

## Open Theism and Other Models of Divine Providence

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Among the many models of God now competing in the marketplace of ideas is a view that has come to be known as ‘open theism’.<sup>1</sup> The view itself is not new,<sup>2</sup> but until very recently it was off the radar of most philosophers of religion. Things changed dramatically in 1994 with the publication of *The Openness of God*,<sup>3</sup> a book which ignited a firestorm of controversy among evangelical Christians.<sup>4</sup> Open theism has since been embraced by a sizable and growing minority of theistic philosophers and is now recognized as a major player in philosophical discussions of the nature of God and of divine providence.

The main goal of this paper is to situate open theism in conceptual space by explaining its core commitments and distinguishing it from its primary competitors. While most of the popular discussion of open theism has been conducted primarily by theologians and Biblical scholars, my methods and interests in this paper are strictly philosophical. Thus, I will begin by defining open theism in terms of five minimal core commitments. I will then note some philosophically significant corollaries of those commitments and discuss an important issue that currently divides open theists. Finally, I will contrast the open theist model of divine providence with its chief competitors: theological determinism, Molinism, and process theism.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on material from Rhoda (2008), (2010a), and (2010b). Rhoda (2008) was read at the Models of God mini-conference at the 2007 Pacific APA.

<sup>2</sup> The medieval Jewish philosopher Levi ben Gerson, a.k.a. Gersonides (1288–1344 CE) is perhaps the earliest *clear* proponent of open theism. See Gersonides (1987). The Christian scholar Calcidius (4th c. CE) has also been floated as an early open theist, but the attribution is less clear. See Den Boeft (1970) for details. Still earlier anticipations of open theism can be found in both Cicero (106–43 BCE) and Alexander of Aphrodisias (late 2nd to early 3rd c. CE). For Cicero, see his *De Fato* and *De Divinatione*. For Alexander, see Sharples (1983).

<sup>3</sup> Pinnock *et al.* (1994).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Coffman (2001) and Olsen (2003).

## I. The Core of Open Theism

Open theists are, as the label suggests, *theists*. Moreover, open theists have been quite insistent that, while their position lies somewhere between the classical theism of high-medieval orthodoxy and process theism, they mean to stay squarely on the classical side of that divide with respect to creation *ex nihilo* and the power of God unilaterally to intervene in the created order as he pleases.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, most open theists see their view as a relatively conservative correction of the mainstream classical theistic tradition for the purpose of resolving what they see as otherwise irresolvable Biblical and philosophical tensions within that tradition.<sup>6</sup> As a group, open theists are committed to a robust perfect being theology according to which God is conceived of as a metaphysically necessary being who essentially exemplifies a maximally excellent set of compossible great-making properties, including maximal power, knowledge, and goodness. The differences between open and non-open theists (both classical and process) have to do with what that maximal property set consists in, not with whether God exemplifies such a set. But even the differences, while significant, should not be overstated. Non-open theists today are far less unified on whether doctrines like divine simplicity, impassibility, and timelessness ought to be included among God's great-making properties than they were in the days of Anselm and Aquinas. Furthermore, as will become clear, each of the *core* commitments of open theism has long had numerous adherents among non-open theists. It is merely the *combination* of those commitments that puts open theism outside the mainstream. So unless we restrict the 'classical theist' label in such a way that few apart from, say, doctrinaire Thomists would qualify, it is somewhat tendentious to oppose 'open' to 'classical' theism and probably better to think of the former as a species of the latter, broadly construed. Open theists, we might say, are *broadly classical* theists in the following sense:

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<sup>5</sup> See Pinnock *et al.* (1994: 156) and Cobb and Pinnock (2000). My use of 'he' in reference to God is due merely to terminological conservatism and is not meant to imply that God has a gender or that masculine metaphors are more revealing of God's essence than feminine ones.

