

Oliver Wiertz, Frankfurt (Germany)

Divine Providence as a subject of analytic philosophy of religion

According to Cicero at the bottom of all philosophical disputes about the nature of the gods lies the question whether the world is created and directed by gods or not. Without a safe answer to this question humans are in total ignorance concerning the most important things¹. Surely the topic of divine providence is of utmost theological, spiritual and philosophical importance. The way you conceptualize the doctrine of God's providential care has implications for your conceptualization of the nature of human beings and their role in God's plan, the relation of human beings to God and so on. Therefore it is not surprising that even among those philosophers who share a commitment to the belief that the world does owe its existence to a perfect divine being, there are heavy disputes concerning the details of the concept of God's providence. Or as Bruce Reichenbach has written: 'divine providence ... presents an intellectual and spiritual puzzle that is both magnetic and enigmatic'².

In the following I will concentrate on some aspects of the discussion of divine providence in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. First I will give a short characterization of analytic philosophy in general and analytic philosophy of religion in particular and then refer to four strands of discussion of providence in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. Subsequently I shall discuss the three main conceptions of divine providence within this analytic discourse.

I. What is Analytic Philosophy (AP) and what is Analytic Philosophy of Religion (APR)?

The difficulties in giving a precise and clear definition of the term 'analytic philosophy' are notorious, and it is likewise hard to draw the distinction between so-called analytic and continental ways of doing philosophy³.

¹ Cf. *Cicero*, *De natura deorum* I, 2.

² *B. Reichenbach*, *Divine Providence. God's Love and Human Freedom* (Eugene OR 2016) XIII.

³ In a way these difficulties should not come as a surprise because they are mere symptoms of the general problem of giving a widely accepted, and helpful, definition of philosophy sim-

Let me propose two initial characterizations of doing philosophy in the analytic mode:

First: AP is characterized by the acknowledgement of certain methodological standards of philosophy: a precise terminology, the duty of rational justification of philosophical theses and a thorough way of arguing for and against philosophical claims.

Second: the merely methodological characterization is not sufficient because the enumerated methodological commitments could be taken to characterize *all* good philosophy. Therefore I propose an additional characterization of contemporary AP by associating it with a certain historical tradition of philosophy (called ‘*classic analytic philosophy*’), which was constituted mainly by a group of renowned philosophers (such as Gottlob Frege, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Rudolf Carnap, J. L. Austin or W. V. O. Quine), and revolved around certain canonical texts, quasi-canonical problems and solutions, and paradigmatic forms of arguments⁴.

In this way one can view AP as a ‘tradition of enquiry’⁵, i.e. a diachronic discourse which is characterized by particular standards of rationality and methodology, and which passes on a series of canonical texts presenting paradigmatic ways of dealing with paradigmatic philosophical problems. Traditions are clusters of beliefs and practices which are socially transmitted in a specific group over a certain period of time, and they constrain all further theoretical-intellectual development within the group as they constitute the normative standard guiding the historical transmission of these beliefs and practices. Therefore one cannot understand what APR is if one neglects its history. Up to the fifties and early sixties much of AP and APR conformed to

pliciter.

⁴ Contrary to many voices announcing the demise of AP or denying any distinction between AP and continental philosophy, it seems that AP still is an identifiable and flourishing school of philosophy. This becomes especially clear in the case of APR. Critics of this categorization and distinction often identify AP with certain aspects or a certain period of its history or seem to presuppose the existence of an unbridgeable gap as necessary condition for distinguishing different traditions of philosophy—both of which are unwarranted. ‘There is probably no such thing as *the* analytic tradition or *the* continental tradition in philosophy; but there are recognizably analytic traditions and continental traditions. They are different in their vocabularies, their canons and their methods or styles of “argument”, *M. Westphal, Hermeneutics and Holiness*, in: O. D. Crisp, M. C. Rea (eds.), *Analytic Theology. New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford 2009) 265–279, here 265.

⁵ For the concept of a tradition of enquiry cf. A. McIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame IND 1988). But I don’t share McIntyre’s thesis that standards of rationality are immanent to a tradition and that there aren’t any substantial criteria of rationality connecting different traditions of enquiry.

the picture many people still have of AP in judging its defining characteristics to be some residues of logical positivism or a vivid commitment to ordinary language philosophy, both of these schools being utterly hostile to metaphysics and religious truth claims. But in the sixties AP and APR witnessed the resurgence of metaphysics and of cognitivist theories of religious language, i.e. theories that affirm that at least some religious sentences express truth claims, and that religion, as a certain way of living, cannot do wholly without truth-apt beliefs and utterances. From this second period of APR—the discussion of religious language and its truth-aptness—a further third phase followed quite organically. If there are religious truth claims about God’s nature and existence, then the question naturally arises whether these claims are also true, in addition to being just truth-apt. Therefore questions concerning the consistency and epistemic legitimation of theistic claims came to the fore in the third period of APR. As only *consistent* descriptions of God can be true, the topic of divine attributes gained interest. Without much discussion or questioning, the traditional theistic attributes of God were presupposed in this discussion.

But even if theism were shown to be consistent that alone wouldn’t guarantee its truth. New and old arguments for and against the existence of God were discussed. Many of these discussions were based on the evidentialist assumption that believers are justified in holding their beliefs only if they have (propositional) evidence for their truth⁶.

In the mid-eighties new topics broadened the agenda of ARP which allows us to speak of a fourth period in the history of APR. So called Reformed Epistemology entered the philosophical stage as a counterpart to evidentialism, which it criticised heavily⁷. To keep a long story short: according to Reformed Epistemology the Christian faith or its believers may enjoy a positive epistemic

⁶ There was also an intense debate about the nature of religious truth claims between the realist majority of analytic philosophers of religion, who viewed the truth value of religious sentences to be independent of the human subject believing them, and such antirealist ‘dissenters’ as Don Cupitt and D. Z. Phillips for whom God’s reality ought to be described in its dependence on the *human* mind (although it is not entirely clear whether Phillips really was an antirealist in a straightforward sense).

Let me briefly mention one consequence of the realist-metaphysical turn in AP: it has led to an estrangement between AP and the (other) humanities. AP has lost much of its importance as a conversation partner or inspiration for literary studies, cultural studies and religious studies. AP is viewed more as a natural associate of scientific research than of the humanities. APR is very much affected by this schism: it is safe to say that it is either neglected in theology and religious studies or treated with suspicion, if not hostility.

⁷ Reformed Epistemology didn’t come out of the blue. Alvin Plantinga, its most influential representative, wrote a study on the rational justification of belief in God already in 1967.

status even if its adherents cannot give any arguments for its truth⁸.

This 'new school' also initiated an intense discussion on the nature and legitimacy of a Christian philosophy in the circles of (North American) APR⁹. Alvin Plantinga argues that philosophy doesn't occur in the void but often reflects one's deepest commitments. From Plantinga's point of view Christian philosophers have the right and the duty to serve their own Christian community and that means that they have their 'own topics and projects to think about'¹⁰. Plantinga's conception of Christian philosophy and especially the part called 'philosophical theology' ('thinking about the central doctrines of the Christian faith from a philosophical perspective'¹¹) played an important role in the emergence of so called Analytic Theology. It broadened the scope of philosophical reflection from an abstract bare theism to a serious interest in the doctrines of real religions (to be honest: mainly the doctrines of Christianity). Therefore you find a widespread willingness among analytic philosophers of religion to deal philosophically with specific doctrines of concrete religions and an openness for the bible and for ecclesiastical doctrinal statements (in a quite traditional reading) as material for philosophical reflection. This is sometimes perplexing in the eyes of some philosophers, and quite objectionable for most theologians, who occasionally prefer to frame this openness as a kind of 'fundamentalistic naivety'.

The third new topic in the fourth period of APR owed its popularity mainly to one person: John Hick, who put the topic of religious diversity on the philosophical agenda. As a consequence of his encounter and comradeship with adherents of nonchristian religions in Edinburgh, Hick launched a series of books and articles on the plurality of religions beginning with his 'God and the Universe of Faiths' in 1973¹², which expounded his view of 'the great world faiths as different but (as far as we can tell) equally valid ways of conceiving,

⁸ Of utmost importance for the positive epistemic status of a belief is that the belief is formed by a properly functioning cognitive module which is successfully aimed at truth, as A. Plantinga puts it in: *A. Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford 2000), the epistemologically most elaborated work of Reformed Epistemology.

⁹ His 'Advice to Christian Philosophers', the inaugural address at the University of Notre Dame, was one of the main events in the resurgence of a Christian analytic philosophy.

¹⁰ *A. Plantinga, Advice to Christian Philosophers*, in: J. F. Sennett (ed.), *The Analytic Theist. An Alvin Plantinga Reader* (Grand Rapids MI 1998) 296–315, here 299.

¹¹ *A. Plantinga, Christian Philosophy at the End of the 20th Century*, in: *The Analytic Theist*, 340.

¹² These contributions to the debate on the plurality of religions were preceded by his widely acknowledged works on faith and reason, the verifiability of theistic language and on the problem of evil.

experiencing, and responding to the ultimate reality that we call God¹³.

Contemporary APR embraces the methodological ideals of mainstream AP by stressing the importance of precise concepts, clear theses, thorough arguments and detailed inquiries of small-scale problems. APR has also welcomed the metaphysical turn in AP (while criticizing its naturalistic leaning) and shares in the 'traditional task of seeking a true metaphysical account of the world'¹⁴. Theistic philosophers of religion are confident that theism is well suited for making an important contribution to this metaphysical project while maintaining that theism itself gains much in terms of explanatory power, rationality, coherence and consistency from metaphysical thinking. Those commitments are commonly fleshed out in a cognitivist-realist theory of religious language and a corresponding interest in questions of truth, consistency and rationality concerning the theistic conception of God. So APR is characterized by a deep interest in questions regarding the truth, coherence and rationality of the theistic conception of God while displaying a (relative) lack of interest in religion as a trait of human nature or as a culturally embedded phenomenon or socially constructed cultural product¹⁵, or in the relation between the spreading of modern culture and secularization and so on. In this way, the work done in APR stands more in continuity with the traditional project of philosophical theology including such figures as Anselm, Thomas Aquinas or John Locke than with modern 'continental' ways of doing philosophy of religion or contemporary mainstream theology¹⁶. These remarks should be sufficient for an understanding of the term 'analytic philosophy of religion'.

In summary, and slightly simplistically, I would characterize contemporary APR by mentioning three features, or commitments, pertaining to the analytic discourse on religion:

¹³ J. Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths. Critical Dialogues on Religious Pluralism* (London 1995) IX.

¹⁴ R. Swinburne, *The Value and Christian Roots of Analytical Philosophy of Religion*, in: H. A. Harris, C. J. Insole (ed.), *Faith and Philosophical Analysis. The Impact of Analytical Philosophy on the Philosophy of Religion* (London, Burlington VT 2005) 33–45, here 35.

¹⁵ Cf. P. L. Quinn, *The Cultural Anthropology*, in: W. J. Wainwright (ed.), *God, Philosophy, and Academic Culture. A Discussion between Scholars in the AAR and the APA* (Atlanta GE 1996) 47–57, here 55.

