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Zeeb, Janelle Louise. "An Analysis of Clark Pinnock's Open Theism as a Potential Solution to Theodicy." M. T. S., Tyndale University College & Seminary, 2015.

An Analysis of Clark Pinnock's Open Theism
as a Potential Solution to Theodicy

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Theological Studies awarded by Tyndale Seminary

August 2015

Toronto, Canada

Abstract

Clark Pinnock has been one of the most notable advocates of open theism; an idea which has been gaining ground over the last few decades. This thesis will examine Pinnock's understanding of open theism as pertains to the issue of theodicy, and will compare and contrast it with traditional views of theodicy. This is done in order to determine if open theism is able to provide a more coherent version of theodicy which is pastorally comforting to Christians who face suffering. As theodicy is a key issue when comparing different theological systems, the ability or inability of open theism to address theodicy in a way that is more compelling than traditional options is an important test to determine whether open theism should be allowed as an orthodox Christian option.

Chapter 1 explains the importance of theodicy as a test for any theological system, examines Pinnock's personal theological background and journey, and gives a short summary of the controversy surrounding open theism. Chapter 2 discusses in detail how three views of God's sovereignty (divine determinism, simple foreknowledge views, and open theism) understand God's omnipotence, omniscience, human freedom, and theodicy, in order to compare these systems' advantages and problems for theodicy. Chapter 3 lays out four specific advantages of Pinnock's open theism as relates to theodicy: it affirms God's character is perfectly good, it takes spiritual warfare seriously, it preserves human moral responsibility, and it encourages Christians to work against evil. Chapter 4 examines common objections to open theism's implications for theodicy. The main issues are the claim that divine determinism is more comforting to Christians than open theism, that open theism reduces the ability to trust God's guidance, that in open theism God is still guilty of allowing evil to occur, that open theism reduces God's glory, and finally, that open theism's theodicy is not supported by Scripture. Each criticism is responded to by Pinnock, supported by other open theists, in order to show that open theism can address these issues in a consistent and convincing manner.

To my parents, for introducing me to
Jesus and providing a loving Christian home,
and to my husband, for supporting me during
my studies which have culminated in this thesis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Purpose and Scope of this Thesis

Over the past two-thousand years there have been many attempts by Christians to understand how God’s omniscience and omnipotence relate to human free will.¹

One of the most recent theories which has appeared over the last few decades is known as open theism. The term “open” means that God is open to new experiences and is flexible in how he works in the world,² and also that the future is “open” and not exhaustively settled by God (either by being completely predestined, or by being perfectly foreknown). This is because creatures to whom God has given free will have some real influence in how the future occurs.³ The term “theism” denotes the belief in “a supernatural, infinite, personal Being who created the material universe and who transcends it,” who can and does act in the world.⁴ So while all Christians are theists, the controversy involves the “open” aspect of open theism.

Open theism has not yet been widely embraced by Christians, and has been resisted by many who hold to traditional views. Despite this, open theists argue that their understanding of God has many advantages over the traditional

¹ See an overview of the development of the viewpoints regarding God’s providence and human free will beginning in the early church and continuing up to modern times by Dennis W. Jowers in *Four Views of Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 11-22.

² Richard Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 16.

³ Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK; Grand Rapids, MI, Paternoster Press; Baker Academic, 2001), 3-5.

⁴ Norman L. Geisler and H. Wayne House, *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001), 8.

views. They say that not only is open theism more Biblical, it is a better fit with how we live our lives, and it also provides a better solution for theodicy. In fact, one author suggests that open theism's origins can be seen as a response to theodicy, on account of how several major open theist authors were led to open theism through wondering about the problem of evil, or through the need to pastorally minister to those experiencing suffering, including themselves.⁵

Theodicy is a key issue in the debate over God's omniscience and omnipotence. Richard Rice notes that

the word [theodicy] originated with a seventeenth-century German thinker, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Along with science, mathematics and metaphysics, Leibniz took a special interest in the problem of evil. And to give his book on the topic a title, he coined the word *theodicy*, combining the Greek words for "justify" (*dikaioō*) and "God" (*theos*). A Theodicy is an attempt to justify, or defend, God in the face of evil.⁶

How evil can exist in a world where God is perfectly good and also omnipotent has been one of the most perplexing theological questions over the centuries.

When wondering about God, philosopher David Hume wrote: "Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?"⁷ Rice restates this in modern language when he says

if God is perfectly good and powerful...then evil is incomprehensible. After all, a good God would want to eliminate it, and an all-powerful God would be able to. So why does evil exist? Why do people suffer? What possible explanation can it have?⁸

⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?: The Current Controversy over Divine Foreknowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 190.

⁶ Richard Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning: Contemporary Responses to the Problem of Pain* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2014), 20.

⁷ John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 13.

⁸ Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 14.

How people answer this question when they are personally faced with suffering can confirm their existing beliefs about God and thus be a great source of comfort, or it might make them completely reconsider everything they had thought about God's relationship to suffering.⁹ While they may not desire explanations immediately, Rice believes that eventually anyone who has experienced serious suffering will want to reflect on possible explanations for their suffering.¹⁰ He says,

Ordinarily, people numbed by enormous loss are not ready for theorizing. What they need most is a helping hand or a shoulder to cry on. Over the long haul, however, they often need something more – a sense of where they are and a reason to keep going. That's where theodicy can help.¹¹

Some have used the problem of evil to argue that God does not exist. Even the famous Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga said, "the argument from evil is the one argument against God's existence worth taking seriously."¹² So the problem of evil is not just a minor issue in theology, it is probably one of the largest and most practical issues that need to be addressed, not just philosophically, but also on a personal level by all those who experience suffering – that is; all of us.

Therefore, because theodicy is such a critical issue, it is argued that "the perceived ability or inability to explain evil is often one of the most important parts of any debate over the superiority of rival theistic systems."¹³ So examining how different views of God's omniscience and omnipotence handle theodicy is a worthwhile exercise. If the implications for theodicy for the system in question

⁹ Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21-23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹³ David Basinger and Randall Basinger, "Theodicy: A Comparative Analysis," in *Semper Reformandum: Studies in Honour of Clark H. Pinnock*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2003), 144.

are not acceptable Biblically, or if they have serious pastoral or practical consequences, then this may indicate that the view in question is not the best theistic system.

This thesis will examine open theism's implications for theodicy, in order to see how well it is able to provide a coherent solution to help comfort and encourage Christians who are experiencing suffering. If open theism is unable to adequately address the issues of evil and suffering or if it has negative practical or pastoral consequences, then perhaps it does not deserve to be taken seriously as a Christian option. However, if it can be shown that open theism is able to address the issues surrounding theodicy in a way that is more comforting than traditional understandings of theism, then this can add support to the argument that open theism deserves to be seen as a legitimate Christian option.

Background for Clark Pinnock

One of the major proponents of open theism was the late Clark H. Pinnock. It is noted that he was "one of the most prominent and provocative theological voices in North Atlantic evangelical Christianity since the 1960s."¹⁴ Through his education and personal theological reflection, Pinnock moved theologically from Calvinism to embracing open theism.¹⁵ He became a leader in the "open" school of evangelical thought, which intended to be theologically faithful yet also

¹⁴ Barry L. Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey toward Renewal: An Intellectual Biography* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Pub. House, 2000), xiii.

¹⁵ Clark H. Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1995), 15-26.

innovative.¹⁶ This section will give a short introduction to his life and background.

Clark Pinnock was born in 1937 and grew up in Toronto, Canada, where he attended the Park Road Baptist Church.¹⁷ He came to faith in 1950 and struggled to maintain a conservative evangelical faith in a church that was theologically liberal.¹⁸ He became involved in various Bible study groups, such as Youth for Christ, and the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.¹⁹ It was particularly from the InterVarsity group that he became acquainted with Calvinistic theologians and divine determinist theology.²⁰ Calvinist theology dominated North America and Europe in the post-WWII period, and because of this strong influence, Pinnock soon came to believe Calvinism was “evangelical Christianity in its purest form.”²¹ However, he was also influenced by more moderate authors such as C.S. Lewis, Sir Norman Anderson, and proponents of dispensational theology such as Charles Ryrie.²²

Pinnock attended Victoria College at the University of Toronto intending to be a missionary, yet later got a degree in Ancient Near East Studies from Fuller Seminary, and went to study in England where he pursued doctoral studies at the University of Manchester, first in Semitic languages and later in New Testament studies.²³ His dissertation discussed the role of the Holy Spirit in Paul’s epistles.²⁴

¹⁶ Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey toward Renewal*, 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19-21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²² *Ibid.*, 24.

²³ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

After this, Pinnock moved between teaching positions in England, the United States, and Canada.²⁵ He took a position teaching New Testament studies at the Southern Baptist Seminary in New Orleans, where he felt called to stand up for Biblical inerrancy against the claims of neo-orthodoxy.²⁶ Here he switched departments from New Testament studies into Theology, and he began to be noticed as having potential to shape evangelical theology.²⁷ Many of Pinnock's early writings are thus aimed at the issue of inerrancy.²⁸

His first shift that brought criticism was a change in his view of inerrancy from a rationalistic approach to one based more on induction and allowing the diversity of Scripture to speak,²⁹ as put forth in his book *The Scripture Principle*.³⁰ Then, beginning in 1969, Pinnock began to critique the entrenched Calvinistic theology which had been dominant in North American conservative circles.³¹ He was beginning to see God primarily as love and not an austere authoritative judge, and God's relation toward us more as a parent, lover, and covenant partner than just a monarch or law-giver.³² Pinnock first came to reject the idea of the perseverance of the saints, and then based on his belief in reciprocity in God-human relationships he also rejected the idea that God elects people to eternal damnation.³³ This required a change in his perspective toward understanding election as corporate and not individual. He then modified his

²⁵ Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey toward Renewal*, 35.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

³² *Ibid.*, 90.

³³ *Ibid.*, 103-105.

views of providence and theodicy, and emphasized that free will makes humans responsible to respond to God's offer of salvation. Finally he accepted that Jesus died for the whole world and not just the elect.³⁴ Pinnock found that Calvinistic theology reduces the dynamic quality of the relationship between God and creatures, and also "threatens the integrity of the gospel which is offered in the New Testament without reservation to all sinners, and not to an arbitrarily selected number (cf. 1 Tim 2:4)."³⁵ By this time he had become one of the leaders of the Arminian evangelical community and had edited two books on Arminian theology, *Grace Unlimited* and *The Grace of God and the Will of Man: A Case For Arminianism*.³⁶ These books focused on God's love, God's desire to save everyone, and how Jesus' atonement is unlimited, rejecting the Calvinist idea that God only intends to save some people.³⁷

In 1977 Pinnock moved to McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, and was excited to exercise evangelical influence there.³⁸ He worked as professor of Systematic Theology³⁹ at McMaster until his retirement in 2002. Daniel Strange suggests that Pinnock's first publication with a clear open theist perspective was in 1986 with the essay "God Limits His Knowledge,"⁴⁰ in *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*. Four years later, Pinnock published the book *The Openness of God*

³⁴ Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey toward Renewal*, 103-105.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

³⁶ Daniel Strange, "The Evolution of an Evangelical," in *Reconstructing Theology: A Critical Assessment of the Theology of Clark Pinnock*, eds. Tony J. Gray and Christopher Sinkinson (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2000), 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey toward Renewal*, 63.

³⁹ "Clark H. Pinnock," McMaster University, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.mcmaster.ca/mjtm/bio1-3.htm>.

⁴⁰ Strange, "The Evolution of an Evangelical," in *Reconstructing Theology*, 9.

along with four other authors, intending to challenge aspects of traditional views of God.⁴¹ While the book was originally John Sanders' idea, Pinnock was chosen to be the editor because of his prominence.⁴² Pinnock says that he hoped the book would become "a catalyst for ongoing reflection and even a source of theological renewal."⁴³ Finally in 2001 Pinnock published his book *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness*, which is Pinnock's longest exposition of his open theist position.

By the end of the 20th century, Pinnock was being called the leader of the "post-conservative evangelical left."⁴⁴ This group emphasized the historically-conditioned nature of theology, and accepted tradition, reason, and experience as important for theology along with Scripture.⁴⁵ Yet despite his many shifts in theological positions, Pinnock continually identified as an evangelical, and claimed that

my insights come from the perspective of one who stands within the stream of historic Christianity, and confesses the great truths of incarnation and atonement, of salvation by grace through faith, and of our everlasting hope only in Jesus Christ. I am committed to the infallibility of the Bible as the norm and canon for our message, and stand staunchly against the modern revolt against all these truths.⁴⁶

Despite this profession, many theologians, especially those committed to Reformed theology, have questioned the direction that Pinnock's theological investigations took him.⁴⁷ Some have wondered,

⁴¹ Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey toward Renewal*, 153.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 153, footnote 65.

⁴³ Clark H. Pinnock, "Open Theism: An Answer to My Critics," *Dialog* 44, no. 3 (September 1, 2005): 237.

⁴⁴ Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey toward Renewal*, 96.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁴⁷ Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey toward Renewal*, xiv.

Is Clark Pinnock the one who unfortunately departed significantly from evangelical orthodoxy? Or is he the one who fortunately took real risks to bring new life and relevancy to the orthodoxy that he staunchly refused to leave to the fate of its own limitations?⁴⁸

It seems both views of Pinnock are possible. In 2002 Pinnock was nearly expelled from the Evangelical Theological Society over his open theist views of God's omniscience and providence, even though his opponents noted that his views were based primarily on Scripture.⁴⁹ Pinnock often criticized Reformed theologians who insisted that evangelical theology must be equated with their own views, and thus excluded not only open theists, but also Wesleyans and Pentecostals.⁵⁰ He felt that he was often in a strange position of being too free-thinking for the Reformed-dominated evangelical groups, but too conservative to be part of the liberal mainline groups.⁵¹

Throughout his career, Pinnock desired to be flexible and continually open to changing his mind. He said it is "better to change one's mind than to continue on a wrong path," and so he did not feel ashamed of being on a "pilgrimage in theology."⁵² It is noted that

doing Christian theology is an ongoing process that never has been free of difficulty. The risks are tolerable if one believes that the Bible and its illuminating Spirit are leading toward the proposed alteration. Pinnock had arrived at such a belief and was prepared to face the challenge.⁵³

However, Pinnock's willingness to change his mind and his admission of being a theological pilgrim has led to various opinions of Pinnock. As Callen says,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁹ Doug Koop, "Clark Pinnock Dies at 73," *Christianity Today*, published August 17, 2010. Accessed April 6, 2015 from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/augustweb-only/43-22.0.html>

⁵⁰ Strange, "The Evolution of an Evangelical," in *Reconstructing Theology*, 17.

⁵¹ Ibid., 18.

⁵² Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey toward Renewal*, 6.

⁵³ Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey toward Renewal*, 137.

The resulting openness and willingness to search, change, and innovate have come to create for him a place in the evangelical community that has been described in ways ranging from staunch defender of the faith against the liberal disaster, to cautious Biblical pioneer, to a dangerous and sophisticated carrier of subtle heresy into the contemporary faith.⁵⁴

Upon his death in 2010, *Christianity Today* said of Clark Pinnock,

Renowned for exploring the frontiers of Biblical truth, he was reputed to study carefully, think precisely, argue forcefully, and shift his positions willingly if he discovered a more fruitful pathway of understanding. He said he preferred to be known, “not as one who has the courage of his convictions, but one who has the courage to question them and to change old opinions which need changing.”⁵⁵

It is likely that the main reason why Pinnock has had such an influence on evangelical thought was his attempt to be consistent and coherent, due to a desire to be thorough and to work through all the implications of his theology.⁵⁶ Thus, his theological proposals cannot be easily dismissed on charges of being inconsistent or un-Biblical.

Now, having examined Pinnock’s background, it is shown that he always claimed to be evangelical, and so his views of open theism should not be seen as a threat to evangelical faith. Also, his initial commitment to Calvinist theology makes his criticisms of divine determinism more legitimate than if they came from someone who had never held divine determinist beliefs. Due to Pinnock’s reputation as one of the leaders of the open theism movement, this thesis will focus primarily on open theism as put forth by Pinnock. However, other prominent open theists and followers of Pinnock such as Gregory Boyd, John

⁵⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁵ Koop, “Clark Pinnock Dies at 73.”

⁵⁶ Strange, “The Evolution of an Evangelical,” in *Reconstructing Theology*, 15.

Sanders, and Richard Rice may be used to complement, support, or clarify Pinnock's arguments.

Background for the Debate on Open Theism

The debate over open theism has become one of the more controversial issues in evangelicalism in recent years. Since the 1980s and 1990s several authors have published works arguing for open theism.⁵⁷ Major Christian publishers such as InterVarsity Press, Baker Books, and Christianity Today have published books and articles by open theists, as they believed their positions deserved to be heard and considered.⁵⁸ In the year 2000, Bruce Ware, a notable critic of open theism, wrote that "open theism is anything but a backwater movement and its impact is increasingly being felt in some of evangelicalism's most significant denominations and institutions."⁵⁹

Some who are hostile to open theism say that its claims about non-exhaustive divine foreknowledge and its implications place open theism outside the boundaries of evangelical orthodox Christianity.⁶⁰ Some say it is a major threat to classical evangelical orthodoxy.⁶¹ Others have outright called open theism heretical,⁶² or equate open theism with the views of the heretic Socinus

⁵⁷ Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 31.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁰ Bruce A. Ware, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Theologically: Is Open Theism Evangelical?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (June 1, 2002): 194, 212.

⁶¹ Norman L. Geisler and H. Wayne House, *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001), 9.

⁶² Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 33.

who believed God did not know all future contingencies.⁶³ However, Socinus had Pelagian views of salvation,⁶⁴ and the Socinians were also anti-Trinitarian,⁶⁵ and even questioned the deity of Jesus.⁶⁶ In contrast, open theists are not Pelagian or semi-Pelagian,⁶⁷ and they affirm the Trinity,⁶⁸ and affirm Jesus' divinity, and so open theists are not heretical on these charges. Others charge that open theism is too close to Process Theology.⁶⁹ Yet unlike Process Theology, open theism agrees with the orthodox Christian position that God is infinite, necessary, ontologically independent of the world, transcendent, and omnipresent.⁷⁰ Pinnock specifically says he is not a Process theist because he believes in God's ontological independence from the world.⁷¹ So while both Socinus and Process theologians have somewhat similar views to open theists on the nature of the future and God's foreknowledge, it does not make open theists heretical on this charge, as it was not the Socinians' or Process theologians' views of the future that made them heretical.

Yet it is clear that open theism has a different understanding of what it means for God to be omnipotent and omniscient than traditional Christian views. Some have gone so far as to claim that because the open theists have a different

⁶³ Ben Merkle, "Liberals in Drag," in *Bound Only Once: The Failure of Open Theism*, ed. Douglas Wilson (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001), 68-71.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶⁵ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 107.

⁶⁶ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*, Revised ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 170.

⁶⁷ Tony Gray, "Pinnock's Doctrine of God and the Evangelical Tradition," in *Reconstructing Theology*, 139-142.

⁶⁸ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 107.

⁶⁹ Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 31.

⁷⁰ Geisler and House, *The Battle for God*, 11.

⁷¹ Clark Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination & Free Will*, eds. Basinger and Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press: 1986), 147.

definition of God's omniscience and omnipotence, it means that the God of the open theists has different characteristics than the real God of the Bible, and therefore open theism is idolatry and puts the gospel at risk.⁷²

Even if open theism is not outright heretical, critics argue that it should not be an orthodox evangelical option. Bruce Ware fears that allowing open theism as an option is potentially harmful as it could lead to a slippery slope which would require evangelicalism to accept even more extreme modifications of doctrines.⁷³

If, for the sake of warm and affirming personal relations with brothers and sisters in Christ, we tolerate views that are contrary to Scripture and detrimental to the health of the church, we show great disregard and lack of love for the broader membership of the church and we become, by our passivity, negligence, and/or lack of courage, complicit in the advocacy of these errant teachings.⁷⁴

Elsewhere, Bruce Ware calls for evangelicals to reject open theism as an option:

I believed then, as I do now, that open theism's denial of what Scripture teaches and what all historic views affirm constitutes a departure that is Biblically, theologically, and practically so serious in nature, that Christian leaders should declare open theism unacceptable as a viable, legitimate model within evangelicalism. That is, because the theological problems with open theism are sufficiently weighty, a call to the broader evangelical church to take a stand in rejecting the openness proposal is not only justified, but, before God and in clear conscience, required.⁷⁵

However, the open theists do not see open theism as such a threat, and dislike being questioned as evangelicals or called heretics. In response to these accusations of heresy, Pinnock writes,

⁷² Douglas Wilson, "Foundations of Exhaustive Foreknowledge," in *Bound Only Once*, 163-168.

⁷³ Bruce A. Ware, "Rejoinder to Replies by Clark H. Pinnock, John Sanders, and Gregory A. Boyd," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (June 1, 2002): 247-248.

⁷⁴ Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 9.

⁷⁵ Bruce A. Ware, "Rejoinder to Replies," 251.

Apparently the fact that I confess Jesus Christ as Lord and believe in my heart that God raised him from the dead is of less importance to some critics than my questioning of certain traditions and constructs.⁷⁶

and elsewhere he writes,

I have not transgressed some rule of theological discourse or crossed over some line and placed myself outside the pale. Why can an evangelical not propose a different view of the nature of the future? What church council has declared this impossible? Since when is it a criterion of being orthodox or unorthodox, evangelical or unevangelical?⁷⁷

Additionally, Pinnock argues that it is unfair to criticize open theists as being unorthodox for modifying traditional theology, as modern proponents of traditional views are also modifying traditional concepts of God's attributes such as impassibility, un-changeability, and a-temporality without having their orthodoxy questioned.⁷⁸ Pinnock wonders if divine determinists are simply not ready for open theism: "How could one expect those, who have only recently come to tolerate Arminian thinking, to stomach a more radical version of it?"⁷⁹ and so this might explain their overreaction and desire to eliminate open theism as an orthodox Christian option. Alternatively, Pinnock suspects divine determinists react so strongly against open theism because they rightly perceive it as a threat and possibly a "more coherent alternative to Calvinism."⁸⁰

Open theists argue that their beliefs are merely an improvement on free-will theism which was put forth by various church fathers and is held to in

⁷⁶ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, xi.

