traditional view held by the Church leaned towards Classical Theism. Recently, though, a third classification has seemingly arisen called Open Theism. Open Theism attempts to bridge the gap between Classical Theism and Process Theism. Process Theists believe that God is still developing and that God is not fixed but is ever-learning.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Classical Theists believe that God has a completely developed, exhaustive foreknowledge of the future. Open Theists lean toward the Process Theism side of the question as to whether God possesses foreknowledge.<sup>2</sup> This question is particularly important in dealing with the occurrence of evil events. In other words, how can God know that evil will happen, and thus, allow evil to occur if He is supposedly omnibenevolent? Both Process Theists and Open Theists believe in Libertarian Free Will, which will be discussed under the branch of free will, known as indeterminism.<sup>3</sup> William Hasker, another popular proponent of Open Theism, provides a very precise definition of Libertarian Free Will that is important to an argument made later: “N is free at T with respect to performing A = df. It is in N’s power at T to perform A and it is possible at T for N to exercise that power, and it is in N’s power at T to refrain from performing A, and it is also possible at T for N to exercise that power.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Open Theists agree with Process Theists on this topic, but deny other aspects of Process Theism to make what they believe much less radical than that of Process Theism, such as the possibility that God’s final will will not come to fruition.

<sup>3</sup> Libertarian Free Will in simplest terms is having the power to choose between doing an action and not doing an action at a certain time.

<sup>4</sup> William Hasker, *God Time and Knowledge*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 138.

Open Theism has posed a problem for many because of its radical change from the traditional way of thinking. Among evangelical Protestants, a division has occurred because of the prevalence of this way of thinking. Men such as Gregory Boyd and David Basinger, two of the more popular proponents of Open Theism, propel this way of thinking into the modern culture which is focused on human freedom, but is this valid for modern Christians? No, because the implications, both philosophically and theologically are not consistent with the traditional nature of God.

### **Terms**

In order to understand the age-old argument, certain terms must first be understood which will assist in separating the various views. The definitions of these terms are debated themselves, but for the sake of argument, the definitions given will be used throughout the thesis. Under the problem of free will, there is a split between determinism and indeterminism. Determinism, in a theological sense, is “the view that God determines every event that occurs in the history of the world.”<sup>5</sup> The most noted form of theological determinism in Christianity is John Calvin, who will be discussed later under one of the branches of theological determinism. From here, divine determinism branches out into two distinct beliefs. The first branch is compatibilism, which affirms that free will is compatible with determinism as long as the antecedent conditions that determine what humans do include their own choices. Compatibilists claim that the choices people make are free, even though they could not do otherwise given the same antecedent conditions. In other words, since “free will is typically taken to be a necessary condition of moral responsibility, compatibilism is sometimes expressed as a thesis about the compatibility between

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<sup>5</sup> “Determinism and Freedom Philosophy -- Its Terminology,” The Determinism and Freedom Philosophy Website, London’s Global University, accessed November, 26, 2016, <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctytho/dfwTerminology.html>.

moral responsibility and determinism.”<sup>6</sup> This echoes what Augustine, an early Father of the Church, first attempted to explain, and furthermore, what Augustine, Aquinas, and Molina all attempted to project with their various beliefs, which is to combine the determinism of God’s exhaustive foreknowledge with the free will of humanity such that they truly coexist. The other branch of determinism is incompatibilism, which affirms “that the truth of determinism rules out the existence of free will.”<sup>7</sup> Theological fatalism, or the result of God’s knowledge/God’s ordination of the future is the inability for man to have free will, has been at the forefront of the entire debate and is the main contention that theologians and philosophers, alike, have tried to circumvent.<sup>8</sup> Some forms of Calvinism embrace fatalism for what it is and claim that humans have no free will because God’s knowledge of the future is exhaustive, for “if determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past. But it is not up to us what went on before we were born, and neither is it up to us what laws of nature are. Therefore, the consequences of these things (including our present acts) are not up to us.”<sup>9</sup>

The other side of the problem of free will is indeterminism. In philosophy, it is common to define indeterminism as the inverse of determinism—that human free will is exactly that, completely free from any causes. Theological indeterminism is best known in the form of

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<sup>6</sup> Michael McKenna and Justin D. Coates, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, summer 2015 ed., s.v. “compatibilism,” accessed November 20, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/compatibilism/>.

<sup>7</sup> Kadri Vihvelin, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, fall 2015 ed., s.vv. “Arguments for Incompatibilism,” accessed November 20, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/incompatibilism-arguments/>.

<sup>8</sup> Theological fatalism can also be attributed in a much broader explanation in that every action is foreordained by God in every possible world.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 2.

Libertarian Free Will. The reason for believing so is to give humanity the moral responsibility for their own actions. Libertarian Free Will is associated with Arminianism and Open Theism.

### **The God of Open Theism**

Open Theism, as expressed by Richard Rice, begins with God's love. It is the belief that since God loves His creation so much, that He wishes His creation to reciprocate that love. The only way for His creation to freely reciprocate God's love is for humanity to be free of influence from His own knowledge of the future. Open Theists affirm that the consequence argument is logically true, but theologically is not the way God interacts with His creation. They then turn to indeterminism to affirm Libertarian Free Will.

In response to the belief that God's knowledge of the future is exhaustive, they claim that it is not. They believe that God's knowledge of the future is not exhaustive, but rather that future human contingent decisions are unknown by God because they are not possible to know exhaustively. God may be able to predict the future with a certain amount of accuracy due to His infinite wisdom, but does not have an exhaustive knowledge of the future. This allows for maximum amount of human freedom, and thus, humans have the ability to change the way God responds to various actions. Open Theism, as presented by Richard Rice, has six tenants listed as follows:

1. Love is God's most important quality.
2. Love is not only care and commitment, but also sensitive and responsive.
3. Creatures exert an influence on God.
4. God's will is not the ultimate explanation of everything. History is the combined result of what God and His creatures decide to do.
5. God does not know everything timelessly, but learns from events as they take place.
6. So God is dependent on the world in some ways.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Clark H. Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 15-16.

A seventh implied tenant that is affirmed by other Open Theists, including David Basinger in his work *The Case for Freewill Theism*, can be applied as well:

7. Humans are free in a libertarian sense.<sup>11</sup>

Open Theists agree that God does have some knowledge of the future though. They claim that major events are foreknown by God in order to bring His will into fruition. So though He may not know the exact human decisions that lead to that event, the event still happens none-the-less.

### **Enticement of Open Theism**

Over the last thirty years or so, Open Theism has brought significant conflict to many modern Christians. It takes away God's impersonalness seen through determinism and replaces God as a being who can change one's mind per circumstances and petitions.<sup>12</sup> This means that humanity has an action role in its faith in that they can change God's mind. Gregory Boyd in his work *Letters from a Skeptic* says,

“If we have been given freedom, we create the reality of our decisions by making them. And until we make them, they don't exist. Thus, in my view at least, there simply isn't anything to know until we make it there to know. So God can't foreknow the good or bad decisions of the people He creates until He creates these people and they, in turn, create their decisions.”<sup>13</sup>

Some are attracted to Open Theism based on its freedom it gives to humanity. Since the early Church Fathers, Christians have wished to be free in order to place the majority of the blame of sin off of God and on to humanity.

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<sup>11</sup> David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 9.

<sup>12</sup> Well what little personalness was there to begin with.

<sup>13</sup> John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth, *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 10.



Another aspect that attracts many Christians to the Open school of thought is the biblical evidence for it. However, issues arise over the use of what Classical Theists call anthropomorphisms of God. These verses project human characteristics upon God and include painting God as confused, regretful, and anxious. They see stylistic writings of humans as evidence of God's almost human nature. This is enticing as it makes God more personal and more like us.

### **Thesis Goals**

Open Theism, though progressed by positive intentions, is not a tenable option for modern Christians. The first of which focuses on the philosophical problems of Open Theism; the second will focus on the biblical issues of Open Theism. Some may oppose this approach and say that a theological argument should be pursued on the basis of Scripture first, and then subsequently on the logical implications of the position, but following the tradition of Aquinas and Scholasticism, the philosophical position will be considered as logic should be coherent with theism.

Philosophically, the argument will start with the overarching idea of omniscience. Omniscience hangs at the crux of this argument, as the conversation boils down to: does omniscience include future human decisions? There are two arguments made against the coherency of omniscience: Cantor's Diagonalization argument and the experiential knowledge argument. When subjected to scrutiny, whether it be through absurd conclusions as in the case of Cantor or a complete misunderstanding of the idea of God as in experiential knowledge, the arguments made against omniscience do not hold. The conclusion from these two arguments results in a coherent definition of omniscience that will be used to tackle Open Theism.

