

Spring 2021

HOW FREE: AN ANALYSIS OF NEO-MOLINISM IN THE SOVEREIGNTY AND FREEDOM DEBATE

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HOW FREE: AN ANALYSIS OF NEO-MOLINISM IN THE SOVEREIGNTY AND
FREEDOM DEBATE

by

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Submitted to the School of Honors Committee

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for University Honors Scholars

Southeastern University

2021

Acknowledgements

First, thank You, Jesus, for helping me finish this thesis. Thank you to my mom, who has always been an inspiration for me and a great encouragement. Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Davis, who has taught me so much in the realm of theology, especially on this topic. Thank you Natasha for helping me edit and proofread as well as assuring me along the way. Lastly, thank you to Dr. Miller, Professor Owen, and all of the Honors College for helping me strive for excellence in my thesis.

Abstract

This extended literature review is an exploration and analysis of Neo-Molinism. Gregory Boyd's Neo-Molinism is compared and contrasted with other theories of divine foreknowledge. Each theory is evaluated on the merits of how it interprets God's sovereignty and human freedom. The major issues of each theory are brought to light along with how Neo-Molinism deals with these issues. Also, major objections to Neo-Molinism are answered using scripture. In conclusion, Neo-Molinism is an improvement upon its predecessor, Open Theism.

KEY WORDS: Neo-Molinism, Molinism, Open Theism, Divine Foreknowledge, Gregory Boyd

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Introduction

Does God know the future? In many Christian circles this would be an obvious yes. For others, like Open Theists, the answer is more complicated than that. Defining and modeling how God interacts with His creation has been a widely regarded topic for much of church history since the Reformation. John Calvin sought to challenge the status quo by introducing his TULIP theology. During the Reformation, John Calvin's ideas gained rapid popularity and also became somewhat controversial. The reformed view became the standard for Calvin, Luther, and other reformers in this time. Since then, the ideas of God's foreknowledge have generally been left untouched, until Open Theism.

Open Theism came onto the theology scene in the 1980's with its proponents being Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, and others. At first, the view was critiqued endlessly by other theologians. The view was seen as a rejection of God's sovereignty. Most people saw it as a rejection of what the Bible taught about God and of what they had been taught their whole life. Whether this theory is right or wrong, it represents a massive shift in how theologians understand freedom and sovereignty. The reformed idea that God meticulously determines what will happen in the future was being challenged by other Christians.

Open Theism had major influence on and inspired Gregory Boyd to come up with his own idea of Neo-Molinism. This view, while similar to Open Theism, sought to elaborate and improve upon the ideas that came before it. This paper is going to evaluate the merits of Neo-Molinism through an extended literature review. The following questions will be explored:

- What is Neo-Molinism?
- What are the similarities and differences of each theory of divine foreknowledge?
- What are the common critiques of each theory?

- Does Neo-Molinism successfully improve upon Open Theism?

The basic structure of this paper will follow these questions. The Literature Review section will provide background and definitions for the major topics at hand along with seminal works. The next section will explore the relationships of the models through comparison. The next section will critique each theory while proposing how Neo-Molinism overcomes these critiques. Finally, the last section will address criticisms of Neo-Molinism and include an evaluation of its merits compared to Open Theism. These questions will be explored through literature and research and will not rely on mere conjecture.

Methodology

The research done for this paper was through a few different avenues. The most used resources were books that were not only available in the Steelman Library but also online. Books were chosen from prominent authors and proponents of the views of Calvinism, Molinism, Arminianism, and Open Theism. Online printed journals were also used in the research for this paper. Primarily Alta, JSTOR, and ProQuest were used to find scholarly peer reviewed journals. Finally, online articles were sparsely used if the author was a main proponent of Neo-Molinism or Molinism. All sources of information are cited fully in the footnotes and in the bibliography section.

Many different areas of study could be examined further from the topics covered in this paper. The first is the differences in thought in the main proponents of Open Theism. Gregory Boyd's Neo-Molinism is the subject of this study, but there could be further research on the similarities and differences of Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, and others. The main proponents of Open Theism seem to agree with each other on a broad range of topics but use varied language in order to communicate their ideas. A study could be done on how Open Theism is viewed differently by different theologians beyond just Neo-Molinism.

Another study could be done on the effects of divine foreknowledge on other aspects of theology. Questions such as does divine foreknowledge correlate with theology of women in ministry, atonement theory, communion, etc. could be explored. Divine foreknowledge may not be the cause of different beliefs, but there could be correlation between more 'conservative' theologies relating to Calvinism and more 'liberal' theologies relating to Open Theism.

Finally, a study could be done on the different effects of divine foreknowledge ideas on mental health. Does believing that everything is predestined, including one's salvation, correlate

to better or worse mental health? Also, does being an Open Theist and believing that the future is open cause one to pray more compared to other Christians? The practical effects of divine foreknowledge on human psychology and behavior could be covered further in another study.

Review of Literature

The main models of divine foreknowledge covered in this literature review will be Open Theism, Molinism, and Neo-Molinism. Although they all have similarities in their intentions, all three theories have major differences. Even within the theories there can be differences of language used by the major figures in their fields. This literature review deals with the major proponents of each theory today. Their major works are analyzed and explained as to lay the foundation for the arguments that will be presented throughout the rest of this paper.

Open Theism

The modern expression of Open Theism is generally accredited to Clark Pinnock in his seminal work *The Openness of God*. However, the earliest influence of Open Theism can be traced back to Calcidius in the 4th century who was a commentator on Plato.¹ Clark Pinnock's goal in *The Openness of God* is to challenge the traditional view of God's foreknowledge through the use of scripture.² Pinnock believes that the idea of a stoic God who does not interact with the choices and free will of his creation is a form of Greek thought and not something found in the scriptures. Pinnock believes that theology has undergone "Hellenization".³ The scriptures have taken a back seat to the philosophy of the ancient Greeks. Pinnock argues that we should embrace the God of scripture who is in a dynamic relationship with the free choices of mankind. Rather than being sovereign through an iron grasp or control, God is sovereign through choosing

¹ Gregory A. Boyd, "A Very Brief History of Open Theism", October 29th, 2019, *Reknew.org*, <https://reknew.org/2019/10/a-very-brief-history-of-open-theism/>

² Clark H. Pinnock, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

³ *Ibid.*, 101.

to create free creatures and giving them control over themselves. This idea of a loving and personal God is what drives Pinnock to develop his model of Open Theism.

Pinnock believes that God is the supremely powerful being, but that He shares some of His power with mankind.⁴ Pinnock asserts that this takes more power than a traditional Calvinist view of God. For God to rule an undetermined world requires more skill than ruling one where God determined everything. God would have to always be calculating the possibilities and working through people to achieve His plan rather than coercing them. God is always ready with Plan B. Pinnock is redefining what he believes to be Biblical omnipotence. Pinnock also redefines God's omniscience, which is the main tenet of Open Theism. According to Pinnock, God is not outside of time.⁵ God is a temporal being just like man, so He does not know the future. In order for choices to be real and human freedom to be substantial, it can't be predetermined according to Pinnock. Arminianism, the idea that humans have free will, but God is outside of time and knows the future, is also problematic for Pinnock because choices are still fixed from God's perspective. Is choice just an illusion if one can't choose otherwise? Pinnock would answer yes. In order for choices to be substantial, the future has to be unsettled and shaped by human choices.

For Clark Pinnock, Open Theism is key to understanding the relationship between God and man. Stories in the Bible, like God testing Abraham, make more sense to Pinnock if God wasn't sure of how Abraham would respond. It is actually a real test when there are real stakes attributed to it. Also, prayer is an important activity that humans participate in that causes God to act on their behalf. In Clark Pinnock's follow up book, *Most Moved Mover*, he emphasizes how

⁴ Ibid., 113.

⁵ Ibid., 122

God is personal and in time with us.⁶ Traditional philosophy has caused what Pinnock describes as a “Pagan inheritance.” Christians’ view of God is more influenced by ancient philosophers than the ideas of the Bible. The Bible uses personal language when talking about God, not describing a God who is timeless, unchangeable, and far removed as described in Greek philosophy.

John Sanders, another prominent Open Theist, in *The God Who Risks* believes that it is part of the divine nature for God to take risks, and He sometimes may be wrong about those risks.⁷ Traditionally, God is seen as an all-knowing arbiter of knowledge, but Sanders argues that God is more akin to humans when making decisions. Just like humans calculate decisions and take risks, God acts in the same way. Sanders reconciles this idea of God taking risks by claiming that God gives up some of His power in order to make it a “fair fight.”⁸ God would be totally omniscient before creation, but once He chooses to make free creatures, God would have to relinquish some of His power.

Molinism

According to Alfred J. Freddoso in his translation of *On Divine Foreknowledge*, the history of Molinism can be traced back to the 16th century to a Jesuit named Luis de Molina.⁹ During this time the Dominicans and Jesuits debated over the issue of human freedom and divine

⁶ Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover : A Theology of God's Openness* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2001).

