A Critique of Open Theists' Solution to Divine Foreknowledge-Freewill Dilemma in the Light of Augustinian Freewill Theory

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Abstract

One of the recent attempts to solve the Divine foreknowledge-freewill dilemma is that of Open Theists, a group of scholars who formulated their solution by redefining Divine-omniscience, arguing that the dilemma can be resolved by saying God does not know the future actions of "libertarianly-free-agents." While Open Theists' theological positions have aroused heated criticisms in contemporary theological discourse; its methodology has not received adequate scholarly attention and none of the previous critiques on the Open Theists' solution was done in the light of Augustine's freewill defence. Therefore, this work attempts a detailed examination of the Open Theists' arguments in attempt to resolve the dilemma and critiques their proposed solution in the light of Augustine's freewill defence. This work concludes that Augustine's freewill defence is more biblically plausible, methodologically correct, and that it can be used as benchmark to correct Open theists' flaws from evangelical perspective.

Key words: Divine foreknowledge, freewill, Open Theists, Dilemma, Augustine.

Introduction

From the earliest time to the present time, the debate over God's foreknowledge and man's freewill has come to be one of the most controversial philosophical issues disputed among

theologians, particularly, the evangelicals. In fact it could be said that the debate over God's foreknowledge and libertarian freewill is the most heated controversy to hit evangelicalism since the inerrancy debate of the 1970s. Theologians and Philosophers up till today continue in trying to give philosophical and theological solution to the problem. The main crux of the dilemma is on the question of "would a supposed free man be free if he does not have the freedom to refrain from performing certain actions."?[1] This divine foreknowledge-freewill debate is so much pressing that it has begun to take place not only in elite theological circles, but also in churches, fellowships, conferences and in layperson magazines. Traditionally defined, God's omniscience includes exhaustive and infallible foreknowledge of all past, present and future events; this definition poses an apparent problem to the concept of libertarian *free*will. After all, if we freely chose to do something other than what God had foreknown, God would be wrong in what He foreknows; but since God cannot be mistaken in his knowledge, we must do all that He foreknows we would do. Michael Murray and Michael Rea in their recently co-authored book titled "*An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion"* expressed the dilemma succinctly:

> The belief that God knows the future in full and fine-grained detail raises difficult philosophical problems. For example, we are accustomed to thinking of the future as open – which is just to say that future events do not exist, and facts about the future are not "fixed" in advance. Indeed, many of our attitudes toward daily

[1] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil,* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 66-73. I observe that instead of Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP), Plantinga used "ability to refrain" These two concepts may mean the same thing if one considers the context of Plantinga's discussion in Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil,* 66-73.

> decisions seem to presuppose that the future is open in this sense.[2]

As it can be seen from this assertion, the crux of the debate lies on the apparent incompatibility of divine prescience which makes the future inevitable or fixed and man's sense of libertarian freewill. That is, if God knows the future perfectly and totally (infallibly), then any action of a man to perform any future action known by God cannot said to be free. The debate is so intense and has assumed such a great portion in the theological discourse within the evangelicalism and even beyond because the dilemma has became a theological lightning rod due to the fact that it has a lot of implications for other cogent orthodox theological standpoints. For example, the dilemma of divine foreknowledge-libertarian freewill has some implications to the traditional definition of God's sovereignty, providence and omnipotence, holiness and justice.[3] As a result of this, there have been several attempts in the contemporary time to give theological explanation to the dilemma. One of these recent attempts is the Open Theists' attempted solution to the dilemma. Meanwhile, in these myriad of attempts, many proposed solutions have some resultant theological models that plague with other major Judeo-Christian theological standpoints which have a lot of negative costs that are not worth the benefit.[4]

In view of this, this paper examines Open Theists' solution, and contrasts it with that of the Augustine, showing where the Open Theists errors lie. The paper argues that Augustine's solution to the debate stands a lot of theological coherence and that it can be 'reinstated' and modified to solve the on-going debate. The researcher of this paper believes that where the Open

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[2]Michael J. Murray and Michael Rea, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion: Cambridge Introductions to Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 35.

[3] This paper shall discuss this in fuller length latter.

[4] C. Stephen Evans and R. Zachary Manis, *Philosophy of Religion,* 2nd edition, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 43.