Next, two arguments that involve the implications of Open Theism will be discussed. These arguments will take the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*. The first of which will be the concept of Divine Self-limitation of God in respect to creation, and the second will be the issue of God's knowledge of the present within the framework of Open Theism. Through these two arguments, the conclusion that Open Theism is not sound and should be rejected on a logical basis will be met. The biblical arguments against Open Theism, as the subject of the Spring Semester thesis, will focus on the various anthropomorphisms of God, God's nature and character, and God's knowledge of future events as seen through the Prophets.

## Historical Review

The history of omniscience dates back to the origins of Christianity. Whenever ancient theologians and philosophers discussed omniscience, they usually deliberated divine foreknowledge. The history of omniscience can be divided into four different eras: Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary.

### *Ancient Era*

The Ancient origins of divine foreknowledge arrived quickly after the first Christians began their spiritual journeys as followers of “the Way.” The Church Fathers commented on the nature of God, including the nature of His knowledge and mostly drew upon their Jewish origins and beliefs as well as the influence of Hellenistic philosophy of Neo-Platonism. Their comments on the subject stem greatly from Scripture, and not from strictly philosophical implications. Their documented conversations about foreknowledge are limited and rare, but three Church Fathers who did broach the topic of foreknowledge and omniscience include Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus.

#### *Clement of Rome*

Clement of Rome was one of the first disciples of the Apostles. In the Roman Catholic tradition, Clement became the first Pope to succeed Peter as the Bishop of Rome. The modern-day church’s knowledge of Clement comes from his Epistle to the Corinthians and the writings of other Church Fathers, including Irenaeus. Clement was well-versed in Scripture, encompassing the modern-day Old Testament as well as the writings of the Apostles and Paul in what the modern-day church calls the New Testament. He used this knowledge to discuss his views of foreknowledge, though brief in nature, and set a precedent to what other early Church Fathers believed.

Clement of Rome did not discuss foreknowledge in a strictly doctrinal manner, but instead used the topic to define characteristics of the Church. For instance, he discussed the implications of chapter seventeen of the book of Numbers when God asked Moses to tell all the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel to present their staffs with their names written on them. Aaron's name was written representing the Levi tribe. All the leaders gathered their rods, and Moses placed them at the Tent of Meeting in front of the Lord. The staff that produced buds would represent the chosen person with whom the priesthood was to come. This way, everyone would be satisfied and cease from grumbling against Moses and God. The result of this test came when Aaron's staff produced buds, and God's decision was final. Clement relates this to divine foreknowledge when he claimed, "What think ye, beloved? Did not Moses know beforehand that this would happen? Undoubtedly, he knew; but he acted thus, that there might be no sedition in Israel, and that the name of the true and only God might be glorified; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."<sup>14</sup> Clement believed that God's foreknowledge was bestowed upon individuals in specific circumstances, as God did to Moses in this case. Another instance where Clement claimed that God bestowed His foreknowledge upon humans was when the Apostles chose a replacement for Judas. The Apostles obtained their perfect knowledge from God and, thus, made the decision that would be in accordance with God's plan, as God had the exhaustive foreknowledge of what decision they would make for they would make future human decisions of which God had foreknowledge.<sup>15</sup>

In respect to Open Theism, Clement would be a strict denier, not of the ability of man to have free will, but of the exhaustiveness of God's foreknowledge. In another case, Clement refers to Lot and makes the argument that humanity does possess power over their own godliness

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<sup>14</sup> Clement, "First Epistle to the Corinthians," Ch. 43.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

as well as their sin. He contrasts the actions of Lot and his wife in this respect: first, that Lot had the free choice to leave the city of Sodom and to reject evil in pursuit of goodness. Lot's wife, on the other hand, freely chose to turn back in lust towards the city; this action was a free choice to do evil and disobey God. In saying so, Clement denied fatalism, in that humanity is free to choose between good and evil. Clement would be considered an early form of simple foreknowledge—God knows all future contingents, but humans are still free.

### *Justin Martyr*

Another early Church Father who discussed God's foreknowledge was Justin Martyr who, in fact, anticipated the concurrent discussion of free will and foreknowledge. Justin Martyr is probably the best-known Church Father of the second century. His life and writings are well documented through his two "Apologies" and his "Dialogue with the Jew Trypho." Justin was well-versed in philosophy, such that in his "Dialogue," he placed himself first under a Stoic, but also studied under Peripatetics, Theoretics, Pythagoreans, and Platonists before becoming a Christian.

He is quoted in his First Apology as saying, "The things which He absolutely knows will take place, He predicts as if already they had taken place. And that the utterances must be thus received, you will perceive, if you give your attention to them. The words cited above, David uttered 1500 years before Christ became a man and was crucified."<sup>16</sup> This means that whenever God uttered prophecy through men, the words were spoken in past tense, as the certainty in God's knowledge made the events inevitable to pass. God's knowledge is exhaustive of future in terms of prophecy.

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<sup>16</sup> Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, Ch. 62, New Advent, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1026.htm>.

In relation to Open Theism, Justin believed that God did possess some level of foreknowledge, as he writes in his “Dialogue with Trypho,” “God will be slandered, as having no foreknowledge.”<sup>17</sup> Open Theists would agree that he does have foreknowledge, but just no foreknowledge of human decisions for humans to be free agents. So though it would seem that Justin Martyr would advocate for simple foreknowledge, but Open Theists could claim that Justin Martyr did not outwardly deny the possibility of Open Theism as well.

### *Irenaeus*

Lastly, an Ancient era example is Irenaeus, the student of Polycarp (who was, in turn, the student of the Apostle John), who was very influential in the beginning of the Church and the first steps in the theology for the Church. Irenaeus was a staunch believer in the endowment of humans to free will. He believed this on the basis of human nature. In essence, if humans did not have free will, then they could not be responsible for their actions.<sup>18</sup> This would constitute that biblically speaking, humans must have free will in order to be held accountable for their actions. Like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus drew the connection between divine foreknowledge and prophecy. He specifically linked Matthew 13:7, “For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.” In response to this verse, Irenaeus says, “In what way, then, did they desire both to hear and to see, unless they had foreknowledge of His future advent? But how could they have foreknown it, unless they had previously received foreknowledge from Himself?”<sup>19</sup> If God reveals future

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<sup>17</sup> Justin Martyr. “Dialogue with Trypho.” New Advent. Accessed November 22, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book I. Ch. 37, New Advent, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103411.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., Book IV. Ch. 11.

events to humans, then God must first have foreknowledge to reveal to humanity in the first place.

Irenaeus was also an opponent of the Marcionites, who believed that God of the Old Testament was the author of sin. Irenaeus refuted the Marcionites by saying that though God knows future contingents, foreknowledge does not automatically entail predestination.<sup>20</sup> Because Irenaeus does not go into the full extent of God's foreknowledge, but only claims that He has foreknowledge, the Open Theist, like the response to Justin Martyr and Clement, would say that they would whole-heartedly agree with these early Church Fathers. On the other hand, Classical Theists would disagree and say that the use of the word foreknowledge by the early Church Fathers meant foreknowledge of every action and event, not just certain ones.

### **Medieval Era**

The next era that impactfully discussed the effects of God's omniscience as to His knowledge of future events came with the Medieval period. During this period, less persecution throughout much of the Church allowed for a greater number of Christian theologians and philosophers to delve deeper into the words of Scripture and of the Church Fathers without the risk of being put to death. The main struggle that would arise out of this time period is the question that exists today: Is God's exhaustive foreknowledge compatible with human free will? Four main theologians who made renowned ideologies about divine foreknowledge fall into this time period: Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, William of Ockham, and John Calvin.

