

FOREKNOWLEDGE, FREEDOM, AND THE FUTURE

ROBERT E. PICIRILLI*

I. INTRODUCTION

My purpose in this paper is to respond, from within the Arminian camp, to the denial of the unlimited omniscience of God by Clark Pinnock and others associated with him. A number of Calvinists have criticized his approach; it is time for an Arminian to affirm that God knows all future events and that the openness of the future is not compromised thereby.

Some background is in order. I approach this subject as an Arminian, holding a nuanced form of Arminianism that is different from what is generally understood as the meaning of that term. This is the Arminianism of Arminius himself and of those originally influenced by him—the first generation (and only that generation) of Remonstrants.

Space does not permit elucidation of this, except to say that this is not the Arminianism of Grotius or the Remonstrant Church, nor of many ways of thinking commonly called Arminian in subsequent church history. It is certainly not the position taken by Clark Pinnock in his revisionist theism. Indeed, the “original” Arminianism I hold needs a name: “classic” Arminianism will not do, nor will “Wesleyan” Arminianism—although in many respects Wesley followed this kind of Arminianism. For lack of something better, I will call it Reformation Arminianism.

By this I do *not* mean to imply that Arminius was one of the magisterial Reformers, only that this proto-Arminianism was directly rooted in the Reformation and is truly “Reformed” in the broadest sense of that word. This kind of Arminianism affirms, among other things: that guilt, condemnation, and depravity passed to the whole human race by means of Adam’s sin; total depravity; the absolute sovereignty of God; salvation by grace through faith, not of works; that Christ’s atoning death was penal satisfaction for sin; that both his penal death and active obedience are imputed to believers; and that apostasy can occur by retraction of faith only, without remedy.

For the more narrow purposes of this paper, I begin by citing Francis Beckwith:

Philosophers and theologians in the Christian tradition as well as those in other traditions have wrestled with the problem of omniscience and free will for as long as people have believed that their Scriptures teach both that God knows everything in the past, present and future and that human beings are

* Robert E. Picirilli is professor emeritus at Free Will Baptist Bible College, 3606 West End Avenue, P.O. Box 50117, Nashville, TN 37205-0117.

free moral agents with the ability to make libertarian choices. Such belief, however, poses a well-known problem. If God has perfect knowledge of future events including human actions, and if God cannot be wrong about what he knows, then all human actions will turn out only one way. But if individuals can make libertarian choices that entail the ability to do otherwise, how can the Christian at the same time affirm that the future will turn out only one way?¹

Calvinists appreciate the problem, but they do not shrink from adding foreordination to the syllogism and affirming forthrightly: (1) that God, having foreordained all events, therefore knows the future perfectly; (2) that every action in the future is therefore certain; and (3) that therefore all future actions, including the free, moral decisions of human beings, *must* be what they certainly will be—else God could not perfectly know what they will be.

Arminians (of whatever sort) also recognize the difficulty. But some Arminians, as we will see, accept the formal validity of this logic and agree that if all future events are certain to be what they will be, freedom of choice is therefore practically excluded. They attack, therefore, not the logic leading to the conclusion but the premise: they deny that God knows everything in the future.

My thesis is that this is a logically unnecessary (not to mention unbiblical) move, based on a faulty understanding of what it means for the future to be certain. To put this positively, I mean to show that there is nothing about the certainty of the future that is in conflict with the ability of human beings to make free, moral decisions. To put this in question form, Does foreknowledge close the future?

II. RELATED THEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Before dealing directly with this problem, let me briefly sketch some related theological assumptions which I hold but will not attempt to develop or prove here.

1. *God is sovereign, the creator and preserver of all that exists outside himself.* That he is sovereign means that no conditions can be imposed on God from outside himself. Nothing other than his own nature limits his absolute freedom to act according to his own good pleasure. That he is creator and preserver of all that exists outside himself means that all that is—including all that happens—is in accord with his will, his plan for the history of the created, subordinate, sustained universe. No force exists except that which is subordinate to God and cannot thwart his will.

2. *God is omniscient.* Implications include: (a) that before creation he knew all possible contingencies and from all these decided or willed the course of events that actually takes place; (b) that he knows all future events perfectly, including the free, moral choices of human beings.

¹ Francis J. Beckwith, "Limited Omniscience and the Test for a Prophet: A Brief Philosophical Analysis," *JETS* 36 (1993) 357.

