

2018

Can God Know Tomorrow?

Jacob Kristian Bergman
University of Northern Iowa

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©2018 Jacob Bergman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt>

 Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bergman, Jacob Kristian, "Can God Know Tomorrow?" (2018). *Honors Program Theses*. 311.
<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt/311>

This Open Access Honors Program Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Program at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Program Theses by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

CAN GOD KNOW TOMORROW?

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors with Distinction or University Honors

Jacob Kristian Bergman
University of Northern Iowa
May 2018

This Study by: Jacob Kristian Bergman

Entitled: Can God Know Tomorrow?

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation

University Honors

Date

Reza Lahroodi

Honors Thesis Advisor

Date

Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

Introduction

It's Tuesday evening, and I sit down to begin writing an essay that is due in a few weeks. As my fingers hit the keyboard, words start to flow out, but are these words original to me? Does someone or something already know the words that will follow before I do? If someone knows what words will be written onto these pages before I do, am I the one formulating these ideas? If God knows everything, all past, present, and future, can humans exist as free thinking beings capable of unique, independent thoughts? If God has a plan for all people and knows all actions that will occur at all times, do humans legitimately have a purpose? It appears that the significance of forgiveness, of Heaven, and of morality would all seem to crumble under the hands of this form of determinism since it removes any autonomy from humanity. If God knows that someone is going to Heaven before he or she is born, then their actions are seemingly already set to be excellent and moral. If someone is going to Hell, then the opposite is true. Human relationships would be meaningless because they would have all been created by God with the end goal of Heaven or Hell already determined. Before the birth of humanity, God would have known the entirety of humanity's possibilities and who would and would not reside next to Him in Heaven. Divine foreknowledge, held by an all-knowing God, appears to inhibit the ability for humans to have free will. Christian theism has traditionally kept the idea of divine foreknowledge, but the claims that God knows all details of the future limits human free will that would have been granted by God.

The debates over free will and determinism have occurred in philosophy and theology for centuries and continue to be a recurrent topic of discussion as more and more studies point towards notions of determinism rooted in scientific studies of neurochemistry and physics.

Regardless of the claims made in areas of the scientific community regarding physical determinism, the concept of an omniscient being, God, that knows the past, present, and future events to every detail does not mesh well with the idea of this God creating a species that has a free will. Open Theism attempts to shed light on this issue in developing a description of an omniscient God that grants free will to His creation for humans to freely choose whether or not to reciprocate His love.

According to the understandings of Greg Boyd, Open Theism is a movement within Christian theology hinged upon the idea of free will that states that because of God's love for humanity and His desire that people freely elect to reciprocate His love. Therefore making His knowledge and His plans for the future conditional upon human action. According to the theological framework of Open Theism, God, while being omniscient, does not know what humanity will freely do in the future. In this theory, God knows all truth and all possibilities, but is unable to distinguish which possibility will actually occur as it is not a truth. Since humans have free will, God is unable to fully know what humans will do, but it remains unclear what, if any, future actions would be knowable to God. God is also, traditionally, omnipotent and omnibenevolent, and Open Theism holds true to these beliefs. While being omnipotent, God simply allows humans to freely exist in the world and develop or oppose any form of a relationship with Him. It is due to God's love and His desire for a personal relationship with each and every person that He allowed free will to exist and flourish within humanity.

Open Theism holds to the claim that God is omniscient by arguing that things that have not yet occurred remain open and are not considered a truth until they occur. Once these truths arise, they become known to God. The future is contingent upon human choice and

remains unknown to God what exactly will happen until it occurs. God can foreknow all possible scenarios of all actions, but cannot precisely determine which one will occur. This description of omniscience is similar to definitions of omnipotence that allow God to do anything except for things that are logically impossible. Typical examples of things that God cannot do include creating a mountain that He cannot move, counting to infinity, creating round squares, or having three times three equal eleven. God cannot do what is logically impossible, similarly, God cannot know what is logically impossible, i.e., the truths about the future actions of humans with free will.

For humans to be morally responsible agents that have a genuine relationship with God, it is necessary for them to have free will; it entails that where a person did action 'A', it was at least possible that at the same time and under the same circumstances they could have chosen action 'B' instead. If the ability to do something else exists for humans, then humans would have free will. God could retract this freedom at any point, but in order to have meaningful relationships with humans and demonstrate his love and affection by allowing choice, God must not interfere with human activity, or it will limit human choice. Open Theists believe in a world where God knows and understands the risk that many people will turn away from Him due to human speculations and other actions, but this is a risk He is willing to take. He instead gives humans the option to freely love their Creator or reject him for all that He is.