⁷⁷ Clark Pinnock, "Response to Part 2," in *Reconstructing Theology*, 152.

⁷⁸ Clark H. Pinnock, "There Is Room for Us: A Reply to Bruce Ware," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (June 1, 2002): 213.

⁷⁹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, xi.

⁸⁰ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 15; Pinnock, "Open Theism: An Answer to My Critics," 241.

Wesleyan, Arminian, and Pentecostal denominations of Christianity.⁸¹ Another open theist, Gregory Boyd, sees the debate as primarily about the nature of the future, not the nature of God's foreknowledge.⁸² In this view, open theism is not advocating for belief in a different God, but is questioning to what extent future free actions are knowable by anyone, including God.

The debate over open theism could also be seen not as creating another god with different characteristics than the God of the Bible, but as a debate over what the Bible reveals about God's characteristics.⁸³ It is thus an issue of Biblical interpretation. Open theists accuse the advocates of traditional views of marginalizing particular verses which show God being open to changing how he deals with humanity or being flexible in how he works out his purposes. They charge that traditional views have been overly influenced by ancient Greek philosophical assumptions which have skewed their views of God's attributes in ways that are not supported by Scripture.⁸⁴ Thus, Pinnock argues that the Reformation should be taken further to correct this flawed tendency toward "divine hyper-transcendence in the doctrine of God."⁸⁵

Finally, Pinnock claims that divine determinists misunderstand "the heart of the Biblical faith," which is the "Biblical love story," because they want a world where everything down to the molecular level is predetermined, "where there is no real narrative and where all accounts are already settled," a "robotic

⁸¹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, x.

⁸² Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 15-17.

⁸³ Clark H. Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God*, 104.

⁸⁴ see Pinnock's chapter "Overcoming a Pagan Inheritance," in *Most Moved Mover*, 65-111. Also see James Larsen's analysis in chapter 2 of his thesis "When Bad Things Happen to Innocent People: Open Theism and the Problem of Evil" Master of Theology thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2006, 18-21.

⁸⁵ Pinnock, "Open Theism: An Answer to My Critics," 239.

world where God gets everything except the one thing he wants most, freely chosen and loving relationships.”⁸⁶ Pinnock pleads for evangelicals to be more open minded, to allow diversity of opinions on theology, and to work together instead of letting Calvinists determine the whole of evangelistic theology and exclude others who disagree with them.⁸⁷

Now, having seen the importance of the role of theodicy in judging any particular theistic system, as well as having seen some of the accusations that are made against open theism and why it has raised so much controversy, it is time for an in-depth look at three major theistic systems – divine determinism, simple foreknowledge, and open theism. An introduction to each of these systems is necessary in order to be able to see the strengths and weaknesses of how they deal with theodicy in order to judge how well open theism performs in contrast to these traditional options.

⁸⁶ Pinnock, “There Is Room for Us: A Reply to Bruce Ware,” 218.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 219.

Chapter 2: Definitions and Important Concepts

In order to be able to assess the possible advantages or drawbacks for theodicy as expressed in open theism, it is necessary to examine in some detail the competing views of God's sovereignty and providence. There are generally three main views that Christians take regarding God's sovereignty and providence. The first is divine determinism, the second is the simple foreknowledge view, and the last is open theism.

For the purposes of this thesis the middle-knowledge view (which is sometimes seen as a logical extension of the simple foreknowledge view) will not be examined in detail, as the open theists are primarily concerned about problems with the divine determinist and simple foreknowledge views, and thus they do not spend much effort debating the middle-knowledge viewpoint. Additionally, the strongest criticism of open theism comes from divine determinists, and so it is essential to understand the divine determinist viewpoint. Yet the simple foreknowledge view is also useful to examine and critique from an open theist perspective in order to understand why the open theists have moved beyond simple foreknowledge into open theism. This chapter will explore each view's understanding of God's omnipotence, omniscience, human freedom, and explanations of theodicy.

Divine Determinism

The divine determinist view essentially believes that God has predetermined everything that will ever occur, both good and evil, and everything happens according to his eternal and sovereign plan. This view is often taken by Christians who identify themselves as Calvinists, although in this thesis the term “divine determinist” will be used, as not all who take this position hold to everything that John Calvin taught. For example, notable theologians such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Zwingli were also divine determinists.¹

Omnipotence

According to the divine determinist view, everything happens because God has eternally willed it (“ordained” it), so nothing happens that is contrary to his will. God is seen as completely omnipotent, meaning that he can do anything he desires to do that is not logically contradictory.² Augustine said that “God is not truly called almighty if he cannot do whatsoever he please, or if the power of his almighty will is hindered by the will of any creature whatsoever.”³

Therefore, this view of omnipotence leads Paul Helm to claim that “the Lord can take away as well as give, and Christians can receive evil things at his hands as well as good things.”⁴ Other determinists claim that while God never *does* evil, God can “*create, send, permit, or even move others* to do evil, for Scripture is clear that nothing arises, exists, or endures independently of God’s

¹ William Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” in *The Openness of God*, 141.

² Pinnock, “God Limits His Knowledge,” in *Predestination & Free Will*, 153.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Paul Helm, *The Providence of God: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 18.

will.”⁵ So basically God can do whatever God wills to do, even the smallest events are part of his eternal plan, and no one can do anything that God does not will, so therefore everything that happens is God’s will even if it appears evil to us. No one, not even Satan or demons can thwart God’s plans or do anything that God did not will them to do. Divine determinists have attempted to find ways around the negative implications for theodicy resulting from this claim, which will be seen in more detail as this thesis develops.

Omniscience

Divine determinists believe God is completely omniscient, in that he knows everything, including everything about the past, present, and future. In referring to the future, often this sort of complete and total omniscience is referred to as “exhaustive foreknowledge.”⁶ However, unlike the simple foreknowledge view, God’s knowledge is not caused by what will happen in the future; to divine determinists God knows things because he has eternally decreed that they will occur. Therefore, there is nothing new that God can learn, God can never be surprised, and even experiencing the event when it occurs in time does not give God any new information that he did not eternally have.

Human Freedom

For divine determinists, even though God is sovereign and his will controls all human actions, humans are still responsible for their actions. In this view,

⁵ Mark Talbot, “All the Good that is Ours in Christ,” in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, eds. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 41.

⁶ Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in *The Openness of God*, 121.

man is a responsible moral agent, although he is also divinely controlled; man is divinely controlled, though he is also a responsible moral agent. God's sovereignty is a reality, and man's responsibility is a reality too.⁷

Some divine determinists say that although this appears contradictory, it actually is not. Instead, it is an antinomy: a mystery in relation to how two principles can both be true when they appear to contradict. Then they say that the proper human response is to uphold both principles simultaneously even if it is beyond rational justification.⁸ Pinnock himself says that he attempted to believe this antinomy, as it had been presented to him as the true Biblical teaching, yet later he was relieved to find that "the Bible does not actually teach such an incoherence, and this particular paradox was a result of Calvinian logic, not scriptural dictates."⁹

Other divine determinists are not satisfied with the idea of antinomy, and look for a way to explain how the two principles are compatible. Usually this is done by taking a compatibilistic view of human freedom, where "God's determination of all events is nonetheless compatible both with human freedom and responsibility."¹⁰ In this view, an act is not partly caused by God and partly caused by a free agent, instead God is the primary cause of an action and the agent is the secondary cause of the action, so that each is wholly responsible for the action.¹¹

But how is this possible for an act to be caused by God but also caused by a free agent? Paul Helm defines compatibilist free will as:

⁷ Helm, *The Providence of God*, 62.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

⁹ Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 21.

¹⁰ Helm, *The Providence of God*, 175.

¹¹ Jack W. Cottrell, "The Nature of the Divine Sovereignty," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 101.

People perform free acts when they do what they want to do, not when they have the power of self-causation or some other version of indeterminism. That is, they are not constrained or compelled in their actions, but what they do flows unimpededly from their wants, desires, preferences, goals, and the like.¹²

In this model, someone can still be responsible for an action, even if they were compelled to do it, if the person consents to the action so that they identify with it:¹³ “They must make it their own in the sense that it is the action, and the sort of action, that in these circumstances they overridingly want to do.”¹⁴ So the divine determinists can claim that a person is still responsible for an action even if God ordains it as long as the person agrees and wants to do what God ordains for them to do. However, in this model “although I freely make choices in accord with the desires and motives of my heart, it is God who determines what desires and motives will prevail at any given time,”¹⁵ and “God so governs the inward feelings, external environment, habits, desires, motives, etc., of men that they freely do what he purposes.”¹⁶ A person is not able to resist God’s will for how they should act, since God’s decree is always effective.¹⁷ So while determinists try to preserve human free will by saying that we are free as long as we want to do an action, it seems that ultimately we are not free as God controls even our desires in order to achieve his purposes, and we cannot resist.

Pinnock is critical of compatibilist freedom and says that “determinist freedom is freedom only in name. It is an invention designed to give the

¹² Helm, *The Providence of God*, 67.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 186-187.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁵ Cottrell, “The Nature of Divine Sovereignty,” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 101.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

appearance of freedom in a context of theological determinism, which allows no true freedom.”¹⁸ This view of freedom is also criticized by author Jack Cottrell who says “the mere ability to act in accord with one’s desires is not a sufficient criterion of freedom,” and he cites people under hypnosis or people who are brain-washed who mistakenly believe that what they are instructed to do is truly what they want to do.¹⁹ Also, it leads to a problem where God wills a person to want to do evil so effectively that the person will unavoidably want to do the evil that God has willed, which could appear to make God responsible for the evil. How divine determinists deal with this will be addressed in the next section.

Theodicy

The divine determinist view raises several important questions regarding theodicy, such as:

How can the moral character of God as wholly good be preserved in the face of the fact that he controls even the most vicious actions of his creatures? How can we escape the cynical view that, in governing all his creatures and their actions, God allows the end to justify the means? Further, how can we continue to assert human responsibility and accountability in the face of such control?²⁰

Often divine determinists will appeal to Romans 8:28 to say that God works all things together for the good of those who love him. “All things” would include events that we normally think of as evil, but which according to divine determinists God has preordained in order to achieve his greater good purposes.

For example, in the story of Joseph, God used the evil intentions of Joseph’s brothers in order to achieve his purpose, yet “he does this, according to

¹⁸ Clark Pinnock, “Response to Part 1,” in *Reconstructing Theology*, 84.

¹⁹ Cottrell, “The Nature of Divine Sovereignty,” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 102.

²⁰ Helm, *The Providence of God*, 26.

Joseph, without himself being implicated in the evil, and without diminishing in any way the evil of what was done to Joseph and the responsibility [of Joseph's brothers] for that evil."²¹ In other cases where God might be seen as using evil to judge people for their disobedience, it is not out of "petty vindictiveness," but is "a principled determination to uphold the terms of the original covenant," where part of the covenant involved God's correction for disobedience.²² So even in this case, God's use of evil is intended for good, where the good is the discipline and correction of disobedient humans.

Divine determinists often appeal to God's will, and say that when asking why any particular event occurred, the ultimate answer is only that God willed it.²³ Yet they say this does not mean God is arbitrary, but that he has holy and wise reasons for what he does which we are not privy to, and so we must be satisfied with that.²⁴ Additionally, the evil that he does bring about is not just for the good of his people, but also for God's own glory, including evil things such as Nazi brutality at Auschwitz, the murders committed by Dennis Rader, and also the sexual abuse of children.²⁵ They say there may be many good reasons why God ordains evil to occur; for example, the death of Jesus was needed for humanity's salvation. However, others say that each person's experiencing suffering and evil is necessary to mature and grow into the people that God desires – this is called the soul-making theodicy. Another approach is to say that ordaining the fall of humanity (and thus the evil that came as a result of the fall)

²¹ Helm, *The Providence of God*, 104.

²² *Ibid.*, 108.

²³ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Talbot, "All the Good that is Ours in Christ," in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 42.

allows God to demonstrate his mercy and forgiveness, which could not be revealed in any other way,²⁶ and so the fall into sin thus brings more glory to God than if humanity had not fallen.

Divine determinists also make use of the concept of God's revealed will (what he commands) versus God's secret will (what he ordains). For example, they say that God commands us to repent, but ordains that some people will not.²⁷ Divine determinists say that God can will people to violate God's own commands in such a way that "the breaking of his will became part of the fulfilling of his will."²⁸ They often refer to the example of the crucifixion of Christ: "in one sense of 'will' the crucifixion of Christ was against the will of God (for it was a wicked act), while in another sense it was in accordance with his will (for it was an action performed in accordance with the set purpose of God)."²⁹ Then they say that Christians must simply accept this as "strong meat,"³⁰ which could come across as insulting to those who find these conclusions unacceptable, as it may imply the divine determinists see them as weaker or less-mature Christians.

However, due to the divine determinist view where human freedom is compatible with what God ordains, therefore "while God ordains moral evil, he is not the author of it in the sense either that he is himself morally tainted by what he

²⁶ Helm, *The Providence of God*, 215.

²⁷ Talbot, "All the Good that is Ours in Christ," in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 44.

²⁸ Helm, *The Providence of God*, 48.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

³⁰ Talbot, "All the Good that is Ours in Christ," in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 47. This statement seems to echo Paul's criticisms of new Christians in the early church who were not yet ready to handle the "solid food" of advanced theological discourse (1 Corinthians 3:2-3, Hebrews 5:11-14).

ordains, or that he takes away the responsibility of those creatures who perpetrate the evil.”³¹ Paul Helm wonders if

the evils which come as punishments for sin are themselves merely permitted by God, or whether God has a stronger relation to them. If God uses the sin of one person as the punishment of another, then this has obvious implications for God’s relationship to sin.³²

One example is how God used Assyria to judge Israel for their disobedience, where

the Assyrian’s intention was not to act as a divine chastiser, but to plunder Israel and other nations for his own ends in a high-handed and imperious way. Because of this when he has carried out what the Lord intends against Israel, then he in turn will be punished for his evil.³³

Even in the crucifixion of Christ,

the Lord uses wicked people to further his purpose. Evil people crucify Christ. Yet such crucifixion is not fortuitous, nor a mere human tragedy, but it is by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. The Lord did not conspire with these wicked people; nonetheless he used their wickedness for his own pure ends.³⁴

Therefore, Helm concludes that these examples show that

whether it is chastening or deliverance, the teaching is clearly that the Lord uses instruments who, in fulfilling their own plans, are also fulfilling his. As with Joseph and his brothers, the Lord is able to use his creatures without either detracting from the evil of their intentions, nor contaminating himself by such use.³⁵

As shown above, the divine determinist theodicy rests on several key ideas. One is that God does ordain evil, but is not guilty of evil because God’s intentions are different than the evil intentions of the person who does the evil action. Secondly, the person who commits evil is responsible for it because they personally wanted

³¹ Helm, *The Providence of God*, 196.

³² *Ibid.*, 102.

³³ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

to do the action, even if it had been eternally ordained by God that they would want to do the action and could not do otherwise. Thirdly, they trust that although God ordains evil, it is justified because God is using evil to achieve a greater good purpose which he could not achieve without the evil in question, and that in the end the evil that occurs will increase God's glory.

Conclusion to Divine Determinism

Despite the best explanations by divine determinists, many people still reject the divine determinist view as they cannot understand how God is not responsible for evil even though he ordains it and controls the desires of those who do evil in such a way that they cannot resist doing evil. It is also hard to accept the implication that everything humans do is determined by God, as this means we have no genuine free will. Pinnock says that "God according to exhaustive sovereignty seems intent on being a bully, to which I could submit but which would not inspire admiration in me and certainly not love."³⁶ Elsewhere, Pinnock strongly criticizes the divine-determinist view of sovereignty when he says,

How weak God would be if his sovereignty were threatened by any element of risk or uncertainty? Only a pathetic god would reign over the world in dictatorial ways. Imagine having to control everything in order to be able to achieve anything! Who admires such dictatorial power? One can submit to, but not love, such a despot.³⁷

Instead, Pinnock believes God wants covenant partners and not slaves, fellowship and not subservience.³⁸ So if one desires to reject divine determinism, the next most popular Christian option is the simple foreknowledge view, which some feel

³⁶ Pinnock, "Response to Part 1," in *Reconstructing Theology*, 84.

³⁷ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 95.

³⁸ Clark H. Pinnock, "Constrained by Love: Divine Self-Restraint according to Open Theism," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 34, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 150.

does a better job of showing that God is not responsible for evil and that humans have real free will.

Simple Foreknowledge View

The simple foreknowledge view is a popular view among Christians, and is the most common alternative to divine determinism. For this thesis it is useful to look at the simple foreknowledge view in order to see where open theists such as Pinnock find faults with it and why they move beyond it to open theism.

It should be noted that there are slightly different approaches to the simple foreknowledge view, just as there are slight differences between divine determinist views. This discussion will outline the major features of this view and will also examine some variations that attempt to counter some of its most obvious criticisms.

Omnipotence

In the simple foreknowledge view, God can do whatever is logically possible to do in accordance with his nature. Primarily, this means that because God is love he will never do anything that is not loving. The difference from divine determinism is that in this view God respects free will, and he only uses persuasion and love to try to get creatures to do his will. God does not control their desires in order to get them to act as God wants, he does not use coercion or threats, and he does not override free will. As Norman Geisler is fond of quoting from C.S. Lewis,

the Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of His scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to override a human will...would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo.³⁹

This is because God is limited by his own nature as perfect love. So therefore, God cannot do things that are contrary to his nature; God cannot lie, God cannot do evil, cannot sin, cannot tempt anyone, and cannot contradict himself.⁴⁰ Also, because humans have free will, we might redefine omnipotence to mean that God can do whatever is logically possible, in accordance with his nature, that does not depend on creaturely cooperation.⁴¹ But if God wants something to happen that does depend on human cooperation, then because he respects free will, he must work with humans who are open to obeying God's desires.

In this view, God does not ordain and cause everything that happens, because God gives his creatures free will. However, God remains in ultimate control of the universe due to his omniscience, since he always perfectly foreknows what will happen (although exactly how this is possible is up for debate and will be discussed subsequently).

Omniscience

In this view, God knows everything that has ever happened, is happening now, and will ever happen, as well as everything about all the creatures he has ever created and will ever create, including their thoughts.

In the simplest version of this view, God's knowledge of an event is independent of the reasons that cause the event to occur. God knows about the

³⁹ Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of God's Sovereignty and Free Will* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2010), 140.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴¹ Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 52.

event *because* it will occur, it does not occur because God knows about it (see Appendix).⁴² God's foreknowledge is chronologically prior to the event occurring, but the event occurring is logically prior to God knowing it.⁴³ This is possible because if statements about the future are either true or false, and if God knows everything that is true, then God knows whether statements about the future are true or not, simply because he is God (as knowing all true statements would be part of the definition of omniscience).⁴⁴

However, this view is open to criticism. If God simply foreknows only the actual future that will actually happen (and not several possible futures), then God is powerless to change the future, and thus it would neutralize God's omnipotence.⁴⁵ If God could foresee evil things that will occur, then because he foresees them, it is guaranteed that they will occur, and thus God could not do anything to prevent them from occurring, because to prevent the evil would be to make his foreknowledge of that evil invalid. This can be difficult to conceptualize, but an example given by William Hasker can help illustrate it. Imagine a woman seeking guidance about who to marry. If God foresees that she will be unhappily married to a particular man, then could God tell her to marry someone else? The answer is no. Since God only knows the actual future where she is unhappily married, there is nothing God can do to change it.⁴⁶

⁴² William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 69.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 121-123.

⁴⁵ Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The Openness of God*, 149-150. Also see Pinnock, "Open Theism: An Answer to my Critics," 241-242.

⁴⁶ Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective" in *The Openness of God*, 149.

Therefore, some have claimed that in order for God to be able to have control over the world and the future, he must have middle knowledge;⁴⁷ the knowledge of what would happen in any possible situation. God would have providential control because he knows what all free agents would freely do in any possible situation, and God then orchestrates the situations in which free creatures are placed so to achieve his purposes.⁴⁸ So in William Hasker's example above, God knows that the woman would be unhappy married to a particular man, and also knows what would happen if she remained single or if she married someone else. Then, based on this middle knowledge he can direct her to the option which is best for her.⁴⁹ Similarly, God knows what would naturally happen if he does not perform a miracle, and he also knows what would happen if he did perform the miracle, and thus he can choose to do a miracle or not according to which option better achieves his purposes. Open theists still reject this position, for they say that if someone is free in the libertarian sense (which is the ability to choose otherwise if everything else in the situation remains the same), then God cannot know for sure what they would choose in any particular situation.⁵⁰ Yet open theists would say that God could have a very good chance of predicting what someone would choose, since he knows their heart perfectly. Additionally, even if our choices are free, if God controls the situation we are in so to produce the "right" choice, it comes across as manipulative (perhaps just slightly less than divine determinism), and also leads to problems with theodicy; God ends up being

⁴⁷ Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 135-136, and also Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective" in *The Openness of God*, 150.