3. *Man is created and wholly governed by God.* What freedom human beings have is therefore relative, entirely subject to God's government of all things for the accomplishing of his will. Even so, in the image of God, persons have a will and are constitutionally free to make moral choices and responsible for them. God is not the only actor in the universe; man also acts—for good or evil.

4. *Man is fallen and thoroughly depraved.* He is therefore capable of no good apart from the help of God to enable him. He is not capable, that is, of any good that would justify him before God, or of any absolute good—not even capable, apart from God's gracious work, of responding in faith to the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Assuming these theological views, I move on to deal specifically with the issue already introduced: namely, whether God's knowledge of the future limits man's freedom.

I have said that some Arminian theologians apparently yield to the Calvinist the formal validity of this logical syllogism: If God knows every future event, then all events are certain; consequently, all future events, including the decisions of responsible beings, *must* be what they will be. To illustrate, I cite just one contemporary neo-Arminian writer on the subject, Richard Rice: "In spite of assertions that absolute foreknowledge does not eliminate freedom, intuition tells us otherwise. If God's foreknowledge is infallible, then what he sees cannot fail to happen. This means that the course of future events is fixed, however we explain what actually causes it. And if the future is inevitable, then the apparent experience of free choice is an illusion."²

While this is not the response of classical Arminianism—certainly not of Arminius or the early Remonstrants—it serves to show the difficulty encountered when combining God's all-encompassing foreknowledge with man's freedom. At first glance, if God absolutely knows the future, then the future must be closed. I submit, however, that a closer examination of the terms and the proposition will show that the conclusion only *appears* to follow.

III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CERTAINTY, CONTINGENCY, AND NECESSITY

What is required is that we make very careful distinctions between the terms involved and then avoid using any of them ambiguously. We must not commit the fallacy of equivocation. The terms that are important here are *certainty*, *contingency*, and *necessity*. One must know exactly how I am using them in order to follow and weigh my argument.³

² Richard Rice, "Divine Foreknowledge and Free-Will Theism," in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man* (ed. Clark H. Pinnock; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 127; cf. his *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Freewill* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1985).

³ Whether I am using them "correctly," or some other set of terms could be used with the same meanings, or even if these terms must always mean what I use them to mean, is beside the point. I only mean to be sure that the reader knows exactly how I am using them and to use them thus consistently.

I affirm, first, that God knows all things that will be as *certain*. I also affirm that, while some of these certainties are *necessary*, others are truly *contingent*.

The Arminian affirms, in other words, that there are events that actually can transpire in either of two (or more) ways, yet God knows which will take place. He knows all future events perfectly. This means that they are all *certain*, else he would not know what will be. (It also means—although this is not essential to the purpose of this particular paper—that all future events are in accord with his overall plan and purpose, that nothing ever happens in his universe that is outside his knowledge or control, or that thwarts his ultimate plan.)

The Arminian view, therefore, is that there is no real (or logical) conflict between “certainty” and true “contingency,” although explanation of this requires a careful and technical discussion. I venture that, in this matter alone, there is more room for misunderstanding, and more to be gained from clarity, than from almost any other point in dispute between Calvinists and Arminians—or, in this case, among Arminians.

1. *Certainty*. The certainty of a future event means, simply, the fact that it will occur. Certainty, as I am using it, means its “factness,” its “eventness” in the future. If God is omniscient, it follows logically that all things that occur are *certainly* foreknown by God. Everything that happens is certain and known as such by God from all eternity.

Does this mean that “What will be will be”—*Que sera, sera*, as our Spanish friends put it? Indeed it does; but the meaning of that set of words requires closer examination. The sentence is, in fact, like a mathematical equation with two equal sides. If I were to say that $4 = 4$, for example, I might well be accused of saying nothing. The proposition “What will be will be” is exactly the same, nothing more than “what will be = what will be.” Everything that will happen will happen. Of course! And if I add “certainly” to the statement—“everything that will happen will *certainly* happen”—I have added nothing, no more than if I had said “ $4 = \textit{certainly} 4$.”

2. *Contingency*. A contingency is anything that really can take place in more than one way. For an event to be contingent, it must not be the *inevitable* or *unavoidable* product of natural law or of the necessitating influence of God. My view, therefore, is that the free acts of morally responsible persons are contingent, and that this freedom to choose does not contradict certainty. Certainty relates to the “factness” of an event, to *whether* it will be or not; contingency relates to its *nature* as free or inevitably caused by some other force. I am saying, therefore, that the same event can be both certain and contingent at the same time, and I will return to this below. Meanwhile, I would observe that, while the Calvinist may sincerely affirm differently, he *appears* to deny that there really are true contingencies in the universe.

