

## **INTRODUCTION**

This seminar will critically engage five major different views of providence.

## **FRAMING THE PROBLEM**

- A. This theological conundrum arises from three questions/problems:
  - 1. What does God know?
  - 2. What can/does God do?
  - 3. What kind of freedom do humans have?
- B. History of the doctrine of divine providence<sup>1</sup>
  - 1. The Ante-Nicene era (70 AD - 325 AD) - Providence was mostly spoken about in relationship to the existence of a God who lovingly cares for the world (contra pagan pantheism). Some spoke of God's providence in relationship to evil.<sup>2</sup> This doctrine was mostly employed apologetically.<sup>3</sup>
  - 2. The post-Nicene era (325 - 787 AD) - Increasingly began to intersect with the doctrine of salvation (soteriology) as the Pelagian and Semipelagian arose.
    - a) Augustine vs. Pelagius - Pelagius as a British monk who insisted that humans were free to choose or not choose to behave righteously.
    - b) "Augustine seems to have been the first to articulate a conception of freedom that allows one consistently to claim both (1) that human beings sin freely and thus deserve punishment for their sins and (2) that human beings, without the assistance of grace, cannot refrain from sinning."<sup>4</sup>
    - c) Augustine won the debate, Pelagius was condemned as a heretic.
    - d) In the Eastern church, however, much more strongly emphasized human agency.
  - 3. The Medieval era (787 - 16th Century) - This was a mashup of Augustinian and anti-augustinian views. As the Medieval period closed Augustinianism waned, and something more like semi-pelagianism rose.
  - 4. The early Modern era (16th - 17th Century) - The Reformation (1517) saw a great resurgence in Augustinian views. Luther, Calvin, et. al. were much more inclined to this view.
    - a) The Jesuits countered with a strong emphasis on personal responsibility. This was the beginning of Molinism (Luis de Molina, 1535 - 1600). This was rejected by Thomas Aquinas (and his Thomists who followed), who taught that grace was efficacious without reference to human will.
    - b) Calvin incorporated Thomas' categories, but took them further.

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<sup>1</sup> I take my cues here from Jowers' "Introduction," found in *Four Views on Divine Providence* (Counterpoints: Bible and Theology) . Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 2.7 (ANF 3:303).

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, this is very similar to its employment today in the West which has largely forgotten the history of thought regarding this doctrine.

<sup>4</sup> *Four Views on Divine Providence*, KL 144.

- c) Jacobius Arminius (1560-1609) rejected five key points of Calvin's theology, and founded a group called "The Remonstrants," who lodged their complaints at the Synod of Dort (which is where we get the so-called "Five Points of Calvinism.")
- d) During this period, huge debates between the Thomistic, Molinist, Calvinist (Reformed), and Arminian positions raged. The Catholic debate (Molinists v Thomists) and Protestant debate (Arminians v Calvinists) was long and difficult.

5. The Enlightenment (17th - 18th Century) - This debate waned as belief in deism and atheism took hold. Deists held to a "general providence," which was rejected by Christians.<sup>5</sup>

6. The post-Enlightenment (Mid 18th Century - Present) - A period marked by two tracks that sought to influence each other—a traditional Christian view and a more atheistic view.

- a) Some tried to explain providence via naturalism. This gave rise to panentheism<sup>6</sup> and Process Theology.<sup>7</sup>
- b) Today there are two main views—Libertarian (Arminian) and Compatibilist (Reformed)—and two lesser known views—Open Theism and Molinism.

### C. Why think about the Sovereignty of God?

#### 1. The Problem of Evil

- a) What is the nature of God's relationship to the evil and suffering in the world?

#### 2. Perception of Ourselves

#### 3. The Challenge of the Bible

#### 4. Confusion concept of "Free Will."

- a) A notoriously slippery concept.
- b) *All position seems to agree that free will is the ability of an agent to make genuine choices that stem from the self. Libertarians argue that free will includes the power to determine the will itself, so that a person with free will can will more than one thing. Compatibilists typically view free will as the power to act in accordance with one's own will rather than being constrained by some external cause, allowing that the will itself may ultimately be causally determined by something beyond the self. Hard determinists deny the existence of free will altogether. Most Christian theologians agree that humans possess free will in some sense...*<sup>8</sup>

### D. How do we decide?

#### 1. Any sufficient view of the sovereignty of God must:

- a) Make the most sense of the biblical data.

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<sup>5</sup> "You say, "You allow a general providence, but deny a particular one." And what is a general, of whatever kind it be, that includes no particulars! Is not every general necessarily made up of its several particulars? Can you instance ... any general that is not? Tell me any genus, if you can, that contains no species? What is it that constitutes a genus, but so many species? What, I pray, is a whole that contains no parts? Mere nonsense and contradiction!"; John Wesley, "On Divine Providence," sermon 67, in *The Works of John Wesley, 3rd ed.*, 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 67.23, p. 322.