Significance

If God were to be omnipotent and omnibenevolent, then evil should not exist in this world. God would have to allow evil to occur if he was omnipotent, but if He is omnibenevolent then this evil would distort all understanding of good. It can be argued that humanity has

original sin because Adam and Eve took the apple from the Garden of Eden or that the Devil comes into the world and forces evil upon humanity, but neither of these arguments defend omnibenevolence or omnipotence and require free actions to occur. God would not allow the Devil to distort the world if He was omnipotent and omnibenevolent. If God knew, through His divine foreknowledge stemming from His omnibenevolence, that Adam and Eve would take the apple from the garden, then there was no choice in their action and God would have placed sin and evil into the world for humanity to suffer forever. What kind of all-knowing God that is all powerful and all good would set a course for His favorite creation to endure eternal suffering? Why would God send people to Hell after death if He was omnipotent and omnibenevolent? Only free will is utilized to explain the atrocities of humanity, it was the choice of humanity to eat the apple and be damned to sin for the remainder of their days, it was the choice of each individual human to turn away from God their Creator, it was the choice of humanity to kill and steal and rape and cause so many injustices in the world. However, how can any free choice that accounts for such evils occur if God knows tomorrow and the actions of all people? How can God have a plan for the world, a divine plan that is perfect and better than any plan any other being could develop, if this plan was always meant to force His creation to suffer? The idea that humanity has free will conflicts deeply with God being omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient and the contradictions within Scripture over divine foreknowledge and free will make it difficult, maybe even impossible, to definitively state that humanity has free will granted by God.

Open Theism is an attempt to provide answers as to how God can remain omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient while also granting free will to humanity. This theory is an

important cornerstone to understanding religion and the contradictions evident in the understanding of free will and omniscience.

Purpose

This paper examines the compatibility of God's foreknowledge and human free will. To narrow the focus of this question, this paper will focus on a branch of this debate by analyzing the arguments of Open Theism. By analyzing the claims made within Open Theism, with respect to its proposal that God can be omniscient while granting free will, it will be possible to determine if this claim is a valid argument as to how humanity can have free will without limiting the scope of God. This paper will focus on an Open Theist critique of the traditional understanding of God's divine foreknowledge as encompassing all free choices and actions.

Brief History of Free Will and Determinism

The notion of a free will is an idea we have inherited from antiquity (Frede, 2012) and has continued to be a focal point of discussion in the philosophical community. With little agreement within the philosophical community there are major philosophers supporting both sides of the debate. Many philosophical theories support the concept of free will, with differing views as to what free will actually is, but some, especially in the realm of psychology, promote the ideas held within determinism, primarily causal determinism.

Within science, there is always a cause associated with each action; therefore, it is reasonable to side with the nature of determinism holding the belief that someday science will be able to accurately explain the cause of everything (Sider, 2005). Early understanding that all actions had a cause began with Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz where he believed that everything had a cause for it to exist, opening the doors for the scientific notion of scientific cause and

effect (Waxman & Magill, 2012). The advancing of scientific inquiry has led more scholars to lean towards the side of determinism, the idea that everything has a cause that can be fully explained. However, not all determinism theories are rooted solely in the development of science. David Hume posited that people are driven by their passions and desires and these passions and desires control the actions that people take. (Waxman, 2012). The concept of determinism has many different branches that all claim some support from different philosophers, scholars, and psychologists throughout time.

This is not to say all philosophers are falling under the realm of determinism. Some of the greatest philosophers believe in the human will and that it has the ability to make choices, even dating back to Plato in his *Laws* where he stated that the soul was free (Waxman, 2012),. Descartes also poses that the faculty of the will is that of freedom and choice and that the will, by nature is free (O'Connor & Fischer, 2005). The conception that humans have free will and free action hinges upon the will of humanity. Harry Frankfurt (1982), proposed that it is the capacity to reflect on the desires and beliefs held by humans that sets them apart from other animals (O'Connor & Fischer, 2005). Contrary to the views of David Hume, Frankfurt believes that passions and desires do not control human actions, but instead it is the ability to reflect on and control passions and desires that sets humans apart from animals and demonstrates that humanity has free will.

While there remains no method to prove or disprove the concept of free will in favor of determinism, most scholars are leaning towards the views of determinism. However, with the introduction of theology, religious beliefs heavily favor the position of free will granted by god (Waxman, 2012). This topic has stretched across time, with many different views coming to

light. With little true consensus on the matter, free will and determinism is still a wide-ranging debate in the fields of philosophy, psychology, and theology.

Free will remains an important topic in philosophy due to its implications on moral responsibility and overall freedom of actions. It has remained one of the most controversial subjects in the field of metaphysics and the introduction of theology furthers the debate. Open Theism attempts to derive a world where humanity holds free will, granted to them by God and confirmed by Scripture in the Bible, while maintaining the notion that God knows all truths and all possibilities.

Libertarian Free Will

One proposal to the free will argument is the understanding of humans having free will in a libertarian sense. Libertarian freedom, defined on page 210 in *Divine Foreknowledge*, is a position on the nature and the possibility of free agency, under which freedom is incompatible with causal determinism and there exists genuine instances of free agency. Most that subscribe to the libertarian free will also follow the Principle of Alternate Possibilities. This principle is “the idea that free agency, in the sense presupposed by moral responsibility, entails the agent’s ability to do otherwise. One’s choosing A is “free” in this sense if and only if one could have chosen other than A. Divine foreknowledge supposedly conflicts with human freedoms on the grounds that a divinely foreknown action would not satisfy this principle” (Beilby & Eddy, 2001, page 212). Libertarian free will is one proposal to an understanding of free will, another proposal is the idea of compatibilism. Compatibilism attempts to grant humanity free will with some version of causal determinism; “the idea that freedom is compatible with necessity, e.g., person P is still “free” with respect to choice C even though C is necessary” (Beilby & Eddy,

2001, page 208). Compatibilism also refers to the idea that divine foreknowledge can be a quality of God while humanity retains free choice in their actions. This can be associated with fatalism where all actions happen according to necessity. Both of these theories upon free will believe that while there is only one route that can occur, it is still a choice. This choice is simply just a choice with only one option. On the opposing side of compatibilism is incompatibilism. Incompatibilism is very similar to the doctrine of a libertarian free will, but it openly rejects the ideas within compatibilism by stating that freedom is incompatible with necessity. Making a choice necessary, only offering one choice that must occur, is not freedom in any sort according to incompatibilists. Open Theists believe that divine foreknowledge and human freedom are incompatible and prescribe to the concept of libertarian free will.