Theists' attempts to solve the dilemma err Augustine's attempt stands. To showcase this, the paper first of all, succinctly highlights the salient elements of the dilemma, and proceeds to do a critical examination of the Open Theists' solution and compared this with the Augustine's solution. The paper later highlights the implications of the Augustine's solution to contemporary discourse on the problem of evil and concludes that Augustine position is more evangelical, orthodox and logically coherent than the Open Theists' solution. Although Open Theism appears to have become a fossil theology, its theological themes are still going around not only in academia but also in churches, conferences and magazines, therefore, there is a need for continuing scholarly effort aimed at assessing its theologies.

Salient Elements of the Divine Foreknowledge- Freewill Dilemma

I shall begin by pointing to some salient elements that are involved in the dilemma, because this will bring up, conspicuously, the issues at stake in the dilemma. First, the major element of the dilemma is the notion of infallibility of God's foreknowledge. Nelson Pike corroborates this fact when he notes in "*Philosophical Review*" that the core factor of the dilemma lies in the definition of infallibility of God's foreknowledge.[5] This is very true because what makes the dilemma to be hydra-headed is the fact that if God knows infallibly (that is, without possibility of any epistemic error) that an action will happen then there is inevitability of eventuality of that very action. If God knows what a man will inevitably do, can we then say such a man is free since such a man has no choice than to do it because if he does not do it then the infallibility of God's foreknowledge is objected. Second, another salient element of the dilemma is the principle of alternate

[5] Nelson Pike, "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action." *Journal of Philosophy,* 60 no 23 (November 7, 1963), 735-736. Also in *Philosophical Review,* January 1965, 29.

possibilities (PAP).[6] Though there can be possibilities of what an agent would do in certain conditions and God may know all these possibilities but since God knows with certitude (infallibility) what a free agent would do eventually, then there is no ground for counterfactual freedom hence such an action is not free since the agent could not have done otherwise. And if the agent could have done otherwise, the infallibility of God's foreknowledge is questioned. Obviously, these two elements, that is, infallibility of God's foreknowledge and the possibility of alternatives, are apparently in conflict, and this intensifies the dilemma.

Another element in the dilemma that makes it a strong debate is the concept of human libertarian freewill. The traditional view in some orthodox theological circles is that human beings have freedom 'libertarianly.' The concept of libertarian freedom includes the principle of alternate possibilities (PAP) and this is in stark conflict with the concept of infallibility in the traditional understanding of God's foreknowledge. If a man is to be a free agent in libertarian sense, it is a requirement that he possesses freedom of alternate possibilities but such an infallible knowledge of God would undermine the very libertarian human freedom, for an agent cannot falsify the knowledge that God has held about him infallibly in regards to his future actions.[7] These elements that are embedded in dilemma have made the debate not to be easily put to rest despite the many proposed theological solutions to the problem. And in fact to "many thinkers it seems that if God knows, already, what will happen tomorrow, then human freewill and responsibility must be a

[6] Though Frankfurt Hary debunked PAP, but I argue that there is no how we can logically talk of libertarian freewill without talking about the ability of a free agent to have done otherwise. If a man could not have refused to do what he did then he was not totally free in the process. See Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities,* ed. David Widerker and Michael McKenna (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006) for 'Frankfurt-Style' arguments. Frankfurt represents a sample of how the debate has been retooled in recent time.

[7] C. Stephen Evans and R. Zachary Manis, *Philosophy of Religion, 43.*

mere sham."[8] I shall later show how Augustine reconciled these elements in his own theological solution to the dilemma.

Why is the Debate so Important to the Evangelicals?

Now, one might wonder why Divine foreknowledge- freewill dilemma is of such a great importance in theologico-philosophical discussion, especially among the evangelicals. Why is it that Christian philosophers care whether free will is compatible with divine foreknowledge? The answer to this is very obvious because debate on freewill and divine foreknowledge hinges on many other philosophical and theological issues that are sacrosanct in Christian orthodoxy. For instance, the argument from divine omniscience seems to demonstrate incompatibility among two of theistic definitions of God; his omniscience and his justice. It is a basic part of evangelical-theism that God is Omniscient and that God holds human beings accountable for their actions.[9] If then the seemingly conflict between God's foreknowledge and man's freewill is not solved, then Christian's understanding of responsibility and morality become jeopardized. I agree with Tina Talsma's arguments, in her doctoral dissertation, that freedom is necessary for moral responsibility and moral responsibility is an important element of personhood. Freedom of a man makes him a being for whom it is appropriate that other expects of her that she so comply, and for whom praise and blame, as well as punishment or reward, might be fitting. And though freedom is not the only necessary condition for moral responsible agency, it is indispensable. Without freedom, the agent is not in control of her actions and thus cannot be appropriately held responsible.[10]

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[8] Simon Balckburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 260.