⁴⁸ Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 135.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁵⁰ Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The Openness of God*, 145.

responsible for every evil that occurs since he was in control of placing a free creature in the situation where he knew they would freely do evil.⁵¹

A different approach to the simple foreknowledge view argues that God's knowledge of the future as well as God's determining of how he will intervene in the future does not require middle knowledge. They say that God can foreknow everything and can also determine how he will act simultaneously because God exists outside of time. Norman Geisler advocates for this view when he writes:

Since God is an eternal being, he does not really foreknow anything. He simply *knows* eternally... what he thinks, he has forever thought. His thought is perfect and absolute; it needs no progress or improvement. So from God's vantage point he simply knows (not foreknows) what we *are* doing with our free choices. For what we have, are and will choose is *present* to God in his eternal NOW.⁵²

Geisler sees it as if God were standing on top of a hill seeing the past, present, and future all spread out before him simultaneously, and so God does not have to wait to know what we will do in the future as God sees us acting in the future just as certainly as he sees us acting in the present and the past.⁵³

Therefore, if God is outside of time, then

there is no sequence in His actions. Whatever He decided to do, He decided from all eternity.... Thus what God knows is not based on what He decides and what He decides is not based on what He knows. He knowingly decides and decidedly knows from all eternity all that will come to pass. Therefore, we cannot say that God's predestination of some (the elect) to salvation was *based on* His foreknowledge, because there is no chronological or logical sequence in God's thoughts.⁵⁴

Geisler feels that this does better justice to God's independence and sovereignty, as it avoids the impression that God merely reacts to what he foreknows we will

⁵¹ Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The Openness of God*, 145-146.

⁵² Norman Geisler, "God Knows All Things," in *Predestination & Free Will*, 73.

⁵³ Geisler, *Chosen but Free*, 151.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

do, which would make God dependent on knowing our free choices in order to decide what he would do in response.⁵⁵

However, Pinnock criticizes Geisler's explanation that God is outside of time and unchanging in any way for being overly influenced by Greek philosophical assumptions.⁵⁶ Pinnock says,

Bringing Plato's view of time into theology only succeeds in making things worse. On the one hand, how is a timeless God supposed to act the way the Biblical God is said to act? A timeless being cannot deliberate or anticipate or remember. It cannot do anything or respond to anything. There cannot be any before or after. In short it cannot be the divine Agent we love and worship. And even worse for Geisler's proposal is the fact that timelessness destroys temporal distinctions and rules out the genuine novelty which results from true freedom.⁵⁷

Gregory Boyd agrees with Pinnock, and says that if God were timeless then God could never experience novelty, creativity, spontaneity, or relationships where one is truly responding to the other.⁵⁸ Therefore, God could never experience anything new, and could not have real relationships which require genuine response if he foreknew everything the other party would ever say or do.⁵⁹ Pinnock argues that instead,

God is characterized by changeable faithfulness... God is completely reliable and true to himself and, at the same time, flexible in his dealings and able to change course, as circumstances require.⁶⁰

So to Pinnock, God is "temporally everlasting," rather than "timelessly eternal."⁶¹

While God's character never changes, God does change relating to his relationships, activities, and experiences which allows for a truly dynamic and

⁵⁵ Geisler, *Chosen but Free*, 149.

⁵⁶ Clark Pinnock, "Clark Pinnock's Response," in *Predestination & Free Will*, 95-96.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵⁸ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 128-129.

⁵⁹ Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 44.

⁶⁰ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 85.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

real relationship with humans.⁶² While God experiences time, he is not necessarily bound to time, as even humans partially transcend time through memory, reason, and imagination, and so God also transcends time even more perfectly in these ways.⁶³

Therefore, either through belief that God inherently knows everything just because he is God, or a middle knowledge approach such as by William Lane Craig, or an approach such as Norman Geisler's which sees God as outside of time, those who hold to the simple foreknowledge view believe that God does know everything that will ever happen, they merely are debating over how God is able to do this. Yet as shown, open theists reject these views for a variety of philosophical reasons.

Human Freedom

Humans are seen to be truly free, it is just that God foreknows what we will freely choose to do, and is able to choose his actions accordingly. For example, in relation to salvation, Geisler uses an illustration of a man who desires to get married, and has a choice of women to propose to. But the man has perfect foreknowledge, and knows if he proposes to Betty she will say no, but if he proposes to Joan she will say yes, and so he chooses to propose to Joan based on his foreknowledge of her free response. Yet he did not manipulate Joan's desires or pressure her to say yes, he just knew ahead of time that she would say yes.⁶⁴

Pinnock came to reject the idea that it is possible for choices to be free and simultaneously foreknown by God, saying,

⁶² Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 85.

⁶³ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God*, 121.

⁶⁴ Geisler, *Chosen but Free*, 146.

I could not shake off the intuition that such a total omniscience would necessarily mean that everything we will ever choose in the future will have been already spelled out in the divine knowledge register, and consequently the belief that we have truly significant choices to make would seem to be mistaken.⁶⁵

and also,

If God sees the whole of the future, then the future is fixed and frozen, and we are mistaken to believe that we have the liberty to choose one way or the other....So the future is not, as he thinks, a realm of open possibility in which he can by his freedom determine what is true. It cannot turn out different in any respect from what God from eternity has infallibly known it to be. Reichenbach can only choose to do actions which God has always known he would do. Therefore he cannot do otherwise than what he is destined to do.⁶⁶

Because of these problems, Pinnock argues that the simple foreknowledge view needs to be rethought regarding God's omniscience.⁶⁷ William Lane Craig has called Pinnock's criticism of God's foreknowledge fatalistic, incoherent, and a logical fallacy, as "it infers from God's foreknowledge of some future event that that event *must* happen, when all one has the right to conclude is that the event *will* happen."⁶⁸

Thus, simple foreknowledge proponents say we are free, as we could choose to act differently than God foreknows, but if that were the case, then God's foreknowledge would have been different and would have matched what we freely chose to do.⁶⁹ However, this does not mean we change the content of God's foreknowledge when we change what we do: God has eternally known

⁶⁵ Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 25.

⁶⁶ Pinnock, "Clark Pinnock's Response," in *Predestination & Free Will*, 137-138.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶⁸ Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 16.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 69-71.

exactly what we would freely do.⁷⁰ Therefore, God's foreknowledge does not force us to act in accordance with what he foreknows, it is that God's foreknowledge shows what we will do, not what we must do.⁷¹ So simple foreknowledge proponents would agree with Augustine's earlier views when he wrote "no one sins because God foreknew that he would sin."⁷²

An alternate argument could be that while God knows what we will choose tomorrow, we do not know what we will choose tomorrow, and so in the moment our choice is genuinely free. Thus, Geisler writes, "the future (including free choices) is determined from the standpoint of God's foreknowledge but free from the vantage of our free will."⁷³ Elsewhere he says,

genuine free will (with the power of contrary choice) is possible in a completely determined world where (by analogy) the Author wrote the history of free people in advance. The story is predetermined from the standpoint of God's omniscience, but it is open and free from the vantage point of human free will. The two are complementary, not contradictory.⁷⁴

He compares it to someone who records a sports game and watches it later:

No matter how many times you rerun it, the final score, as well as every aspect of every play, will always be the same. Yet when the game happened, every event was freely chosen. No one was forced to play in a certain way. Therefore, the same event was both determined and free at the same time.⁷⁵

This is because "he [God] knew eternally exactly how it was going to turn out in time, though we did not.... This does not mean these actions are not free; it simply means God knows for sure how we are going to use our freedom."⁷⁶ So humans

⁷⁰ Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 71.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Geisler, *Chosen but Free*, 157.

⁷³ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 151.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 157.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

have real, significant choices to make, and our choices can have a real impact on the world. We are not puppets controlled by God, even though God foreknows exactly what we will freely do.

Theodicy

The simple foreknowledge view often refers to the free-will defense for its theodicy. The free-will defense is the idea that God allows evil to occur even though it goes against his will, even though theoretically God is powerful enough that he could remove all evil if he wanted to. However, God does not remove all evil, as this would involve overriding human free will to do evil (although God could prevent some evil or mitigate some negative effects of evil by working in ways that do not override free will). God does not override free will because God values our free will more than he values a world with no evil in it.⁷⁷ This is because it is our free will which allows us to truly love God and have real relationships with God which otherwise could not exist (e.g. God could pre-program us to love him, but then our love would not be sincere or meaningful). So humans and angels can misuse their free will and choose to do evil, and this explains much evil. Additionally, because humans disobeyed God by sinning, the consequence is that suffering entered the world, and so this is why there is natural evil such as natural disasters, disease, and animal suffering.⁷⁸

The main strength of the free will defense is that it recognizes that evil and suffering are not right and that they are not part of God's will for us. Richard Rice says,

⁷⁷ Norman L. Geisler, *If God, Why Evil? A New Way to Think About the Question* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2011), 58-66.

⁷⁸ Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 44-47.

When something terrible occurs, our feelings tell us that it should never have happened. It is simply wrong....The free will defense assures us that we are entitled to those feelings. God never meant for us to suffer. It was not something God intended for us. Consequently, we have every right to resent it, resist it, relieve it and try to eliminate it.⁷⁹

So unlike the divine determinist approach which says God ordains evil and Christians should accept it and trust it is for the best, the free-will defense says that God does not ordain evil and that evil is truly against God's will.

The free-will defense for theodicy is used in both the simple foreknowledge view and the open theism view. However, in the simple foreknowledge view "God foresaw the occurrence of suffering in advance, decided to create a world with creaturely freedom anyway, and prepared to deal with it in positive ways when it occurred,"⁸⁰ whereas for the open theists "God knew that creaturely freedom involved the inherent risk of rebellion and resultant suffering, but did not know in advance whether or not the creatures would actually choose to rebel."⁸¹ So open theists say that the simple foreknowledge view can still lead to a problem with theodicy. If God foreknows every evil that will ever happen, it is not just that God allows the possibility of evil, but that God does not prevent the evil he perfectly foreknows will happen. Gregory Boyd writes,

If you claim that God foreknew exactly what Hitler would do and created him anyway, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that the world must somehow be better with Hitler than without him...we must conclude that God believed that allowing Hitler's massacre of the Jews (and many others) was preferable to his not allowing it.⁸²

⁷⁹ Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 48.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* See also Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 46-47.

⁸² Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 98-99.

and,

If God foreknew that Adolf Hitler would send six million Jews to their death, why did he go ahead and create a man like that? If I unleash a mad dog I am certain will bite you, am I not responsible for my dog's behavior? If so, how is God not responsible for the behavior of evil people he "unleashes" on the world – if, in fact, he is absolutely certain of what they will do once "unleashed"?⁸³

So while the free-will defense is used by simple-foreknowledge proponents, open theists say it works better with the open theist view that God knew evil was possible but did not know for sure every specific evil action that would ever occur. So therefore in open theism God is not held as responsible for allowing specific evils like he would be in the simple foreknowledge view.

Simple foreknowledge proponents might respond with the argument that when God was choosing which universe to create, he foreknew all the evil in each possible universe, and decided to create this one with these particular evils that he foreknew. But this is justified because God did it this way in order to produce the best possible universe later on, and so while this universe now is not the best one, it is necessary in order to produce the best universe in the future without overriding anyone's free will.⁸⁴ Geisler writes,

The nature of an all-good God assures us that this world, which He did create, is the best one achievable without violating anyone's free will. As has been shown, no other world is morally superior to this one in which all moral agents are free, where sin is permitted, where sin is defeated, and where the greater virtues are attained by the maximum number of people. All other worlds are not moral, not possible, not achievable with free creatures, and/or morally inferior. *This present world is not the best of all possible worlds, but it is the best of all possible ways to the best of all achievable worlds.*⁸⁵

⁸³ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 10.

⁸⁴ Geisler, *If God, Why Evil?*, 68.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

So Geisler has faith that this universe is the absolute best that it could possibly be given the current circumstances (and thus perhaps evils such as the Holocaust were somehow unavoidable given the universe that God chose to create, or maybe in all other possible universes the Holocaust was even worse than it was in our universe). He also trusts that while God temporarily allows evil which he foreknows will occur, it is only in order to produce people who freely love God and who will have eternal life on the new earth where there will be no sin or suffering. Geisler notes that this does not mean God is guilty of allowing the end to justify the means, as God does not cause evil to achieve his end, he merely permits it.⁸⁶ So the simple foreknowledge proponents have found ways to justify why they feel it is acceptable for God to allow evil that he foreknows will happen, which means they are not as disturbed by the this idea as the open theists are.

Conclusion to Simple Foreknowledge View

Therefore, the main details of the simple foreknowledge views have been shown. It has also been shown why open theists reject these views. Primarily, open theists disagree that it is possible for humans to be truly free if God knows everything about the future. Therefore, open theism seems to attract debate mostly with the divine determinists, as both the open theists and divine determinists find the same faults with the simple foreknowledge view: they both disagree that creatures can have libertarian freedom if God exhaustively knows the future, and both also disagree that simple foreknowledge would give God enough control over the world.⁸⁷ Additionally, while the simple foreknowledge view uses the free-will

⁸⁶ Geisler, *If God, Why Evil?*, 69.

⁸⁷ Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 41.

defense and thus says God is not responsible for evil, it could still be vulnerable in its claim that God foreknows all instances of evil and allows them anyways.

It is interesting to note that Pinnock found more faults with the Arminian views (simple foreknowledge) than with Calvinists (divine determinists), as it seemed to him that the Arminians were inconsistently trying to find a position halfway between Calvinism and open theism, where at least the Calvinists were consistent even if Pinnock believed their position is based on flawed presuppositions.⁸⁸ The main problem Pinnock sees with the simple foreknowledge views is that they try to hold on to the idea that God is still in control of all events but humans are also free and responsible for what they do, which he says is contradictory and “requires one to give up on the goal of intelligibility which theology is oriented toward.”⁸⁹ Even Bruce Ware, an advocate of divine determinism and strong critic of open theism, admits that he sees open theism as more appealing than the simple foreknowledge or middle knowledge views, because in open theism,

here is an Arminian model in which 1) God does actually and genuinely regulate providentially much of what occurs in the unfolding of future events, and 2) the possession and exercise of genuine libertarian freedom is fully grounded, real, and not jeopardized by theological commitments (e.g. exhaustive divine foreknowledge and middle knowledge) elsewhere held.⁹⁰

Open theism has also been called “consistent Arminianism” by its divine determinist critics.⁹¹ Therefore, as both open theists and divine determinists have rejected the simple foreknowledge views, the rest of this thesis will focus on the

⁸⁸ Strange, “The Evolution of an Evangelical,” in *Reconstructing Theology*, 15.

⁸⁹ Pinnock, “Response to Part 1,” in *Reconstructing Theology*, 83.

⁹⁰ Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 42.

⁹¹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 12.

debate between open theism and divine determinism regarding which is a superior solution for theodicy. But before this, it is necessary to examine open theism as proposed by Pinnock and other open theists.

Open Theism

Pinnock describes open theism as “a relational and trinitarian doctrine with an emphasis on God as personal and interactive.”⁹² He claims that this is not a completely new view because its origins can be seen in some early church fathers prior to Augustine.⁹³ While it shares with the simple foreknowledge views the idea that God sincerely loves all humanity and wants all to be saved, and that God gives us significant libertarian freedom which allows us to truly love God and makes us morally accountable for our actions,⁹⁴ there are some differences in how open theism defines God’s omnipotence and omniscience.

Omnipotence

In open theism God’s omnipotence is seen not as the ability to control everything, but is God’s ability to achieve his ultimate purposes. Pinnock says “omnipotence does not mean that nothing can go contrary to God’s will (our sins go against it) but that God is able to deal with any circumstance that may arise.”⁹⁵ Pinnock argues that the view of divine omnipotence is actually of a greater kind than mere coercive power found in divine determinism.⁹⁶ God limits his power in order to

⁹² Pinnock, “Open Theism: An Answer to My Critics,” 237.

⁹³ Ibid., 238; Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, x. These statements of Pinnock are not backed up with evidence, but see Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 140-160 for an overview of historical theologians’ positions which supports Pinnock’s statements that many early church fathers held to free-will theism, although not exactly identical to modern open theism.

⁹⁴ Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory*, 32.

⁹⁵ Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in *The Openness of God*, 114.

⁹⁶ Pinnock, “From Augustine to Arminius,” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 21.

give humans real freedom and autonomy, yet this does not reduce God's power, it actually emphasizes how powerful God must be in order to still be able to achieve his purposes despite human and angelic agents who actively resist his will.

Pinnock writes,

God can keep his promise even though creatures contribute to history and can resist his will. He can still reinstate his sovereignty over the universe, even though the future is open and even though he respects human freedom. God's own resourcefulness, wisdom, and patience can guarantee the end of history... We trust that the One who promised to make all things new knows how to do it and how to accomplish it. Nothing arises which God does not anticipate and handle; he has lots of options at his disposal. God is a flexible and effective worker.⁹⁷

And so through faith Pinnock has confidence that God will ultimately achieve his purposes for the world, because God is able to overcome any obstacles that are created by the misuse of creaturely free-will.⁹⁸ God does not need to foreknow or predetermine everything that will ever happen in order to achieve his purposes.

This is possible because God can achieve his purposes in more than one way; God is free to choose among many possible routes to achieve the same goal,⁹⁹ and thus

Pinnock says,

How history will go is not a foregone conclusion, even to God because he is free to strike in new directions as may be appropriate. If we take divine repentance language seriously, it suggests that God does not work with a plan fixed in every detail but with general goals that can be fulfilled in in different ways. God is faithful to these goals but flexible as to how to fulfill them.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 139.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

So while God knows that he will win in the end, God does not have to plan every detail along the way. Exactly how this works out can be illustrated by Gregory Boyd's conception of God as an infinitely intelligent chess-master:

I am told that the average novice chess player can think ahead three or four possible moves. If I do A, for example, my opponent may do B, C, or D. I could then do E, F, or G, to which he may respond with H, I, or J.... Now consider that God's perfect knowledge would allow him to anticipate every possible move and every possible combination of moves, together with every possible response he might make to each of them, for every possible agent throughout history. And he would be able to do this from eternity past.¹⁰¹

So God is able to achieve his purpose since he is the most knowledgeable, wise, and adaptable being. Boyd argues that in open theism God is actually greater than in the divine determinist view, because it takes more skill to defeat an opponent who is intelligent than to defeat a pre-programmed computer where God knows in advance all the moves it will make.¹⁰² Pinnock agrees with Boyd's conclusion and says,

To have a creation over which he [God] rules with wisdom and flexibility would be breathtakingly wonderful and a sign of strength, not of weakness. Is it not a beautiful thing that God can adjust to changing circumstances as a responsive personal being?¹⁰³

and,

This truth certainly summons us to rely on God's faithfulness and resourcefulness to work things out and not on a divine crystal ball. We have to trust God and not an abstract omniscience as our guarantee. No one now knows how God, pursuing an open route strategy, will win the final victory over sin, for example. Even God knows that the scenario is partly settled and partly unsettled. But we have God's promises to rely on. We can be sure that God, as a kind of master chess player, will win, but we cannot be sure exactly how the end game will play itself out.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 127.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁰³ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 49.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

So open theists say that God's omnipotence is not the ability to control everything that happens down to the smallest detail, but is God's ability to ultimately achieve his purposes and goals despite creatures who use free will to oppose and disobey him.

Omniscience

In this view, God does not exist outside of time, and so God experiences what happens in the world in the same way that humans do – one moment at a time. Therefore, God is not timeless (as Geisler argued in the simple foreknowledge view), and this impacts God's knowledge, as Richard Rice writes:

God's knowledge of the temporal world is also temporal. God experiences things as they happen, and God's knowledge of events develops as events take place. God doesn't see the future in all its detail, because a great deal of the future is not there to be known.¹⁰⁵

However, as Pinnock explains, God is still omniscient, because

God knows everything that any being can know. He knows everything that has ever existed, everything that now actually exists, everything that could possibly exist in the future, and everything that he has decided to do.¹⁰⁶

However, it is impossible for God (or anyone) to know anything with certainty which is a result of human free choice:

The details of his knowledge change as creatures act in new and free ways. This is not a limitation on God as knower; it has to do with the nature of the future as partly settled and partly unsettled. God knows everything that can be known and that is perfection enough.¹⁰⁷

For example, God knows what each of us is doing and thinking right now, and God knows what the movement of the planets will be tomorrow (as these depend

¹⁰⁵ Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 93.

¹⁰⁶ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 138.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

on physical laws of nature which human freedom cannot affect).¹⁰⁸ However, God does not know anything about the future that depends on a human free choice. So if you are debating about whether to chop down a tree tomorrow, God does not yet know if you will go through with it, and so the state of the tree tomorrow is unknown to God as it depends on your free choice, and to keep your choice truly free, your choice cannot be foreknown by God.¹⁰⁹

It should be noted that Pinnock's view that God does not know future free choices is not meant to diminish God's omniscience. He writes,

It is not dishonouring to say that God does not know every detail of the future. To say God cannot know the unknowable is not different from saying that God cannot do the undo-able....If God does not know something in the future, it is not because his knowledge is deficient but because there is nothing to be known as yet about that something.¹¹⁰

So it is no more of an insult to God to say he cannot know some aspects of the future than to try to insult God's omnipotence because God cannot make a square circle, or because God cannot cease to be God. In fact, Pinnock claims that according to open theism, God actually knows more than God according to divine determinism, as God in open theism knows not only what will occur (the things in the future that are settled) but also what might occur (the things that are only possibilities).¹¹¹ Yet this is not middle knowledge, as middle knowledge believes God knows for sure what *would* happen in any situation, not just what *might* happen. Pinnock says open theists do not accept the idea of middle knowledge.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Helm, *The Providence of God*, 45.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Pinnock, "Response to Part 1," in *Reconstructing Theology*, 86.

¹¹¹ Pinnock, "Open Theism: An Answer to My Critics," 242.

¹¹² Clark H. Pinnock, "Constrained by Love: Divine Self-Restraint according to Open Theism." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 34, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 149–60.

