

Neo-Molinism: A Traditional-Openness Rapprochement?¹

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Introduction

In his response to Gregory A. Boyd's exposition of the open view of foreknowledge in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, William Lane Craig suggests, among other things, that Boyd's view of the future compromises "a biblically sound doctrine of providence" because it denies, "that the Principle of Bivalence holds for future contingent propositions and CCFs [counterfactuals of creaturely freedom]."² Boyd's distinction between a class of future events that can be known and a class of future events that cannot be known not only "undermines divine omniscience" and "winds up destroying [both] contingency and freedom," Craig contends, but it also jettisons God's providential control of world history because it cannot account for the "coalescence of human freedom and divine sovereignty" that work together "toward his previsioned end."³ The philosophical challenge facing open theists in general and Boyd in particular, Craig insists, is "to defend the claim that the Principle of Bivalence fails for future contingent propositions and CCFs, and . . . to show that . . . [the open] view alone is able to affirm real possibilities in the world"⁴ without undermining God's sovereign rule over the unfolding course of world history. Open theists will remain unequal to this challenge, Craig concludes, as long as they continue to ignore "the Molinist alternative" to Calvinistic determinism on the one hand and Free-Will theism on the other.⁵

Later in the same volume, Boyd responds to Craig's exposition of the clas-

sical Molinist view of foreknowledge by insisting that the open view, in fact, "could perhaps more accurately be labeled *neo-Molinism*."⁶ "In essence," Boyd suggests, "[neo-Molinism] differs from the classical Molinist position only in that it expands the content of God's middle knowledge to include 'might-counterfactuals.'"⁷ Boyd proposes that,

Between God's pre-creational knowledge of all logical possibilities and God's pre-creational knowledge of what will come to pass is God's "middle knowledge" of what free agents *might or might not do* in certain situations as well as of what free agents *would do* in other situations. If it is true that agent X might or might not do *y* in situation *z*, it is false that agent X would do *y* in situation *z*, and vice versa. On the basis of this knowledge, God chooses to have actualized the possible world that best suits his sovereign purpose. The world God chooses to be actualized, however, is more precisely described as a delimited set of possible worlds, any one of which *might be* actualized, depending on the choices free agents make. Yet because God is infinitely intelligent, he is as perfectly prepared for whatever possible world gets actualized *as if* it were the only possible world that could be actualized. It's just that precisely because we accept that God is infinitely intelligent, a neo-Molinist doesn't suppose that God must choose to falsify all might-counterfactuals in order to acquire this providential advantage.⁸

In short, Boyd is convinced that Craig's critique misses the mark and that the God of open theism retains "significant providential control"⁹ over a future that is com-

prised “of both settled and open aspects”¹⁰ because the class of counterfactual propositions that God knows as true includes statements about what agents with libertarian freedom *might* or *might not* do in certain situations. This is significant, Boyd believes, because it enables the neo-Molinist, first, to take “the entire open motif of Scripture” seriously and, second, to avoid the alleged pitfalls of the notorious “grounding objection.”¹¹ Indeed, “if we accept that some might-counterfactuals are eternally true,” Boyd argues, “we no longer have the problem of an ungrounded eternal settledness to possible worlds that include libertarian freedom, and there is no longer any problem accounting for libertarian freedom itself . . . [for] there simply is no eternal settledness to libertarian free actions. There are only eternal possibilities of what . . . [free agents] might or might not do.”¹² How, though, does including might-counterfactuals in the content of God’s middle knowledge neutralize the alleged force of the grounding objection? The answer is found in the necessary dependence of would-counterfactual knowledge upon the realization in time of true might-counterfactuals, or those counterfactuals that have to do with libertarian freedom and thus with future states of affairs that are possibly one way or possibly another. It is this dependence, then, the essential nature of which is described below and examined more thoroughly in the forthcoming discussion, that accounts for Boyd’s confidence that the God of open theism will accomplish “his sovereign purpose”¹³ for the created order without compromising the integrity of libertarian freedom. “To the extent that would-counterfactuals apply to future free agents,” Boyd concludes,

they do so because the actions of these agents flow either from the character God has given them (*habitus infusus*, in classical terminology) or from the character they will acquire if they pursue a certain possible course of action (*habitus acquisitus*, in classical terminology). In either case the would-counterfactuals are not ungrounded, as in classical Molinism. From all eternity God knows that if he chooses to create free agent X, she will have the basic characteristics of *a*, *b* and *c*. And from all eternity God knows that if agent X freely follows a certain possible life trajectory, she will become the kind of person who would do *x* in situation *z*. The would-counterfactuals for which agent X is morally responsible are contingent on the might-counterfactuals for which she is morally responsible.¹⁴

As such, Boyd would have us believe that neo-Molinism supplies the theoretical framework for a rapprochement between the open view of the future on the one hand and more traditional views on the other because it enables open theists to affirm that God is the sovereign Lord of history while simultaneously insisting that the Principle of Bivalence fails with respect to future contingent propositions and counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. But can open theists like Boyd *really* affirm that God is the sovereign Lord of a future that has yet to be settled? In other words, does neo-Molinism *in fact* afford God significant providential control over the unfolding course of world history while at the same time affirming that the future is partly—perhaps even mostly—open? To the best of my knowledge, Craig has yet to publish a response to Boyd’s proposal. Other scholars, however, are beginning to weigh in. For example, Stephen Wellum is on record as believing that Boyd’s proposal is simply implausible.¹⁵ And Bruce Ware is con-

vinced that it delivers “less than . . . [Boyd’s] rhetoric might suggest.”¹⁶ In this essay, I endeavor to translate some of the more significant aspects of Boyd’s proposal into non-technical language, and then to offer an assessment that is both thoughtful and fair. What I intend to establish is that even if we grant that there is a possible world in which neo-Molinism offers a satisfactory response to the grounding objection as well as a coherent view of the future, it is not this world, as Boyd’s own exposition makes more than clear. For Boyd’s view of the future is marred by an incoherence that reduces the God of open theism to an ambivalent and arbitrary warrior for whom the problem of evil is nothing less than the kiss of death.

Moral Character, Compatibilistic “Freedom,” and the “Infinitely Intelligent” Lord of History

A recent article in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* by Jason A. Nicholls correctly argues that the standard philosophical critiques of the open view of the future tend to presume that openness theologians cannot affirm that God is the sovereign Lord of history because their commitment to the concept of libertarian freedom knows no bounds. This presumption, Nicholls argues, is based upon “a misconception about the openness view,” namely that openness theologians are unwilling “to make room in their system for the possibility of periodic instances of divine intervention . . . , perhaps even to the point of controlling, overwhelming or overriding libertarian freedom on occasion.”¹⁷ The God of open theism “is imminently capable of ‘getting what he really wants,’” Nicholls contends, because he is able “to control the final outcome of a partly unforeseen future by means of spe-

cific, periodic, unilateral intervention—something that might be called his *select determinism*.”¹⁸ While Nicholls certainly has a point—most critiques of open theism *do* suppose that “the open view utterly disallows libertarian freedom to be compromised or infringed upon in any way”—he writes as if unaware of those critiques that challenge openness theologians for precisely this reason.¹⁹ A number of scholars are convinced that openness theologians can affirm God’s providential control over the unfolding course of world history only because they are willing to sanction one or more assumptions that are fundamentally at odds with the foundational commitments of the openness program. The God of open theism can retain significant providential control over the unfolding course of world history, these scholars argue, either because he can, after all is said and done, know at least some future contingents, or because he knows what he is going to do in the future irrespective of the genuinely free decisions of responsible moral agents.