¹⁶ Even though it might be a hard task to pin down the differences between analytic ways of doing philosophy of religion/theology and continental ways, it is safe to say that the reading of Alston's 'Perceiving God', Swinburne's 'Existence of God' and Plantinga's 'Warranted Christian Belief' followed by the reading of Marion's 'God without Being', Richard Kearney's 'Anatheism. Returning to God after God' and Mark Taylor's 'Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology' will give one a sense of the differences between APR and some nonanalytic ways of doing philosophy of religion.

- The use of the same methodological ideals, rational criteria and formal tools as in other areas of AP.
- A realist-metaphysical framework. Theism and the Christian doctrines are viewed as having an essentially metaphysical character in two senses: firstly in offering, implying or contributing to an account of the fundamental structures and the meaning of the whole of reality, and secondly in dealing with reality and not merely with our talk about reality or our constructions of reality¹⁷.
- An optimistic appraisal of the human capacity for rational metaphysical thinking and knowledge of God.

II. Divine Providence as subject of APR

In the following I will use the term ‘providence’ in a wide sense. I won’t distinguish between *gubernatio* and *providentia* in the narrow sense, to use the terminology of Aquinas, that is, I don’t explicitly distinguish terminologically between God’s eternal plan of the order of the world and God’s realization of this plan in history. To put it overly simplistic: ‘providence’ labels God’s act of sovereignly and lovingly sustaining and ordering the world He¹⁸ himself has freely brought into being and will guide toward its end according to His overall salvific plan.

The background of most discussions of divine providence in contemporary APR is the so called perfect being theology (PBT). According to this kind of reflecting on God, it is logically impossible that there is something greater than God. This thesis, going back to Anselm of Canterbury, is explicated in the following way: God exemplifies all great making properties perfectly (and exemplifies no non-compensated limiting property¹⁹)²⁰.

¹⁷ It is indicative of this realist stance that one of the main arguments against Peter van Inwagen’s ‘Relativitytrinitarianism’ refers to its supposed antirealist consequences.

¹⁸ Although I use a male pronoun to refer to God, I capitalize it to avoid giving the impression that God represents the male sex in some exclusive, anthropomorphic or otherwise inappropriate sense.

¹⁹ A compensated limiting property is a property which seems to limit in one way or another a certain aspect of God’s perfection but which is (logically or metaphysically) necessitated by other perfections. Perhaps the possession of one perfection limiting another is inconceivable in the case of ‘pure perfections’. But otherwise, any limiting property has to be compensated in the mentioned sense.

²⁰ Most classical theists would refuse to talk about God as exemplifying any properties at all because of God’s strict simplicity. But at least for stylistic reasons, I prefer to speak of different

P is a great making property iff²¹ it is intrinsically better for A to possess P than not to possess P and iff the possession of P contributes to A's perfection. Exemplifying all great making properties perfectly means that God has all basic great making properties essentially, i.e. that there is no possible world in which God has not all of them and that all great making properties are unsurpassably realized in God—as far as it is logically possible. A instantiates maximum greatness if A instantiates all properties of a *possible* being that is greater than all other *possible* beings²².

Concerning the divine attributes, including those which play the most important role in our context, i.e. omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence, the majority of contemporary analytic philosophers of religion accepts the limits of logic (to speak very loosely) in explicating them. That means that a 'senseless sentence doesn't become an intelligible proposition because we write it down after "God knows that ..."²³. With God's omnibenevolence things are a little bit more complicate since such authors as Marylin McCord Adams, who have a scholarly background in medieval philosophy and theology, are uneasy about subordinating God to moral rules because according to them there are no moral principles which are independent of God. Another controversial question which is relevant for our topic is the question of God's eternity. Some view God's eternity as strict timelessness, some as an existence in time without beginning or end and others try to stir different kinds of middle courses. These different conceptions of God's eternity will play a role when we come to the topic of God's foreknowledge and His acting in the world.

With this background in mind Paul Helm's presumption makes sense that 'the connotation of "omni"terms, terms such as "omnipotent" and "omniscient," [sic!] should, when applied to God, be as wide in their connotation as possible'²⁴. This principle has consequences for the conception of divine providence, because it seems to favour a stress on God's sovereignty and Helm does indeed use it to justify a presumption 'in favour of the so called no-risk

properties of God (a manner of speaking, by the way, that one can find even in the sturdiest defenders of God's simplicity).

²¹ 'Iff' is the abbreviation of 'if and only if' which constitutes a biconditional that can be read from the left to the right as well as from the right to the left. The biconditional 'Peter is a bachelor iff Peter is an unmarried male human being' is only true when it is true that if Peter is a bachelor then he is an unmarried male human being; conversely, it is also true that if Peter is an unmarried male human being then Peter is a bachelor.

²² Cf. D. J. Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness* (Abingdon NY 2010) 3.

²³ P. Geach, *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge 1977) 43f.

²⁴ P. Helm, *God Does Not Take Risks*, in: M. L. Peterson, R. J. VanArragon (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion* (Malden, Oxford 2004) 228–238, here 231.

view of divine government'²⁵, but this prematurely anticipates a discussion I first have to introduce.

Seen from the perspective of contemporary APR the *traditional* doctrine of divine providence rests on two conceptual pillars: the concept of God's perfection, especially His unlimited omniscience, and God's unrestricted sovereignty over the world. According to Thomas Flint, a leading participant in the contemporary discussion, the doctrine of providence 'is essentially a picture of how a God who is perfect in knowledge, love and power exhibits those perfections through the detailed control he exercises over his creation. ... to see God as provident is to see him as knowingly and lovingly directing each and every event involving each and every creature toward the ends he has ordained for them'²⁶. Or to put it more generally: when the theory of providence is the general answer to the question 'How does God run the world?'²⁷, every theory of providence has to pay tribute to the unsurpassably exalted ontological status of God. God doesn't depend in any respect on others while everything nondivine depends on God. Therefore there are no (nonlogical) limitations to God's perfections.

So God's knowledge is not only complete but also certain and infallible. This means firstly that there is nothing not known by God (among those things God *could* know)²⁸. Secondly, God doesn't make conjectures (to make the allusion to the title of Popper's book complete: nor can He be refuted) and has no doubts; His knowledge is of the highest grade of certainty. Thirdly, God's knowledge is not only true (which is a conceptual truism as knowledge implies truth) but also infallible (i.e. God can make no errors; there aren't any cognitive states of God which entail God deeming a false proposition true or a true proposition false). There isn't anything God has to learn, there is no growth in knowledge in the case of God.

His sovereignty is universal and unsurpassably effective. That means that there is no possibility of a failure of God's plans; there isn't so much as a hint of a logical possibility that someone or something thwarts God's will. And there is no event, and there cannot be any event, which does not depend upon God. Nothing transpires without being, in one way or the other, ordained by God,

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

²⁶ *T. Flint*, *Divine Providence. The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, London 1998) 12.

²⁷ *W. Hasker*, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God* (London, New York 2004) 151.

²⁸ The qualification in the brackets refers to those states of affairs which might be inaccessible to God, such as how it is for *me* to be Oliver Wiertz or how the white wine I drank last evening tasted to *me*; this qualification is controversial, however.

i.e. brought about directly or indirectly by God (or as analytic philosophers prefer to say: being strongly or weakly actualized by God).

Consequently, God's providence isn't only general but also meticulous—it rules without any exception—and, furthermore, God's providence is efficacious:

Each effect produced in the created universe is either specifically and knowingly intended by Him ... or ... specifically and knowingly permitted by Him, only to be then ordered toward some appropriate good²⁹.

Even the most remote and smallest event is in this sense ordained by God. Not even a sparrow would fall without God's approval. But God's sovereignty isn't that of a tyrant but rather that of a most wise and morally perfect being. It is not a mode of government characterized by capriciousness but a government conducted by a perfect being with a perfect plan³⁰. Therefore chance or random events have no place in the traditional doctrine of providence. Everything happening does happen according to the governing will of God³¹. "Oops!" is an interjection God need never employ³².

But this strong conception of God's sovereignty in traditional doctrines of providence leads to tensions, which some would prefer to call dilemmas: how does God's sovereignty compound with the freedom of some of His creatures? That means: how does the traditional doctrine of providence square with the equally classical doctrine that God has granted freedom to human beings? Human freedom means that human beings have, at least to some extent, control over themselves and over other parts of creation which gives them a certain responsibility. This problem concerns both God's cognitive and His volitional-executive sovereignty. These questions of compatibility have been intensely discussed in ARP during the last two or three decades³³.

²⁹ A. J. Freddoso, Introduction, in: Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*. Part IV of the Concordia. Translated, with an Introduction and Notes by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, London 1988) 3.

³⁰ Cf. T. Flint, *Two Accounts of Providence*, in: T. V. Morris (ed.), *Divine and Human Action*. Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism (Ithaca, London 1988) 147–181, here 149f.

³¹ Peter van Inwagen defends a contrary position, cf. P. van Inwagen, *The Place of Chance in a World sustained by God*, in: T. V. Morris (ed.), *Divine and Human Action*. Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism (Ithaca, London 1988) 211–235.

³² T. Flint, *Divine Providence*, 13.

³³ 'The last two decades have seen an unprecedented amount of philosophical work on the topics of divine foreknowledge, middle knowledge and timelessness in relation to human freedom.', W. Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, 108.

The difference between alternative positions concerning Divine Providence rests on the different characterizations of the relation between these two deeply ingrained intuitions of many theists: on the one hand the acceptance of the ontologically exalted status of God's cognitive and volitional sovereignty and on the other hand the intuitively strongly supported and biblically motivated assumption of human moral responsibility, which in turn presupposes human freedom. Basically, three main positions in the field of current discussions of divine providence can be distinguished, based on how they confront the problem and what kind of solutions they put forward³⁴:

- The Augustinian-Reformed-Banezian Position of Theological Fatalism (Paul Helm³⁵): the affirmation of God's sovereignty is incompatible with certain philosophical conceptions of freedom, called libertarian which therefore (and for additional philosophical reasons) have to be abandoned.
- Molinism (Thomas Flint³⁶): with the help of the theoretical tool of so called middle knowledge, the compatibility between a robust conception of divine sovereignty and a libertarian conception of human freedom can be demonstrated.

³⁴ It goes without saying that this categorization is very coarse-grained and leaves out many philosophers occupying middle-ground positions, like Richard Swinburne, who has strong leanings towards Open Theism without ever having identified as an open theist, or like Bruce Reichenbach, whose stance in some respects resembles the Openist views, especially in his stress on the importance of a libertarian conception of freedom, but in other respects bears some resemblance with the Augustinian-Reformed position due to its strong conception of trust in God's guidance in every individual life. It is also incomplete since it omits positions on providence based on the theory of 'simple foreknowledge' as well as the recent proposal of 'philosophical Arminianism'; for the first cf. *D. Hunt*, The Simple-Foreknowledge View, in: J. K. Beilby, P. R. Eddy (ed.), *Divine Foreknowledge. Four Views* (Downers Grove IL 2001) 65–103; *D. Hunt*, Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge, *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993) 396–416; for the second cf. *J. Kvanvig*, *Destiny and Deliberation. Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Oxford 2011). One could also add 'process theism' but as it is doubtful whether one should view it as part of APR and it doesn't play any important role in contemporary analytic discussions of divine providence, I won't take it into consideration.

³⁵ Cf. *P. Helm*, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove IL 1994).

³⁶ The common names of these positions, 'Augustinism' or 'Molinism' are not to be taken as historically exact and watertight designations, but rather as convenient conventions which refer in a more or less loose way to historic examples related to the modern positions.