[9] C. Stephen Evans and R. Zachary Manis, *Philosophy of Religion*, 42.

[10] Tina Talsma, "Freewill and Divine Omniscience" (PhD Dissertation, Florida State University, 2012), 5-10.

Also, evangelicals understand the biblical definition of God's justice to be retributivist and thus eternal punishment and other eschatological issues are at stake if the Divine-foreknowledge and freewill dilemma is not given a logical solution. Moreso, the dilemma also has some stereological and eschatological implications, for example, one of the hallmarks of the evangelicalism is the call for evangelistic witnessing, therefore if the needed free choice, that anyone who would be saved by the substitutionary atoning work of Christ must have, becomes only a trick if God's foreknowledge and human freewill dilemma is properly understood. More importantly, the dilemma has some relationship with the Christian answer to logical problem of evil,[11] most especially, the freewill defense and moral evil. The freewill defense of Alvin Plantinga[12] and the freewill theodicy of Aurelius Augustine lie on the fact that human beings are free to act or take decision on their own as free, rational, and moral agents.[13] So, the concept of human libertarian freewill is essential to both the understanding of moral evil and Christian theodicy.

Now that I have succinctly stated the salient elements that are involved in the Foreknowledge- freewill dilemma and the factors responsible for its importance in the contemporary theological discourse, the next segment of the paper centers on the Open Theists' solutions to the dilemma and the pitfalls of

[11] There a lot of Christian theodical theories (e.g. Iranean soul-grafting theodicy, Augustinian principle of freewill defence, principle of plenitude, and metaphysical privation of goods, Hickean Epistemic distance, Plantinga's freewill defence and others) but the one that has become most profound in giving logical answer to logical problem of evil is the freewill defence.

[12] Alvin Plantinga distinguished Freewill theodicy from freewill defence. To him a theodicy is attempt to tell why God permits evil while a defense is the attempt to tell what the reason might possibly be. See Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil,* 27-29 for a more detailed discussion of Alvin Plantinga's theodical arguments.

[13] *Ancient Christian Writers,* "The Problem of Free Choice*,"* Vol. 22, book 2, (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1955), 14-16. See also Norman Geisler, (ed.) *What Augustine Says* (Michigan*:* Bakers Book House, 1982) for more of Augustine's discussions on theological issues.

their solution. After this, the paper shall turn to Augustine's solution and its plausibility in solving the dilemma. The researcher believes that Augustine freewill theory is more biblical and evangelical than that of the Open Theists.

Open Theists' Solution to the Divine Foreknowledge-Freewill Dilemma

Open Theism can also be also referred to as neo-theism, free-will theism, Openism[14] or relational theism. It is a recent theological movement that sprung out of the evangelicals, but different from the evangelicals in that it bucks the classical conception and understanding of God foreknowledge and providence. It has received much attention in the contemporary scholarship in philosophy of religion and theology. The beginnings of Open Theism can probably be traced to Clark Pinnock, David Basinger, Richard Rice and others."[15] Their school of thought was brought to the limelight by the Richard Rice's year 2000 publication titled "*The Openness of God: The Relationship of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free will"* and broader articulation of the school of thought was done in the book co-authored by Clark Pinnock and other four leading exponents of Open Theism.[16] Since these publications, many advocates of Open Theism have sprung up, for example, Pinnock, Robert Brow, Richard Rice, Gregory Boyd, Tina Talsma, John Sanders, and William Hasker, to mention few.[17]

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[14] Michael Murray and Michael Rea used "Openism" instead of "Open Theism" see pg 56 of their book for a brief discussion on Open Theism.

[15] David Basinger and Randall Basinger, eds., *Predestination and Freewill: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Intervarsity Press, 1986).

[16] Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker and David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Illinois: IVP., 1994).

[17] Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology,* revised & exp ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 213.

