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**Divine Providence and Human Freedom in the Tradition of Aquinas: A Defense of Theological Compatibilism**

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**Introduction**

Thomas Aquinas writes:

... all creatures need God to keep them in existence. For the *esse* of all creaturely beings so depends upon God that they could not continue to exist even for a moment, but would fall away into nothingness unless they were sustained in existence by his power.<sup>2</sup>

John Calvin says:

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<sup>1</sup> See [jjim@ecsu.edu](mailto:jjim@ecsu.edu) and Elizabeth City State University, [www.ECSU.edu](http://www.ECSU.edu). Lim said, “I tried out some arguments of this paper in my master’s thesis. Thanks to Hugh McCann for his comments and criticism on those arguments.”

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. T.C. O’Brien (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975), I, Q. 104, A. 1. Hereafter, it will be referred to as ST, and I will use the standard abbreviations for the questions and article numbers.

... providence means not that by which God idly observes from heaven what takes place on earth, but that by which, as keeper of the keys, he governs all events. Thus it pertains no less to his hands than to his eyes. And indeed, when Abraham said to his son, “God will provide” [Gen. 22:8], he meant not only to assert God’s foreknowledge of a future event, but to cast the care of a matter unknown to him upon the will of Him who is wont to give a way out of things perplexed and confused.<sup>3</sup>

The Westminster Confession (chapter 5) states:

God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

These texts summarize a traditional Christian view of God: not only does God create the universe and conserve it in existence at every moment, but he also guides it according to his purpose. The concept of God’s continuing action in preserving his creation is often called ‘divine providence’.

The doctrine of divine providence implies that God has sovereignty all over the universe and has a providential plan for his creatures, including human beings. This then implies that there are no contingent truths or events independent of God’s will. Propositions cannot be true without God’s willing them to be true. And events cannot occur without God’s willing them to occur.

This traditional doctrine of divine providence has puzzled believers because it seems to rule out human freedom. If God has sovereignty over every event before it occurs, and thus God has foreknowledge over the event, then it seems that humans do not enjoy libertarian freedom of the will. To see this, suppose that I am free to decide and act only if my decision and action are not causally determined by external condition other than my own will. Suppose also that God preordained me to go to a Chinese restaurant today, and so knew that I would go to a Chinese restaurant today. No one can have power over the past, so I have no control over what God knew before today. Since God’s knowledge cannot be possibly mistaken, it entails that the event of my going to a Chinese restaurant will occur

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<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 201-202.

today (or the proposition that I go to a Chinese restaurant today is true). It follows that my action is determined by external condition (i.e., God’s will and foreknowledge) than my own will. Then I do not have control over my action and so am not free to go to a Chinese restaurant. Divine providence, therefore, rule out human freedom.

There have been a number of responses to the incompatibility of divine providence and human freedom. These responses include fatalism, strong compatibilism, open theism, and Molinism .<sup>4</sup> I do not endorse any of these theories. And I shall not discuss my reason in this short paper.<sup>5</sup> Rather I shall introduce and defend another response. I will call this response ‘theological compatibilism.’ For clarification, this theory is not an usual compatibilist view according to which an action is free if and only if one could have done otherwise. Theological compatibilism, of course, embraces this typical understanding of compatibilism. But it goes beyond that by claiming that we are free in a libertarian way and this libertarian freedom is compatible with divine providence.<sup>6</sup> I shall first begin with the basic tenets of theological compatibilism (section II). Then I shall address and respond to possible objections to theological compatibilism (section III).

### **I. Theological Compatibilism**

To understand theological compatibilism, we first need to know what constitutes libertarian freedom. Following Hugh McCann’s suggestion, I shall introduce two conditions of libertarian freedom.<sup>7</sup> One is spontaneity. My action is free only if I voluntarily control it. I do not make a decision accidentally or involuntarily. The decision

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<sup>4</sup> For an introduction to theological fatalism, see Linda Zagzebski, “Recent Work on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 46-47. Jonathan Edwards develops strong compatibilism in his *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957). For open theism, see Pinnock, Clark, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1994). For molinism, see Thomas Flint, “Two Accounts of Providence,” in *Divine and Human Action*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> I discussed these theories in my master’s thesis, “A Thomistic Account of Divine Providence and Human Freedom,” Chapter 2 (Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> As we shall see, theological compatibilism is, in part, based on a Thomistic understanding of divine providence and human freedom. For the most recent development of Thomism about this issue, see Hugh McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God* (Indiana University Press, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Hugh McCann, *The Works of Agency* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), chapters 8 and 9.

does not just happen to me, but I am actively involved with it. When I make a decision spontaneously, my decision is entirely in my control and hence it is mine.