#### *Augustine of Hippo*

Augustine of Hippo straddled the Ancient and Medieval period, living from 354 AD to 430 AD. The story of Augustine is well-known throughout most Christian thought, especially

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<sup>20</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book I. Ch. 37, New Advent, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103411.htm>.

through his views as expressed in his two greatest works, *Confessions* and *City of God*. Both explicitly address the issues that arise when one affirms God's omniscience and recognize the seeming incongruence between free will and divine foreknowledge. First, Augustine affirmed that God's knowledge is absolute and transcends time, as he writes, "But far be it that Thou, the Creator of the universe, the Creator of souls and bodies,—far be it that Thou shouldest know all things future and past. Far, far more wonderfully, and far more mysteriously, Thou knowest them."<sup>21</sup> Augustine later addressed the nature of this knowledge and also responded to Cicero who, in turn, refuted the Stoics. While the Stoics believed God does have exhaustive foreknowledge, and therefore, humanity does not have free will (similar to fatalism and Calvinism), Cicero claimed that God does not know future events in order to protect human free will.<sup>22</sup> It is through this discussion that Augustine came to learn of the conflict between free will and foreknowledge. However, Augustine claimed there is no real problem:

"Now, against the sacrilegious and impious darings of reason, we assert both that God knows all things before they come to pass, and that we do by our free will whatsoever we know and feel to be done by us only because we will it. But that all things come to pass by fate, we do not say; nay we affirm that nothing comes to pass by fate."<sup>23</sup>

In this, Augustine clearly demonstrates that there is no real occurrence of fate, as it is "but an order of causes in which the highest efficiency is attributed to the will of God."<sup>24</sup> In

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<sup>21</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, Ch. 31, New Advent, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120105.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Cicero articulates an early form of Open Theism or Indeterminism in the fact that God does not know human future actions (albeit he did think God knows past and present events).

<sup>23</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Book 5, Ch. 9, New Advent, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120105.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



essence, every decision or action occurs through a series of cause and effect events attributable to God.

The main opponent to Augustine's view on the compatibility of God's foreknowledge and human free will is Evodius, a contemporary of Augustine. Evodius' argument against Augustine is best simplified by William Rowe:

- (1) God has foreknowledge of all future events.
- (2) Hence, if a man is going to sin, God foreknows that he will sin.
- (3) Whatever God foreknows must necessarily happen.
- (4) Hence, if God foreknows that a man will sin, he must necessarily sin.
- (5) But if such a man must necessarily sin, there is no voluntary choice in his sinning.
- (6) Therefore, such a man does not have free will.<sup>25</sup>

Augustine would not agree with premise (4), though, as he did not believe that it necessary for man to sin if God foreknows it. Augustine writes, "I omit the equally strange [statement] which I indicated a moment ago, that the same man says that it is necessary that I so will. The man, by supposing the necessity, strives to take away the will. For if it is necessary that he wills, whence can he will when there is no will."<sup>26</sup> For Augustine, necessity must not be taken in this manner. For an act of the will necessitates freedom to begin with, and any act of the will is never necessary.

The difference between Augustine's view and the prior early Church Fathers would be that of foreordination. To Augustine, God not only foreknew but also foreordained all things to come to pass. It is with this view that the Open Theist would disagree entirely. To the Open Theist, there is no level of foreordination by God, for any amount would take away from human freedom and Libertarian Free Will.

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<sup>25</sup> Rowe, William L, "Augustine on Foreknowledge and Free Will," *The Review of Metaphysics* 18, no. 2 (1964): 356-63. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20124060>.

<sup>26</sup> Augustine, and Carroll Mason Sparrow. *De Libero Arbitrio Voluntatis; St. Augustine on Free Will*. 1947.

*Thomas Aquinas*

Largely conceived as one of the greatest theologians and philosophers of all time, Thomas Aquinas developed his views on basically everything concerning Christianity in his master piece, *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas lived from 1225 to 1274 AD. Ironically, he was nicknamed a “dumb ox” by his teachers, yet he laid the groundwork for a majority of Christian doctrine that exists today. He was the first to develop theology on the basis of Aristotle’s philosophy. On the topic of Divine foreknowledge, Aquinas was certain in the Classical view that God knows all past, present, and future. Again, like his predecessors of faith, he based his views regarding Divine foreknowledge on the scriptural evidence of prophecy—since the truth of prophecy is the same as the truth of Divine foreknowledge, as stated above, the conditional proposition:

"If this was prophesied, it will be, is true in the same way as the proposition: ‘If this was foreknown, it will be’: for in both cases it is impossible for the antecedent not to be. Hence the consequent is necessary, considered, not as something future in our regard, but as being present to the Divine foreknowledge.”<sup>27</sup>

To understand Aquinas’ full view of free will, one must define the various terms involved in the concept of will and freedom, according to Aquinas. The first concept is to define what the “will” is. The will in most basic terms is the desire of the mind/soul. They are the consequent of knowledge, as Aquinas says, "Some inclination follows every form."<sup>28</sup> Knowledge can be divided into two categories: sensual and intellectual. Sensual knowledge is the knowledge that humans receive from their senses and the natural world, while intellectual knowledge is that which humans can perceive through reason. Since there are two kinds of knowledge, there are

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Question 171, Article 5, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed November 26, 2016, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.toc.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

two kinds of appetites. The final goal of the will is to act in a certain way to bring about good, as similarly argued by Aristotle.

The next term to be understood is “necessity.” According to Aquinas, necessity is that which cannot mean otherwise.<sup>29</sup> Necessity can be divided into two categories: internal and external. Internal necessity is considered to be natural necessity. For corporeal substances, the intrinsic principles of matter and form are the natural causes of the thing.<sup>30</sup> The will is not material and so has no necessity corresponding to this kind of cause. The will has natural necessity following upon its nature in that it is inclined toward universal goodness based upon reason. External necessity is any external cause that brings about necessity. “In the order of efficient causality, a thing is moved necessarily by an exterior agent contrary to its natural inclination.”<sup>31</sup> Aquinas uses the example of a rock being lifted upward. The rock is not moving upward on its own inclination, but on an external source. The will was moved by an external agent when it was created, and the creator of the will causes the will to move itself. The external cause is not opposed to the inclination of the will, but the will is the external cause of the agent to act through deliberation. The talk of necessity may bring the idea of coercion to mind, and coercive necessity would be against the inclination of the will.

The final term is “freedom,” which applies to the exercise or nonexercise of the will and to the acts of the will with regard to particular ends as means to the general end. Citing Aristotle in chapter 48 of the second book of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas states that humans are free to exercise their will and to choose particular things. Freedom originates from an agent's

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Question 171, Article 5, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed November 26, 2016, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.toc.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Magee, “Aquinas and the Freedom of Will,” Aquinas Online, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.aquinasonline.com/Topics/freewill.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

ability to consider, deliberate, and reconsider all based upon the intellect. Freedom for Aquinas was the manner in which intellectual beings seek universal goodness. It is a condition of the will arising from human nature being in the kind of world that humans inhabit.

Aquinas takes the Aristotelian approach towards free will. Thus, to maintain this definition of free will, Aquinas, influenced by Boethius, places God outside of time.<sup>32</sup> If God is timeless, then He is present to every point, and thus His knowledge does not directly influence the freely made decision of a human. The Open Theist would adamantly deny this proposition, for they claim that God must be in time for a view of Open Theism to be coherent.

### *William of Ockham*

The next Medieval influential philosopher in the area of omniscience came in the fourteenth century—William of Ockham, noted for his belief in nominalism, the view that universal essences are concepts in the mind, and use of the theory of simplicity that would come to be known as “Occam’s Razor.” Ockham struggled extensively with the issue of God’s supposed foreknowledge and humanity’s capability of making free moral decisions and actions. He held that there are two kinds of facts about the past: hard facts that are fixed based on past events and soft facts that since they relate to the future, are not fixed. A hard fact is: “Hitler attacked Russia in 1941.”<sup>33</sup> A soft fact is: “Hitler attacked Russia in 1941, 44 years before Jack’s signing his contract on January 3, 1985.”<sup>34</sup> This relates to God’s foreknowledge as Ockham believed that facts about God’s foreknowledge are soft facts. This way of thinking allows God’s knowledge to be full of past and future events and, hence, allows the compatibility with free will

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<sup>32</sup> Boethius was a sixth-century Christian philosopher who impacted the fields of mathematics, music, and philosophy.

<sup>33</sup> John Martin Fischer and Patrick Todd, *Freedom, Fatalism, and Foreknowledge*, (Oxford New York: Oxford UP, 2015), 229.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 232.

to exist. Ockhamism supports that humans have counterfactual power over God's past beliefs. While Aquinas asserted that freedom arises from reason and will, Ockham held that freedom precedes reason and will and was the prime faculty.