⁷ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 205, “Is it possible for God to have mistaken beliefs about the future? The traditional theological answer is that God cannot, but there are several biblical texts that seem to affirm that what God thought would happen did not come about (for example Jer. 3:7, 19-20).”

⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁹ Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, translated by Alfred J. Freddoso, (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

foreknowledge. The Dominicans, influenced by Thomas Aquinas, emphasized the role of God's sovereignty while the Jesuits, led predominantly by Molina, argued for the importance of human freedom in God's sovereign rule. Molina then came up with the idea that God, before creation, knew not only what would happen, but what could happen; this is what modern theologians have identified as 'middle knowledge'.

Kenneth Keathley, a strong proponent of Molinism, defines the theological model of Molinism in his book *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*.¹⁰ Keathley identifies three ideas that distinguish Molinism from other models. First, God has natural knowledge. God knows everything that could happen in any possible world. A possible world is simply one that doesn't exist but that *could* exist. God knows every possible world that could exist. Next, God has middle knowledge; He knows what would happen in any given situation. God knows the effect of any given cause. He knows what possibility any human would choose in any given situation. These are also referred to as counterfactuals, or 'if then' statements. Keathley explains the last aspect of God's knowledge: what will happen. God knows not only what people would choose but also what they will choose in every situation after he makes his divine decree. God sets the first domino in motion so that everything He chooses will come to pass and yet humans choose their actions freely. In other words, God sees all possible worlds and chooses the best world factoring in human freedom. Thus, the world we live in is the best possible world where humans have free will and God's plan for humanity comes to fruition.

Another prominent Molinist scholar, William Lane Craig, asserts in *The Only Wise God* that Molinism is the best solution to reconciling human free will and divine foreknowledge.¹¹

¹⁰ Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville, TN.: B&H Academic, 2010), 17.

Craig starts by proving that divine foreknowledge is Biblical. In Isaiah 46:10, God declares that “I make the end known from the beginning.” Furthermore, Craig brings up that prophecy in the Bible would have to rely on divine foreknowledge. Prophets spoke in both the Old and New Testaments as though they were declaring the word of God. In order for prophecy to be true, God would have to know the future. Craig also argues that human freedom is true from a Biblical perspective because God could not cause humans to sin if He is perfectly good.¹² If there was no such thing as human freedom, then God would have to be the creator of sin. Therefore, both human freedom and divine foreknowledge have to be true.

For Craig, Molinism is the best model for explaining the relationship between God and humanity. Craig believes that God does not acquire knowledge of the future in the Arminian sense of “foreseeing” ahead.¹³ Rather, knowledge of the future is innate within God. God does not have the potential to learn or grow in any knowledge because He is omniscient. From the start of creation, God had natural knowledge of all possible worlds and middle knowledge of what humans would choose in any given situation. From this, God then created His divine decree of which world He would create. This is where God gets His knowledge of what will happen in the future; not from looking ahead or being outside of time, which is the Arminian idea, rather God chooses which world to create causing Him to know the future.

¹¹ William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987).

¹² *Ibid.*, 47, “if God foreordains and brings about evil thoughts and deeds, it seems impossible to give an adequate account of this biblical asymmetry.”

¹³ *Ibid.*, 133.

Neo-Molinism

Neo-Molinism is a term coined by theologian Gregory Boyd in the book *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* where he defends his nuanced view of Open Theism.¹⁴ Boyd identifies with the model of Open Theism espoused by Clark Pinnock but also adopts the language of counterfactuals that accompanies Molinism. Boyd argues in *Four Views* for the need to add another category of God's knowledge, might-counterfactuals. Boyd believes in the three categories used by Molinists: natural knowledge, counterfactuals, and knowledge of the future. However, he also proposes that might-counterfactuals be added as a fourth category to account for choices that are not yet decided.

Boyd's first critique of Molinism is from scripture. He believes that the Molinist view cannot explain the "open motif" of scripture.¹⁵ Boyd is referring to scriptures and passages where God seems to test individuals, change His mind, or experience regret. Boyd cites God feeling sorry for creating humans after the flood in Genesis 6:6.¹⁶ He also uses Jeremiah 18 to show that God was going to judge Israel but was willing to change His mind if they repented and changed their behavior.

Boyd's philosophical issue with Molinism as it stands is that for all eternity all choices are still settled. There is no room left for open choices on the part of humans. Boyd explains his critique of Molinism in his article "Neo-Molinism and the Infinite Intelligence of God."¹⁷ In

¹⁴ Gregory A. Boyd, "An Open-Theism Response," In *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, edited by James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, 144-8. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Ibid., 145.

¹⁶ Gregory A. Boyd, "The Open Theism View," In *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, edited by James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, 144-8. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

Molinism, person x will always choose y in situation z. Person x can never and will never choose a, b, or c instead of y in situation z. Therefore, all choices are still settled for all eternity. Unless the circumstances are changed, person x's choice will never change. Boyd argues that, because of this, human free will is merely an illusion under Molinism. He describes this as a "metaphysical surd."¹⁸ Boyd goes on to define human free will as the ability for humans to act otherwise if the situation were the same. Under Molinism humans don't have the ability to act differently; before they were created, or their wills were created, they were always bound to act the same in every given situation. Because of this, Boyd concludes that Molinism needs to be amended.

Boyd believes that before creation God had natural knowledge, middle knowledge, knowledge of the future, and knowledge of possibilities. The last category is what Boyd adds to create a consistent view of divine foreknowledge factoring in human free will. God knows what humans would certainly do in some situations and what humans might do in other situations to allow for free will. According to Boyd, the future is partly settled and partly open. During God's divine decree, He chooses to limit the set of possible worlds but does not create a specific world. Under Molinism, God has created the best possible world given human free will and He knows the future extensively. Boyd believes that to account for human freedom, God chose during His decree to select a set of possible worlds, but the exact world would be up to humans' free choices. God perhaps eliminated a number of possible worlds, but there were many options still left for humans to choose to actualize. However humans decide to choose, God will always be ready. Boyd argues that God will be able to anticipate any human choice and thus adjust His

¹⁷ Gregory A. Boyd, "Neo-Molinism and the Infinite Intelligence of God" *Philosophia Christi* 5, no. 1 (2003): 187–204.

¹⁸ Boyd, *Four Views*, 145.

approach in order to accomplish his will. Through God's omniscience, He is always ready with a plan b, c, d, and so on.

Boyd outlines the advantages of his Neo-Molinist view in his seminal work *God of the Possible*. In this book, Boyd brings up the importance of prayer in his model of divine foreknowledge.¹⁹ Under Neo-Molinism, prayer has a real consequence on the world. Prayer wouldn't be for the edification of oneself but for change, healing, and reconciliation. Christians under this view can make sense of how prayer changes the course of the future. If the future is partly settled and partly open, Christians will take the command in scripture to pray seriously. Also, humans are given more moral authority in this view of God. Humans aren't puppets or robots but are given tangible power to make decisions that affect the course of the future, for good or for bad.

Besides the works of Gregory Boyd, not much else has been written about the Neo-Molinist view. Elijah Hess in "Neo-Molinism: A Reappraisal and Defense," agrees and defends Boyd's framework by arguing that it affirms God's omniscience, is logical, and has morally significant freedom of humans.²⁰ Besides this, there has not been a work that has compared Neo-Molinism to the other views of divine foreknowledge. Open Theism and Molinism have been critiqued and defended extensively, but the fusion of the two has barely been addressed. The rest of this paper will deal with the critical evaluation of the model in light of the other ideas of divine foreknowledge: Calvinism, Arminianism, Molinism, and Open Theism.

¹⁹ Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 95.

²⁰ Elijah Hess, "Neo-Molinism: A Reappraisal and Defense" (2014), *Theses and Dissertations*, 2106.

The Relationship Between Each Theory

Calvinism

Before analyzing the flaws of each model or theory of divine foreknowledge, the relationship between each one must be examined. Each theory can be roughly quantified on a spectrum of Divine will and human freedom. The theory that most affirms God's will while limiting human freedom would be that of Calvinism. Michael Horton describes how humans have a natural will but not a moral will. "The fall has not taken away our ability to will in the least, but only the moral ability to will that which is acceptable to God."²¹ Horton differentiates that natural will is humans' ability to make decisions while the moral will is humans' ability to choose right or wrong moral actions. According to Calvinism, humans do not have the ability to choose good because of their fallen and sinful nature. This produces John Calvin's doctrine of total depravity. Calvin writes, "it will be indisputable that free will is not sufficient to enable man to do good works, unless he be helped by grace, indeed by special grace, which only the elect receive through regeneration."²² Calvin believes that free will is irrelevant because humanity after the fall is totally corrupt and unable to help themselves. Even if they had the freedom to choose, Calvin argues that it would not matter. Humanity needs God to intervene and dispense grace in order for them to do any good. This grace isn't available to everyone, though. Only the special elect are given grace, according to Calvin. "For I do not tarry over those fanatics who babble that grace is equally and indiscriminately distributed."²³ This limits human freedom considerably. Humans don't have the option to perform morally good actions under Calvinism;

²¹ Michael Horton, *For Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 44.

²² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion Vol 2 Chapter 2.6*

²³ *Ibid.*

they can only do good with the assistance of grace and only the elect get this grace. Therefore, humanity has no freedom in their moral choices as God is the one who chooses who gets grace. The sovereignty of God is emphasized in Calvinism; there is virtually no room for human freedom.

Some Calvinists do believe that humans have freedom to make decisions, but they also hold that God has predestined who will be saved. This idea is called compatibilism. Jon Balsarak writes that,

The position most Calvinists defend is known as compatibilism. Defense of compatibilism usually entails restricting what is meant by human *freedom*. So, for example, the compatibilist will argue that people have freedom to act according to their motivations, but they cannot be said to be free in some kind of unrestricted, absolute sense which would allow them to do whatsoever they like, as if they did not have a nature.²⁴

The Calvinists who are compatibilists do believe in human free will but not in the libertarian sense. They don't believe that human beings are absolutely free. Rather, all humans have a nature, a sin nature, that motivates them to choose certain actions. Whether a Calvinist identifies as a compatibilist or not, this model of divine foreknowledge allows for the least amount of human freedom while maximizing God's sovereignty.

Molinism

Molinism is a model that tries to maximize both human free will and God's sovereignty at the same time. Molinists will hold to the doctrines of election and free will. Keathley writes, "The difficult goal before us is to achieve a balanced understanding of both sovereignty and permission, particularly as it pertains to predestination. Those who emphasize sovereignty tend

²⁴ Jon Balsarak, *Calvinism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 85.

to be Calvinists; those who emphasize permission tend to be Arminians.”²⁵ Keathley seems to insinuate that Molinism is the halfway point between the Calvinist and Arminian ideologies. By using middle knowledge, the Molinist believes that human freedom and God’s sovereign will can both be sustained through His omniscience. Keathley argues that God does not will a universe void of free will but uses free will in order to create. God knows all possible worlds and chooses one. These possible worlds are created through human decisions according to Molinism, not the will of God as Calvinism states. Thus, under Molinism God does not sovereignly dictate all human choices, but God chooses which choices will come to pass for human beings. Keathley explains that, “God meticulously ‘sets the table’ so that humans freely choose what He had predetermined. Remember the example of Simon Peter’s denial of the Lord. The Lord predicted Peter would deny Him and by use of middle knowledge ordained the scenario with infallible certainty that Peter would do so. However, God did not make or cause Peter to do as he did.”²⁶ God did not will Peter to deny him. Jesus was able to know through middle knowledge what Peter would do thus predestining it. God’s predestination is fueled by free will as he knows how humans would act in any given situation. Whether Molinism is successful in this or not, the ideology seeks to reconcile sovereignty and human freedom. This view is the middle ground between Calvinism and Arminianism.

Arminianism

Arminianism is a system which allows for more human freedom than Calvinism and emphasizes God’s control less than Molinism. Roger E. Olson argues that the distinct feature of Arminians is how the system defines predestination and free will. He writes, “What Arminians

²⁵ Keathley, 139.

²⁶ Ibid., 152.

deny is not predestination but unconditional predestination; they embrace conditional predestination based on God's foreknowledge of who will freely respond positively to God's gracious offer of salvation and the prevenient enablement to accept it."²⁷ Olson is explaining how Arminians and Calvinists agree on most theological concepts- but the definitions of the concepts is where they differ. For the Calvinist, predestination is unconditional; those whom God predestines have no choice because of His irresistible grace but to choose salvation. In Arminianism, God predestines based on His foreknowledge. God knows the future and chooses whom will be predestined based on who will accept it. Therefore, predestination is conditional on humans' choice to accept. This allows for more libertarian freedom than that of Calvinism or Molinism. As established before, most Calvinists would attest to believing in free will, but in the compatibilists sense. In other words, freedom and determination are compatible with one another. Olson explains this concept, "Free will is simply doing what someone wants to do even if that is determined by some force internal or external to the personal willing."²⁸ The non-compatibilists view of free will can also be called libertarian free will. This is the idea that no action is determined beforehand because then the action would not be free. Olson defines this view as well, "Non-compatibilist free will is the free agency that allows persons to do otherwise than they do."²⁹ Arminian theology holds to this idea that actions are libertarian free will; people have the option to choose otherwise in any given situation. For example, if John decided to ride his bike on Saturday, the Calvinist would say that John chose to do so freely, but his choice was also determined beforehand in God's divine decree. The Molinist would also say that John chose

²⁷ Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove: IL, InterVarsity Press, 2006), 19-20.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

to ride his bike freely, but that in another possible world he could have done differently. The Arminian would state that John could have chosen to ride his bike, or watch tv, or do any number of activities. John chose through his libertarian free will to ride his bike, but this action was not determined. Still, God knows that John would choose to ride his bike as He has extensive knowledge of the future. The question then arises of how God can know that John will choose to ride his bike from all of eternity and the choice is still not determined. Open Theism attempts to address this conundrum.

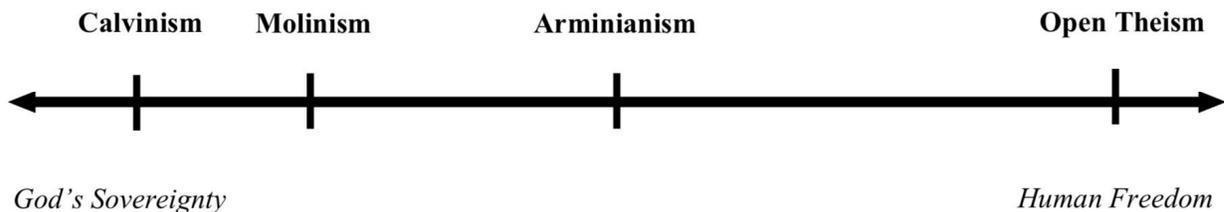
Open Theism

Open Theism would be the farthest on the spectrum of allowing for the most freedom of humans while having the least amount of divine control. There could be other views that are more extreme, such as Process Theology, but this isn't usually considered within the vein of Orthodox Christianity. For the purposes of this paper, Process Theology will not be included in the analysis. Open Theism holds to the idea that the future doesn't exist; The future has not yet been settled and is open. Clark Pinnock explains this view as, "Open theism celebrates a triune God of love who created everything and rules over everything. In sovereign freedom, God decided to make some divine actions contingent upon our actions. In wisdom, he chose to exercise a general rather than a meticulous sovereignty and granted us libertarian freedom."³⁰ Pinnock and other proponents of Open Theism still argue for God's sovereignty, but not in the Greek sense of God being unchanging and static. In Open Theism, God sovereignly knows all of what exists. However, the future hasn't occurred yet and thus doesn't exist. Therefore, God knows only the possibilities of what humans will choose. This view is the most extreme in its assertion of libertarian free will. Not only do humans have the freedom to choose their everyday

³⁰ Clark Pinnock, "Open Theism: An Answer to My Critics" *Dialogue: A Journal of Theology* 44, no. 3 (September 2005) 237-245.

actions, but these actions also have an effect on the events of human history. Human choices have real effects on the world, as God’s plan isn’t always successful. In Open Theism, God’s will has the potential to not come to pass. However, in an ultimate sense, God’s will has been fulfilled because he chooses to give humans the freedom to make their own decisions. It is not as though God is powerless and can’t change the future it is that He chooses not to. “[Open Theism] holds that God could control the world if he wished to but that he has chosen not to do so for the sake of loving relationships.”³¹ God sovereignly chooses not to be totally sovereign in order to have true relationships with individuals. Otherwise, Open Theists would argue that relationships are pre-determined and thus built on false pretenses. If humans don’t have the ability to freely choose to engage or not engage in a relationship with God, then the relationship is illusory. A relationship has to be desired and sought out by individuals, not pre-determined.

Figure 1



After evaluating all views, they have been placed on a visual graph (Figure 1), with the left spectrum being God’s sovereignty and the right spectrum being human freedom. To clarify, all theological groups examined hold to both these ideas; no group generally denies sovereignty or free-will. However, it is clear from the research that some emphasize the role of sovereignty

³¹ Ibid.

more or the role of human freedom more. Calvinism would be the most extreme on the left spectrum, because of the ideas of one not being able to choose their own salvation and of God preordaining the events of the future. Next would be Molinism, as both views hold to the idea of predestination, but Molinists believe that free will is included in this act. For Calvinists, there is no reliance of free will when it comes to who God chooses to elect. Next would be Arminianism, which does not hold to the Calvinist view of predestination and instead believes that humans can choose whether or not they have faith in God. “Arminians interpret predestination in light of Romans 8:29 , which connects predestination with God’s foreknowledge of believers.”³² This qualification of predestination makes God’s election dependent on human actions rather than His own will. Also, the events of the future are not particularly laid out in God’s divine decree; God still knows the future in Arminianism, but He does not will it into existence. Lastly, would be Open Theism. This view minimizes God’s sovereignty the most while emphasizing human freedom. In this view, humans’ choices are not determined and even God isn’t sure what humans will choose in the future.