The other condition is intentionality. I am free to decide to do an action only if I do intentionally. There is no unintentional decision. When I decide to A, I intend to decide to A, and I intend to decide exactly as I do. So the act of deciding is intrinsically intentional.<sup>8</sup> Exercises of agency “have to be undertaken for the sake of some objective the agent deems worthy of attainment.”<sup>9</sup>

Spontaneity and intentionality are sufficient for a libertarian freedom. When I decide, I know that I am the very agent who decides. I am consciously aware that I am freely making a decision and no other things cause me to do that. Further, I am conscious of my intention of deciding. I intend to decide to A to achieve some objectives I think of as valuable. I certainly decide for a reason and this can explain why I decide to A. But that does not mean that the reason causes me to decide to A. Rather, I decide to A for the sake of achieving some goals and this intention is the reason itself. In other words, the content of my intention reflects the goals that I want to achieve. I am not controlled by reason, but I see myself as freely controlling my decision by forming an intention. So my deciding is not a causal process but a teleological one. My decision does not just befall me. My act of deciding is both conscious and purposive toward some objectives and I am certain of the phenomena. The two features provide me with a perfect libertarian freedom of the will.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 180. Some libertarians claim that in order for my decision to be free, I have to confer existence on it. In other words, a decision is free only if it is caused by the agent herself. According to them, when I decide, I produce or bring about the very act by following internal causal structure. This view is usually called agent causation theory. Roderick Chisholm held the view in “Human Freedom and the Self,” in *Free Will*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. ed. Gary Watson. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 27-37. Timothy O’Connor has developed the theory on the basis of the idea of emergence. See his “Agent Causation,” in *Free Will*, 257-284. But the view is untenable. If I conferred existence on my decision to A, I had to do so either through a separate act or as part of my very act of deciding itself. If it is a separate act independent of the act of deciding, it, not the agent, will become the true locus of agency and I will need to explain how it exists. So the first option leads us to an infinite regress. If I confer existence on my action as some aspect of my deciding itself, the act of my deciding has ontological priority over itself, which is impossible. Therefore, a libertarian theory of freedom should not assume that I have to confer existence on my decision and act in order for me to be free. See McCann, *The Works of Agency*, 186.

This view obviously rejects any kind of causalism or determinism for human will and act, according to which every event is causally necessitated by its external fact. Causalists argue that every truth about the future is determined by the past fact in conjunction with the laws of nature. The most important feature of the laws of nature is that no one can render them false. One cannot change the truth of “The earth spins around the sun,” or “Magnets attract iron.” As for the past event, no one can change the truth value of the past fact. The truth of the proposition that Obama was reelected in 2012 cannot be changed in any way.

So if causalism is true, my mental states shaped by past events in conjunction with the laws cause my decision. There are only nomic relations between my will and belief states. On this viewpoint, I am not the active agent. Rather I am controlled by other states of affairs. I decide to A because some of my mental states cause me to decide to A and so I cannot do otherwise; there is only one possible future.<sup>10</sup> So in the determinist theory, one’s spontaneity and intentionality are destroyed. Within causalism, it is hard to see how I can be fully aware of the process of deciding so I can control my act of deciding. And I choose to A not for the sake of achieving a goal but because of my reason-states cause me to decide A.

Now, with the two conditions of libertarian freedom in mind, recall the case of my going to a Chinese restaurant. Suppose that I spontaneously and intentionally decide to go to a Chinese restaurant. Given the traditional doctrine of divine providence, my decision is a part (or a content) of God’s will. How are then my free decision and action compatible with God’s divine providence? To answer this question, consider the following propositions:

- (1) I spontaneously and intentionally decide to go to a Chinese restaurant.
- (2) God wills that I spontaneously and intentionally decide to go to a Chinese restaurant.

If the doctrine of divine providence is true, it seems that (2) entails (1), and not vice versa. What makes (1) true is (2). In other words, God’s will preordains or causes or predetermines me to go to a

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<sup>10</sup> Peter van Inwagen, “An Argument for Incompatibilism,” in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 43-45.