- Open Theism (William Hasker³⁷): the affirmation of libertarian human freedom as it is called for by scriptural, philosophical and experiential reasons is incompatible with the traditional robust concept of divine sovereignty which therefore has to be moderated.

The discussion of providence in APR roughly comprises four strands/topics:

1. The topic of the compatibility between God's sovereign providential care and human freedom, and its repercussions for an adequate conception of God's nature. This strand is fundamental to the whole discussion of providence and its different aspects in contemporary APR. It has mainly to do with the question of God's sovereignty in its more cognitive (omniscience) and in its more volitional/executive aspect (omnipotence): in which sense is God in cognitive and executive control of the universe He has created, a universe which is inhabited by beings with free will?
2. The topic of evil in a world governed by an omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good God. Since the existence of non-divine beings with free will plays an important role in most theistic accounts of evil, this topic has strong connections with the first one.
3. The topic of God acting in history with such sub-questions as that of petitionary prayer, the possibility of miracles and the general question of compatibility between the traditional doctrine of providence and modern findings of science together with the scientific world-view, which is said to be an outgrowth of those findings³⁸.
4. The topic of religious diversity and the soteriological consequences of religious diversity.

In the following I will concentrate on the first two topics and lay the main stress on the first. To the third and fourth topic I will only give some hints in advance.

³⁷ Cf. *W. Hasker, Providence, Evil and the Openness of God.*

³⁸ As already suggested, there are important connections between these four topics. For example the more one stresses the sovereignty of God's providential care and diminishes the role of human freedom, the more pressure one will face in encountering the problem of evil.

The topic of God's acting in history contains two main problems: first, the basic question of whether the concept of an incorporeal being who is still capable of acting is coherent at all, and secondly the question whether the traditional conception of God's ordinary and extraordinary acting on and within an allegedly causally closed physical universe 'reigned' by natural laws is possible and has any explanatory worth. Concerning the first problem let me only sketch a rough outline of a possible solution. Independent of one's stance on the tenability of dualistic conceptions of the mind-body relation, we can at least imagine the change of material reality caused by a pure spirit; for example imagine a situation in which a pure spirit moves the table above the floor. I don't want to assimilate God to a poltergeist and God's actions to telepathic events, but the conceivability of such phenomena is a point in case of the logical possibility of bodiless actions. In the field of action theory the concept of 'basic action', i.e. directly bringing something about without any intermediary steps, can be used as further evidence for the non-necessity of corporeal/material 'tools' for the realization of the intention to change a certain order of matter. Therefore the concept of divine action doesn't seem to be blatantly incoherent.

Concerning the second problem one has to distinguish between physics and physicalism, or more generally: between science and scientism. The former designates a certain mode of enquiry into empirical reality relying on a canon of specific methods, aiming at knowledge about the structure of empirical reality. The latter, however, designates a metaphysical theory or a world-view, which states that empirical reality is all there is, that nothing exists which cannot, at least in principle, be exhaustively dealt with by the methods of natural science. This metaphysical claim, though, is not implied or even supported by the outcome of scientific research into the structures of empirical reality, and that for principal reasons: science cannot provide us with metaphysical knowledge regarding the very foundations of reality or the possible extensions of reality beyond the empirical domain. Firstly because it presupposes the existence of basic regularities and building-blocks within the universe which in turn cannot be explained scientifically because every scientific explanation must rely on these and therefore take them for granted (for example the existence of natural laws). And secondly because the question of the reality of the non-empirical obviously cannot be answered by means of empirical investigation. Hence, science can tell us at most that it cannot detect anything which speaks in favour of divine action in the world, but that shouldn't come as a surprise since God's actions themselves (as distinguished from their outcomes) are not empirical events and therefore don't fall within the scope of

scientific enquiry³⁹.

With respect to soteriology amidst religious diversity, the possible solutions to the problems of the soteriological consequences of religious diversity will vary in accordance with the core insights, concepts and theoretical tools of the respective doctrines of providence. Someone who is committed to Molinism with its theory of middle knowledge will consequently attempt to formulate a solution with the help of the theory of middle knowledge, as William Lane Craig has done⁴⁰. Similarly, an 'Augustinian' would try to solve the problem with the help of God's unrestricted sovereignty which is manifested e.g. in the election of some and the reprobation of others. Another possibility is to say farewell to radical forms of soteriological exclusivism without compromising traditional Christian doctrines, an option that was implemented by the Roman Catholic church at the Second Vatican Council.

1. Conceptual Clarifications

Before turning to the first and second strand of contemporary discussion of divine providence in APR I have to discuss two concepts that are of special importance for the contemporary discussion of divine providence in APR: the concept of freedom and the concept of possible worlds.

Freedom

It is clear and commonsensical that one can distinguish between freedom of action and freedom of will, and that freedom has at least something to do with absence of constraint, which to some extent must exclude external compulsion. But beyond that rather platitudinous common ground philosophical controversy is raging. With the help of the relation between freedom and determinism we can distinguish three possible positions on freedom.

³⁹ Only one short remark concerning the problems which the conservation principles in science allegedly pose for a theistic doctrine of divine providence: first, these conservation principles apply only to closed systems and the theist has good reasons for denying that the universe, taken as the whole of physical reality, is metaphysically closed, i.e. a theist qua theist will claim that the universe is open to the metaphysical influence of a transcendent being. Second, these principles only apply to the relation between physical causes and effects, and God is certainly not a physical cause and not a cause alongside with other causes at all. For a critique of the assumption of a necessary conflict between theism and science cf. *A. Plantinga, Where the Conflict Really Lies. Science, Religion and Naturalism* (Oxford, New York 2011).

⁴⁰ Cf. *W. L. Craig, 'No Other Name'. A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ, Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989) 172–188.

The topic of God's acting in history contains two main problems: first, the basic question of whether the concept of an incorporeal being who is still capable of acting is coherent at all, and secondly the question whether the traditional conception of God's ordinary and extraordinary acting on and within an allegedly causally closed physical universe 'reigned' by natural laws is possible and has any explanatory worth. Concerning the first problem let me only sketch a rough outline of a possible solution. Independent of one's stance on the tenability of dualistic conceptions of the mind-body relation, we can at least imagine the change of material reality caused by a pure spirit; for example imagine a situation in which a pure spirit moves the table above the floor. I don't want to assimilate God to a poltergeist and God's actions to telepathic events, but the conceivability of such phenomena is a point in case of the logical possibility of bodiless actions. In the field of action theory the concept of 'basic action', i.e. directly bringing something about without any intermediary steps, can be used as further evidence for the non-necessity of corporeal/material 'tools' for the realization of the intention to change a certain order of matter. Therefore the concept of divine action doesn't seem to be blatantly incoherent.

Concerning the second problem one has to distinguish between physics and physicalism, or more generally: between science and scientism. The former designates a certain mode of enquiry into empirical reality relying on a canon of specific methods, aiming at knowledge about the structure of empirical reality. The latter, however, designates a metaphysical theory or a world-view, which states that empirical reality is all there is, that nothing exists which cannot, at least in principle, be exhaustively dealt with by the methods of natural science. This metaphysical claim, though, is not implied or even supported by the outcome of scientific research into the structures of empirical reality, and that for principal reasons: science cannot provide us with metaphysical knowledge regarding the very foundations of reality or the possible extensions of reality beyond the empirical domain. Firstly because it presupposes the existence of basic regularities and building-blocks within the universe which in turn cannot be explained scientifically because every scientific explanation must rely on these and therefore take them for granted (for example the existence of natural laws). And secondly because the question of the reality of the non-empirical obviously cannot be answered by means of empirical investigation. Hence, science can tell us at most that it cannot detect anything which speaks in favour of divine action in the world, but that shouldn't come as a surprise since God's actions themselves (as distinguished from their outcomes) are not empirical events and therefore don't fall within the scope of

scientific enquiry³⁹.

With respect to soteriology amidst religious diversity, the possible solutions to the problems of the soteriological consequences of religious diversity will vary in accordance with the core insights, concepts and theoretical tools of the respective doctrines of providence. Someone who is committed to Molinism with its theory of middle knowledge will consequently attempt to formulate a solution with the help of the theory of middle knowledge, as William Lane Craig has done⁴⁰. Similarly, an 'Augustinian' would try to solve the problem with the help of God's unrestricted sovereignty which is manifested e.g. in the election of some and the reprobation of others. Another possibility is to say farewell to radical forms of soteriological exclusivism without compromising traditional Christian doctrines, an option that was implemented by the Roman Catholic church at the Second Vatican Council.

1. Conceptual Clarifications

Before turning to the first and second strand of contemporary discussion of divine providence in APR I have to discuss two concepts that are of special importance for the contemporary discussion of divine providence in APR: the concept of freedom and the concept of possible worlds.

Freedom

It is clear and commonsensical that one can distinguish between freedom of action and freedom of will, and that freedom has at least something to do with absence of constraint, which to some extent must exclude external compulsion. But beyond that rather platitudinous common ground philosophical controversy is raging. With the help of the relation between freedom and determinism we can distinguish three possible positions on freedom.

³⁹ Only one short remark concerning the problems which the conservation principles in science allegedly pose for a theistic doctrine of divine providence: first, these conservation principles apply only to closed systems and the theist has good reasons for denying that the universe, taken as the whole of physical reality, is metaphysically closed, i.e. a theist qua theist will claim that the universe is open to the metaphysical influence of a transcendent being. Second, these principles only apply to the relation between physical causes and effects, and God is certainly not a physical cause and not a cause alongside with other causes at all. For a critique of the assumption of a necessary conflict between theism and science cf. *A. Plantinga*, *Where the Conflict Really Lies. Science, Religion and Naturalism* (Oxford, New York 2011).

⁴⁰ Cf. *W. L. Craig*, 'No Other Name'. *A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ, Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989) 172–188.

1. *Determinism* is the position that every event and therefore every action and decision is causally determined. That means that every event goes back to an antecedent state of nature via deterministic laws of nature. If event E is determined by the causal conditions C, E couldn't be otherwise given C. Since every event is determined there is no human action or decision which could have been otherwise given the actual causal condition. And as backward causation is excluded and the laws of nature cannot be changed by human beings—that is, human beings are unable to change the causal conditions of their actions and decision—no human action or decision could be otherwise. But because freedom presupposes the possibility of doing otherwise, no action or decision is free.

2. *Libertarianism* shares with determinism the presupposition that causal determinism is incompatible with human freedom. Person P's action A is free if a) A results from P's choices over which A has a certain amount of control; b) A is not compelled by any external cause and c) A could have acted differently because he could have decided differently⁴¹. This requirement of the possibility of acting or deciding differently under the same condition is called the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP). According to PAP you are not free if you cannot do otherwise under the same conditions. But not all libertarians hold PAP as a necessary condition for freedom⁴². Nevertheless, even these Non-PAP-Libertarians would argue that determinism and freedom are incompatible, and that determinism must be false since we are free. The thesis of the falsity of determinism distinguishes libertarians from determinists, with whom they share the commitment to the incompatibility of freedom and determinism, while the thesis of the incompatibility of freedom and determinism separates libertarians from compatibilists, with whom they share the claim that we are free.

⁴¹ See for example *Reichenbach*, *Divine Providence*, 16ff.