Counterfactual power over the past is not the same thing as changing the past, nor is it the same thing as causing or bringing about the past. Changing the past is incoherent since it amounts to there being one past prior to  $t_2$  in which God has a certain belief at  $t_1$ , and then Jones does something to make a different past. That requires two pasts prior to  $t_2$ , and that presumably makes no sense. Instead, counterfactual power of the past involves the use of conditional (if-then) statements over what could have happened in the past. There is much debate about the way to analyze the causal relation, as it seems Ockham advocated for a kind of backwards causation, but it is generally thought that causation does not reduce to a counterfactual dependency of an effect on its cause.

An Open Theist would deny Ockhamism in respect to the implications of its causation. Open Theists deny that backwards causation would be possible, as they believe in the fixity of the past, and God's response of the past and present to the future.

### *John Calvin*

One of the most influential theologians of the Medieval period is the famed John Calvin. Calvin, the namesake of the widely-believed Protestant belief system of Calvinism, developed his beliefs in his work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin based his belief of Divine foreknowledge on the work of Augustine—that God's foreknowledge is exhaustive and preordained. Calvin became the poster child for Theological Determinism and, as such, is directly opposed to Open Theism.

The trap involved with Calvinism is falling into Theological Fatalism. While some Calvinists do, in fact, accept fatalism, a majority of them do not. They still claim that humanity is free to make choices and is responsible for the sin in which they partake. The difference between Libertarian Free Will and the freedom of Calvinism is expressed in the fact that in Calvinism (a form of compatibilism), one is not free in the sense to perform an action or not to perform an action. God's knowledge makes the action necessary, but the human is still free in a nonlibertarian sense to perform that action.

Accordingly, Calvinists believe that God's plan has been foreordained from the moment of creation and that there is nothing man can do to redirect or change this plan. In contrast with Open Theism, God reacts with humanity's freedom to perform an action or not in order to make His plan come to fruition. God's plan does not necessarily change in terms of end goals, but the manner in which the end goals are met is changed. The Classical Theist strongly defends the efficacious and irresistible grace of God as the means for man's salvation. The Calvinist does not limit God in His knowledge in any sense, which is an objection presented by Calvinists and other compatibilists to Open Theism—that God is limited in His knowledge.

The main objection given by opponents to Calvinism is that it seems as if God acts as a puppeteer, guiding His puppets to perform the actions that He wishes in order to bring His own desire to actualization. The Calvinist would respond by saying that humanity still makes choices, whether sinful or virtuous, on a free basis, without the causal influence from God. Though the human did not have the freedom to choose otherwise, the act in of itself is still free.

### **Modern Era**

The next era of theology and philosophy came in the form of the Modern age, which lasted from the early sixteenth century until the mid-twentieth century after World War II. This

period is known for the expansion of technology, the Enlightenment movement, and the globalization of Western culture. All these factors came to affect theology as well. Three major ideologies surfaced from men during this time period in accordance with God's omniscience and foreknowledge: Luis de Molina, Jacobus Arminius, and Georg Cantor.

### *Luis de Molina*

The first was the new idea of Molinism, developed by Luis de Molina. While Aquinas and Augustine claimed that humans possessed free will in conjunction with God's knowledge of all future events, Molina developed a system to support how this is logically possible, while the Classic theologians attributed this phenomena to Divine mystery. Molina was a late sixteenth-century Spanish Jesuit, and like many before him, he struggled with the idea that God could know everything, including the future being compatible with the idea that humans still possess free will. Instead of falling into Aquinas' view of determinism based on the mystery of God, Molina postulated "that there is a cooperation of the human will and divine grace."<sup>35</sup> How does this occur? Molina hypothesized that there are three types of knowledge. The first is a knowledge of what is, the last the knowledge of purely possible. Sandwiched in between these two is "middle knowledge" or knowledge of future contingent events. As Molina wrote:

"Finally, the third type is middle knowledge, by which, in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each faculty of free choice, He saw in His own essence what each such faculty would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or in that or, indeed, in infinitely many orders of things—even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite."<sup>36</sup>

Thus, he formulated that God knows all future contingents, and humans have the freedom to choose to do certain known contingents. He wrote, "*If person, P, were in situation, S, then P*

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<sup>35</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *What does God Know and When Does He Know It?: The Current Controversy over Divine Foreknowledge*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 95.

<sup>36</sup> Luis de Molina, *Concordia*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 52.9.

would freely perform action, A (or  $P(S \textcircled{R} A)$ ).”<sup>37</sup> In essence, God has knowledge over every single possible action a creature would freely do in every possible situation. Middle knowledge is knowledge of conditionals (if-then propositions) of the following form: If person P were in circumstance C, P would freely perform act A. Middle knowledge differs from foreknowledge in that foreknowledge is what exactly will happen, while middle knowledge postulates on what could happen. But so what if God knows what might have happened if an action that did not occur really occurred? How does this relate to God’s knowledge of what truly will happen?

In response, let one suppose because of God’s middle knowledge, He knows the following conditional statement is true: If one finds themselves in a McDonald’s on Sunday, January 1, 2020, then the person will freely choose to get a quarter pounder with cheese. Accordingly, God has the power to place that person in that McDonald’s on that particular date, but it is with that person’s free choice that they ordered a quarter pounder with cheese. This is how middle knowledge allows for God to know future contingents, while remaining omniscient in the sense of having unlimited foreknowledge.

Many arguments are made in which opponents to Molinism question whether the belief truly solves the problem of Divine foreknowledge. For even if God knew when He created the world that someone would be in the McDonald’s on that day, then that person is still free to not choose to do otherwise at the present that moment arrives.

Molina’s form of compatibilism has become popular among many current intellectuals, including William Lane Craig, Alvin Plantinga, Thomas Flint, and Alfred Fredosso, well-established theological philosophers of religion. The Open Theist would disagree with Molinism

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<sup>37</sup> John Laing, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.vv. “Middle Knowledge,” accessed November 18, 2016, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/middlekn/>.



on the account of God's knowledge of future contingents, but agree with the Molinist on the acceptance of the freedom to choose to perform an action at a time or not to perform that action.

Like Open Theists, Molinists tend to take a presentism view of God's relation to time.

### *Jacobus Arminius*

A contemporary of Molina, Jacobus Arminius, also wished to uphold free will. Arminius wrote, "Uncertainty cannot be attributed to the will of Him who, in His infinite wisdom, has all things present to Himself, and certainly foreknows all future events, even those most contingent."<sup>38</sup> To the problem of compatibility with free will, Arminius claimed that there is no conflict whatsoever between the two, for foreknowledge does not automatically make something necessary. There are three major points to be accepted of Arminianism (otherwise known as simple foreknowledge).

- i. libertarianism
- ii. divine everlastingness
- iii. complete foreknowledge of the future

In simple foreknowledge, humanity is free in a libertarian sense (i), God is eternal, (ii), and because of God's infinite wisdom, He has a complete foreknowledge of the future (iii). Arminianism denies the consequence argument in favor of the view that God simply knows how humans will freely act. The difference between Arminianism and Molinism is that God does not hold counterfactual knowledge. God only knows what humans will do, not what they could have done if the situation were to be different. As expressed earlier, many of the Church Fathers are considered accepting of simple foreknowledge. An Open Theist, though, would reject this view. This is because of the effects of God's infinite wisdom. An Open Theist would claim that future

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<sup>38</sup> Jacobus Arminius, "*The Works of James Arminius, Vol. 3,*" Bible Hub, accessed November 27, 2016, [http://biblehub.com/library/arminius/the\\_works\\_of\\_james\\_arminius\\_vol\\_3/an\\_examination\\_of\\_the\\_treatise.htm](http://biblehub.com/library/arminius/the_works_of_james_arminius_vol_3/an_examination_of_the_treatise.htm).

human decisions are not able to be known by God because they are impossible to be known. They are outside of the realm of God's knowledge for they have no grounding of truth in the present.

### *Georg Cantor*

Lastly, Georg Cantor is quite different from all modern philosophers previously mentioned, as Cantor is no theologian or philosopher, but rather a mathematician. What does a mathematician have to do with omniscience? Well, Cantor developed a theorem of mathematics known as Cantor's Proof or Cantor's Diagonal Argument. He is credited with developing much of set theory and cardinality.<sup>39</sup> Set theory is the branch of mathematics that deals with the formal properties of sets as units (without regard to the nature of their individual constituents) and the expression of other branches of mathematics in terms of sets. His diagonal proof specifically relates to that of infinities. He determined that there were an infinite number of sets for a set. His diagonal set theory goes as follows:

The power set of a set is always of greater cardinality than the set itself.

