



God's Foreknowledge – A Philosophical Investigation

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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## Abstract

Traditionally, God is considered to have four primary characteristics: Omnipotence (all-powerful), Omnipresence (everywhere at once), Omnibenevolence (all-loving) and Omniscience (all-knowing). God's foreknowledge is a subset of God's Omniscience and refers to his knowledge of the future. Many authors have discussed this idea and the philosophical soundness of the concept. They include St. Augustine, John Calvin, David Hunt, Luis de Molina and Gregory Boyd. From these writings, four positions have emerged: the Augustinian-Calvinist position, Simple-Foreknowledge, Molinism (Middle-knowledge) and Open Theism.

In my paper, I introduce these philosophical concepts; to evaluate and comment on their successes, failures and religious implications. These implications are essential for those who believe God does have Omniscience as they impact the fundamental beliefs held by Christians. I conclude that these beliefs are affected and can be contradicted by the beliefs of the faithful. For example, is God free to reject His knowledge like agents can, or must He abide it? Agents can discard the knowledge of, for example, experts, politicians and so forth to pursue what they deem desirable. If this is the case (that God can deny His knowledge to pursue what He wants), then when (or what) can God reject?

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## Introduction

The Christian God is said to have many characteristics. One of these is Omniscience. Traditionally, Omniscience is the concept that God has complete knowledge of the future, past and present. The word comes from the Latin *omnis* (all) and *scire* (to know). The Philosophy of Religion Dictionary defines Omniscience as,

‘In traditional theology the attribute of omniscience includes completely detailed knowledge of the future as well as knowledge of the past and present... [neoclassical] omniscience includes detailed knowledge of the past and present, but not of the future, since the future does not exist, is not yet made up, and hence is not there to be known.’<sup>1</sup>

The first part of this definition encompasses the traditional theological definition of Omniscience. This view of Omniscience is a literal interpretation; God knows all there is to know, including the future. God’s knowledge of the future is called Foreknowledge. It is defined as, ‘[t]he doctrine that God has knowledge of the future by virtue of His eternity, all events being present to Him in *totum simul* [everything at the same time].’<sup>2</sup>

Biblical texts concerning the Divine plan and prophecies bring up interesting philosophical questions regarding the rational nature of both of these in relation to God’s Omniscience and subsequent Foreknowledge. These questions include: Can God know the future if the future has no truth value? Is there just one potential future that God has dictated, or are there several possible branches? If there are several branches of the future, does God dictate which path is taken at the right moment or does human free will prescribe which course is taken? Many of these questions will be evaluated in this paper with the intention to philosophically scrutinise them and comment upon whether these potential solutions are ultimately successful.

There are three main philosophical positions discussing the questions above, and the true nature of God’s Foreknowledge. These are the Augustinian-Calvinist view, Molinism and Open Theism.

Firstly, the Augustinian-Calvinist view<sup>3</sup>. Those who subscribe to this view hold a literal interpretation of God’s Omniscience. The traditional interpretation suggests that God knows every action taken. Therefore, this position suggests God is the author of everything, the things God is aware of are bound to happen. Consequently, it seems unlikely that humans have libertarian free will. However, not all authors accept this assumption, they suggest that God can still possess Omniscience (as

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<sup>1</sup> W.L. Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion Eastern and Western Thought* (Sussex: Humanities Press, 1980), p.400.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.176.

<sup>3</sup> Also referred to as the Reformed View.

traditionally interpreted) whilst allowing agents free will. For example, Thomas V. Morris makes a valid observation, '[a] teacher can be in control of a classroom without herself causing every move the student make[s]'<sup>4</sup>. Authors partaking in this discourse argue that God can have complete knowledge of the past, present, and future whilst not impeding agents' free will.

The second philosophical position is Molinism. This viewpoint has attempted to resolve the issue of predestination and the lack of free will. Jesuit priest Luis de Molina<sup>5</sup> conceived this position and further developments have led to Molinism. As with the Augustinian-Calvinist view, Molinism employs a literal interpretation of God's Omniscience but unlike the former view, Molinism tries to resolve the apparent contradiction between God's Omniscience and human free will. It does this by arguing that God knows how free agents would behave in all possible circumstances, which He does by His knowledge of counterfactuals. Counterfactual statements are conditional statements made in the subjective mood. Examples of this could be: "if I were a football player I would play for Chelsea Football Club"; "if I were hungry I would eat a pizza" or "if I were rich I would buy Chelsea Football Club". These are counterfactual because they require consequent clauses, statements that are contrary to fact. I am not a football player, hungry or rich, therefore all the declarations are currently false. However, they have or had the potential to be true. It is this potential that God knows. If situation X were to occur, God would know what action I would take. In any potential situation, God would know what action X would do (therefore demonstrating total Foreknowledge of the future). Thus, both Augustinian-Calvinism and Molinism believe that God decides what occurs throughout time but differ because the former states that God achieves this by creating things and then causing those things to act in specific ways. Molinism differs from this by stating that God knowing which possible things would act in a certain way and then specifically creating those things.

The Third philosophical position is Open Theism. Unlike the previous two positions, Open Theism subscribes to the second part of the definition and is described as a neoclassical view of Omniscience. This view maintains God cannot foreknow the future because the future does not exist. Accordingly, God is still Omniscient (as He has exhaustive knowledge of all possible things) but he *cannot* know the future because it does not exist yet. Complete knowledge of the present and past is known to God but the future is impossible even for God to know. God cannot know impossible things or calculations such as  $2 + 2 = 6$  or the existence of a square circle. These things are impossible to know even to a being who possesses Omniscience. Authors who subscribe to this view

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea Of God An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Vancouver: Regent Collage Publishing, 2002), p.90)

<sup>5</sup> Luis de Molina position can be found at: Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, ed. by Alfred J. Freddoso (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988).

include J. R. Lucas<sup>6</sup>, Dale Tuggy<sup>7</sup>, Gregory Boyd<sup>8</sup> and William Hasker<sup>9</sup>. Although these individuals believe that the future does not exhaustively exist, they have different philosophical reasoning for thinking so. J. R. Lucas and Dale Tuggy support Non-Bivalent Omniscience and Gregory Boyd supports Bivalent Omniscience<sup>10</sup> whilst William Hasker endorses Involuntary Nescience. The following philosophical positions are subsets of Open-Theism.

Non-Bivalent Omniscience holds the view that the future does not exist when compared to the present and past. The future cannot be compared to the past and present because the present and past are fixed. They cannot be changed or altered. If asked what I am currently (presently) doing, I would respond that I am typing this paper. If I were asked what I was doing at six o'clock yesterday evening (the past), I would state that I was eating dinner with two other individuals. God would know that I am typing this paper or that I had dinner at six o'clock yesterday evening because I am presently doing this, or that I had already completed these actions. God knows all that is present and past. These things are fixed, and they cannot be changed or altered. The future, however, is different. Unlike the present or past the future is not settled. Instead, it only consists of trends and possibility. When discussing the future one can only discuss possibilities as the future is always in flux. If asked which British party will win the next general election a prediction or guess can be made but nothing can be stated as settled fact. These predictions will be made using information gathered from the past and present but to state that X party *will* win is impossible as the future election has not taken place yet. Not even God knows who will win because the future in which an election takes place does not yet exist. God can make a prediction (probably an accurate prediction as He currently knows the present and past) but he can only make a prediction, nothing else.

Bivalent Omniscience, by contrast, states the future is open whilst trying not to violate the principle of Bivalence. It does this by arguing the improbability of God knowing *Would*-counterfactuals and instead knowing *Might*-counterfactuals. The acceptance of *Would*-counterfactuals decree libertarian free will to be false, as God *would* know what individuals *will* do in X situation. X *cannot* do other than what they would do. *Might*-counterfactuals, on the other hand, would allow libertarian freedom because God *might* know what individuals will do in X situation. Returning to the question

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<sup>6</sup> J. R. Lucas, Foreknowledge and the Vulnerability of God, in *The Philosophy in Christianity*, ed. by Godfrey Vesey (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1989) and J.R. Lucas, *The Future* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Dale Tuggy, "Three Roads to Open Theism", *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007): 28-51 <DOI: 10.5840/faithphil200724135>.

<sup>8</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, David Hunt, William Lane Craig and Paul Helm, ed. by James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, *Divine Foreknowledge Four Views* (Illinois: IVP Academic Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> These terminologies are from Graham C. Floyd, *Omniscience, Foreknowledge, and the Problem of Divine Freedom* (Dallas: Fontes Press, 2019). I will be using his terms throughout the rest of the paper.

regarding which British party will win the next election, God would answer that X might win the election because of Y, Z or Q reason. However, one candidate might do something of their own free will and change the possibility that X candidate will win. The future is open to different possibilities, but God knows each of the different *Might*-counterfactuals.

In contrast to this, Involuntary Nescience is the view that it is illogical for both God and humans to have libertarian free will whilst God possesses Foreknowledge. For Divine Foreknowledge to exist, it must be presupposed that God knows future truths. If this is the case, then libertarian free will cannot exist, as He knows all future truths that will occur. For both God and humans to have libertarian free will the, rejection of Foreknowledge is required. Free will is fundamental to Christian belief; therefore, Foreknowledge must be abandoned for free will to exist. There are reasons why God decided to reject Foreknowledge and instead allow libertarian freedom. According to Involuntary Nescience, God created an open world because it is deemed to be more desirable than a controlled one. God wants his creation to be free so that they may create their path within the world God has created for them. It would seem strange for God to create humanity only for him to control and know every aspect of their lives. It seems more appropriate that God would not have Foreknowledge.

Some philosophers and theologians will reject the concept that the “future does not exist” and instead insist that God *did* know the future before creation but *voluntarily* removed this knowledge. One of those who supports this view is Richard Swinburne<sup>11</sup>. He subscribes to a position called Voluntary Nescience. Swinburne’s argument suggests that God purposely limited his Foreknowledge to give both agents and Himself freedom. To avoid some of the problems associated with the Augustinian-Calvinist position, Swinburne argues that God *chose* not to foreknow the future, as otherwise the divine would know the future. If God forgot the future or does not know the future, then both of these actions were voluntary for Him. If God currently does not know the future, it is because He voluntarily gave up this knowledge; He had the freedom to remove it. At one point God did possess the ability to know the future but gave it up because He believed it would be better for both humans and Himself to have an open future as this allows both Him and ourselves more freedom. Swinburne does not go into details about how God voluntarily gave up this knowledge; he only argues that this happened because it was deemed preferable for both God and agents.

Each of the three philosophical positions included Biblical texts, which they say support their argument. For example, the Augustinian-Calvinist view would propose passages suggesting that God

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<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that Swinburne does not hold this position anymore and his position can only be found in the first edition of Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 1977).



has a Divine plan that cannot be altered. These passages indicate that human free will is an illusion and every action is subject to God's cause. These passages often include words like Divine plan, Foreknowledge, the will of God, it was destined, beginning and end, God's will and so on. Texts such as Acts 2:12, Jeremiah 18 and Isaiah 46:10. In contrast, Open Theism refers to passages suggesting that God does not know the future and seems puzzled or confused. These texts indicate that free will is real and humans possess it. Writings such as Matthew 7:7, Matthew 19:8 and 1 Samuel 15:11-35. Molinism also appeals to Biblical passages supporting its philosophical position. Unlike the other viewpoints, with Molinism it is difficult to demonstrate that God has three types of Foreknowledge. Therefore, those who support to the Molinist position often site Luke 22:54-62 as an example of God's Middle-Knowledge. Jesus can state that Peter will reject him three times because he knows that Peter to whom he refers. He knows that if a different Peter was asked about Jesus, the response the results might be totally different.

Each of the three philosophical positions discusses Foreknowledge's relation to human free will. Each position states either that God's Foreknowledge and human freedom are incompatible or compatible. However, another problem inherent within Christian doctrine is the belief that God has free will. This concept is significant for and important to Christians. Christians refer to Biblical texts, which imply that God has free will (changing his mind, shifting from his plans and so forth). For example, 1 Samuel 15:11-35 suggests God could have changed his mind as He reflected upon the decision to make Saul King. Also, Matthew 19:8 states that divorce was (at one point) unacceptable but that the moral significance changed subsequently. These Biblical texts indicate that God has free will, interacts, and can bend his Divine plan.

Questions concerning God's Divine plan include: Is God's Divine plan unchangeable, even by its maker? Is God's Divine plan flexible so He can change it in accordance with the action of free agents, or has it been set in stone since the creation of the cosmos? Are prophecies likewise set in stone according to God's plan, or are they flexible? Are prophecies created or realised, are they desires or absolute decrees?

For the three philosophical positions to be considered truly 'successful' solutions to issues regarding Foreknowledge, it is necessary to note that this does not just depend upon the rationality of the philosophy involved but also on the philosophical relation to the Christian faith, specifically the faithful's relation to doctrine, teachings and text. A philosophical proposition might be rational and sound, but if it conflicts with fundamentals of the Christian faith, then Christians will not accept it. It

is also important to recognise that the author of this paper is not a Christian<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, this means that many of the philosophical solutions that Christians will reject will be considered acceptable by this author. The purpose of the paper is to evaluate whether these philosophical solutions can successfully co-exist with the fundamentals of the Christian faith. If they cannot, then a compromise must occur; either aspects of the Christian faith must be abandoned (which Christians will not do in fear of corrupting or misunderstanding their faith) or the solution must be rejected. Either way, a significant problem arises for those who describe themselves as Christians, who wish for their philosophical evaluation of Foreknowledge to be sound and to co-exist with their Christian beliefs.

This paper will be structured as follows: part one will be an investigation into the different philosophical positions regarding Foreknowledge, starting with Open Theism and finishing with the Augustinian-Calvinist view. This part will scrutinise each philosophical position individually, analysing their potential successes and failures in relation to Biblical texts and rationality. This part will emphasise each philosophical position regarding the free will of agents and discuss whether any of them are ultimately successful.

Before the evaluation into the three philosophical positions can begin, an investigation into what exactly Omniscience is must be established. As stated in the introduction, Omniscience is defined as, ‘...completely detailed knowledge of the future as well as knowledge of the past and present... [neoclassical] Omniscience includes detailed knowledge of the past and present, but not of the future...’<sup>13</sup>. This definition, however, leaves a lot to be desired and does not fully encompass the full complexity of the characteristic.

Many Theologians and Philosophers have indicated that God’s knowledge is, firstly, much greater than that of humans, and humans cannot ever achieve Omniscience. Secondly, God knows about agents (both in general and specifics). Finally, God’s knowledge is perfect. It encompasses all of reality and everything it is *possible* to know<sup>14</sup>. These medieval authors (writing in Latin) developed God’s knowledge into two types of knowledge: *De Dicto* (concerning a proposition) and *De Re* (of a thing). *De Dicto* involves knowledge such as 3+3=6; Mars is the third planet from the sun, triangles

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<sup>12</sup> The author of this paper is a self-described Agnostic or “Friendly Atheist” in the mould of William L. Rowe. For a description of Friendly Atheism see William L. Rowe, “Friendly Atheism Revisited.” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 68, no. 1/3 (2010): 7-13 (Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40981205>) [Accessed October 28, 2020].

<sup>13</sup> Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy*, p.400.

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that not all philosophers and theologians believe that God knows every mundane fact. For example, Jerome rejects this notion in his commentary on Habakkuk. Available at: St. Jerome, “St. Jerome on Habakkuk - Latin” Patristic Bible Commentary (Available at: <https://sites.google.com/site/aquinasstudybible/home/habakhuk/st-jerome-on-habakkuk--latin>) [Accessed July 7<sup>th</sup> 2022]

*Commentaries on the Twelve Prophets* (Wisconsin: InterVarsity Press, 2016)

having three sides and so forth<sup>15</sup>. *De Re* knowledge on the other hand, concerns what God knows by acquaintance. For example, God knows that this beer bottle is green, my coat black or that I hit a 180 whilst playing against my friend at darts. God knows this information because of his association with the temporal universe. For simplicity, *De Dicto* knowledge concerns what God directly knows about a thing or object. Whilst alternatively, *De Re* knowledge establishes knowledge about a particular thing or object because of His acquaintance to that thing or object.

When Christians declare that God is Omniscient, they are making a necessarily true proposition; under no circumstance is this false. Consider the proposition “bachelors are unmarried men”. The proposition expresses a truth or necessity in the sense that it is conveying a necessary truth with respect to the circumstances of bachelorhood. It is necessarily true as, by definition, bachelors cannot be married. Therefore, the concept of bachelorhood causes “bachelors are unmarried men” to be a necessary truth. “Bachelors are unmarried men” yields *De Dicto* because it concerns a proposition. However, it does not express a *De Re* because it does not involve any particular individual or thing. Bachelors are unmarried men does not mean that bachelors are necessarily (continually, categorically, absolutely and so forth) unmarried men forever. The meaning of bachelorhood holds as long as there are unmarried men. Still, those who can be described as bachelors fluctuate.