The Traditional View of God

The traditional view of God in Christian theology is due to the work of Saint Augustine. Under the Augustinian view, God is wholly perfect and is, therefore immutable and impassible - meaning he is not affected by anything in his creation. God is eternal in the sense of being above and beyond time. God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, the perfectly good agent, and the only creator and sustainer of the universe. God's omniscience entails that He has foreknowledge of all future events, including human free choices and actions. God is also entirely free. It was God's choice to create the universe as he could have done otherwise, but instead created the universe as an act of love for the future inhabitants of this universe. Prior to God's creation nothing existed. Time and space were a creation of God's will, meaning there is nothing that could have existed prior to God and it was necessary for God to create for the universe to begin.

Within God's creation, everything is good. Evil was not created by God and He is not responsible for any form of evil within the universe. While evil is not a product of God, it still holds purpose for its existence as it demonstrates what is God and represents the opposition of God. The good held within and created by God is the only thing that God is responsible for and everything else exists in the world to demonstrate how good God truly is and how horrible the world would be without the goodness of God.

Augustine was a major influence on the traditional view of God by defining God as the only perfect being. While all of God's creations are perfect, since God does not make a mistake, their perfection is not to be understood in the same fashion in which God is perfect. All creations are removed from God's perfection. God is the highest, most powerful, most righteous, most beautiful, most good, and the most blessed being. All other beings fall short of God's qualities and are aiming to be like God in the hope that they too could reach the levels of goodness as God. While their aims will always fall short, the quest for perfection in the attempt to be God-like is a necessity for God's creation. Since God created the universe out of love, He loves all of his creation. God interacts with His creation and holds a relationship with the world. The relationship held between God and his creation was an essential component of Augustine's work. The influence of Saint Augustine on many different Western Philosophers is evident in the traditional view of God. Augustine is in direct opposition to most of works of Aristotle and prescribes to most of the beliefs held within Neoplatonism.

Open Theists View of God

A Brief History of Open Theism

The development of Open Theism began rather recently in the scope of theology when *The Openness of God* was initially published in 1980. It was not until *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* was published in 1994 that Open Theism advanced into a significant topic in both philosophy and theology. In this text, Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger advocate for the claims made within Open Theism and its Biblical significance as a development in the understanding of the relationship between free will and divine foreknowledge. This text would again be revised in Pinnock's *Most Moved Mover* where he continues to develop the ideas of Open Theism while removing some of the most objectionable notions in his original texts. While all Christians agree that God is omniscient and knows reality perfectly, there remains an argument about the content of reality that God knows perfectly (Boyd, Beilby, & Eddy, 2001). The content of God's infallible knowledge is subjected to such debate due to the different understandings of divine freedom and human freedom.

Understanding of Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will

Open Theism maintains the beliefs that God is personal, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good while denying compatibilist views of freedom and endorsing a libertarian understanding of freedom (Robinson, 2000). The rejection of divine knowledge of future contingent actions is a necessity for Open Theism as it negates the possibility of both human and divine freedom. Open Theists also deny the divine timelessness as a solution to the dilemma posed by free will and divine foreknowledge. Instead, divine eternity is meant to be understood as holding both beginningless and endless temporal duration (Robinson, 2000). No divine foreknowledge can occur for free will to exist, however Open Theists do not limit any

divine omniscience of God. Instead, divine omniscience is defined by Swinburne as “a person P [as being] omniscient at a time t if and only if he knows every true proposition about t or an earlier time and every true proposition about a time later than t which is true of logical necessity or which he has overriding reason to make true, which it is logically possible that he entertains then” (Robinson, 2000, page 85). This definition of omniscience allows for God to know the truth of the past and of the present, but limits any sort of divine foreknowledge of a contingent future as it is necessary for humans and God to hold freedom. God cannot know, with certainty, what human actions will be, but He is able to predict all possible outcomes that could occur. Biblical passages depict God responding to unexpected behavior. God anticipates all behaviors, but completely unexpected, or improbable, behavior can occasionally surprise God (Boyd, Beilby & Eddy, 2001). This does not limit God’s omniscience though, since these actions are not logical truths until the actions occur.

Varying understandings of God’s divine omniscience incorporate probabilistic outcomes or the idea that God knows, in detail, all possibilities that could occur. The probabilities of outcomes would shift according to past actions, but at all times God would have an understanding of the probabilities of all possible outcomes. God would also know future events that will happen as an inevitable consequence of past and present factors. These inevitable consequences would not be contingent truths and would be causally or physically necessitated to occur (Robinson, 2000). Some of these inevitable consequences can be explained by the understanding of God’s will. God’s will cannot be incorrectly stated and must occur, but when it will occur is unknown to God. God knows that if He should continue to want a certain event to occur in the future, nothing can stop Him from bringing it about; whatever God needs to do, he

has the power to do; whatever he sees is best to do happens forthwith (Robinson, 2000).