The Rather Dated Nature of the Standard Philosophical Critiques

Such critiques can no longer be universally justified, however, because they betray an understanding of the open view of the future that must be significantly revised in light of Boyd’s more fulsome exposition of the open view in his recent book, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy*. While my fellow critics and I have carefully argued that the distinction between a class of future events that can be known and a class of future events that cannot be known cannot be coherently sustained if the self-determining freedom of contingent beings is regarded as “an [unlimited] end in

itself,"²⁰ what we must now consider more carefully is that openness theologians have remained more or less undaunted by our arguments because many, in fact, are willing to acknowledge the coherence of at least some form of compatibilism. Boyd, for example, is eager to affirm that God can retain "significant providential control" over the flow of world history, simply because he can, in fact, have "a significant role in steering human choices."²¹ But how can this be? How can theologians whose entire theological program to date seems to have been based upon a rejection of compatibilism now be willing to sanction a form of compatibilism? In the paragraphs that follow I attempt to answer these questions by unfolding a number of Boyd's more significant arguments in *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, for these arguments represent the most ambitious and creative attempt to render the open view of the future intelligible. What the reader must note from the start is that Boyd's proposals, although not entirely new, move the openness debate into a realm heretofore unimagined by the critics of open theism.²² For what Boyd makes clear is that the openness debate has moved beyond the question of whether or not God *can*, in fact, foreknow the future actions of responsible moral agents, to the question of the *kinds* of responsible moral actions that God, in fact, can foreknow.

The Sovereign Lord of History and the Balanced Oversight of Established and Yet-to-Be-Established Characters

How, then, can the God of open theism retain "significant providential control" over the flow of world history if it is logically impossible for him to foreknow the libertarianly free decisions of responsible

moral agents? How, in other words, can his providential control of world history really involve anything more than mere "guess-work about the future" if future contingents, in fact, do not exist to be known by anyone, including God, and if genuine freedom really is "incompatible with any form of determinism"?²³ The answers to these questions, as we shall see shortly, are to be found in God's balanced oversight of the kinds of activity that are associated with established and yet-to-be-established characters, that is, the kinds of activity that are associated with would- and might-counterfactuals. While actions that flow from established characters can be foreknown and even determined, thus affording God a significant reservoir of providence-guaranteeing, would-counterfactual knowledge, those that flow from yet-to-be-established characters can be neither foreknown nor determined, for the agent who is performing them retains self-determining or libertarian freedom. The agent retains the "power to do otherwise,"²⁴ in other words, and thus might possibly do one thing or might possibly do another.²⁵

According to Boyd, it is reasonable to suppose that when God creates moral agents, he gives each agent a "domain of irrevocable freedom"²⁶ and then "binds himself to interact with . . . [them] in ways that honor that [gift of] self-determination."²⁷ While the extent and duration of the "domain of freedom" that is given varies from agent to agent and is thus in principle unknowable to the contingent observer,²⁸ what remains constant (at least in theory) is God's commitment "not to microcontrol a free agent he has created" until that agent either oversteps "the parameters of the gift of freedom God has given," or "solidifies" his character

through the use of his self-determining freedom.²⁹ Until agents with self-determining freedom either go beyond the established bounds of their domain of freedom or their free choices “become crystallized in the form of an irreversible character,” God “cannot *by his own choice* coerce . . . [or determine their] decisions.”³⁰ Indeed, God’s “integrity” demands that he “honor” the gift of self-determining freedom that he has given, for if he does not, he “undermines the authenticity of both freedom and moral responsibility,” and thereby establishes that the gift of self-determining freedom was never genuinely given in the first place.³¹

When an agent has exhausted the gift of self-determining freedom that God gave him, however, God is then “under no obligation to refrain from intervening on [that] agent’s freedom,”³² for that agent has established his free choices in the form of an “eternalized”³³ character that is “irrevocably open or irrevocably closed to God’s love.”³⁴ Indeed, it is no longer possible for that agent to be anything “other than [he is],” for his self-determining freedom, which was the “probationary means” to establishing the “kind of eternal being” he would irreversibly become, has given way to a “self-determined character”³⁵ that is defined in its “essence”³⁶ by a kind of moral orientation that is compatibilistically inclined “either for or against God.”³⁷ Since “self-determining acts lead to a self-determined character” and “libertarian freedom [thus] becomes compatibilistic freedom,”³⁸ it follows that there are two kinds of “free” activity for which acting agents are morally responsible and which we must factor into our understanding of the open view of the future. Contingent beings are morally responsible for what they do, Boyd argues, not only when they *could* do other-

wise in a particular situation given their retention of the gift of self-determining freedom but also when they *could not* do otherwise in a particular situation given the characters they acquired for themselves by the use of their self-determining freedom.³⁹ “We must remember,” Boyd notes in a passage that is critically important for understanding his exposition of the open view,

that moral responsibility applies to the acquired character of self-determining agents even more fundamentally than it applies to the particular decisions agents make which reflect and reinforce their character. Traditionally theologians have distinguished the character a person receives from God (*habitus infusus*) from the character they freely acquire (*habitus acquirus*) [sic]. *There is no contradiction in the claim that a person is morally responsible for an act even though they could not have done otherwise, so long as the character that now rendered their action certain flowed from a character they themselves acquired. It was not “infused” into them by God.... Hence, if God decides that it fits his providential plan to use a person whose choices have solidified his character as wicked, God is not responsible for this person’s wickedness.*⁴⁰