However, God knows us so well that he is able to guess ahead of time what we will do, as Richard Rice explains:

God knows the range of possibilities available to us, and among these possibilities, which options we are more likely and which we are less likely to select. But the precise content of our choices is unknown, because it is unknowable, until we make them.¹¹³

So God could know that you are 30% likely to choose to chop down the tree and 70% likely to choose to refrain, but you are still free to choose the option which God believes is less likely, in effect, “surprising” God, as God thought it was more likely that you would leave the tree alone.¹¹⁴ But God is not completely surprised as God knew it was still a possibility that you would choose to chop down the tree.

This view of omniscience does not mean open theists deny the authenticity of Biblical prophecy. Pinnock explains that if we look carefully, most prophecy is explained by either

God’s predicting – on the basis of what he knows – what is going to happen, or by God’s announcing ahead of time what he plans to do in such and such a circumstance or by some combination of these two factors. Prophecy is after all profoundly conditional and oriented to our response to God.¹¹⁵

Other open theists have also pointed out that many prophecies are conditional either implicitly or explicitly, and also that it is much easier to predict the actions of a large group of people than the actions of specific individuals (as even humans do this through statistics).¹¹⁶ Pinnock points out some prophecies which were not fulfilled exactly as predicted, and others which were fulfilled in unexpected

¹¹³ Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 93.

¹¹⁴ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 61.

¹¹⁵ Pinnock, “Clark Pinnock’s Response,” in *Predestination & Free Will*, 139.

¹¹⁶ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 45-46.

ways.¹¹⁷ He says long-range prophecies like those in the books of Daniel and Revelation are vague in detail,¹¹⁸ and so God could fulfill them in a number of ways. (Elsewhere Pinnock suggests that some prophecies in Daniel are a result of later editing based on events during the Maccabean revolt).¹¹⁹ However, there is possibly an issue with how open theists address very specific prophecies – e.g. the denials of Peter, the naming of Cyrus, and Judas’ betrayal of Jesus.¹²⁰ Gregory Boyd goes so far as to say God overrides human free will in some cases,¹²¹ but this would be a major contradiction considering the emphasis that open theists place on the importance of libertarian human free will for God’s purposes and intentions.¹²²

Human Freedom

Paul Helm notes that “the chief (if not the only) reason why a ‘risk’ view of providence is taken is a concern to preserve human freedom...only if providence is risky will there be room for the exercise of human freedom.”¹²³ All open theists place a very high value on human freedom, which is defined as libertarian freedom. Yet Pinnock claims that he is not seeking a new interpretation solely to preserve libertarian freedom – it is that he finds open theism more Biblical than exhaustive divine foreknowledge.¹²⁴

¹¹⁷ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 50-51.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹¹⁹ Clark H. Pinnock with Barry L. Callen, *The Scripture Principle: Reclaiming the Full Authority of the Bible*, Second Ed.(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 144.

¹²⁰ Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory*, 125-130.

¹²¹ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 34.

¹²² Paul Kjos Helseth, “Response to Gregory Boyd” in *Four Views on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 215-222; Geisler and House, *The Battle for God*, 257-260.

¹²³ Helm, *The Providence of God*, 42.

¹²⁴ Pinnock, “Response to Part 1,” in *Reconstructing Theology*, 86.

In libertarian freedom “an agent is free with respect to a given action at a given time if at that time it is within the agent’s power to perform the action and also in the agent’s power to refrain from the action.”¹²⁵ Essentially, as long as a person could have chosen to do differently than they actually did, then their choice was free. One might think that this definition of freedom would mean our actions would be completely random and that we could choose to act completely out of character. However, those who take this libertarian view of freedom do not reject the reality of various influences and causes behind a person’s action, they merely deny that any one influence was so strong that it essentially forced the person to choose one particular way so that they could not choose otherwise.¹²⁶ For example, I could choose to eat yams (there is nothing preventing me from doing so) or not eat yams (I am not being forced to eat them under duress, or the threat of starvation unless I eat them). So then my choice to eat yams or not eat yams is free. But because I strongly dislike the flavor of yams there is a very high probability that I will choose to not eat yams. Some might then claim that because I dislike yams I am not free to choose to eat yams, as I am so limited by my desire to never eat yams that I could never freely choose to eat yams. But this is false, since if I so willed myself, I could eat yams even if I strongly dislike them. I suspect most people would agree with this illustration when considering their own choices, and would agree therefore that our freedom is not removed by a pre-existing disposition for or against one option.¹²⁷ Yet Pinnock does admit that our

¹²⁵ Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” in *The Openness of God*, 136-137.

¹²⁶ John S. Feinberg, “God Ordains All Things,” in *Predestination & Free Will*, 20-21.

¹²⁷ Bruce Reichenbach makes a similar argument regarding his freedom to eat or not eat chocolate treats in his chapter “God Limits His Power,” in *Predestination & Free Will*, 102-103.

libertarian freedom is finite and often restricted because we are influenced by our parents, other people, our past, our previous decisions, and also events that are outside our control.¹²⁸

It should be noted that these possible limits on libertarian freedom are not the same as compatibilist freedom. Pinnock rejected the divine determinist view of compatibilist freedom, and says that when he identified as Calvinist that

sometimes I would try to explain it, other times I would give up and call it an antinomy, but deep down I knew there was something amiss. I was faintly aware that an action forever predetermined to be what it will be, however necessitated, whether by external factors or internal motives, did not deserve to be called a 'free' action.¹²⁹

The problem is illustrated by Pinnock's example of a person who robs a bank:

Joseph robs a bank. He did not have to do it. Nobody made him do it. But he felt like it. His background and desires were such that robbing the bank at that moment was inevitable. He couldn't help himself. Joseph was a victim of causal factors over which he had no control.¹³⁰

So Joseph would not have been truly free while he was robbing the bank, and thus he could claim he was not morally responsible for it. Additionally, one causal factor for compatibilist freedom is that God has eternally decreed that Joseph would want to rob the bank, so Joseph could not resist God's decree and essentially had to rob the bank. Pinnock rejected this idea and instead came to see that people are not "products of a timeless decree" but are "God's covenant partners and real players in the flow and the tapestry of history."¹³¹ Pinnock

¹²⁸ Clark Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination & Free Will*, 148.

¹²⁹ Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 18.

¹³⁰ Pinnock, "Clark Pinnock's Response," in *Predestination & Free Will*, 59.

¹³¹ Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 18.

argues that libertarian free will is assumed both by Scripture as well as our everyday experience.¹³²

While Pinnock says that God could have created a world where everything was fixed and determined, God did not choose to do so.¹³³ Pinnock argues that God gave humans free will in order for real love between God and humans to be possible. Pinnock writes, “Humans are not robots who have no choice. God loves us and wants to be loved in return. Love cannot be forced; it must be freely given,”¹³⁴ and, “He does not prevent us choosing not to love him, though it saddens his heart, because the love he seeks must be freely chosen.”¹³⁵

However, by giving freedom to people, God could not guarantee what they would do with their freedom and did not foreknow what they would choose to do:

God did not know all along what Hitler, or Adam, would do with his freedom. If he did, it would imply that he thought that Hitler’s evils could serve a purpose and that it was better that, on balance, they happen rather than they not happen. Surely not! God gave Hitler freedom but it was not settled ahead of time how he would use it.¹³⁶

But it must be noted that if God values freedom, it does not mean there must always be the possibility of evil:

God will overcome wickedness through his wisdom, power, and resourcefulness. He allows the creature to wreak havoc on the world for a time but not forever. The gift of freedom was not unlimited in scope or duration and therefore the power to do evil is finite.¹³⁷

¹³² Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 41.

¹³³ Pinnock, “God Limits His Knowledge,” in *Predestination & Free Will*, 144.

¹³⁴ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 162.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

So in heaven, Pinnock says we will not be free to do evil, as we will be fully conformed to the image of Christ and the purpose of having libertarian freedom to love or reject God will have been completed.¹³⁸ Also, it could be that our freedom decreases over time as we pursue particular paths which become a fixed part of our character, and so in heaven our character will be so fixed in holiness that we will not be able to sin.¹³⁹

Theodicy

Theodicy for open theism is very similar to theodicy for the simple foreknowledge view, as both use the free-will defense where evil is caused by the misuse of free will that God gave to his creatures. However, in open theism, God did not know for certain that creatures would sin, although he knew it was possible, and God did not know exactly what evil would happen and exactly how creatures would misuse their free will. So while God is responsible for creating the possibility for evil by giving creatures free will, God is not responsible for the actual evil which occurs, as this is due solely to the creature's choice to misuse their free will.¹⁴⁰ Unlike divine determinism and the simple foreknowledge views, God is not in control of evil either by ordaining it, or by foreseeing it. Pinnock writes,

God is not in control of the powers of evil at this time in history, so they do not always play into the hands of God. There is not always a reason for every occurrence of evil. God, though he established the structures of the world, does not always get what he wants in every situation.¹⁴¹

The best illustration of this fact is the fall of humanity:

¹³⁸ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 31.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 47.

¹⁴¹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 133.

The fall into sin was against the will of God and proves by itself that God does not exercise total control over all events in this world. Evils happen that are not supposed to happen, that grieve and anger God.¹⁴²

In open theism according to Pinnock, God created the world where evil is possible but not necessary or inevitable.¹⁴³ He writes,

The reality of creaturely freedom allows us to say that evil originates, not with God, but with creatures and is the misuse of their God-given freedom. This enables us to think of sin as an intruder which does not belong, and understand that certain natural evils are the result of the Fall of humankind and angels. God sovereignly decided to create a world containing morally free beings who had the possibility of serving God or not. This was something for them to decide such that sin was a possibility, though not a certainty, at the time of creation. God knew the creature and is, therefore, responsible for the possibility of evil but not for its actuality.¹⁴⁴

So this view could avoid making God responsible for each and every evil that happens, as one could argue that God did not want it, is not responsible for it, and did not even foreknow it would happen when he created the universe. As Richard Rice explains, the advantage of the open theist view of theodicy over the simple foreknowledge theodicy is that while both say evil is due to a misuse of free will, in open theism, “God is not responsible for these decisions, God cannot be blamed for not knowing them, not preventing them or not warning us about them.”¹⁴⁵ So for example, in the simple foreknowledge view, God knew that Hitler would exist and would do what he did, and so we could wonder why God created Hitler or allowed Hitler to live.¹⁴⁶ But in the open theist view, God did not

¹⁴² Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in *The Openness of God*, 115.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁴⁴ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 46-47.

¹⁴⁵ Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 104.

¹⁴⁶ Gregory Boyd, “God Limits His Control,” in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, 201-202.

know for sure how Hitler would use his free will, and so therefore God is not responsible for Hitler's actions by allowing him to exist.¹⁴⁷

Open theism also emphasizes spiritual warfare to a degree that both divine determinism and the simple foreknowledge views do not. While spiritual warfare can be accounted for in the free-will defense (as God gave angels free will, and so Satan and the demons chose to misuse their free will to oppose God), it is often not emphasized as greatly by simple foreknowledge proponents as it is by several open theist authors, especially Gregory Boyd, who has written two large books on his view: *God At War* and *Satan and the Problem of Evil*.

Conclusion to Open Theism

Now after examining the general features of open theism, and having seen a broad outline of how it deals with theodicy, the next chapter will focus on four specific benefits of open theism for theodicy which give it advantages over divine determinism.

¹⁴⁷ According to open theism, God may not even have known that Hitler would exist, since his existence would be a result of a long chain of free decisions made by his ancestors, as well as the random natural process of genetic combination of his parents' DNA (unless one argues that God controls the DNA combination process according to Psalm 139:13, and thus God has some input into the sort of individual that is produced, while being limited by the options available in the parents' DNA). But even then, it cannot be claimed that Hitler was genetically predetermined to become an evil tyrant, as this would remove his free choice and he would not have been morally responsible for his actions.

Chapter 3: Implications of Open Theism for Theodicy

Having looked at the main features of open theism, now this chapter will examine some specific and significant implications of open theism for theodicy. Pinnock asserts that “practical implications in fact are often what tip the balance for people in favour of open theism. People are already living this way.”¹ As will be shown, there are four areas where open theism’s practical implications for theodicy have advantages over divine determinism.

Open Theism Affirms God’s Character is Completely Good

Pinnock has argued that one significant advantage of open theism is that it is able to affirm that God’s character is completely good. This was actually one of the reasons why he moved toward open theism. Pinnock writes,

Given our experience of such evils as the Holocaust and Cambodia, how can one say that God rules over and controls history? What divine purpose can be detected in death camps and killing fields? History itself seems to call the sovereignty of God into question and to require us to rethink it.²

As shown in this quote, Pinnock finds it hard to believe that a good God is in direct control of all evil that happens in the world. Pinnock found that when he identified as a Calvinist he would “slip into my reading of the Bible dark assumptions about the nature of God’s decrees and intentions.”³ Some of

¹ Pinnock, “Open Theism: An Answer to My Critics,” 240.

² Clark H. Pinnock, “God’s Sovereignty in Today’s World,” *Theology Today* 53, no. 1 (April 1, 1996): 16.

³ Pinnock, “From Augustine to Arminius,” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 21.

Pinnock's "dark assumptions" can be found by looking at his criticism of the divine determinist view on theodicy, as follows.

Primarily, he argues that the problem with divine determinism is that it makes God the direct author of evil. For example, he writes,

The logic of consistent Calvinism makes God the author of evil and casts serious doubt on his goodness. One is compelled to think of God's planning such horrors as Auschwitz, even though none but the most rigorous Calvinians can bring themselves to admit it.⁴

And also,

If God's sovereignty extended to all things it would extend to evil too and even sin. Despite efforts to blame creaturely agents for their part in it (e.g. God hires A to kill B and doesn't do the deed himself), God's power is so decisive that it is difficult to think of God as good. It casts a shadow over God's character. It makes God inscrutable because he simply does what he pleases and we have to submit.⁵

Elsewhere, Pinnock says that divine determinist theology "makes hell as much the divine purpose as heaven and the fall into sin as much God's work as salvation is."⁶ And again, "If God were all-controlling he would be the author of evil, which is a blasphemous thought."⁷ He says the divine determinists' view makes God "some kind of terrorist who goes around handing out torture and disaster and even willing people to do things the Bible says God hates."⁸ While some divine determinists say that everything, including evil, working together as part of God's plan is glorious, Pinnock disagrees and says,

It astonishes me that people can defend the 'glory' of God so vehemently when that glory includes God's sovereign authorship of every rape and murder, the closing down the future to any meaningful creaturely

⁴ Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 21

⁵ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 177.

⁶ Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 28.

⁷ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 46.

⁸ Pinnock, "Clark Pinnock's Response," in *Predestination & Free Will*, 58.

contribution, and his holding people accountable for deeds he predestined them to do and they could not but do.⁹

He says that this view of God's power also leads to evil not being genuinely evil:

As long as God has a monopoly on power, any response to evil becomes extremely difficult. If God had such a monopoly, one would have to deny the existence of genuine evil because evil is something God wanted to happen. Conventional theism, with its obsession for control, makes God the author of evil and condemns itself to defending something untenable. We have to face the fact that, if nothing happens outside the will of God, there is no genuine evil. If he is in control in a monopolistic sense, everything that happens has to have a reason. Even the Holocaust has to have a reason and has to contribute in some way to the greater good, if only we could see it from God's point of view. In this way evil is taken up into God and a dark shadow is cast over God's goodness.¹⁰

He criticizes the common divine determinist appeal to God's mysterious ways when he says: "To say that God hates sin while secretly willing it...such things do not deserve to be called mysteries when that is just a euphemism for nonsense."¹¹ Pinnock outright rejects divine determinists' theodicy when he writes,

Repeating the disclaimer that predestination does not make God the author of evil cannot change the fact that it surely does. God is the one responsible for everything that happens if he willed it so completely, and he must take the blame. This is the kind of theology that makes atheists.¹²

These aforementioned quotations show that Pinnock believes that divine determinism strongly leads to the view that God is the author of evil, sin, and suffering. Believing these things about God would certainly make it harder to affirm that God's character is completely good.

⁹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

¹¹ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God*, 115.

¹² Pinnock with Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 129.

So why does it matter if divine determinism paints God as the author of evil? It is because how one thinks of and portrays God's character is very important. Pinnock argues that we cannot expect Christians to love and delight in God, or for non-Christians to be interested in knowing God "if we portray God in Biblically flawed, rationally suspect, and existentially repugnant ways."¹³ The idea that God is the author of evil causes difficulties for skeptics, apologists, and evangelists.¹⁴ Gregory Boyd avers that sometimes people reject God, or else have difficulty loving God, because they cannot get over the mental picture of God which results from believing that God is responsible for all the evils in the world.¹⁵ Pinnock says that this belief can even contribute to atheism: "Indeed, the strongest, and perhaps only, argument for atheism is the existence of evil, which, if God secretly planned it and had a reason for it, makes belief in God impossible."¹⁶

Several open theists have found that their view of God makes a practical difference in their lives and also in the lives of others. John Sanders says he has received thousands of responses to his book on open theism, *The God Who Risks*, thanking him

for the help it gave them in reconciling belief in a loving God with all the evil in the world. Countless numbers have said that since they finally found a theology in which God does not (secretly) want evil in the world, they no longer agonized about why God wanted their loved ones to suffer as they did. It is not God's desire that they experience suffering at all.¹⁷

¹³ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God*, 104.

¹⁴ Pinnock, "God Limits his Knowledge," in *Predestination & Free Will*, 144.

¹⁵ Gregory A. Boyd, *Is God to Blame?: Moving Beyond Pat Answers to the Problem of Evil*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 15.

¹⁶ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 133.

¹⁷ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 11.

Sanders also found the open theist response to evil personally helpful to come to terms with the death of his brother. He rejected the idea that God had caused his non-Christian brother's death in order for Sanders to become a Christian, as some well-intended divine determinists had told him.¹⁸

Gregory Boyd has also found open theism to be helpful pastorally when ministering to suffering people. He tells a story of a woman who always wanted children, yet had trouble conceiving. Finally when she did conceive, the baby died during birth, and the people around her tried to comfort her with the divine determinist viewpoint. They said things such as "there are no accidents in God's providence," that "God has a reason for everything," that she should trust God who gives and also takes away, that maybe it was not God's will for her to have children, or even that God was trying to teach her a lesson. But these words were not comforting and she felt guilty for not trusting God's plan, which led her to become depressed and her relationship with God deteriorated. Boyd explained to her that it was not God's will that her baby died or that she was unable to conceive, and that God was not trying to punish her until she learned her lesson. Instead, he explained that God was just as grieved over her situation as she was (if not more so). This open theist view of God was finally able to comfort the woman and remove her guilt and her anger at God.¹⁹

The above stories show that for many Christians, it is more comforting to believe that God does not ordain evil as a part of his plan, and that evil is the

¹⁸ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 12-13.

¹⁹ Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 11-15.

result of God allowing free creatures to exercise their freedom.²⁰ They find solace in the idea that God did not want the evil in question to occur and that God is disappointed and saddened by the suffering in the world along with them.²¹ It is easier for them to love and trust God if God is seen as completely good, which improves their personal relationships with God.

Open Theism Takes Spiritual Warfare Seriously

Pinnock asserts that spiritual warfare is a reality that is often neglected by traditional theologians,²² and says that traditional theology presents “an all too serene picture of the situation, where God does not have to struggle with any opposing power.”²³ Pinnock asks, “Why do we forget that there is a war on between God and the powers of darkness? Angels and humans, being in possession of real freedom, have rebelled and are able to create havoc at the present time.”²⁴ He states that “the reason that the world looks at times like a war zone is that it is a war zone,”²⁵ and thus “we are caught up in real warfare and should not be surprised by evil.”²⁶ These quotations all indicate that Pinnock sees spiritual warfare as a significant reality which has important consequences for theodicy.

In his book *The Providence of God*, divine determinist Paul Helm does not mention anything about spiritual warfare or the extent that forces contrary to God might be responsible for evil. In the case of the few divine determinists who do

²⁰ David Basinger, “Practical Implications,” in *The Openness of God*, 171.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 170.

²² Pinnock, “God’s Sovereignty in Today’s World,” 19.

²³ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 36.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

address spiritual warfare, they typically say that God is ultimately in control of Satan and uses Satan for God's own greater good purposes. Thus Pinnock says that while divine determinists accept the "appearance" of spiritual warfare, ultimately they believe it is merely an illusion because God acts on the side of good as well as on the side of evil.²⁷ However, this is problematic for two reasons.

First, it contradicts important evidence in Scripture. Pinnock notes that Jesus saw things like deformity, blindness, leprosy, and fever as evidence of the reign of darkness and due to demonic influence, not God's providence.²⁸ Jesus attributes some illnesses to evil spirits (Matthew 17:14-20, Luke 13:11), and evil spirits are shown to be able to possess humans or animals to cause harm (Acts 19:16, Matthew 8:32). There is evidence in the Bible that sometimes spiritual forces intervene and do not let God do what he wants. For example, God's message to Daniel brought by an angel was temporarily delayed due to an evil power (Daniel 10:13-14).²⁹ Gregory Boyd also notes that many other verses show that we suffer under the rule of the power of this world (John 23:31; 14:30; 16:11, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19),³⁰ and not because of God's will. Additionally, Pinnock says it is clear that the demonic and spiritual warfare is a reality not just in Scripture, but also in the other religions of the world.³¹ Thus, open theism provides a better explanation for these verses because it accepts that forces of darkness which are opposed to God to have some real power in this world; not everything evil spirits do is God's will.

²⁷ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 40.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

³⁰ Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 120.

³¹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 134.