⁴² One must distinguish two ways in which one 'cannot do otherwise'. In the first way, P is compelled to do (including deciding) in the way she actually does. In the other way there is no such compulsion concerning P's actual doing (including deciding) but 'the alternative sequence would prevent the agent from doing other than he actually does.', *J. M. Fischer, Responsibility and Control*, *Journal of Philosophy* 89 (1982) 24–40, here 33. Libertarian 'Non-PAPists' argue that freedom only requires the exclusion of the first way of compulsion while allowing for the second way, cf. e.g. *W. L. Craig*, *Response to Gregory A. Boyd*, in: *D. W. Jowers* (ed.), *Four Views on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids MI 2011) 224–230, here 225.

3. *Compatibilism* claims that determinism is compatible with freedom. P's action A is free as long as A is not physically coerced to perform A. P is free if P is able to act according to his or her decision i.e. is able to perform the action he or she wants to⁴³.

To lay my cards on the table: I am a libertarian with a slight leaning towards PAP. There are two main reasons for libertarianism. The first is that it seems to us that at least sometimes we are free in our actions and decisions in the sense of not being totally determined. We experience ourselves as free persons. According to the principle of credulity, we are (prima facie) epistemically justified in believing that p⁴⁴ if it seems to us that p. Therefore our belief that we are free (in a libertarian sense) is prima facie justified (because of the impression that we indeed are free sometimes), turning it into a direct piece of evidence for our belief that we actually are free. Further, the best explanation for the *experience* that we are free is the supposition of the fact that we really *are* free. Via an inference to the best explanation this gives us indirect evidence for the belief that we are free.

The second reason for libertarianism has to do with moral responsibility. P's being morally responsible for performing A presupposes that P is free with respect to A. If P's doing A is causally determined in a way that A can't influence she cannot be held morally responsible for doing A because it was out of her reach to refrain from doing A. There was nothing she could do or could have done to prevent herself from performing A. Conclusively, viewing ourselves and others as at least sometimes morally responsible presupposes libertarianism⁴⁵.

Possible Worlds and Counterfactuals of Freedom

The concept of *possible worlds* has gained wide influence in analytic philosophy during the last decades. A possible world isn't a galaxy far away, but a maximal possible, i.e. consistent all-encompassing, set of states of affairs⁴⁶, to put it a little bit technical. 'Consistent' means that a possible world mustn't

⁴³ Unfortunately there is also a theological use of the words 'determinism' and 'compatibilism' which signifies competing stances in the discussion about the compatibility of human freedom and divine foreknowledge. To avoid confusion I will qualify these kinds of compatibilism and determinism as 'theological compatibilism' and 'theological determinism' (or using the term 'theological fatalism', which is more apt).

⁴⁴ 'that p' stands for any propositional content.

⁴⁵ For the paradigmatic articulation of that argument cf. *P. van Inwagen, An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford 1983) chapter 5 (153–189).

⁴⁶ Cf. *A. Plantinga, The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford 1982) 45.

contain a state of affairs *S* and its complement non-*S*, there must be an all-encompassing description of a possible world which is free from contradictions; 'maximal' means that for every state of affairs *S* either *S* or its complement non-*S* is part of a possible world. Therefore there is neither a state of affairs *S* nor a possible world *W* so that it isn't determined whether *S* or non-*S* in *W*. To put it in another way: you get a possible world iff you determine for every possible state of affairs in a consistent way whether it is actualized or not.

As awkward as this may sound, the concept of a possible world is by no means without relations to everyday life. We all know that we are not the only beings but rather part of an all-encompassing whole, i.e. that we are part of the whole of reality. This we can call the 'actual world'. But we also know that our actual world could very well have been different. Suppose, for instance, that I would have lost the file with the text of this essay and therefore couldn't have sent it to the editors of the present volume. A world in which I had lost the file and couldn't send it to the editors would have been a world different from our actual world (I leave it to the judgement of the readers whether it also would have been a better world). So the world in which my file gets lost isn't our actual world, but it is a possible world, which up until I fatefully turned off the PC without saving the file has a history identical to our actual world, while then taking a different course than our actual world did (because in the actual world, I saved the file properly before shutting down the computer). It is a possible world different from our actual world.

Counterfactuals of freedom are subjunctive conditionals concerning free acts or decisions typically with a 'false' antecedent⁴⁷. Take for example 'If Thomas Aquinas had lived in the 16th century in Italy he would have (freely) joined the Jesuits.'

But the antecedent or consequent in a counterfactual of freedom *can* be true⁴⁸. There are true and false counterfactuals. According to David Lewis' famous analysis of counterfactuals, a counterfactual of the form 'if *p* had been the case *q* also would have been the case' is true if *q* is true in the possible world most similar to our actual world in which *p* is true⁴⁹. That is, there are

⁴⁷ 'False' means that the state of affairs stated in the antecedent or consequent clause isn't actual.

⁴⁸ 'If Peter asked Paul, Paul would help him.' And Peter really asks Paul and Paul really helps Peter.

⁴⁹ The question of criteria for similarity between possible worlds is controversial. But it seems intuitively plausible that a world in which Augustine existed but didn't write his *Confessions* is *ceteris paribus* more similar to our actual world than a world in which Augustine

counterfactuals that are true at least in one possible world and there are counterfactuals that aren't true in any possible world.

With this background we can move on to a more detailed exposition of the different positions in the contemporary discussion of divine providence.

2. The Augustinian-Reformed-Banezian Account of Providence (ARB)

The main stress is laid on God's absolute sovereignty. God is the 'irresistible ruler' as Paul K. Helseth has phrased it, quoting B. B. Warfield⁵⁰. In creating and governing the world God takes no risk. This account ascribes maximally strong conceptions of omnipotence and omniscience to God.

Paul Helm makes the useful distinction between positive and negative government: 'Positive government is government in which the governor brings about whatever he governs.' In contrast, negative government simply means 'frustrating any event that he [the governor; OJW] doesn't want to occur'⁵¹. According to Helm's position God's governing is for the most part positive government—with one notable exception: that of evil acts (because God's goodness has to be preserved)⁵². God 'positively governs all acts which occur except those which are evil'⁵³, that means he brings about everything except for evil, which God willingly permits (and therefore negatively governs).

But Helm strongly emphasises that we need to distinguish the metaphysical fact that all events are under God's providential control from the epistemological claim that we have insight into God's providential plan. We should cling steadfastly to the belief in a God who cares for and controls everything lovingly and whose providential plan cannot be thwarted, but we shouldn't dare to claim any insight into God's plan. We 'have no special insight into the unfolding course of events'⁵⁴.

According to its adherents ARB is of considerable spiritual worth because it allows us:

to ascribe a significance to the whole of a human life, to every detail, as to the whole of history. It is just because God's providence rules over all, that individual human actions have significance in contributing to the whole⁵⁵.

didn't exist because Monica had never met Patricius.

⁵⁰ P. K. Helseth, *God Causes all Things*, in: D. W. Jowers (ed.), *Four Views on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids MI 2011) 25–52, here 26.

⁵¹ P. Helm, *God Does Not Take Risks*, 229.

⁵² Cf. *ibid.*, 232.

⁵³ Cf. *ibid.*, 231–233.

⁵⁴ P. Helm, *The Providence of God*, 230.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

This approach bears striking similarities to the Thomistic-Banezian approach to divine providence which is testified by the fact that Paul K. Helseth, a contemporary representative of the reformed tradition, refers solely to Roman Catholic authors of a widely Thomistic orientation⁵⁶ when outlining the uniqueness of the creator-creature relationship in the ARB-Tradition⁵⁷. This has led some to speak of an Augustinian-Reformed-Banezian account of providence. The Thomistic doctrines of universal divine concurrence with every creaturely act (*concursum divinum*) and of divine 'physical' premotion (*praemotio physica*), which is characterized as a predetermination, lead to the conclusion that God is not only the primary cause of every event, decision or action, but that God's intended outcome will be actualized inevitably exactly in the way that God decrees⁵⁸. According to this approach, God is not equipped with passive 'speculative' knowledge as we are, having to conform our intellects to the object of knowledge, His knowledge is much more of a practical kind: God knows that *p* because he knows that He created *p*. God causes what He knows⁵⁹.

The ARB-approach faces three main problems: the first is the possibility of the existence of non-divine beings with robust freedom, the second problem revolves around the conception of divine omniscience, and the third concerns God's relationship to evil. I will discuss the first two problems in their interconnectedness.

2.1 Divine omniscience and its incompatibility with human freedom

I start with the problem of omniscience and the providential usefulness of foreknowledge. If the following *reductio ad absurdum* argument is successful, the traditional conception of foreknowledge is incompatible with the PAP-version of libertarian freedom⁶⁰.

⁵⁶ The label 'thomistic' should neither be taken in a narrowly neo-scholastic sense (that would exclude such authors as David Burrell), nor does it guarantee an authentic interpretation of Aquinas.

⁵⁷ Cf. P. K. Helseth, *God Causes all Things*, 32f. With reference to Arvin Vos, Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen write that 'Calvin and Thomas Aquinas are much closer philosophically than is often recognized', C. G. Bartholomew, M. W. Goheen, *Christian Philosophy. A Systematic and Narrative Introduction* (Grand Rapids MI 2013) 110.

⁵⁸ Cf. e.g. L. Ott, *Grundriss der katholischen Dogmatik* (Freiburg 1.Br. 1959⁴) 106f. For a contemporary defence of the thomistic doctrine of premotion cf. D. S. Oederberg, *Divine Promotion*, *IJPR* 79 (2016) 207–222.

⁵⁹ 'God knows what God is doing in creating', D. Burrell, *Providence*, in: P. McCosker, D. Turner (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Summa Theologiae* (Cambridge 2016) 156–167, here 161.

⁶⁰ The following argument doesn't work without the presupposition of PAP as a necessary condition of libertarian freedom.

1. At t_n God knows proposition D (that at t_{n+1} Peter freely denies Jesus).
2. Iff God knows proposition D then D is true.
3. At t_n D is true (from 2, 3).
4. D is true if Peter really denies Jesus at t_{n+1} .
5. At t_n it is the case that Peter will really deny Jesus at t_{n+1} (from 3, 4).
6. If at t_n it is the case that Peter will really deny Jesus at t_{n+1} it is logically impossible that Peter will not deny Jesus at t_{n+1} (principle of non-contradiction).
7. Peter's denial of Jesus at t_{n+1} is only free if it is possible that Peter does not deny Jesus at t_{n+1} (PAP).
8. It is metaphysically impossible that Peter changes the past.
9. If it is metaphysically impossible that Peter changes the past, then at t_{n+1} Peter cannot change states of affairs at t_n .
10. If at t_{n+1} Peter cannot change states of affairs at t_n , then he cannot at t_{n+1} bring about that the proposition D is not true at t_n .
11. If at t_{n+1} Peter does not freely deny Jesus, then at t_{n+1} Peter brings about that the proposition D is not true at t_n .
12. Peter cannot at t_{n+1} bring about that Peter does not freely deny Jesus at t_{n+1} (from 8—11).
13. If Peter cannot at t_{n+1} bring about that Peter does not freely deny Jesus at t_{n+1} , then Peter's denying Jesus at t_{n+1} is not free (libertarian conception of freedom).
14. Peter does not freely deny Jesus at t_{n+1} (from 12, 13).
15. D is false.
16. It is logically impossible to know a false proposition.
17. At t_n God doesn't know D (from 15, 16).