Proof: We show that no function from an arbitrary set  $S$  to its power set,  $\mathcal{P}(U)$ , has a range that is all of  $\mathcal{P}(U)$ . That is, no such function can be onto, and, hence, a set and its power set can never have the same cardinality. To that end, let  $f$  be any function from  $S$  to  $\mathcal{P}(U)$ . We now diagonalize out of the range of  $f$ .

Construct a subset  $C$  of  $S$ , i.e. an element of  $\mathcal{P}(U)$ , which is not in the range of  $f$  as follows: for any  $a \in S$  make  $C$  differ from  $f(a)$  with respect to the element  $a$  itself. That is, if  $a \in f(a)$ , then don't put it in  $C$ ; however, if  $a \notin f(a)$ , put it in  $C$ . Symbolically,  $C = \{a : a \in S \text{ and } a \notin f(a)\}$ . Clearly  $C$  differs from each element in the range of  $f$  (with respect to at least one element). Since  $f$  is arbitrary, we conclude there can be no function from  $S$  onto  $\mathcal{P}(U)$ . Thus, every set has cardinality smaller than its power set.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cardinality is in simple terms the size of a set.

<sup>40</sup> "Sets and Functions," University of California Davis, accessed November 26, 2016, [https://www.math.ucdavis.edu/~hunter/intro\\_analysis\\_pdf/ch1.pdf](https://www.math.ucdavis.edu/~hunter/intro_analysis_pdf/ch1.pdf).

This does not seem to contradict omniscience until you apply his reasoning to areas beyond numbers. Patrick Grim, professor of philosophy at Stony Brook University, applied this logic to a set of all truths and made the conclusion that there was no set of all truths, thus God cannot possibly know all truths. This seeming contradiction will be discussed later in Part One: Omniscience.

### **Contemporary Era**

Though other smaller schools of thought have arisen during the Contemporary period, the greatest has been Open Theism. Accordingly, Open Theism is actually much older than many current scholars tend to think. A common assessment of Open Theists is that classical foreknowledge is based heavily on Hellenistic philosophy, and the early theologians were too heavily influenced by such presuppositions. The question comes up: Which Greek philosophers influenced these men? An Open Theist would claim that Platonism and Stoicism rule the ancient theologians' ideologies, but another question arises: Where did Open Theism get its influence from? Some like Gregory Boyd, popular supporter of Open Theism, would claim as to the evidence of Open Theist thought throughout Church history,

“I must concede that the open view has been relatively rare in Church history. In my estimation this is because almost from the start, the Church's theology was significantly influenced by Plato's notion that God's perfection must mean he is in every respect unchanging—including in his knowledge and experience. This philosophical assumption has been losing its grip on Western minds. . . which is, in part, why an increasing number of Christians are coming to see. . . the biblical motif on divine openness.”<sup>41</sup>

However, the history of Open Theism can be traced back to the ancient Greeks as well. Some in Hellenistic philosophy held a form of libertarianism. A philosopher of antiquity who held to such thoughts includes Heraclitus who believed that everything in the world was subject

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<sup>41</sup> Boyd, *God of the Possible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 115.

to a state of flux. This draws parallels to the idea that God's knowledge is also always in flux, because the world is constantly changing. Another example is that of Epicurus, who believed that everything that occurs is the result of atoms interacting with each other. He claimed, in contrary to prior atomists such as Democritus, that atoms do not always follow straight paths. This rejection of the straight path of atoms allowed Epicurus to deny the determinism found in his predecessors and affirmed Libertarian Free Will. Another early precursor to Open Theism is the previously mentioned Cicero. Ironically, although Cicero rejected the determinism of the Stoics, he strongly disagreed with the randomness presented by Epicurus. Both wished to deny the determinism presented to them, but Cicero ended up misleading "philosophers for centuries who argue that Epicurean free will involves chance directly in the decision, that for every free action there is a server of the atoms in the mind – 'one swerve = one decision.'"<sup>42</sup>

Other influences of Open Theism can be drawn through parallels with other philosophers. One of these influences stems from Faustus Socinus and his movement Socinianism. Socinianism originated in the Minor Reformed Church of Poland during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and was soon after adhered to by the Unitarian Church of Transylvania.<sup>43</sup> On a large scale, Socinianism is declared heresy by Catholics, Orthodox, and many Protestants alike, primarily because of the Socianite rejection of the eternalness of Jesus, claiming that Jesus did not exist until He was conceived and born of the Virgin Birth. This would mean that Jesus is a created being from the Father rather than begotten and consubstantial with the Father. It follows

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<sup>42</sup> "Marcus Tullius Cicero," The Information Philosopher, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.informationphilosopher.com/solutions/philosophers/cicero/>.

<sup>43</sup> "Socinianism," New Advent, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14113a.htm>.

that the Socianites regard the Trinity as a fallacy, hence this strict denial is what led to their declaration as heretics.

Socinus saw his work regarding foreknowledge as a correction of both Calvinism and Arminianism. He proposed “a kind of free will theism in which future contingencies were not settled. This is just about exactly what Open Theists are proposing. The parallels extend further to the Open Theist definition of omniscience that “God knows everything that is possible of being known.”<sup>44</sup> This definition allows Open Theists and Socianites to claim that God is omniscient in respect to everything He can possibly know.

Though the underpinnings and influences of Open Theism have originated from ancient times, there has been a significant amount of evidence pointing towards the Contemporary influences as well. Many Modern philosophers, such as David Hume and Immanuel Kant, who are both considered skeptics of Christianity, attempted to remove God from the equation of the world in order to make room for human freedom. This renewed emphasis on freedom provided the intellectual ability for Open Theism to grow as it has.<sup>45</sup> Also, the challenge to previously-held orthodox views concerning Scripture led to the growth as well. For a long time, views contrary to orthodoxy were quickly snuffed out before being discussed, but the discussion of such views in recent history has contributed to the spread of Open Theism. Current proponents for Open Theism include theologians such as Clark Pinnock and Gregory Boyd, as well as philosophers such as Richard Swineburne, David Basinger, and Peter Van Inwagen. These people will be influential throughout the rest of the thesis.

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<sup>44</sup> Frame, *No Other God*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 34.

<sup>45</sup> Another example of a time in which freedom was emphasized is the Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## Part One: Omniscience

Part One will be devoted to proving the coherency of omniscience. Omniscience has come under attack in two different ways: the first is Cantor's Proof and the second is experiential knowledge. Both of these arguments are generally used by atheists in order to deny that God can be omniscient when faced with the idea of pointing out inconsistencies within the possibility of God's existence,<sup>46</sup> which would seem to logically contradict Scripture and the maximally great view of God.<sup>47</sup> It is necessary that omniscience is logically coherent so that the argument can progress to the nature of God's omniscience in the sense of whether omniscience actually includes foreknowledge.

### **Cantor's Proof**

Recall from the Historical Review of Georg Cantor that if each power set is greater than the set, then the power set must go on to infinity, and each infinite amount of power sets must go on to infinity, and so on. So, in essence, there is no set of all sets. So, what if there are an infinite number of power sets of a set? This specific mathematical argument has been transitioned over to philosophy and is strongly advocated by Patrick Grim. He explains that *S* is a set of all truths, and thus as proven above, there is an infinite set of all sets of truths, which logically entails that there is no *one* set of *all* truths. If there is not a possible set of all truths, then it is impossible for God to know all truths, and thus God's omniscience is not logically coherent. According to Cantor's Proof, if omniscience was logically coherent, there would exist "a set of all truths that

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<sup>46</sup> Due to the success of the Ontological Argument, atheists faced with this argument must concede that if it is possible for God to exist then he must necessarily exist. They then go to pointing out errors within the characteristics of God to deny His existence.

<sup>47</sup> For more on the maximally great view of God see Luke Thurston's thesis on the Ontological Argument.

an omniscient being would have to know.”<sup>48</sup> However, philosophers have tended to disagree with this over time.

One such philosopher is Alvin Plantinga, the analytic philosopher at the University of Notre Dame, who fundamentally disagreed with Grim on this topic and engaged in a multi-article correspondence with Grim in which each argued his view on omniscience and Cantorian arguments. Plantinga’s main point is that even if it is true that there is no one set of all truths, there still is no problem between omniscience and logic as there is one truth about every fact: “Every proposition is true or false (or if you [Grim] don’t think that’s a truth, every proposition is either true or not-true). This doesn’t require that there be a set of all truths.”<sup>49</sup> There does not need to be a set of all truths for God to know, for God knows that every proposition that occurs is either true or false, and this is the extent of His omniscience.