However, God's will can be subjected to change since His own actions and future are perfectly free. God can do with the world as He pleases, but His ideas are not set in stone because God is, unlike humans, perfectly free and capable of changing His mind. God is even capable of experiencing regret. In Gen 6:6 it states that "the Lord was sorry that he made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart" (Boyd, Beilby & Eddy, 2001, page 26). This demonstrates the divine freedom of God where He is capable of changing his mind and that the contingent future still remains unknown to Him.

According to Robinson (2000), God knows the options available to His creatures, God alone is responsible for those options. God determined how much freedom His creatures can have. Despite granting human freedom to His creation, God holds sufficient power to ensure that His will is realized and all actions are subjected to the will of God. Scripture demonstrates God being frustrated with those that do not follow His plans for their lives (Boyd, Beilby & Eddy, 2001). This shows that the plans God sets for people are not necessities for people to follow, however God continues to respect the freedom He granted humanity and allows individuals to stray from the plan. The world does still remain within God's hands, He just simply allows humanity to have freedom and elects not to interfere.

Not only does God respect the freedom He grants humanity, within Scripture, God is also shown to interact with His creation. Open Theists believe that there would be no reason for God to interact with the world if He already knew the entirety of the future. It goes even further to ask why God would question and test people if their life was already set in motion. God will often test the members of his covenants to discover whether or not people will follow

him (Boyd, Beilby & Eddy, 2001). These tests serve as evidence that God does not know if these individuals will or will not elect to follow him and seem to demonstrate that God does not know the contingent future due to His bestowment of free will in His creation. If God has emotion and interaction with humans then God would not know about their actions ahead of time. If it was the case that God knew of their actions ahead of time, His response would also seem to be predetermined. With the expression of emotion on something that God already knew would occur would demonstrate a chain of predetermined actions for both God and humanity thus stripping humans and God of any sort of freedom. Why would God interact with something if He already knew of the unchanging results unless He too was subjected to this pattern?

Open Theists believe that the combination of Scripture and philosophical analysis reveal conditions for free actions to occur. The early Church represented God and His creation as being in a special relationship that hinges on human freedom. Open Theism goes against the traditional views held by the Christian Church, but Open Theism offers definitive questions with regards to freedom, divine foreknowledge, divine freedom, and God's loving relation with His creation.

Within Open Theism, there is no power as great as the power of God. However, each individual has a degree of influence over their own lives and on God. The relationship between God and His creation is pluralistic where there is no all-divine entity calling all of the shots (Pinnock, 2002). God's sovereignty extends only to certain things, where the aspects unchecked by God are subjected to human freedoms. It is not to say that God could not have complete sovereignty over his creation. But instead, His love of His creation provoked him to revoke some of His complete power and allow for humanity to decide whether or not to accept and

return His love. Open Theists also make the claim that God does not require divine foreknowledge to retain complete power over His creation. God is all powerful and is able to react and respond to all actions without knowing of their future.

Open Theism makes better sense of Scripture than other alternatives and answers the questions as to why people inflict horrifying suffering onto each other. It also explains the necessity and validity of prayer. Prayer not only changes people, it may possibly change God's mind and the entire course of history (Boyd, Beilby & Eddy, 2001). In terms of the Bible, Open Theism develops a personal relationship with God and formulates an image of a loving God (Pinnock, 2002). God is not dependent on the world and makes himself independent in certain aspects and dependent in others, thus it is evident that humans hold freedom of action in the aspects in which God is independent of humanity (Pinnock, 2002). Certain passages in the Bible also seem to preach the existence of determinism rooted in God's knowledge. This is misleading and taken out of context. The Bible does not represent God as an all-controlling sovereignty. It refutes determinism and an appropriate understanding of Scripture leads to the understanding of freedom (Pinnock, 2002).

God's passion is to love and to be loved (Pinnock, 2002). He suffers with His children, suffers because of His children, and suffers for His children. God interacts and responds to the situations that His children are placed into. God seeks out covenantal relationships with his people and is deeply involved and not at all removed or detached from their interactions with the world. (Pinnock, 2002). This representation of God shows Him to be loving and invested in the world. God would not be invested into a world in which actions were already set in stone. The removal of divine foreknowledge is what allows Him to suffer with and love His people.

God is meant to be viewed as a personal being, not in absolute terms. God relates to people without being part of the world. God is a relational being who thinks and acts, loves and knows. Jesus describes His Father's love to the world and explains how God is waiting for him to return. This makes God vulnerable as love opens the door for people to turn away and not reciprocate this affection. However, love is more than just an attribute to God and is God's very nature to be love (Pinnock, 2002).