The last view not evaluated in this comparison is Neo-Molinism. Neo-Molinism can be defined as a hybrid view between Molinism and Open Theism. Boyd admits this himself when responding to Craig’s chapter presenting Molinism. He writes,

Reading William Lane Craig’s fine essay reminded me of just how close Molinism is to the open view. Indeed, I shall argue that the view that has come to be labeled *open theism* could perhaps more accurately be labeled neo-Molinism. In essence it differs from the classical Molinist position only in that it expands the content of God’s middle knowledge to include ‘might-counterfactuals.’³³

³² Oleson, *Arminian Theology*, 179.

³³ Boyd, *Four Views*, 144.

It is clear that Boyd's view borrows this idea of counterfactuals and adds it to his open view of the future; other Open Theist theologians don't seem to take this approach of using Molinism at all. This raises the question of why Boyd employs middle knowledge to his view. Wouldn't it be better to borrow from Arminian theology, which is closer to the open view? The answer is that both Molinism and Open Theism hold to the A theory of time. Because of this similarity, it is much easier for both views to amalgamate. Arminianism holds to the B theory of time, which doesn't allow for it and Open Theism to be congruent. The A theory and B theory of time can be summed up in William Lane Craig's words as "Is the present an objective, independent feature of reality or is it merely a subjective feature of consciousness or, at best, a purely relational feature of events?"³⁴ In other words, does the present exist? The B theory of time would argue that either the present is perceived as being real but illusionary or does not exist at all; in this framework, the past, present, and future are all equally true. The present is perceived as a current reality, but in an ultimate sense it is just one event in a series of many. When it comes to theology, this would translate to the notion of God being outside of time. God is a timeless being in the B theory of time that creates time for human beings. However, under this view, the past, present, and future have all already existed for eternity; the present isn't real to God as He is outside of time. These terms were first espoused by metaphysician John M. E. McTaggart. His views can be summed up in the following syllogism:

1. Time is real only if real change occurs.
2. Real change occurs only if the A-series exists.
3. The A-series does not exist.
- [4.] Therefore, time is not real.³⁵

³⁴ William Lane Craig, *The Tensed Theory of Time: A Critical Examination* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 200), 3.

³⁵ Kris McDaniel, "John M. E. McTaggart", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).

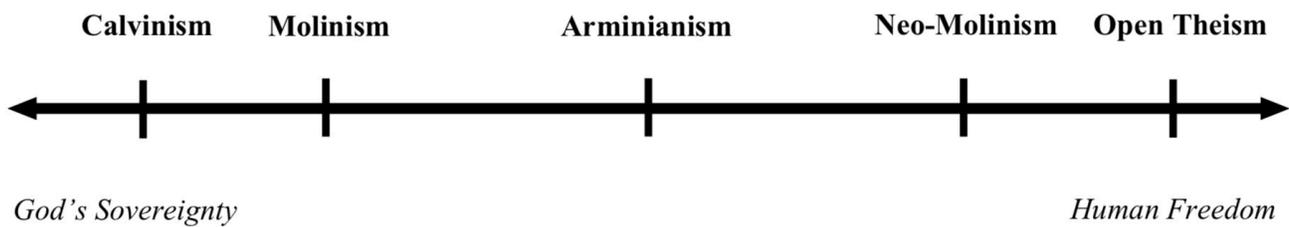
McTaggart argues that the A theory of time does not exist because change is not real. In theology, this would be the idea that not only is God static but the universe as well. Although, Arminians wouldn't hold to the idea that there is no change like McTaggart, they would have to agree that God is timeless and unchangeable. In order for God to understand the future in Arminianism, He has to be outside of time, comprehending the timeline of history all at once. This would mean that the B theory of time would have to be true for Arminians as the present is something we perceive but not something true to God. The A theory of time is what Molinists and Open Theists hold to, which is that the present is an objective aspect of reality. Dean Zimmerman writes, "The A-theorist posits an objective distinction between past, present, and future; there is a fact of the matter about what is really happening, and what is merely past or future, and this fact is not merely relative to a time."³⁶ For Open Theism this would have to be true, as human beings are making conscious decisions in the present. Also, the future is not yet decided and there are merely possibilities, so they couldn't be B theorists. For Molinists, time has to be tensed even for God. In order for God to choose which possible reality to create during His divine decree, He would have to be making that decision in a moment of time. Although this is not explicitly stated anywhere, the B theory of time is the best possible link for why Gregory Boyd chooses to create a hybrid view of Molinism and Open Theism.

Neo-Molinism is more similar to Open Theism than Molinism. Adding the category of might-counterfactuals creates significant differences between the two theories. It would be best to place Neo-Molinism between Arminianism and Open Theism on the spectrum of sovereignty

³⁶ Dean Zimmerman, "The A-Theory of Time, Presentism, and Open Theism" *Science and Religion in Dialogue* 20, no. 53 (January 2010) 789-809.

and human freedom. This is evident as Gregory Boyd acknowledges his view as being Open Theist, and not as Molinist. In Figure 2, Neo-Molinism is added as close to Open Theism but between it and Arminianism.

Figure 2



As represented by Figure 2, Neo-Molinism is very close to Open Theism, but distinct. In this way, Neo-Molinism has a similar function to that of Molinism. Both models are a less extreme view of their predecessors. Neo-Molinism is an adapted version of Open Theism that seeks to improve upon the problems with Open Theism. Boyd seeks to create his own interpretation of the open motif by taking the ideals of Open Theism and making them more coherent and robust. Luis De Molina had a similar aim with Molinism. Molinism was a response in part to Calvin's reform ideology. Molinism is an adapted version of Calvinism that tries to account for the existence of human free will. When evaluating each model of divine foreknowledge, there is a pattern that arises between Neo-Molinism and Molinism. Both theories are not only similar in language and theology but also function. They both seek to adapt and critique theories that came before them by bringing forth similar but different ideas of how God interacts with humans.

Now that the major models of God's foreknowledge have been evaluated, each individual theory can be dissected. The next section of this paper will critique each traditional view of God's knowledge. At the end of each section, the problem will be evaluated in light of how Neo-Molinism is able to answer said problem.

Problems with Each Theory

Calvinism

The most common critique against Calvinism is the claim that it teaches double-predestination. Loraine Boettner describes this idea of double predestination (without using the term) as such, “The Reformed Faith has held to the existence of an eternal, divine decree which, antecedently to any difference or desert in men themselves separates the human race into two portions and ordains one to everlasting life and the other to everlasting death.”³⁷ Boettner is describing how God decreed some to be elected to salvation and some to be elected to hell. In Calvinism, God saves those whom He chooses, without any acceptance or denial on the person’s part (this is called monergism). God doesn’t have to save anyone and does not give the offer of salvation to all of humanity. Through God’s divine decree, He elects those whom He wills. This idea of unconditional election leads many skeptics to argue that Calvinism teaches double predestination. This means that not only does God choose to save those whom He wills, He also chooses to damn those whom He wills. Some Calvinists, like Boettner, embrace this idea and claim it is a part of the Reformed ideology while others deny it. Roger E. Olson explains this Calvinist split in *Against Calvinism*. “Some Calvinists deny [double predestination] in favor of a ‘single predestination’ often called ‘mild’ or ‘moderate Calvinism.’... Single predestination is belief that God chooses some fallen persons to save while simply ‘passing over’ others and ‘leaving them’ to their deserved damnation.”³⁸ The division in Calvinism arises over whether or not God chooses to specifically send the reprobate to hell in His divine decree. Proponents of single predestination will argue that God did not ordain these people to hell, but that they were

³⁷ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Woodstock, Ontario: Devoted Publishing), 39.

³⁸ Roger E. Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 43-44.

simply left out of election and left with the consequences of their sinful nature. The debate though would have to come back to Calvin's own teachings. Calvin writes,

“The predestination by which God adopts some to the hope of life, and adjudges others to eternal death, no man who would be thought pious ventures simply to deny....By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.”³⁹

It would seem that Calvin does in fact teach double predestination. He argues that God has both preordained some to life and some to death. There is not only a decree for election but also a decree that some will spend their eternity in hell. However, regardless if one holds to double or single predestination, the end result is the same. God chooses to save some and whether He decrees the reprobate to hell or not, logically that is where the reprobate will end up if not elected. Some Calvinists like R.C. Sproul will try to justify double predestination and the idea of God electing people to hell by stating that no human deserves salvation; any human that is elected to salvation has been given mercy, and not all people deserve this mercy. R.C. Sproul writes,

God shows mercy sovereignly and unconditionally to some, and gives justice to those passed over in election. That is to say, God grants the mercy of election to some and justice to others. No one is the victim of injustice. To fail to receive mercy is not to be treated unjustly. God is under no obligation to grant mercy to all—in fact He is under no obligation to grant mercy to any. He says, “I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy” (Rom. 9). The divine prerogative to grant mercy voluntarily cannot be faulted.⁴⁰

Sproul's line of reasoning is that salvation is a gift. God can choose to give this gift to whomever He wills, or no one at all, and it would be just. All God is doing to the reprobate is bringing

³⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christians Religion*, 3.21.5.

