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Robert Kane

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# Predestination, Divine Foreknowledge, and Free Will

## *1. Religious Belief and Free Will*

Debates about free will are impacted by religion as well as by science, as noted in chapter 1. Indeed, for many people, religion is the context in which questions about free will first arise. The following personal statement by philosopher William Rowe nicely expresses the experiences of many religious believers who first confront the problem of free will:

As a seventeen year old convert to a quite orthodox branch of Protestantism, the first theological problem to concern me was the question of Divine Predestination and Human Freedom. Somewhere I read the following line from the Westminster Confession: "God from all eternity did . . . freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass." In many ways I was attracted to this idea. It seemed to express the majesty and power of God over all that he had created. It also led me to take an optimistic view of events in my own life and the lives of others, events which struck me as bad or unfortunate. For I now viewed them as planned by God before the creation of the world—thus they must serve some good purpose unknown to me. My own conversion, I reasoned, must also have been ordained to happen, just as the failure of others to be converted must have been similarly ordained. But at this point in my reflections, I hit upon a difficulty, a difficulty that made me think harder than I ever had before in my life. For I also believed that I had chosen God out of my own free will, that each of us is responsible for choosing or rejecting God's way. But how could I be responsible for a choice which, from eternity, God had ordained I would make at that particular moment of my life? How can it be that those who reject God's way do so of their own free will, if God, from eternity, destined them to reject his way?<sup>1</sup>

The problem of divine predestination and human free will that Rowe is describing has troubled most thoughtful religious believers at one time or another. Debates about this problem have been a feature of all the world's theistic religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. It was this problem of predestination and free will that led Muslim scholars (about a century after Muhammad's death) to ask the Caliphs if they could look into the scrolls of the ancient Greek philosophers left hidden in the libraries of the Middle East since the time of the conquests of Alexander the Great. The main concern of these Muslim scholars was to see if they could get some insight from the "pagan" Greek philosophers into the vexing problem of predestination and free will, which the *Qur'an* (Koran) did not resolve. The Hebrew and Christian scriptures also describe an omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and all-good personal God, who created the universe, without entirely resolving the problem of how the omnipotence and omniscience of God could be reconciled with human freedom.

## 2. Predestination, Evil, and the Free Will Defense

One simple way to solve the problem of predestination that has tempted many thinkers in different religious traditions is to argue that divine predestination and human freedom are *compatible*. This solution was developed most fully by the American Calvinist theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). Edwards took the classical compatibilist line discussed in chapter 2 that freedom is the ability to do what we want without constraints or impediments; and Edwards argued that we could have such freedom to do as we want even if everything in the world was determined by the foreordaining acts of God. Though God has created the good or corrupt natures from which we act, Edwards argued, our acts are nonetheless our free acts, imputable to us, since they flow without impediments from *our* natures.

Predestination in this form is difficult to accept, as Rowe notes; and the reasoning of chapter 11 suggests why. If humans were predestined in the way Edwards describes, they would not be ultimately responsible for their actions in the sense of UR. For God's creation of the world, including creating different humans with good or evil natures, would be a *sufficient cause* of everything that happens, including the good and evil acts of humans. Since humans are not in turn responsible for God's creating the world as God did, then humans would not be ultimately responsible for their actions in the sense of UR. Worse still, the ultimate responsibility for good *and* evil acts would lie with God, who knowingly created a world in

which those acts would inevitably occur. Such consequences are unacceptable for most theists, who believe that God is not the cause of evil and who also believe that God *justly* punishes *us* for our sins.