In their attempt to solve the dilemma, the Open Theists propose a modification and reconfigurations of God's Omniscience, and posit that God does not know the future action of a free agent. They argue that to think that an infallible being can have determinate knowledge of the future action of a free agent is to ask such a being to bring about "a metaphysically impossible state of affairs."[18] Since he (God) has given libertarian freewill to man, he cannot pre-know what the free agent would do in future situations.[19] Clark Pinnock and other proponents opined that God is a personal, dynamic, relational and loving God, that is, he, God, partners with human beings. Open Theism maintains libertarian freedom of alternative possibilities of man but denies God's pre-science. The brand of human freedom held by the Open Theists is technically called "incompatibilistic freedom."[20] The Open Theists argue that God himself feels bad when (moral) evil happens but there is nothing he can do since he cannot foreknow exhaustively.[21] They redefine the concept of divine Omniscience and termed it 'dynamic omniscience.'

Another striking feature of Open Theism is their categorization of future realities in to two. Open Theists argue that there are two types of future realities; the open future reality (OFR) and settled future reality (SFR). The settled future reality is the part of the future that God foreknows perfectly while he has left open other aspects of the future which he cannot foreknow perfectly because the open future realities are in the sense of 'possibilities' and 'may-be-s' of the futures.[22] God, they claim,

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[18] Peter Van Iwangen, "What Does an Omniscient Being Know about the Future?" *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Kavaving (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2008), 225-226.

[19] R.A Street, (ed.), "Open Theism" *Criswell Theological Review* Vol. 1, No. 2, (2004), 129.

[20] Gregory A Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Press, 2001), 428.

[21] Bruce Ware, *Their God is too Small: Open Theism and the Undermining of Confidence in God (*Illinois: Crossway Books, 2000), 15.

[22]Gregory A Boyd, "The Open Theism View" Divine *Foreknowledge: Four Views,* eds. James K. Beiilby and Paul Eddy, (Illinois: IVP., 2001), 14.

can foreknow the settled future realities but cannot foreknow the open future realities because they are contingent on the freewill of man. Open Theists believe that "there are things that happen that God has not always believed or known- and hence has not always known would happen."[23] Since the future is indeterminate and so there are no true propositions to know by God about the open realities of the future. It is believed that future changes and when it changes God's knowledge about it also changes. With this reconfiguration and redefinition of God's Omniscience, the Open Theists believe they have solved the freewill-Divine Foreknowledge dilemma. According to John Sanders, one of most leading Open theists:

> God has exhaustive knowledge of the past and the present and also knows the future as partly definite (closed) and partly indefinite (open). The future is not completely fixed, but open, to what both God and humans decide to do, so there are numerous possible futures (trajectory). God knows as possibilities and probabilities those events which might happen in the future. God, together with his creatures, creates the future as history goes along. Hence, God's Omniscience is dynamic in nature.[24]

Open Theists' definition of God's love is also a noteworthy departure from evangelicalism. The Open Theists' God is a risk-taker and love is his major essence. The Open Theists based their arguments on the love as the essence of God in the

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This is a very good book on the Open Theists' argument about God's foreknowledge. Boyd offers both biblical and philosophical arguments for the Open Theists' position.

[23] J. Martin Fischer, Patrick Todd, and Neal Tognazzini, "Re-Reading Nelson Pike's Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," *Philosophical Papers* Vol. 38.2 (2009), 252-53.

[24] John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence,* 2nd ed (Illinois: IVP., 2007), 206.

Gospels and story of Israel throughout the Old Testament. They believe that love is ever present at the core of biblical corpus.[25] Therefore, since God's essence is love, he always depends on man to reciprocate the love, in doing this, God becomes a risk-taker. The love between God and humanity exists by way of legitimate free will. God chose to allow humans to have this ability at the sacrifice of a portion of God's own meticulous control and so he partners with man. In my opinion, this theistic definition is humanistic in orientation and contradicts the biblical standpoints as entrenched in historic Christianity.

Also, The Open Theists aver that their understanding of God's omniscience has solved the dilemma. They aver that God's knowledge of future free actions is logically impossible and since God has given libertarian freewill, He has to adopt a "wait and see approach" before He knows what the free agents will do. They aver that God comes to know events as they take place and learns something from what transpires. God is also said to be receptive to new experiences-This model of divine omniscience is technically termed 'dynamic omniscience.' According to Pinnock, God is unchangeable with respect to his character but always changing in his relation to man. He is a God who changes for our sake.[26] Therefore, the dilemma is resolved since God does not know the future action of a free agent.