Omniscience is the maximal perfection with respect to knowledge—“that a being *x* is omniscient only if for every proposition *p*, *x* knows whether *p* is true.”<sup>50</sup> This is the only way to overcome the problem of the set of infinite sets, as even if there is no universal property of all propositions, omniscience must only be changed in the way it is interpreted, not in the way it is stated. If Grim is correct, there are no truths in any proposition, for the property of true or not true does not exist. This is true as a use of properties is an appeal to quantification. Any appeal to quantification would have to be applied to a set of all propositions. Any set of all propositions fall victim to the Cantorian argument. Given that there is no property of truth though, there is no

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<sup>48</sup> Alvin Plantinga and Patrick Grim, “Truth, Omniscience, and Cantorian Arguments,” *Philosophical Studies* (1993): 267-306.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

logic, as logic is just truths that are universal, separate from an appeal to quantification, and the logic that is used to make the argument in the first place does not exist.

Another argument against Grim's thinking relies on the application of possible worlds. If possible worlds are understood as maximally consistent sets of all propositions, then given the Cantorian argument there is no set of all propositions, possible worlds are illogical. Thus, the actual world is illogical. This is in essence a *reductio ad absurdum*, but the problem of this *reductio* is that it does not explain why Cantor's proof is wrong or has a flaw, but only points out that the logical extreme of Cantor's proof does not make logical sense. So one may say just because the implication is radical does not mean that the set theory would be incorrect, but the question of how to deal with the illogical implication is still necessary to answer.

Another response to the proposition of Grim is going back to the root of what Cantor said. If one understands truths as one understands numbers—as abstract entities—then just because there is no set of all sets of rational numbers, does not mean that there are no numbers. Similarly, if there is no set of all truths, that does not mean that there are no truths, and thus if each truth is taken interdependently from a set, the problem of God knowing a finite or even infinite set of all truths dissolves.<sup>51</sup>

This conclusively leads to a definition of omniscience that is logically coherent—omniscience is the maximal perfection with respect to knowledge, and this maximal perfection is in respect to all propositions, whether they be independent from a set or not. This definition will later be used to show the problems with Open Theism.

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<sup>51</sup> William Lane Craig, "Questions on God's Infinity, Inspiration, and Kant," Reasonable Faith, accessed October 15, 2016, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/questions-on-gods-infinity-inspiration-and-kant>.



**Experiential Knowledge**

The next argument against omniscience involves the type of knowledge that God can know. Many claim that God cannot possibly know any experiential knowledge, like how to ride a bike, because this knowledge requires experience which God does not have. The formal argument is as follows:

- “(1) There are some items of knowledge that can only be acquired through experience.
  - (2) Some of the experiences through which items of knowledge that can only be acquired through experience are acquired are such that they cannot be had by God.
  - (3) If some of the experiences through which items of knowledge that can only be acquired through experience are acquired are such that they cannot be had by God, then there are some items of knowledge that cannot be acquired by God.
- Therefore:
- (4) There are some items of knowledge that cannot be acquired by God.
  - (5) If there are some items of knowledge that cannot be acquired by God, then it is not the case that God is omniscient.
- Therefore:
- (6) It is not the case that God is omniscient.”<sup>52</sup>

Premise (1) is correct, but the only problem is how one defines experience. Experience for humanity is a physical reaction to some sort of stimuli. Premise (2) is where the disagreement comes into play. A maximally great being would have to have full omniscience, and if he does not have knowledge over human experiences, such as suffering, he is not omniscient. Though if a being is maximally great, then does that being not have access to the experience of his creation? Emotion, experience, and action are but a series of physical processes through which the human body reacts to various stimuli. God can know what it is like to ride a bike because He knows how the human body works physiologically, because He did, in fact, create the human body. He can know what pain feels like, for He did, in fact, create the pain receptors through which humans

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<sup>52</sup> “Experiential Knowledge,” Philosophy of Religion, accessed October 30, 2016, <http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/arguments-for-atheism/problems-with-divine-omniscience/experiential-knowledge/>.

recognize and react to pain. This argument can fall into the physicalist versus dualist argument.<sup>53</sup> However, even as a dualist, all that is not physical comes from a necessary being, so God must have this knowledge in order to impart it to a creation.

The argument may arise that one can tell another how something will feel, but can never truly give the experience of how that feels. This is best understood through pain. A doctor can tell one that pain receptors will work in some sort of way, but can never give one the experience of pain. This is a valid objection, as God can know how the pain receptors work, as He is the creator of such receptors, but like the doctor, cannot experience said pain. However, this is a uniqueness that comes with Christian theism, and that is the Trinity. Since a person of God, the Son, became human, He did experience pain and the experience of the pain receptors. Jesus Christ was beaten and crucified and thus knows the experience of pain. He experienced hunger, thirst, and other human experiences, and thus the essence of God in the Trinity would know human experience of desire.

One can also question whether God requires experiential knowledge at all. Remember the definition of omniscience—that a being must know whether a proposition is either true or false. That means that omniscience is defined in terms of propositional truth, not in terms of experiential truth. So being omniscient does not entail, for example, knowing how it feels to break a bone. Propositional truths only deal with the fact that the bone is broken and pain is felt, not the actual feeling of said pain.

In conclusion, both arguments against the omniscience of God fall apart under scrutiny. Cantor's proof, when applied to a set of all truths, denies all truths and logic, and thus the logic used to derive the argument is no longer valid. God also has experiential knowledge for

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<sup>53</sup> See Jake Trippett Thesis on Physicalism.

experience is a physical process, and a necessary being from which all things are contingent and created would have to have this knowledge to impart upon creation.

## **Part Two: Arguments**

Part Two of this thesis contains the crux of the argument—is Open Theism a valid form of belief for Christians on a logical plane? In order to understand the full argument of Open Theism, one must first understand the nature of free will. The different aspects of free will begin with the separation of determinism from indeterminism.

David Basinger writes, “Free will theists (Open Theists) disagree with Process Theists on this important point. They [Open Theists] fall into the group of standard theists, usually labeled Classical Theists, who believe that God can, at least to some extent, unilaterally guarantee that what occurs in this world is what He has determined should occur.”<sup>54</sup> Open Theists, though they may claim they disagree with Process Theism, when taken to the logical extremes, still pose the same problems that Process Theists have, i.e. that God has no knowledge of humanity and that His will has the possibility of not coming to fruition.

### **Problem of Divine Self-Limitation**

In order to change the view of Traditional (i.e. Classical) Theists, but avoid falling into the trap of Process Theism (that God’s will may not come to fruition), Open Theists must assert that God is unlimited in His nature (omnipotent) but through an act of will, freely limits Himself in respect to what He knows (omniscience) when He created the world. Open Theists claim that when God created the actual world he put stipulations on what is possible to be known. Some may object to this by saying that God does not limit himself, but the future is simply “unknowable.” To this question though, one would have to answer if there is a possible world in which future human decisions are “knowable.” If there is such a possible world, then God did limit himself in the actual world, for it is possible that He could have created the actual world

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<sup>54</sup> Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 23.

with an exhaustive foreknowledge. This is called limited foreknowledge in that there are truths of the universe that God has limited Himself from knowing, as God does this out of His own omnipotence. Here emerges the first argument against Open Theism—God’s self-limitation, in respect to knowledge, is incoherent.

God’s self-limitation, when taken in respect to His knowledge, is incoherent because of the generally accepted premise that God is a maximally great being and that by limiting Himself in this manner He is no longer that maximally great being and no longer God. The Open Theist questions the premise that a limitation on God makes him not a maximally great being. In fact, every branch of theism has some sort of self-limiting factor of God. The common example of “Can God make a rock too big for him to lift,” is expressed to prove this point.

There is a misunderstanding of the word possibility, though, in this situation. For Open Theists to say that God’s knowledge of the future is impossible means that it is impossible in all possible worlds, which is not true. It is possible for God to create a world in which the future is exhaustive, for as Gregory Boyd points out, “The issue is not about God’s knowledge at all. Everyone agrees He knows reality perfectly.”<sup>55</sup> There is a possible reality in which God knows the future exhaustively then, thus, God’s self-limitation is no longer an impossibility, but a true limitation. An impossibility that would truly be impossible would be something along the lines of “God cannot die.” This is a limitation that can be applied to every possible world, not just the actual.