The second problem is that it leads to a theological error. Pinnock argues that Jesus is “the centerpiece of the Christian revelation,” “the revelation of God without peer,” the best form of revelation, and “the sum and substance” of Scripture’s message.³² Also, Jesus himself claimed to be the “ultimate revelation of God” who Pinnock says “set himself apart from all others in the authority of his word and the uniqueness of his relation of sonship with God his Father.”³³ So what Jesus reveals of God must be true and accurate, and not partial, incomplete, or misleading. If Jesus is the perfect revelation of God’s character, then it is impossible to say that Jesus did not fully and accurately reveal God’s relationship to evil. But the problem with divine determinist theology is that

it posits a rift between the Father (who supposedly controls Satan) and the Son (who opposes Satan). Indeed, it creates an irreparable duplicity in the Father himself: the Father’s will is done by Satan, *and* the Father’s will is also done by Jesus as he resists Satan.³⁴

Thus, divine determinists who say that God controls Satan are claiming that the will of the Father is not the same as the will of the Son, and that Jesus did not perfectly reveal God’s relationship to evil. This effectively divides the Trinity and disparages the incarnation, and therefore it is not an acceptable orthodox Christian answer.

So instead of the divine determinist view that spiritual warfare is merely an illusion, Pinnock believes it is more accurate to say that

At present, God’s will is resisted by powers of darkness, but the day will come when his will shall triumph. At present, evil is mounting a challenge to God’s rule with considerable effect. The powers of darkness

³² Pinnock with Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 34.

³³ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁴ Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 187.

put up stiff resistance and to a degree block God's plans; that is, they can restrict God's ability to respond to a given crisis.³⁵

And therefore, "God is not now in control – we anticipate complete victory over evil only in the future."³⁶ Yet it must be remembered that "God has the upper hand," and so we can confidently trust that God will have the victory in the end, even though fallen angels and humans can resist God's will and temporarily thwart God's desires.³⁷ The Lord's return is certain, and although our actions may affect its timing, we cannot change its future reality.³⁸

Pinnock says this view of spiritual warfare is confirmed by Jesus who said that God's kingdom was breaking into history but not yet in full effect, as the power of darkness struggle against it, and this is why Jesus instructs that we should pray for God's will to happen on earth because often today it does not.³⁹ He also argues that the early church took spiritual warfare much more seriously than we do today:

Evil was not a problem in the New Testament; it was an enemy that they expected to overcome by the power of God. They did not try to explain evil based on the false problematic of exhaustive sovereignty, they set about defeating it. They did not wonder why Jesus got murdered, they knew why: they powers of darkness conspired against him. What they wondered about was how God was moving redemption forward through it. What caused lament for them was the delay, 'O Lord, how long?' (Rev. 6:11).⁴⁰

Contemporary Christians could learn from the early church's view of evil and accept spiritual warfare as a reality for God and ourselves. This is beneficial as it

³⁵ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God*, 115.

³⁶ Pinnock, "God's Sovereignty in Today's World," 19.

³⁷ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 36-37.

³⁸ Pinnock, "God's Sovereignty in Today's World," 19.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 177.

turns evil from a theoretical problem into a practical problem of how do we face evil in our lives and in our world.⁴¹

As shown here, open theism is a more tenable explanation for spiritual warfare as it says there is a genuine conflict going on between God and the forces of evil; it is not just an act. It is able to take certain biblical verses that affirm spiritual warfare as a reality at face value. Open theism also does not lead to the contradiction between the will of Jesus and the will of the Father which divine determinism does when it says the Father controls Satan but Jesus opposed Satan. Therefore, open theism means that we can fully trust that what Jesus revealed to us of God's character is accurate, and we do not have to fear that behind Jesus there is an unknowable and possibly partly evil God that Jesus did not reveal. This is an additional encouragement that God's character is fully good, which again makes it easier to trust and love God in many other aspects of our lives. Additionally, it lets us take spiritual warfare seriously, and thus might encourage us to do what we can to help God overcome evil. This last point will be expanded on in the next two sections of this chapter.

Open Theism Preserves Human Moral Responsibility

Pinnock argues that if God knew everything about the future, then events would be fixed and determined, and that this would mean that "human freedom is an illusion, that we make no difference and are not responsible."⁴² Instead, open theism ensures that humans are truly responsible for their actions, whether good or evil. Pinnock writes,

⁴¹ Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 79.

⁴² Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God*, 121.

Divine control rules out free agency and any responsibility. How can a person be a free and responsible agent if their actions have been foreordained from eternity? They are only nominally free. Genuine agency contemplates the future as open, not settled. There's room to make a difference by what we do now.⁴³

If the future is open and partly up to us, then “we are motivated to make the best choices and not fall back into resignation. Knowing that what will transpire in the future is still being decided inclines us to assume responsibility for the future.”⁴⁴

Furthermore, he says,

If we are God's covenant partners and co-labourers, it is important that the future not be completely settled, because that would mean that there is no room for us to participate in shaping the future in the service of God as we are called to do. Positively, an open future means that things can be different on account of our existence.⁴⁵

So, for example, in the case of mass starvation, while divine determinists might recognize that it appears to be partly due to human inaction to “create a more equitable global economic system,” ultimately they would believe that it is God's will that mass starvation occurs,⁴⁶ as it would somehow work into God's larger plan for greater good. Since they believe humans cannot resist God's will, it could be seen that humans are ultimately not responsible for the situation. On the contrary, in the open theist view, mass starvation would be at least partly attributable to human misuse of free will and humans would be morally responsible for their contribution to it.⁴⁷

Gregory Boyd says that

⁴³ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 163.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁴⁵ Pinnock, “Response to Part 2,” in *Reconstructing Theology*, 151.

⁴⁶ Basinger, “Practical Implications,” in *The Openness of God*, 172.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

knowing that what transpires in the future is not a foregone conclusion but is significantly up to us to decide, we will be more inclined to assume responsibility for our future. What we *really* believe – at a level that is more fundamental than words – influences how we behave.⁴⁸

Boyd also argues that people “will be more inclined to adventurously and passionately envisage and pursue what they *could* be instead of resigning themselves to what was supposedly settled an eternity ago about what they *will* be.”⁴⁹ Therefore, the open theist view encourages people to be responsible for their lives and motivates them to act rather than being resigned that whatever happens must be God’s will. Pinnock refers to Jesus’ parable of the talents and says,

According to a parable, the master gave his servants different amounts of capital and told them to invest it. He was serious about this and held them responsible. In the same way, God expects us to put our God-given resources to work in order to gain a return. We will be held responsible for the kind of investments we make (Mt. 25:14-30).⁵⁰

We cannot be complacent and expect God to choose everything for us, as then our lives would not be our own and we would just be puppets. It would essentially make history “a piece of theatre in which God, as it were, puts himself on the stage and the creatures are only what is performed.”⁵¹

Pinnock recounts the story of evangelist William Carey, who was told by divine determinists that

God, if he wanted to reach the heathen, could do it without Carey’s help... But Carey knew, instinctively, that he could make a difference if he went to India. He knew that the future could be different if he went. So he put aside his own Calvinism and acted like an open theist would, as Calvinists

⁴⁸ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 94.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 168.

⁵¹ Ibid., 41.

usually do when it comes to practical matters. Their theology fosters indolence but, fortunately, they ignore it in practical matters.⁵²

Therefore, since God holds us responsible for our actions, we must be diligent in working for God's kingdom, realizing that we are responsible if poor people are not helped and if some do not hear the gospel.⁵³ We cannot blame the evil in the world on God's will, and instead must blame ourselves for our inaction or contribution to the situation. While many divine determinists do take responsibility for themselves and work diligently to help others and spread the gospel, as Pinnock points out, they are being inconsistent with the conclusions of divine determinism. So it appears that open theism is a more theologically consistent option than divine determinism if one desires to maintain a belief in human moral responsibility. Also, knowing that we are morally responsible should affect our response to evil, as shown in the next section.

Open Theism Encourages Christians to Work Against Evil

Pinnock says that the divine determinist view

tends to make God the author of evil because evil arises in a world controlled directly or indirectly by him. Whatever happens is thought to be God's will so it is difficult to see that there can be genuine evil. Evil turns out to be in every case something good in disguise. Evil things happen because they fit somehow into his plan, which makes it hard to hate evil without hating God.⁵⁴

Indeed, believing that every evil thing which occurs is God's will would certainly have negative effects on one's motivation to fight evil. Gregory Boyd suggests that the divine determinist view may lead to Christians to adopt "an attitude of

⁵² Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 169.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 168-169.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 176-177.

resignation toward sin and evil in their own lives and in the world around them. They do not strive for the possibility of change in their lives and in the world as passionately as they could.”⁵⁵ Richard Rice agrees that the divine determinist attitude, if applied consistently, leads to a dangerous moral resignation that whatever happens is God’s will, and thus reduces motivation to do anything to make the world a better place.⁵⁶ Instead, Pinnock says that the open theist view of theodicy where God is not responsible for evil or sin, means that “one can fight evil without fighting God.”⁵⁷ Thus, he suspects that open theism may appeal “more to activists than to mystics.”⁵⁸

This is because, as shown previously, in open theism evil is caused by a misuse of God-granted free will by humans and by fallen angels. Therefore, since evil is not ordained, willed, or predetermined by God and is totally against God’s good will, then we can fully pour all our effort into fighting instances of evil, suffering, and deprivation. There will be no worry that in our effort to fight evil we might be ruining God’s plan or preventing the “greater good” which God was intending to bring out of the evil.

In rebuttal, author John Piper argues that having a divine determinist view that God causes all things does not encourage Christians to be passive. He says that we are called to act according to God’s “will of command” (how God wants us to act according to Scripture) and not according to God’s “will of decree”

⁵⁵ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 93.

⁵⁶ Richard Rice, “Exhaustive Divine Sovereignty: A Practical Critique,” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 192-196.

⁵⁷ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 176.

⁵⁸ Pinnock, “Open Theism: An Answer to My Critics,” 244.

(what actually happens).⁵⁹ So therefore he can say it is God's will for us to join in wiping out AIDS or malaria as participation in lifting the curse of futility,⁶⁰ yet if consistent, he would acknowledge that the reason AIDS and malaria continue to exist is because God continues to will their existence. Thus, even if a divine determinist believes that God is bringing good out of some evil, they are compelled to work against it not out of personal convictions but out of their sense of obligation to follow God's revealed will. Pinnock argues that divine determinists often face an inconsistency between what their beliefs would imply and how they actually live their lives. He says,

A conventional theist can, of course, persevere because the gospel requires it but they cannot give an account of why they do so. They have to live as if their view of God were different than it is, i.e. they live as if it were, in fact, the open view.⁶¹

Pinnock suggests that

it is not safe to live on the basis of conventional thinking. It may be exhilarating to discuss it intellectually, but you cannot take it seriously practically because it can destroy your sense of personal responsibility. It can make prayer meaningless and evangelism unnecessary and undermine one's will to live and act.⁶²

So Pinnock argues that even if the divine determinist view is true, it is "better" and "safer" to live as if the open theist view is true, because it encourages action instead of resignation.⁶³ He says "Conventional theists pay the open view of God a compliment when they live their lives on the basis of something like the open

⁵⁹ John Piper and Justin Taylor, "An Interview with John Piper," in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 236.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁶¹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 154.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 155.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

view rather than their own.”⁶⁴ So while divine determinists do fight against evil and feel personal responsibility for their actions, they may be acting inconsistently with their beliefs which imply that their actions are predetermined and that God wills the evil that they are trying to fight against. Yet the open theists find that their actions and beliefs are consistent.

Additionally, Pinnock argues that maybe the reason why God does not do more to prevent evil is because God desires to work with “the covenant partners with whom he shares dominion over the world.”⁶⁵ So when we do not pray for God to overcome evil and do not expect that God can make a difference in the world, it limits God’s ability to act and may lead to the world becoming a more negative place.⁶⁶ This idea that our cooperation may be necessary to allow God to be more active in overcoming evil should encourage us to pray more and to do what we can to help God defeat evil in our lives and the world.

Therefore, not just in the area of personal moral responsibility for evil, but also in the area of motivation to work against evil, open theists find that their personal convictions are supported by their beliefs. In comparison, divine determinists must resort to explanations about God’s revealed will versus God’s secret will which come across as artificial and non-intuitive, and may lead to resignation toward evil or a half-hearted effort in overcoming evil.

⁶⁴ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 156.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Conclusion to Implications of Open Theism for Theodicy

Therefore, as this chapter has shown, open theism's interpretation of theodicy has several major advantages over divine determinism. First, open theism can maintain that God is fully good and never does or wills evil, which makes it easier to love and trust God. Second, because open theism takes spiritual warfare seriously, it does not lead to the conclusion that Jesus resists Satan but the Father controls Satan, which would mean that Jesus does not perfectly represent God to us. Thus, we do not have to fear that the Father might be evil and arbitrary even if Jesus appears to be good and loving. Third, because evil is due to the misuse of human free will, in open theism we are held morally responsible for the evil that we do, which is fair and just and encourages us to choose our actions wisely, unlike in divine determinism where people are unfairly held accountable for the evil that they could not help doing because God willed them to do it. Finally, because open theism assures us that evil is not God's will, we can trust that we are not ruining God's plans when we work to overcome evil and suffering. This should spur us on to take action against evil instead of passively accepting that God wills the evil we see for some greater good purpose.

Chapter 4: Criticism of Open Theism's Implications for Theodicy and Rebuttals by Open Theists

Despite the many advantages of open theism for theodicy as shown in the last chapter, many divine determinists claim there are serious flaws with it. They say that these flaws detract from the supposed advantages of open theism's theodicy, and say that therefore the best option is divine determinism. This chapter will examine some of the most popular criticisms of open theism's implications for theodicy, and will see if Pinnock along with other open theists are able to rebut these criticisms effectively.

It is More Comforting to Say God is in Direct Control of Evil for a Greater Good Purpose

Many divine determinists claim that it is more comforting to Christians to believe that every instance of evil in the world is due to God's divine plan, that God is in control of every aspect of every situation that happens, even evil ones, and that evil is caused by God in order for God to bring some greater good out of it.

This approach can be seen in John Piper's response to his mother's death in a bus accident. Piper was never angry at God and did not blame God for her death. Instead, he thought,

If God cannot control the flight of a four-by-four flying through the front of a bus after a van hits it, I can't worship him. How can you worship a God who just fumbles the ball? He can't control a piece of lumber? That's not a God I'm going to worship. It is far easier to me to worship a God

who is totally in control and offers me the mysterious hope *this is going to be good for you, for her, for your dad, for the cause of evangelism.*¹

Paul Helm argues that Christians can effectively deal with their personal pain and suffering by believing that it has actually been *sent* by God for some greater good purpose.² Another divine determinist, John Feinberg, suggests that there could be many good reasons why God actively brings suffering into our lives. Some of these possible reasons are: it can show God's power, it can remove cause to boast in ourselves, it can demonstrate our faith in God as a witness to others, it can demonstrate the body of Christ as it cares for those members who suffer, it can encourage us to refrain from sin and grow in practical holiness, it can help us grow in faith, it can teach us perseverance or obedience, it can bring us closer to God, it can prepare us for greater trials, or it might be the means of taking someone to be with God in heaven.³ A similar approach is taken by the soul-making theodicy, which says that suffering is necessary in order to grow our character, teach us, and help us fulfill our potential to become the people God wants us to be.⁴ For example, if there was no suffering, it would be impossible to demonstrate compassion, and if there were no danger it would be impossible to be courageous.⁵

Pinnock admits that divine determinism might be attractive because "it is comforting to know that everything that happens has meaning and reassuring to

¹ Piper and Taylor, "An Interview with John Piper," in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 222-223.

² Helm, *The Providence of God*, 231.

³ Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 342-346.

⁴ Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 63.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

deny any element of risk or chance.”⁶ Richard Rice agrees that the divine determinists’ approach to theodicy appeals to the human desire for order and can reduce the fear that life is uncertain, and so the idea that God has a perfect plan for their lives which includes the suffering in question helps divine determinists feel reassured.⁷ It also removes the feelings of regret regarding what might have happened if they had done something differently – for example, what if a woman who became paralyzed from diving head first into a lake had jumped in feet first instead?⁸ Divine determinists would not need to lament over their past choices as they could say that it was how God wanted it to happen and so it could not have happened any other way.

However, while perhaps some individuals can explain their personal pain with this approach, on the grander scale it may be unsatisfactory. Pinnock says,

Some believers seem to derive comfort from the thought that God has a reason for all the terrible things that happen to people. Open theists, by contrast, think it appalling to say, for example, that God had any reason for Auschwitz. We think that God the Father – like Jesus – wept over it.⁹

Gregory Boyd agrees with Pinnock, and expands on this idea when he writes,

I do not see how the classical view of foreknowledge can be embraced without accepting the difficult conclusion that the horrors of world history and the eternal torment of the damned somehow make a positive contribution to God’s creation.¹⁰

Boyd illustrates this point using the story of a girl who is abducted and raped by a pedophile, and says that if we truly believe that God is working everything out for maximum goodness and that particular evils contribute to the greater good, then

⁶ Pinnock, “God’s Sovereignty in Today’s World,” 17.

⁷ Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 35.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹ Pinnock, “Open Theism: An Answer to My Critics,” 244.

¹⁰ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 102.

we must accept the ghoulish conclusion that God's glory as well as maximal goodness would have been *shortchanged* if the pedophile had tortured this girl less viciously and less frequently than he did, and if this victim had shed one less tear and uttered one less scream than she did.¹¹

Thus, while we may personally argue that God had planned a particular negative experience in our lives for good, it is much more difficult to say that the entirety of evil occurrences throughout all history (and the eternal suffering of the unsaved in hell) are necessary for some greater good purpose, and that it was not possible to achieve the same good result with even slightly less evil. But most people could imagine that the world would be a better place if the Holocaust did not happen, if AIDS did not exist,¹² and it would be better if fewer people end up in hell. Boyd suggests that in general people are self-centred, and so they primarily focus on why evil happens to themselves, and so they have not considered the larger picture of evil and suffering in the world which makes the divine determinist position much harder to accept.¹³

It does seem that John Piper has thought in detail more about suffering on the worldwide scale, and concludes that God is using all of this suffering to show us how bad sin is and to point us to Christ as the solution for sin, because we do not understand unless we see practical consequences from sin.¹⁴ Piper also believes that those who have suffered unjustly (e.g. children and infants) will be repaid ten-thousand times in heaven for their suffering.¹⁵ But it seems that this second point that children will be recompensed for their suffering could be used

¹¹ Gregory Boyd, "Response to Paul Kjoss Helseth," in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, 77.

¹² Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 38.

¹³ Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 56-57.

¹⁴ Piper and Taylor, "An Interview with John Piper," in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 232-233.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 231-232.

to reduce the outrage we should feel at child abuse, which would contradict his first point that we should feel outrage at sin, and could lead to other problems.¹⁶

One practical argument against the belief that God controls evil is given by Gregory Boyd. He says that believing God controls evil not only does not match with how we live (as even divine determinists take precautions for their own safety and the safety of their families, which is contradictory if they truly believe evil only happens because God wills it, and therefore no precautions would be effective if God wills evil to happen), but it actually makes the world a scarier place as we cannot trust God's character or trust that God will not afflict us with evil next, all for the sake of his own "glory."¹⁷ But if we believe evil is caused by the misuse of free will, then we are able to try to be proactive against evil, whereas if God is the cause of evil then we cannot avoid evil no matter how proactive we are.¹⁸ Therefore, Boyd argues that while it may be marginally less comforting to believe we can be subject to the evil actions of humans or demons, it is certainly more comforting than believing that God ordains evil.

It must be noted that not all divine determinists say that God ordains evil for the greater good. Yet it seems that this approach often ends up being inconsistent with aspects of divine determinism. A demonstration of this can be seen in how John Feinberg faced the issue of evil and suffering when his wife was

¹⁶ Piper argues that some verses such as such as 1 Corinthians 4:17-18, Romans 8:18, or Matthew 5:11-12 support this view: see John Piper, "Why God Appoints Suffering for his Servants" in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 93-95. However, one could wonder if these verses used to support his argument that children are repaid in heaven for their suffering have not been stretched beyond the original author's intent, as Piper's interpretation could be taken to encourage loving parents to abuse their children in order to earn the children more eternal heavenly rewards, which would be seen as more valuable than avoiding the temporary suffering the parents would inflict.

¹⁷ Gregory Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 369.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

diagnosed with Huntington's disease, a degenerative genetic disease which may have been passed to their children. He was troubled that divine determinist theodicy seemed to say Christians were expected to "take life's harshest blows and say that it was good that this had happened,"¹⁹ and felt inadequate that he could not feel this way over his family's situation.²⁰ He argues that divine determinists do not have to believe that evil and suffering are good things in themselves: "The affliction is not joy; it is evil. The cause for joy is that in spite of the evil, God is with us and can accomplish positive things in our life even in the midst of affliction."²¹ He felt it was wrong to be angry at God as "God had not done this. Nor could I think of anything in or out of Scripture that obligates God to keep this from happening."²² (Even though he initially felt that God had misled them to marry and had concealed information that might have revealed the presence of the disease before they decided to have children).²³ He argues that it is wrong to expect Christians to not feel grief and sorrow, and says "healing cannot come if we deny what we are feeling and act as though it is good that evil has occurred."²⁴ For him, it seems he found comfort not in alternate conceptions of God's sovereignty,²⁵ but in the care of those around him, as well as in the idea that it was not God's fault that his wife had a disease, but it was because humans

¹⁹ Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 325.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 322.

²² Ibid., 319.

²³ Ibid., 318-319.

²⁴ Ibid., 326.