The same cannot be said of God’s Omniscience. The proposition “God is Omniscient” is similar to “Bachelors are unmarried men”. However, it differs because the statement cannot fluctuate; it is always true and cannot be false. For Christians, God is and has always held the characteristic of Omniscience. For God to be divine, it is necessary (and essential) to possess this characteristic in order to be considered sacred in the first place. “God is Omniscient” is unlike Bachelorhood, as Bachelorhood is conditional (or accidental). Omniscience thus is not only an essential characteristic of God but a necessary property for any divine individual. Therefore, God possesses both *De Dicto* and *De Re* knowledge. *De Dicto* because it is an essential part of the proposition “God is Omniscient” and *De Re* because it applies to a particular individual.

This position is called ‘perfect being theodicy’. It states that God must possess knowledge of reality (actual and possible) within His perfect being, because He is perfect. Therefore, God must have a understanding of every truth, fact, or proposition to be considered divine in the first place. God knows all truths. However, He also has knowledge of falsehoods because of his complete knowledge. If God has complete knowledge of all reality, then He does know what is false and what is true but

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<sup>15</sup> This knowledge is similar to God’s Natural-knowledge prescribed by Molinism but unlike Molinism it only applies to propositions.

He only acts (asserts) on what is true, never what is false. For example, God knows that if a rock is dropped from twenty feet, it will fall to the floor. If X asserts that the rock will not drop, God knows that X stated a falsehood (as He has perfect knowledge of reality), but He only asserts a truth (that the rock *will* fall). God knows this because everything is first found in God's mind and then expressed in the world He has actualised. So, God has actualised a world in which when a rock is dropped at twenty feet, it will fall to the floor instead of floating, rising or remaining static. God knows what He wants to create and then forms that thing or object. God can be compared to an artist sculpting or painting different forms and matter. Before an artist creates their piece of art, it is first theoretical (as an idea) before becoming actual. The same can be said of God's knowledge. Before God actualises what He wants to create, He has a theoretical idea of what these things are and then makes what He wishes to create.

Having developed our understanding of Omniscience, let us move on to the three philosophical arguments concerning God's Foreknowledge, starting with Open-Theism. Richard Rice first coined the term Open-Theism in his book *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free will*<sup>16</sup>. Like all the philosophical positions discussed in this paper, Open-Theists use Biblical texts to support their positions, such as Matthew 19:8, Luke 7:30, John 3: 10, Genesis 3:13, cf. 6:6-7, 1 Sam 15:11-35 and Jeremiah 19:5; cf. 7:31; 32:35<sup>17</sup>.

The above passages seem to strengthen the religious underpinnings of Open-Theism. This study needs to question whether they irrefutably indicate that God does not have complete knowledge of the future. Many would argue that the passages are incorrect and that there are at least four problems relating to them. These relate to the literal interpretation applied to the text by Open-Theism. Firstly, all the passages suggested in the paper are literal interpretations of the text. Thomas V. Morris describes them as '.... a simple-minded reading of some biblical passages...'<sup>18</sup>. Although I think Morris could have used kinder language, his point stands. On a 'simple-minded reading' (what I will term a literal interpretation), it does seem as if God lacks knowledge of the future, therefore confirming the Open-Theist position. However, if a literal interpretation is taken throughout the Bible, then empirical problems quickly arise. For example, the universe was not created in the way the Bible describes<sup>19</sup>, Adam and Eve did not exist and were not created from dust and Adam. Scientific discoveries have made these assertions null and void. Alternatively, these passages could be considered symbolic or metaphorical (as empirical evidence has discredited them as actual events

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Rice, *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free Will* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> All references use the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translations.

<sup>18</sup> Morris, *Our Idea Of God*, p.85.

<sup>19</sup> For the Biblical account of creation see Genesis 1 and 2.

that occurred in reality). Open-Theists need to explain why their 'simple-minded reading' of texts suggesting God does not know the future is justified. Their view and the scientific view cannot exist simultaneously. Either the Open-Theists must explain why these passages should be taken literally or abandon or compromise their position. This must occur so that the religious underpinnings of their philosophical position maintain legitimacy. The second problem (which also relates to taking a literal interpretation of Biblical passages) regards the Biblical text Isaiah 41:21-24. In this passage, God challenges the idols to prove their divinity by revealing the future. God states that He can know and declare the future as a mark of His divinity. Open-Theists state that God does not know the future; however, this passage indicates that He does, as it is an integral part of His divinity. Should the passages proposed by the Open-Theists be read literally but Isaiah 41:21-24 not? Thirdly, a literal interpretation of certain Biblical passages implies a human (anthropomorphic) image of God. Many would argue that this portrayal of God is incorrect. God should not be anthropomorphised because God is a perfect being.

Not only are there the obvious anthropomorphisms, like God's having arms and legs, but the unconscious anthropomorphisms, such as God's "seeing" the distress of his people or "hearing" their prayer or "striking" his enemies... we have every reason to be suspicious of a literal interpretation of passages that portray God as finite or limited<sup>20</sup>

Comparison between humans and God should be limited as we cannot truly understand the greatness of God. The limited capacity of the human mind cannot truly comprehend His greatness. Therefore, an anthropomorphic picture of God should be taken cautiously<sup>21</sup>. Fourthly, the general picture portrayed in the Bible is a God who does foreknow the future<sup>22</sup>. The passages demonstrated by the Open-Theist position could be considered as a minority when compared to passages that show God does have Foreknowledge of the future, as these are far more numerous. Those who disagree with Open-Theism would argue that the overall picture the Bible portrays is not one in which God gets surprised, confused, regretful or amazed. Finally, according to Open-Theism, there is no guarantee that God will overcome evil. For Christians, it is impossible for God to lose the battle against Satan. However, on the Open-Theist perspective, can this be guaranteed? If God does not know what the future will hold, can it be said that it is inevitable that God will beat Satan?

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<sup>20</sup> William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge*, pp.57-59.

<sup>21</sup> It should be noted some Christian do believe in a very anthropomorphised picture of God, most prominently the Mormons. For the Mormon picture of God see: Joseph Smith, *the Book of Mormon. Another Testament of Jesus Christ* (Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Specific Biblical passages demonstrating God's complete foreknowledge will be provided when discussing the religious underpinnings of the Augustinian-Calvinist position.

Having discussed some religious passages the Open-Theist position propose in order to support their argument, the discussion will move on to evaluating the Open-Theist philosophical arguments. Open-Theism can be split into four distinctive subcategories: Voluntary Nescience, Involuntary Nescience, Bivalent Omniscience and Non-Bivalent Omniscience. In this paper, I will first discuss Voluntary Nescience.

### Voluntary Nescience

Richard Swinburne first proposed Voluntary Nescience (VN) in the first edition of his book *The Coherence of Theism*<sup>23</sup>. It should be noted that in later editions of this book, VN does not appear. It is therefore unclear whether Swinburne still believes in this philosophical position.

According to Swinburne, God's actions come from His intentional choices. All actions performed by agents require reasons for their undertaking. Actions performed by agents are based upon judgements which are believed to be good or worthwhile. For example, an individual who gets intoxicated believes that intoxication is a worthwhile sensation. A vegan believes veganism is good because it is beneficial for the environment. An individual who does exercise believes that this is advantageous for their body and good for their mental health. According to VN, agents never perform actions for which they have an overriding reason to practice avoidance. For example, the agent who becomes intoxicated believes it is worthwhile because they are with friends who are also getting drunk, they reason that they have no commitment the next day and so forth. However, humans have a limited capacity for reason (especially when intoxicated). They often do not comprehend the overriding reason they should refrain from doing actions that they considered good or worthwhile at the time. God does not have such a problem as it is impossible for Him to perform actions that could be regarded as irrational, as God is a perfect being. Therefore, only rational factors can influence the actions He decides to make. Unlike humans, who can be influenced by many factors, only reason can influence the decisions God decides to make. As God is also an agent, all actions and choices He makes are also based upon judgments deemed good or worthwhile but only rational factors can influence them. So according to VN it was good or worthwhile that God purposely limited his Foreknowledge because it is beneficial for both Him and for agents. God chose to limit his Foreknowledge, as this would allow both Him and humans to have freedom. If God has Foreknowledge, He will also know what the future holds, making free will (for both Him and humans) invalid.

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<sup>23</sup> Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*.

The question then turns to the relationship God has with his Foreknowledge. Unlike other Open-Theist positions, VN takes the perspective that God *voluntarily* gave up this knowledge because it was good or worthwhile for Him to do so. However, VN never investigates the nature of this voluntary action. For example, does God forget the future (He knows the future but fails to recall it)? Alternatively, did He initially not know the future, but has He developed the ability to know the future at a later date, therefore voluntarily giving up His Foreknowledge at the time He actualised creation? VN does not explicitly state how he believes God voluntarily gave up His Foreknowledge. All that matters for the VN position is that God gave up his Foreknowledge, deeming it worthwhile or good for him to do so.

As this position postulates God's rejection being voluntary, it stands to reason that God can decide whether to reinstate His Foreknowledge whenever He wishes. If the situation is deemed necessary, He can therefore also remove freedom at any time. For example, if the cosmic battle between good (God) and evil (Satan) is going badly for God, He could restore His Foreknowledge in order to win the great battle. God can guarantee a victory over evil by removing the limitation of not knowing the future but in doing so would remove free will. The future therefore is alethically settled.

Having established Voluntary Nescience's philosophical basis, it is useful to consider the potential weaknesses related to VN. There are potentially three of these. Firstly, forgetting or blocking knowledge of future truths does not undo them<sup>24</sup>. According to VN, God voluntarily gave up His Foreknowledge, but this knowledge is still available if needed. If this knowledge is still there, but God has forgotten it, this does not mean that the truth has become falsehood, as God only knows the truth. It does not matter if God has blocked this knowledge of codified truths, because its value remains unalterable. For example, everybody was a baby at one point in their lives, but it is highly unlikely that a person would retain knowledge of this time. This knowledge has been forgotten, but it is still true that everyone was once a baby. The proposition "everybody was once a baby" still holds true despite the lack of memories. The agent has forgotten this knowledge, but it is still a codified truth because it is an unalterable aspect of becoming human. People who have experienced traumatic events are a good example of agents blocking the truth. This would be because the individual blocks the knowledge of the event. The event still occurred; however. Its fixity is permanent even though the agent has blocked this knowledge.

The second problem related to VN is that God and humans are both free because He has voluntarily given up his Foreknowledge. This position is untenable because even if this is the case, future actions

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<sup>24</sup> This criticism was proposed by Avery Fouts, "Divine Self-Limitation in Swinburne's Doctrine of Omniscience", *Religious Studies* 29, (1993): 21-26 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500022010>>.

are settled. This problem is related to the first weakness, as even if God has forgotten or blocked future truths, He cannot undo the fixity of these truths. As these truths are fixed, then free will is an illusion because everything is settled as fact. Irrespective of God forgetting what these truths are, they are still codified. For example, a proposition that holds a future truth value such as “Joe Biden will win the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election” is unknown to God. The proposition has a truth value (Joe Biden will or will not win the 2024 election). Its truth is still fixed. These truth values also apply to God. God did not voluntarily (freely) self-limit His Foreknowledge as VN proposes, as this action was a fixed truth. The proposition “God gave up His Foreknowledge voluntarily” is a statement made up of two truth values. Firstly, that God had Foreknowledge and secondly that He freely gave it up. The first part of the proposition is uncontroversial and stated as true. It is believed (according to VN) that God had Foreknowledge. The controversial aspect of the statement is the second truth value stated. If truth values are fixed, even if God has forgotten what these truths are, then God cannot freely give up his Foreknowledge. This is because, when God does reinstate His Foreknowledge, this was a fixed truth. There is no ambiguity and no free choice that God can make. He will or will not reinstate His Foreknowledge, because this truth has been fixed irrespective of whether He has forgotten or blocked it.

The third problem relating to VN is that many complex questions arise when considering the details of how God has either forgotten or blocked his Foreknowledge<sup>25</sup>. As stated above, VN does not go into specifics about this. The only important thing for VN is that the knowledge is forgotten or blocked. This question needs to be addressed before VN can be considered a legitimate, rational argument. The first question arising is how exactly did or does God eliminate this Foreknowledge, retaining the fact that these forgotten truths still exist. Did God formulate a world with the ability of Foreknowledge (He knew future truths) but when He actualised the world, He removed these? Therefore, He would have had exhaustive knowledge at one point, but currently lacks it. This could seem foolish or bad in retrospect. It is useful to return to the example of the individual who becomes intoxicated for clarification. This individual believed getting drunk was worthwhile at the time but may have discovered the downside of this action in hindsight. If the agent wakes up late for work, being fired as a result, the ‘worthwhileness’ of his tardiness was clearly irrational. The same could be said of God. God could believe it was worthwhile or good to remove His Foreknowledge to allow free will, but the worthwhileness of this action could be seen as irrational or reckless. For example, if God knew then forgot that I was going to murder Jim, it makes God complicit in Jim's murder. He could have stopped the event from occurring. If I had told my neighbour that I wanted to kill Jim, going

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<sup>25</sup> These questions were proposed by Richard Rice, *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free Will* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1985).



into detail about how and when this was going to happen, but my neighbour completely forgot about the conversation once he went inside his house, he would be complicit in the murder. He could have stopped the murder from taking place. Would he then be to blame? No, because he did not take part in the murder. However, he does hold some responsibility for Jim's death<sup>26</sup>. God is like my neighbour. If He did not forget what I was going to do, He could have prevented the event from happening.

The next question concerns how much knowledge God can forget. Does He forget all or only some truths? If God has forgotten all truths, is his knowledge like a blank slate, whereby He needs to relearn all truths? For example, does God need to gather the truths inherent in mathematical equations such as  $1 + 1 = 2$ , a triangle has three sides, a right angle is 90 degrees and other inherent truths related to the laws of nature such as relativity, thermodynamics, cause and effect? Suppose God does not know fixed, absolute truths. In that case, it is possible to say that when God actualised creation, he lacked *De Dicto* knowledge, an assertion that many Christians would find problematic, as many subscribe to the 'perfect being theodicy'<sup>27</sup>. If VN believes that God lacks knowledge of all truths, then if this concept is taken to its logical extreme, God is not very wise and needs to develop the understanding of every truth, even truths fundamental to the working universe. God would eventually develop the knowledge of many truths (through His association with creation). When He first actualised creation, He would even lack the knowledge of how His creation (the universe) operated. This is an absurd suggestion. This is like an engineer formatting, designing and configuring an intricate device before voluntarily forgetting every aspect of it once it was created. The engineer would learn a lot about the device by their observations, understanding many of the complex mechanisms. This knowledge would come through association rather than inherently knowing how the device operates. If God knows some truths, what are they? Are they only mathematical equations, the laws of nature and *De Dicto* propositions, or do they extend further? VN needs to establish the sphere of knowledge God has before this can be recognised as a viable, reasonable argument.

### Involuntary Nescience

The philosophical position Involuntary Nescience (IN) is similar to VN as both arguments propose that God is nescience regarding future knowledge. Both argue that God does not know the future

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<sup>26</sup> The extent to which my neighbour is to blame is not the point of this analogy. The point is that he holds *some responsibility* for the death of Jim.

<sup>27</sup> God could "discover" *De Dicto* knowledge rather than it being inherent in His character. By "discover" I do not mean reinstate. God could "discover" *De Dicto* knowledge by his observation of creation, given He has infinite time. God would gain this knowledge through association rather than having it inherently.

because this allows humans to possess free will. According to both arguments, if God knows future contingents, free will is impossible, as God knows how agents would act or respond to different situations and that the future is alethically settled.

Richard Rice notes that even though God's foreknowledge may not be the cause of what happens, it is still true that something causes this knowledge such that God can know it<sup>28</sup>. To avoid determinism that follows from God's knowledge, Rice therefore claims that God can only know that which is logically possible and because agents have free will it is not possible to know the future. As a result, it cannot be expected that God knows something that is not possible to know. God perfectly knows all that is possible to know.

However, IN is different to VN because IN believes that God did not voluntarily give up his Foreknowledge but instead believes that God never has (nor ever will) possess this knowledge. Instead, IN proposes that God cannot plan based on a priori knowledge of how agents act or respond to different situations because this knowledge does not technically exist<sup>29</sup>. Like VN, the future is alethically settled but unlike VN, it is not (and can never be) epistemically known to God.

God cannot believe what is false and can only know what is logically possible to know. God's knowledge of the future includes all possible states of affairs, the likelihood of their outcomes, and those things that will necessarily exist. God's foreknowledge of future contingents is not know with certainty, only with probability. God knows himself, His purposes, and how best to carry them out. He knows all of the past and the present. He may know that allowing natural processes to continue unimpeded will be best, or he may know that his direct intervention (such as miracles) is required. Therefore, God can determine things by making offers to agents that they cannot refuse based upon their inherent tendencies and dispositions. This determinism is not manipulative (according to IN) because the agent is acting in accord with his own tendencies and dispositions<sup>30</sup>.