Scriptural Support

Within Scripture there are many instances that demonstrate God as having foreknowledge of the world. Open Theists acknowledge their importance to understanding this topic, but do not believe that the collection of Scriptural examples supporting foreknowledge are exhaustive. To only accept these verses and make the claim that the Bible clearly states that God has divine foreknowledge would be greatly handpicking the Bible and greatly misinterpret the text. As Boyd in *Divine Foreknowledge* (2001) described that, "alongside the scriptural motif that celebrates God's control and knowledge of the settled aspects of creation is another, rarely appreciated motif that celebrates God's creative flexibility in responding to open aspects of his creation" (page 23). Within this motif, God raises questions about the future to His creation, verbalizes the future in a conditional fashion instead of a necessary one, demonstrates emotions like regret, and changes His mind about how to handle situations after interacting with His creation. This motif is frequently written off in the traditional understanding of Christianity and the followers of this traditional understanding believe that God was only appearing to say these things and his utilization of objects, such as a bush, to vocalize Himself is enough to discredit this view. An Open Theist would reject that understanding and believes that

both of the motifs evident in the Bible should be interpreted in a similar fashion and both be utilized to describe what God and creation are really like (Boyd, Beilby & Eddy, 2001).

Passages, as understood by Gregory Boyd in *Divine Foreknowledge*, to support the claim that God can be surprised and confront the unexpected include: Isaiah 5:2-4, when God says he expected for the vineyard to yield grapes, but it instead yielded wild grapes; Jeremiah 19:5, when the Lord expressed surprise at Israel's behavior; as well as Jeremiah 7:31, 32:35, 3:6-7, 3:19-20. God expresses regret in Genesis 6:6; 1 Sam 13:13; 1 Sam 15:35 and Romans 8:28. God expresses His frustration for the world in Ezekiel 22:30-31. Scripture even demonstrates God's plan and judgement being reversed by the power of prayer in Ex 32:14; Num 11:1-2, 14:12-20, 16:20-35, 16:41-48; Deut 9:13-14, 9:18-20, 9:25; Judg 10:13-15; 2 Samuel 24:17-25; 1 Kings 21:27-29; 2 Kings 13:3-5, 20:1-7 and 2 Chron 12:5-8. The utilization of prayer as a conversation between God and a human participating in prayer would require God to interact with and listen to the prayer for it to be meaningful. It is evident in Scripture that God gets frustrated when people reject his invitation for eternal life in 2 Peter 3:9, again in Ezekiel 18:23, 18:32, 33:11; John 3:16; 1 Tim 2:3-4, 4:10, and in Acts 17:27, 17:30. Boyd also references passages where God is shown to be genuinely grieved when people refuse to yield his influence in Is 63:10; Eph 4:30; Acts 7:51; Heb 3:8, 3:15, 4:7. Throughout Scripture, God has also been shown to speak in conditional terms, which for Open Theists confirms that the future is not already determined, in Ex 3:18, 4:1; Ezekiel 12:3; Hebrews 6:18; Jeremiah 26:3; Mt 26:39; Acts 2:23, 4:27-28; Rev 13:8; Mt 12:40, 16:21 and John 2:19. God also tests people throughout the Bible and evidence of this occurs in Gen 22:12; 2 Chron 32:31, where God tests Hezekiah and if God already knew with complete certainty what Hezekiah would do then he would not be a test, Deut 8:2, 13:1-3 and

Judg 3:4. God would not test people if He already knew with complete and infallible certainty what was going to happen and what their responses would be. Lastly, Open Theists believe that the Bible demonstrates God changing His mind. If the future, like the past, was set in stone and unable to be changed then God would not have been able to change His mind unless it was already predetermined that God would do so. If it was predetermined then God would also be limited in His freedom. Throughout Jeremiah, God is shown to change his mind and this suggests that God's knowledge and intentions are not eternally settled (Boyd, Beilby & Eddy, 2001).

This Scriptural evidence is enough for Open Theists to at least raise the question about God's foreknowledge that is evident in other passages. However, a thorough examination of these scriptural passages and their implications for God's foreknowledge is beyond the scope of this thesis. Due to Augustine's influence on Christianity, the doctrine of divine foreknowledge is an essential element of mainstream Christian theology. Open Theists dissent from this opinion and believe that there is strong Scriptural evidence to support their claims.

Arguments Against Open Theism

While some members of the Christian Church have adopted an Open Theist approach to religion, most Christians reject the ideas held within this branch for a myriad of reasons. The first major reason is that the Scripture utilized in Open Theism is considered to be taken out of context and misused by many people in opposition to these beliefs. Another major issue with Open Theism is the humanization of God with respect to truth and understanding of the future. The third issue that traditional Christians have is that Open Theists believe themselves to be more loving and capable of changing God's mind by showing Him better alternatives.

According to traditional theologians, the Scripture utilized in support of Open Theism has many different natural translations and understandings associated with them. However, most of the passages utilized in support of Open Theism can also be used against the theory. Open Theism reads the bible atomistically and without sensitivity to Hebrew idiom (Duncan, 2001). For example, when the Bible says that God's nose got hot, it means that God was angry (Duncan, 2001). Open Theists rely on passages such as God's nose getting hot to formulate arguments of out of context relations because the Open Theist approach does not distinguish between literal and anthropomorphic language (Helm, Beilby & Eddy, 2001). Proper interpretation of the Bible, according to those against Open Theism, refutes the beliefs held by Open Theists.