Another question may be about the Trinity involving the Son. The Son became human; is that not a limitation? This is a question about reality, for God could have chosen another way to fix a possible world of sin. The error in this argument comes with the Trinity though. Even

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<sup>55</sup> Boyd, *God of the Possible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000) 34.

though the Son became limited, the essence of God, or Triune God, never became limited. When talking about Open Theism, the question is whether the essence of God is limited, not just a person.

Another objection raised to this argument is that the phrase “self-limitation” is not accurate, as God makes himself greater through Open Theism, not limited. The argument proceeds that though God may have limited his foreknowledge, He becomes greater in His infinite wisdom.<sup>56</sup> Gregory Body uses the analogy of chess players. He says that a novice chess player can predict an opponent’s move up to three or four times ahead; a master can predict up to 30 moves; God, being the maximally great “chess player” can predict every move through His infinite wisdom. The problem with this analogy and definition of God’s wisdom is the word infinite. If God’s wisdom is infinite, in that it has no bounds, then could not God logically reduce every possible option to a 100% certainty that that action will occur? This would mean that God would have exhaustive foreknowledge over the future because, in His infinite wisdom, God deduced the possible actions down to a complete certainty, in essence becoming the God of simple foreknowledge.

An objection to this would be that Open Theism does not dictate that infinite knowledge requires that God’s knowledge reduce every possible option to 100% certainty, but very close to it, say 99%. The rebuttal to this would be that in order to say so, an Open Theist would have to give up the term “infinite” in reference to God’s knowledge of the present. For if God’s knowledge is truly infinite, then it has no bounds, not even reality. Since God’s knowledge would then extend beyond reality then Boyd’s remarks that the argument is about reality would thus be rendered useless for God’s knowledge by definition would extend beyond reality.

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<sup>56</sup> As Open Theists claim the future is only partly Open.

Another option would be to claim that God is not a maximally perfect being, but a quasi-maximally perfect being. The only part of His being that is not perfect would be His knowledge. The problem with this, though, as expressed by William Lane Craig, is that if it is possible that a maximally great necessary being exists, then that being exists (i.e. the ontological argument). A quasi-maximally great being would then have to be independent of the maximally great being which is impossible because the maximally great being is omnipotent. The Open Theist may deny that the maximally great being exists, but as stated previously, since there is a possible world in which God has exhaustive foreknowledge, then there is a possible world where God is fully maximally great and necessary, and since there is one possible world where this being exists, this being exists in all possible worlds.

### **God's Knowledge of the Present**

The basic formal argument that Open Theists expound against the exhaustive foreknowledge of God, as proposed by William Hasker, is as follows:

- “(A1) Necessarily, God has always believed that Clarence will have a cheese omelet tomorrow morning. (Premise: the necessity of the past)
- (A2) Necessarily, if God has always believed that a certain thing will happen, then that thing will happen. (Premise: Divine infallibility)
- (A3) Therefore, necessarily, Clarence will have a cheese omelet tomorrow.”<sup>57</sup>

By making this argument, Hasker and Open Theists affirm that God's foreknowledge is infallible, so the definition of omniscience mirrors that which was proposed by Plantinga in response to Grim—omniscience is the maximal perfection with respect to knowledge. Where the difference comes in is in the term “maximal.” Open Theists claim that God's knowledge of the future is out of His possibility since He limited himself when He created the world. God only

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<sup>57</sup> Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 66.

knows present knowledge—“everything that is (or has been) actual and to what follows deterministically from it.”<sup>58</sup>

However, for God to be restricted to present knowledge, He must exist inside of space and time and affirm an A-Theory of time, which states that only the present exists, and neither the past nor the future do. Thus, God’s knowledge is limited to the direct present moment. On the other hand, if a B-Theory of time<sup>59</sup> is true, Open Theism is impossible. However, this thesis is not to argue between which time is coherent, but whether Open Theism is valid regardless of time. Thus, for the sake of argument, assuming that A-Theory of time is true, Open Theism can be plausible to that regard, for all Open Theists conclude that God must be in time.

There are some problems with the first argument (A1 above), though, in terms of the difference between essential necessity and accidental necessity. The difference between the two properties comes in modal terms—“an *essential property of an object* is a property that it must have, while an *accidental property of an object* is one that it happens to have but that it could lack.”<sup>60</sup> The property that “Clarence will have a cheese omelet” is not absolutely necessary. For instance, it is false that “in every possible world in which God is infallibly omniscient, God believes that Clarence will have a cheese omelet tomorrow morning.”<sup>61</sup> Consider a possible world

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<sup>58</sup> Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism A Philosophical Assessment*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 39.

<sup>59</sup> The belief that all time exists, which follows that God, or at least the transcendent essence of God exists outside of space and time.

<sup>60</sup> Teresa Robertson and Philip Atkins, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, summer 2016 edition, s.vv. “Essential vs. Accidental Properties,” accessed September 27, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/essential-accidental/>.

<sup>61</sup> Arbour, “When does God Learn? Open Theism, simultaneous Causation, and Divine Knowledge of the Present,” Academia, accessed September 24, 2016, [http://www.academia.edu/7871747/When\\_Does\\_God\\_Learn\\_Open\\_Theism\\_Simultaneous\\_Causation\\_and\\_Divine\\_Knowledge\\_of\\_the\\_Present](http://www.academia.edu/7871747/When_Does_God_Learn_Open_Theism_Simultaneous_Causation_and_Divine_Knowledge_of_the_Present).



in which Clarence does not exist, then it is not necessary that God always believe that Clarence will have a cheese omelet tomorrow, and thus, (A1) is false.

Hasker recognizes this problem and gives a second argument:

- “(B1) It is now true that Clarence will have a cheese omelet for breakfast tomorrow. (Premise)
- (B2) It is impossible that God should at any time believe what is false, or fail to believe anything that is true. (Premise: Divine omniscience)
- (B3) Therefore, God has always believed that Clarence will have a cheese omelet for breakfast tomorrow. (From 1,2)
- (B4) If God has always believed a certain thing, it is not in anyone’s power to bring it about that God has not always believed that thing. (Premise: the inalterability of the past)
- (B5) Therefore, it is not in Clarence’s power to bring it about that God has not always believed that he would have a cheese omelet for breakfast. (From 3,4)
- (B6) It is not possible for it to be true both that God has always believed that Clarence would have a cheese omelet for breakfast, and that he does not in fact have one. (From 2)
- (B7) Therefore, it is not in Clarence’s power to refrain from having a cheese omelet for breakfast tomorrow. (From 5,6) So Clarence’s eating the omelet tomorrow is not an act of free choice.”<sup>62</sup>

This is in essence the same consequentialist argument as described by Van Inwagen earlier. Thus, Open Theists reject Divine foreknowledge in favor of Libertarian Free Will. This argument seems valid enough, until one applies this to the present:

- “(B1\*) It is now true that Clarence is presently eating a cheese omelet for breakfast, and Clarence does so freely. (Premise)
- (B2\*) It is impossible that God should at any time, including the present, believe what is false, or fail to believe anything that is true. (Premise: Divine omniscience)
- (B3\*) Therefore, God presently believes that Clarence is presently eating a cheese omelet (freely) for breakfast. (From 1,2)
- (B4\*) If God believes a certain thing, it is not in anyone’s power to bring it about that God does not believe that thing. (Premise: the inalterability of

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<sup>62</sup>Arbour, “When does God Learn? Open Theism, simultaneous Causation, and Divine Knowledge of the Present,” Academia, accessed September 24, 2016, [http://www.academia.edu/7871747/When\\_Does\\_God\\_Learn\\_Open\\_Theism\\_Simultaneous\\_Causation\\_and\\_Divine\\_Knowledge\\_of\\_the\\_Present](http://www.academia.edu/7871747/When_Does_God_Learn_Open_Theism_Simultaneous_Causation_and_Divine_Knowledge_of_the_Present).

the present, for surely the present lies on the side of the past with respect to temporal asymmetry)

- (B5\*) Therefore, it is not in Clarence's power to bring it about that God presently believes that Clarence is not presently eating a cheese omelet (freely) for breakfast. (From 3,4)
- (B6\*) It is not possible for it to be true both that God believes that Clarence is presently eating a cheese omelet for breakfast, and that Clarence is not, in fact, presently eating a cheese omelet (freely) for breakfast. (From 2)
- (B7\*) Therefore, it is not in Clarence's power to refrain from presently eating a cheese omelet (freely) for breakfast. (From 5,6) So Clarence's present act of eating the omelet for breakfast is not an act of free choice."<sup>63</sup>

It appears Clarence is not free to refrain from eating his omelet at either the future or the present; it does not matter when God knows it, for God, according to Open Theism, cannot know future contingents, or in light of this one, present contingents either. In order for the accountability of actions to still be the responsibility of the person, one must be free to do an action at the present. Once the present arrives, it is accidentally necessary and fixed.