IN splits God's knowledge into three sections. These are: firstly, all possible states of affairs, secondly, the most likely outcomes and finally, those things that necessarily exist independently of God. To understand these categories, consider the game of darts and a dartboard. When an agent plays darts and is left on one hundred and seventy, God knows that the agent requires two treble twenties and a bull's eye to win the leg, set or match. He knows this because that is the rule for

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<sup>28</sup> Richard Rice, *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free Will* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1985). PP.127-129

<sup>29</sup> The word "technically" here means that it is not in God's repertoire to have the a priori knowledge of how agents would react in different situation.

<sup>30</sup> For example, an agent maybe determined to eat tomorrow, but the agent has the choice of what, when, and where to eat.

winning in darts. If instead it was possible to finish on a single, double, or treble instead of just doubles or bull's eye, then God would know that instead. God knows that it is *possible* that the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC) could change the rules of darts and make the second option a possibility. He knows this because He knows *all possible states of affairs*.

The second aspect of God's knowledge concerns the most likely outcomes and, in this case, God knows that it is unlikely that the PDC will change its rules regarding winning the game because this would be likely to incite public outcry, would alter history and culture, and cause lack of interest. He knows that it is not *impossible* that the PDC could change its rule, just that it is doubtful that this would happen. God's knowledge of likelihoods also includes the probability of the agent hitting one hundred and seventy. God knows that if the agent is an established darts player (within the top ten in the world), the likelihood of hitting one hundred and seventy is relatively high compared to an agent who has never played darts before. If God were betting, He would undeniably put money on the established top ten players compared to betting on the agent who has never played darts before. God's knowledge, therefore, of future contingents is not known with certainty, only probability.

Finally, the third option concerns God's knowledge about things that necessarily exist. A dartboard is a circular object consisting of sixty-two different sections<sup>31</sup>. This information could be other (therefore being part of God's knowledge concerning possible states of affairs). The dartboard could be square in shape and consist of a different number of sections<sup>32</sup>. However, God's knowledge of shapes cannot change because the shapes necessarily exist. For example, a square is a shape consisting of four ninety-degree corners connected, a circle is 360 degrees connected, a triangle is three-sided with its angles making up 180 degrees, an octagon is an eight-sided shape and so forth. All these shapes necessarily exist because objects consist of factors that make up said shapes. There

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<sup>31</sup> The make up of a dart board is this: Single, double, treble 1, single, double, treble 2, single, double, treble 3, single, double, treble 4, single, double, treble 5, single, double, treble 6, single, double, treble 7, single, double, treble 8, single, double, treble 9, single, double, treble 10, single, double, treble 11, single, double, treble 12, single, double, treble 13, single, double, treble 14, single, double, treble 15, single, double, treble 16, single, double, treble 17, single, double, treble 18, single, double, treble 19, single, double, treble 20, 25 (outer-bull) and 50 (bulls' eye).

<sup>32</sup> In fact, Harrows Darts Technology introduced "The Quadro 240" in 1992 (ceasing production in 2000) which included a quadruple section meaning the dart board had eighty-two different sections. These include: Single, double, treble, quadruple 1, single, double, treble, quadruple 2, single, double, treble, quadruple 3, single, double, treble, quadruple 4, single, double, treble, quadruple 5, single, double, treble, quadruple 6, single, double, treble, quadruple 7, single, double, treble, quadruple 8, single, double, treble, quadruple 9, single, double, treble, quadruple 10, single, double, treble, quadruple 11, single, double, treble, quadruple 12, single, double, treble, quadruple 13, single, double, treble, quadruple 14, single, double, treble, quadruple 15, single, double, treble, quadruple 16, single, double, treble, quadruple 17, single, double, treble, quadruple 18, single, double, treble, quadruple 19, single, double, treble, quadruple 20, 25 (outer-bull) and 50 (bulls' eye).

cannot be a five-sided square, a circle of 500 degrees, a triangle where the angles make up more than 180 degrees and so forth.

Having established the remit of God's knowledge, the question arises as to why God does not possess (and can never possess) Foreknowledge. According to IN, the answer to this is that God decided to create an open world because it is more desirable than a controlled world. VN agrees that it is preferable to live in an open world compared to a controlled world. However, according to VN, God still has the power (free will) to reinstate his Foreknowledge if He deems it necessary to do so. For IN, however, God cannot reinstate his Foreknowledge because He is unable to. His lack of Foreknowledge is involuntary. It is not in God's power (free will) to have (therefore reintroduce) His Foreknowledge, even if He wishes this were possible. Why is this? According to IN, God would never attempt to undermine the open world he created. Why did God do this? Because He loved creation so much that He did not want to micromanage every detail. He maintains the ability to defeat evil without the need to reintroduce His Foreknowledge. God has the capability of defeating Satan and his demons without the need to know future contingents.

IN carries within it a significant weakness that needs addressing. Firstly, Avery Fouts' criticism against VN can also be applied to IN, although instead of VN indicating that God has blocked or forgotten future truth, IN suggests that God is unaware of future truth. However, this unawareness does not negate the fact that the truth value is settled and fixed. If this is the case, then there is no freedom for humans, as future events and actions cannot be other than what the future truth value has stated.

Secondly, a further criticism is proposed by Alan Rhoda<sup>33</sup>. IN must explain why God cannot know settled truth values occurring in the future. Future propositions cannot be unknowable (as they consist of truth values), so something else makes them impossible for God to know. What is or does this? VN argues that God can know future propositions by reinstating His Foreknowledge, however, IN proposes that this is not possible. IN needs to propose a solution for why God cannot know future propositions.

### Non-Bivalent Omniscience

The third Open Theist philosophical position that will be discussed is Non-Bivalent Omniscience (NBO). However, before this evaluation can begin, what Bivalence means must be established.

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<sup>33</sup> Alan Rhoda, "Generic Open Theism and some varieties thereof, *Religious Studies* 44 (2008), 225-234.

The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy defines Bivalence; thus, ‘...there are exactly two truth-values, true and false, and... within a certain area of discourse, every statement has exactly one of them’<sup>34</sup>. An example to demonstrate a Bivalent statement is, “Mary’s dogs are asleep”. For this statement to be true, it requires three factors to remain true: firstly, a person called Mary must exist; second, they have multiple dogs, and third, these dogs are currently asleep. All of these factors need to remain true in order for the total statement to be true. If any aspect of the above proposition is false, then the whole statement becomes false. For example, if there is someone called Mary, they have multiple dogs, but these dogs are awake, then the totality of the statement becomes false, even if some aspects of the proposition are true.

NBO argues that the principle of Bivalence only applies to propositions regarding the past and present. For example, the proposition, “Donald Trump won the 2016 U.S. Presidential election” is true because it happened in the past, therefore, its truth value is immobile. For the rest of history, it will be true that Donald Trump became the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America because he won the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. Nothing can (or will) change the truth of this fact because it happened in the past. The same is said about the present. Currently, I am typing this paper, therefore, the proposition, “the author of this paper is currently typing” is true because the author of this paper *is currently* typing (at the time of writing). If the author had been doing something else instead, then a statement about that would have been true. For example, the proposition, “the author of this paper is asleep” would be true if the author of this paper was presently sleeping. NBO, therefore, upholds the principle of Bivalence when considering past or present propositions but not when considering future propositions, because the principle does not apply to future propositions. This is because the future is non-existent. The future only consists of trends, tendencies and possibilities (compared to the past and present). Therefore, a proposition (regarding the future) cannot be either true or false because the event has not yet been actualised. Once the event is actualised, then the principle of Bivalence can be applied to the proposition, as a truth value will be applied. Consider some contemporary examples, for example that of the US 1.9 trillion-dollar rescue package and the possibility of President Joe Biden winning the 2024 U.S. Presidential election. Many economists, pundits, news organisations and others have argued that the 1 trillion-dollar infrastructure plan could cause the dollar's inflation<sup>35</sup>. Individuals who argue that

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Mauter, *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* (London: Penguin Books, 1996). p. 70

<sup>35</sup> Jeanna Smialek and Jim Tankersley, ‘The White House Says Its Plans Will Slow Inflation. The Big Question Is: When?’, *The New York Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

<<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/11/business/economy/biden-inflation.html>> [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> November 2021] or Stephen Miran, ‘The Trillion-Dollar Infrastructure Bill Will Fuel Inflation’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 8<sup>th</sup> August 2021 <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/bipartisan-infrastructure-bill-inflation-stimulus-biden-automobile-regulations-american-rescue-plan-11628447581>> [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021].

inflation will occur use a metric of different systems methods and rationale to conclude that inflation will occur in the future. However, none of the economists, pundits, news organisations or others can guarantee that inflation will occur in the future. According to NBO, the principle of Bivalence cannot be applied to the proposition, “Inflation will occur in the U.S. because of the 1.9 trillion-dollar rescue plan”, as the statement’s truth value cannot be known yet. Until such a time whereby inflation will or will not occur, the proposition will remain neutral, neither true nor false. The same can be applied to the proposition, “President Joe Biden will or will not win in re-election in 2024”. This is because agents in 2021 do not know whether President Joe Biden will or will not win re-election in 2024, so they cannot place a truth value on the proposition. Until the 2024 campaign finishes, it is impossible to know the truth value of this statement because unforeseen circumstances may intervene. For example, the USA might cease to exist, the election might be suspended, Joe Biden might die or resign and so on. Until the event either happens or does not happen, applying the principle of Bivalence to the proposition is impossible as the truth value is currently unknown, making it neither true or false, but neutral.

Having established the principle of Bivalence and NBO’s relationship with it, an investigation into the individuals who have subscribed and developed the NBO philosophical position must begin. These include John Randolph Lucas and Dale Tuggy. This paper will investigate Lucas first.

Lucas’ contribution to NBO can be found in his works *Foreknowledge and the Vulnerability of God*<sup>36</sup> and *The Future*<sup>37</sup>. In these pieces of work, Lucas develops our understanding of the term *know*. According to Lucas, the term *know* does not indicate certain knowledge but instead probable knowledge when discussing future contingents. For example, consider someone who needs to go to the shops tomorrow to buy some butter. The individual *knows* that they require butter, but until they have gone to the shop, collected the butter and paid for it, it cannot be said that the individual knows that the event (getting butter) will occur. The individual might have a partner waiting at home for them to return. This agent might respond to a question regarding the individual's whereabouts with, “they are getting butter, I *know* this because I just saw them leave”. The agent is using the term *know* as Lucas would describe its use. The agent does not know for certain that the individual has gone to collect butter, only that the individual has gone out (probably to get butter). Once the individual has returned with the butter, then it can be said that the agent was correct in their knowledge that they went out to buy butter. Until the conclusion of the event, the agent did not *know for certain* what the outcome would be. God’s knowledge is the same. He does not know for

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<sup>36</sup> J. R. Lucas, *Foreknowledge and the Vulnerability of God, The Philosophy in Christianity*, ed. Godfrey Vesey (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1989).

<sup>37</sup> J. R. Lucas, *The Future* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

certain that the individual tomorrow will buy butter, or at least not until the event is actualised. Once that has happened, then it can be said that God knows the individual has bought butter.

The second individual who has developed the NBO is Dale Tuggy in his paper *Three Roads to Open Theism*<sup>38</sup>. In the paper, Tuggy discusses the nature of time and the uses of different tenses. Tuggy argues that an open future and undefined ability to act in different directions must occur in order for free will to exist. All future possibilities are grounded in current conditions, which themselves are present fact. Future potentialities arise from present facts, which can change or be annihilated depending upon what current actions are taken. As a result, one can only discuss possible and impossible branches of possibilities, as everything is in constant flux. There is an actual world with a possible future, but it is impossible to judge what this future consists of. Any contingent state of affairs may occur. So (according to Tuggy), the concept of God actualising unilaterally a completed creation is false. There are aspects of the future that are defined but not its totality. The future still has gaps. The future, therefore, is only a partial segment with multiple gaps to be filled. Some propositions regarding the future will be true or false, but not all. Propositions about the future can be true or false only if the event indicated appears on all future branches. If the event does appear on all of these, then it can be said that the proposition is true. If it does not, then it can be said to be false. However, if the event appears on some branches but not on others, then the proposition cannot be given a truth value.

Tuggy also asserts that there are two different tenses concerning propositions about the future, simple future statements and posterior present claims. Simple future statements claim that at some future time an event will occur. For example, in three days, it will rain or tomorrow I will watch Chelsea Football Club play Manchester United. Posterior present claims that as of today, something will *definitely* occur. For example, today it will rain or at five in the afternoon I will watch Chelsea Football Club play Manchester United. Tuggy argues that posterior present claims do not reject the principle of Bivalence because these claims are false. On the other hand, simple future statements cannot be either true or false since nothing can guarantee that they will or will not occur. It is my best intention to watch Chelsea Football Club at five today, but until I am watching the game (the event is actualised), there is no guarantee that the event will occur. As a result of the future being open, any creation would not be complete, due to the actions of free agents being able to change the course of history. Therefore, any statement regarding the future cannot have the principle of Bivalence applied to it because the branches of history are constantly in flux.

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<sup>38</sup> Dale Tuggy, "Three Roads to Open Theism", *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007): 28-51 <<https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil200724135>>.

Having established NBO's position, a potential problem arises regarding the assertion that propositions about the future are neutral, neither true nor false. When a future proposition is stated, the contents of the proposition still have a correspondence with reality. Consider the previously mentioned proposition, "President Joe Biden will or will not win re-election in 2024". According to NBO, the proposition's truth value cannot be currently known because the event has not happened and therefore cannot be ascribed a truth value so is considered neutral (neither true nor false). According to NBO, until such a time (either President Joe Biden does or does not win re-election in 2024), the truth value of propositions regarding the future will not be true or false but neutral. It is this neutrality regarding future propositions that could be considered problematic. Propositions whose content concerns the future will either be true or false, not neutral if the Principle of Bivalence is accepted. It is correct that it is impossible to know the truth value of future propositions until they happen or do not happen. However, if the principle of Bivalence still applies, these proposition's truth value is not neutral but true or false. It is true presently (2021) that the proposition, "President Joe Biden will or will not win re-election in 2024" regards the future so currently cannot be ascribed a truth value if the principle of bivalence is rejected. However, the logical construction of the claim seems to imply that the proposition has a truth value. The event will either happen (Biden wins re-election) or does not happen (Biden does not win re-election). The same can be said for the proposition, "President Joe Biden will both win and not win re-election in 2024". This statement is evidently false because it involves a contradiction. Someone cannot both win and not win re-election at the same time<sup>39</sup>. The same principle applies to the proposition, "God will and will not do X". Propositions either have a correspondence relation with reality or do not. Therefore, they are either true or false, not neutral. NBO leads to irrationalities and contradictions with its rejection of bivalent propositional truth values.

### *Bivalent Omniscience*

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<sup>39</sup> For more information regarding this criticism see William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Oregon, Wipf and Stock, 1999), pp. 59-63.



The final Open-Theism philosophical position to be discussed in this paper is Bivalent Omniscience (BO). Those who have developed BO are Alan Rhoda<sup>40</sup>, Gregory Boyd<sup>41</sup> and Thomas Belt<sup>42</sup>. They (like NBO) reject the future being alethically settled. However, unlike NBO, it does not assert that this belief violates the principle of Bivalence when considering propositions whose contents concerns the future. Instead, it arrives at this position by invoking the Incompatibility Thesis. This Thesis suggests that a semantically and metaphysically settled future is irreconcilable with future contingencies. A semantically settled future implies a metaphysically (or at least causally) settled future. To understand better, consider the word *will*. This word has many uses, and the Thesis emphasises that the predictive tense can be used both *deterministically* or *indeterministically*. For example, consider the statements, “if you drop that object, it *will* fall” and “if you go outside, you *will* get cold”. The word “*will*” in the former implies certainty, whilst the latter implies possibility. Along with arguing this, these authors also argue that two types of tense logics are associated with the word *will*, the Ockhamist and Peircean.

The Ockhamist’s *will* implies that the word has no causal force at all. The word only indicates prediction that something does happen and nothing more. Therefore, the Ockhamist interpretation of the word *will* is indeterministic because it implies that the word *will* have no causal force and only indicates a prediction that something happens. By contrast, the Peircean sense of the word indicates that the causal force of *will* is maximal, meaning something *will* happen (it must causally happen). Therefore, the Peircean understanding of the word *will* is deterministic because something must happen. The former use of the word *will* denies the Incompatibility Thesis whilst the latter affirms it. This is because the Peircean *will* is incompatible with *might not* propositions (because something *will* happen), whilst the Ockhamist position implies that the word *will* is compatible with *might not* statements because the word *will* only indicates a prediction<sup>43</sup>.