Open Theists believe that God becomes aware of contingent events as the events unfold. This equates God with humans in the sense that what happened is only knowable once it happens (Hunt, Beilby & Eddy, 2001). God only has perfect knowledge of what has occurred or is occurring. It is a logical consequence of God's omniscience that God cannot hold any false belief, but according to Open Theism God can be mistaken and disappointed in the actions of humans demonstrates instances where God holds false beliefs (Craig, Beilby & Eddy, 2001). The Open Theist will state God is not actually holding any false beliefs because beliefs about the future cannot be true or false, but this is not the case. God would have to hold false beliefs if he incorrectly assumed the future since he predicted something and was wrong. Even if future contingent propositions are not to be considered true or false, the beliefs held by Open Theists do not hold God to truly be omniscient (Craig, Beilby & Eddy, 2001).

Since God is omniscient and knows of all future actions, within classical theism, horrible acts occur only as a part of the “good sovereign reason.” In Open Theism, this is not the case and instead God allows horrible actions to occur out of respect for human free will (Hunt, Beilby & Eddy, 2001). God allows and respects the immoral actions of humanity since He granted free will. What is disturbing about allowing these actions to occur is that God could have intervened. Instead under Open Theism, God lets evil occur out of a respect for humanity’s right to freedom. This openness of God provides an illustration of the world that does not require the grace of God to relieve evil while simultaneously limits the power of God entirely (Helm, Beilby & Eddy, 2001).

If Open Theists are to believe that God’s mind can be changed by humans, then these supporters of Open Theism are willing to say that they have a better understanding of what is right and can offer more love than God. This kind of misguided interpretation occurs with stories such as the story of Moses. Moses pleads with God not to destroy the Israelites and because of Moses’s love and compassion, God changes His mind and does not kill Moses’s people (Duncan, 2001). This can also be seen in the Open Theists depiction of prayer. The belief that prayer is a conversation with God that can change God’s mind and even alter the course of history is not a claim to be taken lightly. Prayer is meant to be a conversation with God where people are asking God for guidance and attempting to learn of God’s plan for them. The Open Theist depiction of prayer seems to be one of bargaining and holds the possibility of convincing God of something. Open Theism proposes a world where God has things to learn from His creation. God can learn not only the best way for the future to occur, but how to be loving, compassionate, and moral.

God is completely purposeful and perfect in all actions. If the Open Theist approach to free will was to be accepted, then God would have had to incorrectly assess certain aspects of His creation. By granting humans free will and holding no insight on the truths about the future, God was not perfect in His creation. All things would have happened with a purpose and part of God's divine plan if He was perfect. Traditional Christian Theologians would argue for this point and must reject the ideas of Open Theism as blasphemous against God's glory.

Many of the arguments against Open Theism demonstrate the inadequate attempt at explaining human freedom and divine foreknowledge. I concur with some traditional Christians that Open Theism has some glaring flaws, but none of the members in the opposing parties offer any valid claims to finding a compatible way in which free will and omniscience can occur. Under my understanding, it seems that by sticking to Scripture, it is impossible to deny God's omniscience and impossible to accept the notion that God granted humans complete free will as there are too many contradictions within Scripture itself. Most of the dissenters of Open Theism completely disregard the issues that Open Theism raises in their theological beliefs and instead simply demonstrate the flaws in its proposal. The potential implications for God being omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent, as most of the Christian community subscribes to, are devastating. One implication is that with no free will, there is no autonomy for humanity. The confusions demonstrated by omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence are already massive and the generally accepted claim to why evil exists in the world is that humans have free will to go against the blessings of God. It is clear that free will and these three generally accepted ideals cannot go hand in hand. While Open Theism is not the answer to this

issue, it, unlike its predecessors, begins a conversation and introduces logical analysis to attempt to understand how freedom and God can coexist.

Augustine's Solution to Divine Foreknowledge

Augustine proposed different solutions to the issue of divine foreknowledge and human freedom, all which Open Theists reject, but the most prominent is the guarantor solution. Augustine also proposed the divine-case solution, the eternality solution, and the modal-placement solution, but Augustine was most satisfied with the guarantor solution. We know he was most satisfied with this solution because he offered it once in his early career in his book *On Free Choice of the Will* and then it was the only proposal he offered in *City of God*, which he wrote towards the end of his life. Augustine writes that “our will would not be a will, unless it were in our power. Therefore, because it is in our power it is free... Nor can it be a will if it is not in our power, therefore, God also has foreknowledge of our power. So the power is not taken from me by His foreknowledge, but because of His foreknowledge, the power to will will more certainly be present in me” (Augustine & Matthews, 2005, page 97). For Augustine, the guarantor solution can be summed up by allowing God to not just have foreknowledge of what someone will do, but also foreknowledge of what someone will do with their own free will. God's foreknowledge is not a threat to free will, but instead it guarantees free will. Augustine believes that God allows people to sin on their own free will. It is necessary that one sins, but these sins are done with the freedom of their own will.