Broadly classical theism =<sub>def.</sub> there is a unique, personal, metaphysically necessarily being (namely, God) who essentially possesses a maximally excellent compossible set of great-making attributes, including maximal power, knowledge, and goodness, and to whom all (concrete) non-divine beings owe their existence. Further, God created the world (i.e., the space-time system of concrete non-divine beings) *ex nihilo* and can unilaterally intervene in it as he pleases.<sup>7</sup>

The first core commitment of open theism, then, is

- (1) Broadly classical theism is true.

But what puts the ‘open’ in open theism? The answer to that has two sides. One concerns the openness *of the future*, meaning roughly that the shape of things to come is not (yet) fully given, settled, or fixed. Instead, what is to come is progressively taking shape as events unfold, choices are made, and contingencies are resolved one way or another. The other side to the question has to do with the openness *of God*, who, according to open theists, freely enters into dynamic, ongoing, two-way relations with at least some of his creatures. As open theists see it, the openness of the future and the openness of God are intimately related. Thus, having a world with an open future requires a degree of openness in God. As an essentially perfect knower responsible for creating and sustaining an open-ended world, God’s knowledge and experience of the world must change so as accurately to reflect changes in the world. Conversely, God’s openness to creation, particularly his openness to fostering mutually loving relationships with his creatures, requires an open future in which their free contributions help to determine the shape of things to come.

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<sup>6</sup> See Pinnock *et al.* (1994: esp. chs. 2–4).

<sup>7</sup> The final sentence distinguishes open theism from process theism.

The foregoing sketch is, admittedly, quite rough. There are undoubtedly many non-open theists who, with perhaps minor qualifications, could endorse most or even all of it. To refine the sketch, and to isolate the issues that divide open and non-open theists, it is most helpful to focus on the openness of the future. (After all, we seem to have a better grip on the future than we do on the nature of God.) What has not been sufficiently appreciated, though, is that there are several different senses in which the openness of the future may be cashed out. To understand the central debates surrounding open theism, these senses need to be carefully distinguished.

In the first place, then, open theists believe that the future is *causally* open. They believe, in other words, that there are future contingents, events which are causally possible but not causally necessary or otherwise unpreventable.<sup>8</sup> In general,

The future is *causally open* if and only if there is more than one causally possible future, where a ‘causally possible future’ is a complete, logically possible extension of the causally relevant actual past,<sup>9</sup> compatible with holding fixed the laws of nature and concurrent divine causal contributions to creaturely events. The second core commitment of open theism is therefore

(2) The future is causally open (i.e., there are future contingents).

It should be noted that the sort of future contingency of chief importance to most open theists is creaturely libertarian freedom.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, there is reason for not viewing this as a *core* commitment of open theism, for one easily could hold a view that agrees with (1), (2), and the other

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<sup>8</sup> I use ‘causally necessary’ and ‘unpreventable’ interchangeably. Somewhat roughly, a state of affairs (event) is causally necessary or unpreventable as of time *t* if and only if it obtains (occurs) in all logically possible worlds having the same causal history as the actual world up to and including *t*. Similarly, a proposition is causally necessary as of time *t* if and only if it is true in all logically possible worlds having the same causal history as the actual world up to and including *t*. On my usage, it follows that logically and metaphysically necessary truths or states of affairs are also causally necessary.

<sup>9</sup> Restriction to the *causally relevant* actual past is needed to avoid begging the question against Ockhamism, which affirms a causally open future while positing in the actual past something (i.e., divine foreknowledge) that entails a unique causally possible future. For a good primer on Ockhamism see the essays in Fischer (1988).

three core commitments of open theism that I will identify and yet denies that any creatures have libertarian freedom. Someone might hold, for example, that the future is causally open purely for reasons having to do with quantum indeterminacy. This sort of view is providentially in the same camp as mainstream open theism.

At any rate, all open theists believe in future contingency. Open theists also believe that future contingency is *incompatible* with divine foreknowledge, or more exactly, with God's knowing (or infallibly believing) of some unique causally possible future that it is (or is going to be) *the* actual one.<sup>11</sup> More simply, open theists believe that if the future is causally open then it must be *epistemically* open, not just for us, but also for God. In general,

the future is *epistemically open* if and only if for some causally possible future F, (i) neither <F will come to pass><sup>12</sup> nor <F will not come to pass> is either known or infallibly believed *now* and (ii) neither <F comes to pass> nor <F does not come to pass> is either known or infallibly believed *simpliciter*.