Since 17) contradicts 1) it is shown that a contradiction ensues from the combination of the traditional conception of foreknowledge and the PAP-libertarian conception of freedom, making them incompatible. Therefore the traditional conception of omniscience, a pillar of the ARB-conception of providence, leads to the denial of libertarian freedom, i.e. it results in theological fatalism⁶¹.

The defender of ARB could argue that this critique rests on two false premises, namely that God's *foreknowledge* is conceived chronologically which implies that God exists in time, and second that God's knowledge logically or metaphysically *depends* on the actual existence of the objects and events God knows about. But according to ARB God does not exist in time but rather outside of time, and God's knowledge does not rest on the existence of its objects but quite the other way round: the existence of the objects of God's knowledge depend on God's knowing since this act of knowing creates reality, i.e. God's act of knowing brings the objects of God's knowledge into existence. To put it differently: the defender of ARB can accuse the critics of conflating ARB with the position of simple foreknowledge.

To the first response: it is correct that the argument is formulated with the help of a temporal conception of God's omniscience, but at least in the context of the providential importance of divine omniscience, one can also formulate an argument against atemporal conceptions of omniscience⁶², which only presupposes the possibility of the *revelation* of God's knowledge of a contingent event to a prophet at a point of time prior to the event itself. In 605 BC (t_n) God reveals to Jeremiah that king Zidkija won't surrender to the Babylonians but will deliberately resist them in 586 BC (t_{n+1}). As a result of this revelation, Jeremiah has at t_n knowledge about a contingent event at t_{n+1} , i.e. Jeremiah has foreknowledge about a contingent event in the future. But if Jeremiah really *knows* at t_n that King Zidkija won't surrender but offer resistance at t_{n+1} then Zidkija's decision is no longer free in the sense of PAP-libertarian freedom, because even the logical possibility of Zidkija deciding in a different way under the same circumstances will be excluded⁶³. With other words: you only need to replace the phrase 'God knows at t_n ' in 1) with 'God reveals to a prophet at

⁶¹ This critique of ARB doesn't assume that ARB leads to theological determinism, the thesis that God causally determines every decision/action.

⁶² For a general argument against the compatibility of omniscience of a timeless God and human libertarian freedom cf. *L. Trinkaus Zagzebski*, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (New York, Oxford 1991) 184ff.

⁶³ Cf. *E. Wierenga*, *Prophecy, Freedom, and the Necessity of the Past*, *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991) 425–445, here 441.

t_n ' and the phrase 'God knows at t_n ' in 2) with 'The prophet knows at t_n ' and the argument works even for a timeless God if He at some instances reveals important messages to prophets—an idea which is familiar to all traditional conceptions of providence.

But even if that problem is solved another problem remains because providence 'requires more than that God *knows* our future; it also demands that he controls our future'⁶⁴. If God 'foreknows' that p it is because p will obtain—if it didn't obtain God would not know it. If a) God foreknows that at a certain point of time p will obtain as a consequence of q and he ponders to prevent q in order to prevent p or to prevent p directly and b) He decided to prevent q in order to prevent p or to prevent p directly, c) He would have changed the future course of events and d) thereby falsified His 'foreknowledge' which is not only logically impossible as knowledge implies truth (which logically excludes the possibility of falsifying knowledge, in contrast to knowledge *claims*) but is also metaphysically impossible because God as an essentially omniscient being is infallible, i.e. God cannot err and cannot lose this 'inability' to err (due to the fact that He is *essentially* omniscient). In other words: God's knowledge that p is logically dependent on the obtaining of p. So God's foreknowledge doesn't give God the opportunity to change the future.

A second time the defenders of ARB would reply that this argument is directed only at simple foreknowledge while failing as a critique of the classical conception of foreknowledge which holds that divine knowledge is not a result of a certain epistemic assessment relation between God and created objects, but rather the cause of the things God knows, or to put it in a little bit different idiom:

the foreknowledge of God is logically subsequent to his decree. ... God's decree is all embracing, and his foreknowledge is simply his knowledge of what he has decreed before that decree takes effect in time. ... divine foreknowledge and divine foreordination are necessarily coextensive⁶⁵.

But *prima facie* this kind of response makes things even worse for the defender of human freedom in arousing a new worry concerning the compatibility of ARB and human freedom. If God ordains all events including every human decision and action, it seems that these don't have their source in individual human beings but in the end originate in God's decrees. But then human be-

⁶⁴ T. Flint, *Divine Providence*, 84.

⁶⁵ P. Helm, *The Augustinian-Calvinist View*, in: J. K. Beilby, P. R. Eddy (ed.), *Divine Foreknowledge. Four Views* (Downers Grove IL 2001) 161–189, here 163.

ings are not free in the robust sense prescribed by the libertarian conception of freedom (with or without PAP).

Surely, defenders of ARB would reply that God can bring it about that Peter *freely* converts after his threefold denial of Jesus because God, as the source of all being of his creatures and their final end, can transform human creatures without distorting their integrity for He doesn't act on them as an external but rather as an internal cause⁶⁶. This answer, however, leads us into the deep waters of the debates about God's efficacious concurrent activity, divine promotion and predetermination, all subjects which I would like to circumvent at this point of the discussion. Suffice it to say that this response, especially coming from the thomistically minded defenders of ARB, is a fascinating one but one which has to leave at least PAPists unsatisfied. And in fact most historical and contemporary representatives of ARB seem to be, or to have been, followers not of a libertarian but instead of a compatibilist conception of freedom. This difficulty of ARB, concerning its relation to more robust conceptions of human freedom, appears again in connection with the problem of evil to which I turn now.

2.2 The Problem of Evil

Concerning the problem of evil two different aspects should be distinguished. It seems clear that in the days of Augustine, Aquinas and even still in the days of Molina, Suarez and Báñez, the existence of evils in the world didn't pose a major threat to the confidence of Christians in the truth or rationality of their belief that an omniscient, omnipotent and perfectly good divine creator of the world exists. For those Christians, the existence of God was beyond doubt. But the existence of evil, to be more precise: the existence of moral evil, evoked the question of God's relation to moral evil, i.e. the question whether God as the cause of everything is also the cause of sinning or of the sins. A positive answer to that question would undermine his holiness and therefore this problem can be called the 'holiness problem of evil'. For centuries this was the central theoretical problem in connection with the existence of evil, and it became even more pressing in the light of a powerful alternative explanation for the existence of moral evil: the Manichean distinction between two basic metaphysic principles or divine beings. Pierre Bayle in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, to take a prominent example, supported his claim that reason cannot ground faith by arguing that Manichaenism offers a better explanation for the 'mixed' character of our world than orthodox Christianity, at

⁶⁶ Cf. for example *Thomas Aquinas*, *Summa Theologiae* I, 105.

least viewed from a purely rational-philosophical perspective⁶⁷. It was against the background of his exchange with Bayle, and in view of the overall impression Bayle made on the intellectuals of his time (especially on his royal pupil queen Christine of Prussia), that Leibniz wrote his lengthy *Theodiciée*.

In one way or another the most convincing solution to the problem of the compatibility of God's holiness, his sovereignty and the existence of moral evil seems to be the theory of the privative character of evil. Evil, according to the privative theory, has no positive existence but is a defect and results from a deficiency, a privation of being. This, together with the distinction between God's actively causing something and His mere permitting something (a distinction that Leibniz used in his *Theodiciée*), seems to constitute a workable strategy.

But the attempt to understand the compatibility of the sovereignty of a holy God with the existence of moral evil is not the main concern of APR with respect to the problem of evil. The contemporary discussion is dominated by a question which J. L. Mackie brought (back) on the philosophical agenda in a famous article from 1955: the existence of natural and moral evil in the world is the basis for a deductive argument for the positive irrationality of theistic faith⁶⁸. But in the meantime it has become clear that there is no straightforward way of demonstrating a logical contradiction between the existence of God and the existence of evils in the world. The concept of freedom has played a central role in the development of this near consensus and it still plays an important role in this debate. It seems that the philosophical defenders of theism against the argument from evil cannot do without the concept of libertarian freedom. As a consequence, the incompatibility of the ARB-position and libertarian freedom is a grave disadvantage for the ARB within contemporary APR⁶⁹.

⁶⁷ Cf. his entries 'Manicheism' and 'Paulicians'.

⁶⁸ Cf. J. L. Mackie, *Evil and Omnipotence*, *Mind* 64 (1955) 200–212.

⁶⁹ There are, however, defences against the atheological argument from evil which don't presuppose libertarian conceptions of freedom. Among them, so called skeptical theism is the most important one. Skeptical theism argues that from the absence of evidence for the existence of good reasons for God to permit the existence even of horrible evils, one cannot rationally conclude in a direct way that there aren't any such reasons, because our cognitive resources are much too limited to ponder the question of the existence of possible justifying reasons for God to create a world with all the horrible evils extant in our world. But in my view skeptical theism, though an important part of a theistic defence against the argument from evil, needs to be supplemented with defences presupposing a libertarian conception of freedom. For skeptical theism cf. T. Dougherty, J. P. McBrayer (eds.), *Skeptical Theism*. New Essays (Oxford 2014).

3. Molinism

Molinism is viewed by many (even by some of its opponents like e.g. David Hunt) as an attractive position because it tries to combine the strong conception of divine sovereignty and providence of the ARB-tradition with an affirmation of robust libertarian freedom of human beings. For this aim it uses a powerful and fruitful theoretical tool: the theory of middle knowledge which goes back to the two sixteenth century Spanish Jesuits Luis de Molina and Francisco Suarez. At the centre of this theory is the concept of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom and the debate revolves around the question of how divine knowledge relates to these counterfactuals⁷⁰.

'Counterfactuals of creaturely freedom' (CCF) are conditionals of the form 'If person P were in circumstance C, P would freely perform action A.' Whether God does know all CCF is not a subject of dispute between ARB and Molinism; both affirm God's unrestricted omniscience (and the existence of CCFs) which entails his knowledge of CCFs. Instead, the controversy is about the logical 'place' of God's knowledge of these counterfactuals. Proponents of ARB traditionally distinguish two kinds of divine knowledge. First, God has necessary knowledge, i.e. God knows all necessary propositions and He knows about all necessarily false propositions that they are false. Since the possibility of states of affairs is necessary as well⁷¹ this so called 'natural knowledge' of God includes the knowledge of all possibilities. Therefore the knowledge of all possible worlds also belongs to this kind of knowledge. God possesses this knowledge independent of His decision to create a world. Concerning this natural knowledge, ABR and Molinism (and even Open Theism) are in agreement. They (but not Open Theism) also agree concerning God's knowledge of contingent state of affairs, especially free decisions or actions. This knowledge about that which is not only possible but also contingently actual is called 'free knowledge' since it depends on God's free will which contingent states of affairs are going to be actual; it is His prerogative whether he chooses to actualize some possible states of affairs instead of other equally possible states of affairs. This kind of knowledge determining which contingent states of affairs are actual is a logical consequence of God's free 'creative act of will'⁷².

⁷⁰ In the following, apparently temporal terms are meant only in a strictly logical sense; they refer to cases of logical dependence or independence but not to temporal relations.

⁷¹ When it is possible that a certain state of affairs S obtains, than this is necessarily so; i.e. when it is possible that S obtains, it is logically impossible that the obtaining of S is impossible.

⁷² T. Flint, *Divine Providence*, 36.