At this point, the problem of predestination and free will becomes entangled with the religious “problem of evil”: if God is all-powerful and all-good, then why does God allow horrendous evils in the world? Either God cannot eliminate evil, in which case God is not all-powerful; or God can eliminate evil but chooses not to, in which case God is not all-good. One standard solution to this problem of evil due to Saint Augustine is called “the Free Will Defense.” God is not the source of evil, according to the Free Will Defense. Instead God gives free will to creatures (such as humans and angels) who then cause evil by their free actions. But why would God give free will to other creatures, knowing the terrible consequences that might flow from it? The standard answer, given by Augustine, was that “free will is one of the good things.” Without free will, he reasoned, there would be no *moral* good or evil among creatures, no genuine responsibility or blameworthiness, and creatures could not choose to love God of their own free wills (love being a greater good when it is *freely* given). God therefore allows evil for a greater good, but God is not the cause or source of evil.

But the Free Will Defense runs into trouble if predestination is true. As Rowe says: “How could I be responsible for a choice which, from eternity, God had ordained I would make at that particular moment of my life? How can it be that those who reject God’s way do so of their own free will, if God, from eternity, destined them to reject his way?” If all acts are predestined, the *ultimate* responsibility for good and evil acts would go back to God after all and the Free Will Defense would fail.

For this reason among others, *compatibilism* is more difficult to accept in a religious context if you are a theist who believes in an omnipotent, omniscient, and all-good God who created the universe. Compatibilists believe that freedom (in all the senses worth wanting) could exist in a *determined* world. But if we did live in a determined world and it was *also* true that *God had created that world*, then everything that happened in that world would have been predetermined, and hence predestined, by God’s act of creation. The ultimate responsibility for all that occurs would go back to God. That is one reason most (though not all) modern theists, as Rowe notes, believe that the free will God has given us could not exist in a determined world and therefore must be an *incompatibilist* or *libertarian* free will. The only way around this conclusion would *seem* to be accepting that, in creating the world, God predetermines every act, good and evil, that humans perform; and most theists are reluctant to concede that.

But suppose that someone who is a theist is reluctant to concede that God predetermines every act. Must he or she thereby deny that God is all-powerful and all-good? Not necessarily. For theists can say that God has the *power* to predestine all things but *chooses* not to exercise that power in order to give free will to humans. And if Augustine is right in saying that giving humans free will is a “good thing” (for without it there would be no genuine responsibility or blameworthiness), then theists can continue to hold that God is all-powerful and all-good, even though God chooses to limit God’s own power by giving humans free will and not predestining everything they do.

### 3. *Foreknowledge and Freedom*

But if theists take this line, thus preserving God’s power and goodness, another problem looms. For God is supposed to be not only all-powerful and all-good, according to the biblical traditions, but also *all-knowing* or *omniscient*. Though God might freely choose to restrain divine power over all events in order to give humans free will, it seems that God would nonetheless know everything that is going to happen. And there are reasons to believe that divine *foreknowledge* would be as much a threat to free will as divine *foreordination*. The problem posed by divine foreknowledge is clearly stated by a character named Evodius in Saint Augustine’s classic dialogue *On the Free Choice of the Will*. Evodius says:

I am deeply troubled by a certain question: How can it be that God has foreknowledge of all future events, and yet we do not sin of necessity? Anyone who says that an event can happen otherwise than as God has foreknown it is making an insane and malicious attempt to destroy God’s foreknowledge. If God therefore foreknew that a good man would sin . . . the sin was committed of necessity, because God foreknew that it would happen. How then could there be free will when there is such inevitable necessity?<sup>2</sup>

In response to Evodius, Augustine makes a point that many other thinkers have since made on this topic. Augustine points out that merely foreknowing or foreseeing that something is going to happen is not the same thing as *causing* it to happen.

Your foreknowledge that a man will sin does not of itself necessitate the sin. Your foreknowledge did not force him to sin. . . . In the same way, God’s foreknowledge of future events does not compel them to take place. . . . God is not the evil cause of these acts though God justly avenges them. You may understand from this, therefore, how justly God punishes sins; for God does not do the things which he knows will happen.<sup>3</sup>

To illustrate Augustine's point, imagine scientists standing behind a screen observing everything we do, but not in any way interfering in our actions. They may know enough about us to predict everything we are going to do. But it does not follow that they cause what we do or are responsible for it, if they always remain behind the screen and never interfere. So it would be with God, Augustine is saying, if God merely foreknows what we will do. Although *foreordaining*, or predestining something makes it happen, merely *foreknowing* it does not make it happen. In short, foreknowledge is not the cause of what is foreknown.