⁴⁰ R.C. Sproul, ““Double” Predestination”, Date Accessed March 1st, 2021, *Ligonier Ministries*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/double-predestination/>

justice upon them, which is the right thing to do. The elect are being given a privilege- not a right. In this line of thinking, anyone who is chosen to be saved is given mercy, and mercy is not obligatory. The problem with this idea is that God has still created the reprobate to be destined to hell with no option for any chance of salvation. The people who are not elected to salvation, are given no chance at redemption because God made them that way- an idea that seems to be contrary to scripture. Boyd writes, “The Lord does not desire any one to perish, but rather he wants all people to repent and be saved...If it was only up to God to choose who would be saved, we have every reason to believe *he would choose everyone.*”⁴¹ Boyd’s argument is that if God chooses to save unconditionally, why hasn’t He predestined everyone to salvation? The Calvinist might respond that it is a mystery for only God to know; it is God’s gift of salvation to give out freely and we cannot critique God. However, Boyd brings up that this is not the God who is portrayed in scripture. There are many verses which show how God desires for everyone to be saved. For example, Ezekiel 18:32 states, “For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!” Also, 1 Timothy 2:3-4 states, “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” Lastly, 2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” It is clear from these verses that the Bible teaches of a God who desires for no one to perish, but for everyone to be saved. In Calvinism, God has this ability to save and elect everyone, and yet chooses not to. Why would God choose not to if the scriptures teach that it is His will for everyone to be saved? Is something stopping God from saving everyone? In

⁴¹ Boyd, *Four Views*, 193.

Calvinism, God is sovereign and can do whatever He wills. Thus, the idea of unconditional election falls apart when brought to its logical conclusion.

Neo-Molinism has no such problem when addressing the election of people. In the model of Neo-Molinism, all people have the opportunity to be saved. God chooses to give the gift of salvation to everyone, and it is on the specific person to reject or embrace this gift. No one is elected unconditionally, rather their salvation is still an open possibility. The salvation of a particular person is not set in stone or determined until they choose their destiny. How does Neo-Molinism deal with the idea of predestination and election in the Bible? Romans 9 seems to teach that God is the potter who fashions the clay as He pleases. This chapter is interpreted by Calvinists to mean that God is in control of who receives mercy and who does not. Boyd explains his perspective on this issue in his interpretation of Romans 9.

I unequivocally affirm that the sovereign God “has mercy on whomever he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whomever he wants to harden.” I would simply add that the “whomever” he has mercy on refers to “all who choose to believe” while the “whomever” he hardens refers to “all who refuse to believe.” The passage demonstrates the wisdom of God’s loving flexibility, not the sheer determinism of God’s power.⁴²

Boyd is explaining how Paul could actually mean that God fashions those who have already chosen which group they belong in. God isn’t arbitrarily shaping some to salvation and some to hell. Rather, people choose through their actions whether to put their faith in God and He begins to fashion their destiny through their choices, not the other way around. God is the potter in that He assists us in what we choose. God is flexible and lets people choose whether to accept His plan for their lives. If one does accept God, they are then given mercy, but the choice is up to the particular person. Mercy is a choice and is not forced in the Neo-Molinist perspective. When the Bible speaks of predestination, it can then be interpreted as groups and not individual election.

⁴² Gregory Boyd, “How Do You Respond to Romans 9?”, January 17th, 2008, *Reknew.org*, <https://reknew.org/2008/01/how-do-you-respond-to-romans-9/>

It's important to remember that when ancient Jews spoke about God choosing people, they thought primarily of their nation, not individuals. God chose Israel as a nation to be his "chosen people." Yet, individuals had a choice as to whether or not they wanted to be part of this corporate election, as Paul elsewhere explicitly teaches (Rom 11). So when Paul says that "God chose us" in Christ, he doesn't mean "God choose us individuals to be in Christ, as opposed to other individuals he didn't choose." What he means is "God chose all of us who are now in Christ."⁴³

Boyd is explaining that election is not prescribed in the Bible for individuals but for groups.

When scriptures teach of predestination and election, the Neo-Molinist perspective is that God has elected certain groups, the saved and the unsaved. The particular individuals in these groups are not predetermined and are up to their own choice. Boyd makes a historical argument for this, referencing how Jewish people used to believe they were a chosen nation. The Jews in the Old Testament didn't speak of how particular people are chosen to be Jews, rather how the nation as a whole has been elected for greatness by God. Boyd believes this is the correct interpretation of Romans 9 when it speaks of election; God has chosen Christians for special purposes, but God has not elected who specifically will be Christians as He wishes for everyone to be saved. This interpretation also makes sense in the literary context, especially with verse 13 which says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." The Calvinist interpretation is that God chose sovereignly to give mercy to Jacob while hating Esau. God can choose to give mercy to whomever He likes and to hate whomever He likes. However, the Neo-Molinist interpretation makes perfect sense with this verse, since Jacob represents the nation of Israel and Esau represents the Edomites. This idea that the individual represents the whole has been described as corporate solidarity by Brian J. Abasciano. "The examples of Isaac and Jacob embody the OT concept of corporate solidarity or representation in which the individual represents the community and is identified with it and vice versa. The concept is especially evident in the case of kings and patriarchs, who are seen to

⁴³ Gregory Boyd, "Predestination: What Does it Mean?", July 3, 2014, *Reknew.org*, <https://reknew.org/2014/07/predestination-what-does-it-mean/>

represent their people and sum them up in themselves, especially in the context of covenant.”⁴⁴ If this idea of corporate solidarity is true, it fits perfectly with the mentioning of Jacob and Esau in Romans 9. God didn’t love or hate the two specific persons, but he elected the nation of Israel to be his chosen people.

The Neo-Molinist adoption of corporate election helps this model of divine foreknowledge overcome the problems of Calvinism. In Calvinism, it seems that God chooses who will go to heaven and hell, even though in scripture it is taught that God wants all to be saved. In Calvinism, either God is helpless to some outside force in which He cannot save everyone or He contradicts Himself. In this area, it seems that Neo-Molinism fixes the problem by using the idea of electing the church as a whole rather than individuals. God grants people free will in order to choose whether they will accept or reject God.

Molinism

Probably the most common critique laid upon the Molinist ideology is the grounding objection. The grounding objection is summed up by William Lane Craig as such,

It is the claim that there are no true counterfactuals concerning what creatures would freely do under certain specified circumstances—the propositions expressed by such counterfactual sentences are said either to have no truth value or to be uniformly false—, since there is nothing to make these counterfactuals true. Because they are contrary-to-fact conditionals and are supposed to be true logically prior to God's creative decree, there is no ground of the truth of such counterfactual propositions. Thus, they cannot be known by God.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Brian J. Abasciano, “Corporate Election in Romans 9: A Reply to Thomas Schreiner.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 2 (June 2006): 351–71

⁴⁵ William Lane Craig, “Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the ‘Grounding Objection,’” *Faith and Philosophy* 18, no 3, (2001): 337-52.

Craig is describing how the critique argues that there is no ground for counterfactuals. God has middle knowledge prior to His divine decree, so there is no basis for this knowledge. Creation has not existed yet, people have not made choices, and the future is still not yet determined. This begs the question: where do counterfactuals come from? What is middle knowledge eternally grounded in? It seems that what humans would and would not choose is just eternally determined before humans actually have the ability to choose. If it is eternally determined, and just simply exists, this would mean there is some sort of reality that is outside of God; His middle knowledge would be something determined by something other than Him and also not determined by human actions. This would result in some sort of cosmic fate that God has no control over. Boyd calls this a type of “eternal dualism.”⁴⁶ There would be an eternal series of events that are true, and that God didn’t create. This would mean there is some outside infinite or rival to God. Thus, counterfactuals have to either be grounded in God or in human beings. There has to be some basis from which these possibilities arise. If they do come from God, then the result is Calvinism, where God determines human actions. The other possibility is that choices come from human beings, which grounding objectors would argue is impossible since these finite beings haven’t made choices or even existed before God’s creation decree. Boyd argues that this version of Molinism cannot accurately account for human freedom. “In this view, every possible decision any possible free agent might ever make in any possible world is an eternal fact. Every future free decision and every possible future free decision is exhaustively settled in eternity before it takes place.”⁴⁷ It cannot be that counterfactuals are grounded in the choices of human

⁴⁶ Gregory Boyd, “Molinism and Open Theism Part I”, May 12th, 2014, *Reknew.org*, <https://reknew.org/2014/05/molism-and-open-theism-part-i/> “this view is tantamount to a type of eternal dualism, for it is positing an eternal reality alongside God that God himself didn’t create. Think about it. From all eternity, the truth of what every possible agent will do and would do in other circumstances is eternally settled — and God didn’t choose this!”