Another possibility proposed by Augustine was the divine-case solution. Augustine does not expand much upon this solution, which is not really a solution, but the proposal is that God has foreknowledge of his own actions. Augustine quickly points out that God would not seem to

act on his own free will in this scenario. This demonstrates that having foreknowledge of God's future inhibits God's freedom, which could not be the case, but Augustine still attempts to find a way in which God knows the future of all humans while humans retain freedom. Augustine's third solution is the eternality solution. In this solution, Augustine appeals to God's eternality and proposed that God cannot have foreknowledge because of His eternal present. According to Augustine, everything that has happened, is happening, and will happen, is presently happening. Therefore divine foreknowledge does not exist for God since He is present at all times. Augustine does not pursue this development any further as it seems that the eternality solution still inhibits freedom because not only is the past unchanging, the future would be unchanging since it has all already occurred according to God's eternal presence. The final solution is the modal-placement solution. Within this solution, having foreknowledge that someone will sin does not compel this person to sin. God does not necessitate, or prompt, someone to sin by knowing that this person will sin, but instead just has knowledge that this person will sin. This attempts to alleviate the misunderstandings of necessity of the conditional and necessity of the consequent, but having complete, infallible knowledge of sin within a person does not allow this person to not sin. This solution states that what is going to happen is going to happen necessarily, but is not asserting that what is always going to happen happens by necessity. Foreknowledge is claimed not to compel actions to happen, but if actions are foreknown to the extent of every detail possible and this knowledge is infallible, then the course of actions for humans is set and this does not provide any proposal cohesive to free will.

All of these solutions occur in Augustine's early book, *On Free Choice of the Will*, but only the guarantor solution is expanded upon in the *City of God*. However, it seems that the

understanding of freedom within the guarantor occurs under a compatibilist understanding of freedom and does not offer any sort of actual freedom to humanity. Just because Augustine states that God has foreknowledge of what someone will freely do, instead of just stating that God has foreknowledge of what someone will do, does not change the result of what will occur. In both scenarios God knows exactly what is going to happen and there is no other outcome that could have occurred. Augustine appeals to Adam sinning on his own free will and the belief that it was necessary for Adam to sin, but it would occur under Adams choice. However, this is not a choice if God already knew that Adam would make the choice to sin, when Adam would sin, how he would sin, and that God was going to punish Adam and the rest of humanity for this sin.

Open Theists Critique of Augustine's View

Open Theism rejects the claims made by Augustine by differentiating between past, present, and future actions as necessary and contingent. Augustine attempts to find a way in which freedom and foreknowledge can coexist, but mistakes God's foreknowledge as logically contingent instead of necessary. "Past events are logically contingent, [but] they are historically necessary, for they cannot now be other than they are" (Boyd, Beilby & Eddy, 2001 page 191). Relating this to God's foreknowledge, if God eternally knows all future actions then all of these actions are historically, or accidentally, necessary. While all of these actions could have been something else, which would fall under a libertarian free will, these actions could only have been something else for God. God having divine foreknowledge of these actions makes them similar to actions of human past. Rome could have continued flourishing and developed into a modern day country. This is a logical possibility, but it is a historical necessity that Rome fell and

is not a modern day super power. By understanding this, it can be related to God's understanding of foreknowledge. All actions could have been something else and other possibilities are logically contingent, but if God already knows which action is going to happen then these are necessary actions. Since God is infallible, whatever God believes to happen shall occur in the future. "The definiteness of the future is part of the (now necessary) definiteness of the past" (Boyd, Beilby & Eddy, 2001 page 191). So if God possesses an exhaustively definite foreknowledge, no libertarian free will can be exercised to future actions any more so than past actions. The Open Theist claim is that humans have libertarian freedom and deny that God possesses exhaustively definite foreknowledge (Boyd, Beilby & Eddy, 2001).

Open Theists also make the claim that Augustine was heavily influenced by neoplatonic philosophy and a neoplatonic understanding of God. Since Augustine has been one of the most influential figures in developing an understanding of Christianity, the claim that Augustine based portions of his understanding of God from neoplatonism, instead of scripture, and the dissent from the traditional view has placed Open Theists under a great deal of criticism from Christians. Augustine was guided by neoplatonism beliefs and this misinterpretation of the issue about foreknowledge and freedom has caused the Christian Church to incorrectly identify a solution to divine foreknowledge.

According to Open Theism, Augustine failed to accurately engage with Scripture and his understanding of God due to his influences from neoplatonism. Augustine also failed to provide an accurate account to how divine foreknowledge and free will are compatible and fails to make the distinction between logical contingencies and necessities laid out by God. The proposal offered by the Augustinian view does not offer an adequate understanding of

freedom. His proposal only allows one choice to be available, the path known to God, and incorrectly believes that because all actions are logically contingent that humans are subjected to there being more than one option for them.

Response to Open Theism and Augustinian View

Open Theists, as well as myself, are not willing to give up a libertarian understanding of freedom, which is the only freedom worth having, in exchange for God having divine foreknowledge of the world. Augustine's solutions to God having foreknowledge and humans having free will do not grant humanity any sort of freedom, instead it is an illusion of freedom where God will always know what the outcome of every scenario would be and when it would happen prior to it occurring. Augustine falls short in all of his proposals, failing to develop freedom beyond a compatibilism understanding. While the Open Theist finds a solution to this issue under a libertarian understanding of freedom, their definitions of God restrict omniscience and limits God to a guessing game of what the future will hold. Open Theists develop a critique that limits God as an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent being without acknowledging these limitations. This view fails to create a substantial explanation between the relationship of divine foreknowledge and freedom with respect to most other understandings of God.