#### 4. *Foreknowledge and the Consequence Argument*

For many people, this distinction between *causing* or *predetermining* what will happen and merely *foreknowing* it solves the problem about divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Unfortunately, the problem is not so simply solved. For there are reasons to believe that foreknowledge itself might be incompatible with human freedom, even if foreknowledge is not the cause of what is foreknown. One way of seeing why this might be so is to consider the following argument, which has some interesting parallels to the Consequence Argument of chapter 3 for the incompatibility of free will and determinism. If God has foreknowledge of all events, including human actions, then the following conditions obtain.

1. God believed, at some time before we were born, that our present actions would occur.
2. God's beliefs cannot be mistaken.
3. It must be the case that <if God believed, at some time before we were born, that our present actions would occur and God's beliefs cannot be mistaken, then our present actions will occur>.
4. There is nothing we can now do to change the fact that God believed, at some time before we were born, that our present actions would occur.
5. There is nothing we can now do to change the fact that God's beliefs cannot be mistaken.
6. There is nothing we can now do to change the fact that <if God believed, at some time before we were born, that our present actions would occur and God's beliefs cannot be mistaken, then our present actions occur>.
7. Therefore there is nothing we can now do to change the fact that our present actions occur.

In short, if God has foreknown what we will do, we *cannot now do otherwise* than we actually do. Since this argument, like the Consequence

Argument, can be applied to any agents and actions at any times, we can infer from it that if God has foreknowledge of all events, no one can ever do otherwise; and if free will requires the power to do otherwise, then no one would have free will.

In assessing this argument, it is helpful to note the parallels between it and the Consequence Argument of chapter 3. Step 4 of this argument (There is nothing we can now do to change the fact that God believed at a time before we were born that our present actions would occur) corresponds to premise 1 of the Consequence Argument (There is nothing we can now do to change the past). Step 5 of this argument (There is nothing we can now do to change the fact that God's beliefs cannot be mistaken) plays a similar role to premise 2 of the Consequence Argument (There is nothing we can now do to change the laws of nature). Just as the laws of nature make it necessary that, *given* the past, our present actions will occur (which is step 5 of the Consequence Argument), so the fact that God's beliefs cannot be mistaken makes it necessary that, *given* that God believed at a *past* time that our present actions would occur, our present actions will occur (step 3 of this argument). God's prior beliefs may not *cause* our present actions to occur, yet they make it *necessary* that our present actions will occur, *if* God's beliefs cannot be mistaken.

Consider, finally, premises 1 and 2 of this Foreknowledge Argument. It is hard for theists, if they believe God is infallible, to deny that God's beliefs cannot be mistaken (premise 2 of the argument). As for premise 1 of the argument (God believed, at a time before we were born, that our present actions would occur), it follows straightforwardly from the assumption that God has foreknowledge. Remember that the argument merely has to *assume* God has foreknowledge in order to show that *if* God has foreknowledge, then we would lack free will.

### 5. *Eternalist Solutions to the Foreknowledge Problem: Boethius and Aquinas*

This Foreknowledge Argument has provoked many responses through history. In the rest of this chapter, we will consider four of the most important attempts to respond to it and thereby to solve the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Three of these responses have their origins in medieval philosophy, but they have been refined in modern times. The first response was put forward by the philosopher Boethius (480–524 CE), who lived a century after Augustine, and was later defended by Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 CE), the most influential philosopher of the Middle Ages.