beings because from all eternity it was settled as to what their choices would be. Human choice in this view is somewhat of an illusion since their choices are predetermined. Unless a Molinist takes a compatibilist view and not a libertarian view of free will, counterfactuals are ungrounded. They have to be grounded in God in order for these statements to be true. Otherwise, as Steven B. Cowan points out, middle knowledge is no better than guessing or betting. "At best, the Molinist can assert a probabilistic connection between the antecedent and consequent of counterfactuals of freedom. But, to say ['if David remained in Keilah, Saul would *probably* besiege the city['] will not give the Molinist what he wants. For God to know what Saul would probably do does not amount to middle knowledge."⁴⁸ Cowan is explaining how counterfactuals have to be grounded; otherwise, they are probabilistic guesses. God could guess what a certain individual, like Saul, would do in the Bible before it happens, but if the knowledge is not grounded in something, then there is no truth value to the statement. It would be the same as people guessing which football team will win on Sunday; there is no absolute truth value in guesses. This is not true Molinism or middle knowledge. Again, Molinists argue how God knows what would and would not happen in any given situation, not what might and might not happen. Neo-Molinists are the ones who believe God knows what might and might not happen.

The Neo-Molinist solution to the problem is to embrace this grounding objection. God only knows the possibilities of libertarian free choices, not the exact outcome (in most circumstances). God knows in any given situation what individuals might or might not choose. God is able to make very strong hypotheses based on human behavior, but He does not know for

⁴⁷ Boyd, *Four Views*, 145.

⁴⁸ Steven B. Cowan, "The Grounding Objection to Middle Knowledge Revisited." *Religious Studies* 39, no. 1 (2003): 93-102.

sure the outcome in Neo-Molinism. For Boyd, this is the only way for human libertarian free will to be true. However, some of the future is predetermined as God does use middle knowledge to bring about His divine plan and will. These counterfactuals are grounded in God's will. This does create a partly determined future, but Boyd is okay with this.

in our view, God pre-settled the future as much as he wisely determined it should be settled. And to this degree, relevant propositions regarding what *will and will not* come pass are rendered *true*, and relevant propositions regarding what *might and might not* come to pass are rendered *false*. But to the degree that the Creator wisely and adventurously left the future open, relevant propositions regarding what *might and might not come to pass* are rendered *true* while relevant propositions regarding what *will and will not* come to pass are rendered *false*.⁴⁹

According to Boyd, there are some events left open by God and some events that are closed. Counterfactuals that are grounded in God's will are rendered true after His divine decree, but some are rendered as maybes. God sovereignly chooses to leave some decisions in the future open in order to give humans substantial freedom.

Another objection Boyd has to Molinism is that it misunderstands God's middle knowledge. Rather than knowing what would and would not happen, Boyd argues that God knows what would and might or might not happen. "If God knows the truth value of propositions about what *will* come to pass, he must, *by logically necessity*, also know the truth value of propositions of *what might and might not* come to pass."⁵⁰ Boyd argues this idea through the lens of the Aristotelian Square of Opposition. The Aristotelian Square was developed by Aristotle to understand the difference between contradictories, contraries, and subcontraries. "Two propositions are contradictory [if] they cannot both be true and they cannot both be false."⁵¹

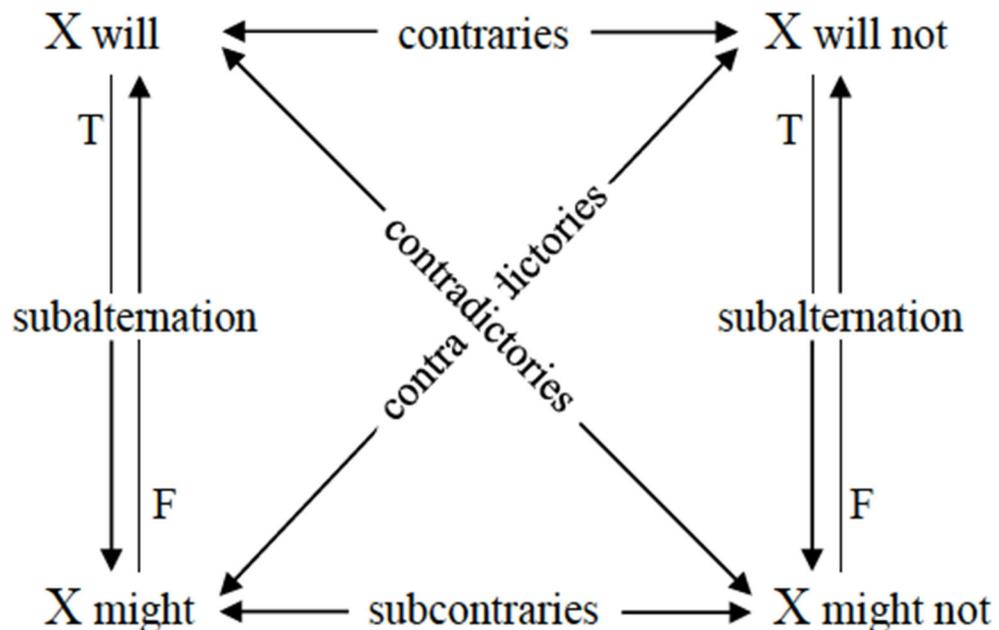
⁴⁹ Gregory Boyd, "Molinism and Open Theism Part II," May 13th, 2014, *Reknew.org*, <https://reknew.org/2014/05/molism-and-open-theism-part-ii/>

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Boyd extrapolates this idea to Molinism. Middle knowledge is the belief that God knows what would and would not happen, however, the opposite of ‘would’ is not ‘would not’. According to Boyd, the opposite of an event that would happen is an event that might or might not happen.

This theological square of opposite is represented by Figure 3.⁵²

Figure 3



If a contradictory, or opposite, is two things that both cannot be true at the same time and false at the same time, then Boyd is correct in his assertion. The contradictory of an event that will happen is an event that might not happen; X (a human choice) happening and not happening cannot both be true, but they can both be false. Y might occur instead of X, making both statements false. This is because humans have many different options when it comes to any

⁵¹ Parsons, Terence, "The Traditional Square of Opposition", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/square/>>.

⁵² Elijah Hess, "Neo-Molinism: A Reappraisal and Defense", 14.

given situation. Not every human choice is a yes or no; there can be many options that will or will not occur. It is a false dichotomy that X has to happen or has to not happen; both options could be false as another choice like Y is chosen. The opposite then of X happening would be X might not happening. They cannot both be true because if X will happen, then X might not happen is inaccurate. They also cannot both be false. If 'X will happen' is not true, then 'X might not happen' has to be the case. This is because Y could still happen or X could not happen, they are maybes. X will and will not happen are contraries rather than contradictories. Boyd puts it in simpler terms with the example of eating chocolate. "For example, suppose my lovely wife Shelley says, 'Greg will certainly eat chocolate on May 16th.' If you want to contradict her, you shouldn't say, 'Greg will certainly not eat chocolate on May 16th.'... You would rather say, 'It's not the case that Greg will certainly eat chocolate on May 16th.'"⁵³ The opposite of an event being certain is an event being uncertain. With the chocolate example, it is not a matter of the chocolate being eaten or not eaten, rather the chocolate being certainly eaten or uncertainly eaten. For Boyd, this means God chooses whether some events will occur or might/might not occur. God in His divine decree chooses what events to determine and what events to leave open for humans to decide.

For the Neo-Molinist, the difference of might and might-not counterfactuals makes a big difference when it comes to how God deals with His creation. It affects humans' understanding of libertarian free will and God's plan for humanity. God has chosen some things to come to pass that are important throughout history, like the crucifixion of Jesus and the end times, but has left other things open, like the individual salvation with humans. Even though both Molinism and

⁵³ Boyd, "Molinism and Open Theism Part II."

Neo-Molinism share the same nomenclature, the slight differences create great implications for the theology of God's foreknowledge.

Arminianism

The common critique of Arminianism is similar to that of Molinism, with slight differences. Boyd writes, "I remain under the conviction that exhaustively definite foreknowledge is not logically compatible with free agency. Person X is free...regarding an action *A* if and only if it is genuinely possible for him to do *-A*."⁵⁴ In other words, in Arminianism, is it possible for humans to act otherwise? A true libertarian free act would have to include the ability for a human to choose other actions if they so desire. In Arminianism, God knows from all eternity the actions that every human will decide. If God knows these actions from all eternity, do humans have the ability to choose otherwise? It would seem that Arminianism is stuck in the conundrum of fatalism. If human beings are not able to change their actions because God exhaustively knows all of what they would choose, it would seem the universe is already predetermined and there is no libertarian free will. However, William Lane Craig differs on this conclusion as he argues that God's foreknowledge of the future does not equate to fatalism. "Suppose God knows that some causally free event will occur. How does his merely knowing about it constrain it to occur?...How does the addition or deletion of the factor of God's simply knowing some act in advance affect the freedom of that act?"⁵⁵ Craig is arguing that God knowing what humans will choose has no bearing on whether actions are free or not. Just because God knows what person X will choose, it doesn't mean they didn't choose it freely. Regardless, it still stands that in Arminianism, or the Simple Foreknowledge view, all events and

⁵⁴ Boyd, *Four Views*, 108.