Those who subscribe to BO argue that the Peircean sense of the word *will* is more suitable for standard use of language than the Ockhamist position. When people make predictions, they are

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<sup>40</sup> Alan Rhoda, “Probability, Truth, and the Openness of the Future: A Reply to Pruss,” *Faith and Philosophy* 27, 197-204 (2010) <DOI:10.5840/faithphil201027218>, Alan Rhoda, “Open Theism and Other Models of Divine Providence,” *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities*, 287-298 (2013) <[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5219-1\\_24](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5219-1_24)> and Alan Rhoda, “The Philosophical Case for Open Theism,” *Philosophia* 35, 301–311 (2007) <DOI:10.1007/s11406-007-9078-4>.

<sup>41</sup> Gregory Boyd, “Two Ancient (and Modern) Motivations for Ascribing Exhaustively Definite Foreknowledge to God: a Historic Overview and Critical Assessment,” *Religious Studies*, 46.1, 41–59. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0034412509990163>>, Gregory Boyd, “Neo-Molinism and the Infinite Intelligence of God,” *Philosophia Christi* 5, 187-204 (2003) and Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books), 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Alan Rhoda, Gregory Boyd, and Thomas Belt, “Open Theism, Omniscience, and the Nature of the Future,” *Faith and Philosophy* 23, 432-459 (2006) <DOI:10.5840/faithphil200623436>.

<sup>43</sup> It should be noted that for these authors the word *will* implies that the law of nature are deterministic.

either making a definitive or probabilistic claim, implying causal connections and possibilities. When people use *will*-statements, they often apply a truth value before the event has occurred. However, this does not mean that the proposition was true or false when it was said. But what is this belief based on? If there is no future reality to establish *will*-statement, they cannot be true (and must be false). These statements are only probable, not certain. How can future tense propositions be true or false if there is no real future state of affairs with which the proposition can correspond? The solution, according to BO, is that these statements must be grounded in present conditions. This grounding is only possible if the sufficient condition for a state of affairs already exists in the present<sup>44</sup>. Consequently, Belt, Boyd and Rhoda reject the claim that opposing propositions whose content concerns the future and whose truths are not grounded in present conditions are contradictories of each other, as are their past and present tensed counterparts. The future is not determined (relevant to the past and present). Therefore, future tensed propositions must be considered probability statements of what *might* or *might not* happen rather than what *will* or *will not* happen.

Gregory Boyd develops this concept of *might* or *might not* do rather than what the agent *would* or *will* do. He believes that it is an assumption that propositions whose content concerns the future must be contradictories. Boyd instead argues that the contradiction to “x would/will do Y at Z” is “x might not do Y at Z”. The proposition “x would/will no do a at z” is the conflicting position, leaving *might* statements as sub-contraries. Accordingly, Boyd argues that *would*-counterfactuals do not cover all counterfactuals because there are three ontological positions: *will*, *will not*, *might* or *might not*. Therefore, God also knows *might*-counterfactuals. He knows *would*, *will* or *will not* counterfactuals as false and *might*-counterfactuals as true. Boyd believes this is because if God actualised a world in which he knew *would*-counterfactuals, *will*-counterfactuals or *will-not*-counterfactuals, God would know the future actions agents would make before they were actualised.

Conversely, *would*-counterfactuals could be known if God’s will created a world where the future is established (settled). Accordingly, Boyd would argue that propositions such as, “President Joe Biden *will* or *will not* win re-election in 2024” are false as there can be no truth as to what an agent *will* or *will not* do since there is no (future) reality these propositions can correspond. *Will*, *will not* and *would* propositions, therefore, should be rephrased to, “President Joe Biden *might* or *might not* win re-election in 2024,” as *might* or *might not* propositions allow the future to be open. Accordingly, agents are free because there is nothing that imposes how they will behave in the future. *Would*,

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<sup>44</sup> For example, natural laws that concern the sun’s future rising.

*will not* or *will* counterfactuals must (according to Boyd) come either from a personality that God gives an agent (making them not free), or by an agent acquiring a character (personality) by the free choices they pursue. Since God actualised a world with *might*-counterfactuals, the future is open to change and infinite possibilities. However, as agents act, they develop a personality that limits their future choices. So, according to Boyd, agents are moving away from libertarian freedom to compatibilist freedom.

A way to understand Boyd's argument is to consider God a Grandmaster of chess<sup>45</sup>. If the chess master knows every *would*, *will* or *will not* move his opponent makes, he would know how his opponent plays. Every move is anticipated because the chess master knows his opponent *would* place their X to Y square. If the master played some particular move, he would know that his opponent *will* or *will not* respond in some specific way. However, if the master alternatively knows all *might* or *might not* moves his opponent, the game is not fixed but is open to different outcomes. For example, instead of the master anticipating that his opponent *would* or *will* move X to Y square, he knows that his opponent *might* or *might not* move X to Y square. His opponent is subsequently free regarding the moves they make because the master only knows these as infinite possibilities, not certainties.

It should be noted that Boyd argues that his formulation of BO could be considered a form of neo-Molinism,

...I shall argue that the view that has come to be labelled *open theism* could perhaps more accurately be labelled *neo-Molinism*. In essence it differs from the classical Molinist position only in that it expands the content of God's middle knowledge to include "might-counterfactuals"<sup>46</sup>.

Boyd's comment was meant to persuade those who subscribe to Molinism (as it is traditionally conceived) to subscribe to his reiterated position instead. He believes to be similar to Molinism except for expanding the content of God's middle-knowledge to include might or might not counterfactuals.

If Boyd's assertion is accepted, it could avoid the unfortunate claim that Biblical texts such as 1 Samuel 15:11-35 should be taken literally. Remember Morris' comment that such interpretations

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<sup>45</sup> It should be noted that Peter Geach uses an analogy of the Grand Master of chess in his 1977 work *Providence and Evil*. Geach adopts the analogy to describe another argument rather than neo-Molinism. Despite this, there is still a strong overlap regarding how he uses the analogy and how I use it.

<sup>46</sup> Boyd, *Divine Foreknowledge Four Views*, p.144.

are, '... a simple-minded reading of some biblical passages...'<sup>47</sup>. These texts (interpreted through a BO/neo-Molinist perspective) would avoid such association. Rather than God *literally* being surprised, leading to Him being infuriated, stunned, dejected, and so on, He always knew what might or might not occur. Therefore, these texts could be seen as simply the best way for the authors to portray how God felt in terms humans could understand.

Having established the philosophical basis of BO, there are at least two criticisms associated with the position. These are: the changing of a proposition's truth value and Isaiah 41: 21-24. Finally, will, would and might have different meanings, but might and will *are* interchangeable. The evaluation of these criticisms will begin with an investigation into the meaning of will, would and might.

BO asserts that *would/will*-counterfactuals have the same meaning, that is, if an agent were in X situation, they would (or will) do Y. It is unavoidable to do anything other than Y (X would/will do A at Y). However, this is debatable. Would and will have different meanings. To emphasize this, consider the statements, "I *would* eat cake for lunch" and "I *will* eat cake for lunch". The former statement indicates that if it was lunchtime, I cannot fail but eat cake, whilst the latter statement only indicates that I will eat cake when lunchtime arrives, signifying that the event will occur later. Both statements suggest that it remains possible that I do not eat cake (at all), or that I prefer to eat something different. Therefore, both words have separate and distinct meanings that should not be confused or interchanged with each other. However, the terms might and will are interchangeable because might is a modal locution whilst will is a non-modal locution. Will is the future tense of a verb; someone might indicate that something will occur, but this event in actuality might not happen. Consider the proposition again, "I will eat cake for lunch". The statement indicates that the event will occur but logically, it might not.

The final criticism is associated with all of the Open-Theist positions rather than BO specifically, that of Isaiah 41: 21-24. Within this passage, God challenges the idols to demonstrate their divinity by revealing the future. God here states His ability to know the future as a mark of His divinity. However, according to Open-Theism, God knows for certainty nothing about the future, therefore, His claim to divinity is doubtful. He cannot for certain declare the future, and this makes Him no better than the idols He is trying to disprove. A potential solution to this problem is God announcing a future event He believes will occur with high possibility. God does not know that this event will happen but knows that it is highly likely that it will occur. Is this a good solution? No. The idols could

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<sup>47</sup> Morris, *Our Idea Of God*, p.85.

do the same, declaring something that is highly likely to happen (for example, declaring that the sun will rise tomorrow).

Having discussed all four Open-Theist positions, are any of the arguments ultimately successful in suggesting that God lacks Foreknowledge? I believe not. All four arguments have significant weaknesses that need addressing before adoption.

### Molinism

Before the investigation into Molinism can begin, a synopsis of Thomas Aquinas'<sup>48</sup> omniscience must commence because the philosophical position was developed to counter some of the problems associated with his argument.

Aquinas argues that God's mind is identical to the essence of God. That is to say, the formal assimilation of mind to object (what Aquinas terms *species intelligibilis*) is identical with the mind of God. God's knowledge is in no way affected by something else. If God's knowledge did depend on external factors that would make His own knowledge incomplete. In this way, God knows how things can be a reflection of Himself by participating in His perfection. At this point, we need to distinguish between God's intellect and His will. In ordinary language, we distinguish between intellect and will. They are defined differently. Primarily, intellect conveys someone's intelligence, whilst will implies what they intend to do. However, if God is considered simple, these two concepts must be the same. Having established that Aquinas thought that God was simple, His knowledge complete in His perfection, His intellect and will are therefore the same. This concept can then be applied to an examination of how God's omniscience interacts with a time-bound world.

Aquinas was committed to the view that God was eternal (formulated by Boethius<sup>49</sup>) and he believed that it is a challenging task to understand eternity in a language primarily adapted to express our time-bound experience. He did, however, think eternity consists of several elements. Firstly (i), eternity is not an everlasting amount of time. Secondly (ii), nothing in eternity takes place simultaneously with any other event (in time). That is to say, the whole of time is 'present to' eternity. Finally (iii), it includes the entirety of time, meaning that no event in time is temporally (or subsequently) prior to eternity. God, therefore, has knowledge of everything that is merely possible but perhaps never actual. This knowledge does not depend upon what God might decide to create,

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas Aquinas, 'The Knowledge Of God From *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Question 14' in *Philosophy Of Religion Selected Readings*, ed. by William L. Rowe and William J. Wainwright (Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989).

<sup>49</sup> Boethius, 'The Consolation Of Philosophy', in *Philosophy Of Religion Selected Readings*, ed. By William L. Rowe and William J. Wainwright (Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989).

but God knows what is in existence. He is therefore aware of actual creation and what is (or was) possible in existence. This awareness Aquinas names 'knowledge of vision', since it concerns awareness of existences that are other than God.

Now a certain difference is to be noted in the consideration of those things that are not actual. For though some of them may not be in act now, still they were, or they will be; and God is said to know all these with the knowledge of vision: for since God's act of understanding, which is His being, is measured by eternity; and since eternity is without succession, comprehending all time, the present glance of God extends over all time, and to all things which exist in any time, as to objects present to Him. But there are other things in God's power, or the creature's, which nevertheless are not, nor will be, nor were; and as regards these He is said to have knowledge, not of vision, but of simple intelligence. This is so called because the things we see around us have distinct being outside the seer<sup>50</sup>.

How then does God understand<sup>51</sup> propositions regarding time that include temporal expressions like "before" and "after"? Examples of this include: "Nazi Germany invaded Poland in 1939. This invasion happened before the Presidential election of Ronald Regan but later than the birth of Thomas Cromwell". God understands this by being in the eternal 'present'. Remember, one of Aquinas' elements of eternity is the belief that the whole of time is 'present to' eternity (ii). God, therefore, understands that one event succeeds another. However, God does not understand propositions such as, "Nazi Germany is invading Poland" or "the birth of Thomas Cromwell happened over one hundred years ago". He does not understand these statements because they presuppose a relationship between the agent's time and the event in which the proposition relates. Since God is eternal, these propositions cannot be expressed by God.

Nevertheless, God would know if an actualised agent stated the propositions at the appropriate times. For example, God knows the statement "I am speaking to Mark right now". He *knows* that I am speaking to Mark but does not know that I am talking to Mark *now* as *now* for God is a tensed verb in relation to God's location in time. Although at any given time I can say 'it is true now that God knows that I am speaking', the *now* does not really convey "know" but instead "is true" because God actualises things that are "eternally present" only in the way that He eternally creates (knows) things. He does not create eternal things. Whilst Aquinas' argument might imply that all

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas Aquinas, 'The Knowledge Of God From Summa Theologica, Part 1, Question 14' in *Philosophy Of Religion Selected Readings*, ed. by William L. Rowe and William J. Wainwright (Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), p.36

<sup>51</sup> The term "understand" here indicates something which God can comprehend but not experience. For example, I might "understand" someone's pain without myself being in pain. In the same way God "understands" that one event succeeds another without Himself experiencing it.

time-bound events are simultaneously real and equally actual to God, however this interpretation would be incorrect. Time-bound events are truly time-bound for Aquinas, as God creates them, He is therefore aware of their temporal nature. For example, when I say that I have not eaten the lunch that is in front of me, this is the actual state of affairs. Indeed, I have not eaten lunch yet and God knows that it is true even though He cannot say, "Tim currently has not yet eaten the lunch in front of him". This is because God has no corresponding Divine knowledge of time-bound statements. Both existence and timing of the event comprise one element of the truth condition. Another element is the relation in time between the agent and the time of the event.

The next question that concerned Aquinas was an enquiry into how God knows things that are expected to happen but that may not happen? In other words, how does God know contingent things? He knows all contingent events as actual through his act of creation. He does not perceive them as future events or events that are currently happening. This is because the futurity of future contingents is like present events that are occurring currently. They only have relativity to the agent who is situated in time. Aquinas is not suggesting that an event *already* exists in eternity before it is actualised but instead is stating that God knows created events from his position in eternity. From our viewpoint, these created events have not taken place yet but from God's, they may have. A problem could potentially arise here for Aquinas. If God knows what will come about, can it be true that the imminent events need not come about? Suppose God knows what will happen because He creates all events. Is it an illusion for agents to believe that our actions make one possible future determinately come about rather than another? In other words, if God has created all events, do agents have the ability (freedom) to change a determined future? Aquinas tried to resolve this problem by claiming that a necessary<sup>52</sup> first cause can produce contingent second causes. If these secondary contingent causes contribute to the kind of effect produced and do so at a certain time, then those effects are not determined prior to that time. God indeed causes those effects because of their existence. If these causes are not actualised, then God does not cause the possibilities of these effects. This solution might, however, lead to another problem. If God's knowledge cannot be added to, changed or affected, then God unalterably causes (knows) contingent events. It appears that Aquinas' solution fails. However, Aquinas proposes what has been called "Transfer of Necessity Argument" (TNA) to resolve this apparent failure<sup>53</sup>. TNA suggests that God's knowledge necessarily transfers itself to the things God knows. Firstly, if a contingent future event will happen, it is necessary that God knew that this event would take place. Secondly, this

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<sup>52</sup> "Necessary" here means "unchangeable" or "irreversible". Therefore, God's knowledge is "accidentally necessary".

<sup>53</sup> Gerard J. Hughes, *The Nature Of God* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.75

truth is necessary for two reasons: first, the truth is eternal; second, it is experienced<sup>54</sup> in the past tense. For Aquinas, therefore, whatever is known by God is necessary, not contingent.

The TNA also poses some problems. As Aquinas suggests that God's knowledge is unalterable and not obtained by "seeing" what is happening, the connecting link goes in the opposite direction. God knows what will pass by being aware of his eternal activity. He is the cause of contingent, time-bound events. To emphasise this problem, consider the statement, "To say in 2010 that, "President Joe Biden will attend the G7 in 2021" is true". This is true, according to Aquinas, because President Biden can decide whether to run for president in the first place or lose in the primaries and then whether to go to the G7, and so on. If Biden decided to do otherwise (for example, not run for President), it would never have been true that President Biden would attend the G7 in 2021. The connection between what is true and what Biden decided to do is logical, not causal. A possible response to this is to state that Biden's decisions do not alter the truth value of the past state of affairs, but they do logically determine what could have been done at a previous time. However, this reply implies that if President Biden did not go then, it would not have been the case that God knows of Biden's going. Does God's knowledge not then depend upon Biden's decisions that he has not made? Aquinas could try repeating his previous solution, that God's knowledge is dependent on logic, not causality. However, this solution leads to additional difficulties for Aquinas. Primarily, this infers that God's knowledge could be different. This suggestion goes against Aquinas' proposal that God's knowledge is accidentally necessary<sup>55</sup>. Aquinas would probably reply that God knows a different world, since He could actualise another, distinct world. However, once God has actualised creation, could it still be that God knows a different world only because agents' actions decide which world is actual? If the answer is yes, then it seems that God's knowledge *is causally* dependent upon things agents might do. Remember, Aquinas believed that God's knowledge is logical, not causal. He must have therefore rejected this suggestion but if he did so, this introduces more questions. Primarily, to what point does it remain open for agents to decide differently? The natural response would be until the time the agent decided to do something. Until that time nothing is fixed. However, God's causal action (which is source of God's knowledge) of what agents do, unalterably created this universe, not some other and in this universe President Joe Biden does go to the G7. How then could Joe Biden decide not to go? Aquinas' answer would have been that Biden (as the contingent cause) is not determined in his choices, but he would still find it necessary to say that God's having unfailing knowledge of what Biden shall do, is problematic. If God is the transcendent

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<sup>54</sup> By "experienced" I do not mean that God would experience the event as a human agent would. That would be too anthropomorphic. I am saying that God has manifested the contingent event.