Boethius and Aquinas appeal to the *eternity* or *timelessness* of God to answer the foreknowledge problem. A perfect God would not be subject to time and change as we creatures are, they insist. But if God is eternal in the sense of being timeless, or outside time altogether, then we cannot say that God has *foreknowledge* of future events at all. For, foreknowledge implies that God is located at some point in time and knows at that time what is going to take place at future times; and this makes no sense if God is not in time. We must say that God knows everything that happens, to be sure. But if God is eternal in a timeless sense, then everything that happens must be known by God in an eternal present, as if God were directly seeing it happen at that particular moment. Thus, Boethius says of God's knowledge:

It encompasses the infinite sweep of past and future, and regards all things in its simple comprehension as if they were now taking place. Thus, if you will think about foreknowledge by which God distinguishes all things, you will rightly consider it not to be a foreknowledge of future events, but knowledge of a never-changing present.<sup>4</sup>

Various images have been suggested to illustrate how God knows eternally a changing world. The simplest image is of a road we are walking on. Travelers on the road proceed one step at a time. But God sees their whole journey and the entire road all at once from above the road, so to speak, being outside of time.

If we accept this eternalist account of God's knowledge, it seems that premise 1 of the Foreknowledge Argument would be false: we could no longer say "God believed, *at a time before we were born*, that our present actions would occur." So our present actions would not be necessitated *by the past*, including by God's past beliefs. Thus, our actions could be free, even in a libertarian sense, since they might be undetermined by all past events in time, even though they were timelessly known by God. Divine *omniscience* could then be reconciled with human freedom, even if divine *foreknowledge* could not be; and the foreknowledge problem would be solved.

Or would it? There have been objections to this way of solving the foreknowledge problem. Many objections have to do with the idea of divine timelessness itself. How could a timeless being know a changing world? How can it be that events occurring in time are simultaneously present to God? If God is timeless, how can God interact with temporal creatures like us, reacting and responding to what we do, as God often does in the Bible? Defenders of divine timelessness have attempted to answer these objections to the idea that God is eternal in a timeless sense. But from our

point of view, the more important question is whether ascribing timeless knowledge to God really does solve the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Some philosophers argue that it does not.

Some of these philosophers have questioned whether God's timeless knowledge of all that happens is not just as much a threat to our freedom as God's foreknowledge would be. They ask, in Rowe's words, how we could have done otherwise "if God knew *from eternity* what choice we would make at this particular time." Linda Zagzebski states this objection by saying that "we have no more reason to think that we can do anything about God's timeless knowledge than about God's past knowledge."<sup>5</sup> In support of this claim, Zagzebski suggests that an argument like that of section 4 could be reformulated so that it applies to God's eternal knowledge as well.

In place of premise 1 (God believed, at some time before we were born, that our present actions would occur), we would have premise 1\*: God believes from eternity (timelessly) that our present actions occur. Since God's timeless beliefs also cannot be mistaken, it would be necessary that, if God believed from eternity that our present actions occur, then our present acts would occur. But there is nothing we can now do to change the fact that God believes from eternity that our present actions occur and nothing we can now do to change the fact that God's beliefs cannot be mistaken. So there is nothing we can now do to change the fact that our present actions occur. If this argument is correct, it would appear that God's timeless knowledge is just as much a threat to our freedom as God's foreknowledge would be. Zagzebski does not claim that this argument necessarily refutes the doctrine of divine timelessness. But she thinks it does show that appealing to God's timeless knowledge *alone* will not solve the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom without further arguments.

## 6. *The Ockhamist Solution: William of Ockham*

A different solution to the foreknowledge problem that has been much discussed by contemporary philosophers was suggested by the medieval philosopher William of Ockham (1285–1349 CE). Ockham argued that we can and should ascribe genuine *foreknowledge* of all future events to God. Thus he rejected the timeless solution of Boethius and Aquinas. To understand how God's foreknowledge can be reconciled with human freedom, Ockham appeals instead to a subtle distinction between two kinds of facts about the past, "hard facts" and "soft facts." To illustrate the difference, suppose

(H) Adam Jones was born at midnight at Mercy Hospital in Ames (Iowa) on May 1, 1950.