The two clauses serve to rule out both (i) temporally situated knowledge of the future and (ii) timeless knowledge of the future. For the future to be epistemically open means that, as far as *anyone* knows, there are multiple causally possible futures that might come to pass and no one of them that certainly *will* come to pass. To use Borges's apt metaphor,<sup>13</sup> it means that all knowers, even God, approach the future as though it were a 'garden of forking paths'.

Open theists are committed to an epistemically open future because they are committed to a causally open future and to the incompatibility of a causally open future with an epistemically *settled* one. The third core open theist commitment is thus

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Pinnock *et al.* (1994: 156).

<sup>11</sup> They believe this on the basis of philosophical arguments like Pike's (1965) and Edwards' (2009 [1754]: II.12).

<sup>12</sup> <p> is short for 'the proposition that p' (i.e., the proposition named by the sentence enclosed in angle brackets).

(3) Necessarily, if the future is causally open then it is epistemically open.

And (3), together with (2), entails

(4) The future is epistemically open.

Here it is important to note that, for open theists, (1), (2), and (3) are more fundamental commitments than (4). Open theists, recall, are broadly classical theists. Thus, they want to say that God essentially has *maximal* knowledge. It follows that if it is *possible* that God know something (either *now* or *simpliciter*) then he knows it (either *now* or *simpliciter*). So if the future is causally open with respect to whether future F comes to pass and if it were still possible for God to know *now* <F will come to pass> or *simpliciter* <F does come to pass>, then it would follow that God knows as much and that the future is epistemically settled. The only reason, therefore, why open theists accept (4) is because they believe (1), (2), and (3). The future is epistemically open only because—and only to the extent that—it is causally open.

In addition to (1)–(4) there is one more core thesis of open theism that requires mention:<sup>14</sup>

(5) The future is providentially open,

where a ‘providentially open’ future is understood as follows:

The future is *providentially open* if and only if no agent S has acted in a way that guarantees that a unique causally possible future F shall come to pass while knowing for certain that in so acting F is guaranteed to come to pass.

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<sup>13</sup> Borges (1998: 119–128).

<sup>14</sup> In Rhoda (2008) I ended my analysis of open theism’s core commitments with (4). Subsequent discussions with Joseph Jedwab convinced me to add (5).

We might put this another way and say that the future is providentially open if and only if no possible future has been *ordained*, where a future F has been ordained if and only if an agent S has either strongly or weakly *actualized* F.<sup>15</sup> If we assume that only God could be in a position to ordain the future, then we can replace S with God and say that the future is providentially open if and only if the future has not been ordained by God. Conversely, the future is providentially *settled* if and only if God has ordained, in the words of the Westminster Confession, “whatsoever comes to pass.”<sup>16</sup> In affirming the providential openness of the future, open theists categorically deny this. They believe that God’s providential decrees are *silent* with regard to *some* of what comes to pass.

Observe that (5) is a logical consequence of (4). Thus, it follows from the definitions of ‘providentially open future’ and ‘to ordain’ that if the future were providentially settled then it would also have to be epistemically settled because in ordaining F, God would thereby *know* that F would come to pass. Epistemic openness therefore entails providential openness. Furthermore, (5) is entailed by (2) and (3). If, on the one hand, God *strongly* actualizes all that comes to pass then God becomes the ultimate sufficient cause of all events, which conflicts with (2). If, on the other hand, God *weakly* actualizes all that comes to pass, then the future is epistemically settled for God, which conflicts with (3). So, given both (2) and (3), it follows that God does not ordain all that comes to pass.

Summing up, (1)–(5) are the core commitments of open theism. While the first three are the foundational ones, with (4) and (5) derivative upon them, it is helpful to state (4) and (5) explicitly since they have been the chief focal points of controversy surrounding open theism.