<sup>6</sup> "The notion that the universe is God but that God is more than the universe. In other words, though the universe is part of the reality of God, it is not all of that reality."; Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 321.

<sup>7</sup> "A theological system founded on the idea that all reality is in process, a dynamic and creative process of becoming. The view of God in this system is of a God with two poles: a transcendent, eternal pole and an immanent, experiential pole that is embedded in reality's process of becoming. Certain aspects of process theology can be found in open theism."; Douglas Mangum, *The Lexham Glossary of Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> C. Stephen Evans, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics & Philosophy of Religion*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 46.

- b) Comport with the laws of logic, be both plausible and valid in argumentation.
- c) Sufficiently answer the challenges listed above.
- d) Produce good fruit.

## VIEW 1: DETERMINISM

### A. A Closed Universe

- 1. It is built on a closed, monistic view of reality—the idea that the only things that exist are natural, material things—it presumes atheism.
- 2. It is a form of *monism*—the belief that there is only one kind of thing that exists.
- 3. It is not a view open for Christians to embrace.

### B. History

- 1. Determinism has been around since philosophy has been around.

### C. Key Ideas

- 1. Every event in the physical universe is the effect of a previous event (think Newton's Third Law).
- 2. The regression of cause-and-effect goes back to the first cause, which itself was a purely physical event.
- 3. Human will, choice, responsibility, etc., are useful fictions, but fictions nonetheless.
- 4. "What will be, will be."

### D. Critiques

- 1. This view is wholly unbiblical, and therefore is not an option for Christians.
- 2. This view does not take any non-physical reality into account.
- 3. However, *if there is no God*, I cannot see how this view is not true.

## VIEW 2: OPEN THEISM

- A. A view on the nature of God that rejects classical attributes like omniscience or immutability in favor of positing a God who learns, adapts, takes risks, and modifies his plans in response to human actions. In this view, God's foreknowledge is limited by the uncertainties inherent in creating humanity with truly free will where even he does not know what free human agents will choose to do.<sup>9</sup>

### B. History

- 1. Post-Enlightenment, German Criticism, Schleiermacher
- 2. 20th Century Process Theology - The idea that all reality is in process, a dynamic and creative "becoming." God is dipolar: a transcendent, eternal pole and an immanent, experiential pole that is embedded in reality's process of becoming.
  - a) Downstream from Hegel
  - b) Panentheism - The belief that part of God's being is entangled or imbedded in the natural world.

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<sup>9</sup> Douglas Mangum, *The Lexham Glossary of Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

### 3. Motivations

- a) Dissatisfaction with Other Models
- b) The Problem of Evil - If God is infinitely good, wise, and powerful, why does He allow so much evil and suffering in the world? Could a good God allow all the horrible things that happen in the world if He had the power to prevent them? Does God really know all things that have ever happened or will ever happen, with one, eternal, intuitive act of cognition?
- c) Libertarian Human Freedom - Open theism is motivated by the highest view of human, creaturely freedom.<sup>10</sup>

### C. Modern Definition

#### 1. Sympathetic Definition:

- a) What is "Open Theism"?

*... God rules in such a way as to uphold the created structures and, because he gives liberty to his creatures, is happy to accept the future as open, not closed, and a relationship with the world that is dynamic, not static. . . . We see the universe as a context in which there are real choices, alternatives and surprises. God's openness means that God is open to the changing realities of history, that God cares about us and lets what we do impact him<sup>11</sup>*

#### 2. Critical Definition:

- a) *Openness theology, a modern theological movement that is essentially a resurgence of the Socinian heresy condemned by the church in the 16th century, denies the orthodox doctrine of God's omniscience, the belief that God knows all things exhaustively before they happen.*

### D. Key Ideas

1. God cannot/does not know what his free creatures will do in the future.
2. Any foreknowledge of creaturely choice is a destruction of libertarian freedom.
3. The goodness and love of God make it impossible that (a) humans do not have libertarian freedom, and (b) God has chosen some but not others.

### E. Scriptural Support

1. "Growth in Knowledge" Passages - Genesis 22:1-12 - "for now I know that you fear God" (v. 12), or Genesis 18:16-21 - "and if not, I will know" (v. 21)

- a) Open Theism Argument

*(1) God needs to know if Abraham is the sort of person on whom God can count for collaboration toward the fulfillment of the divine project. Will he be faithful? Or must God find someone else through whom to achieve his purpose?<sup>12</sup>*

- b) Response

*(1) God already know that Abraham feared him.*

*(a) "And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness." - Gen 15:6.*

*(2) Almost no one interprets this verse this way...*

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<sup>10</sup> Libertarian Freedom is "the freedom to do otherwise." A more robust definition

<sup>11</sup> Clark Pinnock, *The Openness of God*, 103-104. Similarly, Hasker remarks: 'God is not remote, closed off and self-contained. Rather, God is open to us his creatures, to the world he has made, and to the future. We in turn need to be open toward God and toward the future he is creating for us. These are the central themes of "open theism" ', *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, 97.; Found in *Themelios* 32, no. 2 (2006).