In order to adequately develop an understanding of the relationship between divine foreknowledge and human freedom, the three legs that God sits on, being omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and omniscience must be called into question. While there is no doubts, for me, that God, within Christianity, is the most powerful being and the creator of everything, being all-powerful would allow God to do anything logically possible. This would mean that God

would enact his perfect goodness and never be surprised of evil as He is omniscient. Instead, God could be considered as the most powerful, instead of all powerful. Similar to this, redefining God as being the most knowledgeable and the most good being also limits the issues present within God's foreknowledge and human freedom. If God is only the most knowledgeable, similar to the beliefs held within Open Theism, then God would not know the future and could interact with and be surprised by His creation. This allows for genuine relationships to form between God and His creation, because if God already holds infallible knowledge of an individual, then this person could not truly interact with God. Similar to this, the explanation of evil can occur if God is only to be considered the most good being. God would have failed to create everything perfectly good and the development of evil could then be attributed to human actions.

The redefining of God as being the most powerful, most knowledgeable, and most good being in the universe alleviates many issues understood within Christian theology. It would seemingly alleviate the issue of divine foreknowledge and human freedom as it would place God into a position where He would not know the future, did not have the power to fully alter the pathway of His creation, and allow for members of His creation to turn away from Him and towards evil. The contradictions evident in the world that exist when God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent do not work with the problem of evil or the understanding of humans holding any sort of meaningful free will. Instead, analyzing God and potentially redefining His traits seems like a more adequate way of understanding Gods human project.

Recommendation

Going forward, further examination of Scripture, as well as philosophical texts, is necessary in order to develop a theory that works with a coherent understanding of God. A logical analysis of the contradictions held by an entity that is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent and grants free will to its creation is also necessary. Prior to delving into Scripture and other religious texts, it should be examined with a philosophical lens focused on the possible validity of developing a theory contingent upon humans holding free will and a God that has all of the typically associated traits of God. Once a possibility is found, religious texts should be consulted to find evidence that can support and work with this proposed theory. Another way to develop an understanding the relationship of free will and omniscience for Christian Theologians would require more analysis of Biblical passages. The contradictions evident in the Bible are subjected to interpretation biases that pit such groups as Open Theists with most of the Christian community. The generally accepted claims made by Christian Theologians about God's knowledge, power, and goodness, do not correspond with the idea of free will and human evil, so further analysis of Scripture and understanding the contradictions shown through different interpretations is necessary for a further analysis of claiming humanity has free will while believing in a God with divine foreknowledge.

References

5 Ways the Bible Supports Open Theism. (2017, January 30). Retrieved from <http://reknew.org/2015/10/5-ways-the-bible-supports-open-theism/>

Beilby, J. K., Eddy, P. R., Boyd, G. A., Hunt, D., Craig, W. L., & Helm, P. (2002). *Divine foreknowledge: Four views*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press.

Brian, M. (n.d.). Western Concepts of God. Retrieved from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/god-west/>

B. (2018, January 06). Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry. Retrieved from <https://carm.org/what-is-open-theism>

A. (2003). *Concerning the city of God against the pagans*. London: Penguin Books.

Conee, E. B., & Sider, T. (2014). *Riddles of existence: A guided tour of metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fischer, J. M., & O'Connor, T. (2005). *Free will*. London: Routledge.

Frame, J. (2012, June 04). About. Retrieved from <https://frame-poythress.org/open-theism-and-divine-foreknowledge/>

Frede, M., & Long, A. A. (2012). *A free will: Origins of the notion in ancient thought*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Matthews, G. B. (2005). *Augustine*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.

Neoplatonism and the Transition to Christianity. (n.d.). Retrieved from

<https://campus.aynrand.org/campus/globals/transcripts/neoplatonism-and-the-transition-to-christianity>

A., & Williams, T. (1993). *On free choice of the will*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub.

Pinnock, C. H. (n.d.). *The openness of God: A biblical challenge to the traditional understanding of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Pinnock, C. H. (2002). *Most moved mover: A theology of Gods openness*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press.

- Reilly, P. (n.d.). Open Theism - Openness of God Controversy. Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/11835242/Open_Theism_-_Openness_of_God_Controversy
- Rhoda, A. R., Boyd, G. A., & Belt, T. G. (2006). Open Theism, Omniscience, and the Nature of the Future. *Faith and Philosophy*, 23(4), 432-459. doi:10.5840/faithphil200623436
- Rissler, J. (n.d.). Open Theism. Retrieved from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/o-theism/>
- Robinson, M. (2000). Why divine foreknowledge? *Religious Studies*, 36(3), 251-275. doi:10.1017/s0034412500005254
- Timpe, K. (n.d.). Free Will. Retrieved from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/freewill/>
- Ware, B. A. (2001). *Gods lesser glory: A critique of open theism*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity.
- Waxman, R. (n.d.). Five Philosophers' Theories on Free Will: Plato, Hobbes, Hume, Leibniz, and Hegel. Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/28486811/Five_Philosophers_Theories_on_Free_Will_Plato_Hobbes_Hume_Leibniz_and_Hegel
- Westphal, J. (2011). The compatibility of divine foreknowledge and freewill. *Analysis*, 71(2), 246-252. doi:10.1093/analys/anr023
- Wildberg, C. (2016, January 11). Neoplatonism. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/neoplatonism/>
- Wyckoff, J. (2010). On the Incompatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom. *Sophia*, 49(3), 333-341. doi:10.1007/s11841-010-0168-6
- Zagzebski, L. (2017, April 13). Foreknowledge and Free Will. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/free-will-foreknowledge/>