In light of the fact that morally responsible actions can be foreknown and even determined if those actions flow from self-determined characters, it follows that openness theologians like Boyd feel justified in affirming that the future is both partly open and partly closed because they view the future as an unfolding story involving God’s balanced oversight of both determined and yet-to-be-determined components. Whereas the unfolding story is open and unknowable to the extent that moral agents retain self-determining or libertarian freedom, it is settled and knowable to the extent that actions flow from self-determined characters that are allowed

to act spontaneously or are manipulated compatibilistically. As the author of an unfolding story involving agents who possess self-determining freedom, God thus retains “significant providential control” over the story not only because he knows how particular moral agents with established characters will act in particular situations if the contingents of history unfold in a certain fashion, but also because he can, if he chooses, have a more direct role in the steering of history by interacting compatibilistically with moral agents who have solidified their own characters through the use of their self-determining freedom. Indeed, God can accomplish his loving purpose for the created order not only by predestining and foreknowing events without ordaining from eternity who will carry out those events, but he can also orchestrate circumstances that exploit the character traits of compatibilistically free yet susceptible moral agents so that those predestined events are actualized in time.⁴¹ Scripture suggests, for example,

that the Messiah’s betrayal was predestined and Jesus foreknew that Judas would betray him (Jn 6:64, 70-71; 13:18-19). These contentions do not contradict the view that morally responsible, self-determining actions cannot be predestined or foreknown as long as Judas was not *in particular* chosen to carry out this deed before Judas had *made himself* into the kind of person who *would* carry out this deed. After Judas unfortunately hardened himself into this kind of person, God wove his character into a providential plan. God thus used evil for a higher good (cf. Gen 50:20). Jesus could therefore foreknow that Judas would be the one to betray him. But nothing suggests that it was God’s plan *from eternity* that Judas would play this role.... [As such,] there is no difficulty in understanding how God could predestine and thus foreknow that Jesus would be betrayed and

crucified by wicked people without predestining or foreknowing who specifically would betray and crucify him. God orchestrated events to the extent that certain wicked people (and certain wicked spirits, Jn 13:27; 1 Cor 2:8) acted out their self-acquired characters and did what they wanted to do in conformity with his plan to have his Son betrayed and crucified. But they are still responsible for what they did, for they are responsible for the kind of agents they had freely become. God was simply employing their sinful intentions to his own end.⁴²

Divine Coercion: The Key to the Continuity of History

In the end, then, openness theologians like Boyd can affirm that the future is both partly open and partly closed and that God “is intelligent and powerful enough to... accomplish all his objectives”⁴³ only because they are willing to sanction a form of compatibilism that, ironically, regards compatibilistically free acts as coerced or determined acts for which the acting agent is morally responsible. God is the sovereign Lord of history, openness theologians argue, not only because he is “an infinitely intelligent chess player” who is able “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,”⁴⁴ but also because he will act unilaterally or coercively when necessary, as David Basinger says, in order “to keep things on track.”⁴⁵ He will ensure that his purpose for the created order is accomplished, in other words, in part by acting in ways that “override or withdraw [genuine] freedom of choice,” i.e., that empty future creaturely actions of their uncertain or contingent nature.⁴⁶

**The Incoherence of the
Open View of the Future
*The Revocable Nature of the
Irrevocable Gift of
Self-Determining Freedom***

What, then, are we to make of the willingness of openness theologians like Boyd to sanction the unilateral or coercive activity of God in the lives of particular moral agents? Does their qualified endorsement of a form of compatibilism present any serious difficulties for the rest of the openness program? In addition to undermining their stated concern for the inherently contingent nature of “genuine creaturely freedom,” it presents serious difficulties, I would argue, for at least three reasons.⁴⁷ In the first place, it demonstrates that the foundational convictions of even Boyd’s more fulsome exposition of the open view cannot be consistently applied to the analysis of the flow of history. Openness theologians like Boyd would have us believe that the future is open to God as well as to contingent beings because the “ultimate purpose [of God] includes having free agents”⁴⁸ whose self-determining freedom is “irrevocable.”⁴⁹ While the God of open theism can steer agents who have established their own characters through the use of their self-determining freedom, his integrity demands that he refrain from determining the decisions of agents who have yet to establish their own characters.⁵⁰ The willingness of openness theologians to allow for God to work in a fashion that violates the self-determining freedom of moral agents jettisons the coherence of the openness program, then, for it establishes that God cannot accomplish his ultimate purpose without violating a significant component of that purpose. Indeed, it establishes that God cannot accomplish his

purpose for the created order without moving beyond the realm of what we might call “soft” coercion—working compatibilistically with agents who have established their own characters—into the relentlessly robotic realm of “hard” coercion—compelling agents to do what they otherwise might not do given their retention of the gift of self-determining freedom.⁵¹

Consider Boyd’s treatment of Peter’s denial of Jesus. Boyd says, “it should be clear that this episode poses no significant problem for the open view of the future.”⁵² I, on the other hand, contend that it undermines the coherence of his entire program. As we have seen, openness theologians like Boyd are convinced that there is such an intimate relationship between established moral character and moral activity that when self-determined individuals are “squeezed” in the correct fashion, their behavior is not only “predictable,” it is “certain.”⁵³ It is no longer contingent, in other words, but settled because it flows out of the solidified nature of the acting agent, and for this reason the agent retains responsibility for performing the event. It is the exploitation of character in this particular sense, then, that Boyd suggests is manifest in the case of Peter’s “divinely orchestrated lesson.”⁵⁴ “God,” Boyd argues, “knew and perfectly anticipated (as though it was the only possible outcome) that if the world proceeded exactly as it did up to the point of the Last Supper, Peter’s character would be solidified to the extent that he would be the kind of person who would deny Christ in a certain situation.... On the basis of this knowledge and his sovereign control as Creator, God decide[d] at some point to providentially ensure that just this situation would come about,”⁵⁵ and then actualized the event by orchestrating

“highly pressurized circumstances” that “squeezed” Peter’s cowardly character out of him three times.⁵⁶

Even if we grant, for the sake of argument, that what we are calling “soft” coercion is compatible with the foundational assumptions of the openness program,⁵⁷ the case of Peter’s denial of Jesus still presents insurmountable difficulties for the openness program because it establishes, despite what openness theologians like Boyd would have us believe, that the God of open theism is willing to violate the self-determining freedom of contingent beings in order to bring about states of affairs that he really wants to bring about. Remember, openness theologians insist that when God creates moral agents, he gives each agent the gift of self-determining freedom “and binds himself to interact with . . . [them] in ways that honor that [gift of] self-determination.”⁵⁸ In other words, he covenants not to “coerce . . . [their] decisions” until they have “spent”⁵⁹ their gift of self-determining freedom and their self-determined decisions have given way to a self-determined character that is compatibilistically free and inclined either for or against God.⁶⁰ What Boyd’s treatment of Peter in fact establishes, however, is that God worked coercively with Peter *before* Peter’s character became “crystallized in the form of an irreversible character.”⁶¹ Indeed, Boyd contends that God’s compatibilistic manipulation of Peter was the “loving but necessarily harsh” means by which Peter’s character “was permanently changed,”⁶² thereby conceding that Peter’s character was never irreversibly established or “eternalized” in the first place.⁶³ What the case of Peter really suggests, then, is both the coherence of a more full-bodied form of compatibilism—one that recognizes that genuinely free actions can be foreknown

and even determined even if the character of the acting agent has yet to be “solidified” or “established”—and the utter untrustworthiness of the God of open theism. Since the God of open theism coerced Peter *before* Peter’s character was “unalterably”⁶⁴ acquired, it is reasonable to conclude that the God of open theism is a covenant breaker who could accomplish his purpose only by revoking the “irrevocable” gift of self-determining freedom that he gave to Peter.