But how does God know the true CCFs, i.e. the counterfactuals that correctly specify how a certain person would freely act under certain circumstances? According to ARB, the truth of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are solely due to God's decree, i.e. God's knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom is postvolitional; it depends on God's free will. In contrast, Molinism introduces a third kind of knowledge, situated between natural and free knowledge, and therefore aptly called 'middle knowledge' (*scientia media*). Owing to His middle knowledge, God knows how a certain person would freely decide/act in every particular situation. For example, God knows how Peter would freely react to the claim of the servant that Peter is a follower of Jesus under certain circumstances. God can use this knowledge to actualize a possible world containing exactly the circumstances under which Peter would freely deny Jesus. But even if God, in this way, is in a position to govern the whole history of the world, it doesn't contradict human freedom. This is due to *scientia media*'s characteristic combination of elements from free and from natural knowledge: From free knowledge middle knowledge borrows the modal character of its objects: they are contingent truths, namely the true CCFs. From natural knowledge it borrows its logical (prevolitional) place: the objects of middle knowledge, the true CCFs, are independent of God's creaturely will. That means that God cannot decree which counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true and which are not; they are not under God's control. So middle knowledge is distinguished from both free and from natural knowledge in virtue of its combination of logical (prevolitional) place and contingent status. Therefore God has knowledge of all true CCFs but the truth of CCFs (and therefore the divine knowledge of them) is independent of God's will. In this way God's middle knowledge of all true CCFs allows Him the meticulous providential governing of the world as God actualizes complete possible worlds. But because the truth of CCF depends on the free decisions and actions of human beings and not on God's decree, Molinism at the same time respects human libertarian freedom. God's middle knowledge allows Him to eat the cake (meticulous providential governing and sovereignty⁷³) and still have it (respecting human libertarian freedom).

Middle knowledge is also used in the debate about the argument from evil, sometimes even unwittingly, as in the case of Plantinga's first formulation of his seminal free-will defence against the logical argument from evil⁷⁴. But the use of middle knowledge cuts in both ways in the debate about the atheologi-

⁷³ God and no one else actualizes possible worlds.

⁷⁴ Cf. A. Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford 1974).

cal argument from evil. On the one hand it answers the critique that God was irresponsible in taking the risk of creating libertarian free beings with the ability to do harm to themselves and to others, because with the help of his middle knowledge God knows exactly which harms will be done and cannot be said to be a blind risk-taker⁷⁵. Further, the account of middle knowledge exonerates God from the responsibility for all the cruelties in the world, because these remain the product of free human decisions. Possibly, God couldn't actualize a world with free human beings while still eliminating all atrocities, since no possible world with free human beings but without atrocities exists. But at the same time this answer causes new misgivings. If God knew the outcome of creating a world with free beings like us (together with the impossibility of creating a better world than ours), He *should* have abstained from creating entirely, given all the terrible evils in this world. That he did create it in spite of this isn't just irresponsible, it is even highly immoral. So even if God might not be an irresponsible risk-taker, He is still a moral monster⁷⁶.

Nevertheless, Molinism can be argued for in different ways. I will only discuss two.

One reason for Molinism is the providential usefulness of middle knowledge. As already pointed out, simple 'fore'knowledge is providentially impotent since it doesn't allow for the government of the world, while on the other hand the strong 'causal' conception of omniscience in ARB is incompatible with libertarian freedom. With the help of middle knowledge, Molinism can combine the admission of creatures with libertarian freedom (because the truth of CCF is prevolitional) with an affirmation of God's undiminished providential control over his creation (because God can ponder all 'feasible'⁷⁷ possible worlds before deciding which one to actualize). That is: He has complete knowledge about how every free being would decide in every possible situation before deciding which situations to actualize. So in contrast to simple foreknowledge, God's knowledge about free human actions in a certain situation doesn't 'come too late' to guide God's decision on which situation to actualize. And on the other hand there is real libertarian freedom because

⁷⁵ And it is possible that God knows that there is no feasible possible world with free creatures in which every free creature does not commit at least one wrong act.

⁷⁶ Alvin Plantinga himself has admitted that denying the possibility of middle knowledge proves to be an advantage for the theists in the debate on the argument from evil, cf. *A. Plantinga, Replies*, in: J. E. Tomberlin, P. van Inwagen (eds.), *Alvin Plantinga* (Dordrecht 1985) 313–396, here 379.

⁷⁷ Feasible worlds are those possible worlds which can be actualized by God. Not all possible worlds can be actualized by God; e.g. worlds in which there exist large amounts of completely pointless and unredeemed horrible evils.

the truth values of the counterfactuals concerning free acts performed by creatures are not decreed by God but are independent of God's will. Human decisions and actions are not predetermined by God, contrary to ARB. But that doesn't compromise God's sovereignty since God is free in deciding which situations to actualize on the basis of his knowledge of all true CCFs.

The problems of foreknowledge and sovereignty are solved on this picture due to the fact that God's foreknowledge of contingent events flows from a combination of knowledge beyond his control [i.e. knowledge of the true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom; OJW] and decisions under his control [i.e. the decisions which creatures to create in which situations; OJW]⁷⁸.

This capacity of Molinism to solve one of the most pressing problems of the traditional doctrine of providence is a strong reason in favour of Molinism.

Secondly, Molinists can argue in the following way for God's possession of middle knowledge on the basis of premises which are granted by ARB⁷⁹.

1. God is omniscient.
2. God knows every true proposition it is logically possible for God to know (from 1).
3. There are true counterfactuals of freedom.
4. It is logically possible for God to know all counterfactuals of freedom.
5. God knows all counterfactuals of freedom (from 2, 4).
6. God knows counterfactuals of freedom either prevolitionally or postvolitionally.
7. It is logically impossible for God to know counterfactuals of freedom postvolitionally.
8. God knows all true counterfactuals of freedom prevolitionally; i.e. God has middle knowledge (from 6, 7).

⁷⁸ *T. Flint*, *Divine Providence*, 44.

⁷⁹ See e.g. *W. L. Craig*, *God Directs all things. On Behalf of a Molinist View of Providence*, in: *D. W. Jowers* (ed.), *Four Views on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids MI 2011) 79–100, here 95.

The most debated premise is premise 3). Are there any true CCFs, especially true CCFs with a 'false' antecedent? Another question is whether God can know them prevolitionally in case there are true CCFs. These questions have stirred a controversial debate which cannot be summarized here. I will only point to two problems of Molinism.

The first problem with respect to true CCFs is the grounding of their truth values. Roughly a proposition that *p* is made true by facts which act as truth-makers for the proposition that *p*. The fact that *p* is the case makes the claim true that *p* is the case. The claim that Peter denies Jesus three times is made true by the fact that Peter denies Jesus three times. But which fact makes true such a claim as 'If David had remained in the town Keilah he would have been surrendered to Saul', or 'If David were to remain in Keilah he would be surrendered to Saul'? David didn't remain in Keilah but went away (because of a divine warning) and therefore the inhabitants of Keilah couldn't deliver him. So there is no fact which can act as truth-maker for this subjunctive conditional. Thomas Flint, inspired by arguments of Alfred Freddoso, has argued against such kinds of objections by pointing out that the plausibility of the grounding objection against CCFs presupposes the plausibility of the grounding objection against absolute future contingents while the latter can be shown to fail⁸⁰. In a crucial step, rebutting the grounding objection against absolute future contingents, Flint argues with the help of the uncontroversial status of past contingents⁸¹. Take for example the past contingent proposition *P* 'In 2013 Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected as Pope Francis'. What makes this proposition true is the fact that in 2013 Bergoglio was elected as Pope Francis. That means that *P* is grounded in a contingent proposition, which in 2013 was a present tense proposition, namely *C* 'Jorge Mario Bergoglio is elected as Pope Francis'. The past tense proposition *P* is now grounded if the present tense proposition *C* was grounded in 2013. From this Flint generalizes to the truth of the following universal claim "It was the case that *C*" is now grounded iff

⁸⁰ Cf. *T. Flint*, *Divine Providence*, 128–137.

⁸¹ Another argument supporting the argument in favour of absolute future contingents is based on predictions. If we claim in 1996 that Al Gore will run for president and in 2000 Gore actually runs for president we would be inclined to say (in 2000) that our claim in 1996 was true. But this argument isn't conclusive because there are two possibilities of how to interpret our claim made in 2000 that the 1996-claim was true. One can understand it as saying that the claim *of* (i.e. made in) 1996 is/was true or one can understand it as saying that it was true *in* 1996. Only if Flint could show that our claim in 2000, that the 1996-claim was true, is meant in the 'in'-sense his argument would succeed. But he offers no reason for such an interpretation and against the 'of'-interpretation.

“C is now grounded” was the case⁸².’ Now Flint, following Freddoso, suggests that we understand CCFs in analogy to past contingent propositions.

Just as a past contingent requires grounding activity, not in the present, but only in the past, so a future contingent ... requires grounding ... only in the future, not in the present. In other words, once we have accepted the formulae noted above concerning past contingents, we have a solid reason for endorsing parallel formulae dealing with future contingents⁸³.

But this argument seems to overlook an important disanalogy between these two cases. According to the ‘growing block’-theory of time, only past and present objects do exist while future objects do not exist (yet); this means that the universe of existing things is growing every second. If this theory of time is correct, as I think it is, there is an important ontological difference between past and future things: past things exist whereas future things do not exist (yet). But since only existing things can ground a proposition one cannot infer from the grounding of past contingent propositions to the grounding of future contingent propositions.

The second problem with Molinism concerns the capability of middle knowledge to circumvent the dilemma of all-encompassing divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

As pointed out earlier ‘counterfactuals of creaturely freedom’ play a central role in Molinism. Now take the CCF ‘If Peter were asked by a servant he would freely deny Jesus’. Grant for the sake of the argument that at least some CCFs have a truth-value and that this CCF ‘If Peter were asked by a servant he would freely deny Jesus’ belongs to this set of CCFs which have a truth value. Let us call the time of the servant asking Peter t_n , the moment after the servant’s question, when Peter decides, time t_{n+1} and the time of Peter’s replying to the question and thereby denying Jesus t_{n+2} . If Peter had libertarian freedom in the strong sense of PAP he had two opportunities at t_{n+1} and it was at least logically possible for him to choose either one. Even if he had stronger inclinations towards one of the two possible answers (because his anxiety was rather strong) he wasn’t determined to deny Jesus (because in this case the sentence ‘If Peter were asked by a servant he would freely deny Jesus’ wouldn’t be a counterfactual of *freedom*). Now let us distinguish the two possible worlds W_d , in which Peter denies Jesus and W_{non-d} in which Peter doesn’t deny Jesus. Up to t_n both possible worlds have an identical history. It is up to Peter in t_{n+1}

⁸² Cf. T. Flint, *Divine Providence*, 131.

⁸³ Cf. *ibid.* 132.

which possible world will become actual, i.e. Peter's free decision is a necessary condition for the actualisation of W_d ⁸⁴. Peter's freely deciding at t_{n+1} is part both of W_d and W_{non-d} ; but Peter's freely deciding to deny Jesus is only part of W_d and not of W_{non-d} and if Peter's free decision at t_{n+1} to deny Jesus is part of W_d then God's actualization of W_d instead of W_{non-d} means the actualization of Peter's decision to deny Jesus. But if God actualizes W_d instead of W_{non-d} Peter is not free to decide not to betray Jesus because it is logically impossible that God actualizes W_d without actualizing Peter's free denial of Jesus. But then the question arises: who is the decisive instance which decides about the actualisation of W_d instead of W_{non-d} or vice versa? Above I have pointed out that it is up to Peter's free decision whether W_d or W_{non-d} obtains. But now it seems that it's up to God which possible world to actualize. But if it's up to God to actualize W_d then it is no more logically possible for Peter to refrain from denying Jesus, because if Peter still had this possibility it would be possible that W_{non-d} was actualized instead of W_d , which, however, is impossible since God still has brought about W_d , i.e. has actualized W_d .