Chinese restaurant prior to this very event. This rules out my freedom, and so I do not endorse it.

One obvious way out is to say that (1) entails (2). In other words, my current decision and action ‘change the past’ regarding God’s will and knowledge. God came to know that (1) is true because *I* will freely decide to go to a Chinese restaurant today. But I assume that this proposal rejects a traditional concept of omniscience. So I assume that (2) does not entail (1).<sup>11</sup>

In order to save both (1) and (2), the only left option is that (1) entails (2) and (2) entails (1). Or, following Robert Koons’ suggestion, the truth-maker of (1) and the truth-maker of (2) are identical.<sup>12</sup> If this is true, there is no causal relation between (1) and (2). It is not then the case that God’s willing and foreknowledge causally determine (2).

I endorse this identity relation. We can explain the identity relation between (1) and (2) by assuming that God is outside of time. For this, I rely on Aquinas. He says:

Whatever is found in any part of time coexists with what is eternal as being present to it, although with respect to some other time be it past or future. Something can be present to what is eternal only by being present to the whole of it, since the eternal does not have duration of succession. The divine intellect, therefore, sees in the whole of its eternity, as being present to it, whatever takes place through the whole course of time. And yet what takes place in a certain part of time was not always existent. It remains, therefore, that God has a knowledge of those things that according to the march of time do not yet exist.<sup>13</sup>

In this text, Aquinas holds that God, unlike us, does not experience events as past, present, and future. It is wrong to say that God has existed, that he exists now, or that he will exist forever. God does not exist within the temporal framework in which his creatures exist. Rather, according to Aquinas, God exists timelessly. Temporal terms cannot apply to God.

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<sup>11</sup> For the view of changing the past, see Alvin Plantinga, “On Ockham’s Way Out,” *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 3 (1986): 235-269.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Koons “Dual Agency: A Thomistic Account of Providence and Human Freedom,” *Philosophia Christi* 4 (2002): 397-410.

<sup>13</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, tras. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), B. 1, C. 66, 7. Hereafter, it will be referred to as SCG, and I will use the standard abbreviations for book numbers and chapter numbers.

There are good reasons to accept the concept of timeless God. If God were in time, he would be subject to the limitation of time. He would have to experience temporal differences as we do. And he would have to wait for a certain time when he wants to do an activity in the world. It is hard to believe that the supreme creator is confined to doing his activity within his created thing, i.e., time. Moreover, if God existed in time, he would not be able to have complete sovereignty over the world since he does not know anything about the contingent future until it occurs. The obvious way to avoid these problems is to assume that God exists atemporally.<sup>14</sup>

Since God is outside of time, God does not know all contingent future events successively but “all at once.” God’s knowledge is “measured by eternity, as is also his existence.”<sup>15</sup> A timeless God knows every event from eternity so all the events that happen in time are present to him.

Therefore, it is not correct to say that God knows a future contingent event *e prior* to its occurrence. God’s knowledge is not *foreknowledge*, in the sense that his belief about it was not in the *past*. Rather, just as a center of a circle is simultaneously related to every point of its circumference, so God’s knowledge from eternity is simultaneous with a temporal event.<sup>16</sup> That means that God does not know a future contingent event by means of inference from present events. For example, God’s knowledge is not dependent upon *modus ponens*, that is,  $P \rightarrow Q$ ,  $P$ , then  $Q$ . Although the logical rule is correct, God does not use it to gain knowledge. His knowledge is not

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<sup>14</sup> Some people might argue that since God is timeless, there is one thing God does not know, that is, what time it is. But this critique is very naïve because if we accept that God is the creator of all things, it must be that he knows of time. God timelessly knows all the truths, including truths about time and future contingent events. See John Martin Fisher, “Introduction,” in *God, Foreknowledge and Freedom*, ed. John Martin Fisher (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 1-56. Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that God is not timeless but everlasting in “God Everlasting,” in *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, ed. Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 139-148. But I think that his approach is based on too much anthropomorphic interpretation of the Bible.