<sup>55</sup> Again, necessary here means "unchangeable" or "irreversible".



cause and does not determine what agents do, how can what God possesses be anything but merely speculative knowledge? If God only has conjectural knowledge, how is it possible that He possesses accidentally necessary knowledge that is identical with His own essence?

The problem that faced future authors was whether it is possible to modify (or at least adjust) some of Aquinas' assumptions in such a way as to make them less problematic. It is these assumptions Molinism tried to resolve.

Molinism is named after the Spanish theologian Luis de Molina and was theorised in his book, *On Divine Foreknowledge : Part IV of the Concordia*<sup>56</sup>. Others, including William Lane Craig<sup>57</sup> have developed the argument for a contemporary audience. Unlike Open-Theism, Molinism subscribes to the traditional interpretation of Omniscience, believing that God has complete knowledge of the past, present and future. Molinists believe that this interpretation still allows for agents to have free will. They argue that God knows counterfactuals; specifically, the knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom. Along with this concept, they split God's knowledge into three sections: Natural-knowledge, Free-knowledge and Middle-knowledge. Before the evaluation can begin, some preliminary information about Molina is required.

Molina (like Aquinas) believed that God is eternal and wished to portray that all time-bound things are present to God<sup>58</sup>. He, therefore, holds that statements like, "Joe Biden is the President of the United States" and "Joe Biden is not the President of the United States" are both true (from God's perspective in eternity). However, the statements "Joe Biden is the President of the United States" and "Joe Biden is not the President of the United States" cannot be true simultaneously as they are time-bound events. He then proposes two different sources of knowledge. First, that God knows everything which is *De Re* possible. All truths that are *De Re* are themselves necessarily truths (natural-knowledge). Secondly, God knows everything that is actual. This includes everything that happens through the interaction between natural and contingent things (free-knowledge). Having established some preliminary information about Molina, the investigation into God's different types of knowledge can begin.

Natural-knowledge indicates what God knows by His essence or nature, which includes all necessary truths. Necessary truths encompass propositions such as "all bachelors are unmarried" as well as mathematical certainties like  $2+2=4$ . Knowledge of these truths should be conceived as inherently

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<sup>56</sup> Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*.

<sup>57</sup> William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1999).

<sup>58</sup> It should be noted that the 'are' here does not have a temporal sense. All things past, present or future are simultaneous in eternity.

correct. God has no control over this knowledge. It is independent of his will. Putting the symbols 3, +, 3 and = together correctly will equal six remains true *independent* of God's will, as it is a necessary truth. It should be noted that because this knowledge is independent of God, He is constrained in some of the things He can do. For example, God cannot make  $2+2=7$  or bachelors married, no matter how hard He tries or wishes. Natural-knowledge is, therefore, a determining factor for the actions God wants to bring about.

Free-knowledge regards God's own will, in both His *desires* and *what He will do*. This knowledge then is made up of truths that *actually have existed* or *will exist*, concerning metaphysically contingent truth that exists because God has willed it to exist. For example, if God chose to create different beings, circumstances or nothing at all, then those circumstances would be metaphysically true instead of the world as we know it. The statement "Donald Trump exists" is undoubtedly true but this truth is dependent upon God's choice to actualise a world where he exists. Free-knowledge, therefore, can be applied to all statements resembling "It is the case that...". For example, "it is the case that Trump exists", "it is the case that Joe Biden is the President of America", "it is the case that I am typing this paper" and so on. Free-knowledge consequently is dependent upon God's free will.

God's middle-knowledge (*scientia media*) is between these two concepts and concerns His knowledge of what any possible agent would do in any possible world. In other words, God has comprehensive knowledge of the different possibilities that would result from any creation He decides to actualise. Within Molinism, middle-knowledge is central and is so important that Molinism is sometimes referred to as just 'middle-knowledge' in some sources. This perspective concerns God's knowledge of counterfactuals, referred to as "counterfactuals of freedom". Molina suggests two philosophical reasons as to why middle-knowledge is correct. Firstly, God understands His creative power, demanding that He knows everything within that scope. Secondly, if it can be said that God knows our free choices (and He knows them not by agents making them). Even if those decisions are presented to God (in eternity), it cannot be that this is how God is able to know them. Middle-knowledge then can be formatted in the following manner. Firstly (i), God *De Re* necessarily knows all *De Re* truths, which are expressed by His ability to create. He knows how all these truths interact with one another in any creation that is actualised. Second (ii), God *De Re* knows all contingent events in any creation He decides to actualise. These would arise from the interactions of determined and free secondary causes. Thirdly (iii), God accidentally necessarily knows which creation He will actualise and fourthly (iv), God accidentally necessarily knows all (including

contingent) events in the creation that He has actualised<sup>59</sup>. In formatting middle-knowledge in such a way, Molina tries to avoid some of the problems associated with Aquinas' problem. Primarily this problem relates to God's knowledge of some future contingent event being true depending on His decision about which creation He actualises. This leads God's knowledge to be only accidentally necessary. This therefore makes it difficult for God to acquire knowledge without determining the free decisions agents make.

God's knowledge, according to Molina, can therefore be formatted in the following matter: God knows that agents would freely do decisions in a completely determined (CD) set of affairs, were it ever to come about that agents were placed in a CD<sup>60</sup> set of affairs. What then makes it true that agents would arrive at one decision rather than a different decision? If the agent's freedom is to be respected, then it cannot be the case that a CD's set of affairs obliges agents to do a decision at time Y. Is it then enough to say that what makes it true that agents would do decisions at a specific time, simply because agents do a specific decision in a CD set of affairs? The primary difficulty is that it is difficult to see how God acquires knowledge without determining the free decisions agents make. For Molina, even though God knows what agents do in a CD set of affairs, this knowledge is irrelevant. This point is critical for Molina, as God knows what agents would do whether or not the agents even exist or are even placed in a CD set of affairs in the first place. The question arises, though, as to what this knowledge actually depends on. It is not enough to suggest that agents often know what they will do in different hypothetical situations because firstly, such claims are not easily validated, and secondly, even if it were true that occasionally these claims could be substantiated, it is difficult to suppose that we know all such claims. The Molinist solution is to suggest that God knows counterfactuals of freedom.

Counterfactuals of freedom refer to God's knowledge of how free agents act in different situations. God knows that if agent A were in situation S and could decide between option X or Y, they would decide X. God has not directed or coerced the agent to do X but simply knows that the agent would do X rather than Y. Although these passages can be seen through a Molinist perspective, Molinist authors have instead focused on other texts, including John 18:13-27 (Peter denies Jesus three times). Jesus can predict that Peter will deny him three times because he knows all the possible circumstances, persons and permutations. He knows that if Peter is interrogated by X instead of Y, at X instead of Y, Peter would deny him three times. Jesus would also have known other

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<sup>59</sup> It should be noted that i and ii refer to God's decision to create, whilst iii to iv refer to God's accidentally necessary knowledge, given what He decides to create. ii, according to Molina is true no matter what God decides to actualise.

<sup>60</sup> It should be noted that it is assumed that agents are free to not make decisions given those circumstances.

counterfactuals of freedoms. If someone else were in Peter's situation, then Jesus would have known or not known whether that agent would betray him. For example, if instead of Peter, it was me, you or someone else being questioned, Jesus would have known whether they would betray him, or not. According to Molinism, Jesus did not guess or predetermine that Peter would betray him. However, he still knew because he knew Peter's counterfactuals of freedom. The whole scenario, therefore, still unfolded according to the Divine plan.

Having established the philosophical tenets of Molinism, we will investigate the criticisms associated with the argument. We will start with the most prominent, which asks, is divine middle-knowledge of free human actions even possible? How can God actualise possible worlds that include free actions without infringing upon or predetermining them?

Suppose God has infallible knowledge of counterfactuals, that in x situation, I will do Y rather than P. God's knowledge cannot be wrong. In that case, I will do Y. God knows that I would be sitting when I type this paper. God knows this because He knows what I would do in such a situation. He also knows that if I were someone else or placed in a different situation, I would do something else, such as running, walking, swimming, eating, talking, and so forth. However, can it be said that if God has infallible knowledge that I would be sitting whilst I type this paper, that I am truly free? Unless I can indeed refrain from sitting, regardless of the circumstance in which I am placed, can I be truly free? Remember the problem with Ockhamism regarding God's beliefs about future propositions; namely, "x believed that p" is about the past and hence unavoidable (and therefore necessary). The same problem appears here because, from God's perspective, in eternity, He always knew that I would be sitting whilst typing this paper (as it is true that I am sitting here typing this paper). However, these other possibilities would become irrelevant to the situation once God actualised creation. The problem, therefore, is a misunderstanding about God's position in eternity compared to our (actualised agents') relation to time. Although to us (actualised agents) the statement, "I would be sitting whilst typing this paper" is contingent (as it concerns the future) from God's perspective, in time, it is not contingent but true because I am sitting whilst typing this paper. If God had a belief that I would sit, then I would sit. Nothing can change this fact. As Morris writes, '[w]e cannot change what already has been. It is not plausible to think that I can act in such a way as to alter what God's belief has already been'<sup>61</sup>. God knows all truths from His perspective in time, even though they appear contingent to us, and God's belief concerns the past, and it is therefore unavoidable.

### *The Augustinian-Calvinist views*

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<sup>61</sup> Morris, *Our Idea of God*, p.95.

Usually, the Augustinian-Calvinist position is presented as follows: (i) God has total knowledge over all things and everything happens according to the Divine plan. (ii) For any event x, God knew x and no individual can prevent x. (iii) Therefore, every event depends on God's knowledge, and free will is an illusion. Premise (i) is extrapolated from the Biblical texts and implies that God cannot be wrong in His beliefs. (ii) Follows as a direct consequence to (i) and (iii) presents predestination. Therefore, traditionally the Augustinian-Calvinist model argues that God determines all events and that whatever God knows cannot be prevented. This formulation of the traditional Augustine-Calvinist position could be considered extreme and remove the possibility of any freedom, including a compatibilist account of freedom<sup>62</sup>.

Many theists would find the above formatted sequence uncomfortable. If agents do not possess free will, how are they morally responsible for their decisions? Many Christians are convinced that individuals have freedom (whatever inherent limitations it contains) and believe that God can remain sovereign without predetermining every cosmic detail.

Norman Geisler is a Soft Determinist, arguing that an agent's actions are free and determined simultaneously. He writes that we should speak of '*knowingly determining* and *determinately knowing*'<sup>63</sup> when referring to God's Foreknowledge and what He predetermines. In other words, they are the same. 'Whatever he forechooses cannot be *based on* what he foreknows. Nor can what he foreknows be based on what he *forechose*'.<sup>64</sup> God knowingly determines and determinately knows everything that will pass (including free actions). For simplicity, think about the past. The past cannot be changed. Whatever happened previously is now determined. However, we recognise that actions and decisions result from free will. Yesterday I freely walked my dog, but now that it is the past, I can no longer decide not to do it, but I was free when I chose to walk my dog. When actions are performed, they are done freely. God has determined that I will freely sit whilst typing this paper. There would be no conflict between determinism and free will if God determined that I will *freely* sit. If God is omniscient, He knows the past with the same certainty that He knows the future. Therefore, the future can be determined, yet agents have free will.

This position advocates that God is simple and that His perspective in time is eternal. God does not experience temporal successions as agents do and instead knows eternally. From God's vantage point, He knows what agents do freely. He does not foreknow these actions, for God's

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<sup>62</sup> By "extreme" I mean that God has predetermined every event that occurs and humans have no freedom at all. Later in the paper I shall explore the Reformed Augustine-Calvinist position which allows for compatibilist interpretation of freedom.

<sup>63</sup> Geisler, *Predestination and Free Will*, p.73.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p. 71.

Foreknowledge is not foreordaining, as nothing occurs later for God. All of time is present from God's perspective. He observes that I am freely sitting whilst typing this paper, knowing that I am sitting and whatever God knows, He determines. Consequently, 'God *determinately* knows and *knowingly determines* what we are freely deciding'<sup>65</sup>. The next question Geisler tries to tackle is the nature of free will.

For Geisler, free will is not the efficient cause of a free action but the power through which the agent performs the act. The efficient cause of the free action is the free agent. Freedom (the ability to make a free choice) is up to the free agent, not free will. 'We do not say that agents *are* free will but only that they *have* free will'<sup>66</sup>. So it is not the power of free choice that causes a free action but agents who have this power. Once it is established that the real cause of a free action is the agent and not the action itself, it becomes meaningless to ask what action caused the action. '[W]e do not say that humans are thought but only that they have the power of thought'<sup>67</sup>. Also, it cannot be said the cause of a free action is another free action. The term "Free action" is meaningless when it has been recognised that it is agents that are free. If something (other than the free agent) caused the action, the free agent cannot be responsible for as they did not cause it. Free agents cause free actions as they are the first cause of their actions. If this were not true, the actions would not be their action. If it is argued that agents cannot be the first cause of their actions, then it is also impossible for God to be the first cause of his moral actions. According to Geisler, stretching the first cause of agent's actions to God does not solve the issue of finding a cause for every action but merely pushes it back. Eventually, theists will have to admit that a free action is self-determined, not being caused by another.

Another suggestion Geisler gives for agents being the first cause of their own acts is that if it is true that agents are not the first of their actions, then aren't there not uncaused events in the universe? This suggestion is based on a confusion between uncaused and self-caused actions. Self-determinists do not claim there are any uncaused actions and that moral agents cause all actions. However, unlike determinists who believes that all actualised agent actions are caused by another (for example, God), self-determinists believe that the cause for every moral action is a moral agent, whether God or actualised agents.

However, doesn't this conclusion suggest that self-determined actions are self-caused and that agents cannot cause themselves? No agent can force themselves to exist, but a self-caused action is

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p.73.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

not implausible since the agent (causer) must be prior to the act itself. A self-caused agent is impossible, but agents self-causing is not. Agents cannot cause their own being, but they cause their own character (behaviour). So moral self-determinism refers to the determination by agents, not the determination of agents.

However, how can God determine the future without violating free choice? The difficulty with believing in strong determinism regarding God determining and knowing the future is how God can do this. It is not difficult to understand how God can bring about His required end through the necessary means, but how can God bring about the required end through contingent agents (agents freely choosing). Many of those who believe that the future is determined imply mystery. Traditionally, a mystery is something that goes beyond reason, meaning that the two truths (God's sovereignty and human free choice) are not contradictory but simply incomprehensible. Both these are true, but we do not know how this is so. However, why is it a mystery that agent free will and divine determinism are incomprehensible. Why cannot agents know *how* God determines free actions without violating their freedom? Geisler suggests a solution. The reason agents cannot know how this is, is because there is no "how" to be known. "How" questions imply a mechanism, a modus operandi or an intermediate force. But if the interaction between sovereignty and free choice is immediate, then there is no intermediate means<sup>68</sup>.

Therefore, Geisler argues that there is no intermediate means between God, the primary efficient cause of freedom and agents, the secondary efficient cause of free actions. God is the cause (provider) of freedom, and agents are the causes of the acts of freedom. God created agents, but agents cause the actions. God gives agents power (the power of free choice), and they implement it without compulsion. Therefore, God is responsible for bestowing freedom upon agents, but agents are responsible for using it. The only answer to how God determines free actions without violating their freedom is that He did it through His infinite power and wisdom. How God did it is only accountable by His direct knowledge (efficient cause) and not by some other means (instrumental cause). There is no instrumental cause between God's sovereignty and the agent's free choice as the former acts on the latter.

How does Geisler's Soft Determinism interact and interpret certain Biblical passages. Firstly, Soft Determinists would argue that Jeremiah 18:1-11 indicates that God is sovereign over creation and His plan will inevitably materialise. However, this passage does not necessarily imply that God has preordained what His plan will be. Humans still have some freedom to change God's mind even though God knows all the free decisions agents make. God is a flexible potter, willing to revise His

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

Divine plan if agents (the clay) enact their power of free choice. If God is willing to change His mind, He is willing to change His plan. This suggests that God considers the free decisions agents make and adjusts accordingly. Therefore, Soft Determinists argue that Jeremiah 18:1-11 does not show humanity preordained but free without infringing upon God's sovereignty.