This is a *hard* fact about the past. It is a fact that is *simply* about the past in the sense that its being a fact about May 1, 1950, does not depend on any facts that might occur later in time. Nor is there anything anyone can do at a later time to change the past fact that Adam Jones was born at that place at that time.

But suppose now that Adam Jones had a son, John, born in 1975, and at midnight on June 1, 2000, John committed a murder. From then on, it became true that

(S) The father of a murderer (namely, John's father, Adam Jones) was born at midnight at Mercy Hospital in Ames on May 1, 1950.

This is a *soft* fact about the past. It is *about* the past in the sense that it is about something that happened in 1950 (Adam Jones's birth). But it is *not simply* about the past because its truth also depends on something that happened at a later time in 2000. Unlike the hard fact H (Adam Jones was born . . . in Ames . . . in 1950), this soft fact S (the father of a murderer was born . . . in Ames . . . in 1950) was not a fact about the past at all at times *between* May 1, 1950 and June 1, 2000. (The soft fact became a fact about the past only after June 1, 2000.)

We may even suppose that John's murdering someone in 2000 was a *free* action that was undetermined and so John might have done otherwise. In that case, it would have been "up to John" *in 2000* whether the soft fact S would become a fact *about the past*. But this would not be so about the hard fact that Adam Jones was born in Ames on May 1, 1950. Nothing John or anyone else could do after May 1, 1950, could change the hard fact.

Now Ockham suggests that facts about God's foreknowledge, though they are about the past, are soft facts about the past rather than hard facts. They are not simply about the past because they refer to and require the truth of future events. Thus, God's knowing at earlier times that John will commit a murder in 2000 is a fact if and only if John does commit a murder in 2000. Ockham then argues that, while it is not in our power to affect hard facts about the past, it is in our power to affect soft facts about the past. If John's murder was a free action, then John could have done otherwise; he could have refrained from murdering. And if he had refrained from murdering, then God would have known *at earlier times* that John would refrain rather than knowing that John would commit murder.

We have to be cautious here. Ockham is not claiming that John's power to do otherwise in this sense is a power to *change* what God previously believed. We are not to imagine that God knew earlier that John would murder and that John changed what God had foreknown by refraining. That would be to assume that God's foreknowing was a *hard* fact about the

past and we cannot change hard facts about the past. But if God's foreknowing was a soft fact, it does not have to be changed. For if John had refrained from murdering, the soft fact would simply have *been* different all along: God would have foreknown at all earlier times that John was going to refrain rather than having foreknown that John was going to murder.

This solution is certainly subtle. But it provokes more than a few questions. Can we believe that God's foreknowledge is really a soft fact about the past? If God had foreknowledge of a future event, it seems that God would have to believe at an earlier time that the event would occur. But a divine past belief seems to be as good a candidate for a hard fact about the past as anything else. If you or I believed today that a future event was going to occur tomorrow (say, an earthquake), the fact that we had this belief today would be a hard fact: whether the earthquake (or anything else) occurred tomorrow would not affect the fact that we *believed today* that it would occur. But Ockhamists would point out that God's beliefs are different from yours and mine. God's beliefs cannot be mistaken. So whether or not God *has* a certain belief today depends on what happens tomorrow. With you and me, by contrast, whether our belief was *true* would depend on the future, but our *having* the belief today would not depend on the future.

Yet this admitted difference in God's beliefs leads to further puzzles. If John's committing murder on June 1, 2000, was a *free* action, then John could have done otherwise—he could also have refrained; and whatever John did, God would have known that at all earlier times. So it seems that John has the power at this moment on June 1, 2000, to determine *what God has foreknown at all earlier times*. That would seem to preserve John's free will all right. For John's voluntary action would be *ultimately responsible* for what God had foreknown at earlier times rather than the other way around. But John's free will is thus preserved, it seems, by making God's foreknowledge quite mysterious. For God's foreknowledge at all earlier times—even at times before John existed—now seems to depend on what John does at this moment in time.