3. *Necessity*. Necessary events are those that can transpire in just one way because they are caused by some other force and therefore must inevitably be the way they are. For such events there were causes leading to the

event that allowed no freedom of choice, causes that *necessarily* produced the event. These are cause-effect events, where the cause can issue in no other result than the effect. Such events are common in natural law, for example. But God may also act in such a way whenever he “makes” something happen the way it does. In such instances, if the effect of his influence cannot be otherwise, that event is a necessity.

As I have defined the words, then, I am saying three things:

- a. All events—past, present, or future—are certain.
- b. Some of those events are necessary—produced by causes that allow no other possibility.
- c. Others of those events are contingent—produced by free decisions that really could be otherwise in exactly the same sets of circumstances.

An event can therefore be certain without being necessary: “shall/will be” (certain) is not the same as “must be” (necessary).⁴ Some events are necessary, inevitably caused by a prior influence. Others are “contingent,” capable of more than one possibility depending on a free, unforced choice. Both kinds are equally certain and certainly known to God.

IV. THE RELATIONSHIP OF KNOWLEDGE TO CERTAINTY

How then does *knowledge* of an event relate to the factness of an event? Human knowledge can serve as an illustration. While we cannot know the future, we can know past events, and know them as certain. At the same time, the certainty lies in their factness, and our knowledge of them affects that factness in no way at all. The knowledge issues from our awareness of the facts.

Just so, God foreknows everything future as certain. That certainty of future events does not lie in their necessity but in their simple factness. They will be the way they will be (again, nothing else is possible, because what they will be has already been affirmed in the front of the equation; events can most certainly *not* be different from the way they *will* be), and God knows what they will be because he has perfect awareness, in advance, of all facts. But that knowledge *per se*, even though it is *foreknowledge*, has no more causal effect on the facts than our knowledge of certain past facts has on them.⁵

To provide a simple illustration, let us suppose that tomorrow I will come to a fork in a road and need to choose which way to travel. The fact is that I will choose one or the other, and the one that I will choose is the one that I will certainly choose. To put this in the form of a formula again: “The one that I will choose” = “the one that I will choose.” Of course this is so, and for no other reason than that I have already assumed, in the front of the equation,

⁴ While “shall” (or “will”) and “must” *might* be used in other ways, I will consistently use them in this way, with “shall/will” to mean certainty and “must” to mean necessity.

⁵ I do not deny that *foreknowledge*, in the NT, may sometimes mean more than mere *pre-science*. Indeed, I am inclined to think it does. But that is beside the point of this paper.

the certainty of “the one that I will choose.” But this is *not at all* to say that I *must* (by necessity) choose it. In fact, I will be free to choose either route, considering whatever I wish to consider at that time. Indeed, then, he most certainly knows that I will be free to make either choice tomorrow, and I will be free to make either choice. Likewise, he most certainly knows which choice I will make, and I will certainly, and freely, make that choice. His knowledge of which I will choose, as knowledge, does not limit my choice; indeed, he also perfectly knows what would happen if I should make the other choice.

To clarify: If I am going to choose the right fork tomorrow, it is certain that I will choose it (how could that possibly be denied?), and God knows that certain fact. But it is equally true that if I am going to choose the left fork tomorrow, it is certain that I will choose it and he knows I will choose it. The choice will be freely made, by *me*, tomorrow, and I will be just as capable of making the other choice as I am of making the one I will make. That God knows which choice I will make (so long as we consider knowing as “mere” knowledge) in no way necessitates the choice. Then the future is both certain and open; it will not be closed until it occurs. The action is, therefore, truly contingent and really can go either way, even though the way it will go (to write tautology again) is the way it will go.