Another deterministic position is the Reformed Augustinian-Calvinist view. This position differs from both the traditional Augustine-Calvinist position and Geisler's Soft Determinism. It differs from traditional Augustine-Calvinism because it states that *some things* (not all things) are known and predetermined. God's plan will be achieved, and this will require *some* predetermination. This is clearly different from Geisler as he proposes that agents are free and foreknown by God. It is therefore less deterministic than Augustine-Calvinism but more than Geisler's Soft Determinism. An example might be helpful. Consider a plane (P) that is leaving Y at  $T^1$ . God has preordained that this plane will leave Y at  $T^1$ . Nothing can stop this from occurring. Since the decision whereby God decided to actualise creation, it was decided that P would leave Y at  $T^1$ . However, the Reformed Augustine-Calvinist position argues that God He has not predetermined who will board the plane. In other words, God has predetermined that P would leave Y at  $T^1$  but not who boards the plane; this latter part is variable.

Consider another example, the man who lives by the river<sup>69</sup>. The man heard a report that it would rain, causing the river to rise, flooding the town and that everyone should therefore evacuate immediately. He did not think this applied to him. The man said, "I'm religious, I pray, God loves me, God will save me". The rain came down, and the river rose, and a person came along in a boat and shouted, "you, you there, the town is flooding, let me take you to safety", but the man called back, "God will save me". Soon after, a helicopter was above him, and a person yelled down, "you, you there, the town is flooding, let me drop this ladder and take you to safety", but the man shouted back, "it will be God that takes me to safety". Before too long, the man drowned. Standing at the gates of St Peter, he demanded an audience with God. "Lord," he said, "I'm religious, I pray, I thought you loved me, why did this happen?" God said, "I sent you a report, a boat and a helicopter, what are you doing here!" God had determined that the man would hear a report and get offered help by both a person in a boat and a helicopter but did not determine what action the man would make. The man was free to either accept or deny the help God had sent him. Therefore, God has determined that certain events (or actions) will occur *without* removing agents' free will.

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<sup>69</sup> This example comes from the television show *The West Wing* (Season 1: Episode 14 – "Take This Sabbath Day"). Although Father Cavanaugh (Karl Malden) proposes it when discussing the Death Penalty, rather than any particular philosophical, or Theological position.



God's Divine plan is similar. God determined that Jesus would be executed; however, how this was achieved was flexible. In actuality, the Romans executed Jesus, but the circumstances could have been different. God did not predetermine all the individual choices agents make in order to achieve His plan. How this occurred was adaptable, as the agents involved had free will. Agents were able to make free choices, and these affected the outcome. Accordingly, God is the playwright of the play we call reality, but actors (agents) still have space for improvisation and spontaneity. God knows how the play finishes, but He does not know all the actors' decisions.

Having established Geisler's Soft Determinism and the more deterministic Reformed Augustinian-Calvinism, it is now worth noting potential weaknesses associated with the arguments, starting with Geisler's Soft Determinism.

Firstly, Geisler argues that God is simple, meaning that God's being is not divisible into parts. He suggests that God's simplicity allows Him to understand foreknowledge and foreordination simultaneously in eternity. Neither foreknowledge nor foreordination is temporally prior to the other. However, God's thoughts and conceptual acts (such as decreeing or foreknowing) are *not* part of his essence *any more than His acts* in the world (such as creating or preserving the universe) are part of His essence or attributes. Geisler treats God's thoughts *as part* of His essence or attributes. Since God's essence is simple, he concludes that God's thoughts must not be separated into sequential parts. It can be agreed that whatever God knows, He knows all at once and has always known. However, this is true of God not because of His simplicity but because of His omniscience and sovereign will. Giving God such knowledge does not mean He does not know the logical sequence and relations among the things He knows. Additionally, granting that God foreordains all things simultaneously does not mean that there is no order in what He foreordains. For instance, God always knew that Jesus would be born and would die. Still, he also understood that logically (and chronologically), one event had to precede the other.

To clarify, this does not mean that God knew one of those events before He knew the other, only that in knowing both simultaneously, He knows the relation (logical and chronological) between the two events. Furthermore, suppose God foreordained both events simultaneously. In that case, this does not mean that He did not recognise the logical point that agents cannot be foreordained to die who has not been foreordained to be born. In other words, it is still valid and important to know whether God chooses because of what He foresees or whether He foresees because He has foreordained. Geisler appears to reject the former option but does not answer the latter. Geisler does not answer the question because He argues that it will commit him to stating that there is a

sequence in God's thoughts which would (in Geisler's option) remove God's simplicity. These claims only stop the simplicity of God if someone confuses His being and attributes with His acts (mental).

Secondly, Geisler argues that free actions are self-determined. For example, he argues that Judas's betrayal was determined by God (as God determines all that occurs) and a free act determined by Judas himself. However, this is contradictory, as if Judas determined the act of betrayal, it could not then have been determined by God<sup>70</sup>. Furthermore, if an agent is free, they can do otherwise in those cases where they are free. If Judas's actions were free action, then Judas could have done other than what he did. However, if God determines all events according to his eternal plan, the act of betrayal was necessary, and Judas could not have done otherwise. As Geisler writes,

In brief, God *determined* that Judas would *freely* betray Christ. There is no logical contradiction between determinism and free will. There would be a contradiction only if God *forced* Judas to *freely* betray Christ. Forced freedom is a contradiction in terms. But if God simply determines that Judas will *freely* do it, then there is no contradiction. God can determine through free choice with the same certainty that he can determine without it. An omniscient mind cannot be wrong<sup>71</sup>

This is also a contradiction because if the act was necessary, it could not have been performed otherwise than it was, and vice versa.

A possible response to this potential criticism is to state that it is a confusion of standpoints. Geisler argues that from Judas's perspective, the event could have been different or not have occurred at all. However, from God's standpoint, it had been determined that the betrayal would happen. Therefore, Judas could not do otherwise than he did. Does this response work? No, for if Judas could have chosen differently by not betraying Jesus, then the fact that he actualised God's timeless plan is nothing but a fortunate circumstance. Judas's free actions were carried out following God's plan. He could not have chosen anything inconsistent with God's Divine (and therefore determined) will. The impossibility of Geisler's contradictions undermines his view of divine sovereignty, a God who *determinately knows* and *knowingly determines* every outcome.

As this solution fails to strengthen Geisler's argument, he could again introduce some of Aquinas' other concepts. Aquinas argued that God would know if an actualised agent stated a proposition at

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<sup>70</sup> There are two other options available to Geisler. Both are undesirable to him. Firstly, if it was determined partly by God and partly by Judas (the act was not exclusively Judas's action), then he was not solely responsible for his actions as he shared that responsibility with God. Secondly, if God determined it, Judas was not free.

<sup>71</sup> Geisler, *Predestination and Free Will*, p.72.

the appropriate times. But, again, consider the statement, “I am speaking to Mark right now”. He *knows* that I am speaking to Mark but does not know I am talking to Mark *now* because *now* for God is a tense verb. Although at any given time I can say “it is true now that God knows that I am speaking”, the *now* does not convey “know” but instead “is true” as God actualises things that are “eternally present” to Him. Remember, Aquinas is not implying that all time-bound events are simultaneously real and equally actual to God. Time-bound events are truly time-bound. Both existence and timing of the event comprise one element of the truth condition. However, the problem that encompasses Aquinas (and Geisler if he adopted this concept) is related to contingency. In short, Aquinas’ dilemma is predicated upon the premise that if God knows what will come about, can it be true that the forthcoming events need not be actualised? Aquinas tried to resolve this problem by claiming that a necessary first cause can produce a contingent second cause. God indeed causes those effects because of their actualisation in existence. If these causes are not actualised, then God does not cause these effects. However, if God’s knowledge cannot be added to (changed or affected), then God unalterably knows (causes) all events. It appears that this solution also fails. Suppose Geisler does introduce some of Aquinas’ more sophisticated propositions into his argument. In that case, he still does not ultimately resolve the problem that from God’s perspective in time, what God knows, He causes and what God causes, He knows.

The third problem associated with Geisler’s Soft Determinism relates to his concept of freedom and coercion. Judas was not coerced into his betrayal (it was something he freely chose to do), yet what does Geisler mean when he states God *determined* that Judas would betray Jesus? Geisler never clearly defines his concept of *determine*, instead equating self-determination with self-causation. However, if this is the case, to determine is to cause and if God determines (foreordains), he causes. Therefore, a contradiction occurs because although Judas was not coerced to act the way he did, God *caused* Judas to act as he did.

The fourth criticism against Geisler is his suggestion that once an agent performs an action, that action is now determined, though they were free at the time it was performed. Geisler writes, ‘there is no contradiction between an event resulting from a totally free choice and at the same time being completely determined’<sup>72</sup>. However, this conclusion does not work, as the action was not determined at the time it was done. The action is determined because it cannot be altered or changed once completed, but when the action was first performed, it was not determined.

The fifth criticism associated with Geisler’s argument is related to the memorable but confusing phrase, “knowingly determines and determinately knows”. It suggests that God determines things

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid, p.73-74.

based on his knowledge, but knowledge of what? Is it founded upon what God sees? No, because, 'God sees what we are freely doing. And what he sees, he knows. And what he knows, he determines'<sup>73</sup>. However, elsewhere Geisler rejects the concept that knowledge is the basis for determination, 'perhaps God's predetermination is neither *based on* his Foreknowledge of human free choices nor *done in spite of it*'<sup>74</sup>. What then does it mean to determine knowingly and to have determinately known, if knowledge is not the basis of determination? Does Geisler mean that God's knowledge is settled by what He wills, but then God's knowledge is of what he decides (wills) and thus it is subjectively based.

Having discussed the problems associated with Geisler's Soft determinism, let us move on to problems related to the more deterministic argument, the Reformed Augustinian-Calvinist position. The first problem with this more deterministic argument is that it does not specify *which*, *when* or *what* is determined and who is free. To illustrate this, consider again the two analogies presented above: the plane being determined to leave Y at T<sup>1</sup> and the man who lives by the river. In both examples, specific individuals are determined, whilst others are not. Specifically, the pilot, reporter, person on the boat and helicopter are all determined, whilst the man who lived by the river and those who got on the plane are free.

Both analogies present slightly different concepts. Firstly, the plane analogy could be considered an example of God's Divine plan in totality. God has determined that his plan will be enacted at T<sup>1</sup>. Nothing will (or can) prevent this from occurring. In the other analogy, those determined could be considered those who try and help the man who lived by the river, whereas others (namely the man who lived by the river) had the freedom to either accept or reject the help God had sent him. However, reality resists simplicity, and this quickly becomes apparent because *when* or *who* is determined at which times remains ambiguous. The Reformed Augustinian-Calvinist position claims that God only determines what is necessary for His Divine plan to be enacted. The argument then could suffer from similar problems associated with the Frankfurt analogy. The analogy suggests this, Black wishes to see Smith dead; Jones shares this belief and Black believes it likely that Jones will act upon this belief. Although Black believes it is probable that Jones will kill Smith, he is unwilling to take any chances and therefore deploys a device capable of monitoring and controlling a person's thoughts and actions. If the device signifies that Jones is not going to murder Smith (of his own free will), then the device interferes, ensuring that Jones does murder Smith. If, however, the machine indicates that Jones is going to kill Smith freely, then the machine monitors the situation without

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p.73.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p.70.

interference, allowing Jones to kill Smith<sup>75</sup>. What does the analogy suggest? It looks like Jones cannot do otherwise than kill Smith, but on the other hand, there is also a strong suggestion that Jones kills Smith of his own free will. It is a strong suggestion because the machine is never used within the analogy. '[Black's device] played no role at all in leading [Jones] to act as he did... everything happened just as it would have happened without Black's presence<sup>76</sup>.'

The problem with the Frankfurt analogy is that it frames a free decision in terms of mental processes. Jones indeed had no alternative in killing Smith with regard to his external behavioural processes. Still, it is not true that Jones had no alternative regarding his internal mental processes (although he did not know it). Jones' choice was to either kill Smith (of his own free will or not). Had he listened to his conscience and decided not to kill Smith, the device would have killed Smith anyway. Jones would not have done the murder of his own free will. Faced with a fair jury who informed that Jones had Black's device, they would undoubtedly never sentence Jones, because he was not morally responsible for what the device made him do.

What then are the similarities between the Frankfurt analogy and the plane analogy? According to the Reformed Augustine-Calvinist position, God knows what is going to pass without influencing what actions free agents make. For example, the plane analogy suggests that agents are free to either board the plane or not. However, when the time came, God already knew who would and would not board the plane. If someone is required to board the plane, they will board the plane. God's prior knowledge is like Black's device; no matter what, the necessary passengers will board the plane. It is irrelevant what these passengers wanted to do; they would board the plane because God's prior knowledge indicated that they would. If the passengers desist, God's previous knowledge of the fact would interfere, forcing the necessary passengers to board.

The parallels between the Reformed Augustinian-Calvinism position and the analogy should be obvious. When the time comes for these individuals to act, God already knows what these actions would be because God's prior knowledge is like Black's device. God's timeless knowledge showed Him what the determined would do. If agents desist from God's plan, His previous knowledge of the fact would interfere, forcing agents to do what is necessary for God's plan to be enacted.

Although he cannot be considered a Reformed Augustinian-Calvinist or a Soft Determinist, Rene Descartes, in a letter to Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia written in January 1646<sup>77</sup>, presents an analogy

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<sup>75</sup> The Frankfurt analogy can be found at: Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 23 (December 1969), 829-839 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2023833>>.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* pp.836-37.

<sup>77</sup> Anthony Kenny, *The God Of The Philosophers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p.77.

arguing that God still has knowledge over what agents do without Himself coercing them. Suppose that a King has forbidden duels and knows (with certainty) that nothing will prevent X and Y from fighting, if they were to meet. If the King orders them (X and Y) to go on the same day to the same place, he knows (with certainty) that they will fight and disobey his decree. However, he does not force them to fight. X and Y are still free and may voluntarily decide to fight each other, whilst at the same time, the King knows with certainty that they will fight if they meet. Accordingly, Descartes is arguing that God's knowledge is similar to this. This argument is different from Geisler's Soft Determinism because, according to him, 'God *determinately* knows and *knowingly determines* what we are freely deciding'<sup>78</sup>. The Reformed Augustinian-Calvinism position sees God as predetermining certain things whilst allowing free will. As Descartes' letter does not support a Soft Deterministic or Reformed interpretation of God's knowledge, it must come under another umbrella, namely Edwardsian, named after the Theologian Jonathan Edwards.

Edwards introduces his *Freedom of the Will* by questioning what the will is. His answer is as follows: the will is the power of the mind to choose. Therefore, an act of will is the mind willing (choosing) X, Y, or no action. Edwards' use of the word 'action' is very broad. It refers to both doing something (for example, smoking a cigarette that has been offered) and not doing something (for example, not smoking a cigarette that has been offered). What determines which action (smoking or not smoking) the agent makes? According to Edwards, the agent performs the action that is most preferable to them. Perhaps refraining from smoking is preferable to those who do not smoke, whilst a smoker might find the offer quite agreeable. Edwards is arguing that if agents have the will to refrain, they also have the ability (power) to actualise that act of will. For Edwards then, all that matters (as far as freedom is concerned) is that the person would have been able to do x if they had chosen (willed) to do it. Whether they *could* have chosen to do it has no bearing on the question as to whether they were free to do x.

To emphasise this point, consider someone who is so addicted to nicotine that they are incapable of rejecting a cigarette if it is offered. Indeed, their addiction is so great that they cannot refrain from smoking if they are placed within these circumstances. The individual simply does not have the *will power* to refrain from smoking the cigarette. Obviously, it is not true that they lack the physical power to refrain. Nobody overpowered the individual and forced them to smoke. The individual does not lack the *physical power* over their arms and fingers, but rather they lack power over their choices. For Edwards, the question of whether the individual can or cannot smoke the cigarette is decided solely on their physical power to smoke. If the individual is in control of their limbs, it would

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<sup>78</sup> Norman Geisler, *Predestination and Free will*, p.73.

be wrong to say that the individual cannot choose whether to smoke. If agents possess the required physical ability to smoke, it cannot be said that they lack choice, even if the agent does not have power over the will. Of course, given the individual's addiction, it can be true that even while holding a cigarette, they could move their limbs away from their mouth *if they will* it. The fact that someone cannot make a decision (use their will) does not imply that an agent would be *incapable* of choosing.