<sup>15</sup> Aquinas, SCG, B. 1, C. 66, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Aquinas takes the example of circle as follows:

Let us consider a determined point on the circumference of a circle. Although it is indivisible, it does not co-exist simultaneously with any other points as to position, since it is the order of position that produces the continuity of the circumference. On the other hand, the center of the circle, which is no part of the circumference, is directly opposed to any given determinate point on the circumference. Ibid.

dependent upon his creation. Timeless God knows directly all contingent events from eternity. Aquinas says:

God knows all contingent events not only as they are in their causes but also as each of them is in actual existence in itself.... Hence all that takes place in time is eternally present to God...because he eternally surveys all things as they are in their presence to him.”<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, a contingent event *already* exists because God atemporally knows every contingent event by willing that it occur. Since God has providence and is omniscient and timeless, God knows a contingent event in its actual existence and it is eternally present to God. God knows a contingent event because he wills it. So Aquinas holds that “the divine intellect through its knowledge is the cause of things.”<sup>18</sup> In this sense, God’s knowledge and God’s will are identical to each other; God’s knowing that p is the same as God’s willing that p be true. It can be said that in the Thomistic picture, God knows that p through only one mode of knowing, that is, “executive self-knowledge.”<sup>19</sup> So the contingent event cannot exist independently of God’s willing. God wills that a contingent event exist, and thereby he knows the truth-value of the corresponding proposition. In this way, God comes to be omniscient and has sovereignty over the event.

Given the assumption of timeless God, (2) is not *causally prior to* (1). It is not the case that the truth of (1) is determined by the truth of (2) before (1) happens. For God is timeless and God’s will is eternally simultaneous with every event in the universe. That is to say, (2) is eternally simultaneous with (1). The relation between the two propositions is not characterized by a causal relation because every causal relation is involved with some temporal features. A cause must be prior to an effect. But given the assumption of timeless God, God’s will and knowledge are not subject to time. It is wrong to say that God’s willing that I freely choose to go to a Chinese restaurant occurs prior to the event that I freely choose to go to a Chinese restaurant. Rather the proposition (1) is present to God eternally.

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<sup>17</sup> Aquinas, ST, I, Q. 14, A. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Aquinas, SCG, B. 1, C. 61, 7.

<sup>19</sup> I borrow this term from Koons, “Dual Agency: A Thomistic Account of Providence and Human Freedom,” 398.

Therefore, if we accept timeless God, then we should admit that (1) and (2) are not causally connected to each other. Rather we can say that (1) and (2) are the same proposition expressed in two sentences. So in every world in which (1) is true, (2) is also true. It is impossible that (1) is true and (2) is false in a possible world or (2) is true and (1) is false in another possible world.

So we have dual aspects of a single event. One is that a human agent is entirely spontaneous and intentional in her action, so she is entirely free in the libertarian sense. The other aspect is that her decision as a contingent event comes from God's will. God wills her decision not in a temporal way but in an atemporal way so a human will comes to be present to God eternally. This way her will is not involved in any causally deterministic factor.<sup>20</sup>

## II. Objections to Theological Compatibilism

In this section I will consider and respond to some objections to theological compatibilism. The first objection I will consider is that theological compatibilism rules out human freedom because my decision, after all, is a result of God's will. Even if there is no temporally causal relation between (1) and (2), it seems that my decision is not fully up to me, in the sense that God wills my decision. To have free will in the libertarian way, we must, the objection goes, enjoy entirely indeterministic freedom, and theological compatibilism does not guarantee it.

This line of reasoning, however, does not fully capture the nature of free will. As far as I know, no one, whether a libertarian or not, thinks that freedom must be entirely indeterministic. For the term 'indeterministic' often means 'random' or 'fully uncaused,' and free will does not have to do with these two terms. Free will rather is always involved in cause or control. As Richard Taylor, a libertarian, puts it, behavior "that is mine must be behavior that is within my control, but motions that occur from no causes are without the control of anyone."<sup>21</sup> If I decide and act randomly, they are not up to me;

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<sup>20</sup> As James Ross puts it, "God does not make the person act; he makes the so acting person be." James Ross, "Creation II," in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Alfred J. Freddoso (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 130.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 43.

rather my decision and action are fully determined by external random facts. This obviously goes against the libertarian spirit.

Here is another response to the objection. Although God wills my decision and action in (1), this does not imply that that very decision and action are the only options God has and so my decision and action are determined by God's will. Rather suppose that at the logical moment (prior to creation), God sees *all* (infinite number of) possibilities in which (God wills) I could or would do in all possible situations. And suppose that God picks just one possibility for actualization (e.g., (1)) for a purpose; God *chooses* to will that (1) be true. Given that (1) is one of the all possible choices I can make and that once I get created, I must decide and act at every moment I am existing, it does seem that my decision and action are not determined by God's will in the typical deterministic sense.<sup>22</sup> It is not the case that once I am created, I necessarily go to a Chinese restaurant. So God's willing that (1) be true does not rule out my free decision and action.