Notwithstanding the Open Theists' opinions that their theological position is logical and plausible, they have to bite the bullet because there are a lot of critical and fundamental difficulties in their standpoints. First, they contradict the evangelical concept of divine providence, if God does not know

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[25] James E McGregor, "The Hope of Drawing near: Pastoral Debate between Open Theism and Evangelical Calvinism in North America" (BA Honors Thesis, Texas), 61. www.cn.edu/../McGregor_Jamie.pdf

[26] Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 4-5.

what each of us will do in the future, how can he be in the in control of the world? Second, it conflicts with divine sovereignty that is so central a part of orthodox and evangelical Christianity. Also, Open Theists' position on divine Omniscience and man's freewill dilemma contradicts itself. According to Michael J. Murray and Michael Rea:

> Given that God is omnipotent, it seems that there is nothing that anyone could possibly do that God could not foresee and prevent; for presumably there will always be a time between a free act of will and the physical effects of that free act, and God could surely foresee the physical effects once the act of will has occurred, even if he could not have foreseen the act of will itself. Thus, God can never be surprised by the physical effects of evil choices, and any misery that results from human action could have been prevented by him. Thus, again, it is hard to see why Openism offers any particular advantage, given that it doesn't remove God's foresight of human action but only shortens it.[27]

Open Theism trivializes evangelical understanding of the exhaustive omniscience of God with the aim of reiterating human libertarian freewill. Also, Open Theists directly contravene the doctrine of biblical inerrancy which is foundational to evangelical theology, in their attempt to solve the dilemma; they compromised the inerrancy of the Scripture. Their treatment of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic expressions in the bible is not hermeneutically correct. The hermeneutical method of the Open Theists is an "exaggerated literalism" or "hyperbolic literalism" and they often use certain interpretive centers in the Bible - (This could technically called creating "a canon-within-the canon"). By this, they are able to easily jettison

[27]Michael J. Murray and Michael Rea, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion,* 56.

very many biblical situations where God exercises his absolute foreknowledge in the Bible. For example, the divine standard for any authentic prophetic ministry in the Old Testament is the criterion of fulfillment of its prophecy and some prophecies came to pass even in the lifetime of the concerned prophets. If God, then, does not have absolute foreknowledge, how would such a prophecy come to pass, and how would God make prophecy-fulfillment the criterion for any genuine prophetic ministry?[28]

Some of the biblical texts that are employed by the Open Theists to argue their points include Deuteronomy 8:2, Judge 3:4, Genesis 6:6-7; 37:8-11, 1 Samuel 15:11, 35, Mathew 24: 2 and others. Bruce Ware, A.B Caneday, Millard Erickson, Norman Geisler and others have offered an evangelical response to the hermeneutical cum theological fallacy of the Open Theists, why their criticism of the Open Theists is noteworthy; none of them have attempted to assess Open Theists in the light of Augustinian freewill theory. Lastly, the standpoint of the Open Theism has a lot of eschatological implications, for example, if God does not know the future exhaustively how can one be sure of the rapture, tribulation, millennial reign, and others biblical facts. Even though the Open Theists offer some theodical advantages in their philosophical and theological positions, its solution to the divine foreknowledge-freewill dilemma is not plausible and convincing. Open Theists approach the dilemma from the standpoint of human reason without adequately

[28]John Sanders has argued against this fact in his book "*God Who Risks"* that some prophecies in the Bible are conditional and some are what God himself wanted to bring to pass not by the action of a free agent. He also argued that just as we predict about the future actions of those we know based on past knowledge of their characters so God can also make some predictions about the future actions of some event based on his knowledge of past, present and future possibilities. See John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence,* 2nd ed. (Illinois: IVP, 2007), 209 and William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 989), 187. However, a critical look at Sanders' hermeneutic reflects a lot of exegetical fallacies. See D.A Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Bakers Academic Press, 1996) for a thorough discussion on technical fallacies in biblical hermeneutic and exegesis and how they can be avoided.

exploring the related theological factors, and Scriptural standpoints.[29] The God of the Open Theists is a humanized God who is not the God of the Bible and not worthy of ascriptions of God. The flaws and pitfalls of Open Theism can be made more strikingly obvious by contrasting it with the Augustinian solution to the Dilemma. To this we now turn our attention.