Supposedly, Molinists would respond to this critique by marking a distinction between strong and weak actualization. To put it roughly: when P strongly actualizes E, P directly brings about E, i.e. causes E; when P weakly actualizes E, P brings about B which leads to E⁸⁵. God does not strongly actualize Peter's free denial of Jesus (because that is logically impossible due to the libertarian freedom of Peter's denial) but rather in a weak way. But what does that mean? Let 'SA(W)' stand for the sum of all states of affairs which God strongly actualizes in a certain possible world W. Then it is the case that God could only ensure that W becomes actual if his strong actualization of SA(W) surely led to W. Peter's freely denying Jesus doesn't count as a member of SA(W) because it cannot be strongly actualized by God. But then the question arises how God's strong actualization of SA(W) can guarantee that Peter freely denies Jesus. I don't see any possibility for an explanation, because according to strong libertarianism Peter's denial of Jesus is free only if Peter could have refrained from denying Jesus under the exactly same conditions as those that obtained in W_d up to t_n . So even if SA(W) was congruent with all states of affairs in W_d

⁸⁴ It is not a sufficient condition because external forces are necessary as well, such as God's sustaining Peter and the whole universe in existence, and God's granting him libertarian freedom and so on.

⁸⁵ More formally: person P weakly actualizes the state of affairs S in case there is another state of affairs T and P a) strongly actualizes T; b) P's strongly actualizing T counterfactually implies S; c) P doesn't strongly actualize S; cf. E. R. Wierenga, *The Nature of God. An Inquiry into Divine Attributes* (Ithaca, London 1989) 120.

up to t_n that cannot ensure that Peter really denies Jesus. To guarantee that, God must remove libertarian freedom from Peter at least at t_{n+1} and/or at t_{n+2} . But then Peter's denial wouldn't be free any longer.

In a nutshell: God's actualizing a possible world means either the preordination of all events in W because the identity of W (in contrast to all similar (nearest) possible worlds) requires the determination of all state of affairs in W excluding authentically free beings in W . Or it means that God cannot control all state of affairs in W in the sense that he will not know exhaustively prevolitionally what will happen in W (because he doesn't know which free decisions and/or actions will be actual and which not) and that he will lack an exhaustive postvolitional knowledge of exactly which one of alternative similar possible worlds will become actual, since He doesn't know which future free decisions and actions will take place.

These are bad news for Molinism and I am sad that I cannot announce better ones, because middle knowledge is such an intellectually elegant and explanatorily powerful theoretical tool. But Molinism doesn't succeed.

4. Open Theism

For some, the upshot of the discussion of divine providence up to now is that the problem of the seeming incompatibility of a maximally strong conception of divine sovereignty and human freedom cannot be solved. Open Theism (OT) accepts this seeming dilemma and draws the lesson from it that one has to weaken the classical conception of divine sovereignty if one wants to save human freedom. In a way OT is the reversed mirror-image of ARB, the latter sacrificing human libertarian freedom in the name of divine sovereignty (at least in the eyes of most opponents of ARB).

'Open Theism' takes as its starting point the fact that God merely out of love creates beings with morally significant freedom which they can use to decide to cooperate with God or turn their back on Him. The grant of significant freedom to human beings is the necessary condition for human beings' loving response to and sharing in God's love, the end to which they were created. To help to realize this aim God enters a dynamic relationship with humans, which leads to a common history of God and humans.

Open theism owes its name to a twofold openness. The first is a many faceted divine openness: basically, God is open in the sense of loving His creatures and therefore being responsive to them. This leads 'openists' to abandon the classic divine attributes of impassibility, immutability and timelessness. And God's

omnipotence and omniscience have to be more cautiously circumscribed as well.

According to OT, this doesn't mean diminishing God's perfection. Openists 'can endorse precisely the same conception of divine omnipotence' as its competitors but have another view on 'how God has chosen to *use* his omnipotence'⁸⁶. The same goes for divine omniscience. In both cases openists argue that the God of OT can do and know everything which is logically possible for Him to know or to do, and that all great traditions of philosophical reflection on God accept the limits of logic - in this respect OT is a quite traditional position. Since God's omnipotence doesn't include bringing about logically impossible state of affairs (pace Descartes), taken together with the fact that it is indeed impossible to determine the decisions and actions of free beings, God cannot control everything and cannot determine the course of history⁸⁷. But that is not an impediment or unduly restriction of God's omnipotence but only the logical-metaphysical consequence of God's decision to create beings with a free will. As a consequence of God's existence in time and the attenuated, as some would say, conception of omniscience, God is also open in the sense of having a real future and of having something to learn—namely the details of His future history with human beings.

The openness of OT doesn't only concern God but also the openness of the future—at least in some measure. Human beings have an open future because God respects their freedom and doesn't decree their life history. There is a real future for human beings, which is open in the sense that it is neither pre-determined by divine decree (as in ARB) nor chosen and known in advance (as in Molinism). As a consequence, no one, not even God, possesses knowledge about contingent future events and state of affairs as there aren't any true propositions about future contingent events and states of affairs.

That God's omniscience doesn't include knowledge of contingent events in the future isn't a diminishment of his perfect omniscience because there aren't any propositions about future contingent states of affairs with a definite truth value that can be known. There isn't any use in saying that God knows the future of contingent events when there don't exist any propositions about future contingent events. The openist can argue for the nonexistence of such propositions in the following way: According to a widespread theory of truth a proposition is true iff there exists a fact which makes that proposition true.

⁸⁶ W. Hasker, Reply to Helm, in: M. L. Peterson, R. J. VanArragon (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion* (Malden, Oxford 2004) 238–240, here 238.

⁸⁷ A further consequence of this is that ARB's theory of divine knowledge as divine causation doesn't work for God's knowledge of future free decisions and actions.

The proposition that snow is white is made true by the fact that snow is white. To state it in a more philosophical jargon: a proposition is true iff there exists an apt truth-maker for this proposition⁸⁸. But what about facts about future contingent state of affairs? At t_n it may be a fact that at t_{n+1} Peter will freely deny Jesus or will freely not deny Jesus but at t_n it can neither be a fact that Peter will freely deny Jesus at t_{n+1} nor can it be a fact that Peter will freely not deny Jesus at t_{n+1} because at t_n they don't exist, and logically cannot exist, any facts about the course of Peter's future free action for the reason that it indeed is a free action. You can also strengthen this argument by a general denial of the existence of the future in the sense of "exist" expressed in formal logic by the existential quantifier⁸⁹. From this perspective, it is logically impossible for God to know propositions about future contingent events and therefore knowledge about future contingent events cannot be part of divine omniscience properly understood⁹⁰.

But God can have knowledge about the objective *probability* of the obtaining of future contingent events. This means God might not know at t_n that Peter freely denies Jesus at t_{n+1} but God instead knows (on the basis of his knowledge of Peter's character and the circumstances in which Peter (probably) is at t_{n+1}) that it is highly probable that Peter will freely deny Jesus at t_{n+1} and that it is therefore very improbable that Peter won't deny Jesus at t_{n+1} . But sometimes highly improbable things obtain. Therefore it is possible that God sometimes is, in a way, 'surprised' by the outcome of human history—not in the sense that He didn't know that such an outcome was possible but in the sense that this outcome wasn't very probable.

What does all that mean for the openist's conception of divine providence? T. Flint enumerates in a summarizing way three major components of the 'open' picture of providence⁹¹:

- God lacks comprehensive knowledge of the future because of the incompatibility of libertarian human freedom and strict omniscience.
- God's knowledge of the probability of certain free decisions/actions of certain persons in certain circumstances is sufficient for God providential care for the world.

⁸⁸ Cf. as locus classicus *D. M. Armstrong*, *Truth and Truthmakers* (Cambridge 2004).

⁸⁹ *P. Geach*, *Providence and Evil*, 54.

⁹⁰ Not all openists deny propositions about future contingents any truth-value; cf. *A. R. Rhoda*, *Generic Open Theism and Some Varieties Thereof*, *RelSt* 44 (2008) 225–234.

⁹¹ Cf. *T. Flint*, *Divine Providence*, 96.

- God’s control over the world is notable but not complete and therefore God has to take risks in creating and governing the world.

The lovingly caring God of Open Theism who providentially attends to the well-being of human beings and longs for their free sharing in his divine love is surely different from the picture of God in ARB or Molinism, and as a consequence, the open conception of divine providence differs substantially from the molinistic conception of providence, and even more from the ARB-conception.

When in ARB the picture of God as the great ordainer and governor by decrees prevails, OT presents God as a kind of Grand-Grandmaster who knows all *possible* courses of history, knows the objective probability of the different courses and has a plan for every possible course of history in advance. In this sense it is impossible for God to be providentially surprised as he cannot be faced with a situation He wasn’t prepared for. God knows that highly improbable events sometimes obtain and therefore He has a plan for every event however improbable it may be. Since God’s intellectual and action related resources are unlimited, He needn’t be really worried about the outcome of the common history of Him and the human race. But there is a residual risk of failure He cannot eliminate completely. The God of Open Theism is undeniably a Risk-Taker (to a larger or smaller degree). That is the price God has to pay for the creation of human beings with morally significant libertarian freedom, and in the end, that is the price God has to pay for being able to express His own loving nature in a loving relationship with humans⁹². Perhaps the deepest and most profound difference between OT and its competitors lies here: Whereas God’s sovereignty plays the most central role and is the criterion of all conceptions of God and divine providence in Molinism (and even more so in ARB), God’s sovereignty is instrumentally related to God’s love as the basic divine attribute in OT⁹³.

⁹² Some openists are prepared to allow God a kind of a ‘providential emergency break’, for example the possibility of a unilateral intervention in human history. Other openists are content with the guarantee that even if we cannot show the logical impossibility of a failure of God’s providential plan it is ‘overwhelmingly improbable’ and therefore the risk God has taken in creating free human beings is ‘negligible’, *W. Hasker, A Philosophical Perspective*, in: C. H. Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God. A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove IL, Carlisle 1994) 126–154, here 153.

⁹³ ‘[L]ove is the most important quality we attribute to God’, *R. Rice, Biblical Support for a New Perspective*, in: *ibid.*, 11–58, here 15.

It is safe to say that Open Theism ‘constitutes a radical break with the picture of providence that has been dominant within Christianity throughout its history’⁹⁴. Therefore it doesn’t come as a surprise that the discussion about the rather recent position of OT has, quite untypical for philosophical questions, stirred some heavy and partly bitter controversies, especially in US-American evangelical quarters, and has led to the demise of at least one professor at an evangelical college. I will omit the question whether OT is compatible with the testimony of scripture (in my view, there doesn’t seem to be an unambiguous answer to be found in scripture with regard to the complex question of which account of providence is the right one)⁹⁵, and instead concentrate on the question whether the philosophical-theological price OT has to pay for saving libertarian freedom might be too high.