Another puzzling feature of divine foreknowledge on the Ockhamist view is this. Suppose it is now 1990. Can we truly say in 1990 that God *then* foreknew that John would commit murder in 2000? Apparently not, because what God believed at times before June 1, 2000, was not settled or determined *until* John acted one way or the other on June 1, 2000. If God's foreknowledge of a future free action is a soft fact about the past in this sense, then it seems that it would not *become* a fact about the past until after the time when the free action is performed. God's foreknowledge

would be similar to the soft fact S—the fact that the father of a murderer was born in Ames on May 1, 1950—which did not become a fact about the past until after June 1, 2000, when John Jones committed murder.

Conceiving free actions in this way does preserve free will, as noted, since it seems to make God's foreknowledge depend on our free actions rather than the other way around. But it certainly makes God's foreknowledge difficult to understand. Ockham himself conceded this point. He said: "I maintain that it is impossible to express clearly the way in which God knows future [free actions]. Nevertheless, it must be held that He does so."

## 7. *The Molinist Solution*

The third solution to the foreknowledge problem originated with another late medieval thinker, the Spanish Jesuit philosopher and theologian Luis de Molina (1535–1600 CE). Like Ockham, Molina rejected the timeless solution to the foreknowledge problem of Boethius and Aquinas. But Molina sought a better answer than Ockham was able to give about *how* God can foreknow future free actions. To explain this, Molina introduced the notion of divine "middle knowledge."

Molina begins by distinguishing three types of knowledge that God would have. The first is God's knowledge of all that is *necessary* or *possible*. Being omniscient, God would know everything that *must* be and also every possibility—everything that *might* be. In addition, by a second kind of knowledge, God would know, among *contingent* things—those that might exist or might not exist—which of them *actually* existed because God had *willed* them to be so and not because they were necessary. But, between these two types of divine knowledge, according to Molina, there is another:

The third type is *middle* knowledge, by which in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each free will, God saw in His own essence what each such will would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this, or in that or, indeed, in infinitely many orders of things—even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite.<sup>6</sup>

Middle knowledge is thus the knowledge God has of how free creatures are going to exercise their freedom. By virtue of middle knowledge, according to Molina, God foreknows what each free creature *would* do, *if* placed in any possible situation, even though the creature is not determined to act as he or she does. So, for example, by middle knowledge,

God would know the following.

1. If the Apostle Peter were asked if he is a follower of Jesus (at a certain time and in certain circumstances), Peter would freely deny it.
2. If Molly were offered a job with the law firm in Dallas (at a certain time and in certain circumstances), she would freely choose it.

By middle knowledge, God would know these things even though both Peter and Molly were not determined to do what they did *and* both could have done otherwise.

Propositions like 1 and 2 are called *counterfactuals of freedom*: they describe what agents *would freely* do, *if* placed in various circumstances C (where it is assumed that the circumstances C do not determine how they will act). How can God know the truth of such counterfactuals of freedom *if* it is not necessitated or determined that the agents will do A in the circumstances C? God cannot foreknow the truth of such counterfactuals by the *first* kind of knowledge of what is necessary, Molina insists, because future free actions do not occur of necessity. God also cannot know in advance what free creatures, such as Peter and Molly, are going to freely do by knowing the laws of nature and the past because, by hypothesis, the past and laws of nature do not determine what they will do. God also cannot know what Peter and Molly are going to do by knowing everything about their characters, motives, and personalities, because their characters, motives, and personalities also do not determine which of several ways they might act.

Finally, God cannot know what Peter and Molly will *freely* do in the circumstances by virtue of Molina's *second* kind of knowledge either—by God's knowledge of what God has *willed* that they do. For free creatures do not always do what God wills (as in Peter's case); and if God's will *caused* creatures to do whatever they appear to freely do, then God would be ultimately responsible for the evil acts of creatures as well as for their good acts.