According to Edwards, two other external factors affect the agent's ability to choose different voluntary actions, namely nature (natural inability) and morality (moral inability). Nature has given birds the ability to fly by flapping their wings, although it has not given all individuals this ability. Humans cannot flap their arms and fly away no matter how hard they will it. Therefore, humans have a natural inability to engage in certain situations, such as flying. Nature thus has impeded different potential voluntary actions agents could will. Natural inability relates to limits placed upon individuals by nature. Moral inability is present within habits or motives, which render the individual incapable of using their will. Such incapability arises from the inability to do some actions due to either lack of motivation or the presence of different motives. Therefore, moral inability consists of the incapability of willing (doing) an action and the inability to will from refraining from doing an action. Consider the smoker again. According to Edwards, as long the smoker possesses the psychological power needed to will to do something (either X, Y or nothing), they have power (freedom), even though they were unable to refrain from doing (willing). The moral inability to refrain from doing (willing) what agents do, does not suggest a natural inability (lack of physical power) to refrain from doing (or not doing) a certain act. Whilst the smoker has the physical capability to refrain from accepting the cigarette, they will not accept it. For Edwards, if agents have control over their limbs, it can be said that the agent is free to refrain from doing (willing) something, even if they do not have the necessary power over their will.

This control over the limbs is fundamentally the most crucial aspect of the decisions agents make. The smoker cannot prevent the urge to smoke; physically refraining from smoking seems an impossibility. However, they are morally responsible for their actions (smoking a cigarette), whether or not their addiction dictates their next action. For Edwards, the moral inability of the smoker to choose (will) not to smoke in no way excuses the smoker from the moral responsibility of performing that action. Edwards' reasoning is based on the concept that humans morally evaluate each other. In other words, this evaluation raises the possibility of moral responsibility because each agent invariably judges others according to their actions, even if the source of the action (the *will*) cannot prevent the individual from acting. To clarify, consider the example of a saint under duress to accept a bribe. It is against the saint's moral promise to accept a bribe, but the saint is nevertheless praised for his fortitude even though they are acting according to their moral rule base, which forbids them

from accepting a bribe, rather than making an independent decision. Edwards recognises that, irrespective of the saint's rule base, they are *physically capable* of choosing to accept the bribe, just as the addict is *physically capable* of refusing the cigarette. Both examples are theoretically free to refrain from an action.

Having established the basic tenets of Edwardsian, it is relevant to return to Descartes' letter to Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia. Although Descartes' comments were original to Descartes<sup>79</sup>, I believe they are best interpreted within Edwardsianism. The King has not determined that X and Y would fight if they encountered one another but knows that each individual's *will* compels them to duel. Both X and Y are free regarding their physical ability to move their limbs and therefore decide to duel. Like the smoker, the duellers have the physical capability not to engage each other and thus prevent themselves from duelling, despite their *wills* dictating that they *shall* duel. The King is within his right to judge the duellists as agents who are able to morally evaluate each other, even regarding actions they cannot prevent. Therefore, they are theoretically able to resist duelling.

It should be noted that at first, Edwards' argument regarding the physical capabilities of agents to decide what to do seems appealing. When the smoker accepts the cigarette, they must use their physical ability to perform the necessary actions to smoke. If someone is not forcing the person to smoke the cigarette, it can be said that the person can move their limbs and subsequently reject the cigarette. This observation of Edwards' is reasonable. Even if the *will prevents* the smoker from rejecting the cigarette, it is still *true* that the individual has the *physical capability* of not accepting the offering. However, according to Edwards, the smoker who willingly smokes the cigarette is free in that action (and therefore is morally responsible for it), given they had the physical ability to refrain from smoking should they *will* to refrain. As William L. Rowe write,

[S]o, the drunkard who is physically able to refrain from picking up the glass should he will to do so, is morally responsible for his act of picking it up and drinking from it, and it matters not at all that due to his addiction he is simply unable to refrain from willing (choosing) to pick up the glass and drink from it. For this is a moral inability, not a physical or natural inability<sup>80</sup>

Indeed, as noted above, Edwards believes that it does not matter that the smoker is unable to will to refrain from smoking; all that matters is that the individual has the physical power to refrain from making the necessary actions to smoke. So, Edwards takes the meaning of "being free with respect to X-thing" to be "having the power to do X should we *will* (choose) X". For simplicity, when X

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<sup>79</sup> With Descartes comments coming in 1646 whilst Edwards wrote *Freedom of the Will* in 1754.

<sup>80</sup> William L. Rowe, *Can God Be Free?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.64.



decides to do X action, Edwards interprets the common meaning of “Y is not free to do X” to be “Y cannot do X if Y wills to do X”. However, the problem with this is that it supposes that an agent has the power to determine their will. For ease, Edwards argues that moral inability (the inability to act according to one’s morals) is *irrelevant* to the agent’s moral responsibility, which arises from the moral evaluation of each other.

To emphasise this potential criticism, consider someone who is mentally unwell, suffers from multiple illnesses and is on constant medication. They shoot and kill three people in an episode of mania. The defence argues that the person was insane at the time of the shootings. Therefore, they should be considered innocent due to insanity. The prosecution, however, argues that the person was sane when they killed the people and therefore argues for the death penalty. It is clear that the jury would have great difficulty in concluding whether the person was incapable of refraining from shooting the victims at the time of the crime. Of course, there is reason to think that they could have refrained from shooting the victims if they had really tried. This conclusion is possible because the person has control over their physical abilities. However, this is not the relevant question. Indeed, it is what Edwards would call their *moral ability* to effectively choose not to kill. To reply to that question, the jury would have to confront the problem of determining whether their decision to kill was an irresistible decision or a decision they refused to resist. It may be difficult to determine whether their decision to shoot was irresistible (rather than not resisted). This seems relevant to whether the individual should or should not be punished for their actions. If the cause of the actions were mental illness, pain beyond the realms of their ability to bear, in all justice, we would have to conclude that the individual cannot confirm their conduct. This would be true even if it is also true that had they refrained from shooting, they willed not to kill the victims. Therefore, the first criticism of Edward’s position is that moral inability to refrain from willing as one did is *irrelevant* to the agent’s moral responsibility. Agents take into account extenuating circumstances for a person’s responsibility for choosing and acting.

Sensing the need to respond to this potential objection, Edwards attempts to neutralise it by arguing that it is absurd to suggest that agents lack control over their choices.

And if it be improperly said, that he cannot perform those external voluntary actions, which depend on the Will... that he is unable to exert the acts of the Will themselves; because it is more evidently false, with respect to these, that he cannot if he will: for to say so, is a downright contradiction; it is to say, he cannot will, if he does will. And in this case, not only

is it true, that it is easy for a man to do the thing if he will, but the very willing is the doing; when once he has willed, the thing is performed; and nothing else remains to be done<sup>81</sup>.

The most probable interpretation of this passage is that Edwards felt the need to do more than just assert that it does not matter whether the agent has control over their will. The critical question is whether the agent can do what they will. So, Edwards is proposing that the question, “but what if Y cannot will to do X” is meaningless because it supposes something that is a contradiction in terms. A person who wills to bring a particular action (X) could fail in that endeavour. Therefore, the contradiction occurs because to suppose that a person wills to do X does not will anything at all. Since it cannot be true that you both will something and yet do not will anything at all, the question, “but what if Y cannot will to do X” is senseless.

It is worth stating each position’s strengths and weaknesses before stating which argument the author prefers. The paper will not evaluate all the Open-Theism positions because the author believes that BO is the strongest of the Open-Theism positions presented in this paper. However, a quick summary of Bivalence is needed before this can begin.

The Principle of Bivalence states that there are exactly two truth-values, true and false, and within every statement (or discourse), either one of them (true or false) is the answer. Remember the example given before, “Mary’s dogs are asleep”. As stated, this statement requires three factors to remain true: firstly, a person called Mary must exist; secondly, she has multiple dogs, and thirdly, these dogs are currently asleep. All these factors need to remain consistent for the total statement to be true. If any part of the above statement is false, then the whole statement becomes false. Why is this information relevant to our discussion of Bivalent Omniscience? Because BO argues that God possesses Omniscience while not violating this principle. Unlike other Open-Theist positions, primarily Non-Bivalent Omniscience, God cannot know the future because the future does not yet exist. BO agrees that the future is open yet disagrees with Non-Bivalent Omniscience’s conclusion that the principle cannot still be applied. Therefore, a recap of the Bivalent Omniscience argument is needed before a true comparison can begin.

BO advocates an open future whilst trying not to violate the Principle of Bivalence. It does this by arguing the improbability of God knowing *Would*-counterfactuals. Instead, He would employ *Might*-counterfactuals and explore different possibilities. Firstly, BO claims that God knows *Might*-counterfactuals instead of *Would*-counterfactuals to allow for freedom because God *might* know what individuals will do in different situations. He does not know *Would*-counterfactuals because

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<sup>81</sup> Edwards, *Freedom Of The Will*, p.18.

otherwise, agents would not have free will. Secondly, the word *will* can be used *deterministically* or *indeterministically*. For example, the statement, “drop a rock and it *will* fall”, the *will* is used *deterministically* because it applies certainty. However, in the proposition, “if you eat that cake, you *will* get fat”, the word *will* only indicates *indeterministically* because it is probable, not definite. So why is this information relevant to our discussion? Because those who advocate BO subscribe to the Peircean definition of the word *will*, which implies that when actualised agents use the word, they mean it *deterministically* instead of *indeterministically*. For simplicity, the Peircean position suggests that when people make predictions, they are either making a definitive or probabilistic claim, implying causal connections and possibilities.

The first strength associated with BO is that I agree that when people make predictions, they are either making a definitive or probabilistic claim, both of which imply causal connections and possibilities. When people use *will*-statements, they often apply a truth value before the event has occurred. However, this does not mean that the proposition was true when it was said. But what is this belief based on? If there is no future reality to establish *will*-statement, then they cannot be true (and must be false).

The second strength related to BO is the establishment that God knows *would*, *will* or *will not* counterfactuals as false and *might*-counterfactuals as true. It is clear that if God actualised a world in which he knew *would*-counterfactuals, *will*-counterfactuals or *will not*-counterfactuals, God would know the future actions agents would make before they were actualised. Conversely, *would*-counterfactuals could be known if God’s will created a world where the future is established (settled). Accordingly, propositions such as, “President Joe Biden *will* or *will not* win re-election in 2024” are false as there can be no truth as to what an agent *will* or *will not* do since there is no (future) reality these propositions can correspond. *Will*, *will not* and *would* propositions therefore should be rephased to, “President Joe Biden *might* or *might not* win re-election in 2024” as *might* or *might not* propositions allow the future to be open.

Consequently, agents are free because there is nothing that imposes how they will behave in the future. *Would*, *will not* or *will* counterfactuals must come either from a personality that God gives an agent (making them not free), or by an agent acquiring a character (personality) by the free choices they pursue. Since God actualised a world with *might*-counterfactuals, the future is open to change and infinite possibilities.

The third strength of BO against the other Open-Theist position is that it accepts the Principle of Bivalence. If this principle is not adopted, it leads to absurdities. Remember the proposition, “President Joe Biden *will* or *will not* win re-election in 2024” regards the future so currently cannot

be ascribed a truth value if the principle of bivalence is rejected. However, the logical construction of the claim seems to imply that the proposition has a truth value. The event will either happen (Biden wins re-election) or does not happen (Biden does not win re-election). As we cannot currently know, The same can be said for the proposition, "President Joe Biden will both win and not win re-election in 2024". This statement is false because it involves a contradiction. Someone cannot both win and not win re-election at the same time.

The adoption of the principle of Bivalent means that BO is a stronger argument than NBO. Before stating why this position is stronger than NBO, the author will comment on some of the positives because it is a rational argument with a few critical errors. The most robust strength associated with NBO is Dale Tuggy's evaluation of the future. Primarily, his assertion states that there is an actual world with a possible future. Still, it is impossible to judge what this future might be. All future possibilities are grounded in current conditions, which are present facts. These facts change or cease to be possible depending upon recent actions. Only possibilities and probabilities can be proposed when discussing future contingents until the proposition either *does* or *does not* take place (in actualised creation). The author can concur wholeheartedly with these basic principles suggested by Tuggy. However, Tuggy expands on these ideas, and it is these concepts the author cannot continue to concur with his developments.

Tuggy proclaims that some propositions about the future will be true or false, but not all. These propositions can be true or false only if the event is indicated on all future branches. In that case and in that case only, then the proposition is true. However, if agreement can be found on some branches but not others, the proposition cannot be given a truth value (it is in a neutral zone). It is these later developments that critically undermine NBO. Propositions whose content concerns the future will either be true or false, not neutral if the principle of bivalence is accepted. It is correct that it is impossible to know the truth value of future propositions for certain until they happen or do not happen. However, if the principle of Bivalence still applies, these proposition's truth value are not neutral but true or false. No current (future) reality corresponds to these propositions, so they must be considered currently false. It is true presently (2021) that the proposition, "President Joe Biden *will* or *will not win* re-election in 2024" regards the future so we currently do not know for definite what the truth value of the proposition will be. However, according to NBO, because we do not know for sure what the proposition's truth value will be, the statement's truth value should be considered neutral, neither true nor false. However, the logical construction of the claim seems to imply that the proposition has a truth value. The event will either happen (Biden wins re-election) or does not happen (Biden does not win re-election). The same can be said for the proposition, "President Joe Biden *will both win* and *not win* re-election in 2024". This statement is false because it

involves a contradiction. Someone cannot both win and not win re-election at the same time. Propositions either have a correspondence relation with reality or do not; therefore, they are either true or false, not neutral. Unfortunately, those who have developed NBO feel the need to expand the fundamental principle to create an open future consisting of trends, tendencies, and possibilities. This fundamental mistake undermines NBO. The rejection of Bivalence causes the argument irrefutable damage and ultimate failure, even if aspects of the argument are legitimate.

With reference to the author's stance explained above, the writer agrees with NBO's assertion that the future is open, made up of inclinations, predispositions and opportunity, and the author disagrees with the need to expand this fundamental concept. The principle of Bivalence can be applied to propositions about the future that concern contingent events, even if it is true that at the time the proposition is stated, agents do not know whether the proposition will turn out to be true or false. Because of this, the proposition must be considered currently false as there is no future reality these propositions can correspond to. If the event occurs (in actualised creation), it can be said that the proposition is true. Until such time, the proposition is false to uphold the principle of Bivalence.

However, the main criticism associated with the BO position is its assertion that *would*, *will* or *will not* counterfactuals have the same meaning and that if God knows these counterfactual then agents would not be free because if this was the case God would know the future actions agents would make before they were actualised. Conversely, *would*-counterfactuals could be known if God created a world where the future is established (settled). If an agent were in X situation, they *would*, *will* or *will not* do Y. However, this is debatable. *Would* and *will* have different meanings. To emphasise this, consider the statements, "I *would* eat cake for lunch" and "I *will* eat cake for lunch". The former statement indicates that if it was lunchtime, I cannot fail but eat cake.

In contrast, the latter only indicates that I will eat cake when lunchtime arrives, signifying that the event will occur later. Both statements suggest that it remains possible that I do not eat cake (at all) or that I prefer to eat something different. Therefore, both words have separate and distinct meanings that should not be confused or interchanged with each other. However, the terms *might* and *will* are interchangeable because *might* is a modal locution whilst *will* is a non-modal locution. *Will* is the future tense of a verb; someone *might* indicate that something *will* occur, but this event, in actuality, might not happen. For example, consider the proposition again, "I *will* eat cake for lunch". The statement indicates that the event *will* occur, but logically, it *might not*. This criticism is philosophically complex and technical but meaningful. Although the average person would not distinguish the necessary difference between *would* and *will* propositions, there is a difference,

whilst *might* and *will* have similar meanings. This criticism is important because BO places significant importance on the belief that *would*, *will* or *will not* counterfactuals are the same (predetermined by God), whilst *might* or *might not* counterfactuals allow agents the possibility of creating their personality (character).

Luis de Molina developed Molinism to enhance, develop and defend some of Aquinas' concepts and arguments. Firstly, Molina was concerned with Aquinas' assumption that if God's causal action (which is the source of God's knowledge) of what agents do unalterably created this universe, not some other, how could (or can) agents decide to do other? Aquinas answered that agents (as the contingent causes) are not determined in their choices. However, it is problematic that Aquinas would still find it necessary to say that God has (or will have) unfailing knowledge of what agents shall do. For example, suppose God is the transcendent cause but does not determine what agents do. How can what God possesses be anything but merely speculative knowledge? If God only has conjectural knowledge, how is it possible that He accidentally possesses necessary knowledge identical to His own essence?

