

# Divine Foreknowledge and Providence: Trade-offs between Human Freedom and Government of the Universe

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**Abstract:** In this paper, we aim to examine the relationships between four solutions to the dilemma of divine foreknowledge and human freedom— theological determinism, Molinism, simple foreknowledge and open theism—and divine providence and theodicy. Some of these solutions— theological determinism and Molinism, in particular—highlight God’s government of the world. Some others—simple foreknowledge and open theism—highlight human autonomy and freedom. In general, the more libertarian human freedom is highlighted, the less God’s government of the history of the world seems possible. However, the task of theodicy becomes easier because humans are fully responsible for the evil they do. Conversely, the more God’s government is highlighted, the more human freedom seems to be restricted. Moreover, God seems to be directly or indirectly responsible for evil in the world. Because of the trade-off between control and freedom, each solution finds itself at ease with some problems, while on other fronts, it must adopt a defensive position. As we will see, no solution can solve all problems; thus, the pros and cons of each solution should be weighed carefully.

**Keywords:** Divine foreknowledge, Human freedom, Divine providence, Theodicy, Future contingents

‘Of course God let us handle all this stuff.  
He does not spoil children!’  
–Manuela, age 7,  
on providence and foreknowledge

The dilemma of the compatibility between divine foreknowledge<sup>1</sup> and human freedom has given rise to several attempts at solutions. These attempts can be split into ‘extreme’ and ‘moderate’ solutions. The former denies one of the dilemma’s horns by redefining the relevant concepts. In particular:

- *Theological determinism* claims that God knows the future because He determines it. This solution denies human freedom, at least in the libertarian sense.<sup>2</sup> As God determines every aspect of the future, He also determines human actions. Therefore, libertarian freedom must be denied. At most, theological determinists who wish to preserve human freedom must *redefine* it by accepting compatibilist freedom.
- *Open theism*, conversely, denies that true future contingents exist and that God can know them. The traditional concept of omniscience must be *redefined* in this framework to exclude knowledge about future free human actions.

Conversely, *moderate solutions* try to reconcile divine prescience and human freedom as these concepts are traditionally intended. We will consider two of them here:

- *Theological Ockhamism*, in which true future contingents and free human actions determine past divine beliefs. For reasons we will see below, Ockhamism can be matched with some timeless solutions to the dilemma, according to which God is outside of time and ‘sees’ what happens over time.
- *Molinism*, according to which God knows the truth value of all counterfactuals of freedom through His middle knowledge. Counterfactuals of freedom take the following form: ‘In circumstance *C*, agent *a* would (freely) carry out *x*’. In this way, God knows what all possible agents would carry out in all possible circumstances and can create the world that is closest to His aims. By doing so, He knows human agents’ free actions.<sup>3</sup>

This paper does not aim to analyse these solutions with their advantages and drawbacks.<sup>4</sup> Rather, we aim to examine the relationships between these solutions and another dimension: *divine providence*. According to the traditional conception

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<sup>1</sup> The focus of this paper is on divine foreknowledge of free human actions. God foreknows a free action *x* of an agent *a* iff He knows at a time *t*<sub>0</sub> that *a* will do *x* at time *t*<sub>1</sub> (where *t*<sub>0</sub> < *t*<sub>1</sub>).

<sup>2</sup> An agent *a* is free to perform an action *x* in a libertarian sense if and only if i) *a* is the cause of *x*; (ii) *a* could do otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> The dilemma has received other solutions. However, in this paper we confine ourselves to these ones because they are the most discussed in literature.

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of these solutions and of their advantages and drawbacks in light of the logic and metaphysics of time, we refer readers to our De Florio and Frigerio (2019).

of providence, God sustains the world and directs it towards the aims that He established. The history of the world is neither the result of chance, nor does it depend completely on human will, but is governed by God's plan, and for this reason, it acquires a deep sense, which also provides meaning to the evil present in the world. As we will see, theodicy is an important theme in the debate about foreknowledge and providence.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, a strict connection exists between the solution to the dilemma of foreknowledge and freedom and the ways in which God directs the world towards His aims. We are facing a sort of trade-off: The more libertarian human freedom is highlighted, the less God's government of the history of the world seems possible. Conversely, the more this government is highlighted, the more human freedom seems to be restricted. Furthermore, if God sustains His creation and directs it towards His aims, how can we account for such a large amount of horrendous and gratuitous evil in the history of the world? In other words, what is the relationship between divine providence and the presence of evil in the world? This paper aims to analyse how the four solutions that we mentioned above deal with the problems of divine providence and theodicy. Because of the trade-off between control and freedom, each solution finds itself at ease with some problems, while on other fronts, it must adopt a defensive position. As we will see, no solution can solve all problems; thus, the pros and cons of each solution should be weighed carefully.

## 1. Theological Determinism

As mentioned above, theological determinism contends that God knows humans' future choices because, directly or indirectly, He determines them.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, within this view, it easily is explained how God knows the future: He is the direct or indirect cause of all that will happen and, thus, knows the future because He intentionally produces it. Theological determinists have no problem with divine providence either: Considering that God determines everything that happens, He directs the creation towards His aims and, God being infinitely good and wise, we are sure that He is directing His creation toward His reign, in which evil will be defeated.

However, theological determinists have two serious problems: It seems that they must deny human freedom and responsibility; thus, they are forced to affirm that God is the origin of evil. If God is the cause of our actions, we cannot act differently than we do; therefore, the responsibility for our choices does not seem to be ours.