Using Augustinian Freewill Theory as the Benchmark to assess the Open Theists' Solution to the Divine Foreknowledge-Freewill Dilemma

In this part of this paper, an attempt is made to investigate the Augustinian solution to divine foreknowledge and freewill dilemma, and this will be juxtaposed with the Open Theists' views discussed above. According to Colin Brown, the most outstanding thinker in the history of theology and philosophy was Augustine, the saintly Bishop of Hippo in North Africa.[30] He was a genius who applied philosophical intellect to his theological enterprise; he represents how philosophy can be useful to theology, and this he exemplified in his solution to the dilemma of Divine foreknowledge and freewill.

Augustine maintains, contrary to the Open theists' views discussed above, that all future (both contingent and non contingent) matters are completely known by God prior to their occurrences. Augustinianism holds the strongest conception of divine providence, that is, God's control over his creation is absolute and meticulous.[31] Augustine argued that for an evangelical anthropological conception of man but man is not to be exalted in humanistic sense like the Open Theists have done. With this, he holds that freewill is an essential constituent of human nature and the greatest gift of God's goodness in the

[29] Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology,* 215.

[30] Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith: A Historical Sketch from the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (Illinois: IVP., 1968), 14.

[31]Michael J. Murray and Michael Rea, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion,* 61.

creation of man. To Augustine, man has freewill in the sense that the will of man is not subjected to coercion; though the will of man is corrupted and depraved by the original or inherited sin, (this is the bone of contention in Augustine-Pelagius controversy), and therefore needs God's grace to come back to the original state. While man, to Augustine, is free in libertarian sense, God knows all his past, present, and future actions (eternalism) as against the "presentism" in Open Theism. Augustine did not differentiate between the types of realities to be known like the Open theists. That is, unlike the Open Theists who distinguished between the types of future realities (Settled future realities, SFR and Open future realities, OFR), Augustine believed that God eternally knows all things and his knowledge includes the past, future, and present events.

I shall make use of three philosophical theories to explain the fundamental differences between the Augustine's philosophical standpoints and that of the Open Theists. The first one is 'presentism,' presentism is the view that all of realities exists now in the present, past is no more, and the future is not yet, therefore, no non-present state of affairs exists and cannot be known by any knower. Second and contrary to the first one is 'eternalism,' eternalism is the view that past, present and future things are equally real and knowable. Third, the Contingency thesis, which holds that for any moment t_0, any possible state of affairs S, and any time t_1 subsequent to t_0, S may obtain at t_1 uttered at t_0 and S may not obtain at t_1 because it is still a matter of contingency at t_0. The Open Theists can be referred to as 'presentists' because their presentistic view of realities informed by Contingency thesis influenced their theology of God's foreknowledge. Contrarily, Augustine can be termed an 'eternalist'; his understanding of God's knowledge includes past, present and future events. Augustine avers that God knows future entirely both the contingent future events and non-contingent future events. To a casual observer, these theories (presentism, contingency thesis and eternalism) may not be so explicit in Open Theism and Augustine's works but my in-depth look into these positions shows that they are at

least implicit. For example, eternalism can be deduced from Augustine's statement that "God foreknows all things of which He himself is the Cause, and yet He is not the cause of all that he foreknows. Everything in the past, present and future exists as exemplars in the mind of God"[32]

Augustine's understanding of eternalism represents a form of epistemological emphasis of medieval Christian theologians. The attention of so many medieval theologians was on cognitive mechanism and its relationship to theology and epistemology. Their understandings of what is knowable include the object of truth that is immaterial, eternal, and unchanging. Augustine demonstrates that mere acquaintance or knowledge of future events by God does not provide necessity, causality and agency of the action. Therefore there is the compatibility between God's foreknowledge and human freedom. Previous research on Augustine's view on God's foreknowledge and man's freewill has not taken the influence of Augustine's theories of time and knowledge adequately. Augustine's understanding of 'knowledge and time' is very crucial to his solution to the dilemma. Augustine refuted epistemological skepticism of his time, and argued that the eternal and immutable ideas and truths of this world exist in the mind of God as the exemplars. Augustine understands human mind to be incapable of knowing the 'time' but since God is outside the realm of time, he is eternal in existence and in knowledge- for God, there is no future, no past; everything is eternally present to God. Augustine, therefore, argued that divine foreknowledge is compatible with man's freedom, if the latter is properly understood.

Augustine's view on this subject resonates well with the evangelical definition and understanding of characteristics of God's decree. Evangelicals understood God's decree to include the knowledge of all things from eternity past but are manifested in time in the context of his sovereignty.