²⁵ Ibid., 324-325.

sinned against God and disease is one result of what God had warned would happen because of sin.²⁶

Open theists such as Pinnock would likely agree with much of what Feinberg has said here, and thus it seems Feinberg's explanations for evil may match better with an open theist understanding of theodicy than with a divine determinist one. In his book *The Many Faces of Evil*, Feinberg attempts to explain moral and natural evil as a consequence of the sort of world and the sort of human beings that God willed to make.²⁷ But again, this argument matches better with the simple foreknowledge or open theist understandings of theodicy. Feinberg says his aim is to show "that there is a way to explain consistently why an all-loving, all-powerful God might allow evil,"²⁸ but even his use of the word "allow" brings to mind the free-will defense used by simple foreknowledge views and open theism. Yet Feinberg says he is a moderate Calvinist and believes in compatibilist free will.²⁹ So how can Feinberg's belief in compatibilist free will³⁰ match with this explanation for evil? Feinberg says that compatibilist free will means that God can effectively convince a person to freely do an act even if they did not initially want to do the act.³¹ But then Feinberg says that God made us able to act but does not create or perform our actions, and does not intend for people to do moral evil.³² He tries to say that his position does not contradict

²⁶ Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 330-331.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 124-143 and 148-155.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁰ See Feinberg's explanation for compatibilist free will in his chapter "God Ordains All Things," in *Predestination & Free Will*, eds. Basinger and Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press: 1986), 24-28.

³¹ Feinberg, "God Ordains All Things," in *Predestination & Free Will*, 26.

³² Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 126-127.

compatibilist free will,³³ but how is it possible for God to compatibilistically will someone to do evil if God does not want them to do evil? It seems that in any form of compatibilist freedom God remains the author of evil as he influences the desires of his creatures so effectively that they cannot resist doing the evil God wills them to do. Pinnock notes that in an earlier work,

he [Feinberg] even shrinks from saying that God only ‘permits’ some atrocity like the Holocaust, as some less stout Calvinists inconsistently do, because this would suggest it originated outside God’s sovereign will. Far be it from the Calvinists to deny God the glory of causing everything!³⁴

So it seems that Feinberg has contradicted himself in these two separate works, the earlier one where he says all evil is caused by God, and the later one where he says God does not cause evil and evil is a result of the type of world and humans that God willed to make. It is possible that he has changed his views in the time between these two publications. However, this apparent inconsistency in Feinberg’s beliefs could be seen as a demonstration that the idea that God causes evil for a greater good purpose is not acceptable even to other divine determinists who experience personal suffering! If even some divine determinists have difficulty consistently accepting the hard implications of their views when faced with suffering in their own lives (which leads them to change their views or come to inconsistent conclusions), perhaps this indicates a flaw in divine determinist theodicy.

In contrast to these various explanations by divine determinists, instead of believing that God has a plan for each and every evil, open theists take the view that much evil which happens is unnecessary in terms of God’s larger plan for the

³³ Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 129.

³⁴ Pinnock, “Clark Pinnock’s Response,” in *Predestination & Free Will*, 58.

world. Pinnock says, “greater goods do not arise out of every occurrence of evil.”³⁵ John Sanders agrees that there is such a thing as “pointless evil,” such as when children contract painful diseases, and that “God does not have a purpose in mind for these occurrences.”³⁶ Many divine determinists react strongly against these sorts of statements, as they say it removes the purpose and meaning behind suffering which provides the ability to endure it.³⁷

However, it is possible to keep the advantages of an open theist approach to theodicy while maintaining the confidence that God can bring good out of evil and suffering. Remember that Pinnock’s interpretation of God’s omnipotence means that God is able to achieve his purposes despite human or angelic opposition, because he is flexible and the most adaptable, resourceful, and intelligent. Therefore, Pinnock is able to say that “some evils like the disasters of war are pointless. God did not want them to happen even though, having happened, God can often accomplish something good through them.”³⁸ So while Pinnock believes there may be some pointless evil (pointless in the sense that God did not plan it for some specific purpose), Pinnock trusts that because God is adaptable, God is able to use the evil that is experienced by the believer in some way for good, even though it was not intended for good. Yet this is not because God foreknew or foreordained that the evil would occur, but is because God is able to adapt to unforeseen evil occurrences and is able to work around them like a chess-master, or can use them in ways that could bring about some good out of

³⁵ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 176.

³⁶ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 272.

³⁷ Paul Kjoss Helseth, “God Causes all Things,” in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, 52.

³⁸ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 47.

them, even if it is not necessarily a greater good than if the evil had not occurred. For example, in the case of the death of John Piper's mother, Pinnock could say that it was not God's will for Piper's mother to die in the accident, and it would have been better if his mother had lived and been able to influence Piper's children,³⁹ but since she died, God was able to use her death in other ways to bring good to Piper's family. Pinnock says "God sets goals for creation and redemption and realizes them ad hoc in history. If Plan A fails, God is ready with Plan B."⁴⁰ Gregory Boyd expands on Pinnock's idea when he says that God is

wise enough to know how to weave our failed plan A's into these alternative plans so beautifully that looking back, it may look like B or C was his original plan all along. This isn't a testimony to his exhaustive definite foreknowledge; it's a testimony to his unfathomable wisdom.⁴¹

Thus, open theists can still have the comfort of Romans 8:28, since they trust God's promise that he will work all things in Christians' lives for their good (although not necessarily greater good, at least in this life). This is because of God's adaptability and wisdom, not because he had pre-planned their lives down to the last detail and intentionally sent the evil in question.

However, when it comes down to choosing which theodicy is best, Richard Rice says, "Each of these explanations has attractive features, yet each one leaves lingering questions. So, in spite of our efforts and our hopes, suffering never makes perfect sense."⁴² Additionally, he says,

Different theories of suffering have different practical consequences and, predictably, different people find certain theodicies more helpful than others. In fact, in the case of each interpretation of suffering, there are

³⁹ Piper and Taylor, "An Interview with John Piper," in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 223.

⁴⁰ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God*, 113.

⁴¹ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 106.

⁴² Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 10.

people who like it and people who don't. And the very responses that some people find helpful may actually strike others as offensive.⁴³

Rice notes that he can appreciate aspects from many different theodicies:

I appreciate the confidence in the fulfillment of God's purposes that perfect plan theodicy exhibits; the affirmation of soul making theodicy that God uses suffering for positive purposes; the insistence that suffering is not what God intended for creation that is basic to the free will defense; the dramatic portrait of good versus evil that cosmic conflict theodicy paints; the conviction of open theists that God took a risk in creating beings who were significantly free; the realization that God does not always get God's way that finite God theodicy expresses; and the cry of outrage at innocent suffering that protest theodicy raises.⁴⁴

So Christians can draw from aspects of many theodicies in order to gain a broader view of the multiple possible causes and reasons for suffering. Therefore, ultimately it is up to the individual to determine which approach they find most comforting when they face evil, and it should not be assumed that Christians must find divine determinism more comforting than open theism in order to be orthodox Christians. Likewise, if some are able to find comfort in divine determinism, then they should not be prevented from believing it, provided it does not hurt their relationship with God in other ways, and provided they do not impose their view on others. Therefore, multiple ways of looking at the issue of evil are needed in the church, as there is not just one "one-size fits all" solution. Additionally, since some find the divine determinist viewpoint so disturbing that it threatens their relationship with God, it is better to offer these people an alternate theodicy such as open theism in order to preserve their faith rather than claiming they must accept divine determinism, which if they find it unacceptable might lead them to abandon faith in God altogether.

⁴³ Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

It Reduces Trust in God's Guidance

As seen in the previous section, even if open theism is comforting in its understanding of God's relationship to evil and God's ability to bring good out of unforeseen evil, divine determinists charge that open theism is less comforting to Christians in another way. It is alleged that open theism leads to a reduction of the Christian's trust in God's guidance. The issue is that if God cannot perfectly foreknow the actions of free agents, then his guidance is less trustworthy, for God would not know what evil free agents may do to us in the future and could not give us guidance on how to avoid it.

The question of God's guidance in open theism is illustrated by Gregory Boyd's pastoral experience of helping a woman named Suzanne. Suzanne wanted to be a missionary to Taiwan, and had prayed that God would guide her to the right man for her to marry who would have a similar heart for missions. In college, she met a man who had the same goals as she did, and was compatible with her in many other areas, and so they felt it must have been divine providence that they met. But Suzanne wanted confirmation from God that this was indeed the man she should marry. She prayed intensely, and finally believed she had received this confirmation by a supernatural feeling of joy and peace. Yet she was devastated two years later when she found out her husband had committed adultery. He appeared to repent, yet cheated on her several more times. He lost his desire for missions to Taiwan, and became physically and emotionally abusive.

Finally, he filed for divorce and moved out, and just two weeks later Suzanne found out she was pregnant.⁴⁵

Suzanne was very troubled by the idea that “if God knew exactly what her husband would do, then he bears all the responsibility for setting her up the way he did.”⁴⁶ Instead, Boyd suggested to her that God regretted how things had turned out, but it was not God’s fault because God did not foreknow how her husband would misuse his free will to hurt Suzanne. Initially, Boyd says, God believed that Suzanne marrying her husband would have a high chance of having a happy marriage and fulfilling ministry. But when her husband decided to misuse his free will to commit adultery, it led to him becoming a different person than who he was when God had recommended that she marry him.⁴⁷ This explanation was very comforting to Suzanne, who was able to retain her trust in hearing God’s guidance, and it helped her to be able to love God again.⁴⁸

Bruce Ware is very critical of open theism’s implications for trusting God’s guidance. In the case of Suzanne, he says, “What assurances can she be given that God will do any better in his future leading than he has in the past?”⁴⁹ and so he fears Suzanne may have a harder time trusting God’s guidance in the future. He says that if God cannot know the future, then God is incapable of helping Christians make the most significant choices of their lives – the ones which will have very long-term implications, such as choices surrounding careers, marriage partners, or ministries. He says,

⁴⁵ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 103-104.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁴⁹ Ware, “Defining Evangelicalism’s Boundaries Theologically,” 208.

To say that God is pretty good at short-range guidance but can't really handle long-range direction is to say that, concerning the weightiest decisions we make in our lives, God has little if any solid help to give. Surely this only discourages greatly what the Bible commends throughout: trusting God implicitly with all of our lives.⁵⁰

Bruce Ware argues that in contrast, the traditional view of divine determinism has led Christians to find great comfort in trusting God's plan for their lives:

For countless generations and millions of Christian believers, great strength and hope has been founded on the truth that God knows every detail of what will happen in the future. Even though we are blind to just what tomorrow or next year or the distant future might bring, we may hold the hand of the One who sees that future perfectly and truthfully, in all of its vast and exhaustive (and, yes, definite) detail, and follow him unquestioningly as he directs us and charts the course of our lives. Christian theology has said that this view is essential to our understanding of God, and Christian faith has leaned on it during dark and stormy days.⁵¹

and again,

Over the centuries, innumerable Christians have been deeply comforted by the realization that, whatever difficulties they face, they can know that God has good and wise purposes, often including distant purposes, that he is fulfilling. Furthermore, they can be confident that those purposes, both near and far, are best accomplished only as God providentially takes them through the thorny paths they now walk.⁵²

Ware believes that the open theist view of God's guidance is not reassuring to Christians, as it means God regrets his mistakes, and God might give well-intended advice which could later turn out to be wrong or harmful.⁵³

In response to this argument, Pinnock states that God may not have a specific plan for each of our lives:

God has goals for our lives but they have open routes. Even if we fail in some way, God continues to work for our good. His ways with us are marked by flexibility and we need not trouble ourselves with the thought

⁵⁰ Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 182.

⁵¹ Ware, "Rejoinder to Replies," 245.

⁵² Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 188.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 187.

that there is a detailed plan and we missed it (as if we could miss it if it was foreordained).⁵⁴

So one benefit of open theism's view of divine guidance is that it provides relief and comfort to Christians who are concerned that if God had a set plan for their life that it would take away their freedom,⁵⁵ and it might reassure those who fear they have somehow missed God's plan for their lives. Pinnock does not deny that God might provide specific guidance to us, but says that giving us specific answers is not God's main concern:

God may have a specific piece of guidance about what we should do in a given situation. Mostly though, he wants us to be a certain kind of person who loves and obeys him. God wants us to go through life together with him, making responsible decisions as we go.⁵⁶

Sanders agrees with Pinnock, and expands on this concept when he says,

God's will for my life does not reside in a list of specific activities but in a personal relationship. As lover and friend, God works with us wherever we go and whatever we do... For example, there may be a variety of vocations available to me with which God is pleased, not just one that is 'best' or 'perfect' in comparison to the others. I am free to make my choice in consultation with God and others in whom I detect godly wisdom. In my opinion, God is concerned about which vocation I select but is much more concerned about how I live my life in that vocation. Whatever vocation I choose God wants me to do it Christianly.⁵⁷

Additionally, Pinnock argues the area of God's guidance is one more example of how it is better to live as if the future is open. Even if God does have a detailed blueprint for our lives, because we do not have access to it, we essentially live as if the future is open and depends on our choices.⁵⁸ He says,

⁵⁴ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 175.

⁵⁵ Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 211.

⁵⁶ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 175.

⁵⁷ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 286.

⁵⁸ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 176.

Guidance does not consist in asking God to check the future and give us the secrets. It is about facing the future together with God. It is about going together through life and deciding with him what its course shall be. Whatever its actual course in detail, the goal is the same – God will have us conformed in the image of Christ. That can happen whether one is a preacher or an undertaker. It can also fail to happen if we do not want it to happen.⁵⁹

So open theists do not need to believe that God has predestined every detail of their futures, but are happy to trust that God is able to adapt to any circumstance they may face, whether good or evil, and any good or bad choices that they may also make, in order to keep developing Christ-like character in them.

However, Ware still dislikes this. He exclaims,

Oh, the implicit arrogance embedded in the notion that God takes into consideration what I think before he and I decide together what is best to do, as if I, or we, could possibly contribute something that could be joined with God's understanding and wisdom resulting in an overall better plan.⁶⁰

He essentially objects that how can finite, sinful humans know what is best for us any better than what God knows is best for us? Divine determinists believe it is not a disadvantage that humans are unable to change God's plan, because they say God's plan is perfect, so it does not need our correction or input.⁶¹ However, it is useful to look at Pinnock's analysis of how God and Moses interacted in Exodus chapters 3 and 4 to refute Ware's point. Pinnock sees that God does not impose his own perfect, predestined plan on Moses, but works with Moses and all of his "hesitations and uncertainties," and God ultimately honours Moses' dignity by adjusting the plan to include Aaron.⁶² While divine determinists might say that God caused Moses to be hesitant in order that God could involve Aaron just as

⁵⁹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 176.

⁶⁰ Ware, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Theologically," 209.

⁶¹ Helm, *The Providence of God*, 138.

⁶² Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God*, 116.

God had predestined, this merely demonstrates how divine determinists often see prayer as nothing more than a God-ordained means to achieve God's predestined purposes, and not as a real relationship with real interaction between God and humans.⁶³ On the contrary, Pinnock says that God cares about our input so much that God is even willing to go with less-than-ideal plans because of it.⁶⁴ Yet Pinnock does say that God is not completely dependent on us, as God has his own ideas and other resources to use, and so even though God values our input, sometimes we have to accept God's will instead of our own desires.⁶⁵ But in general, God does not impose his "perfect" plan on us without our say, because God loves us and respects us by asking for our input, even if the final result is less than perfect.

Furthermore, Pinnock argues that divine determinism actually gives even less reason for seeking God's guidance than open theism. Since divine determinists say that God's will is always done, if that were the case, then as Pinnock says, no one

needs to worry about being in the will of God. How, given this view of deterministic sovereignty, could anyone fail to be in God's will...God's will is always done....God willed whatever happens. It would be irrational to worry about anything in the Calvinist's universe.⁶⁶

Thus, if open theists are accused of reducing the potential quality of God's guidance, divine determinists could be accused of negating the entire reason for seeking God's guidance altogether. Sanders agrees and elaborates on this point:

⁶³ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 174.

⁶⁴ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God*, 116.

⁶⁵ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 174-175.

⁶⁶ Pinnock, "Clark Pinnock's Response," in *Predestination & Free Will*, 59.

It remains inappropriate for proponents of the no-risk model to ask whether we are following God's guidance, for we cannot but follow it. It is never a question of whether we submit to God's leading, for God's leading is never thwarted or frustrated in the least detail. Otherwise, God would in some sense be dependent or contingent on us to follow his guidance. Proponents of meticulous providence who write on the topic of divine guidance often fail to understand this point which is why they often erroneously say we could miss God's direction.⁶⁷

So for divine determinists, even if we mishear God's directions, or are confused about God's will, it is because God wills for us to mishear or wills us to be confused at that point in time.⁶⁸ So if we can never be outside of God's will for our lives no matter what we choose, regardless of if we seek God's guidance or not, regardless of if we correctly hear God's guidance or not, and regardless of if we even want to follow God's guidance or not, then is there any reason left to seek God's guidance? Why would it matter if we ask God what he thinks is best for us if whatever God wants for us will happen to us anyways and we cannot avoid it? If, as divine determinists say, the evil that happens to us in the future is God's will for us, then we also cannot avoid it, and so how would asking God to show us how to avoid evil do us any good if God has willed for the evil to afflict us? Therefore, perhaps divine determinists should be less critical of open theism's view of divine guidance when their own view could potentially discourage Christians from turning to God for guidance altogether.

However, even if open theists believe God does not know everything about the future, or what evil may happen in the future, there could still be good reasons to seek God's guidance. Several such reasons can be found in the popular-level book by Jim Samra: *God Told Me: Who to Marry, Where to Work, Which*

⁶⁷ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 285.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Car to Buy – and I’m Pretty Sure I’m Not Crazy. Samra says that relying solely on our own judgement to make decisions is not reliable, because even the wisest person, Solomon, made some serious mistakes in his life.⁶⁹ So God’s guidance is very helpful. But Samra never assumes that God’s guidance is based on either a predestined plan for our lives or on God’s perfect knowledge of the future. Instead, he argues that we can trust God’s guidance for many other reasons.

For example, God is able to know our true motives when we do not know them ourselves, as often our motives are impure and are influenced by other factors. Because God knows all of our thoughts and attitudes (Heb. 4:12-13), God is able to give clear advice which is not skewed by our own motivations.⁷⁰ Also, God can help us choose the best option when faced with competing good values.⁷¹ Additionally, we are often subject to information overload when presented with many options to choose from, but God is not overwhelmed and is able to know all the facts and sort through all the possibilities and lead us to the option has the best chance of success.⁷²

Pinnock and other open theists agree with Samra when he says that God is able to know everything about the present. So God knows information that we do not have access to, and God knows the truth if we are presented with false information. For example, in Joshua chapter 9 when the Gibeonites lied to Joshua about their proximity to Israel, God condemned Joshua for not asking God what to do with them, because Joshua merely judged based on the appearance of the

⁶⁹ James George Samra, *God Told Me: Who to Marry, Where to Work, Which Car to Buy – and I’m Pretty Sure I’m Not Crazy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 49-50.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 52-54.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 54-56.

Gibeonites and trusted them when he should not have.⁷³ So God's exhaustive present knowledge can help us make better choices than relying on our own limited knowledge.

And finally, if God knows us better than we know ourselves, then God knows what is most likely to make us the most satisfied, when we often do not know what it is we want for ourselves. We might think we would be happy with much wealth, but maybe God knows we actually would be happier with less. Or maybe the future we imagine for ourselves might be less than what God wants us to aim for.⁷⁴ However, all these good reasons to trust God's guidance does not mean that we will not experience suffering by following God's leading:

Does this mean that when we seek guidance from God everything has a storybook ending? Not at all. Jesus listens to the Father and ends up with Judas Iscariot as one of his disciples. Polycarp listens to God and is led to martyrdom... But I can testify that even when God has led us down difficult paths, his guidance has always been better than anything I could ever have imagined.⁷⁵

This view of God's guidance based on his perfect and exhaustive knowledge of the present is not without criticism. Millard Erickson says open theists can only trust that God knows what is best for us right now.⁷⁶ But this must mean that God could possibly point us down a path that he later regrets, and so Erickson says that open theists must rely on their own ability to predict the future.⁷⁷ However, Erickson forgets that because God is much more intelligent and has more thorough knowledge of the present than we do, we should expect that God can

⁷³ Samra, *God Told Me*, 56-57.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁷⁶ Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 211.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

predict the future much better than we can, even if there is still some uncertainty involved even for God. So even if there is no guarantee that things will go as we want and as God wants, it is still better to trust God's guidance than our own.

Another criticism by divine determinists is that at least divine determinists can have confidence in what God has told them, and do not have to constantly reassess God's guidance to see if it is still valid, so they can trust that it is valid until God says something else.⁷⁸ However, this is not any different than it would be for the open theist. In the open view, God could see how well his guidance is working out and would know if he needs to provide new guidance to account for any new unforeseen developments. Therefore, both divine determinists and open theists need to be sensitive to seeking God's guidance continually, as both could expect God to give a new piece of guidance that is different than God's previous guidance. It is just that to the divine determinist it was always God's eternal plan to provide one piece of guidance first and then another piece later, whereas to the open theist God's guidance would be seen as flexible and adapting to changing circumstances that were not completely foreseeable. But either way the result is the same in that both must be ready for changes in God's guidance. In the example of knowing who to marry, a divine determinist might believe that God has picked the person that they will spend the rest of their life with and never question it again as long as things keep going well. But as seen in Boyd's example of Suzanne, divine determinists can experience divorce also, and it can trouble them much more than it would trouble an open theist. Yet both open theists and divine determinists would not have to keep checking every day with God "Do you

⁷⁸ Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 212.

still want me to stay married to this person?”, but if issues come up which are not able to be resolved and the situation becomes harmful, both divine determinists and open theists would probably start to ask God if they should remain in the relationship or not. Similarly, if one feels that they are led to a specific job, they would not ask every day “Should I go to work today?”, but if they find that after some time the job is not working out the way they had expected or the negatives outweigh the positives, they might start to question whether God has new guidance for them regarding keeping the job or leaving.