<sup>12</sup> John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 52-53.

- (a) Abraham interpreted this as a search-and-destroy mission, not a simple investigation (thus the pleading).
  - (b) The same passage of Genesis attributes to God election and sovereignty, not a limited knowledge of Abraham's situation (Gen 18:18,19).
  - (c) Jewish Scholars don't interpret this in this way
    - i) Aben Ezra, for example, "if they have so done (according to the cry) I will make a consumption among them (so he takes the sense of the word we render altogether); but if not, I will know, I will have mercy on them."
  - (d) Non-Christian, critical scholars don't interpret this way.<sup>13</sup>
  - (e) Christian Scholars don't interpret this way.<sup>14</sup>
- (3) How should we interpret such passages?
- (a) The Bible has to interpret the Bible, and whatever it says about God it must say with a unity.
    - i) This interpretation doesn't jive with Genesis itself... (Gen 1, creation. Gen 15:13, "Know for certain...")
  - (b) See anthropomorphism – the Bible is filled with it.
2. "Divine Repentance" passages (e.g., 1 Samuel 15:11, 35)
- a) Open Theism Argument
    - (1) *We must wonder how the Lord could truly experience regret for making Saul king if he was absolutely certain that Saul would act the way he did. Could God genuinely confess, "I regret that I made Saul king" if he could in the same breath also proclaim, "I was certain of what Saul would do when I made him king"? I do not see how... Common sense tells us that we can only regret a decision we made if the decision resulted in an outcome other than what we expected or hoped for when the decision was made.*<sup>15</sup>
  - b) Response
    - (1) 1 Sam 15:29 – "the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind (*nacham*); for He is not a man that he should change His mind (*nacham*).
      - (a) God will not lie or change his mind – requires absolute unchangeability of mind
      - (b) God is not a man to change his mind – requires absolute unchangeability of mind<sup>16</sup>
    - (2) Jacob's Blessing of Judah: Gen 49:8-1- Judah is promised "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet" (49:10). Saul is from the tribe of Benjamin and therefore simply could not be considered by God to be the first in the line of the promised Kings of Israel. God already knew he would not be "the King."
    - (3) Other "repentance" texts provide confirmation: Exodus 32:14; Jonah 3:10

## F. Critiques

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<sup>13</sup> *The voluntary concessions of the Lord to Abraham in this chapter probably contributed to the rabbinic tiqqune sopherim in v. 22, which elevates Abraham over the Lord by reversing their positions: "The Lord stood before Abraham"; C. McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim and other Theological Corrections of the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament*, OBO 36 [Freiburg: Universitätsverlag/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981], 70-76).*

<sup>14</sup> John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, The Baptist Commentary Series (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1810), 130.; Also, K. A. Mathews, Genesis 11:27-50:26, vol. 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Greg Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 56.

<sup>16</sup> Ware, Bruce. "Uncertain Hands of God and Men: Providence in Process Thought and Open Theism." Keynote Address. The Resurgence Conference. Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA. March 23, 2007.

## 1. Theo-Philosophical Problems

- a) The openness of God theory presents a God who "is genuinely baffled about the future, cannot see its outcomes, is limited in power, but is nevertheless struggling mightily in the adverse circumstances of life to save us because he loves us so much."<sup>17</sup>
- b) Arbitrary Coercion -The god of open theism "can and does at times unilaterally intervene and work in a coercive way to bring about a certain state of affairs,"<sup>18</sup> yet he does so without "an all-encompassing divine blueprint."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, he retains providential control over a future that is partly settled and partly open, in part by acting in ways that violate the self-determining freedom of responsible moral agents, yet he does so without an exhaustive plan that determines when he will act unilaterally and when he will not, thus suggesting that his unilateral activity is governed by nothing more than the passing whims of one particular moment or the next.<sup>20</sup>
- c) It doesn't solve the problem of evil. It makes it worse. "What becomes of the attempt to get God "off the hook" for the problem of evil if he in fact is willing to violate the gift of self-determining freedom that he has given to moral agents, the gift that openness theologians insist is not just "irrevocable" but "the key to morally responsible personhood"<sup>21</sup>
- d) The cognitively limited deity of openness theology thus makes the problem of evil worse, not easier, for it becomes inexplicable why God just sits by wringing his hands while letting evils go on unchecked without any morally sufficient reason for not stopping them.
- e) Bears a striking resemblance to Socinianism.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. Biblical Problems