Some might still think that theological compatibilism leads to an absurd consequence. On this objection, the same event, my going to a Chinese restaurant, is determined by *two* causes, i.e., my will and God's will. But the so-called 'overdetermination' is absurd. Therefore, theological compatibilism is false.

In response, this objection is based on a wrong understanding of (1) and (2). When I say that the truth of (1) guarantees the truth of (2) and vice versa, (1) and (2) are 'analytically entailed' each other.<sup>23</sup> When two proposition are analytically entailed each other, there is no overdetermination. Consider the following propositions:

(3) My left arm is injured.

(4) I am injured.

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<sup>22</sup> I believe this response is similar to the molinist account of counterfactual freedom. I believe that theological compatibilism is compatible with counterfactual freedom, though on my view, God does not have to use some inference rules to know how I decide or act in various possible circumstances.

<sup>23</sup> The concept of analytic entailment I am using here is found in Amie Thomasson, *Ordinary Objects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), Chapter One. There Thomasson discusses this concept to defend ordinary objects, such as statues and baseballs, from metaphysical eliminativism (the view that there are no composite objects). Although Thomasson does not discuss any theological issue there, I think her concept can be used to address the relation between (1) and (2).

These two propositions do not say that there are two things that are injured, i.e., my left arm and I. There is only one being that is injured in this case. In other words, given the truth of (3), the truth of (4) is guaranteed. And vice versa. (3) and (4) are neither additive nor rival.

The same is true of the following propositions:

(5) I am fixing my old car at t.

(6) I am fiddling with wrenches and bolts at t.

So, (5) and (6) are in the relation of analytic entailment. This implies that there are not two different, incompatible events going on. Nor does it imply that there are two entities doing different things. There is not overdetermination with respect to fixing my old car.

Likewise, if (1) analytically entails (2), there is no doubling up of the cause of my decision and action. My decision and God's will is neither additive nor rival. So there is no over-determination problem in theological compatibilism.

Let us turn to the most obvious objection to theological compatibilism. It is the problem of evil. To see this objection, consider the following:

(7) A person X spontaneously and intentionally decides to kill another person P.

(8) God wills that X spontaneously and intentionally decide to kill P.

If theological compatibilism is true, the truth of (8) guarantees the truth of (7). In other words, God's willing is the very reason that (7) is true. Then it seems that God is responsible for X's immoral decision. God comes to be the 'author of sin.' Given that God is wholly good, God cannot will such an immoral event. Therefore, the objection concludes, theological compatibilism is false.

I have to confess that there is no perfect response to this objection. Elsewhere I have attempted to block the objection by appealing to an Irenaean-type 'soul-making' theodicy.<sup>24</sup> The basic idea of this view is that sin is a process through which we are getting more morally mature and eventually we can be more conformed to his likeness.<sup>25</sup> This way God can share his perfection with his intelligent

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<sup>24</sup> In my master's thesis, "A Thomistic Account of Divine Providence and Human Freedom."

<sup>25</sup> Romans 8:29.

creatures who are developing their moral level. God uses the sin event to help us realize our sinful nature and seek God's grace for moral and spiritual maturity. So the whole purpose of creation is to bring imperfect beings to more perfection so that God and they can enjoy personal fellowship.<sup>26</sup>

On this view, sin is the *cost of human freedom*; to create free creatures, God has to will events that are (somehow) contradictory to his own nature, such as benevolence. This is what God must pay for to give us a chance to freely develop moral and spiritual maturity. I still believe that the soul-making theodicy is the best way in which the problem of evil can be blocked. But I also know there are many objections to this view. One of the objections is that it still implies that God is the ultimate cause of sin and other evil events, such as natural disasters that kill many innocent people. Shouldn't God be responsible for them if God is in control of every event for his providential plan?