⁵⁵ Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 69.

choices are determined in the mind of God. Craig seems to be looking at individual events, but in the grand scheme of time, all things are already settled. William Hasker explains this idea of fatalism in Arminianism, “If God knows already what will happen in the future, then God’s knowing this is part of the past and is now fixed, impossible to change... if God knows that a person is going to perform [an action], then it is impossible that the person fail to perform it, so one does not have a free choice whether or not to perform it.”⁵⁶ God’s foreknowledge seems to create a problem with genuine human libertarian free will. Even if humans choose their actions, they still are fixed because of God’s complete knowledge of the future.

Open Theism

Open Theism has had its fair share of critiques. Some of the critiques of Open Theism overlap with those of Neo-Molinism, which will be addressed later. Charles Hodge, although not talking about Open Theism, summarizes the core of the issue.

Who would wish to see the reins of universal empire fall from the hands of infinite wisdom and love, to be seized by chance or fate? Who would not rather be governed by a Father than by a tornado? If God cannot effectually control the acts of free agents there can be no prophecy, no prayer, no thanksgiving, no promises, no security of salvation, no certainty whether in the end God or Satan is to be triumphant, whether heaven or hell is to be the consummation. Give us certainty—the secure conviction that a sparrow cannot fall, or a sinner move a finger, but as God permits and ordains. We must have either God or Satan to rule. And if God has a providence He must be able to render the free acts of his creatures certain; and therefore certainty must be consistent with liberty⁵⁷

Hodge is explaining the problem with a God who is not in control and does not even know what will happen in the future. If God cannot predestine certain events, or even be aware of them coming, the future of humanity is left to itself. God is merely playing catch up when disasters happen. God is able to make educated guesses of what will happen in the future, but He won’t

⁵⁶ William Hasker, et al, *The Openness of God*, 147.

⁵⁷ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology II*, (New York City: Scribner, 1873), 301-302.

know for sure. God can be left surprised or caught off guard by what humans decide to do. “How can the God of open theism retain providential control over the flow of world history if it is logically impossible for him to foreknow the libertarian-free decisions of responsible moral agents[?]”⁵⁸ God’s knowledge of the future is left to guesses, which makes it very hard for God to intervene and accomplish His will. The course of human events could be thrown off entirely by finite choices that God is unable to predict. Imagine if the Russians and Americans during the Cold War decided to nuke each other, resulting in nuclear holocaust. God might have been able to predict this but also may have not been able to. If He wasn’t able to predict this hypothetical event, all of humanity could have been wiped out. Thus, the end times and prophecies in the Bible of Jesus returning would not occur, making God a liar and also an ineffective protector of humanity. Of course, this is the worst case scenario, but it seems entirely possible in the Open Theism model of God’s foreknowledge.

Neo-Molinism easily fixes the problem of God being a guesser in the events of human history. Boyd writes,

Think of God as an infinitely intelligent chess player. If you’re playing him, he doesn’t control what you do, or even foreknow what you’ll do. But he can anticipate every *possible* move you could make from the beginning of the game. So whatever move you make, he’s been looking at that very move as though you *had* to make it, and he’s been preparing a response to it *in case* you made it. So whatever move you make, it will only further his plan to checkmate you. Only a God of limited intelligence would need to control you or foreknow your every move in order to assure he can bring the “good” (of defeating you) out of whatever move you might make.⁵⁹

In Boyd’s view of divine foreknowledge, God can and will anticipate every choice a particular human could ever make. God has all possible knowledge of what could and could not happen

⁵⁸ Paul Kjoss Helseth et al., *Four Views on Divine Providence*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 413.

⁵⁹ Gregory Boyd, If God Can’t Control, How Can I Trust Him?, March 10th, 2014, *Reknew.org*, <https://reknew.org/2014/03/if-god-cant-control-how-can-i-trust-him/>

inherently before the creation of the world. In both Molinism and Neo-Molinism, God knows all possibilities. This inclusion of Molinism into Open Theism helps God become less of a helpless bystander to the future as He is more prepared for what will happen. Whatever choice a human being will make, God will always be prepared for it in Boyd's view. Other Open Theist theologians use this example of God being the ultimate chess master, but not as skillfully as Boyd. Richard Rice writes, "We can be sure that God, as a kind of master chess player, will win, but we cannot be sure exactly how the end game will play itself out."⁶⁰ In Rice's view, God does not have the traditional Molinist view of knowledge before creation, making the analogy of a chess master useless. God, in this analogy, is a chess master who does not know any of the possible moves or strategies the other player will use. Neo-Molinism improves upon this view as God can anticipate all possibilities that humans will choose but does not know exactly which particular choice will be actualized. Also, in Neo-Molinism, the future is partly open and partly settled, allowing God to accomplish His plan while also giving humans libertarian free will; God knows some of the choices that humans will choose because they were determined through middle knowledge while others were left open to possibility. Some Open Theists also argue for a partly closed and open future but with no mechanism or explanation of how this occurs. "Open theism affirms what I call dynamic omniscience. This means that God knows the past and present with exhaustive definite knowledge and knows the future as partly definite (closed) and partly indefinite (open)."⁶¹ Sanders here is arguing for a very similar view that Boyd holds but with no explanation of how this is possible. Boyd is able to logically explain how possibilities

⁶⁰ Richard Rice et al., *Most Moved Mover*, 52.

⁶¹ Sanders, *The God who Risks*, 15.

and definite events are possible through the Square of Opposition while other Open Theists cannot.

Furthermore, prophecy is also one of the biggest critiques of Open Theism. How can God accurately predict the future if He is not sure of what will occur? Also, does this make the Bible false, as it contains many prophecies that God says will come to pass? Michael D. Stallard writes, “Open theists may say they hold to inerrancy, but to be consistent within their system they must see prophetic Scripture as potentially errant. If the future is ‘open,’ then God has made mistakes in prophecy and the Bible is not inerrant.”⁶² In the Open Theist view, some argue that God and scripture can possibly be incorrect. Richard Rice answers this objection by arguing, “A prophecy may express God’s intention to do something in the future irrespective of creaturely decision. If God’s will is the only condition required for something to happen, if human cooperation is not involved, then God can unilaterally guarantee its fulfillment, and he can announce it ahead of time.”⁶³ The problem with this line of reasoning is that human cooperation will always be involved. If God is not sure of the circumstances that lie ahead, His plan to do something in the future might not work out. For example, when God prophesies that the messiah will come out of the line of David, God has to be sure that David’s bloodline will last and not be cut short. If God is surprised and caught off guard by Solomon dying, then David’s bloodline has been killed off and His prophecy will be wrong. God can predict His own behavior, but He cannot predict the behavior of others certainly. Boyd has a more robust view of prophecy within His view of Neo-Molinism.

The open view holds that some of the future is open, not all of it. God can pre-settle as much of the future as he wants to pre-settle. If, in order to fulfill specific prophecies, God

⁶² Michael D. Stallard “A Dispensational Critique of Open Theism’s View of Prophecy.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161, no. 641 (January 2004): 27–41.

⁶³ Rice, *The Openness of God*, 51.

needed to providentially orchestrate things so that certain people with evil characters played out their evil intentions in specific ways, he could easily do this, and do so with impunity.⁶⁴

God pre-settling certain events to happen ensures that a prophecy will come to pass rather than God planning on doing it in the future. God is no longer guessing or hoping to accomplish His will in the future if He has already determined it will happen before creation. God can ensure that Jesus will come out of the line of David because He has lined up events beforehand that will determine it to occur.

Another critique of Open Theism is that the model cannot ensure the occurrence of the end times. “Open Theists cannot maintain that Christ will return and establish his Kingdom if God cannot exhaustively foresee the future. On their view, it must be possible that human beings will so freely choose and thwart God’s plan that it becomes impossible for Christ to return.”⁶⁵ Mody is arguing that in Open Theism, Christ’s return can be stopped by human choices as it is not a guaranteed event. Again, the Neo-Molinist solution would be the same as for prophecy. God can predetermine some events to happen, including the end times.

It is clear that Neo-Molinism has improved upon the criticism that Open Theism has received. It improves upon the notion that God is helpless to the choices of man, as God can anticipate what will happen in the future because He knows all the possibilities. God is not a

⁶⁴ Gregory Boyd, “How does an Open Theist explain all the prophecies fulfilled in the life of Jesus?”, *Reknew.org*, January 19, 2008, <https://reknew.org/2008/01/how-does-an-open-theist-explain-all-the-prophecies-fulfilled-in-the-life-of-jesus/>

⁶⁵ Rohintan Mody, “Theodicy and the Problems of Open Theism.” *Churchman* 131, no. 1 (Spr 2017): 25–38.

bystander in the world; He is actively bringing His plan to fruition. It also improved upon the criticism of prophecy and the end times that Open Theism has received.