Secondly, Molina splits God's knowledge into three sections; Natural, Middle and Free. Natural-knowledge concerns what God knows by His essence or nature, which includes all necessary truths. For example, necessary truths encompass propositions such as "all bachelors are unmarried" as well as mathematical certainties like  $2+2=4$ . Knowledge of these truths should be conceived as inherently correct. God has no control over this knowledge and is independent of His will. Free-knowledge regards God's own will in both His desires and what He will do. For example, if God chose to create different beings, circumstances or nothing at all, then those circumstances would be actual instead of the world as we know it. The statement "I am writing this paper" is undoubtedly true, but this truth depends on God's choice to actualise a world where I exist. Free-knowledge consequently is dependent upon God's free will. God's middle-knowledge is between these two concepts and concerns His knowledge of what any possible agent would do in any possible world. In other words, God has comprehensive knowledge of the different possibilities resulting from any creation He decides to actualise. Molina gives two philosophical reasons as to why middle-knowledge is correct. Firstly, God understands His creative power, demanding that He knows everything within that scope. Secondly, it can be said that God knows our free choices directly (and not by agents making them). Even if those decisions are presented to God (in eternity), it cannot be that this is how God is able to know them.

The first strength for Molinism is that Molina has adopted many of Aquinas' concepts as a basis whilst introducing new ideas of his own to combat many weaknesses he has perceived. For example,

one of these perceived weaknesses relates to the contingency of events. These events exist (in creation) because God has caused them. If He had not directly caused them, then they would not exist in actualised creation. However, if God's knowledge cannot be added to (changed or affected), then God unalterably knows (causes) all events. Trying to resolve this problem, Molina argues that even though God knows what agents do in a completely determined set of affairs, this knowledge is irrelevant, allowing Molina to introduce his concept of counterfactuals of freedom. Whether you accept or deny the ultimate success or failure of Molina's attempt to resolve some of Aquinas' underlining difficulties, the philosophical underpinning of Molinism is strong.

The second strength of Molinism is that it can be formatted simply, which potentially avoids the criticism associated with Aquinas. Firstly (i), God *De Re* necessarily knows all *De Re* truths, which are expressed by His ability to create. He knows how all these truths interact with one another in any creation that is actualised. Second (ii), God *De Re* knows all contingent events in any creation He decides to actualise. These would arise from the interactions of determined and free secondary causes. Thirdly (iii), God accidentally necessarily knows which creation He will actualise and fourthly (iv), God accidentally necessarily knows all (including contingent) events in the creation that He has actualised. In formatting middle-knowledge in such a way, Molina tries to avoid some of the problems associated with Aquinas' position.

The third strength associated with Molinism is that it subscribes to the traditional interpretation of Omniscience, believing that God has complete knowledge of the past, present and future, whilst not violating agents free will. This is only a strength if it is believed that God does have complete knowledge of the past, present and future whilst allowing actualised agents free will. If it is believed that God does not have complete knowledge of the future or that agents do not have free will, then this would not be considered a strength.

The main criticism associated with Molinism is how can God actualise possible worlds that include free actions without infringing upon or predetermining them? God knows that when I type this paper I would be sitting. God knows this because He knows what I would do in so and so situation. He also knows that if I were someone else or placed in a different situation, I would do something else, such as running, walking, swimming, eating, talking, and so forth. However, can it be said that if God has infallible knowledge that I would be sitting whilst I type this paper, that I am truly free? Unless I can indeed refrain from sitting, regardless of the circumstance in which I am placed, can I be truly free?

Remember the problem with Ockhamism regarding God's beliefs about future propositions; namely, "x believed that p" is about the past and hence unavoidable (and therefore necessary). The same

problem appears here because, from God's perspective, in eternity, He always knew that I would be sitting whilst typing this paper (as it is true that I am sitting here typing this paper). However, once God actualised creation, these other possibilities would become irrelevant to the situation. The problem, therefore, is a misunderstanding about God's position in eternity compared to our (actualised agents') relation to time. Although to actualised agents the statement, "I would be sitting whilst typing this paper" is contingent (as it concerns the future) from God's perspective, in time, it is not contingent but true because I am sitting whilst typing this paper. If God had a belief that I would sit, then I would sit. Nothing can change this fact.

The traditional Augustinian-Calvinist position can be formatted as (i) God has total knowledge over all things, and everything happens according to the Divine plan. (ii) For any event x, God knew x and no individual can prevent x. (iii) If agents cannot prevent x from occurring, agents cannot be free. (iiii) Therefore, every event depends on God's knowledge, and free will is an illusion. This argument formation is very restrictive; therefore, others including Norman Geisler and Johnathan Edwards have introduced different concepts to all God knowledge of the present, past and future whilst allowing free will. For example, Edwards' concept of the physical capabilities of agents to decide what to do and Geisler's suggestion that the term "free will" is relatively useless because it is free agents who perform free actions. Both of these notions improve the philosophical underpinnings of the position and attempt to allow God Omniscience (as traditionally interpreted) and free will.

The first strength related to the Augustinian-Calvinist position is that out of the three positions presented within this paper, the Augustinian-Calvinist position has the strongest Biblical basis. Augustinian-Calvinists would present passages such as Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 9:16 to suggest that grace is not given by actions performed but is bestowed through God's grace alone. Its dependence upon religious subtext and passages might strengthen those who are more theologically or religiously inclined. Moreover, these individuals might not feel that a solid philosophical basis is needed if the argument has a firm religious reference. This is further supported if it is accepted that most Christians believe in the traditional interpretation of Omniscience and are more inclined to support positions that uphold this belief rather than reject it.

The second strength associated with the traditional Augustinian-Calvinism is the introduction of some Edwardsian and Geisler's concepts to strengthen the philosophical underpinnings. Firstly, Edwards' concept of the physical capabilities of agents to decide what to do seems appealing. When the smoker accepts the cigarette, they must use their physical body to perform the necessary actions. For example, if someone is not forcing the person to do X action (such as smoking a cigarette), it can be said that they can move their body freely. Secondly, Geisler's Soft Determinism



tried to reconcile God's sovereignty over His creation with human free will by suggesting that the term "free will" is relatively useless because it is free agents who perform free actions and that all agents actions are free and foreknown by God. Although Edwardsian and Geisler's arguments present their own difficulties, their introduction to the Augustinian-Calvinist position provides the necessary philosophical context.

The final potential rationale for why some would support the Augustinian-Calvinist position instead of the other arguments is that some Christians may believe that agents do not have free will. Indeed, God does decree all that will pass. These individuals will be comfortable with this assumption, believing that whatever happens to them personally (positive or negative) was directed by God as part of His Divine plan for humanity.

The main criticisms concerning the Augustinian-Calvinist position are associated with the Reformed position and some of Geisler's suggestions.

Firstly, the Reformed Augustinian-Calvinist position argues that God's Divine plan will be enacted. However, how this is achieved is flexible. God is the playwright of the play we call reality, but agents still have space for improvisation and spontaneity. God knows how the play finishes, but He does not necessarily know all the actors' decisions. The problem with the Reformed Augustinian-Calvinist position is that it does not specify how much improvisation and spontaneity agents have within our actualised creation. For God's play to have the required ending, some predeterminism is required. Still, the Reformed position does not specify what is spontaneous or predetermined. The Reformed Augustinian-Calvinist position wants agents to have free will whilst not denying that God knows how His Divine plan ends.

The second criticism of this position is some of the concepts Geisler introduces. Primarily, the notions of "knowingly determines and determinately knows" and his concept of freedom and coercion.

Geisler argues that Judas was not coerced into his betrayal (it was something he freely chose to do). However, what does Geisler mean when he states that God determined that Judas would betray Jesus? Geisler never clearly defines his concept of determination. He instead equates self-determination with self-causation. However, if this is the case, to determine is to cause, and if God determines (foreordains), He causes. Therefore, a contradiction occurs because although Judas was not coerced to act the way he did, God caused Judas to act as he did.

The final criticism associated with Geisler's argument is related to the phrase, "knowingly determines and determinately knows". It suggests that God determines things based on His

knowledge, but knowledge of what? Is it founded upon what God sees? Seemingly not, because God sees what agents are freely doing and what He sees, He knows, and what He knows, He determines. However, Geisler rejects the notation that knowledge is the basis for the determination, 'perhaps God's predetermination is neither based on his Foreknowledge of human free choices nor done in spite of it'<sup>82</sup>. What does it mean to determine knowingly and to have determinately known if knowledge is not the basis of determination?

The religious connotations of Foreknowledge dictate that each position needs to rely on, propose, and suggest different Biblical passages to support these religious underpinnings. Therefore, a reminder might be necessary here. The author of this paper is not a Christian and would instead describe himself as an agnostic<sup>83</sup>. Because of this (along with this paper being philosophical), I believe that the positions' philosophical basis and rationality are more important than religious, theological doctrine or literature.

Biblical passages (if interpreted literally) either indicate that God does not know the future or that He has a Divine plan which cannot be altered; both positions are entitled to their interpretation. As the author of this paper is not a Christian, he cannot dictate which interpretation of different Biblical texts is correct or more legitimate. Both understandings of their respective passages lead to a refortification of Christians' beliefs that God either *does* or *does not* possess total knowledge of the future. However, this back and forth of Biblical passages implies that a literal interpretation of specific Biblical texts is a theological discussion rather than philosophical. It is, therefore, rather difficult to suggest which Biblical passages should be taken literally, whilst others should be considered symbolic, metaphoric or abstract. The acceptance or rejection of these passages will depend upon what other religious and theological concepts individuals adopt. These ideas, concepts, and doctrines require further enquiry, as do the individuals who propose them. This is beyond this paper's purview.

The final suggestion I wish to make to this paper before concluding remarks is the connection between God's Foreknowledge and His freedom. Specific Biblical texts such as 1 Samuel 15:11-35 and Matthew 19:8 indicate that God has the freedom to change His mind regarding making Saul King or allowing divorce when it was not originally His intent to tolerate it. Passages such as these indicate that God can interact and change His Divine plan. If these texts are interpreted literally, this suggests that God has at least some freedom within actualised creation.

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<sup>82</sup> Geisler, *Predestination and Free Will*, p.70.

<sup>83</sup> For clarity see footnote 19.

The authors who have developed the literature investigating God's knowledge have only discussed this concept from their respective positions. However, their failure to recognise that God's Foreknowledge connects to other aspects of God's character, such as His freedom, undermines each one of these positions. For example, consider Augustinian-Calvinism. If God has complete knowledge over all things, knowing that x would occur. No individual can prevent x; actualised agents cannot prevent x from occurring. Everything depends upon God's knowledge in order to exist.. Another potential problem arises that is specific to Augustinian-Calvinism. Firstly, if we are created in God's image (Genesis 1:26) and humans have no freedom, does that mean God has no freedom, as we were created in His image, and secondly, what is the nature of prophecies? Are they created, realised, are they wishes or absolute decrees?

### Conclusion

The challenges associated with God's freedom and Open-Theism are not necessarily as noticeable compared to the other positions presented within this paper. This is because it could be considered that Open-Theism allows God more freedom because He is reactive to the future instead of passive, as He does not know what the future comprises, whereas this is not the case for the other positions. Open-Theists state that God is free to react according to how He feels in relation to different situations because He does not know the future. However, difficulties about God's freedom arise for those who subscribe to Open-Theism because they do not specify the extent of this freedom (in actualised creation) or God's freedom before actualisation.

Along with these problems that are specific to these philosophical positions, other difficulties arise from the Christian perspective. For example, many Christians believe that this actualised creation is the best of all possible worlds, but what impels God to create such a world? Is it His goodness that inclines Him to make the best possible world or does something else motivate this? If it is something else, such as His reason, is God's knowledge limited because of this fact? Can He deny future knowledge (as Swinburne's Voluntary Nescience suggests); must He have a complete understanding of the future as, the Augustinian-Calvinist position argues, or could a compromise occur, such as Molinism?

Instead of evaluating these questions, the author presented them to Open-Theists, Molinists and Augustinian-Calvinists to comment on potential solutions rather than to present any answers in this paper. If the authors who have developed the philosophical positions regarding Foreknowledge answer these questions, another investigation should commence within a separate document. Firstly, they have failed to present such refutations, and secondly, these potential rebuttals are complex and worthy of an independent examination. Therefore, it is beyond the realms of this paper

to either take this step or to develop this enquiry further. However, whatever potential solutions these authors impose, their success does not just rely on the rationality of the arguments, but also the relationship between Christian dogma, beliefs, and text. These authors might propose philosophically sound solutions. However, these solutions might be religiously illiterate or contradictory. Therefore, these solutions would be rejected by Christians because they could impede fundamental Christian beliefs, even if the philosophical propositions are rational and sound. Therefore, if an accord is to be reached, Christians must either accept a compromise between traditional Christian principles and the philosophical perspective or they must reject the rational solution to preserve their traditional belief system. Either way, this might be a difficult decision as the two perspectives are inimical.

Finally, the author started by investigating what exactly Omniscience is, as the accepted definition leaves a lot to be desired and does not fully cover the full complexity of the concept. The author explained that God's knowledge is much greater than that of mortal agents who can never achieve Omniscience. The author then investigated *De Dicto* and *De Re* knowledge, stating that for Christians, God's Omniscience is like propositions "bachelors are unmarried men" because bachelorhood is necessarily true by its definition. Therefore, bachelorhood yields *De Dicto* knowledge because it concerns a proposition, whilst the original statement does not suggest *De Re* knowledge because it does not involve any specific agent or thing. For example, the statement "God is Omniscient" is similar to the proposition, "bachelors are unmarried men"; however, it differs because the proposition can never fluctuate or change because it is necessarily true and an essential feature of God's character. It is also unlike bachelorhood because bachelorhood is contingent. Therefore, God possesses *De Dicto* knowledge as it is an essential aspect of His character and *De Re* knowledge because it applies to His specific being.

Having established the basic tenets of Omniscience, the paper moved on to evaluating Open-Theism, Molinism and Augustinian-Calvinism, explaining, assessing, and investigating these positions in some depth, noting the positions' strengths and weaknesses within philosophical contexts. Primarily, the author has focused upon the philosophical perspective of these positions, stating that Bivalent Omniscience is the strongest argument within the Open-Theist sub-group because it accepts the principle of Bivalence whilst arguing that the future is still open to different possibilities. Although it should be noted that the criticism associated with the words would, will and might does significant damage to BO. I agree that the words would and will have different distinct meanings that should not be interchanged, whilst might and will are interchangeable as someone might indicate that something will occur, but logically the event might not. This criticism does significant damage to the credibility of BO because it places critical importance on establishing that there is a difference

between might-counterfactuals and would or will-counterfactuals. For this reason, the author cannot fully endorse the position within its current formulation.

Although the author believes Bivalent Omniscience cannot be fully endorsed, it is still the strongest argument presented in this paper. This is because Molinism fail to recognise the problem associated with the Ockhamist position, (which is that the truth value of “X knew that p” is logically dependent upon p occurring, the truth value of “X believed that p” is not contingent (on the truth value of p), as it does not matter whether or not p turns out to be true). The latter statement is about the past and hence unavoidable, concluding that free will is an illusion that must be true if God believed it.

The problems associated with the Augustinian-Calvinist position are multifaceted but mainly consist of two problems; Norman Geisler’s Soft Determinism and Jonathan Edwards’ attempted effort to develop a solution to the first problem.

The chief issue with Geisler’s Soft Determinism is his assertion that, ‘[W]hatever he forechooses cannot be based on what he foreknows. Nor can what he foreknows be based on what he forechose’<sup>84</sup>. He compares this knowledge to the past, arguing that God knowingly determines and determinately knows everything that will pass. So, according to Geisler, free actions are self-determined. This solution does not work because he argues that God determines agents, and the agents themselves determine free actions. This is contradictory and causes Geisler’s Soft Determinism severe damage. The principal problem associated with Edwardsianism is his somewhat naive assumption that moral inability is superfluous to the agent’s moral responsibility. This is problematic because agents consider mitigating circumstances for another agent’s responsibility for choosing and acting in different situations.

Whilst the primary focus of this paper is an evaluation of the philosophical positions regarding God’s Foreknowledge, the author has not discounted the religious underpinnings upon which these arguments depend. This is because these foundations are vital to establishing the arguments. It is not the author’s place (within this paper) to either remark on the legitimacy of a literal interpretation of different Biblical passages and the broader context of why Christians adopt their specific beliefs. This was decided because this paper is philosophical, and secondly, these issues are complex and worthy of a separate investigation.

In addition, the author has detailed the potential oversight of those who have developed philosophical positions regarding God’s Foreknowledge and His freedom. Moreover, God’s Foreknowledge relates to different underlying suppositions many Christians believe are fundamental

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<sup>84</sup> Geisler, *Predestination and Free Will*, p.71.

for their beliefs. As noted, every philosophical position presented within this paper fails to recognise this point and suffers because of it. Moreover, the author has failed to present any potential solutions to these problems because any possible resolution would be beyond this paper's scope. Once different authors (writers who subscribes to one of the respective philosophical positions and realises this problem) has developed solutions to the issues surrounding God's Foreknowledge and freedom a more comprehensive investigation can commence. Until such a time, the author of this paper will mention the problem for others to solve.

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