One way to answer this question is to accept the so-called 'skeptical theism': the view that due to cognitive limitations of finite humans, we cannot fully know God's reason for allowing evil. I shall not discuss this theory here.<sup>27</sup> But I do want to add one more

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<sup>26</sup> One of the most important assumptions for this view is that God did not create human beings in perfection, but with the capacity for perfection through experience of growth. It is called Irenaean-type theodicy, according to which Adam and the original creation were innocent but not mature. They were not created perfect. So the origin of evil has to do with weakness and frailty in human beings. So Irenaeus says, "God made humanity to be master of the earth and of all which was there... Yet this could only take place when humanity had attained its adult stage... Yet humanity was little, being but a child. It had to grow and reach full maturity... God prepared a place for humanity which was better than this world... a paradise of such beauty and goodness that the Word of God constantly walked in it, and talked and talk with them, associating with human beings and teaching them righteousness. But humanity was a child; and its mind was not yet fully mature; and thus humanity was easily led astray by the deceiver." In *The Christian Theology Reader*, 2nd ed, ed. Alister McGrath (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 173. But humans possess the privilege of becoming good by loving God and fellow creatures. Moral maturity requires some evil experience such as temptation. In this sense, evil is not a decline from a state of pristine purity and goodness, but an inevitable state in the gradual growth and struggle of human race. John Hick supports the Irenaean-type theodicy by calling it "soul-making" theodicy. He thinks that the sin event is God's grand scheme of helping human beings become morally and spiritually mature. The goodness of the goods outweighs the evils which are permitted. He says, "Man as he emerged from the evolutionary process already existed in the state of epistemic distance from God and of total involvement in the life of nature that constitutes his 'fallenness.' He did not fall into this from a prior state of holiness but was brought into being in this way as a creature capable of eventually attaining holiness." In John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 287.

<sup>27</sup> See Michael Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and the Problem of Evil," in Thomas Flint and Michael Rea, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Chapter 11, and Stephen Wylkstra, "The Human Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from [Footnote continued on next page ... ]

response. It is this: the present objection is not distinctive of theological compatibilism only. It is a problem of other theories of divine providence. Consider Molinism. Molinists believe that God knows all possibilities of my choice in every possible situation in which I can act freely. By knowing the counterfactuals of freedom for every set of circumstances in which I can freely decide and act, my free choice comes to be a contingent event which is independent of God's will and at the same time God comes to have sovereignty over my decision and action. But so long as God *knows* what free creatures would decide and act, it does seem that Molinism also is not free from the problem of evil. It follows that if theological compatibilism implies God's responsibility for evil, so does Molinism.

Even open theism leads to the same consequence. Open theists believe that since God created humans as entirely free creatures, God limits his own knowledge of what they will do. But open theists say that the open future does not hurt God's providential plan. This is because God "has a vast amount of knowledge about the probabilities that free choices will be made in one way rather than another."<sup>28</sup> By knowing probabilities of beliefs he has, God can have a plan toward us. But if this is true, open theism cannot be free from the problem of evil (even problem of moral evil). So long as God *knows* that a person is very likely to do something immoral, he, the wholly good being, has a reason to prevent the action from happening prior to that action. If (and since) God does not prevent evil, this naturally leads to the idea that God allows such evil. So if foreknowledge in theological compatibilism makes God the author of sin, so does God's vast amount of knowledge about probabilities of his beliefs.

So the present objection to theological compatibilism equally applies to other theories of divine providence. In other words, the fact that God foreknows by willing does not uniquely threaten the truth of theological compatibilism by implying that God is responsible for evil.<sup>29</sup> So the criterion of the true theory of divine providence is not

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Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of 'Appearance,'" *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984): 73-94.

<sup>28</sup> William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The Openness of God*, 151.

<sup>29</sup> My argument suggests that a possible solution to the problem of evil should be based upon a correct understanding of benevolence, not divine foreknowledge. So the question that should be answered is not "Why does all knowing God allow evil?" but "Why does wholly good God allow evil?"

the problem of evil. The criterion must be which theory preserves both God's providential plan and human freedom. This concludes my response to the last objection to theological compatibilism.

### **Conclusion**

I have argued that theological compatibilism explains both divine providence and the libertarian human freedom. For the part of divine providence, timeless God wills and therefore knows that we spontaneously and intentionally decide and act. For the libertarian human freedom part, our decisions and actions are not temporally caused or determined by factors outside human agency. So our decisions and actions are fully up to us. There are objections to theological compatibilism. These include concerns about determinism, overdetermination, and the problem of evil. I have attempted to block these objections. If my argument is correct, theological compatibilism is better than other theories of divine providence, such as fatalism, molinism, and open theism, in that each of those theories sacrifices either divine providence or human freedom.



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