The God of Open Theism: The Occasional Author of Sin

In the second place, the willingness of openness theologians to allow for God to work in a coercive fashion makes it much more difficult for them to maintain consistently that “the ultimate cause [and explanation] of any particular evil is the free agent, human or angelic, who produced it.”⁶⁵ Consider again Boyd’s treatment of Peter’s denial of Jesus. The case of Peter establishes that the God of open theism does in fact know what particular moral agents will do in the future, for he *knew* that Peter would betray Jesus if his character were “squeezed” in the correct fashion. God, Boyd tells us, “saw past Peter’s false bravado and *knew* the effect Jesus’ arrest would have on him.”⁶⁶ In light of the fact that God “squeezed” Peter *before* Peter’s character was irreversibly established, Boyd must either concede that the “God of the possible” can know what openness theologians contend it is logically impossible to know, namely the future free decisions of agents possessing self-determining freedom, or he must acknowledge that God *knew* what Peter would do because God *knew* that he would orchestrate circumstances that would *compel* Peter to betray Jesus, in which case God forced

Peter to sin.

While the critic might respond that such an acknowledgement would undermine the foundational assumptions of the openness program, open theists like Boyd apparently do not share this concern, for this is precisely the kind of acknowledgement he appears to make in his remarkable discussion of Genesis 45:5 and 50:20. Of these passages, Boyd argues that he is “largely in agreement” with compatibilists who insist that this text “illustrate[s] that God ordains evil actions for greater good.”⁶⁷ The passage “seems to indicate,” he concedes, “that God intentionally orchestrated the evil intentions of the brothers in order to get Joseph into Egypt.”⁶⁸ But while Boyd agrees with compatibilists “that this text shows that God *may decide* to orchestrate evil actions according to his sovereign will, . . . [he] den[ies] that this passage supports the conclusion that *all* evil actions occur in accordance with God’s eternal, sovereign will.”⁶⁹ Why? Of the three reasons that Boyd cites in his discussion of these texts, the second is most relevant to the question of who is ultimately responsible and therefore culpable for the evil actions that God actualizes through compatibilistic interaction. If we take Genesis 45:5 and 50:20 “as evidence of how God always operates,” Boyd argues,

we must accept the consequence that this passage always minimizes the responsibility of human agents. This is the conclusion Joseph himself draws from his observation that God used his brothers to send him to Egypt. “Do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves,” he tells them, “for God sent me.” If this text is taken as evidence of how God *always* controls human action—if God is involved in each kidnapping and murder the way he was involved in the activity of Joseph’s

brothers—we must be willing to console every murderer and kidnapper with Joseph’s words: “Do not be distressed, or angry with yourself . . . for God kidnapped and murdered your victims.” We cannot universalize the mode of God’s operation in this passage without also universalizing its implication for human responsibility.⁷⁰

When we consider Peter’s “divinely orchestrated lesson” in light of this rather strained caricature of compatibilism,⁷¹ we are, it seems, left with two options, neither of which speaks very highly of the openness program: Either God *knew* that Peter would deny Jesus because he *knew* a future contingent (which for an open theist is a bit like saying that God can make a square circle), or, more likely, he *knew* that Peter would deny Jesus because he *knew* that he would remove Peter’s self-determining freedom and *make* him deny Jesus (which calls God’s sinless perfection into question, given the presumption that genuine creaturely freedom is “incompatible with any form of determinism”). What the case of Peter establishes, then, is that openness theologians can rescue God from the charge of being the author of coerced sins only by advancing the *ad hoc* hypothesis that some instances of compatibilistic activity—even some that involve what we referred to earlier as “hard” coercion—are intransitive. Apparently, in some cases, causing or determining or forcing an event does not entail responsibility for the event.

The God of Open Theism: An Ambivalent and Arbitrary Warrior

Finally and most importantly, the willingness of openness theologians to sanction coercion is problematic because it makes it much more difficult to rescue God from being tarnished by the problem of evil. Why? Before we consider the answer

to this question, note that openness theologians would have us believe that their view of evil is superior to traditional views not only because it helps us understand that evil in general and specific evils in particular are simply the unfortunate consequences of free decisions to reject the love of God, but also because it helps us understand why “the all-powerful Creator of the world” does not prevent certain events “he wishes would not take place.”⁷² Whereas traditional views presume that there is “a *specific* divine reason for each *specific* evil in the world” and that all evils thus occur because they are part of an inscrutable divine plan, the open view insists that certain evils occur because God simply cannot with integrity prevent them without revoking the irrevocable gift of freedom that is necessary to love.⁷³ Indeed, while it is certainly true that the God of open theism is always doing everything he can “to further good and hinder evil,” what he in fact can do in each particular situation is “determined” less by what “God would desire” than it is by the “innumerable [contingent] variables that constitute the ‘givens’ of . . . [that] situation.”⁷⁴ God can prevent some evils but not others, in short, neither because he lacks omnipotence nor because he is an inherently arbitrary being, but because the “nonnegotiable givens” of some situations prevent him from intervening in a fashion that does not compromise “the domain of irrevocable freedom that he has given to agents.”⁷⁵ Thus, since it is impossible for contingent beings to know all of the variables that impact God’s interaction with free agents in various situations,⁷⁶ they must simply trust that he is always doing everything he can to maximize good and minimize evil “given the situation he must work with.”⁷⁷ They must trust, in other words, “that when the Father

tolerates wickedness, he does so out of his integrity. When he puts an end to it, he does this out of his integrity as well. Whatever good he can do, he does. Whatever evil he can prevent, he prevents. Whatever he must out of integrity allow, he allows.”⁷⁸

What, then, are we to make of the assertion that God can intervene to prevent evil in some cases but not in others because his integrity prevents him from compromising the “say-so” that is “the key to morally responsible personhood”?⁷⁹ Can we really rescue God from being tarnished by the problem of evil simply by insisting that he intervenes in one situation and not in another because “the complex constellation of contingent variables that collectively constitute a particular situation” allows him to intervene without rendering the gift of self-determining freedom “disingenuous”?⁸⁰ Boyd’s exposition leaves us with no compelling reason to conclude that we can. Since God can and does work unilaterally from time to time to bring about certain states of affairs, and since this coercive involvement can entail, as it did in the case of Peter, real violations of the gift of self-determining freedom given to moral agents, we simply cannot say that God is always doing “all he could do” to prevent evil and promote good when what he is doing falls short of a violation of the covenant that he has established with free agents.⁸¹ Recall again that God worked compatibilistically with Peter *before* Peter’s character was unalterably acquired, thus establishing that covenant infidelity is an option available to the God of open theism.⁸² But how and on what basis does the God of open theism decide when he is going to violate his covenant vows? How does he determine, in other words, which aspects of the future he is going to leave open and which aspects he is going to close

when the stated mechanism for making this determination does not obtain in all circumstances? Without a satisfactory answer to these questions—which, I submit, openness theologians simply *cannot* coherently provide—we can only conclude that the God of open theism is an ambivalent and arbitrary warrior who cannot be trusted to rule in every situation in a way that maximizes good and minimizes evil for his creatures.⁸³