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<sup>5</sup> Here we intend *theodicy* in the traditional sense, as the attempt to answer the question of why a good, omniscient and omnipotent God permits the existence of evil.

<sup>6</sup> Several kinds of theological determinism exist (Our De Florio and Frigerio (2019) provide a classification; 100–101). However, we are not interested here in the various branches of this position, but in the general thesis that God determines human actions, as well as in the resultant denial of libertarian freedom.

If God determines our actions, He ultimately must be responsible for what we do. This leads to the second consequence: God is in charge of our evil actions. More generally, because all that happens is determined by divine will, evil also seems to be a consequence of God's will; thus, God is the cause and origin of evil in the world.

These two consequences are not *prima facie* acceptable from a theological perspective. Even though we will not go into a detailed theological analysis here, it is a stable and shared heritage of Scriptures and tradition that humans are responsible for their good or evil actions and that God cannot desire evil. The idea that God would reward or punish humans for acts for which they are not responsible and that God Himself has wanted is particularly repugnant. Furthermore, the fact that these rewards and punishments are eternal further exacerbates the problem.<sup>7</sup> Thus, theological determinists must show that their assumptions do not imply that humans are not responsible for their acts and that God desires evil.

As far as human responsibility, it is possible to exploit Harry Frankfurt's arguments,<sup>8</sup> for which an agent can be judged responsible for her choices even though she is free in a compatibilist sense. Let us briefly review Frankfurt's thesis and how theological determinists can exploit it. Compatibilists maintain that we also can speak of freedom in a determinist framework, namely that there is a sense in which human agents are free, even though they cannot act differently from how they actually act. In particular, an agent is free when her will does not encounter obstacles to its fulfilment. Classical compatibilism—whose founders include philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke and Hume—focuses on the power (or ability) to do something and on the constraints or impediments that might prevent one from doing it. For instance, Emma could be prevented from going to a party tonight in many ways: by 'inner' physical impediments (e.g., paralysis, disease); by 'outer' physical impediments (e.g., being jailed or someone tying her up); by coercion (she has been threatened); or by lack of opportunity (the bus that should have dropped her off at the party broke down). Compatibilists claim that she is free when she has the power or ability to do what she wants to do.

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<sup>7</sup> Walls (2011) offers the example of a preschool operated by a psychologically savvy woman who deliberately does various things to condition her children. Some of the children are conditioned to grow up and behave as virtuous persons typically do, while others are conditioned to behave in a perverse manner, and some become rapists or child molesters. Let us assume that she completely succeeds in her project and that each child turns out just as she intended. In particular, one of the abused children becomes a child molester. Suppose that when he was tried for his crimes, the judge eloquently condemns his behavior and labels him a menace to society who deserves severe punishment, and that she accordingly sentences him to life in prison, with no chance for parole. After he is imprisoned, he comes to the ironic realization that his judge was his preschool teacher years ago. The teacher-judge's behavior appears not only to be unjust, but also particularly repugnant from a moral perspective. However, this is what God seems to do with humans, based on theological determinism.

<sup>8</sup> See Frankfurt (1969).

Some compatibilists say that not only is there a sense in which humans are free within a determinist framework, but also that it is possible to speak of responsibility for their actions. Locke, one of the founding fathers of compatibilism, tried to prove that agents can be viewed as responsible for their actions even if they cannot do otherwise. Locke suggests the following example: Some people are in a room, and they must decide whether to stay there or get out. Let us suppose that they decide to stay, but unbeknownst to them, the room is locked from the outside and, therefore, if they had decided to get out, they could not have. And yet, we are inclined to view them as responsible anyway for their staying. Locke concludes that the possibility of doing otherwise is not necessary for responsibility.

Libertarians objected because Locke's agents actually have two alternatives: They can *decide* to stay or get out. In the second case, they try to open the door, but could not. However, this history differs from the one in which they decide to stay; therefore, these agents can do other than what they actually do.

Frankfurt tried to provide examples in which we attribute responsibility to an agent, even though she cannot do otherwise. Details can vary, but basically, they are examples in which the agent's choice is blocked before she makes it. For instance, suppose Emma must choose whether to vote for Candidate A or Candidate B in the presidential election. A wicked scientist implants a chip in Emma's brain, which will block Emma's choice if she is about to choose Candidate B and make her choose Candidate A instead. However, if Emma is about to choose Candidate A, the chip will do nothing. If Emma spontaneously chooses to vote for Candidate A, we will hold her accountable for her choice, even though she cannot vote for anyone except Candidate A.

Frankfurt's examples gave rise to a large amount of literature: Libertarians tried to show that two possibilities existed between which Emma could choose, while compatibilists denied this. We have no space to deal with this debate. Instead, we are interested here in what theological determinists would do with Frankfurt's examples. Baker (2003) states:

Free will as libertarians construe it has been thought to be required for moral responsibility. There is a long tradition of philosophers who believe both that all events, even the exercises of free will, are caused and also that on some occasions, we are morally responsible for what we do. Augustine himself held human beings morally responsible for their sins, on the (compatibilist) grounds that they sin willingly. If sinning willingly suffices for moral responsibility for sin, then moral responsibility is compatible with being caused. (470–1)

In light of these considerations, Baker believes that Christian philosophers should embrace theological determinism because it warrants divine prescience, God's full control over the world and human freedom and responsibility. However, this kind of strategy has at least two problems: First, it wholly depends on the success of Frankfurt's argument, which is highly contested, and second, even though the fact

that God causes sin does not eliminate human responsibility, one can argue that God is at least *co-responsible* for the sin. After all, if one pushes someone to commit a crime, one is an accessory to the crime. Why should this not also be true of a God who arranges things so that humans perform evil actions?