God therefore does not know the truth of counterfactuals of freedom by either the first or second kind of knowledge. Yet, Molina insists that there must be a truth to be known about what Peter is going to do in his circumstances and what Molly is going to do in hers, even if neither is determined to do what he or she does. And if there is a truth about what they are actually going to do, then God, being *omniscient*, would have to know that truth "in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each free will." God would not make them perform any given action, to be sure. The agents would act of their own free wills. But God would see "in His own essence what each such will would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or in that circumstance."

If God did not have such middle knowledge, Molinists argue, Jesus would not have been able to know that Peter would freely deny that he was a follower of Jesus; nor would God have been able to foresee what various figures in the Bible were going to freely do. In the first book of Samuel, for example, God foresees and prophesies that Saul will freely choose to besiege the city of Keilah if David stays in the city. Without middle knowledge, Molinists insist, prophecy would not be possible where human free actions are concerned; and God's providence and ability to control all events in creation would be limited.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to understand how God can have middle knowledge of what free creatures will do. (Molina himself says that it involves an "inscrutable comprehension of each free will.") Critics of Molinism go further and say that middle knowledge is impossible. They focus on Molina's claim that *there must be a truth to be known* about what Peter will freely do if placed in certain circumstances and about what Molly will freely choose in certain circumstances, even if neither person is determined by those circumstances to do what he or she does. But *is* there a truth about what Peter and Molly will freely do *before* they actually do it? What would *make* counterfactuals of freedom of the form "If placed in circumstances C, the agent will freely do A" *true* before the agents themselves act? Such counterfactuals are not true of necessity, as we have seen. Nor are they true by virtue of the laws of nature. Nor are they true because God willed them to be true. (Otherwise God would be implicated in all human free actions, good and evil.)

Reflecting on all this, critics of Molinism, such as Robert Adams and William Hasker, have argued that there is nothing that makes counterfactuals of freedom true.<sup>7</sup> So there *is* no truth to be known, they say, by God or anyone else about what free agents *will* do before they act. There may be a truth, as Adams notes, about what free agents will *probably* do before they act; and God, being omniscient, would know such a truth. For example, it may be true that "If Molly were in circumstances C, she would *probably* choose to join the law firm in Dallas." For there may be facts about Molly's character, motives, and circumstances that make it probable (though not certain) that she will make this choice, if her choice is undetermined. Of course, there may also be other facts that make it probable she might choose the firm in Austin instead. (And there are no doubt other facts about Molly that make it highly *improbable* that she will choose neither firm, but decide instead to become a topless dancer in Seattle.)

In sum, there may be facts supporting statements about what free agents will *probably* do and *probably not* do; and God would know these facts. But there are no facts, according to critics of Molinism, that suffice to make it true that free agents, like Molly, would *definitely* make one choice

rather than the other *before* they act. As you might guess, defenders of Molinism reject this criticism. They argue that, even though facts about the characters and circumstances of free agents and facts about the laws of nature do not suffice to make counterfactuals of freedom true, there must be some truths in the nature of things about what agents would do with their freedom in various circumstances. And if God were really omniscient, God would somehow know these truths.

### 8. The “Open Theism” View

The fourth and final solution to the foreknowledge problem is the “Open Theism” view. Defenders of this view do not think any of the previous solutions to the problem of foreknowledge are satisfactory. The only way out, they believe, is to deny that God *has* foreknowledge of future free actions. On this Open Theism view, the future is genuinely “open,” and even God does not know what free agents are going to do before they act. Such a view was held by a few isolated figures in the history of religious thought. But it was usually regarded as unorthodox, if not scandalous, to deny that God had *complete* knowledge of the future. In the twentieth century, however, this “Open Theism” view was revived and defended by “process philosophers,” such as Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, who argued that orthodox solutions to the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom were inadequate.<sup>8</sup> In recent decades, other philosophers and theologians have also defended Open Theism without necessarily accepting all the metaphysical presuppositions of process philosophers.<sup>9</sup>