- a) While it tried to take certain Scriptures seriously, it obliterates others.
  - (1) Every genuinely prophetic text.
  - (2) Everywhere God himself claims exact divine knowledge of the future. (Here is a brief selection)
    - (a) Isaiah 41:21-29
    - (b) Isaiah 46:8-11
    - (c) Psalm 139
    - (d) Daniel 11
    - (e) Jesus' Prediction of Peter's Three Denials (John 13:38; note also John 13:19)
- b) Openness cannot make sense of compatibilistic texts (Gen. 45:5; 50:20, 1 Sam 31:1-6, 1 Chronicles 10:8-14, Acts 2:32, 4:27-28), because God cannot have "intentions" in any meaningful sense in the course a "free" human action, as open theism construes human action.

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<sup>17</sup> David F. Wells, *What Ever Happened to the Reformation*, ed. Garry L. W. Johnson and R. Fowler White, xxiv-xxv.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, "A Response to John Piper," May 4, 1998. [www.bgc.bethel.edu/4know/response.htm](http://www.bgc.bethel.edu/4know/response.htm). Accessed September 3, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 302 n. 18.

<sup>20</sup> *Four Views*, KL 657.

<sup>21</sup> Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 232-233.

<sup>22</sup> "The heretical system named after an Italian theologian, Faustus Socinus (1539-1604). Socinus denied the doctrine of the Trinity, going further even than the ancient Arians ... advocating the example theory of the atonement. He held that sinners are pardoned and accepted by God, through divine mercy, on the ground of their own repentance and reformation. Socinus also denied the Scripture doctrines of ... predestination, original sin, total inability, and endless punishment." Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, (Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 420-421.

3. Practically, this God can console you in your suffering, but he cannot conquer suffering without *you*. This does not seem to be the God of resurrection and hope.

### VIEW 3: LIBERTARIANISM/ARMINIANISM

- A. A system of Christian doctrine that taught that God's election for salvation was conditional on his foreknowledge of human free choice. Though he thought of himself as a follower of John Calvin, his views were rejected by the Reformed Synod of Dordt. The relation between human free will and divine electing grace is still hotly debated within many Christian denominations, with those who emphasize free will often labeled Arminians.<sup>23</sup>
- B. History
  1. Jacobius Arminius (1560-1609)
  2. Arminian Remonstrants, and Calvinistic response (Synod of Dort, 1618-1619)
- C. Key Ideas
  1. Primary Concern: God's goodness.
  2. Humans have been given *Libertarian Freedom* by God - The freedom to choose *N* or *not-N*, all things being equal, on the basis of know prior cause. Also known as the "power of contrary choice."
  3. Predestination/Election is *conditional*, based upon God's knowledge of the future.
- D. Biblical Support
  1. Human free will is inferred from every moral command or instance of choice in Scripture.
  2. God's love (universal, John 3;16) rules out his choosing some and rejecting others.
  3. God's justice indicates that God cannot have *anything to do with evil*. (Psalm 119:137; Hosea 14:9)
- E. Critiques
  1. The "Free-Will Defense" has problems
    - a) "Christians are divided over how to understand apparently pointless suffering at the hands of others. Was it because God couldn't prevent it or God wouldn't prevent it? The Free Will Defense and related theodicies take the first view, postulating that such sufferings are the unavoidable consequences of creature-freedom. They hold that in order to achieve his purposes in creation, God had to grant libertarian free will, because such purposes involve a creature's freely choosing to do good. The idea is that were God always to prevent every creature from choosing to do evil he could not achieve his purposes. "'No-Risk' Libertarian Freedom' shows how it is possible for God to achieve his purposes so described while preventing every moral evil. Such a possibility is a refutation of the Free Will Defense and related theodicies. However, it demands an account of God's goodness that would justify God's not preventing moral evil when he could have"<sup>24</sup>
    - b) In this theory, God has nothing to do with the decisive act of the free agent. Moreover, the theory of libertarian freedom cannot be confined to matters of general providence. It relates directly to the debate about grace and justification that raged in the sixteenth century. This theory transforms God's will to save into a mere offer subject to human validation. How ironic that some evangelical heirs of the Protestant Reformation would outdo their Roman

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<sup>23</sup> C. Stephen Evans, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics & Philosophy of Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Walter J. Schultz, " 'No-Risk' Libertarian Freedom: A Refutation of the Free-Will Defense," *Philosophia Christi* 10, no. 1 (2008): 165 - 66,

Catholic contemporaries in making a sleepy church comfortable with the Semipelagianism that the Reformers risked life and limb to expose!<sup>25</sup>