We now come to the second drawback of theological determinism: If God determines every aspect of the world, then is He not the origin and cause of evil? Theological determinists sometimes rely on Hick's (2010) soul-making theodicy, in which God allows evil and suffering into the world to develop humans into virtuous creatures. For instance, Helseth (2011) states:

Evils happen because he [God] ordained that they would, and he did so for reasons that, while ultimately inscrutable, nevertheless serve to conform believers more and more to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:28–30) and, in the process, to cultivate in them the Christian virtues of perseverance, proven character and hope (Rom. 5:1–5). (30)

However, Hick's soul-making theodicy presupposes a libertarian view of freedom. Suffering can make people's character more mature and can make them more inclined toward good. And yet, within theological determinism, in which God causes every human choice, this becomes problematic: Why doesn't God make people choose good actions from the beginning? Why must they suffer and carry out evil actions? More radically, if God determines every aspect of humans' character, why doesn't He create only mature and virtuous humans?<sup>9</sup> It is difficult to see how theological determinists can answer these questions.<sup>10</sup> Actually, the only solution seems to appeal to the mystery and trust in God. For example, Pereboom (2012) states:

The stance one takes in everyday life toward any particular horrendous evil is to avoid speculation about the specific reason why God causes or allows it, on the ground that we lack the capacities to comprehend such matters, while at the same time affirming that the divine governance of the world is thoroughly providential. (277)

This implies a waiver of addressing the problem in a rational way.

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<sup>9</sup> As Walls (2011) remarks, if free will is compatibilist, then God could create a world in which the agents are free and always do good. Determinists should explain why God did not create such a world.

<sup>10</sup> This criticism extends to every form of theological determinism for which the evil existing in the world is willed by God as a means for a greater good (for such a defense of determinism, cf. Wainwright 2001). The question is why God did not create that good directly without using that evil as a means.

## 2. Molinism

Molinism affirms God's full control of the world even if it tries not to delete human freedom.<sup>11</sup> According to Molinists, God knew, before the creation of the world, how each possible agent would act in each possible situation. De Molina calls this knowledge *scientia media* (middle knowledge). On the basis of this knowledge, God can create among the possible worlds He can actualise the world closest to His aims, namely the world where He infallibly believes that the agents make the best choices.

Some remarks are in order:

- Unlike theological determinists, Molinists embrace a libertarian view of free will: God does not cause human choices.
- However, God indirectly brings about human agents' free choices. Indeed, God actualises a possible agent in certain circumstances, *knowing* that the agent will perform certain actions in these circumstances. If God did not want that outcome, He could refrain from actualising that agent or arrange different circumstances. God has full control over the world, with every aspect of the world directly or indirectly elicited by His divine will.
- However, God cannot actualise all possible worlds, namely the worlds in which humans act differently than how they act in various possible situations. For example, consider a possible agent, *a*, and a possible circumstance, *C*, and suppose that *a* would freely perform action *x* in *C*. However, *a* is a libertarian agent and, therefore, *a* could do something different from *x* in *C* because *C* does not causally determine *a*'s action. There is a possible world in which *a* acts differently than *x* in *C*, but God cannot actualise this world because the choice of what to do in *C* is up to *a*. Of course, God could determine that *a* chooses to do *x* in *C*, but in this case, *a* would no longer be free. God cannot actualise a world in which agents freely choose differently than they actually choose. Free human choices restrict the set of worlds that God can actualise.

Molinists believe that their view can reconcile human freedom, divine prescience, divine providence and the existence of evil. Let us view these aspects in this order. As we have seen, the circumstances under which a human freely acts do not determine her action and, thus, libertarian free will is preserved. However, God foreknows what human agents will do freely by virtue of His middle knowledge: He created certain circumstances and knows what human agents will do freely in these circumstances. Moreover, God actualised the best possible world that He could actualise. In this world, God's plan about His creation will be carried out.

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<sup>11</sup> For an introduction to Molinism, see Flint (1998). For a defense of the Molinist approach to providence, see Craig (2011a).

Indeed, if no world among those that God can actualise had been sufficiently close to His aim, He would have refrained from creating any world. If the actual world had not been a world in which God's plan will be carried out, He would not have actualised it. Thus, Molinists can restate the traditional view of providence, in which God directs the world towards the aims that He established.

Finally, Molinists are in a better position with respect to theological determinists regarding the problem of evil. First, because they are libertarians, they can say that the responsibility for evil actions lies with humans. Indeed, God does not determine free human actions. Second, God cannot create all logically possible worlds. Let us consider a possible world ( $w_s$ ) in which human agents always perform good actions. Although  $w_s$  is a possible world, suppose that all possible human agents carry out at least one evil action in at least one possible circumstance in every world (of course, the reprehensible actions would vary from world to world).<sup>12</sup> Therefore,  $w_s$  is a possible world that God cannot actualise.