Concerning (4), the debate is whether to accept (2) and (3) and consequently (4), or whether to reject (4) and with it either (2) or (3). In this regard, open theism falls squarely between two competing positions within the broadly classical theistic tradition: the theological determinism of the

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<sup>15</sup> The distinction between strong and weak actualization comes from Plantinga (1974: 173). S *strongly* actualizes F iff S’s actions are *causally* sufficient for, and known by S to be causally sufficient for, F’s coming to pass. S *weakly* actualizes F iff S’s actions are *counterfactually* sufficient for, and known by S to be counterfactually sufficient for, F’s coming to pass.

late Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Edwards; and the freewill theism<sup>17</sup> of Ockham, Molina, and Arminius. Thus, open theists side with non-open freewill theists over against theological determinists by affirming (2), the causal openness of the future. But they also side with most theological determinists over against non-open freewill theists by affirming (3), the incompatibility of future contingency with the epistemic settledness of the future.

The debate over (5) is parallel: Should we accept (2) and (3) and consequently (5), as open theists suggest, or should we reject (5) and with it either (2) or (3)? In this regard, open theism falls squarely between theological determinism, which rejects (2), and Molinism, which rejects (3).

## II. Some Important Corollaries

There are some important corollaries of (1)–(5) worth noting. In the first place, if the future is epistemically settled for God in all and only those respects in which it is causally settled, and if, in addition, the future is causally open, then the content of God’s knowledge must change over time as future contingencies are resolved. And if God changes, then God cannot be atemporal. Hence, open theism entails divine *temporality*.

But we must guard against several misunderstandings of divine temporality. First, it should not be understood as implying that God is literally ‘in’ time (as though time were a sort of container). Rather, divine temporality simply means that God has undergone at least one intrinsic change. Further, since God is essentially uncreated, if God is temporal, then time is not created. Instead, proponents of divine temporality should say that time supervenes on a dynamically changing reality and that the reality of time is nothing over and above the fact that ‘things change’. Moreover, since God is essentially nonphysical, if God is temporal, then time is not a strictly physical phenomenon, and so not a topic on which physics has the last word. Finally, it should not be assumed, at least, not

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<sup>16</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* 3.1.

<sup>17</sup> The term ‘freewill theism’ comes from Basinger (1996).



without further argument, that affirming divine temporality commits one to *essential* divine temporality and mutability, for it is not immediately clear why the divine temporalist could not adopt Craig's suggestion that God is atemporal *sans* creation and temporal since creation.<sup>18</sup>

Another second corollary of open theism is divine *passibility*, the idea that God is in some respects dependent on creation. Here it is helpful to invoke Creel's fourfold distinction between passibility in nature, will, knowledge, and feeling.<sup>19</sup> As broadly classical theists, open theists will not admit that God is passible in nature, for God's fundamental attributes are essential to him and cannot change. Open theists are, however, clearly committed to divine passibility with respect to knowledge, for how God's epistemic states change over time depends on how creaturely future contingencies are resolved.<sup>20</sup> As for passibility in will or in feeling, these are matters of in-house debate. Some open theists point to Biblical descriptions of God's 'changing' his mind, 'repenting', getting angry, and so forth, as evidence that God is passible in will and in feeling,<sup>21</sup> whereas others, like Creel, argue that passibility in either will or feeling is incompatible with divine perfection and that therefore Biblical passages suggesting such passibility on God's part should not be construed literally.

The third and last corollary I will mention is that open theism is committed to a 'dynamic' or 'A'-theory of time, according to which the totality of what exists *simpliciter* is non-constant. This means that if we could survey all that exists from an absolute or 'God's-eye' vantage point, our perspective would be irreducibly *tensed* because there would be an absolute distinction between what *has existed*, what *now*

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<sup>18</sup> Craig (2001).

<sup>19</sup> Creel (2005 [1986]: 9–12).