I turn, now, to Arminius himself. These points he presented with convincing clarity. He said, for example, “If [God] resolve to use a force that . . . can be resisted by the creature, then that thing is said to be done, *not necessarily* but *contingently*, although its actual occurrence was certainly foreknown by God.”⁶ Thus, Arminius went on to say, even what was divinely prophesied might take place contingently and not by necessity, so long as it was not produced by an irresistible cause. Arminius used the case of Jesus’ bones as an illustration, denying that they *could* not have been broken but affirming the certainty that they *would* not.⁷

Bringing prophecy into the discussion provides opportunity for some added observations. Like foreknowledge, prophecy need be nothing but a revelation of what will be, not the cause of an event. Nor does God’s ability to prophesy a wicked act carry with it any responsibility for that act. The truth is that even I am often able to “prophesy” that if I do a certain thing someone I know well enough will in all likelihood respond in a certain way. Even if that response is wicked, so long as my action does not close all other doors except for that wicked action, and what I am doing is the right thing to do, I am not responsible for the other person’s wrongdoing. Given that my ability to prophesy is entirely derivative and subject to misreading of people I know well, this is a poor analogy, though an accurate one. God, of course, has intuitive and perfect knowledge of all that will occur.

In another place Arminius observed, “Because God, in His infinite wisdom, saw, from eternity, that man would fall at a certain time, that fall occurred infallibly, only in respect to His prescience, not in respect to any

⁶ James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius* (trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956) 1.291. The entire discussion makes a strong case that one event cannot be both a necessity and a contingency at the same time.

⁷ Arminius, *Writings* 1.289–292.

act of the divine will." He proceeded to distinguish "between what is done *infallibly* [which he used the way I use "certainly"] and what is done *necessarily*. The former depends on the infinity of the knowledge of God, the latter on the act of his will." The former, he says, "has respect only to the knowledge of God, to which it pertains to know, infallibly and with certainty, contingent things."⁸

One of the best of the Wesleyan theologians was Richard Watson. While his style is that of the old divines, and somewhat cumbersome, I recommend highly his treatment of this difference between certainty, contingency, and necessity. I quote here just a few lines:

The position, that *certain* prescience destroys *contingency*, is a mere sophism. . . . The great fallacy in the argument . . . lies in supposing that *contingency* and *certainly* are the opposites of each other. . . . Contingency in moral actions is, therefore, their *freedom*, and is opposed, not to *certainly*, but to *necessity*. . . . The question is not . . . about the *certainly* of moral actions, that is, whether they *will* happen or not; but about the nature of them, whether free or constrained, whether they *must* happen or not. . . . The foreknowledge of God has then no influence upon either the freedom or the certainty of actions, for this plain reason, that it is *knowledge* and not *influence*; and actions may be certainly foreknown, without their being rendered necessary by that foreknowledge. . . . But [some will say] if a contingency *will* have a given result, to that result it *must* be determined. Not in the least.⁹

Making a point that I regard as especially forceful and important, Watson goes on to cite S. Clarke, to the effect that, *even if the future were not foreknown, it would still be certain!* Precisely, because the "certainty" of the future is nothing more than its futurity.

V. VARIOUS APPROACHES TO THE ISSUES INVOLVED

To accept that God can know the future certainly without thereby closing the door to human freedom, as I am arguing for, is often thought of as naïve or simplistic. Admittedly, the issues seem difficult—though no more or less difficult than what they finally resolve into: the problem of an unchanging God and a changing world, which has been with us for a long time. Zeno and Parmenides, centuries before Christ, were responding to the problem when they affirmed that all change is illusory—analogue in its own way, I think, to Calvinism. Regardless, there are different positions on these matters, as we relate them to the problem at hand.

1. *Calvinism*. Calvinists affirm that all events, including future ones, are certain and foreknown *because God has foreordained all events*: "His foreknowledge of future things and also of contingent events rests on His decree."¹⁰ In that case, there is no problem with absolute foreknowledge, or with divine control; the question is whether there is any real freedom and moral responsibility for humans.

⁸ Arminius, *Writings* 3.197.

⁹ Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1850) 1.378–381.

¹⁰ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949) 67, 68.

To this Calvinists verbalize a positive answer, even though it seems to the Arminian that they are hedging. Berkhof, for example, goes on to quote favorably from Orr: "A solution of this problem [of the apparent inconsistency between God's absolute foreknowledge and man's freedom] . . . probably lies, not in denying freedom, but in a revised conception of freedom."¹¹ But in this redefined "freedom" there is also a redefined "contingency."

Sometimes Calvinists make a distinction between the *primary* and *secondary* causes of an event and represent human decisions as the latter. In this case, however, human agency seems reduced to being God's instrumentality. This seems no different from a "hard determinism" that finally makes all freedom an illusion and traces all events to prior, necessitating causes.