We believe that Molinism has at least two drawbacks. As we stated above, the focus of our article is the relationship between the views on foreknowledge and the problem of providence. Accordingly, we do not explore the internal problems concerning Molinism. However, it is worth mentioning the question of counterfactuals of freedom since it is somehow connected with Molinist account of providence. Let us first consider the view according to which future contingents are true or false. Suppose that the world is indeterministic and that the actual state of the world and its laws do not completely determine the future. In other words, the world is causally open, and many possible future histories exist. However, if future contingents are true or false, the world is alethically closed, i.e., a possible history of the world exists that is privileged because it is the history that actually will occur.<sup>13</sup>

If these two claims—causal openness and alethical closure—are combined with presentism and the view that the truth of propositions depends on how things are in the world, we have a problematic set of principles. What is the truth-maker of a future contingent? In this framework, it can be neither a future fact (because no future fact exists according to presentism), nor a present fact (given that the present does not determine the future). However, if the truth of propositions depends on the facts of the world, we run into trouble.

We believe that Molinism inherits and radicalises this problem. Molinists not only think that future contingents are true or false, but also that it is true or false that a possible agent,  $a$ , would freely perform a certain action,  $x$ , in possible circumstances  $C$ . As Molinists are libertarian, they maintain that  $C$  does not

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<sup>12</sup> Plantinga (1977) calls this metaphysical feature *transworld depravity*. In this scenario, every possible agent performs at least one reprehensible action in every possible world that God can actualize. Thus, God cannot actualize a perfect world. Plantinga does not want to demonstrate that we live in a transworld-depravity scenario. For a defence, it is sufficient to show that this scenario is possible.

<sup>13</sup> For the different senses in which the future can be open or closed, see Rhoda (2011).

determine *a*'s free action. If we adopt the thesis that the truth of propositions depends on the world, it is difficult to see which is the truth-maker of the proposition: 'In *C*, *a* would do *x*'. It can be neither the situation of the actual world given that we are speaking of possible circumstances, nor *C* because *C* does not determine *x*. Also, in this case, it is difficult to explain how the truth of the propositions that are the content of divine middle knowledge can depend on the world's facts.

However, there is something more troubling: In the case of future contingents, we could reject presentism and embrace eternalism. Without renouncing libertarianism,<sup>14</sup> we would have truth-makers for future contingents: They would be contingent on future facts, not determined by the world's present situation and its laws.<sup>15</sup> However, Molinists do not have this exit strategy: If they accept eternalism, they can provide truth-makers for propositions, such as 'In *C*, *a* would do *x*' *only if C* is actual, but not if *C* is a possible situation. Even though the actual world is a timeless block of facts, this is not enough to ground middle knowledge's content because that content concerns possible situations and free actions. Molinists might accept realism regarding all possible worlds and affirm that they are all B-blocks of existing facts, but then it would be difficult to understand in which sense God actualises a world among the others.<sup>16</sup>

Molinism must address a second, more theological issue regarding theodicy. As we have seen, Molinism is in a better position than theological determinism. Still, according to Molinists, all that happens in the world is, directly or indirectly, willed by God. He also indirectly brings about free human actions because He creates a world in which He knows that the agents will perform certain actions. Therefore, God also wills the most horrendous evils. Someone might find this situation annoying. For instance, Hasker (2004) points out that:

Some of the less trivial details decreed by God include the Holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia and Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait—each of them specifically planned, ordered and provided for by God. God, fully knowing Hitler's counterfactuals and the use he would make of his freedom, specifically chose that he should become leader of the Third Reich and instigator of the Holocaust. (115)

Certainly, Molinists can deploy several strategies to respond to this criticism. They can stress that God does not will, but rather only permits evil. Presumably, God permits the evil present in this world to exist in light of His knowledge that the plan He prepared will be carried out in this world in one way or another. However, one might criticise this strategy by noting that God could have arranged things so that

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<sup>14</sup> On the compatibility between eternalism and libertarianism, see Oaklander (1998).

<sup>15</sup> Obviously, if they embrace eternalism, 'future' and 'present' would have only an indexical meaning: The present is the instant with respect to which propositions are evaluated, and the future is what follows that instant.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed version of this argument, see our De Florio and Frigerio (2019).

the same good could have arisen through a smaller amount of evil, i.e., God could have reached His aim by creating a world that contains a smaller quantity of evil than the actual world. As in other kinds of theodicy, the problem is not that some evil is present in the world, but that *so much* evil is present. Molinists could reply by appealing to transworld depravity: Among the worlds God could actualise, the actual one is the world that contains the smallest amount of evil.

We have no space here to analyse the transworld–depravity hypothesis and the considerable amount of literature that it has engendered. We only will identify the major issue that it must address in our opinion. As Plantinga claims, the transworld–depravity hypothesis is a defence, not a theodicy. Plantinga does not intend to show that this hypothesis is true or even probable, but only that it is possible. However, when different providence theories and theodicies are compared, probability becomes an important factor for comparison. It seems very improbable that no possible world exists among those that God could actualise in which free human agents overall behave better than they actually do, although obviously, we have no conclusive evidence of this. If another defence or theodicy could provide a less implausible hypothesis than that of transworld depravity, we should prefer it.

### 3. Simple Foreknowledge and Ockhamism

In this section, the simple foreknowledge view will be considered. The basic idea of this view is that God knows humans' free choices precisely because humans will decide in that way. For instance, God knows that agent *a* will do *x* precisely because *a* will do *x*. Thus, if *a* had decided to do *y* instead of *x*, God would have known that *a* would do *y* instead. Thus, the content of divine prescience depends on free human actions, which make some propositions true. Since God knows all true propositions, He also know the propositions regarding free human freedom.