Overall, Pinnock believes the difference for divine guidance in open theism is that open theists trust God’s faithfulness and resourcefulness rather than God’s eternally predetermined plan: “This truth certainly summons us to rely on God’s faithfulness and resourcefulness to work things out and not on a divine crystal ball. We have to trust God and not an abstract omniscience as our guarantee.”⁷⁹ He criticizes those who would rather trust an impersonal plan for their lives rather than having faith in the living and dynamic person of God, when he says: “I have no remedy for those who wish to walk by sight because they find the way of faith too unnerving.”⁸⁰ Jesus warned his disciples that they would face persecution and suffering (Mark 13:9), and said that in this world we will experience difficulties and trials (John 16:33). Thus, even if we are not guaranteed in this life that everything will go perfectly for us by following God’s guidance, we can trust that in the end, all things will work together for the good of those who love God (Rom. 8:28), as every tear will be wiped away (Rev. 21:4), and will

⁷⁹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 52.

⁸⁰ Pinnock, “From Augustine to Arminius,” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 28.

live forever with God in restored creation which will be beyond compare with our present suffering (Rom. 8:18).

It Does Not Get God Completely off the Hook for Evil

Even if God does not know what evil may happen in the future, divine determinists say that open theism's emphasis on God's exhaustive present knowledge would still make God guilty for not preventing evil that he is relatively certain will occur given the conditions in the present. It is argued that

in light of even the twentieth century's horrific display of atrocities it is difficult to take seriously the claim that by God's infinite intelligence (which includes God's "virtually certain" knowledge of all that might occur), God is thereby able to "intervene and alter what would otherwise come to pass."⁸¹

For example, regarding the Holocaust, why did God not notice the changes in Hitler's character over time and allow him to be fatally shot in WWI, or allow one of the assassination plots against him to succeed, as these would not have required overriding human free will?⁸² Or, regarding the terrorist attack on the World Trade Towers, God would have known the plans of the terrorists and would have seen them carrying out each step of their plans, yet did nothing to stop them.⁸³

Therefore, divine determinists say that even the open theists must admit that God has two wills, in the sense that God wills what he specifically commands, but also wills what he permits to occur. If God allows an action, even a morally evil action, to be freely done by a person, in some sense God must will

⁸¹ Ware, "Rejoinder to Replies," 252.

⁸² Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 193.

⁸³ James Larsen, "When Bad Things Happen to Innocent People: Open Theism and the Problem of Evil" Master of Theology thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2006, 27.

it because God allows it to happen and does not prevent it.⁸⁴ After all, if God did not want a specific action to occur, then God would have stopped it, perhaps by killing the person about to do the evil act, or by distracting them from completing the evil action.⁸⁵ Thus, divine determinists claim that God's permission must extend not just to the freedom to choose a variety of actions, but God must will each specific action, even if that action is evil.⁸⁶ Therefore, they say that the open theists must either "acknowledge that God's gift of freedom is not unconditional, or acknowledge that he may be incapable of preventing any given instance of evil."⁸⁷ Some divine determinists go even further and argue that if God does not choose to prevent evil when he could, it would make God arbitrary or capricious, and would prove he is not working in the best interest of those that he says he loves.⁸⁸ If this accusation were true, it would reduce the goodness of God's character, which is key for open theism's theodicy.

In response to this argument, open theists argue that divine determinists themselves cannot use the two wills of God concept in their own theodicy. The deterministic idea that everything which happens is due to God's unconditional, completely effective decrees, which occur in such a way as to control our desires so that we always do what God wants (compatibilistic free will), is inconsistent with the concept of permission (the idea that God lets us do what we want even if it goes against his will), as nothing can go against God's will if he is the one who

⁸⁴ Helm, *The Providence of God*, 132.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 192.

⁸⁸ Helseth, "God Causes All Things," in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, 47-48.

made us to want to do something that goes against God's will.⁸⁹ God could only "permit" actions that he does not will if he does not have complete control over a person's free will.⁹⁰ So the divine determinists criticize the open theists for saying God permits evil, when the determinists themselves could be accused of saying that God specifically wills – and thus causes – all evil, which is even worse.

Moreover, there is a rebuttal to the argument that God is guilty for not preventing evil he sees occurring or can predict is likely to occur. Even if God may intervene occasionally, say to prevent the "worst" moral evils, then since we would be unaware of this worst evil that God prevented, we would demand that he also prevent the next-worst moral evils that we see occurring. This would continue in a cycle until we would expect God to prevent all moral evil. But if God did this, then we would essentially be asking him to override all human free will, which would mean that no moral choices would be possible.⁹¹ Therefore, it is understandable that God does not prevent all moral evil (even if he may have prevented worse evils that we are unaware of), because to prevent all evil would override all human free will. Pinnock argues that God does not revoke freedom whenever a creature wants to use it in a way that goes against God's will, because

to prevent his creatures working evil would be to act against the liberty God gave them and removing that freedom would show that God was not serious in giving it in the first place. He made a kind of covenant of non-coercion with creatures, which involved the necessity of his enduring their decisions as free agents for a time. Thus, he also accepted the need to work around their evil influences.⁹²

⁸⁹ Cottrell, "The Nature of Divine Sovereignty," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 106.

⁹⁰ Rice, "Exhaustive Divine Sovereignty: A Practical Critique," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 202-203.

⁹¹ Bruce Reichenbach, "God Limits His Power," in *Predestination & Free Will*, 122.

⁹² Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 136.

So if God desires that we exercise free will to love and obey him, then he must accept that since we are free, we will not always use our free will in the way he wants and in order to honour that, he must not override the negative consequences that arise from the misuse of free will. Although God could theoretically override all free will so that there would be no evil, Pinnock says, “God is moved by love to restrain the divine power, temporarily and voluntarily, out of respect for the integrity of creatures, even creatures whose activities fall short of God’s purposes.”⁹³ Pinnock compares God to the father in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son, and notes that the father respects the rebellious son’s freedom by giving him the inheritance, yet hopes that his love will melt the son’s resistance away.⁹⁴ Thus, God voluntarily limits the use of his power in order that he can make love real, as love cannot be compelled or forced,⁹⁵ and a side-effect is that God allows those who wish to use their freedom to rebel against God to do so for a time, hoping they will be drawn back by God’s love, realize their errors, and repent.

However, what if God could override our intentions to do evil in a way that does not take away our freedom? Walter J. Schultz claims that it is possible for God to allow libertarian freedom and still prevent all moral evil, based on evidence from recent studies in neuroscience regarding decision-making.⁹⁶ He says God could interrupt the decision making process at the point between when a person forms the intent to act, and when they perform the actual action itself (as God becomes aware of a person’s intention to act and intervenes faster than it

⁹³ Pinnock, “Constrained by Love,” 150.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁹⁶ Walter J. Schultz, “‘No-Risk’ Libertarian Freedom; A Refutation of the Free-Will Defense,” *Philosophia Christi* 10, no. 1 (2008): 183.

takes for the person to complete the action), and so in effect it would be no different for the person than imagining taking an action that one never got around to doing.⁹⁷ Yet the person would still be morally responsible for having an evil intention even if God prevented them from completing the evil action.⁹⁸

However, Pinnock would disagree with the above argument, as he says that God voluntarily makes himself vulnerable by limiting his own power, in order to share power with free creatures who have self-determination, and this gives creatures “room” to rebel against God.⁹⁹ Therefore, if God shares power and gives room to rebel, God must allow creatures to act out this rebellion by using their freedom to perform real actions that go against God’s will. Even Millard Erickson who is not an open theist agrees with Pinnock, and says,

Libertarian freedom must include the power of actions to carry to their consequences. If not it is a rather spurious form of freedom... This would seem to be a denial of freedom, not in the sense of precluding the action, but of negating its intended effect.¹⁰⁰

So if God interrupts a person’s thought to shoot a gun, it is denying that person the right to use their freedom to have a real effect in the world. Even if God let them go through with it but then miraculously diverted all the bullets from hitting an innocent person, it would still be overriding the shooter’s freedom.¹⁰¹ Richard Rice agrees, and says,

God must respect the consequences to which our actions lead. For actions to have real integrity, they must have real results. After all, freedom is more than making a decision, it also involves making a difference.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Schultz, “‘No-Risk’ Libertarian Freedom,” 185-192.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 194.

⁹⁹ Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in *The Openness of God*, 115.

¹⁰⁰ Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 194-195.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 195.

¹⁰² Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 100.

So God does not intervene to override free will (even if he theoretically could, as Schultz argues) as this would take away our ability to make a real difference in the world, for good or for evil, and being able to make a difference is a critical aspect of freedom. While Pinnock admits it is risky to allow the world to be affected by creaturely power in ways of which God does not approve, God allows it because it also allows for genuine relationship.¹⁰³

Additionally, Pinnock says some causes for evil are simply the conditions of the natural world, which God does not override:

As creator, God cannot and will not scrap the conditions, including the stable natural environment required to sustain life, which underlie the project. Heat and cold are good things but not in excess. Learning to cope with dangers is positive but can lead to accidents. Some evils are the unavoidable by-products of an orderly natural process which is life giving and at the same time gives opportunity for noble responses.¹⁰⁴

As creation is under God's curse since the fall of Adam, we should not expect living conditions to be as hospitable as they were in the garden of Eden, and so some extremes in temperature or weather will exist that will be harmful for human life. Natural processes will occur that will cause natural disasters. And if one happens to fall into water, because of the nature of physics and human physiology, there is a possibility of drowning. Finally, remember that Pinnock recognizes that some evil which occurs is due to spiritual warfare, as seen earlier in Chapter 3.

Additionally, even divine determinist Paul Helm believes that it is not obvious that permitting evil to occur is evil in itself, because if it did then it would

¹⁰³ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God*, 115.

¹⁰⁴ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 136.

lead to a problem for both the open theist and divine determinist theodicies.¹⁰⁵

This argument is also made by John Feinberg, who notes that in typical theories of theodicy, God is able to either eliminate evil or give people free will (or some other benefit), but God cannot do both and this is not guilty for not doing both.¹⁰⁶

So open theists say that God desired to create creatures with libertarian free will in order to make relationships with God genuine, which means that it was not possible for God to eliminate the chance that people would misuse this free will to do evil. However, “God is lovingly at work, moment to moment, to maximize good and minimize evil as much as possible given that he must work around the irrevocable free will of humans and angels.”¹⁰⁷ So Pinnock and other open theists deny that God is guilty of evil for not preventing evil, and trust that God is working to minimize evil and maximize good, given the conditions of the world and the nature of the free will that he has given to creatures. Also, as suggested earlier, God may indeed prevent significant evil, yet we are unaware of it, as the evil did not happen, and so we should not complain that God is not preventing all evil.

And finally, we must admit that Pinnock does appeal to a version of the “greater good” argument regarding why God allows evil.¹⁰⁸ Pinnock speculates that even if God could have prevented certain evil people such as Hitler and Stalin from being born, it might have metaphysically prevented God from making many

¹⁰⁵ Helm, *The Providence of God*, 173.

¹⁰⁶ Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 348.

¹⁰⁷ Boyd, “Response to Paul Kjoss Helseth,” in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, 71.

¹⁰⁸ Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 194.

good people such as Moses, Beethoven, or Mother Theresa.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, as seen earlier, the “greater good” in open theism is allowing people to use their libertarian freedom (in contrast to the simple foreknowledge view where the “greater good” is creating some future “best” world as Geisler argues, and in contrast to bringing some “greater good” out of every specific evil as divine determinists argue). So all three theodicies use some sort of argument based on the “greater good”, they simply vary on what that good is.¹¹⁰ Ultimately, Pinnock simply trusts that God will overcome evil and that all the suffering in the world will be worth it.¹¹¹

It Reduces God’s Glory

While the above discussion explains why God allows evil, divine determinist Bruce Ware argues that even if it were true, open theism is flawed because this view of theodicy reduces God’s glory, for two main reasons.

First, he says that open theism glorifies God only to the extent that God successfully achieves his purposes, despite opposition by free agents. However, if God’s glory depends on how well God achieves his purposes, then God’s glory could be reduced if God fails in achieving all of his purposes:

¹⁰⁹ Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 194. See the quote Erickson refers to here in Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 140.

¹¹⁰ Even Karl Barth’s theodicy, which is not discussed in this thesis, and which says evil should be outright impossible if God created the world and humanity perfectly good (unlike open theism which says God created the possibility of evil by giving creatures libertarian freedom), ends up saying that sin and evil (specifically, the fall of humanity) was necessary and predestined in order for God to have a deeper relationship with humanity, and through the reconciliation effected by Jesus on the cross to bless humanity with greater eschatological restoration than would have been possible if humanity had never sinned. Thus it too uses a “greater good” argument. See Robert Scott Rodin, “A Study of the Doctrine of Evil and Theodicy in the Theology of Karl Barth” (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 1993), 98-102.

¹¹¹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 140.

God, in the openness model, *is worthy of glory to the degree to which he succeeds, and unworthy of glory to the degree to which he fails*. For if it is the case that God is glorified precisely through the display of his resourcefulness to direct free creatures to freely choose his way, then it stands to reason that he deserves credit (glory) when his persuasion succeeds but not so when his persuasion fails (remember, it is the *resourcefulness to make it work* that is commended). So, not only is God's glory and our good tied to the exercise of moral freedom; the *degree of glory* and *degree of good* are likewise inextricably connected to the kinds of choices freedom produces.¹¹²

So for example, if God fails to prevent horrible evil, or if God does not get as many people to freely worship him as he wants, then God is a failure and less glorious than if he were more successful. Ware says that just looking around and seeing what bad shape the world is in should be an indication to open theists that God is currently failing to achieve his purposes.¹¹³ Therefore, Ware argues that the open theist view that God does not get everything he wants because free creatures can oppose him and resist his will makes God less attractive to worship because people will see him as a failure.¹¹⁴ He also says that given God's current success rate, including the original fall of humanity and how all of history has proceeded since then, how can we trust that God will actually win in the end, when it seems like God has failed so many times in the past?¹¹⁵

However, recalling Pinnock's explanation of God's omnipotence, it seems Ware is over-exaggerating the issue here. First, as discussed previously, Pinnock argues that no creature can perpetually thwart God's will, and so while there is temporary resistance to God, because God is the most resourceful, intelligent, and wise being, he is guaranteed to win in the end – the only question is when and

¹¹² Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 222.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

how God will win. Second, perhaps re-examining God's purposes is in order. While it may temporarily look like God is failing, creation with its suffering and evil is ultimately going to be worthwhile as God will finally achieve a group of people who freely choose to love him, which is ultimately what God wants. Pinnock says that while God does want things to go well in this world, ultimately God wants people to freely choose to love him and become the sorts of people who develop Christ-like character.¹¹⁶ As seen in the previous section, because freedom is necessary to achieve that purpose, God has to tolerate the evil which occurs as a result of free-will. So it seems Ware's comments are overly influenced by his deterministic views, as if God has very specific desires for every event on earth and is a "failure" whenever anyone sins or something happens on the small scale that God does not want. In contrast, Pinnock looks at God's long-term plans, and on scale of eternity God will be ultimately successful and will be glorified, even if temporarily not everything goes how God wants. Pinnock writes,

Of course we wonder how God can, apart from exhaustive foreknowledge and in light of libertarian freedom, bring about the victory. The answer is that God has promised a new creation. It is not necessary to win every single skirmish and know every single detail ahead of time in order to deliver on his promise.¹¹⁷

Therefore, God would only be a "failure" in open theism if at the end of history absolutely no-one has chosen to freely love him. The temporary setbacks that happen along the way should not be seen as failures, but as unfortunate by-products of the freedom which is necessary to achieve God's ultimate purpose.

Pinnock says that

¹¹⁶ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 176.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

the full display of God's sovereignty would not be a present reality but something to come at the end of history, when his glory is revealed, rather than at the present time, when the Spirit suffers with us and the universe groans.¹¹⁸

So while Ware expects God's glory and sovereignty to be seen in the current world, Pinnock says that God's glory and sovereignty will only be fully revealed at the end of history.

Also, a shift in perspective could be useful. John Feinberg suggests that instead of focusing on how bad things are in the world, maybe we should focus on what goes right and works out well:

It is easy to focus on what is going wrong. But when you stop to think about it, it is truly amazing that in a world where Satan is so dominant and sin so rampant anything ever goes right. That much does go right is ample evidence of God's grace and goodness to us.¹¹⁹

So instead of blaming God for not preventing evil and calling him a "failure," we should instead give glory and thanks to God for things that do go right in this fallen world, and also thank God that things do not constantly end up as badly as they could.

Additionally, Pinnock would retort that divine determinism does not glorify God, because it tarnishes his character as not fully good and thus reduces God's glory. Recall Pinnock's quote seen earlier that

it astonishes me that people can defend the 'glory' of God so vehemently when that glory includes God's sovereign authorship of every rape and murder, the closing down the future to any meaningful creaturely contribution, and his holding people accountable for deeds he predestined them to do and they could not but do.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God*, 117.

¹¹⁹ Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, 330.

¹²⁰ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 16.

Instead, Pinnock says that God's act of limiting himself in order to allow free creatures to exist actually enhances God's glory as God gets to experience real loving relationships with creatures which "makes possible and renders visible wonderful new forms of God's glory."¹²¹

So it seems that there is a disagreement over what makes God truly glorious – is it his meticulous control over every event, even evil ones, or is it God's ability to achieve his ultimate purpose despite human and demonic opposition, as well as his perfectly-good character? While divine determinists like Ware say God is glorious for the former, and thus less glorious when God does not achieve meticulous control over every event, open theists like Pinnock do not see this as making God less glorious. Instead, Pinnock and other open theists say God's glory comes from his ability to overcome and achieve his ultimate purpose even when contending with free agents who resist, and from how God is able to take those occasions which free agents intended for evil and turn them into occasions for good (yet without foreseeing or foreordaining the evil in question).

The second problem, Ware says, is that even if open theism is able to make God not responsible for the evil that we do, then we can equally say that God is not responsible for the good that we do, which instead gives us the credit for the good things we do.¹²² Ware writes,

It is impossible for the actions of human freedom to be outside of God's control and for God, nonetheless, to get the credit for what good effects were produced by those free actions... That is to say, if God should not take the blame for the evil done by human freedom, then correspondingly

¹²¹ Pinnock, "There Is Room for Us," 214.

¹²² Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 225.

he should not get the credit for the good done equally freely and fully outside his control.¹²³

Essentially, he sees open theism as usurping the glory due to God for our good works and giving it to humans instead. So while there is a role for human involvement, Ware says it is only to joyfully embrace the work that God wills for us to do and has worked in us, and thus God gets the credit when we do the good he wants us to do.¹²⁴

However, it is possible that Pinnock would disagree with Ware's interpretation here. A glimpse of how Pinnock might address this could be seen in his explanation for how despite having libertarian free will, we are not responsible for our own salvation, and thus God gets the credit for our salvation and not us. Pinnock acknowledges that God is the one who initiates relationships with humans through grace, and so

there is a role for human participation in salvation but it is grounded in God's gracious empowering, not in our inherent abilities. Our cooperation is possible because of God's empowering Spirit working within us.¹²⁵

He also says,

The fact that we have to respond to God does not make salvation a matter of works though. There is a difference between earning grace and receiving it. Accepting a gift is not a meritorious act (Rom 4:16). Accepting a gift is not work.¹²⁶

Pinnock thus rejects the divine determinist idea of irresistible grace,¹²⁷ and says that people can reject God's offer of salvation, and so while we must accept

¹²³ Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 226.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹²⁵ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 164.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

salvation on our behalf, it is not a work and thus we do not deserve credit for our own salvation.

Others also agree with this argument. Norman Geisler, while he is not an open theist, argues that “no free human act can move toward God or do any spiritual good without the aid of his grace.”¹²⁸ Geisler also quotes W.G.T. Shedd who says that “man is responsible for sin because he is both the author and the actor of it; but he is not responsible for holiness, because he is only the actor and not the author.”¹²⁹ So even moderate Calvinists do not agree with Ware that attributing evil to misplaced human will also means that God does not get glory for the spiritual good that humans do.

So in a similar way, Pinnock and other open theists could say that while we are responsible for our choices to obey God and do good works, if part of the motivation for doing good works is the Holy Spirit working in us to conform us to the image of Christ and to produce the fruit of the spirit in us, we could see that while we were the ones who made a choice to obey God and do the good work, ultimately we only did the good work because of the Holy Spirit’s motivation and inspiration. Additionally, open theists could say we only had the opportunity to do a good work because of the abilities and resources that God has given us, or due to a situation which God was able to orchestrate for us to be in, and so God is the one who has prepared the good works we will do, and we just have to choose to walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). Pinnock mentions this verse and says “God has planned that good works be done and it is up to us to do them... We bear primary

¹²⁸ Geisler, *Chosen but Free*, 48.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

responsibility for what is or is not done.”¹³⁰ Thus God still gets the glory for the good works we do, while at the same time we are held responsible for our obedience and so we will be rewarded for the good things we do in this life (2 Corinthians 5:10). Therefore, Ware’s charge that open theism takes away the glory for good works from God is incorrect.

It is Not the Best Interpretation of Scripture

Finally, there are two issues involving Pinnock’s interpretations of Scripture to which divine determinists object. The first is how Pinnock takes some verses literally which say that God changed his mind or does not know some things about the future, while the divine determinists say these verses are metaphors, anthropomorphic descriptions of God, or God accommodating human understanding. The second issue relates to disagreements over how to interpret verses which the divine determinists say prove that God directly ordains or causes evil.¹³¹

Regarding the first issue, divine determinists argue that proper scriptural interpretation means we take verses such as Ephesians 1:11, which says God works all things according to his will (which they interpret as meaning God directly controls everything) as normative and that any verses which are claimed to support open theism must be interpreted accordingly.¹³² This principle also applies to the verses about God’s foreknowledge, where they argue that

the statements about the extent and intensity of God’s knowledge, power and goodness must control the anthropomorphic and weaker statements,

¹³⁰ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 169.