- c) The “gun on the kitchen table” defense.
2. Arminian doctrine of providence is problematic.
    - a) *For if God foreknows all the choices that every person will make, he can make his own plans accordingly, fitting his purposes around these foreknown decisions and actions.*<sup>26</sup>
    - b) If God exerts real and active providential control, then the future is “adjustable” and hence he cannot have known it via simple foreknowledge.
    - c) If God knows every detail about the future of the world before he creates, then he cannot change any single feature since he knows precisely what every feature will be.
  3. The Arminian answer to the “Problem of Evil” is likewise problematic.
    - a) The Arminian Argument:
      - (1) Love requires libertarian freedom. God cannot give LF to creatures for the purpose of their using it for good without the possibility of their using their freedom, instead, for evil.
      - (2) Before God creates the world he knows that the use of freedom for good will be greater than its use for evil.
    - b) Problems
      - (1) Why does love require LF? God does not have LF, in the ways that Arminians construe it. LF is limited by his nature. Yet, we do not deny his love.
      - (2) LF become arbitrary - If when we choose one thing, all things being just what they are when we make our choice, we could have chosen otherwise, this means that any reason or set of reasons we have for choosing one thing would be the identical reason or set of reasons for choosing, instead, its opposite.
      - (3) This means there *is* such a thing a purposeless evil.
      - (4) The donut maker is still responsible for the holes.
  4. The Arminian doctrine of salvation is problematic.
    - a) The Arminian argument:
      - (1) God’s love requires that salvation be offered to all, conditioned only on their acceptance or rejection, not on God’s choice—only on their choice.
    - b) Problems
      - (1) God’s love is not simple, and is not used in the Bible univocally.
      - (2) God’s Justice alone would lead God to condemn all people to eternal punishment. That any is saved is grace, pure grace!
      - (3) The Pull toward Inclusivism and a denial of the full reality of Hell.

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<sup>25</sup> *Four Views*, KL 963.

<sup>26</sup> Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible Says about God the Ruler*, 208.



## VIEW 4: MOLINISM

A. The view that God created a world based on his middle knowledge – Knowledge of those propositions now called “counterfactuals of freedom,” which deal with how a being who possesses libertarian freedom would act in any particular situation.<sup>27</sup>

### B. History

#### 1. Thomism, and Molina.

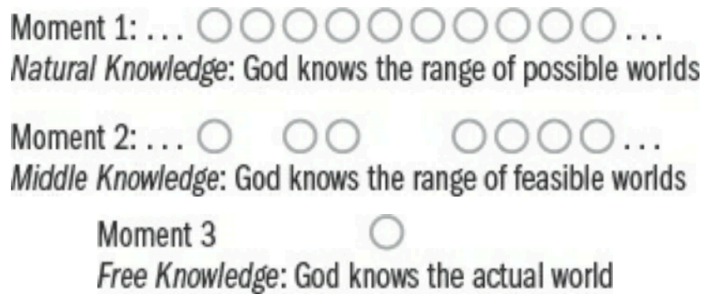
a) Dominican/Thomistic View: God knows what creatures will do logically after (subsequent) to his decree to create.

b) Molina/Jesuit View: God knows what free creatures will do logically prior to his decree to create.

(1) This is meant to preserve creaturely freedom.

(2) By employing his hypothetical knowledge, God can plan a world down to the last detail and yet do so without annihilating creaturely freedom, since God has already factored into the equation what people would do freely under various circumstances. Since God’s hypothetical knowledge lies logically in between his natural knowledge and his free knowledge, Molinists called it God’s *middle knowledge*.

#### 2. Here is what that might look like:



a)

#### 3. Biblical Supports

a) The Bible suggests that God possesses *middle knowledge* or, knowledge of hypotheticals.

(1) Note: hypothetical knowledge and middle knowledge are not the same. What makes it “middle knowledge” is that it is a possible future God knows logically prior to creating the world.

b) There is no biblical support for suggesting God’s hypothetical knowledge is a middle knowledge (knowledge of hypotheticals prior to his divine decree of which world to instantiate).

#### 4. Theo-philosophical Supports

a) Conceptualist foreknowledge > Perceptualist foreknowledge

b) Provides a different view of “compatibilist” texts (like Acts 2:32, 4:27-28).

c) William Lane Craig put it into a syllogism:

(1) If there are true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, then God knows these truths.

(2) There are true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.

(3) If God knows true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, God knows them either logically prior to the divine creative decree or only logically posterior to the divine creative decree.

<sup>27</sup> C. Stephen Evans, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics & Philosophy of Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 75.

(4) Counterfactuals of creaturely freedom cannot be known only logically posterior to the divine creative decree.

From premises 1 and 2, it follows logically that

(5) Therefore, God knows true counterfactuals of creaturely Freedom.

From premises 3 and 5, it follows that

(6) Therefore, God knows true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom either logically prior to the divine creative decree or only logically posterior to the divine creative decree.