This is a very simple idea, but complications immediately arise. An advocate of simple foreknowledge should characterise the relationship between God and temporal reality. She has two main options: Either God is inside of time or He is timeless. Let us examine both.

According to the first option, God knows at a certain time,  $t_1$ , what an agent will do at time  $t_2$ . He knows this because of what the agent will do at  $t_2$ . Consequently, future states of affairs determine past states of affairs. This is the major thesis of theological Ockhamism, a discussion of which would go beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>17</sup> In short, the debate focuses on the notion of metaphysical determination of

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<sup>17</sup> We refer the reader to De Florio and Frigerio (2016) and (2017) for a discussion of the Ockhamist proposal. A referee points out that our juxtaposition of Ockhamism and timeless solution is peculiar. We recognize that there are important differences between these positions. However, we believe that they have something in common: divine (fore)knowledge of free human actions depends on such actions. This aspect is particularly important when we try to assess the relationships between these

past facts: The ontological cost of backward causation clearly is higher than that of simple counterfactual dependence.<sup>18</sup>

According to the second option, God exists outside of time and ‘sees’ the temporal series all at once. In this view, God timelessly knows all truths; thus, the problem of the backward causation of past states of affairs disappears. However, because God ‘sees’ the whole temporal succession, this succession should exist in some way so that this view seems to be committed to a B–theory of time.<sup>19</sup>

The important point we would like to stress here is the difference between simple foreknowledge and Ockhamism on one side and theological determinism and Molinism on the other. In the latter two accounts, God strongly or weakly determines human actions. In theological determinism, God causes human actions and, thus, strongly determines them. In Molinism, although God does not cause human actions, He weakly determines them because He arranges conditions under which He knows that humans will make certain choices. In both views, God knows free human choices because He, directly or indirectly, brings about them. Conversely, the simple foreknowledge account and Ockhamism make human agents entirely autonomous: God does not bring about humans’ actions strongly, as theological determinists claim, but also does not bring about them weakly either, as Molinists claim. From a purely logical perspective, simple foreknowledge is *compatible* with a view in which God does not create the world, but merely knows it and, perhaps, intervenes in it<sup>20</sup>. Human freedom is preserved maximally in this view. Thus, the principal issue is to account for divine providence.

It often has been argued that simple foreknowledge is useless for divine providential action. As God’s foreknowledge depends on the agent’s very actions, God cannot use this knowledge to *change* these actions. If God knows that *a*’s action will occur precisely because it is true that *a*’s action will occur, God cannot prevent *a*’s action; otherwise, His knowledge would not be knowledge, i.e., it would not be *factive*. Being *a posteriori*, God’s knowledge comes too late to prevent anything.<sup>21</sup>

As David Hunt points out, God can use foreknowledge of an event neither to change the event—the future, like the past, cannot be *changed*—nor to elicit the event because a causal circle would result otherwise: The event would produce God’s knowledge, and the event would occur because of God’s knowledge. However, Hunt still believes that simple foreknowledge can be useful

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solutions and the problem of providence. Therefore, for the aims of this paper, these solutions, although different, can be treated jointly

<sup>18</sup> On this, see Wasserman (forthcoming).

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the timeless perspective, see Helm (1988), Rogers (2007) and our De Florio and Frigerio (2019).

<sup>20</sup> This obviously does not mean that the advocates of simple foreknowledge *must* endorse this form of Averroism.

<sup>21</sup> For similar arguments, see Kapitan (1993), Basinger (1993), Sanders (1997), Hasker (1998, 104–105) and Robinson (2004).

providentially. In a series of insightful papers,<sup>22</sup> He contends that it is true that God cannot use His foreknowledge that  $a$  will do  $x$  to prevent  $a$  from doing  $x$  (because the future cannot be changed) or to arrange for  $a$  to do  $x$  (because this would produce a causal circle). However, God can use His foreknowledge that  $a$  will do  $x$  to operate in some other areas of the world. For instance, suppose that God foreknew that Hitler would give the order to invade the United Kingdom in 1940. God does not want Germany to win the war, so He ensures that a terrible storm hits the German fleet over the English Channel the day after Hitler's order. The storm sinks half the German fleet, forcing it to retreat. In this case, we have no causal circle: God does not use His foreknowledge that Hitler will give the order to attack to prevent or bring about that order. Of course, God foreknows that He will decide to prepare certain meteorological conditions over the channel and that His intervention will cause a storm. However, He will not use this foreknowledge to cause the storm. He knows that He will produce the storm because He will produce the storm, but He will not produce the storm because He knows that He will produce it. As long as God does not use His foreknowledge of an event to determine it, no vicious circle arises.

Hunt's argument is ingenious, but it has elicited criticism. One of the most troubling aspects concerns the fact that Hunt's view entails that God foreknows that He will decide to do something before deciding to do it. Kapitan (1991 and 1993) defended the principle that one cannot decide to do  $x$  if one already knows that one will do  $x$ . However, Hunt disagrees (cf. Hunt 1992). Nevertheless, we will not address this dispute, but we will discuss another problem with Hunt's account. As we have seen, he accepts, at least for the sake of argument, what he calls the metaphysical principle according to which one cannot use the foreknowledge that a certain event will happen to arrange the conditions that will lead to that event.<sup>23</sup> Hunt believes that his account does not violate the metaphysical principle, but we will advance two arguments to show that this is not the case.