¹³¹ Talbot, “All the Good that is Ours in Christ,” in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 41-47.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 44.

and not vice versa. The alternative approach would appear to be quite unacceptable, for it would result in a theological reductionism in which God is distilled to human proportions.¹³³

Divine determinists say the verses which appear to show that God changes his mind, repents, or does not know what people will do are not literally true. Instead, “God uses such language to accommodate himself to human incapacity and weakness.”¹³⁴ This is because God needs to represent himself to humans in a way that shows he can respond and act in space and time, since “only on such an understanding is it possible to provide for that divine-human interaction which is at the heart of Biblical religion.”¹³⁵ They also say that when the Bible records God as changing his mind about how to deal with people, such as giving Hezekiah additional years of life, or saving Nineveh from destruction, they are not examples of God truly changing his mind, but they only “appear” to be God changing his mind.¹³⁶ Essentially, these sorts of arguments could make it appear that God has to lie to us (because of our human weakness and finitude) in order to make it appear that there is the possibility of dynamic relationships between God and creatures, even though in reality everything has been foreordained and thus God does not genuinely respond to anything we do.

In response, Pinnock argues that he found clear Biblical evidence that God actually does change his mind. He writes,

I began to notice how the prophets in the Old Testament would present God as considering the future as something he did not already know fully. God is presented as saying, ‘Perhaps they will understand,’ or ‘Perhaps they will repent,’ making it sound as if God is not altogether sure about the

¹³³ Helm, *The Providence of God*, 52.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 53.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 138.

future and what he may have to do when it reveals itself (Jer. 3:7; Ezek. 12:3). I also detected a strong conditional element in God's speech; for example, 'If you change your ways, I will let you dwell in this place, but if not...' (Jer. 7:5-7). These are future possibilities that are seen to hang upon the people's amendment of their ways, and what God will do (and therefore knows) depends on these outcomes.¹³⁷

Pinnock argues that it is not proper to dismiss the texts that say God changes his mind as being metaphorical, because to do so is essentially to make oneself and one's own preconceptions the judge of Scripture. For example, Pinnock is critical of Calvin and says,

Calvin knew, or thought he knew, that God cannot repent or be surprised, hence if such a thing is said it must be a case of God lisping. He knew the truth about God independently of the Bible and could judge when the Bible spoke in childish ways.¹³⁸

This comes across as highly arrogant – as if Calvin thought he was so intelligent that he can know when God is accommodating his speech to us and when God is not. But if it is the case that some humans are intelligent enough to not need accommodation, then God would not have to accommodate himself to us, and also if even God's accommodations need to be explained by someone like Calvin then clearly these accommodations are not helping us understand the truth about God as God had intended.¹³⁹

So instead, Pinnock argues that

there is no antinomy here... There are not two sets of texts – one affirming exhaustive sovereignty and the other affirming human freedom. That would create a contradiction. We are not asked to believe that God exercises all-controlling sovereignty and still holds human beings morally responsible. The Bible is coherent and the contradiction is imaginary. All-controlling sovereignty is not taught in Scripture. There may be mysteries that go beyond human intelligence but this is not one of them. One can

¹³⁷ Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 26.

¹³⁸ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 67.

¹³⁹ Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 98.

hold both to divine sovereignty and human freedom because sovereignty is not all-controlling. The Bible, not rationalism, leads to this solution.¹⁴⁰

Pinnock does say that while all language about God is metaphorical, his problem is not with the metaphors but with how the truth that these metaphors communicate are ignored by divine determinists.¹⁴¹ Gregory Boyd agrees, and says that the divine determinists' interpretive approach leads to an arbitrary "canon within the canon" with some verses seen as true and others seen as less true, misleading, or even downright deceptive.¹⁴² Additionally, Boyd argues that while the anthropomorphic verses about God's eyes or arms are clearly metaphors meant to express something about God, the verses that say God changes his mind cannot be taken metaphorically as one cannot "metaphorically" change one's mind; it has to correspond to some sort of reality or else it would be deceptive.¹⁴³

Therefore, Pinnock argues that it is unfair to question his orthodoxy when other divine determinists who are considered orthodox take parts of the Bible less seriously than he does.¹⁴⁴ Additionally, he notes that many divine determinist theologians promote the popular Biblical interpretation principle to "interpret texts literally unless there were good reason not to do so," yet Pinnock criticizes these authors for ignoring their own principle and humorously says "apparently there is an amendment now – we take it literally if it agrees with our dogmatic stance!"¹⁴⁵ In contrast, Pinnock says open theists "try to take all the texts seriously and deal with the impression that the whole Scripture creates. We try to reject

¹⁴⁰ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 55-56.

¹⁴¹ Pinnock, "Response to Part 2," in *Reconstructing Theology*, 148.

¹⁴² Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 98-99.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 99 ; also see Pinnock's longer argument about interpretation of metaphors in Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 61-64.

¹⁴⁴ Pinnock, "Response to Part 2," in *Reconstructing Theology*, 148.

¹⁴⁵ Pinnock, "Open Theism: An Answer to My Critics," 243.

ideologies which require some texts to be authoritative and other texts to be disregarded.”¹⁴⁶

Pinnock does recognize that there might be a few verses out of the many thousands in the Bible which might “embarrass” open theism, just as there are verses which “embarrass” other views.¹⁴⁷ In an earlier work, Pinnock says that “the Calvinist’s proof texts are difficulties for Wesleyan reader, and the other way around,”¹⁴⁸ and “the Calvinist will want the Bible to be Reformed, and Wesleyan will want it to be Wesleyan.”¹⁴⁹ But instead of trying to squeeze the Bible into one particular theological system, Pinnock says he accepts the theological diversity in the Bible which exists as a result of the dialog of many voices and a long struggle to understand God, and thus says we should listen to the Bible like a conversation and not use it merely as a source for proof texts.¹⁵⁰ He says the complicated nature of the Biblical witness “means I cannot claim that the Bible teaches the open view of God or any other subject simply and straightforwardly such that there is no counter testimony which probes and questions and objects.”¹⁵¹ But Pinnock does claim that “the overwhelming impression the Bible leaves us with is one of significant human freedom and dynamic divine sovereignty.”¹⁵² However, as pointed out by Millard J. Erickson, both divine determinists and open theists have

¹⁴⁶ Pinnock, “Open Theism: An Answer to My Critics,” 243.

¹⁴⁷ Pinnock, “God Limits His Knowledge,” in *Predestination & Free Will*, 158.

¹⁴⁸ Pinnock with Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 134.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁵⁰ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 21.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Pinnock, “God Limits His Knowledge,” in *Predestination & Free Will*, 158

areas in scriptural interpretation where each is strong and where each is lacking, and so more work is needed in this area on both sides.¹⁵³

Regarding the second issue, divine determinists argue that there are verses which say that God controls evil, and even controls demons and Satan. They argue that

it isn't just that God manages to turn the evil aspects of our world to good for those who love him; it is rather that he himself brings about these evil aspects for his glory (see Ex. 9:13-16; John 9:3) and his people's good (see Heb.12:3-11; James 1:2-4).¹⁵⁴

For example, Norman Geisler refers to 1 Kings 22:19-22 which he believes shows that God sent an evil spirit to lie to Ahab's prophets in order to persuade Ahab to attack Ramoth.¹⁵⁵ He also says that the story of Job shows that God had to give permission to Satan to test Job, or else Satan could not have had power to affect Job.¹⁵⁶ Geisler argues that God has power to bind Satan whenever he wants to, since God is able to bind Satan at will for 1000 years in Revelation 20:2.

Therefore, he concludes that "while he [Satan] is presently roaming the earth (1 Peter 5:8), he does so only on a leash held firmly by God's sovereign hand."¹⁵⁷

This verse could be interpreted to mean that Satan can only do what God allows him to do, and so God is in control of Satan. Other verses that are claimed to show that God controls evil are Proverbs 16:4: "The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil," and Ecclesiastes 7:14: "When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has

¹⁵³ Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 238-248.

¹⁵⁴ Talbot, "All the Good that is Ours in Christ," in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 42.

¹⁵⁵ Geisler, *Chosen but Free*, 28.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

made the one as well as the other.”¹⁵⁸ Also, Isaiah 45:7 where God says “I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things,” and Amos 3:6: “...When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?”¹⁵⁹ There is also the case of the evil spirit which was sent by God to torment Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-23), an another spirit sent by God that “caused the leaders of Shechem to deal treacherously with King Abimelech” (Judges 9:23).¹⁶⁰ One verse even suggests that God will send delusions which make people believe lies which lead to their condemnation (2 Thessalonians 2:11).¹⁶¹ Then there are the examples in the Old Testament of God destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, God sending the plagues of Egypt, God sending the poisonous snakes to the Israelites (Numbers 21:6), and God sending a pestilence that kills many Israelites (2 Samuel 24:15). All these examples lead Mark Talbot to claim that “open theists are trying to let God off the hook for evil. But God doesn’t want to be let off the hook.”¹⁶² Because of his belief that God ordains absolutely everything that happens, Talbot concludes that “when even the worst of evils befalls us, they do not ultimately come from anywhere other than God’s hand.”¹⁶³

Pinnock does address some of these verses and interprets them by looking at them in their context. For example, he says Isaiah 45:7 refers not to evil in general but to Israel’s deliverance from Babylon, and Amos 3:6 is referring to

¹⁵⁸ Talbot, “All the Good that is Ours in Christ,” in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, 42.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

judgement on a city for sin, not disasters in general.¹⁶⁴ When Lamentations 3:38 claims “is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?”, Pinnock says this refers to the Babylonian exile, not evil in general, and when God says to Moses in Exodus 4:11, “Who makes the mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I the Lord?” it does not mean that God causes disabilities but that God can use imperfect people to achieve his purposes.¹⁶⁵ Pinnock speaks approvingly of John Sanders’ lengthy and detailed Biblical exegesis in his book *The God Who Risks*,¹⁶⁶ in which Sanders addresses some of these verses in a similar way to Pinnock, and although space precludes its discussion here, Sander’s book is recommended if one desires to do further reading on how open theists interpret these sorts of verses.

The question of God’s relationship to evil could also be seen in how God appears to use evil means to express his wrath and judgement. For example, it might easily appear that God acted in an evil manner when he destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, or when he sent the worldwide flood, as these events inflicted suffering and death on God’s creatures. Erickson says that open theists have historically rarely addressed verses regarding God’s wrath and judgement which are often seen as existing in tension with God’s nature as love.¹⁶⁷ Yet Pinnock does address God’s wrath, and says that God’s wrath is real and is a result of God’s love:

When we refuse love’s offer, God manifests himself to us in another way – as wrath. God becomes wrathful because he loves us. God would not

¹⁶⁴ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 55.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶⁷ Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, 217.

become angry if he was not loving...God becomes angry because he is love. He does not become wrathful spontaneously out of his nature. Rather he reacts to evil and it is in his dealings with faithless creatures that God becomes what he was not previously, i.e. angry.¹⁶⁸

In his book *The Scripture Principle*, Pinnock spends several pages discussing the common objection to how a good God could command Israel to wipe out the Canaanites. Pinnock notes that the Canaanites had a very evil culture which promoted child sacrifice and religious prostitution, and so God was acting in a holy and just way to punish their sin, and also protect Israel from their evil influence which could have jeopardized Israel's relationship with God.¹⁶⁹ Regarding the imprecatory psalms that cry out for God to dash enemies' babies' heads against rocks (Psalm 137:9), as well as the martyrs' cries for God to bring vengeance on their enemies (Revelation 6:10), Pinnock says these difficult verses must be interpreted within the larger context of God's justice, where God is vindicating his own reputation and bringing deserved punishment on those who continue to reject him.¹⁷⁰ Regarding the difficult commandments in the Old Testament to put to death various groups of people including murderers, homosexuals, adulterers, witches, and incorrigible youths, Pinnock suggests that God's good reason for these laws was to protect Israelite society from the serious negative consequences of these practices.¹⁷¹ Some of these violent commandments were not God's plans for the ideal society, but were given because of the Israelites culture at that time and the reality of sin, much like how

¹⁶⁸ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 82-83.

¹⁶⁹ Pinnock with Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 139.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

Jesus says God allowed divorce not as an ideal but only as a concession to human sin.¹⁷²

So God could be justified in using evil as a judgement on those who have rejected him for several reasons, provided he is doing it out of love and not arbitrarily or maliciously. Pinnock says God does not become angry and wrathful spontaneously, but it arises out of his nature as love, because God is not indifferent to spiritual adultery and because God has an interest in our well-being; if God did not love us then God would not become angry when we sin.¹⁷³ Pinnock would likely agree with Gregory Boyd, who says that while God did use evil to punish Israel when Israel disobeyed, it was only as the lesser of two evils and God is sad when it must happen, as God does not enjoy destroying anyone.¹⁷⁴ Boyd also notes that Israel received punishment from God because God used rewards and punishments to teach Israel what it meant to be a faithful covenant partner – it does not mean that God uses evil to punish people in general.¹⁷⁵ Pinnock quotes Volf who says that evildoers will ultimately experience God’s terror not because of their sin but because they have persisted in rejecting God’s love shown in Jesus.¹⁷⁶ So perhaps God’s wrath revealed in the judgements in the book of Revelation, for example, can be seen as a combination of the above – disciplining those who continue to reject God, but also using suffering to try to convince those

¹⁷² Pinnock with Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 138.

¹⁷³ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 82-83.

¹⁷⁴ Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 68. Also see Pinnock with Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 140 where Pinnock refers to Ezekiel 33:11 which says God does not delight in punishing sinners.

¹⁷⁵ Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 82. Pinnock does use the word “punish” when he translates Rev. 3:19 as “I punish all whom I love,” in Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 82. Yet it should be noted that major Bible translations use the words “reprove and discipline” (ESV), “rebuke and discipline” (NIV), or “rebuke and chasten” (KJV) in this verse, and not “punish” as Pinnock does.

¹⁷⁶ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 83.

that God loves to turn to him (as some may turn to God only when they are in dire straits).

But what about the specific verses that suggest that God uses and controls evil and Satan, such as those in the book of Job? Pinnock does not examine the book of Job in detail, but does say that Job is “a literary composition in the form of a long, dramatic poem that grapples with the problem of evil in human existence.”¹⁷⁷ Boyd agrees with Pinnock’s interpretation of Job, and expands on this idea which makes it possible to interpret Job in a way that does not affirm that God controls Satan. Since it is a poem, Boyd says the first few verses are simply setting up the narrative context of Job’s trials, and so it is erroneous to try use these verses to answer questions such as “does Satan always have to get specific permission every time he does something” or “is every affliction the result of a heavenly challenge to God’s authority?”¹⁷⁸ He sees the book of Job as similar to Jesus’ parables, where what matters is the central point, not peripheral details.¹⁷⁹ Boyd believes that the overall theme of the book of Job actually argues against the divine determinist view that everything happens because God willed it. This is shown when God corrects Job’s friends’ theology who said that God was punishing or disciplining Job because he was unrighteous.¹⁸⁰ But God also corrects Job’s mistaken theology which claimed God was the source of his

¹⁷⁷ Pinnock with Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 143.

¹⁷⁸ Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 86.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 86-87. For example, Boyd argues that in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, we are not meant to believe that those in heaven can see and talk to those in hell – the point is that those who had rejected the revelation they had in this life would not believe even if they saw a miracle like Lazarus coming back to life.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 87-89.

trouble.¹⁸¹ Boyd argues that Job 42:11 which is often interpreted to imply that God caused Job's problems actually does not, and instead it simply expresses the ancient middle-eastern view of a sovereign monarch who took ultimate responsibility for everything done by their subordinates, even if the actions were not according to the monarch's will.¹⁸² So God takes ultimate responsibility for all that occurs since he was the creator of free agents and created a world where evil was possible, but it does not mean it was all his will or that God is morally implicated in evil.¹⁸³ Ultimately, God took responsibility for evil by overcoming it on the cross, and we see in Jesus' life that he healed those who were afflicted like Job, which indicates it was not Jesus' will that they suffer.¹⁸⁴ Boyd says that although Job depicts God as cruel, tyrannous, and arbitrary,¹⁸⁵ Job passes God's test because despite this mistaken view of God, Job does not reject God.¹⁸⁶ Yet God corrects Job's faulty theology during his speech from the whirlwind by referring to how little humans can understand about the universe, the complexity of nature, and the types of chaos that God has to deal with.¹⁸⁷ Also, in God's references to Behemoth, Leviathan, and the chaotic sea all found in the book of Job, God is indicating that there are powerful forces of evil at work with which he must contend.¹⁸⁸ So Boyd concludes that

We don't know and can't know why particular harmful events unfold exactly as they do. What we can know, however is why we can't know: it's not because God's plan or character is mysterious but because we are

¹⁸¹ Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 90.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 99-101.

finite humans in an incomprehensibly vast creation that is afflicted by forces of chaos.¹⁸⁹

Therefore, he says the book of Job should show us not that there is something flawed with God's character but that something else is going on in the relationship between God and evil that we do not fully understand.¹⁹⁰

Finally, one other factor that must be considered when interpreting these difficult Old Testament verses is the addition of the New Testament. Pinnock argues that there is progressive revelation in the Bible, meaning that God's truth is revealed slowly over time, and that God often starts where people are at and does what he can with them.¹⁹¹ Therefore, Pinnock says "the Bible itself indicates a certain weighting of the material by messianically directed revelation...the New Testament must be taken as the key for interpreting the Old Testament."¹⁹² As seen earlier in the section on spiritual warfare in Chapter 3, we cannot accept interpretations that say God causes all evil but Jesus resists evil, because this would mean that Jesus does not perfectly represent God. So this is a strong argument that encourages us to re-examine Old Testament verses that are frequently used to say God causes all evil to see if they can be reinterpreted in a way that is more consistent with God's character as revealed by Jesus.

¹⁸⁹ Boyd, *Is God to Blame?*, 102.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁹¹ Pinnock with Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 138.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 138-139.

Conclusion

As shown by the analysis in this thesis, open theism as described by Clark Pinnock does have several major advantages over divine determinism for theodicy. Pinnock argues that open theism makes it easier to believe that God is fully good because evil is due to creaturely misuse of God-given free will, instead of being due to God's willing of it. It also means we can take spiritual warfare seriously, without having to attribute demonic activity to God's will, which prevents any contradiction between the Father's and Jesus' wills. This makes it easier to love God if his character is shown to be completely good. Also, Pinnock believes open theism helps Christians to be more motivated to work against evil in the world, since we can trust we are not ruining God's plans to bring greater good out of the evil, and we are held accountable for our action or inaction to fight evil. As seen in some pastoral examples mentioned in this thesis, Pinnock's approach to theodicy can be beneficial to some Christians, as they do not have to blame God for their suffering and do not have to think that God willed horrible evils to occur. This can preserve their trust in God and love for God when they cannot accept the conclusions of divine determinism which imply that God is the ultimate cause of all evil. After examining several points of criticism from divine determinists regarding the implications for open theism and theodicy, it appears that open theists such as Pinnock are able to effectively counter these arguments.

Overall, to open theists such as Pinnock, it is more desirable to give up some certainty over God's specific plans for our future in order to gain the assurance that God is fully good and is not the author of evil in any way. Yet other Christians who choose divine determinism may find more comfort in knowing that everything that occurs to them is God's will, and they may not be as troubled by the idea that God ordains the evil in question because they trust it will be justified by a greater good purpose. However, as seen in this thesis, open theists can still trust that God can work whatever evil befalls us into some sort of good (although in this life it may not be necessarily greater than the evil done to us), and can trust that eternal life with God in heaven will make all suffering in this life ultimately negligible.

This thesis is done with the hope that it demonstrates that open theism can be considered a legitimate evangelical Christian option, as it may be pastorally useful to comfort some Christians who are troubled by the conclusions of the divine determinist view regarding the suffering they face in their lives or the evil that they see in the world. Remember the test put forth in Chapter 1, that "the perceived ability or inability to explain evil is often one of the most important parts of any debate over the superiority of rival theistic systems."¹ The success of open theism in dealing with the issue of theodicy as shown in this thesis and its numerous advantages over divine determinist theodicy indicates that open theism may indeed be a more compelling theological system than divine determinism.

However, further analysis of open theism is still needed in areas such as Biblical interpretation, how to explain specific Biblical prophecies that depend on

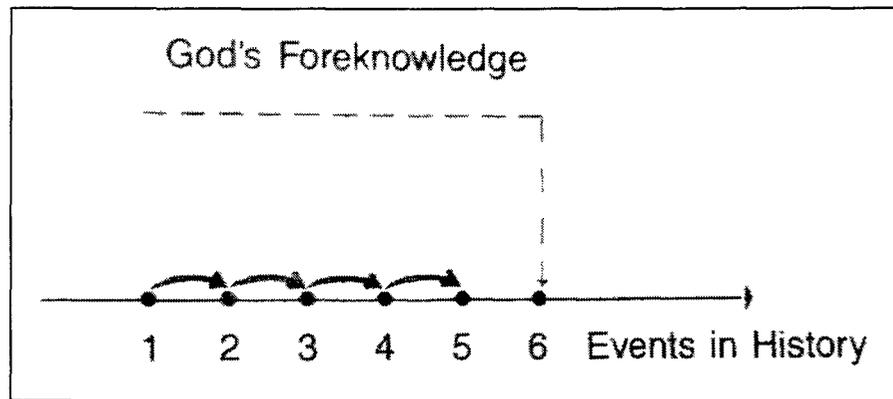
¹ Basinger and Basinger, "Theodicy: A Comparative Analysis," in *Semper Reformandum*, 144.

human cooperation, the philosophical influences behind open theism and divine determinism, God's relationship to time, and the nature of creaturely freedom.

More work in these areas could provide further support that open theism could be a valid orthodox choice for Christians alongside the traditional divine determinist or simple foreknowledge views.

Appendix

An illustration by William Lane Craig of how God's foreknowledge of an event is independent of the reasons that cause that event to occur. This supports his argument that God's foreknowledge merely shows what will happen – it is not one of the factors that causes the event to happen.



Source: William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, 69.

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