And from premises 4 and 6, it follows that

(7) Therefore, God knows true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom logically prior to the divine creative decree.  
–which is the essence of the doctrine of divine middle knowledge.

### C. Key Ideas

1. Acknowledges that the Bible teaches the absolute sovereignty of God *and* libertarian human freedom, and seeks to solve that puzzle.
2. Middle Knowledge = God's knowledge of those propositions now called "counterfactuals of freedom," which deal with how a being who possesses libertarian freedom would act in any particular situation.
3. In electing a timeline, God is sovereign. In electing it with middle knowledge, humans are free.

### D. Critiques

1. Middle knowledge is nowhere specifically taught in Scripture.
2. Molinism has a difficulty accounting for the precise decisions accounted for in the Scriptures, which God causes humans to make/be (think Pharaoh, etc.).
3. Molinism and the problem of evil.

## VIEW 5: COMPATIBILISM

A. Regarding human agency, the claim that human responsibility is compatible with divine determination of the acts of human agents.<sup>28</sup>

### B. Main Ideas

1. God is Sovereign.
  - a) "The providence of God ... is—in the beautiful words of the Heidelberg Catechism—' the almighty and ever present power of God by which he upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures and so rules them that all things, in fact, come to us, not by chance but from his fatherly hand' (Lord's Day 10, Q. & A. 27)."
  - b) God continually oversees and directs all things pertaining to the created order in such a way that
    - (1) He preserves in existence and provides for the creation He has brought into being (see Neh 9:6; Matt 6:25-34; Acts 2:25; Col 1:16-17; and Heb 1:2-3; Jas 1:17), and
    - (2) He governs and reigns supremely over the entirety of the created order in order to fulfill all of His intended purposes in it and through it (see Deut 32:39; Psa 135:5-7; Prov 21:1; Isa 45:5-7; Dan 2:21; 4:34-37; Eph 1:11)

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<sup>28</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; Apollos, 2011), 677.

2. God chooses.
3. God has a plan.
  - a) Answer to "the problem of evil."
    - (1) It encourages believers to embrace an understanding of freedom that, although ultimately inscrutable, emphatically affirms our status as contingent beings while attempting to do justice to the kinds of tensions that are found in the overarching covenantal framework of Scripture, as well as in particular texts like Isaiah 10, Daniel 4, Acts 2 and 4, 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, and Philippians 2.
    - (2) It says "we can't scrutinize the inscrutable, but we can trust the trustworthy."

### C. Biblical Support

#### 1. "Spectrum Texts"

- a) Deuteronomy 32:39
 

"See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, and there is no one who can deliver from My hand."
- b) Isaiah 45:5-7
 

I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; 6 that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, 7 the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD Who does all these."

  - (1) The term *bara* ("create") - Only God can "bara." Here it is used in v. 7 for the two negative aspects of God's control - darkness and calamity
  - (2) This is at a minimum unsettling, and at a maximum, an affront to the idea that God cannot at all be related to negative or sinful circumstances.
- c) Main Idea - God controls fully both light and darkness (Isa 45:7), but consider 1 John 1:5 also - "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."
- d) This all leads to the conclusion that God fully controls both good and evil, yet God is wholly good and is not evil in any respect whatsoever.

#### 2. The Cross and other Compatibilist Texts

- a) Acts 2:23
 

"This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."
- b) Acts 4:27-28
 

"...for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place."

### D. Critiques

1. Consider, for example, Paul's promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it"(RSV). Imagine, then, a situation in which a Christian succumbs to temptation.... To say that he was causally determined to succumb and so was unable to do otherwise is to deny this promise of Scripture.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> William Lane Craig, *Four Views*, KL 826.