Conclusion

The Achilles Heel of open theism is found in the eagerness of openness theologians to sanction what Jason Nicholls calls “select determinism.” Critics are convinced that when open theists insist that the God of open theism can retain providential control over the unfolding course of world history only through periodic instances of coercive intervention in the affairs of free moral agents, they open themselves up to the charge that their view of providence is something less than satisfying simply because coercion is difficult to reconcile with genuine freedom. Boyd contends that neo-Molinism neutralizes this charge by including might-counterfactuals in the content of God’s middle knowledge. The God of open theism retains “significant providential control” over the unfolding course of world history without undermining the genuine freedom that is necessary to love, he reasons, because the class of counterfactual propositions that God knows as true includes statements about what agents with libertarian freedom *might* or *might not* do in certain situations. Indeed, his providential control of world history involves his balanced oversight not only of would-counterfactuals, but also of might-counterfactuals, or those counterfactuals

that have to do with libertarian freedom and thus with future states of affairs that are possibly one way or possible another. As such, Boyd would have us believe that neo-Molinism supplies the theoretical framework for a rapprochement between the open view of the future on the one hand and more traditional views on the other because it enables open theists to affirm an ostensibly robust view of providence while simultaneously insisting that the Principle of Bivalence fails with respect to future contingent propositions and counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. In this essay I have tried to establish that no matter how innovative and therefore commendable this proposal might be it must be rejected not only because it is incoherent, but more importantly because it reduces the God of open theism to an ambivalent and arbitrary warrior for whom the problem of evil is insurmountable.

ENDNOTES

¹Much of the material in the second and third sections of this essay is adapted from Paul Kjos Helseth, “What Is at Stake in the Openness Debate? The Trustworthiness of God and the Foundation of Hope,” in *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*, ed. John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjos Helseth (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003) 275-307. This material is used with permission.

²William Lane Craig, “A Middle-Knowledge Response [to Gregory A. Boyd],” in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001) 58, 56. According to Craig, the Principle of Bivalence can be defined as follows: “for any proposition *p*, *p* is either true or false.” See also William Lane

Craig, "What Does God Know?" in *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God*, ed. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 137-155. Must we, along with open theists, say that statements about future contingents can be neither true nor false because the states of affairs to which they refer do not yet exist? According to Craig we must not. "To say that a future-tense statement is now true is not, of course, to say that we may now know whether it is true or to say that things are now so determined that it is true. It is only to say that when the time arrives, things will turn out as the statement predicts. A future-tense statement is true if matters turn out as the statement predicts, and false if matters fail to turn out as the statement predicts—this is all that the notion of truth as correspondence [which "holds merely that a statement is true if and only if what it states to be the case really is the case" (ibid., 144)] requires. Hence, there is no good reason to deny that future-tense statements are either true or false. . . . Think about it for a moment. If 'It is raining today' is now true, how could 'It will rain tomorrow' not have been true yesterday? The same facts guarantee that a future-tense statement asserted earlier, a present-tense statement asserted simultaneously, and a past-tense statement asserted later are all true" (ibid., 144-145).

³Craig, "A Middle-Knowledge Response [to Gregory A. Boyd]," 55, 58.

⁴Ibid., 57.

⁵Ibid., 59.

⁶Gregory A. Boyd, "An Open-Theism Response [to William Lane Craig]," in *Divine Foreknowledge*, 144.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 146.

⁹Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001) 130.

¹⁰Gregory A. Boyd, "The Open-Theism View," in *Divine Foreknowledge*, 14.

¹¹Boyd, "An Open-Theism Response [to William Lane Craig]," 147. According to the grounding objection, "there are no true counterfactuals about free decisions because there is nothing to make such statements true" (ibid., 209).

¹²Ibid., 147-148.

¹³Ibid., 146.

¹⁴Ibid., 148.

¹⁵Stephen J. Wellum, "What Is at Stake in the Openness Debate? The Inerrancy of Scripture," in *Beyond the Bounds*, 252, 253-254, 257, 264-265, 272.

¹⁶Bruce A. Ware, "What Is at Stake in the Openness Debate? The Gospel of Christ," in *Beyond the Bounds*, 330, cf. 324-331.

¹⁷Jason A. Nicholls, "Openness and Inerrancy: Can They Be Compatible?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (2002) 631, 647. It is interesting to note that in making his case for "select determinism" Nicholls anticipates some of Boyd's proposals by conceding that occasionally Scripture does depict God interacting with moral agents in a way that closely resembles compatibilism. He refuses to grant, how-

ever, that the decision-making depicted in these instances is genuinely free. If God is truly sovereign, Nicholls argues, "then it must always remain within his prerogative to periodically withhold or override our libertarian freedom. Indeed, it may even be true that in some selected instances that human decision-making does look something like what Ware and other Calvinists would call 'compatibilistic'—though, of course, as an Arminian-minded thinker I would be hesitant to call this 'freedom' in any genuine sense" (cf. 644-645, especially note 54).

¹⁸Ibid., 647, 640.

¹⁹For example, see Craig, "A Middle-Knowledge Response [to Gregory A. Boyd]," 55-60; Paul Kjoss Helseth, "On Divine Ambivalence: Open Theism and the Problem of Particular Evils," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2001) 493-511.

²⁰Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 190. See, for example, Ronald Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999) 320-321; Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000) 216; and Helseth, "On Divine Ambivalence," 497-510. Note that these critiques remain valid critiques of openness theologians who are consistently opposed to all forms of compatibilism.

²¹Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 123. As we shall see, this steering activity can involve God's foreknowing and even determining of the future decisions and actions of

responsible moral agents.

²²It is important to note that most of Boyd's proposals in *Satan and the Problem of Evil* are not new, but involve more fulsome explanations of commitments that, in retrospect, were largely assumed in his earlier writings. For an example of an earlier discussion that is easier to understand in light of the material presented in *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, see Gregory A. Boyd and Edward K. Boyd, *Letters from a Skeptic: A Son Wrestles with His Father's Questions About Christianity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1994), 41-43.

²³Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 123, 423.