Recall the definition of Libertarian Free Will, though. In order for it to be true, one would have to deny that only the present exists so N cannot possibly be free to do A at t2. Divine omniscience in that God's knowledge is perfect and presentism seems to be in peril with this revelation.

### **Simultaneous Causation**

The only other option available to possibly uphold Open Theism is that of simultaneous causation, as this would allow God to know the present instantaneously, but this poses many problems to the Open view. The law of causation is defined such that every change in nature is produced by some cause. So simultaneous causation means that some cause and effect is happening simultaneously. The most popular argument for this comes from Immanuel Kant. He

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<sup>63</sup> Arbour, "When does God Learn? Open Theism, simultaneous Causation, and Divine Knowledge of the Present," Academia, accessed September 24, 2016, [http://www.academia.edu/7871747/When\\_Does\\_God\\_Learn\\_Open\\_Theism\\_Simultaneous\\_Causation\\_and\\_Divine\\_Knowledge\\_of\\_the\\_Present](http://www.academia.edu/7871747/When_Does_God_Learn_Open_Theism_Simultaneous_Causation_and_Divine_Knowledge_of_the_Present).

imagined a ball resting on a pillow. The impression of the ball on the surface of the pillow is a simultaneous cause and effect according to Kant. However, it is common knowledge that the ball must be dropped onto the pillow first, and as the ball drops, the impression in the pillow deepens. So the cause does precede its effect in Kant's example. Many theists use the idea of simultaneous causation in order to save the Kalam Cosmological Argument.<sup>64</sup>

Open Theists are torn about the idea of simultaneous causation. Some, like Richard Swineburne in his work *The Coherence of Theism*, argues for limited foreknowledge, yet in his work *The Christian God*, denies simultaneous causation. Swineburne argues for himself best:

“Causation in a circle is not logically possible. If A causes B, B cannot cause A (or cause anything which by a larger circle causes A). For what causes what is logically contingent—‘anything can produce anything’, wrote Hume. Let us put the point in this way: a sufficiently powerful being could, it is logically possible, alter the laws of nature in such a way that some event had, instead of its normal effect at a certain time, one incompatible with that normal effect. So if causation in a circle were logically possible and A caused B and B caused A, a sufficiently powerful being at the moment of B’s occurrence could have altered the laws of nature so that B caused not-A; in which case A would have (indirectly) caused A not to occur—which is absurd. So since manifestly the future is causally affectible, the past is not. It follows that backward causation is impossible—causes cannot be later than their effects. It follows too that simultaneous causation is impossible. For if simultaneous causation were possible, and A caused B simultaneously, and B caused A simultaneously, then, by Hume’s principle cited earlier, it would be logically possible that B could have had, instead of its normal effect, not-A. That logically impossible conjunction of causal sequences is, given Hume’s principle, only rendered impossible if we suppose simultaneous causation itself to be impossible. Hence, given that causes and effects are events which last for periods of time, any effect (which has a beginning) must begin at an instant later than its cause begins; and any effect (which has an end) must end at an instant later than its cause ends.”<sup>65</sup>

Swineburne equates simultaneous causation with backwards causation, which if it is true, means that counterfactual power over the past is coherent. Given this, it would seem that

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<sup>64</sup> See Ethan Walker’s thesis on Time and the Kalam Cosmological Argument.

<sup>65</sup> Richard Swineburne, *The Christian God*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 82.

Ockhamism or Molinism is a successful response to the problem of Divine foreknowledge, and thus, Open Theism would be rendered unnecessary.

The obvious rebuttal to this is that God has the ability to do what humans cannot and that simultaneous causation occurs divinely. In that, simultaneously as a human performs an action, God learns of this action because of His infinite wisdom is not limited by physical measures such as time. This does not answer the question as to how human beings who are metaphysically smaller beings can be the “determining cause of any simultaneous decisions.”<sup>66</sup> Remember that God has no possible way of knowing the present, for the present, once it comes, lies on the side of the past—it is necessary. The present cannot be changed, and every decision that a human make requires some time for deliberation, regardless of how small this time is, such as reactions. Swineburne and most people hold that a change requires the passage of time, and in Open Theism, God learns, so a change is made. Open Theism, according to Clark Pinnock, claims that God is immutable (unchanging) in His essence and trustworthiness, but not in other respects. This contrasts Classical Theism in that God is immutable in all properties relating to the Triune God.<sup>67</sup> So, according to Open Theism, if God is to react and change for every human decision He learns of, then this change requires the passage of time, given Open Theism adherence to divine temporality.

William Hasker, on the other hand, identifies the problem that Swineburne has and gives another reason as to why it is possible based upon Kant’s hypothetical situation:

“There are two objects, A and B. A is able to exert some sort of causal power on B, bringing about some unspecified change in B. A has two relevant states: causing, when it is exercising the causal power in question, and not-causing,

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<sup>66</sup> Arbour, “When does God Learn? Open Theism, simultaneous Causation, and Divine Knowledge of the Present,” Academia, accessed September 24, 2016, [http://www.academia.edu/7871747/When\\_Does\\_God\\_Learn\\_Open\\_Theism\\_Simultaneous\\_Causation\\_and\\_Divine\\_Knowledge\\_of\\_the\\_Present](http://www.academia.edu/7871747/When_Does_God_Learn_Open_Theism_Simultaneous_Causation_and_Divine_Knowledge_of_the_Present).

<sup>67</sup> The Son obviously experiences change in His form as He does become human.

when it is not. B also has two relevant states: allowing, the state in which it allows A to exercise power on B, and preventing, which prevents A from exercising such power. Now, suppose B is in allowing, and A goes into the state causing. Then all goes smoothly, and A produces the appropriate changes in B. On the other hand, if B is in preventing, A cannot go into causing, and A produces no change in B. Now, suppose causation is instantaneous. B is in allowing, and A goes into causing at *t*. But the instantaneous effect of this is that B goes into preventing, again at *t*, and A exerts no causal power on B. So A, by exerting causal power on B, causes it to be the case that A never exerts any causal power on B. Call this the self-negating causation sequence (hereafter SNC). SNC is obviously impossible. But the only way to forestall it, according to Swinburne, is to deny the possibility of instantaneous causation. I reply, SNC can be blocked without denying instantaneous causation. The problem with SNC is that B is said to go into preventing at *t*, the very time at which A's causal action begins. But this means that there is no interval of time subsequent to *t* during which A's causal action can occur. And since before *t* A is in not-causing, there is no interval at all during which A is in causing. But Swinburne would agree that there is no sense to the idea of a causal action which occurs at a single point in time but neither before nor after that point. So the description of SNC is incoherent: to restore coherence, we must suppose that B goes into preventing at some time after *t*, and the paradox disappears. SNC requires B to be in allowing at *t*, so as to enable A to be in causing at *t*. But it also requires B to be in preventing at *t*, so as to prevent A from causing B to change. But a scenario that requires B to be in two contradictory states simultaneously is obviously out of the question, and creates no problems for instantaneous causation as such.”<sup>68</sup>

So, under the assumption that simultaneous causation is possible, then humans must be able to change what has become necessary, the present, to be something that it is not. In other words, a being at the exact same moment must be able to choose to do some action and refrain from doing that action, which is illogical if the present is necessary in that the present consists of the smallest time slice possible. Since God must know whether a proposition is either true or false, and either proposition in the instant at the present can be either true or false,<sup>69</sup> then whatever God believes is wrong. He is no longer omniscient, for His knowledge is no longer infallible. God is no longer maximally great, which would mean He is not God.

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<sup>68</sup> Hasker, *God Time and Knowledge*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 138.

<sup>69</sup> Or true and false simultaneously.

### **Conclusion**

Based upon these considerations, the idea of Open Theism does not stand up to philosophical scrutiny. Through the coherent definition of omniscience and flaws in arguments made by Open Theists, those who believe in it must either reinterpret their belief to come even closer to a version of Process Theism or abandon their viewpoint altogether. In the next semester, given that many theists put biblical evidence prior to that of logic, the evidence given by Open Theists as to the God who risks will be put under strict scrutiny and a scriptural conclusion will be reached accordingly.

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