2. Temptation toward fatalism.
3. Temptation toward a sub-Christian view of God.

<i>Doctrines</i>	<b>Open Theism</b>	<b>Libertarianism</b>	<b>Molinism</b>	<b>Compatibilism</b>	<b>Determinism</b>
<b>Nature of God</b>	<p>God is love.</p> <p>God is not eternal in the classic sense (existing outside of time). Rather he is “everlasting,” with no end or beginning to his being. God is temporal (at least since creation).*</p>	<p>God is love. God is eternal. God is omnipotent. God is omniscient.</p>	<p>God is love. God is eternal. God is omnipotent. God is omniscient.</p>	<p>God is love. God is eternal. God is omnipotent. God is omniscient.</p> <p>God's nature (<i>ontos</i>) does not change. His actions and emotions toward his creatures do.</p>	<p>God does not exist.</p> <p>Or, <i>Allah</i>, the god of Islam, exists. Muslim theology tends toward radical determinism</p>
<b>Meaning of “Providence”</b>	<p>“General sovereignty: not determinate control of every detail. God takes risks and his will can be thwarted.”*</p> <p>View never defines “General sovereignty.”</p>	<p>Predestination/Election is conditional, based upon God's knowledge of the future.</p>	<p>Predestination/Election is conditional, based upon God's <i>middle</i> knowledge of what free creatures might do in any situation.</p>	<p>Predestination/Election is unconditional, based upon God's decrees.</p>	<p>Providence is a myth.</p>
<b>Creation</b>	<p>Creation <i>ex nihilo</i></p>	<p>Creation <i>ex nihilo</i></p>	<p>Creation <i>ex nihilo</i></p>	<p>Creation <i>ex nihilo</i></p>	<p>Naturalistic causation?</p> <p>(There is no prevailing theory of naturalistic origins)</p>
<b>What does God know?</b>	<p>God cannot (or chooses not to) know the free-will actions and choices of his creatures.</p> <p>If God knows the future, the creatures in that timeline are not free in any meaningful sense.</p>	<p>Traditional view of divine omniscience via <i>Simple foreknowledge</i>.</p> <p>God has exhaustive knowledge of everything that will happen, and what could have happened otherwise (aka Middle Knowledge).</p>	<p>Traditional view of divine omniscience via natural knowledge, middle knowledge, and free knowledge.</p> <p>God has exhaustive knowledge of everything that will happen, and what could have happened otherwise (aka Middle Knowledge) logically prior to instantiating the actual world.</p>	<p>Traditional view of divine omniscience via <i>divine decree</i>.</p> <p>God has exhaustive knowledge of everything that will happen, and what could have happened otherwise.</p>	<p>There is no Divine being to know anything.</p>
<b>Meaning of “Predestination” and “Election.”</b>	<p>God's predetermination on behalf of those who are or will be Christians, <i>not</i> God's choosing who will believe or how certain persons become Christians.</p>	<p>Conditional Election. Election to salvation is conditioned upon God's foreseen faith in the person.</p>	<p>God elects potential futures, but not select individuals or instances.</p>	<p>God's saving grace is unconditional (not conditioned on human will or effort), irresistible grace, and works monergistically.</p> <p>God's election is based on God's love, kindness, and mercy. God chose us because he decided to bestow his love and grace upon us, not because we are worthy, in and of ourselves, of being saved.</p>	<p>Meaningless fiction.</p>
<b>Human Nature</b>	<p><i>Imago Dei</i>. Humans have libertarian freedom, which was damaged at the fall.</p>	<p><i>Imago Dei</i>. Humans have libertarian freedom, which was damaged at the fall.</p>	<p><i>Imago Dei</i>. Humans have libertarian freedom, which was damaged at the fall.</p>	<p><i>Imago Dei</i>. Humans have compatibilistic freedom... freedom which comports with their (our) nature.</p>	<p>Determined by physical, genetic predisposition.</p>

<i>Doctrines</i>	<b>Open Theism</b>	<b>Libertarianism</b>	<b>Molinism</b>	<b>Compatibilism</b>	<b>Determinism</b>
<b>Sin</b>	Man is touched/affected by sin in all that he is, but not so affected that he cannot choose to follow Christ and respond to the gospel.	<b>Total Depravity:</b> Man is completely touched/affected by sin in all that he is (in nature he is completely fallen) but is not as bad as he could be (in action, i.e., not all murder, etc.). Furthermore, this total depravity means that the unregenerate will not, of their own sinful free will, choose to receive Christ.	<b>Total Depravity:</b> Man is completely touched/affected by sin in all that he is (in nature he is completely fallen) but is not as bad as he could be (in action, i.e., not all murder, etc.). Furthermore, this total depravity means that the unregenerate will not, of their own sinful free will, choose to receive Christ.	<b>Total Depravity:</b> Man is completely touched/affected by sin in all that he is (in nature he is completely fallen) but is not as bad as he could be (in action, i.e., not all murder, etc.). Furthermore, this total depravity means that the unregenerate will not, of their own sinful free will, choose to receive Christ.	An outmoded view describing behaviors we find socially unacceptable, or that has negative reproductive outcomes.
<b>Atonement</b>	Christ bore the sin of the world—whomever will believe.	Christ bore the sin of the world—whomever will believe.	Christ bore the sin of the world—whomever will believe.	Christ bore the sin of the elect, effectively saving his church from sin. Christ's blood is capable of atoning for all, but efficacious only for the elect.	Meaningless fiction.
<b>Human Freedom</b>	<b>Libertarian freedom</b> to the fullest extent is an irreducible part of human nature.  Openness theologians argue that it is logically inconsistent to say that God knows in advance what someone would freely do in a libertarian sense.	<b>Libertarian freedom</b> —The freedom Human decisions are free only insofar as they are not caused or constrained by anything at all. If your choice is made necessary—by your own desire, your nature, your inclinations, someone else's power over you, or even God—your decision is not free.  Libertarian freedom is sometimes called "incompatibilism," because it is incompatible with any kind of causation.	<b>Libertarian freedom</b> —The freedom Human decisions are free only insofar as they are not caused or constrained by anything at all. If your choice is made necessary—by your own desire, your nature, your inclinations, someone else's power over you, or even God—your decision is not free.  Libertarian freedom is sometimes called "incompatibilism," because it is incompatible with any kind of causation.	<b>Compatibilist Freedom</b> —the freedom to act on what you desire. On this view, it doesn't matter whether your decision is caused or necessitated. The term "compatibilism," in fact, indicates that freedom is compatible with causes and constraints. As long as you can choose to do what you want to do, your choice is free.	<b>Illusory Freedom</b> Free will of any kind is an illusion.
<b>Connected Tribes, and movements.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Process Theology (somewhat).</li> <li>- Liberal protestantism (somewhat).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Arminians (Remonstrants)</li> <li>- Wesleyans (Methodists)</li> <li>- Catholics (sort of)</li> <li>- Most Baptists</li> <li>- Most Pentecostal/Charismatics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some Jesuits/Catholics</li> <li>- Some Evangelicals (though no group or denomination has officially embraced this view).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reformed Theology</li> <li>- Presbyterians</li> <li>- Calvinists</li> <li>- TGC &amp; The "New Calvinism."</li> <li>- Acts29</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Atheistic Materialism</li> <li>- Scientism</li> </ul>
<b>Key Figures</b>	John Sanders Clark Pinnock Greg Boyd	Jacobius Arminius	Luis Molina William Lane Craig	Augustine John Calvin	New Atheists