²⁴Boyd is convinced that moral agents are genuinely free only when they possess *self-determining* freedom. The essential characteristic of *self-determining* freedom, he contends, is the "power to do otherwise." According to Boyd, "This conception of freedom affirms that 'given the same causal conditions, [free agents] could have chosen or done otherwise than we did.'" To put it differently, "In this view ... the total set of antecedent causes does not determine a truly free action. While factors outside the agent are *influential* in every decision an agent makes, such factors are never *coercive* when the decision is in fact free. Thus, appealing to factors external to the agent can never *exhaustively* explain the free choice of the agent. In light of all influences and circumstances, agents ultimately *determine themselves*" (ibid., 56). On the basis of this conception of freedom, Boyd argues that for freedom to be any-

thing more than a robotic "charade," human beings must be "autonomous, self-determining, morally responsible agents" (Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000] 134, 136). They must possess, in other words, the authentic ability "to choose between ... possibilities" that really matter, and those choices must not be "pre-settled" in any significant sense (ibid., 122, 126). Note that Boyd is convinced that this understanding of freedom—which is based upon "the concept of indeterministic causation," the notion that an event or a decision can be caused yet not irresistibly determined or necessitated by a set of antecedent conditions (*Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 73; cf. Boyd's discussion of "A Theology of Chance," ibid., 386-393)—is supported by Scripture, reason, "our experience of ourselves as self-determining agents" (ibid., 83), and contemporary science, especially quantum mechanics. For a critical assessment of Boyd's understanding of quantum mechanics, particularly the concept of causation that informs his understanding of "the complementarity of determinism and indeterminism" (cf. ibid., 151-155), see John C. Beckman, "Quantum Mechanics, Chaos Physics and the Open View of God," *Philosophia Christi* 4 (2002) 203-214. Note as well that there is a significant distinction in Boyd's thought between "self-determining freedom" and "self-determined acts." "Self-determining freedom" is the same thing as

"libertarian" or "incompatibilistic" freedom, and as such it is "incompatible with any form of determinism" (cf. *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 52 n. 3, 423). The class of "self-determined acts," on the other hand, includes acts performed with "self-determining freedom" *as well as* acts that flow out of self-determined characters. It is important to note that these latter kinds of acts—those that flow out of self-determined characters—*can be foreknown and even determined by God* if God so desires. For more on this critical distinction, see the forthcoming discussion. For a brief discussion of the rather clever role that "our experience/perception" plays in Boyd's thought, see note 28 below. Finally, note how Boyd's understanding of self-determining freedom equates determinism with coercion. This point will be important in the discussion that follows.

²⁵The critical nature of the relationship between moral character and the two kinds of activity that God weaves together into the unfolding story of world history is perhaps nowhere more concisely articulated than in the following quotation: "Classical Molinism ... affirms that God has significant control over the world even though agents possess libertarian freedom because God knows what agents would do in every conceivable situation.... The open view substantially agrees with this position but asserts, in contrast, that God also knows what agents might do in certain situations. In other words [*sic*], classical Molinism errs in limiting God's counterfactual

knowledge to *would*-counterfactuals instead of including *might*-counterfactuals. In the neo-Molinist view God knows what agents *might* do insofar as agents possess libertarian freedom. And God knows what agents *would* do insofar as they have received from God and through circumstances or acquired for themselves determinate characters. God knows both categories of counterfactuals as they pertain to every possible subject in every possible world throughout eternity. As in classical Molinism, God creates the world (or better, the set of possible worlds) that best suits his purposes" (ibid., 425).

²⁶Ibid., 182; Boyd also refers to this "domain" of freedom as an agent's "quality of freedom" (cf. 182, 428).

²⁷Ibid., 183 n. 6. God's self-imposed commitment not to undermine the self-determining freedom of genuinely free agents is captured in what Boyd calls his "covenant of non-coercion" (cf. 420).

²⁸Boyd is convinced that it is our ignorance of the innumerable contingent variables that condition God's interaction with the world—variables that are directly related to the inscrutable domains of freedom that he gives to every moral agent—that accounts for the apparent arbitrariness of life. "Life lacks rhyme or reason," he contends, "not because God is arbitrary ... [but] because *our perspective on reality is so myopic*. We experience the effects but can never comprehensively discern the causes [of what happens in history]." Note that it is this appeal to creaturely ignorance that also

plays a critical role in Boyd's Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy. The impenetrable mystery of evil is emphatically "*not about God's character or plan*," Boyd contends, but about "*the complexity of creation*." There is, he argues, "an element of impenetrable mystery surround[ing] every particular contingent feature of our world. Everything ultimately influences everything else, and ... there is an element of spontaneity at every level of being. Thus an exhaustive explanation of anything would ultimately require an exhaustive explanation of everything, and even then we would have to acknowledge that things could have happened differently. Only the omniscient God can be certain of why particular events happen precisely as they do." Since the created order is "so complex," contingent beings who "observe God's interactions with free subjects from the outside" must recognize that they "are simply not in a position to know most of the relevant facts that would explain the specifics of his interaction in any given situation." Although they can know "some of the principles on which God operates," they are largely ignorant of the innumerable contingent variables that condition his providential guidance of the world. In light of the fact that contingent beings simply cannot know everything that goes on "behind the scenes," they must trust God "despite appearances," believing that if "[they] saw what God sees, . . . [they] would understand why God did what he did and . . . [they] would see that he is

always concerned with maximizing goodness and minimizing evil" (ibid., 386, 215-216, 216, 196, 203, 200, 204). Please note the rather predictable and convenient role that "our experience/perception" plays in Boyd's thought. Boyd uses "our experience/perception" to justify his take on the *coherence* of self-determining freedom (cf. ibid., 78, 83), the *incoherence* of an Augustinian understanding of sovereignty (cf. ibid., 37 n. 13), and the *untenability* of "the mechanistic, deterministic worldview of Newton" (cf. ibid., 153-155). "Our experience/perception" is completely disregarded, however, when it challenges a critical component of his theodicy. While "in our experience" God's "mode of operation certainly appears arbitrary," in reality it is not, for God is not an arbitrary being. In short, we must trust that the God of open theism is not arbitrary despite the appearance that he is (ibid., 196, 200). It goes without saying that one can only wonder what larger hermeneutical principle, if any, guides Boyd's reliance upon "our experience/perception." Without such a principle, it is reasonable to conclude that his employment of "our experience/perception" in one way and then another is ultimately informed by little more than a rather nuanced form of special pleading.

²⁹Ibid., 420, 191, 188.

³⁰Ibid., 427, 183 n. 6.

³¹Ibid., 191, 60, 182. It is important to note that the domain or quality of freedom that the God of open theism gives to moral agents *does not extend* to those solidified character

traits that are the targets of compatibilistic manipulation. While it is certainly true that the God of open theism does infuse “basic characteristics” (ibid., 128) into moral agents when he creates them, he does not “preordain” that particular individuals will have the solidified traits that render their activity certain when manipulated compatibilistically. Rather, moral agents *themselves* establish the character traits that make them susceptible to compatibilistic exploitation (ibid., 122 n. 8).

³²Ibid., 191; cf. 171 n. 42.

³³Boyd, *Letters from a Skeptic*, 42.