Open Theists emphasize that denying God has foreknowledge of future free actions does not mean giving up the idea that God is *omniscient*. This sounds paradoxical but really is not, they insist: for they grant that God *does* know everything that happens and has happened. Nothing that occurs escapes God’s knowledge. But the future *has not yet occurred* and is not yet real. So, when it comes to free actions, there is nothing real there to be known, at least not *yet*. God *can* know the events in the future that are necessary or determined by knowing what has already occurred and by knowing the laws of nature and the laws of logic. Thus God may know many things about the future, about the movements of stars and the falling of rocks and many other matters. But events such as human actions that are not necessary or determined are a different matter. They are not yet real and they may *or may not* occur at all. Not to know what *is not* (yet) or is not (yet) *real* and may never be is not to be lacking in omniscience. God will know all such future events when and if they become real, but not before.

The Open Theist view, according to its defenders, provides a more natural account of God's interactions with the created world and with humans, as described in the theistic scriptures. God gives free will to humans without knowing in advance what they will do with their free will. Humans then use this free will to do good or evil. God waits to see what they will do and reacts accordingly by rewarding or punishing them. In the Open Theist view, this is the simple, commonsense interpretation of the scriptures. Human free will is preserved and humans are ultimately responsible for their own free actions, not God. Moreover, God's goodness and justice are preserved because God justly punishes or rewards us for the actions for which we are ultimately responsible.

Given the simplicity of this solution to the foreknowledge problem, one may wonder why many theists regard the Open Theist view as unorthodox and why it is not more widely held. The answer is that it would require major changes in traditional theological views about the nature of God. On this Open Theist view, God can no longer be regarded as unchanging or immutable, another important attribute that has often been ascribed to God. For God comes to know many things that God did not know from eternity as the world unfolds; and thus God changes. God can also no longer be conceived of as timeless or beyond time. One could still say that God was eternal, but that would no longer mean beyond time, but rather that God exists at *all* times.

Traditionally, it was also held that God was the cause or creator of all things, but not the effect of anything. God was impassible and not affected by a changing world. On the Open Theist view, however, it seems that when God comes to know what we do, God is affected by us. In other words, God is no longer impassible. The Open Theist view also seems to require a different view of prophecy. God could prophesy earthquakes and other natural disasters with certainty, but where human free actions were concerned, such as Peter's denial or Saul's freely choosing to lay siege to the city of Keilah, God could know in advance only that these acts would probably occur, but would not know it with certainty. This is a limitation that is unacceptable to many theists.

Open Theists may respond (and many do respond) by arguing that the traditional understanding of the nature of God is in need of rethinking. The idea that a perfect Being would be entirely beyond time and change, impassible, or unaffected by changing things, and knowing everything about the future, is an idea of perfection that has its origins in Greek philosophy rather than in the biblical traditions. What is needed, they might argue, is a rethinking of the idea of perfection or what it means to say that God is perfect. By contrast, those who are reluctant to abandon traditional ways of thinking about God and cannot accept this Open Theist view must rely

on one of the other solutions to the foreknowledge problem discussed in this chapter; or they must come up with a solution as yet unknown.

### Suggested Reading

Augustine's classic work on foreknowledge and freedom is *On the Free Choice of the Will* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1964). A selection from this work can be found in my edited volume *Free Will* (Blackwell, 2002). Two fine general studies of the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom are William Hasker's *God, Time and Knowledge* (Cornell, 1989) and Linda T. Zagzebski's *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (Oxford, 1991). Luis de Molina's view can be found in *On Divine Foreknowledge*, translated with a useful introduction by Alfredo Freddoso (Cornell, 1988). The most thorough modern defense of the Molinist view is Thomas Flint's *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Cornell, 1998). Robert Merrihow Adams's critique of Molinism can be found in "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil" (*American Philosophical Quarterly* 14, 1977). The Open Theist view is defended by Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger in *The Openness of God* (InterVarsity, 1994). The Open Theist view of process philosophers such as Whitehead and Hartshorne is readably introduced in David Griffin and John B. Cobb, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Westminster, 1976).