Many Calvinists profess to believe in "compatibilism"—sometimes called "soft determinism"—that attempts to combine determinism with human freedom by redefining freedom to mean the freedom to do as one desires, rather than the freedom to do something different from what one does. In other words, faced with a decision, a person chooses according to the sum total of influences, circumstances, and effects of previous choices that are operative at the time. Only one course of action is really possible, therefore, but the person involved "freely" chooses that course of action. Arminians, while agreeing that one's decisions must be set in the context of his circumstances at the time, unanimously deny that this view does justice to human freedom.

The key to Calvinism, on this point, is to be found not so much in the claim that certainty precludes contingency as in its introduction of foreordination into the picture. For Calvinists, God knows the future certainly *because he first unconditionally foreordained it*. This in effect makes foreknowledge and predestination synonymous and thus makes foreknowledge an active cause.

I am not suggesting in this paper that my thesis will solve any difference between Calvinists and Arminians, even though it should make those differences clearer. So long as the Calvinist holds the premise that God foreknows events because he first foreordained them, the syllogism with which I introduced this paper will logically and validly follow: the future not only *will* be but *must* be what it will be. All events, whether past, present, or future, are both foreknown and foreordained and therefore necessary. The Calvinist will simply deny that there is real contingency in the universe *as I have defined it*.

The Arminian, on the other hand, not having imbued foreknowledge with the character of foreordination, will continue to believe that God's foreknowledge, *considered as prescience*, is part of his omniscience and includes all things as certain, both good and evil, contingent and necessary, without being in itself causal. As Arminius put it, "God foreknows future things through the infinity of his essence, and through the pre-eminent perfection of his understanding and prescience, not as he willed or decreed that they should necessarily be done, though he would not foreknow them except as they were future, and they would not be future unless God had decreed

¹¹ Ibid. 68.

either to perform or to permit them."¹² One will notice that this *does* involve an element of foreordination, but it is foreordination by permission and this permission in no way makes the free, moral choices of persons *necessary*. Nor is it the foreordination that makes them *certain*.

To clarify: *from* his knowledge of all possibilities, God chose and ordained the course of action that he willed to set in motion—a course of events that includes (by permission) contingencies which he did not and does not make necessary one way or the other. Even when applied to election and reprobation, then, for the Arminian predestination is not the basis of foreknowledge; the Biblical order is foreknowledge, then predestination (Rom 8:29).

2. *A Neo-Arminian approach.* There is a new Arminianism abroad these days that denies God's foreknowledge either of all "free" human decisions or at least of man's sinful decisions.¹³ These contemporary Arminians have permitted the supposed logical problems involved (see the earlier quotation from Rice) to affect them. Consequently they have redefined foreknowledge to mean that God knows all that is possible to know. Just as he cannot do what is not possible to do, he cannot know what is not possible to be known; and the future free acts of moral agents cannot possibly be known. Some call this the "limited foreknowledge" or "limited omniscience" view.

Clark Pinnock has led the way in this innovation, which is nothing less than a revision of traditional Christian theism.¹⁴ For the theory I cite Pinnock's summary of the position of Richard Rice: "Just as there are things God cannot do though omnipotent, Rice argues, so there are things God cannot know though omniscient, namely future free choices that are not properly objects of knowledge. If human choices are truly free, he reasons, they do not exist to be known in advance by any knower, not even God."¹⁵ In other words, "Decisions not yet made do not exist anywhere to be known even by God."¹⁶

This is certainly not Reformation Arminianism, nor even classic Arminianism. When Pinnock observes that this is a form of theism midway between the traditional form and process theism, one fears he betrays the influence of process theology. He is correct in insisting that God is not static and impassive, but neither is God a Hegelian "Becoming." Jack Cottrell is correct when he writes, "To say that God could not foreknow truly free human decisions is either to exalt man too highly or to reduce God to a creaturely status."¹⁷ As Norman Geisler has trenchantly observed, "If Pinnock's view of God is right, then he cannot even be an Arminian!"¹⁸

¹² Arminius, *Writings* 2.480.

¹³ See, for example, T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1966); R. Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Fairlawn, NJ: Clarendon, 1977).

¹⁴ See, for example, Clark H. Pinnock, "God Limits His Foreknowledge," in *Predestination and Free Will* (ed. D. and R. Basinger; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986) 156–158.

¹⁵ Clark H. Pinnock, ed., *The Grace of God, The Will of Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) xii. For Rice's views in his own words, see the article cited in note 2 above.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 25.