At first sight, openists could ease possible misgivings in the following way. God’s knowledge—not only of natural laws and all determined events but also of all possibilities and of the objective probability of all possible world-histories (i.e. all possible worlds)—gives Him a great amount of control, even if not total control, over the world. The same goes for divine omnipotence. According to OT God acts in history in ordinary and extraordinary (i.e. miraculous) ways. But as it is logically impossible to determine free beings qua free beings, even an omnipotent God cannot guarantee the exact course and outcome of history. But that isn’t a diminishment of God’s omnipotence as the laws of logic are not a threat to God’s omnipotence, but only to unclear, gibbering talk about God—at least openists think so.

But things aren’t quite that simple.

First of all let me make clear that in OT God does not and cannot (logically), neither strongly nor weakly, actualize possible worlds with free beings as inhabitants because ‘the “future” is not exhaustively settled’⁹⁶. Instead God ‘creates an initial concrete world-state, one with inherent propensities (some non-deterministic) for development into successor world-states’⁹⁷. In other words: God takes a first step by creating human free beings and setting the

⁹⁴ T. Flint, *Divine Providence*, in: T. Flint, M. C. Rea (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, New York 2009) 262–285, here 272.

⁹⁵ One motive for the development of Open Theism was the attempt to do justice to the scriptural picture of God and his providential interaction with the world.

⁹⁶ G. A. Boyd, *An Open-Theism Response to the Simple-Foreknowledge View*, in: J. K. Beilby, P. Eddy (eds.), *Divine Foreknowledge. Four Views* (Downers Grove IL 2001) 104–108, here 107. At least if possible worlds ‘must include a unique and complete history’, God doesn’t and cannot actualize any possible world which are populated with beings with free will, A.R. Rhoda, *Gratuitous Evil and Divine Providence*, *RelSt* 46 (2010) 281–302, here 284.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

scene, and then he waits and sees how His creatures will react. Surely OT does grant God a lot of knowledge about the future course of the world. But is it enough? There are reasons for giving a negative answer.

Let us grant for the sake of argument that God knows that the actualization of some freely executed human decisions and actions are very probable, and the laws of nature are deterministic. Now imagine God's epistemic-providential situation after the fall. He knows that it is highly probable that Eve will give birth to Cain and Abel and that it is highly probable that Cain will take the decision to kill Abel (God can increase the probability of the first murder by accepting Abel's sacrifice but neglecting Cain's sacrifice). God knows that if Cain wants to kill his brother it is highly probable that Cain will grab a stone and hit his brother on the head (I beg your pardon for this adornment of the original biblical story). God also knows that it is certain that if Abel's head is hit by a stone with a certain force and in a certain angle Abel will die and God knows that it is highly probable that Cain's stone will hit Abel's head in the range of these parameters (if you want, give Cain more than one attempt). God also knows that it is highly probable that after this first homicide in human history, Cain won't kill his other younger brother Set, and that every step which leads from Set's birth to the birth of Noah is highly probable, and that it is also highly probable that Noah won't be killed by one of his depraved contemporaries before Noah can build the Ark. Now try calculating the probability of the obtaining of God's covenant with Noah from God's perspective short after the fall. Grant for the sake of argument the high probability value of 0.9 for every single step. If you only take into consideration the genealogical table from Set to Noah in Genesis 5 you get a probability value of 0.43. This means that, from God's perspective after the fall, it was more probable that there wouldn't be a covenant with Noah (because Noah's existence seemed quite improbable) than that there would be⁹⁸. And the covenant with Noah is only the first one in a long series of turning points of salvation history leading to, and finally culminating in, the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Is it possible to speak of a divine *plan* on this background⁹⁹? Surely the openist can reply that God needn't have aimed specifically at entering into a covenant with Noah from the beginning of time, but that this was only one of different possible divine reactions to the course of history. Perhaps that is right. But what about God's covenant with Abraham, or the Exodus and the

⁹⁸ Even if you take an implausibly high probability value such as 0.95 for every single step you get an overall probability of the covenant with Noah of 0.663.

⁹⁹ My argument doesn't presuppose the in matters of probability problematic use of the value of infinities; thanks to Sebastian Mateiescu for his remarks concerning this question.

Exile? Are all these turning points of salvation history only one possibility of many others? And finally: What about the incarnation¹⁰⁰? One needn't be a supporter of radical forms of meticulous providence to become a little bit nervous at this point. It seems to lead on to a slippery slope, some would argue, which at the end inevitably evokes the picture of a mere 'Godling'¹⁰¹ who hasn't any possibility to control history except bringing an end to it (at least in the sense of eliminating human freedom).

This leads us to the question of OT's dealing with the problem of evil. One advantage of OT's renunciation of meticulous providence is that God seems to be exonerated from all guilt. He neither ordains nor permits evil which He clearly foreknew, nor does He strongly or weakly actualize evil. He merely permits evil about which He had only more or less, but not fully, certain beliefs in advance. God only knows that evils are possible in the history of the world whose first stage He has created, but He doesn't know in advance whether and which evils will become actual. The possibility and even probability that some of God's providential moves won't lead to the expected result is part of the picture of OT. This helps in dealing with some well-known problems of the so called soul-making theodicy according to which God permits (especially) natural evil for furthering the moral and spiritual growth of human beings. Unfortunately, not every evil leads to more virtuous characters but sometimes evils make the moral condition of humans even worse. For example, a famine may motivate some people to share their bread with their neighbours, even at the risk of starvation, but others might instead steal the bread of their neighbours in order to avoid starvation. Molinism and ARB have problems in dealing with such cases of 'failed soul-making' because God knows in advance about these cases and the question arises why He still permits them. The God of OT hasn't any such knowledge and therefore cannot be asked why He didn't prevent these cases¹⁰².

But nevertheless, the God of OT can also be accused of permitting too much evil. Even if God hasn't foreseen some horrendous evils and doesn't have knowledge about possible positive or negative outcomes of these evils, He could have stopped them at a rather early stage. Even if God couldn't foresee the course of history after the birth of Adolf Hitler one wonders why He

¹⁰⁰ Not even openists are prepared to deny God's knowledge 'that if humans were to rebel, he would send his Son to save them', G. A. Boyd, Response to William Lane Craig, in: D. W. Jowers (ed.) *Four Views on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids MI 2011) 123–139, here 124.

¹⁰¹ P. K. Helseth, *God Causes all Things*, 27.

¹⁰² For an interesting comparison of diverse conceptions of divine providence in encountering the problem of gratuitous evil cf. A. R. Rhoda, *Gratuitous Evil and Divine Providence*.

didn't stop Hitler before 1945. This question becomes much more pressing when one takes into consideration that, according to OT, even if God doesn't possess foreknowledge in the strict sense, He has well justified beliefs about the future course of history and therefore knew which enormous risks he put up with when creating our world.

If openists tried to escape this problem with the help of a further reduction of God's providential resources (His power and knowledge), the God of OT could be accused of gross negligence. If God knows that He hasn't foreknowledge of free decisions and actions and therefore cannot foresee the course of human history and all its horror in detail, He should have set the initial stage of the world including its laws of nature with much more circumspection and shouldn't have given humans such a high amount of autonomy and morally significant freedom since those features seem to hinder God from effectively intervening to prevent the most horrible evils. I am sure that OT has answers to these critical remarks but I guess that they are at least partly more or less identical with the type of answers 'nonopenists' would give to some similar questions (it is good that God hasn't created a toy-world without any hardships; we don't know which terrible evils God already has prevented/not actualized; God has resources to compensate even for the most horrible evils and so on). That is: contrary to the first impression, OT doesn't seem to have a definite advantage over its competitors concerning the argument from evil.

In fact some open theists really feel uneasy about OT's picture of God's risky providential care, but open theists must accept it as a seemingly unavoidable implication of the affirmation of libertarian human freedom. Open theists can try to come to terms with these misgivings by pointing to the fact that 'freedom' isn't an all-or-nothing concept but a graduated concept, and therefore God can decide how much morally significant freedom he grants. God has also the possibility to intervene and to set human history on course again. That can be done in a more (St. Paul's conversion) or less (the divine hardening of the heart of Pharaoh) miraculous way, and I cannot see any fundamental logical reasons against such an answer but the picture of salvation history which openists draw is far away from the picture Aquinas draws, in which there isn't any need for 'divine repair mechanisms'. This points to the possible danger (unfortunately it is not always a mere possibility) of anthropomorphizing God in OT. Thomas Flint has caught this temptation in his ironic characterization of OT's God as 'bookie than which none greater can be conceived'¹⁰³. But perhaps the only reason for OT being prone to a somewhat anthropomorphic

¹⁰³ T. Flint, *Divine Providence*, 98.

and attenuated conception of divine providence is the fact that OT is the only party in the debate which takes human freedom and God's creative will to create free human beings and all its consequences really serious.

III. Summary

The great strength of ARB is the highlighting of God's sovereignty and of his majestic strangeness. God isn't a being like other beings but He is being itself and therefore escapes the limits of our language and thought. But ARB is in danger of overstressing God's sovereignty at the expense of human freedom, and of forwarding a conception of sovereignty and government which is modelled after the example of absolutist monarchies, which is no less anthropomorphic than process theologian's image of God as the great comrade, and which betrays the radicality of the thought of its greatest thinkers, like Thomas Aquinas.

Open theists are in constant danger of speaking of God in too anthropomorphic ways, viewing God more as a superhuman social worker than the creator of heaven and the earth, although this is not a necessary consequence of OT. In any case OT has the potential to take seriously the radicality of God's decision to create human beings with free will and thus starting a dramatic history of God's 'relationship' with the human race.

Prima facie, Molinism appears to be the perfect synthesis of the two more extreme positions of OT and ARB. Its explanatory potential and theoretical beauty and elegance are astonishing but unfortunately, its centre piece, divine middle knowledge, raises difficult problems which don't seem to allow for quick and easy solutions.

I haven't presented any knockdown argument against any position and in my view all three positions bear the potential for further strengthening their respective cases (perhaps with the help of some modifications) and each could be stated more precisely in doing this. So it seems that we can expect further decades and centuries of philosophical-theological discussions on divine providence.

In the end the many subtle discussions and arguments concerning an adequate theory of divine providence and the difficulties this endeavour has to face are one more reminder of the often overlooked fact that 'God, the concept of whom is routinely discussed by the bulk of Christian philosophers and philosophical theologians, is incredibly strange'¹⁰⁴. If the whole debate teaches

¹⁰⁴ P. Helm, *How are we to think of God's Freedom?*, EJPR 7/3 (2015) 49–65, here 49.

us a lesson it is surely the appropriateness of intellectual humility (but without any scepticism).

As I have unduly neglected the spiritual aspect of the three different positions and their implications for spirituality, let me finish with some verses from a hymn which is part of the Roman Catholic evening-prayer:

Christ, ruler of heaven and earth,
Lord of powers, thrones and forces.
You are the First and you are the Last
Beginning and End.
In your hand the destiny of all humans rest.
Nothing on earth can slip out of your powerful grip,
You are the judge of all people,
Full of mercy.
Empires rise, flourish and decline,
But your empire survives them all,
Because your reign is conferred to you by God the father,
Of eternal origin¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁵ I want to express my gratitude to the participants of the Pronoia-Conference at Warsaw for their helpful remarks. I owe Åke Wahlberg a special debt of gratitude not merely for his linguistic assistance but especially for his many valuable philosophico-theological questions and advices.