³⁴Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 190.

³⁵Ibid., 189, 188, 122 n. 8; cf. 171 n. 42.

³⁶Gregory A. Boyd, “Christian Love and Academic Dialogue: A Reply to Bruce Ware,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (2002) 242.

³⁷Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 189. Boyd refers to the period of time in which agents possessing self-determining freedom are determining their *own* characters as a “probationary period” (cf. 171 n. 42, 188-189, 427). Note that during this period God cannot work in a deterministic fashion without revoking the irrevocable gift of freedom that he has given to moral agents. Note as well that during this time moral agents are determining not only their whole characters as either for or against God but also those individual character traits that eventually become the targets of compatibilistic exploitation. According to Boyd, “We tend to become the decisions we make. The more we choose

something, the more we *become* that something. We are all in the process of solidifying our identities by the decisions we make. With each decision we make, we pick up momentum in the direction of that decision.... So it is, I believe, in every area of our lives. The more we choose something, the harder it is to choose otherwise, until we finally are solidified—eternalized—in our decision. The momentum of our character becomes unstoppable. We create our character with our decisions, and our character, in turn, exercises more and more influence on the decisions we make. It’s in the nature of free, created beings, and I don’t see how it could be otherwise. Life, I guess, is like the proverbial snowball rolling down the hill” (*Letters from a Skeptic*, 41-42). For confirmation that individual character traits—and not just entire characters—are solidified through the use of libertarian freedom, see, for example, Boyd’s discussion of Peter’s cowardice in *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 130-133. For examples of other character traits becoming established through the use of libertarian freedom, see *Letters from a Skeptic*, 41, 42; and *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 122-123, 188-189.

³⁸Ibid., 122 n. 8. According to Boyd, it is the *self*, not God, who gives *determinateness* to character. Once this determinateness has been acquired God is then free to work compatibilistically with the agent, and to do so with integrity (cf. ibid., 375).

³⁹Ibid., 392-393.

⁴⁰Ibid., 122, emphasis added; cf. Gre-

gory A. Boyd, “Neo-Molinism and the Infinite Intelligence of God” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Colorado Springs, 15 November 2001) 7; and idem, “An Open-Theism Response [to William Lane Craig],” 148.

⁴¹Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 122 n. 8. Boyd is convinced that objections to the notion that events can be ordained without ordaining the particular people who will carry out those events are ultimately based upon the presupposition of “a mechanistic worldview. . . . That is, if a one-to-one relationship between causes and effects is assumed, then a particular effect cannot be determined without its antecedent causes also being determined. But this assumption is not necessary. To the contrary, this assumption is at odds with the general direction most fields of science took throughout the twentieth century. In a multitude of differing ways we have discovered that reality is constituted as a balance between determinism and freedom, stable laws and chance, regularity and spontaneity, general predictability and an element of unpredictability about specifics” (ibid., 121). For a discussion of how Boyd’s own assumptions might be coloring his reading of the scientific literature, cf. Beckman, “Quantum Mechanics, Chaos Physics and the Open View of God,” 203-214.

⁴²Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 122-123. As this text makes clear, Boyd clearly endorses some form of the “greater good” argument (see also ibid., 19, 396-397). Note, how-

ever, that these “greater goods” are not ordained from before the foundation of the world, as in more traditional theodicies, but as the narrative of history unfolds; God works these “greater goods” into his providential plans in time rather than before time, as moral agents solidify their characters and thereby acquire compatibilistic freedom.

⁴³Ibid., 130.

⁴⁴Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 127.

⁴⁵David Basinger, “Practical Implications,” in Clark Pinnock, et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994) 159; see Basinger’s extended discussion of this point in, “Can an Evangelical Christian Justifiably Deny God’s Exhaustive Knowledge of the Future?” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 25 (1995) 136-139. In *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 32-36, Basinger notes that while “Freewill theists believe that God does unilaterally control some things,” they nonetheless insist “that God, as a general rule, must allow choice to be voluntary in the sense that it is free from coercive divine manipulation.” In other words, God, as a general rule, must allow history to unfold without “overrid[ing] or withdraw[ing] freedom of choice” (“Can an Evangelical Christian Justifiably Deny God’s Exhaustive Knowledge of the Future?” 138). On the sporadic nature of God’s unilateral/coercive involvement in creaturely affairs, see also Nicholls, “Openness and Inerrancy,” 629-649;

William Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” in Pinnock, et al., *The Openness of God*, 142; Clark Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in *The Openness of God*, 194 n. 49; and John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 257-261. See Steven R. Tracy’s incisive discussion of this point, “Theodicy, Eschatology, and the Open View of God” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Danvers, Mass., November 1999) 14-29.

⁴⁶Basinger, “Can an Evangelical Christian Justifiably Deny God’s Exhaustive Knowledge of the Future?” 138. Bruce Ware correctly notes that, “At the heart of the openness proposal is the desire to uphold the *real* relationship that exists between God and others” (*God’s Lesser Glory*, 43). Openness theologians are convinced that real relationships are not possible when God deals with contingent beings in a compatibilistic fashion, for compatibilistic interaction, they argue, compromises genuine reciprocity by negating the freedom of the will. While committed compatibilists would certainly challenge this presumption, note that it is not they who have a problem with coercion, but those who insist that genuine freedom presupposes the indeterminacy of the will. Charles Hodge, for example, is by no means guilty of reducing the Spirit’s sovereign work in regeneration to what John Sanders calls, in a particularly uplifting example of irenic scholarship, the “divine rape” of the soul

(*The God Who Risks*, 238-240), for Hodge insists that regeneration involves a moral change that takes place “in a manner perfectly congruous to the nature of a rational and active being.” It takes place, in other words, “without any violence being done to the soul or any of its laws,” for the Spirit’s activity, “though immediate, is not compulsive,” but “according to reason, and the natural motion of the creature; the understanding proposing and the will embracing; the understanding going before with light, the will following after with love” (“Regeneration, and the Manner of Its Occurrence,” *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 2 [1830] 255-261). In the case of a compatibilist like Hodge, therefore, the Spirit’s sovereign activity in regeneration ought not be cited as evidence of what Sanders calls “nonconsensual control” (*The God Who Risks*, 238-240), for the supernatural influence by which he works in the elect both to will and to do his good pleasure “[does] the soul no more violence than demonstration does the intellect, or persuasion the heart” (“Regeneration, and the Manner of Its Occurrence,” 255-261).

⁴⁷Note that these points both echo and build upon the conclusions of scholars who are troubled by the apparently arbitrary nature of the God of open theism’s unilateral activity in creaturely affairs, particularly as this activity relates to moral evil and human suffering. See especially Tracy, “Theodicy, Eschatology, and the Open View of God,” 13-29; and Edward Wierenga, review of *The*

Openness of God, by Pinnock, et al., in *Faith and Philosophy* 14 (1997) 248-252. See also Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 207-211; Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997) 105-106; and Alfred J. Freddoso, review of *God, Time, and Knowledge*, by William Hasker, in *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993) 105-106.