Criticisms of Neo-Molinism

This section of the paper will address both possible and actual critiques that have been made of Neo-Molinism. Since Neo-Molinism is a new theory in the realm of theology, not much has been written critiquing it or defending it. Some of the objections written here are anticipated while others have been written by theologians.

How is God sovereign in Neo-Molinism?

A common critique of both Open Theism and Neo-Molinism is that it undermines the sovereignty of God. James White argues, “Open theism is specifically designed to undercut and deny the sovereignty of God and the idea that He is accomplishing a specific, freely chosen purpose in this world.”⁶⁶ However, Boyd and other Open Theists would disagree with this objection. Even though the future is open, God still chose, through His sovereign will, to create the world this way. It is not as though God can’t know the future; He could have created a Calvinist world where all things are determined through His world, but the Neo-Molinist would argue that God didn’t. Boyd writes, “Why should we think that God would cease to be God because he decided to create something he does not meticulously control?”⁶⁷ In Neo-Molinism, God could have chosen to create a meticulously controlled reality but chose not to in order to have loving relationships with His creation. God is still in control from the beginning and does not cease to be God just because He chose to give people free will that is substantial. Boyd takes it a step further and argues that the sovereignty of God in Neo-Molinism is superior to that of Calvinism.

⁶⁶ James R. White, *The Potter’s Freedom: A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal of Norman Geisler’s Chosen but Free* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2009), 106.

⁶⁷ Gregory Boyd, “Re-Thinking Divine Sovereignty”, April 3rd, 2018, *Reknew.org*, <https://reknew.org/2018/04/re-thinking-divine-sovereignty/>

It is hard to conceive of a weaker God than one who would be threatened by events occurring outside of his meticulous control. It is difficult to imagine a less majestic view of God than one who is necessarily limited to a unilateral, deterministic mode of relating to his creation. Power is about having choices. If this is so, then if God cannot choose to create an open creation, his power is actually undermined.⁶⁸

In Neo-Molinism, God is not only more fair and loving, but also powerful. God is more powerful because He is able to create either an open or closed view. Boyd is saying that Calvinism limits God to only one view. To argue that God determined everything is one thing, but to argue He *has to* determine everything is limiting His power.

Why does God have to respect people's wills?

This issue of God having to respect humans' and Satan's wills has been brought up before. Joseph Davis writes, "If God must respect the choice of evil people and cannot overrule them, why would one pray to someone who is powerless in the face of another's choice."⁶⁹ While it is true that God often respects people's wills to choose, it is not as though God is compelled to under Neo-Molinism. God chooses to create a world where He does not interfere with human choices (most of the time) in order for there to be true relationship between creation and Creator. Even though God allows humans to have some autonomy through their choices, He is still in control. Boyd writes, "[J]ust because God does not always get his way does not mean that God is 'at the mercy' of free decisions or that his sovereignty is demanded...it is therefore inaccurate to say that the Creator is at the 'mercy' of anything or anyone-even though he has set things up so that his will can be frustrated."⁷⁰ God chooses to respect the wills of other beings

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Joseph Davis, *Agreement and Disagreement in the Kenosis of the Spirit in Clark Pinnock's Open Theism*, Presented at the 43rd Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies. 2015.

⁷⁰ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 147-148.

but is not under or subjected to these wills. He is the creator of this system and is still in control of what happens but chooses to allow humans to have free will.

Why should a Christian trust God if He doesn't know the future?

Some of the most important aspects of faith are trusting God that has a plan and that He will provide and sustain. However, in Neo-Molinism, God's plan is somewhat open; this doesn't mean He is clueless. God is prepared for any situation; He will be able to have a plan A, B, C, etc. for whatever may occur. "If God is infinitely intelligent, then he can anticipate every future possibility as perfectly as he could a future certainty. So he can have a plan in place to bring good out of it, in case it comes to pass."⁷¹ God is still omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent in Neo-Molinism. Just because there are still some possibilities in this model, it does not mean God is not adept to help.

How does prayer work in Neo-Molinism?

Prayer is one of the strongest proofs for Neo-Molinism because most Christians pray as Open Theists. Christians tend to ask God to intervene in their life and in their circumstances. Also, the Bible seems to teach that prayers do have an impact on the outcome of events. Boyd uses the example of Psalm 106:23⁷², which says, "So he said he would destroy them-- had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him to keep his wrath from destroying them." It seems as though Moses's prayers and pleadings had an effect on the fate of the Jewish people. This idea of dynamic prayer is perfectly congruent with the God of Neo-Molinism. Prayer can

⁷¹ Gregory Boyd, "If God Can't Control, How Can I Trust Him?", March 10th, 2014, *Reknew.org*, <https://reknew.org/2014/03/if-god-cant-control-how-can-i-trust-him/>

⁷² Gregory Boyd, "Does Prayer Really Change Things?", May 5th, 2015, *Reknew.org*, <https://reknew.org/2015/05/does-prayer-really-change-things/>

have the effect of changing the outcome of human history, on both a macro and micro scale; it can have a real effect on people's personal lives and on nations as well.

Neo-Molinism also makes sense of why prayer is so heavily emphasized in scripture. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, "pray continually." If the course of the future is contingent on prayer, it makes sense as to why God would emphasize it so heavily. Boyd writes, "The Lord does not play with words when he teaches and illustrates throughout Scripture that much of what will happen in the future depends on prayer."⁷³ Boyd then quotes 2 Chronicles 7:14 which says, "if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." It seems as though God's healing is directly linked to the prayers of His people. Neo-Molinism is able to make perfect sense of how prayers can affect the future while other theories are not as effective.

If this view is correct, how has church history been wrong for thousands of years?

Boyd argues that the open view has been taught long before Open Theism came about in the 1980s. As stated in the literature review, Calcidius could have been the earliest proponent of the open view.⁷⁴ "It also appears to have been fairly widespread among nineteenth-century Methodists, as evidenced, for example, by the writings of the chancellor of Ohio Wesleyan University, Lorenzo McCabe, and the popular circuit preacher Billy Hibbard."⁷⁵ It is clear that although this view is very uncommon, it is not an entirely new idea.

⁷³ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 97.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 114-115, "While little research has yet been done tracing this Questions and Objections view throughout history, it seems it was espoused by Calcidius, a fifth-century theologian."

⁷⁵ Ibid.

It is also fallacious to always agree with church tradition. Just because something has been taught one way, it does not mean it is correct (is-ought fallacy). Although church tradition is a rich source for Christians to draw from, it should be open to questioning. Otherwise, Luther would have never been able to start the reformation if the church could have never been questioned. If an idea like Neo-Molinism is Biblically consistent, logical, and theologically coherent, then it can't be disproven just by church tradition.

Conclusion

Neo-Molinism is not perfect, but it greatly improves upon Open Theism. The open view of divine foreknowledge is somewhat of a new theological idea that needs improvement. Neo-Molinism seems to add the clarity and cohesiveness that Open Theism lacks. By borrowing from Molinism, this theory is able to reconcile both a partly open and closed future. Neo-Molinism makes more sense logically, theologically, and scripturally than Open Theism.

Neo-Molinism should not become the adapted theory of divine foreknowledge immediately, as there needs to be more research and interaction with this theory. However, theologians and scholars should not be so quick to brush it off as heresy. There are interesting claims being made by theologians in the open view that should be taken seriously, especially with the addition of Neo-Molinism. Boyd is able to articulate the open motif with unmatched precision. Rather than appealing to pathos, Boyd makes strong philosophical arguments for Neo-Molinism and its congruency with scripture. Open Theists should be quick to adopt Boyd's nuances. If Open Theism is presented as Boyd's Neo-Molinism, it will likely be taken as seriously as the traditional theories of foreknowledge.

Neo-Molinism is a more balanced theory of divine foreknowledge than Open Theism. The theory is able to adapt to criticism and become more plausible with the inclusion of middle knowledge and a partly open/closed future. Though the name of the theory is slightly confusing; because it is more similar to Open Theism than Molinism, it may be best to call it Neo-Open Theism. Regardless of the name, it is entirely possible for this theory to gain popularity in the coming years. Theologians should consider it in the array of theories of divine foreknowledge. Although it is new, Neo-Molinism is able to stand against the traditional theories of divine foreknowledge as presented in this paper. However, regardless of whatever theory a Christian

holds to, it is always important to engage with one another with love and respect. God has given humans the ability to reason with one another, but it should be done Biblically. For Peter writes, “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Pt. 3:15). Although this passage is usually applied to apologetics, it is true for all Christian discourse. Christians should respect others and be able to engage with them on this topic with gentleness.

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