Suppose that God foresees Hitler's order to invade the United Kingdom, and God's foreknowledge is complete. Therefore, He also foresees what happens at each time point following Hitler's order. What does He 'see' happen after this order? Does He see the winning Wehrmacht parading through the streets of London, or does He see another future? Hunt responds that because God decided to prevent the landing of the German fleet, He sees a terrible storm form over the channel and the German invasion plan's failure. However, God's decision to prevent the invasion is based on the foreknowledge of Hitler's order. It is because God knows that Hitler will give the order that He decides to arrange certain meteorological conditions. Thus, God's decision logically *follows* His foreknowledge. Now, the

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<sup>22</sup> See Hunt (1993a), Hunt (1993b), Hunt (1996) and Hunt (2004).

<sup>23</sup> According to Lewis (1976), such circles are not impossible, although they are inexplicable. Here, we will presuppose that allowing such circles is very costly from a metaphysical point of view. Hunt seems to agree.

following question seems to be in order: What does God see happen the day after Hitler's order *before*<sup>24</sup> His intervention on the channel weather? Does He see the winning Wehrmacht marching through London or does He see the German fleet sunk by a storm? In the first case, His intervention changes the future, which is impossible. In the second case, on the basis of His foreknowledge, He determines an event that He knows will happen, breaching the metaphysical principle. In both cases, divine intervention is impossible.

Perhaps Hunt might say that God does not see any true future *before* His decision to intervene on the channel weather, but rather sees only possibilities, e.g., the possibility that the invasion succeeds and the possibility that the invasion fails. Thus, God neither changes the future, nor determines a future that He foreknows. However, this answer has two defects. First, it implies that God's knowledge is incomplete because He cannot see some aspects of the future. Second, a God who sees possibilities and not the true future is not in a better position than the God of open theists. He could know that the German Army's victory is probable, but not whether it is *true* that the invasion will succeed. This situation is exactly what open theism hypothesises—a topic that we will address later. Thus, simple foreknowledge gives God no providential advantage.

Our second criticism focuses on the manner in which God intervenes in the world, though Hunt does not specify it. For example, suppose that God creates the storm over the channel. How does God operate so that the storm forms? We can imagine two different models: Either He makes a miracle and elicits the storm or arranges some past conditions that lead to the storm forming the day of the invasion. In the first case, we have no objections to raise, but the second case is more problematic. If this is how God usually intervenes in the world, it is a serious issue for Hunt's proposal.

Suppose that Hitler orders the invasion of the United Kingdom at time  $t_2$ . Soon afterward, a terrible storm forms over the channel and prevents the German landing on the English coast. This storm is the consequence of certain conditions,  $C_1$ , that God arranged at a previous time,  $t_1$ , which deterministically led to the storm at  $t_2$ . The first question is: How temporally distant is  $t_1$  from  $t_2$ ? The development of a storm is a complicated matter, in which many factors are involved. How far back in time must God go to arrange  $C_1$ ? Days? Years? Centuries? Causal effects spread, and time magnifies them. A small change in  $t_1$  can carry enormous consequences at  $t_2$  if  $t_2$  and  $t_1$  are sufficiently distant. These consequences can play a role in Hitler's decision to invade the United Kingdom. In such a case, we would fall back into the causal circle, but suppose that this cannot happen: Although the consequences are wide-ranging, God can foresee them and ensure that they have no causal impact on Hitler's decision to order the invasion. However, note that every providential action would be very costly because it would exert a global impact on the world.

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<sup>24</sup> Note that 'before' here is meant in a logical, not a temporal, sense.

Another more serious problem must be addressed. How does God arrange  $C_1$  at  $t_1$ ? Again, two models are possible: Either God makes a miracle and makes conditions  $C_1$  appear at  $t_1$  or arranges some conditions,  $C_0$ , at a time point before  $t_1$ —say,  $t_0$ —which deterministically leads to  $C_1$  at time  $t_1$ . If we want to disregard miracles, we must turn to the second model, but the same problem emerges again: How does God arrange  $C_0$  at  $t_0$ ? To avoid miracles, we must go far enough back in time until we arrive at the initial conditions of the world.

As we must repeat this reasoning for every one of God's providential interventions, it is clear that He had to choose among very different initial conditions, which would lead to very different evolutions of the world. Because of the effects' amplification over time, a small change in the initial conditions of the universe leads to enormous changes over such a long period of time. Furthermore, if the divine interventions are numerous, the changes in the initial conditions cannot be so limited.

We can see the problem now: Big changes in the world's evolution necessarily impact the circumstances in which free agents must perform their choices, and different circumstances could mean different reasons and motivations, which could lead to different decisions. In extreme cases, different initial conditions of the world can lead to the birth of different free agents. The advocate of simple foreknowledge faces a dilemma: Either God can foresee what free agents would choose in different circumstances or He cannot. If He has this kind of knowledge, He can control the consequences of the choice of different initial conditions on free agents' decisions. However, in this case, God has no simple foreknowledge, but rather middle knowledge. Conversely, if God cannot foresee free agents' choices in different circumstances, His providential action is as risky as that of an open theist God. Suppose that God must decide between two different initial conditions:  $C_t$  and  $C_c$ .  $C_t$  will lead to a storm over the channel the day of the German invasion, while  $C_c$  will lead to calm weather. Conditions  $C_t$  and  $C_c$  can have many causal effects and change the conditions in which many human agents must make free decisions. The choices that free agents perform in the  $C_t$  world might be worse overall than the choices that free agents make in the  $C_c$  world. Therefore, the  $C_t$  world is worse overall than the  $C_c$  world, but if God has no middle knowledge, He cannot know this. Thus, every divine providential action is a risky matter because an improvement in some aspect of the world (e.g., the German army fails to invade the United Kingdom) could be offset if other aspects worsen, and the negative effects could exceed benefits overall.