<sup>20</sup> Incidentally, non-open theists who affirm (with Ockham) God's simple foreknowledge of future contingents or (with Boethius) God's timeless knowledge of future contingents, are also committed to saying that God is passible in knowledge. Open theists are therefore in good company on this issue.

<sup>21</sup> This seems to be Sanders's (1997: 196–197, and note 117) view. He clearly wants to go further than Creel in the extent to which he attributes passibility to God.

*exists*, and what will or might *come to exist*. More fully, open theists are committed to a version of the A-theory according to which the future is *ontically* open, where that notion is defined as follows:

The future is *ontically open* as of time *t* if and only if no unique, complete sequence of events which are future relative to *t* exists *simpliciter*.

In contrast, on a ‘static’ or ‘B’-theory of time the future is ontically settled because the totality of what exists *simpliciter* includes a unique, complete sequence of past, present, *and future* events. Open theists reject a static view of time and affirm an ontically open future because, by (1), they believe that God is an essentially maximal knower. This means God is fully and immediately *acquainted with* all of reality. Hence, if the future were ontically settled—that is, if a unique, complete sequence of future events exists *simpliciter*—then God would be fully acquainted with that sequence of events and the future would therefore be epistemically settled for God. Given (4), that the future is not epistemically settled for God, it follows that the future is ontically open.

### III. The Alethic Openness of the Future

As I’ve hinted a couple of times already, open theism is not a monolithic position. There are live in-house debates about, for example, the extent of divine passibility and the extent to which the future is causally open. But there is another in-house debate that is of greater dialectical interest. Whereas all open theists believe that the future is causally, epistemically, and providentially open, they divide over whether the future is *alethically* open, where this notion is defined as follows:

The future is *alethically open* if and only if for some causally possible future *F*, (i) neither  $\langle F \text{ will come to pass} \rangle$  nor  $\langle F \text{ will not come to pass} \rangle$  is true *now* and (ii)  $\langle F \text{ comes to pass} \rangle$  nor  $\langle F \text{ does not come to pass} \rangle$  is true *simpliciter*.

More simply, but less exactly, the future is alethically open just in case there is no *complete, true story* of the future.

Obviously, *if* the future is alethically open, then it must be epistemically open, since knowledge presupposes truth. But why think the future is alethically open? The central argument turns on the principle that *truth supervenes on being* (TSB), which says that all (contingent) truths are true in virtue of what exists, such that any difference in what is (contingently) true would have to be accompanied by a difference in what exists. Now, if we add to TSB the assumption that the future is both causally and ontically open—an assumption, recall, that is embraced by open theists—then it seems that there is not enough *being* for a complete, true story of the future to supervene upon. Thus, if the future is ontically open, then a complete, true story of the future can't supervene on future events, for they don't exist. And if the future is causally open, then it can't supervene on past or present events plus causal laws and concurrent divine causal contributions, for all that together leaves undetermined which causally possible future shall come to pass.<sup>22</sup>

Given TSB, then, there is a straightforward argument for the alethic openness of the future that should appeal to open theists. Accordingly, many, and probably most, open theists do accept the alethic openness of the future. But some prominent open theists—most notably Swinburne and Hasker—do not.<sup>23</sup> They hold that the future is alethically *settled*. They thus admit that there is a complete, true story of the future parts of which God does not (indeed, cannot) yet know. This raises an obvious worry: How can God be an essentially maximally excellent knower as required by (1) if there are truths that God doesn't know? Neither Swinburne nor Hasker offers anything by way of explanation. Perhaps they would say that God can only know truths that are either directly accessible to God via his acquaintance with reality or truths that are inferable from ones that are

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<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed presentation of this argument for alethic openness, see Rhoda, Boyd, and Belt (2006) and Rhoda (2010b). For related arguments that a causally open and alethically settled future requires an ontically settled future, see Rea (2006) and Finch and Rea (2008).

directly accessible to him. If so, and if the future is both causally and ontically open, then there would be no epistemically accessible truths about future contingents. But the problem with this proposal is that the very reason offered for thinking that some truths aren't *knowable* by God is also, given TSB, a reason for thinking that they aren't *true* to begin with. And so it remains unclear why an open theist wouldn't affirm the alethic openness of the future, especially if not doing so requires them either to deny TSB or to deny that God is fully acquainted with all of reality.