[32] Norman Geisler, (ed.), *What Augustine Says,* 157.

Evangelicals understand biblical phrases such as "from eternity past," "His own purpose," as used in Ephesians 1:4, 2 Timothy 1:9, 1 Peter 1:20 and others, to represent God's eternal knowledge of all events; past, present and future.

Now, how did Augustine solve the apparent contradiction between the infallibility in Omni-foreknowledge of God and freedom of alternate possibilities in libertarian freewill of man? Augustine averred that there is no necessary transitivity in the case of any causal aspects or features of divine knowing and man's freedom.[33] Augustine understood human freedom in compatibilistic sense and distinguished predictability and prescience from causality and coercion. The fact that God pre-knows perfectly what a free agent will do in the future does not mean that God is the cause or that God coerces the free agent to do whatsoever. The decision of a free agent is still free even though God knows perfectly what the free agent will do. Augustine says that:

> For example your recollection of events in the past does not compel them to take place. As you remember certain things that you have done and yet have not done, all things that you remember, so God foreknows all things of which He himself is the Cause, *and yet He is not the cause of all that he foreknows*.[34] (Italicized for my own emphases)

In other words, God's foreknowledge is not the cause of man's actions; man's actions are the objects of God's foreknowledge. God's knowledge of all future contingent acts is *chronologically* prior to those acts. This makes sense because epistemologically defined; 'knowledge' has no causal powers. Contrary to the Open Theists' belief, knowledge cannot cause something, so therefore God's knowledge of the future cannot be the cause of our acts. Augustine also distinguished

[33]Augustine, *The City of God 5.9,* trans. John Healey (London: Dent, 1945).

[34] Norman Geisler, (ed.), *What Augustine Says,* 157.

between the *foreknowledge* and *necessity* of actions of free agents. One of the three levels in which God's foreknowledge can be understood is 'straight cause sense,' the view that Augustine rejected. On this view, there is divine causality of whatever God foreknows. Augustine refuted and disbelief this view and argued that God may know something without causing it. Therefore, the fact that God knows the future, and man is free in libertarian sense is not a dilemma. But the Open Theists view is contrary; they hold to causal sense of God's foreknowledge and thereby trying to solve the ensuing dilemma by limiting the knowledge of God about the future and over-estimating the freedom of man.

The Open Theists are wrong in their opinion that if we say God foreknows a future action, then God is necessarily the cause. This is an area where Augustine's viewpoint differs and more logical than that of the Open Theists. The method employed by the Open Theists involving whittling away the God's Omni-foreknowledge as evangelically and traditionally understood and exalting human libertarian freedom. This is a lamentable foul on the part of the Open Theists. Meanwhile several critiques have been done on the Open Theism, the inability of those work to juxtapose the Open Theism with the Augustine's theological position has not brought out these methodological flaws in Open Theism.

However, some anti-Augustinian scholars have argued that if God knows the future exhaustively as Augustine opined then God should be held responsible for any evil action of man. But a critical look at the Augustine's position solves this objection. Augustine argued that God does not do evil and He cannot will evil but he knows that evil will occur in future action of a "free" agent. But God cannot remove totally the possible future-evil without removing freewill and if God should remove human freewill, moral good will also be made impossible. So for God to create a world where there is moral goodness, libertarian freewill is essential. But the freewill, which is essential for moral goodness, can also be misused by man. This misuse of freewill

by a free agent is the cause of evil not God.[35] Augustine based his solution to divine foreknowledge- freewill dilemma on logical reasoning and holistic biblical/theological standpoints without compromising any of the cardinal attributes of God. This is where the Open Theists in their attempts to solve the divine foreknowledge-freewill dilemma failed. The Open Theists are swift to compromise a major attribute of God in their attempts to solve the problem. Another thing that makes Augustine's solution so plausible is that it has some positive implications to the contemporary discourse on the problem of evil, particularly moral evil. Moral evil is becoming more important in the current philosophical discourse and it is also becoming more obvious that most of the evils that plague the world are as a result of human moral weaknesses.

