

Divine Control & Human Freedom: Part 4

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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.”

[M. James Sawyer, “Doctrinal Taxonomy and Theological Controversy: A modest proposal for addressing divisive issues,” www.scriptia.com/html/taxonomy.html]

Outline

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

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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].

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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.

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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 ...

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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.

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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 expresses frustration: Ezek. 22:30–31; 2 Pet. 3:9
- # 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

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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.

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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.”
[Gregory Boyd, “Neo-Molinism and the Infinite Intelligence of God,” *Philosophia Christi*, 5(1), 2003]
- # Difficult to see how this could be true!

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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.)

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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.”

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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?

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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.

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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.

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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]

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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.

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Further Reading

- # Gregory Boyd, “Open View Theism,”
www.gregboyd.org
(might no longer be available)
- # Paul Helm, “Openness Theology:
A Response to Gregory Boyd,” 2000.
http://www.evangelical-library.org.uk/articles/open_theism.html

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