¹⁷ Jack W. Cottrell, "Conditional Election," in *Grace Unlimited* (ed. Clark H. Pinnock; Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975) 69.

¹⁸ Norman Geisler, *Predestination & Free Will* (ed. D. and R. Basinger; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986) 170.

Space does not permit an extensive treatment of this view, although it is attracting attention on the evangelical scene.¹⁹ We should note in passing, however, that this is not altogether a new view after all. Richard Watson faced the very same approach in 1850: "From the difficulty which has been supposed to exist, in reconciling this [foreknowledge of future things] with the freedom of human actions, and man's accountability, some have however refused to allow prescience, at least of contingent actions, to be a property of the Divine nature."²⁰

It will have to be sufficient for now to lodge objections from both sides.²¹ On the one hand, the view is falsified by the Bible itself. One would need to cite but a few of numerous instances in the Scriptures where God demonstrates his perfect foreknowledge of future, free choices—both good and evil ones. But for me and for this paper, it is enough—and especially primary—to observe that Christ's atonement for sin was foreordained before the foundation of the world (1 Pet 1:18–20). By itself, this destroys the view that sin is not foreknown by God.

On the other side, and equally important, this view is not logically needed; the reasons proposed do not require it. I have already cited Rice's assertion that intuition tells us that absolute foreknowledge eliminates freedom, that what God foreknows cannot fail to happen and therefore the course of future events is fixed, making the experience of free choice an illusion. But this is an all too shallow and careless set of affirmations, as I wish to demonstrate in this paper. Rice may speak for himself; my intuition does not tell me any such thing.

To say that "the course of future events is fixed" (if it does not say that someone has "fixed" it) is to say nothing more than that the course of future events is the course of future events. In other words, it is to speak of the facticity of the future, of its certainty as fact, without speaking of its necessity. *The alternative to a certain future is not an uncertain future but no future at all.* Rice's unannounced switch from "fixed" (as a synonym for "certain") to "inevitable" (in the sense of "necessary") is an entirely unjustified equivocation.

It seems reasonably clear to me that those Arminians who take this approach have been careless about the meaning of the words involved and have therefore unwittingly accepted the idea that knowledge of the future is something more than knowledge of the future. Witness Frederick Sontag, for example, who concludes his argument that God need not be thought of as omniscient in the traditional sense of the word with these words: "Were you a god, would you not find it dull to fix the future irrevocably from eternity?"²² He seems not to realize that "fix the future irrevocably" is foreordination, not foreknowledge.

¹⁹ For a recent summary, with critical responses, see "Has God Been Held Hostage by Philosophy" in *Christianity Today* 39/1 (Jan. 9, 1995) 30–34.

²⁰ Watson, *Institutes* 1.375.

²¹ Beckwith, in the article cited above (357–362) offers another telling objection based on the logic of the test of a true prophet in Deut 18:22.

²² Frederick Sontag, "Does Omnipotence Necessarily Entail Omniscience?" *JETS* 34 (1991) 508.

I repeat, then, what I have already said: A future event can be both certain and contingent at the same time, without being necessary. That I *will* make a certain choice in the future does not mean that I *must* make it, or that I will be unable to make a different one.²³ All that is required to grasp this is careful thinking and unambiguous use of words. The future, however certain, is not closed until it occurs.

3. *The "middle knowledge" approach.* Another approach is currently being offered, perhaps its best known spokesman being William L. Craig. He suggests that "middle knowledge" offers the possibility for rapprochement between Calvinists and Arminians.²⁴ What Craig means by "middle knowledge" is that God knows both everything that will come to pass and everything else that could or would come to pass in all other conceivable sets of circumstances—"all possible worlds," as philosophers like to express this.

What is the advantage of this? According to Craig, "Since [God] knows what any free creature would do in any situation, he can, by creating the appropriate situations, bring it about that creatures will achieve his ends and purposes and that they will do so *freely*. . . . In his infinite intelligence, God is able to plan a world in which his designs are achieved by creatures acting freely."²⁵

No doubt there is truth here, although its significance for the problem at hand is questionable. Its usefulness is found in contributing to our understanding just how, at times, God is able to bring about the doing of his will freely by his creatures without in any sense acting on their wills causally. As I have often said, if God keeps me from going to work in my garden by sending the rain, he has not thereby interfered with my freedom.