Augustine's discussion on 'freewill' is important in that it solves the questions of 'why is it that God did not create freewill in such a way that man will always do what is good and the question of why is it that God did create the freewill since He must have foreknown that such freewill is mis-usable.'[36] Augustine's answers to these questions are very important to the contemporary discourse on freewill theodicy. How did Augustine answer these questions? In his book titled "*On the Free Choice of the Will*" (Book I,II, III), Augustine argues that if man is compelled or programmed to always use his freewill to do good, then such a freewill cannot be referred to as freewill in libertarian sense. His view on God's foreknowledge and libertarian freewill is compatibilism. Augustine argued that the freewill as at when created was good, meanwhile good at intermediate level.[37] Augustine distinguishes the three levels of "goodness" in

[35] Augustine, *Enchridion on Faith, Hope, and Love,* trans. J.F. Shaw, (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961), 117.

[36] This is J.L Mackie's objection to freewill theodicy. Some other critics of freewill defence in contemporary time are David Griffins, Anthony Flew and others. See J.S Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil,* 67-120 for a detailed discussion on freewill Defence in contemporary scholarship

[37] J.S Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil,* 70.

creation. The levels are the highest, intermediate and the lowest. The highest level is the level of God's goodness which cannot be turned 'less-good' while freewill is at the *media bona* (intermediate) level which can be turned "less-good and misused." To Augustine, this is the reason why the freewill is misused by man. The goodness at intermediate and lower level can be used to either do good or evil; therefore, God did not create what is not good when he created freewill.

Also, to answer the question of 'why did God create freewill since He must have foreknown that the freewill will be misused and turned 'less-good?" Augustine appeals to the significance of freewill in God's creation. The Lord wanted to create a world where there will be moral goodness, and for there to be moral goodness, freewill is indispensable. Therefore, God's foreknowledge of future misuse of freewill He has given could not have compelled God not to create freewill for man, because if He did not create freewill simply because some people will misuse it, then what of those who will use the same for moral goodness. If freewill was not given by God, moral evil may not be possible but moral good will also be absent, but since God wanted to create a world where moral goodness, (or moral responsibility) is present therefore God could not have declined the benefit of freewill to man because of His prescience of the misuse of the freewill.[38] To Augustine, a run-away horse is better than a stone which does not run away because it lacks self-movement and sense perception. Most freewill-defenders follow these Augustine's arguments and even though there have been a lot of modifications and refinements over the time, the arguments, I believe, it can be restated (and of course it has been restated.[39]) to meet up with the contemporary atheistic arguments that is

[38] Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will,* trans. Anna Benjamen and L.H Hackstaff, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill,1964), 80-81.

[39] Alvin Plantinga represents one of the modern refinements of Augustinian freewill theodicy. See J.J. Johnson, *Alvin Plantinga's Restatement of Augustine's Free Will Theodicy and its Implications for his Concept of "Warranted" Christian Belief* (A PhD Dissertation, Baylor University, USA, 2009) for how Plantinga restated Augustine's freewill defence.

predicted on the logical problem of evil. This Augustinian argument has some characteristic features of modified rationalism and is logical and plausible. Unlike the Open Theists, who caused theological problems in their attempts to solve the dilemma, Augustine's appeals to thorough understanding of biblical depiction of God and his arguments represent well the evangelicals' view of God's providence and man's responsibility.

Conclusion

There is a significant need for an acceptable solution to the dilemma involved in freewill and divine foreknowledge, but if such a solution will be acceptable evangelically, it must be based on a proper theological system and sound biblical hermeneutics and exegesis. Any solution which compromises the basic tripod-stand of biblical attributes of God and biblical view of man can never be a good solution but only a "compromise." The Open Theists' views discussed in this paper fall within the line of compromise and not a logical solution as this becomes very obvious when compared to the Augustine's response. Open Theists wrongly believed that they can accept anti-Christian methodology without buying inevitably into a non-Christian theology. The major problem with the views lies within their methodology which has fundamental difficulty. The methodology and presupposition with which they find solution to the dilemma is humanistic and un-orthodox particularly when compared to Augustinian solution.

So, I have argued for Augustinian view that divine foreknowledge and man's freedom is consistent, when the foreknowledge is understood in a 'non-causal sense' and man's freedom is understood in 'compatibilist sense.' While Augustine's view has received popular fame, it has not been used to advance arguments to critique the Open Theists' view. This has been my purpose in this paper. Due to the wide criticism of the Open Theism, some scholars believe that the last word has been said on it and that it is now a fossil theology, but if one check the

internet, local conferences, and magazines, one will see that Open Theism is a living theology. Therefore, mainstream evangelicals still need to continue to make their position known against Open Theists' theology both in academia and in pulpit.

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