In my view, open theists are *much* better off if they affirm the alethic openness of the future. Indeed, there is a significant dialectical advantage in doing so, for it helps rebut one the most frequently leveled charge against open theism. The charge is that the God of open theism is a “diminished” God—and so not worthy of the divine title—because he isn't truly omniscient.<sup>24</sup> Swinburne's and Hasker's position on the alethic settledness of the future plays into the hands of critics by conceding that there are truths that God doesn't know. While they would counter by saying that God knows all *knowable* truths, this doesn't allay the worry, for, in the absence of a clear explanation—which they don't provide—of how there can be a real distinction between truths and divinely knowable truths, it's not clear why the critics aren't right that the God of open theism, so construed, knows *less* than God should know if he is an essentially maximal knower. In contrast, by affirming the alethic openness of the future, open theists can say without qualification that God knows *all* truths, and the charge doesn't get off the ground.

#### IV. Four Models of Divine Providence

Having discussed the core commitments of open theism, some corollaries of those commitments, and one important in-house debate, it remains to compare open theism with other models of divine providence. I take its main rivals to be theological determinism, Molinism, and

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<sup>23</sup> Swinburne (1993: 180); Hasker (1989:187) and (2001: 111).

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., Ware (2000).

process theism. As we will see, open theism shares significant common ground with each of these models, though it also differs from each in important respects as well. Since I've already said a lot about open theism, I'll begin with brief descriptions of each of the other three models.

First, by 'theological determinism' I mean the view of the later Augustine, Calvin, Luther, and Edwards according to which God is the ultimate sufficient cause of all creaturely events. On this view God *strongly* actualizes a specific possible world, one with a complete history—past, present, and future—from which it follows that the future is causally, epistemically, providentially, and presumably alethically settled.

Second, by 'Molinism' I mean Molina's view according to which God has 'middle knowledge'—prevolitional knowledge of 'conditional future contingents' (CFCs) by which God knows, before he makes his creative decree, what outcome *would* result from any causally specified creaturely indeterministic scenario. Armed with this knowledge, God *weakly* actualizes a specific possible world, one with a complete history—past, present, and future—and does so in such a way that the causal openness of the future is preserved.<sup>25</sup> For Molinists, therefore, the future is epistemically, providentially, and alethically settled but causally open.

Third and finally, by 'process theism' I mean the view of Hartshorne, Cobb, and Griffin, according to which God's activity vis-à-vis creation is exclusively 'persuasive'.<sup>26</sup> For process theism, in contrast with theological determinism, God is not the ultimate sufficient cause of *any* creaturely events, though he does make a necessary contribution to all creaturely events. Also, for process theism, it is metaphysically necessary that the future be causally, epistemically, providentially, ontically, and alethically open.

I will now compare and contrast these models with each other and with open theism in terms of the manner, scope, and limits of God's providential activity vis-à-vis creation.

First, concerning the *manner* in which God exercises power over creation, let us say that God acts ‘efficaciously’ in bringing about a creaturely event or state of affairs just in case God’s activity is *causally sufficient* for its occurring or obtaining. And let us say that God acts ‘persuasively’ in bringing about a creaturely event or state of affairs just in case God causally contributes to its occurring or obtaining but not in a way that is causally sufficient. In these terms, theological determinists hold that God’s activity vis-à-vis creation is always efficacious; process theists, that it is always persuasive; and Molinists and open theists, that it is sometimes efficacious and sometimes persuasive.

Second, concerning the scope of divine providence, let us say that God exercises ‘meticulous’ providence just in case God ordains *all* the details of creation.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, let us say that God’s providence is ‘general’ just in case it is not meticulous, that is, just in case there can occur creaturely events that God has *not* ordained. In these terms, theological determinists and Molinists affirm meticulous providence, whereas open and process theists affirm general providence.