But this will not do as a *whole* explanation of the problem. Nor does it seem to me that this "middle knowledge," as thus explained, is any advancement on traditionally conceived foreknowledge or omniscience. It is already clear that God knows not only all future facts but also all other possibilities, and that helps nothing. In the final analysis, the difference between Calvinist and Arminian is not as much about foreknowledge and free will as it is about God's sovereign foreordination and free will, as already noted above. And the proponent of this "middle knowledge" cannot still avoid having God

²³ I should probably comment on the words "can" and "cannot," which are especially ambiguous. Used in one way, the sentence "If God's foreknowledge is infallible, then what he sees cannot fail to happen" is true. In this sense, "cannot" is being used with respect to *facticity*. But if "cannot" is made to speak of *necessity*, the sentence is not true. It is therefore best to avoid "can" or "cannot" in sentences dealing with these issues and speak of certainty and necessity, using "will" or "shall" to refer to certainty and "must" to refer to necessity. Watson, however, was willing to stay with "can": "It is said, if the result of an absolute contingency be certainly foreknown, it *can* have no other result, it *cannot* happen otherwise. This is not the true inference. It *will* not happen otherwise; but I ask, why *can* it not happen otherwise? *Can* is an expression of potentiality" (*Institutes* 1.380). While his conclusion agrees with mine, his words illustrate that it is better to dispense entirely with "can" and "cannot." They too easily lead to equivocation and misunderstanding.

²⁴ William L. Craig, "Middle Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?" in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man* (ed. Clark H. Pinnock; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 141–164.

²⁵ William L. Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 135.

decide which sets of circumstances—and therefore which human responses—to actualize, as David Basinger has pointed out.²⁶

VI. CONCLUSION: THE REFORMATION ARMINIAN APPROACH

Somewhat abruptly, then, I conclude, and this brings me back to where I started. The Reformation Arminian (together with the classic Arminian, for that matter) affirms that the future is perfectly foreknown by God and yet is, in both theory and practice, open and undetermined. That is, future free decisions, though certain, are not necessary. In other words, the person who makes a moral choice is free to make that choice or a different one.

This is a form of indeterminism—better, “self-determinism”—as compared to determinism or compatibilism. For his part, the Arminian is satisfied that this is required if one is to affirm the reality of both God’s omniscience (all-encompassing foreknowledge) and human freedom.²⁷

It seems to me that two things need mentioning as potential obstacles to understanding the position I have set forth here. One is that some who discuss the issues often introduce unnecessary matters into the discussion. Among these are discussions of God’s relationship to time and of “possible worlds.”²⁸ I am quick to acknowledge the intellectual stimulation involved in speculation about such matters. But “speculation” is precisely the right word. The fact is that we cannot finally be sure enough about such matters to use them definitively in this discussion. Furthermore, we do not need to, as I have attempted to demonstrate. The issue discussed in this paper is much simpler than that: God’s knowledge of the future in no way determines the future.

The other “problem” is that people simply tell themselves, as though having grasped some great secret, that if God knows the future it cannot be any other way. This, I believe, is not intuition but the “sophism” that Watson spoke about (in the quotation cited above). One erects, perhaps unintentionally, the mental block that keeps him from seeing otherwise. No doubt such thinking is easy to fall into, and equally difficult to overcome. As I have attempted to show, the way out of this difficulty lies first in the simple realization that when we speak of “what will be” or that “God knows what will be,” we have already affirmed “what will be.” One needs only to follow that with a forthright and confident statement—repeated, if need

²⁶ David Basinger, “Divine Control and Human Freedom: Is Middle Knowledge the Answer,” *JETS* 36 (1993) 55–64.

²⁷ Almost any introductory philosophy text will provide a discussion of the difference between determinism, indeterminism, and compatibilism. See Emmett Barcalow, *Open Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1992), chapter 5, for example. For “self-determinism” as the preferable term, see Richard Taylor, “Freedom and Determinism,” in *Philosophy: The Basic Issues* (ed. Klemke, Kline, and Hollinger; 2d ed.; New York: St. Martin’s, 1986) 115–125.

²⁸ For a recent example, see Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

be, until he “sees” it is so—that though God knows the way I will choose, I will be free to choose that way or another when the time comes. God also knows that.

For the Reformation Arminian, then, the final set of facts to hold is: (1) the future is certain and foreknown certainly by God; (2) this is in full harmony with the fact that human beings make free, moral choices for which they are held justly responsible. In short, certainty is not necessity and precludes neither freedom nor ability to act in more than one way. In the end, this view has the advantage of fully explaining both Scripture and human experience.