⁴⁸Boyd, *Letters from a Skeptic*, 47.

⁴⁹Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 181-184.

⁵⁰Remember that the domain or quality of freedom that the God of open theism gives to moral agents *does not extend* to those specific character traits that are the solidified targets of compatibilistic exploitation.

⁵¹Note that even if we grant that "soft" coercion is compatible with open theism, "hard" coercion still presents insurmountable difficulties for the openness program.

⁵²Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 131.

⁵³Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 33-35.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁵Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 131. Boyd's comments on character solidification in this quotation are vague. When he says, "solidified to the extent that," does he mean "irreversibly" established and "permanently" or "unalterably" acquired (*ibid.*, 189)? Or, does he really mean something less than "irreversibly" established and "permanently" or "unalterably" acquired? If "solidified to the extent that" really means something less than *really* "solid," then how are we to avoid the conclusion that we are

all compatibilistically free, even with regard to those character traits that have yet to be "permanently" fixed or settled? Are not *all* of our character traits solidified to one extent or another? What, then, does it really mean to say that a character trait is solidified "to the extent that" it serves as a legitimate candidate for compatibilistic exploitation, particularly when that character trait changes when it is manipulated compatibilistically?

⁵⁶Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 35-37.

⁵⁷For a thoughtful analysis of "neo-Molinism" that refuses to grant that compatibilism and open theism are compatible in any way, see Ware, "What Is at Stake in the Openness Debate? The Gospel of Christ," 324-331.

⁵⁸Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 183 n. 6.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 183 n. 6, 191; cf. 171 n. 42.

⁶⁰Cf. *ibid.*, 122 n. 8, 189. Again, the domain or quality of freedom that the God of open theism gives to moral agents *does not extend* to those character traits that are the solidified targets of compatibilistic exploitation. The God of open theism, in other words, does *not* "preordain" that certain individuals will have the solidified traits "that would render some of their behavior certain" (*ibid.*, 122 n. 8), for moral agents acquire those traits for *themselves* through the use of their libertarian freedom.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 427.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 133, 132.

⁶³Boyd, *Letters from a Skeptic*, 42; cf. *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 122 n. 8, 132.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 189.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 429.

⁶⁶Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 36, emphasis added.

⁶⁷Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 396.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 397.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 396-397.

⁷¹Compatibilists endorse the doctrine of "concurrence" and thus believe that the same event is both fully caused by God and fully caused by the creature who performed it. Although the divine and creaturely causes "work in different ways," the doctrine nonetheless affirms "that God *directs*, and *works through*, the distinctive properties of each created thing, so that these things themselves bring about the results that we see. In this way, it is possible to affirm that in one sense events are fully (100 percent) caused by God and fully (100 percent) caused by the creature as well" (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994] 319). Boyd, however, appears to believe that when God is active, the agent is passive, and when the agent is active, God is passive. Thus he conceives of responsibility like a pie; the more pieces God gets, the less the agent has, and *vice versa*. Note that if what Boyd says elsewhere about the moral responsibility of agents who have allegedly acquired compatibilistic freedom is to be believed (cf. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 122-123), this caricature of compatibilism ironically supports the contention that Peter's

character was *not* irreversibly established when God forced him to betray Jesus.

⁷²Ibid., 16.

⁷³Ibid., 429; cf. 16, 423.

⁷⁴Ibid., 203, 391, 392, 389 n. 3; cf. 212-213, 232-233. "The metaphysical principles that condition God's interaction with free agents ... together with all the particular decisions and chance occurrences that influenced history to arrive at just this situation, constitute the 'givens' of a particular situation. The givens constitute that which God is up against in responding to a situation" (ibid., 422).

⁷⁵Ibid., 196, 231. One of the key differences between open theism and process thought is found at this point. While the God of process theism "can *only* act in response to decisions of free agents and he must respond in accordance with metaphysical principles governing both him and creation," the God of open theism can intervene in a unilateral fashion if that intervention will not compromise the restrictions that he has placed on himself. Thus, whereas in process thought God exerts "the same influence at all times and in all places," in the open view of the future God can work in an exceptional fashion if he decides that he can do so in a particular situation with integrity, i.e., without undermining the self-determining freedom that he has given to moral agents (ibid., 229).

⁷⁶Cf. ibid., 196-197.

⁷⁷Ibid., 422, cf. 196; 204, 212-213.

⁷⁸Ibid., 200. On the very real likelihood that Boyd's employment of

"our experience/perception" ultimately reduces to a sophisticated form of special pleading, see note 28 above.

⁷⁹Ibid., 232-233.

⁸⁰Ibid., 422, 215.

⁸¹Ibid., 214. Again, remember that God coerced or rendered Peter's activity certain *before* Peter's character was irreversibly established. This is significant because the "givens" that obtain in particular situations *include* the "metaphysical principles" that "condition" God's interaction with contingent beings (ibid., 422). Among these "metaphysical principles" is God's covenant promise *not* to intervene in the free activity of responsible moral agents until those agents have established their *own* characters as either for or against God. Obviously, the case of Peter calls the negotiability of this "nonnegotiable given" into question since he was not eternalized as a particular kind of person when God manipulated him compatibilistically.

⁸²That the God of open theism violated his covenant of noncoercion with Peter is established by the fact that Peter's character in fact *did* change; God's coercion of Peter was the means by which Peter became a "new" man, "a man willing to lay down his life for the lambs the Master entrusted to him" (ibid., 133). Note that this conclusion is sound only because the domain or quality of freedom that the God of open theism gives to moral agents *does not extend* to those character traits that are the solidified targets of compatibilistic interaction. It is sound,

in other words, only because the God of open theism did *not* ordain before the foundation of the world that certain individuals would have the solidified character traits that would render some of their activity certain.

⁸³Note that it is this character flaw that establishes that there is no principled way to rescue the God of open theism from being tarnished by the problem of particular evils, whether the evils in question are mundane and isolated or horrendous and large-scale. While it is certainly true that responsibility for horrendous evils like the Holocaust is "widespread," since, "Evil on a grand scale always involves cooperation on a grand scale," it is also true that the God of open theism could prevent these evils if he really wanted to not only because he is willing and able to steer agents who possess compatibilistic freedom but more importantly because this steering activity can involve, as it did in the case of Peter, real violations of the gift of self-determining freedom given to responsible moral agents. Since God has both the wherewithal and the willingness to do to all agents involved in a particular evil or set of evils what he did to Peter, the attempt to absolve God of responsibility for large-scale, horrendous evils by pointing to the "shared nature of moral responsibility" (ibid., 174) simply will not wash. For a more extended discussion of this point, cf. Helseth, "What Is at Stake in the Openness Debate? The Trustworthiness of God and the Foundation of Hope," 300-307.