\* John Sanders, "Chart of Four Views on Divine Providence," [JohnSanders.com](http://drjohnsanders.com/chart-of-four-views-on-providence/), <<http://drjohnsanders.com/chart-of-four-views-on-providence/>> (accessed Feb 3, 2020).

## PASTOR ADAM'S VIEW

- I. God is a Father, Son, and Spirit
- II. This is my own view, admittedly under development, which is nestled somewhere between Molinism and Compatibilism.
  - A. Simply put, God actualizes a reality that he knows perfectly (a la Arminianism, Molinism, Compatibilism)
  - B. God knows this reality in love, according to his grace, and his plans.
  - C. God actualizes the reality he knows.
  - D. God rules over reality.
- III. What is the nature of human freedom?
  - A. I am extremely dubious of the entire notion of libertarian human freedom
    1. It is filled with logical problems
      - a) Causality – If (a) causes are understood as conditions prior to an effect that guarantee an effect, and (b) all events have causes, then it follows that (c) all events were preceded by conditions that guaranteed those events. Since the choices of humans are events, it follows that the choices of humans are determined.
      - b) Responsibility – Rather than salvage human responsibility, libertarian freedom destroys it. If our choices have no causes (other than our will, whatever that is), in what sense are they our choices? Is it better to hold humans responsible for choices they didn't cause (because LF has no 'causes') than to hold them responsible for choices that were caused?
      - c) God's Freedom – Some have maintained libertarian freedom on the basis that all things done of necessity are not worthy of praise or blame. But what are we to think of God's actions? We believe that God does good, and that God cannot do evil. Does God's moral inability to do evil make His good actions unpraiseworthy? If God must do good, is He then unpraiseworthy? Some have said that God must do good because God's nature determines His choices. God is still free, some say, because God can act in accordance with His choices, but God's choices are *determined* by His nature. If God's choices are determined, and God is worthy of praise, this is a clear case, some say, of actions that are determined and thus necessary while also being morally praiseworthy.
      - d) Limits – It is plainly obvious that our wills have dramatic limits—our bodies, our moods, our incomes, our opportunities, the laws of nature, just to name a few.
    2. It doesn't seem to best describe human action given the Scriptural data.
      - a) Just because a scripture says what X would have done otherwise, doesn't necessarily entail LF. It simply entails *middle knowledge*.
      - b) The Heavenly Future - In order for the future to truly be without sin and evil, our wills must, in some way, be constrained.
    3. On LF, not even God has it
  - B. Compatibilist freedom makes far more sense to me, and seems much more like what I read in the Bible.
- IV. Who are the elect?
  - A. The elect are those upon whom God set his love, without reference to their moral goodness or NCF.
- V. What is the nature of God's providence?
  - A. He instantiates the actual world from a range of possible worlds.
    1. He upholds that world, and preserves it.

2. He instantiates regeneration in the elect, logically prior to their repentance and faith.

B. God interrupts human "freedom" according to his will, and because he is God, he is able to do so without succumbing to the charge of determinism or evil.

VI. God loves us, and like a good dad, allows us a measure of freedom because he wishes to grow us up.

VII. God will bring about the future he has promised.