We conclude that either God has middle knowledge, or He must take risks equal to those of the God of open theists. The only other option is to affirm that God's providential action is always miraculous and exerts local and limited effects without causal propagations in other regions of the world. However, open theists also can adopt this strategy. Despite the ingenuity of Hunt's proposal, reasons exist

to doubt that a God with simple foreknowledge has actual providential advantage over a God who cannot foresee future contingents.

#### 4. Open Theism

In this section, we analyse the extreme solution to the dilemma of foreknowledge and freedom that open theism proposes. In this view, future contingents are never true.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, God does not know such futures because there is nothing to know about them. Consequently, God cannot foresee humans' future choices, but rather learns of them when they perform actions. Therefore, He must *wait* for humans' decisions to be made before making any providential moves.<sup>26</sup> Thus, open theism's advantages are the opposite of theological determinism's advantages: God cannot control, or even foresee, humans' choices, so it follows that He is not responsible for their evil actions, i.e., humans have complete freedom and responsibility. There is no doubt that, from the perspective of theodicy, open theists are at an advantage compared with other solutions, particularly with theological determinism and Molinism.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the latter must claim that God is the cause, either directly or indirectly, of the evil in the world.

However, open theism also has disadvantages:

- 1) The denial that God knows how humans will act in the future. This seems to be incompatible with the classical Christian view, according to which God has complete knowledge of the future. In this sense, it is particularly difficult for open theists to account for prophecy. On many occasions, prophets and Christ seem to predict what some humans will freely choose to do (e.g., Jesus' prophecy that Judah will betray Him, or His prophecy that Peter will disown Him three times before the rooster crows [John 13:21–30 and Mark 14:66–72]).
- 2) God's poor control over creation.

Here, we will focus on the second point. A frequent criticism of open theism is that God does not know whether the world ultimately will realise the aims that He desires. Therefore, He must accept the risk that His plan might fail completely. This seems to be incompatible with the classical theistic view of God, who has full control of His creation and leads it toward the aims that He prepared from the beginning of time. For example, Ware states (2003):

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<sup>25</sup> More precisely, this is what most open theists affirm. Some of those who accept this position believe that future contingents are all false, while others believe that they are neither true nor false (cf. Boyd, 2003, and Todd, 2016). Hasker is an exception because he states that some future contingents are true, but that God cannot know them (see Hasker, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> For an introduction to open theism, see Pinnock et al. (2010).

<sup>27</sup> Or at least this is majority view among the scholars. There are some contrary voices, for instance Perszyk (1998) and Hunt (2001). Some of their arguments will be analyzed in the next paragraph.

The hope of Scripture is based on the certainty of God's work and the unfailing accomplishment of his wise and good purposes and plans. Where Open Theism reduces our hope to something unavoidably fragile and weak, the Bible commends a hope that is strong, secure, fixed, and certain. Life is purposeful, and the God who gives himself to us is the conquering God who will lead us in his triumph. Our hope is secure, it is filled with joy and peace, and it will last eternally. [...] The openness God unavoidably makes all kinds of mistakes—mistakes in his guidance, mistakes in his dealings with free moral agents, mistakes in his own actions and responses—but the true God chooses perfectly, designs flawlessly, and accomplishes his will as he alone knows is best. The openness God cannot guarantee whether eternity will be what he hopes it will be, any more than he can guarantee that he'll get what he wants now, or in the immediate future, or in the distant future [...]. The certainty of hope that is founded in the true and living God is simply diminished and defeated by Open Theism's understanding of God. (125–126)

Open theists have replied to these criticisms with two arguments:

1. Every loving relationship, if genuine, entails a certain amount of risk; otherwise, it is not a loving relationship, but rather a form of absolute control.
2. The risk that God is taking is limited. By having unlimited resources, God will succeed in carrying out His general plan of salvation, even though some humans pull away from Him. The failure of the divine plan then is limited to single cases, but never will be general.

Concerning the first point, open theists argue that we must choose between two conceptions of God: either that of an absolute monarch who reigns over the universe and human decisions, or that of a father who has entered into a relation with His creatures. By accepting the second model, we accept at the same time that God takes the risk of being rejected. If we would like to avoid this risk, we must adopt the first model:

We may think of God primarily as an aloof monarch, removed from the contingencies of the world, unchangeable in every aspect of being, as an all-determining and irresistible power, aware of everything that will ever happen and never taking risks. Or we may understand God as a caring parent with qualities of love and responsiveness, generosity and sensitivity, openness and vulnerability, a person (rather than a metaphysical principle) who experiences the world, responds to what happens, relates to us and interacts dynamically with humans. (Pinnock 2010, 103).