Third, concerning the limits of divine providence, let us say that God’s providential activity is ‘unconstrained’ just in case there are no *unavoidable external or contingent* limits on what God can do vis-à-vis creation.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, let us say that God’s providential activity is ‘constrained’ just in case there are unavoidable contingent constraints on what God can do. In these terms, theological determinists and open theists believe that God’s providential activity is unconstrained, whereas Molinists and process theists believe it is constrained. For the Molinist, there are unavoidable *contingent* limits on what God can do because God has no control over which CFCs are true. For the process theist, there are unavoidable *external* limits on what God can do because the world process necessarily exists in partial independence of God.

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<sup>25</sup> For detailed exposition of Molinism, see Flint (1998) and Freddoso (1988).

<sup>26</sup> For detailed exposition of process theism, see Cobb and Griffin (1976).

<sup>27</sup> Freddoso (1988: 3) nicely states the doctrine of meticulous providence as follows: “God, the divine artisan, freely and knowingly plans, orders, and provides for all the effects that constitute His artifact, the created universe with its entire history, and executes His chosen plan by playing an active causal role sufficient to ensure its exact realization.”

The following table summarizes:

	<b>Theological determinism</b>	<b>Molinism</b>	<b>Open theism</b>	<b>Process theism</b>
<b>Manner of God's providential activity</b>	always efficacious	only sometimes efficacious	only sometimes efficacious	always persuasive
<b>Scope of providence</b>	meticulous	meticulous	general	general
<b>Unavoidable external or contingent limits on God</b>	no	yes	no	yes

It is interesting to note that open theists agree with theological determinists that God's providential activity is unconstrained. For open theists, God could have done just what the theological determinist thinks God has done, namely, strongly actualize a possible world, one which includes a complete, determinate history. But open theists also believe that God deliberately chose *not* to do that. Instead, he chose to create a causally open world so that free creatures could significantly contribute to shape of things to come.

Similarly, open theists agree with Molinists that God's providential activity is only sometimes efficacious. In this they take a broadly classical position on divine power over against process theists while affirming the causal openness of the future over against theological determinists. But unlike Molinists, open theists believe that God's providential activity is unconstrained. In this respect, Molinism is at a dialectical disadvantage. The existence of unavoidably and contingently true CFCs limits God's creative options, thereby threatening to undermine God's standing as an essentially maximally powerful being.

Finally, open theists agree with process theists that God exercises general providence. It is not the case that *all* details of creation history have been ordained by God. This is a particularly useful thing for theists to say about moral evils, for the claim that God ordains moral evils—not for their own sake, presumably, but for the sake of a greater good—is a hard one to swallow. Theological

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<sup>28</sup> By 'unavoidable' here I of course mean unavoidable *for God*.

determinists and Molinists simply have to bite the bullet at that point. On the other extreme, process theists hold that *none* of the details of creation history are ordained by God. This allows them to say about natural evils what open theists say about moral evils, namely, that God doesn't ordain any of them. But process theists pay a price for this, for it's not at all clear that a God who can only exercise persuasive power qualifies as an essentially maximally powerful being. In any case, it is arguable that open theism occupies the virtuous middle ground on this issue.

## V. Conclusion

In summary, I've argued that open theism can be defined in terms of five core theses: (1) broadly classical theism, (2) the causal openness of the future, (3) the incompatibility of an epistemically settled future with a causally open future, (4) the epistemic openness of the future, and (5) the providential openness of the future. Important corollaries of these commitments include divine temporality, divine passibility, and a dynamic or A-theory of time with an ontically open future. In addition, I argued that open theists should affirm that the future is alethically open as well, though this issue is currently a matter of in-house debate. Finally, I compared and contrasted open theism with its three main rivals among models of divine providence: theological determinism, Molinism, and process theism. While open theism shares features in common with each of its rivals, it also differs significantly from each and so fills a significant theoretical gap. For that reason alone, and despite its having only recently come to widespread attention, open theism merits a place at the discussion alongside its rivals.



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