Heresy Trial

“Evangelical Theological Society Moves Against Open Theists: Membership of Pinnock and Sanders challenged by due process.”
[Doug Koop, Christianity Today, Nov. 22, 2002]

“In the present debate, that of openness theology, ETS again finds itself embroiled in controversy and the specter of a heresy trial looms large.”
Outline

- What is open theism?
- Theological motivations.
- Biblical support.
- Divine control in open theism.
- Philosophical and theological issues.

Open Future

- Main premise in open theology: The future is “open:” God does not exactly know the future.
- No exhaustive foreknowledge.
- Some believe the future is simply unknowable [Boyd, Hasker].
- Others believe that God has dispositional foreknowledge [Willard].
Nature of Reality

- Open theists do not question divine sovereignty or omniscience.
- The future is open because God (in His sovereignty) created reality that way.
- So God has no exhaustive foreknowledge because of the nature of the future, not because of lack of omniscience or sovereignty.

Intuitive Appeal

- Openness of the future has intuitive appeal.
- Asymmetry of time (arrow of time).
- Popular notions of the future based on openness ideas.
- Long history: Aristotle …
Theological Motivations

- God’s love and interaction with humans.
- Theological fatalism (incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and libertarian freedom). Goes back to the time of Aristotle.

Biblical Support

- God confronts the unexpected: Is. 5:2–4; Jer. 3:6–7, 3:19–20, 19:5
- God experiences regret: Gen. 6:6; 1 Sam. 13:13, 15:10, 15:35
- God speaks in conditional terms: Exod. 4:1, 13:17; Ezek. 12:3; Jer. 26:3; Matt. 26:39
- God tests people “to know” their character: Gen. 22:12; 2 Chron. 32:31; Deut. 8:2, 8:21, 13:1–3; Judges 3:4
- God changes His mind: Jer. 18; Joel 2:12–13; Jonah 4:2
Divine Control in Openism

God cannot use foreknowledge of human free acts to control his creation.
He has to make decisions at any given time with the information available "to date."
Clearly even less control than Arminianism.

Infinite Intelligence?

Boyd: But God has "infinite intelligence."
"At the very least, the providence control ascribed to God by open theists is far greater than that ascribed by simple foreknowledge Arminians."
Difficult to see how this could be true!
Control Only What Matters?

Some open theists (e.g., Boyd) claim that God controls what matters (to accomplish His will) and leaves other choices to human free will.

Implication: In some cases, God overrides human freedom. (Less freedom than in Arminianism.)

Divine Regret

Well-known story of Suzanne [Boyd, *God of the Possible.*]

“I suggested to her that God felt as much regret over the confirmation he had given Suzanne as he did about his decision to make Saul king of Israel.”
Prayer to Move God

“I do not see that any view of God captures the power and urgency of prayer as adequately as the open view does, and, because the heart is influenced by the mind, I do not see that any view can inspire passionate and urgent prayer as powerfully as the open view can” [Boyd, God of the Possible, p. 98].

What is the point of moving God when God cannot move the world?

Other Philosophical Issues

If theological fatalism is false, then much of the weight of openism disappears.

If the principle of bivalence holds for statements about the future, then omniscience entails foreknowledge.
Ad Baculum Stratagem?

- What about all the Biblical support?
- “… exegesis should always drive our philosophy, instead of the other way around.” [Boyd, DFFV]
- A common admonishment to a Christian audience.
- Fallacious reasoning.

More Orthodox Exegesis

- Anthropomorphism.
- Impossible to avoid talking about God using human terms. (What other kind of terms do we really have?)
- “… a consistent application of Boyd's hermeneutic leads to a defective concept of God.” [Craig, DFFV]
Summary

- Open theism: future is (at least partly) “open” and unknowable.
- Full human freedom (libertarianism).
- No divine foreknowledge of human free acts.
- Divine control is very limited (or freedom is compromised).
- Philosophical issues.

Further Reading

- Gregory Boyd, “Open View Theism,” www.gregboyd.org (might no longer be available)