Concerning the second point, open theists stress that divine omnipotence allows God to intervene in any and all situations, and arrange things so that the world will

go along with His desires. God's perfections (i.e., perfect knowledge, power of persuasion, infinite wisdom) should make us confident that the divine plan will be realised. A very illuminating metaphor is that of the chess master who plays against a beginner. The development of the match is not *a priori* predictable, and the grand master will adapt his moves to those of the beginner. However, the game's outcome is fully determined:

God is the supreme Grand Master who has everything under his control. Some of the players are consciously helping his plan, others are trying to hinder it; whatever the finite players do, God's plan will be executed; though various lines of God's play will answer to various moves of the finite players. God cannot be surprised or thwarted or cheated or disappointed. God, like some Grand Master of chess, can carry out his plan even if he has announced it beforehand. 'On that square,' says the Grand Master, 'I will promote my pawn to Queen and deliver checkmate to my adversary': and it is even so. No line of play that finite players may think of can force God to improvise: his knowledge of the game already embraces all the possible variant lines of play, theirs does not. (Geach 1977, 58)

Boyd (2003) extensively exploited and developed Geach's metaphor. He claims that God, by means of His infinite intelligence, prepared a response to any decision that humans can make. Pursuing Geach's metaphor, it is as if God can set a sequence of winning moves in advance for each of His opponents' moves. Even if God cannot strictly foresee which particular moves humans will make, He has laid out, for all eternity, several effective strategies for any possible situation. When humans make their decisions, God will implement His previously planned responses.

Actually, Boyd says something more: God can choose which initial conditions of the world to create *on the basis* of the possible strategies that He can actualise. Let us suppose that God can prepare initial conditions  $C_1$ . Many possible histories will depart from these initial conditions, depending on the choices that humans make. Let us call  $H(C_1)$  the set of possible histories stemming from  $C_1$ . For each of the histories belonging to  $H(C_1)$ —which corresponds to a precise set of human decisions—God can set up a response strategy.

Let us suppose that God can prepare another set of initial conditions  $C_2$ . From these conditions, another set of histories,  $H(C_2)$ , branches off. God also can set up other response strategies for each of the histories belonging to  $H(C_2)$ . Moreover, let us hypothesise that God knows that the strategies for the histories in  $H(C_2)$  are globally more efficacious than those of the histories in  $H(C_1)$ . Thus, God can choose to create initial conditions  $C_2$ , because they favour His providential plan. Generally, we can say that God creates the set of initial conditions that are more favourable to His providential action.

Boyd does not hesitate to describe his version of open theism as *neo-Molinism*. While classical Molinism claims that God creates the best of all feasible worlds, a neo-Molinist says that God creates the best initial conditions. According to classical

Molinism, God chooses the best world that He can create. However, according to neo-Molinism, God selects among various sets of histories— $H(C_1)$ ,  $H(C_2)$ , ...,  $H(C_n)$ —those that are the most favourable to His providential plans. Within the boundaries of open theism, Boyd's view seems to be the proposal that gives God maximum control over His creation. In Boyd's framework, humans' moves never will surprise God because He has a plan for any eventuality. Moreover, He does not actually take any risk because His strategies are all perfectly efficient.

However, it is important to investigate whether this kind of control is sufficient. One could argue that it is not. Two possible counter-objections to Boyd's neo-Molinism exist. The first one was proposed by William Craig (cf. Craig 2011b). He maintains that a large part of the evil in the world is unjustified, even within the neo-Molinist framework. According to the classic Molinist, we live in the best of all possible worlds that God can create. Therefore, actual evil is justified by the fact that God, evaluating the amount of evil and good in every possible world, has judged that this very world comprises the best possible combination.

Nevertheless, neo-Molinists cannot say this. Let us suppose that God chooses to actualise initial conditions  $C_1$ . Even though God has better strategies *overall* in response to human actions within the histories in  $H(C_1)$ , the best world in  $H(C_2)$  likely is better than the worst history in  $H(C_1)$ . Let us suppose that humans behaved badly, and that the worst history in  $H(C_1)$  became actual. Had the  $C_2$  conditions become reality, perhaps we would be living in a better world. It follows that much evil present in the world is not morally justifiable in view of a greater good because the same good could have been achieved with a smaller quantity of evil. In this vein, Craig asserts: 'In the openness view, the Not-So-Grand Master will churn up a lot of unforeseen, unnecessary, and pointless suffering as he plays the game.' (86)

The second reply to Boyd's view questions the chess master metaphor's cogency. In chess, victory is the only thing that matters; it does not matter how the victory is reached. Single moves—including those that sacrifice pieces—have no intrinsic value, but merely a relational value in light of the final victory. The point is that, in human history, victory refers to the Kingdom of Heaven, but every single step has relevance, i.e., every little life has value in the Lord's eyes. Indeed, this is a profound theological novelty within Christianity. Thus, the open theist cannot exploit the chess metaphor as an explanation for her account of providence because in human history, each person's value is infinite and cannot be subordinated to the final outcome, no matter how important it is. Therefore, the open theist can provide, at most, a conception of providence limited to the final outcome (everything will be all right, in the end), but it lacks the idea of constantly ruling the world.

## 5. Conclusion

The various solutions to the foreknowledge dilemma have important consequences concerning the problem of divine providence. We carried out our analysis starting

from the doctrines that postulate God's greatest control over the world, then we considered the views that reduce God's sovereignty in favour of human freedom. In the frameworks in which God exerts strong control over the world, His providential action is incisive. However, in this case, God seems to be directly or indirectly responsible for evil in the world, as human free will is compromised. On the other hand, if divine control is limited, His providential action becomes uncertain and risky. However, in this scenario, humans are fully responsible for the evil they do. It is straightforward that no solution is a clear winner, and that all candidates must face conflicting requirements that are difficult to reconcile.<sup>28</sup>

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