

## BE WARY OF WARE: A REPLY TO BRUCE WARE

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No theological position is immune to question or free from problems. I admit that open theism has questions that we have yet to answer and areas that need further development. Ware's paper brings out a few of these, and I appreciate his thinking on these points. On the other hand, several of Ware's criticisms are simply mistaken, while others apply just as much to traditional Arminianism. All criticisms come from a particular point of view, so it is important to state Ware's perspective right off the bat: he is a strong Calvinist neo-evangelical in the Calvinist scholastic tradition.<sup>1</sup> Ware's God is one who controls every single detail of what we do, including the very words I am now writing, such that nothing ever happens which God did not specifically ordain to occur prior to creation. God's meticulous providence encompasses even our sin and evil. God wants us to sin for some, unknown to us, good reason—it is all part of God's great plan to redeem some and damn the majority of humans. Ware rejects as absolutely unbiblical the Arminian views of human freedom, enabling grace, conditional election, and unlimited atonement. It is important to get these points on the table, because many readers will fail to see that these beliefs are behind his criticisms of open theism.

Ware does not claim that he disagrees with open theism on every point. He says that openness and "classical theism" agree on divine aseity, self-sufficiency, and *creatio ex nihilo*. Furthermore, he correctly acknowledges that openness and traditional Arminianism agree on these points as well as the centrality of the love of God and libertarian freedom as essential for moral responsibility, love, and genuine personal relationships. Of course, open theism agrees with both classical and freewill (Arminian) theism on many more points than these, but it is good of Ware to bring this up, since it is often ignored.

It is common for Calvinist critics to claim that open theism rejects the "classical theism" upon which Christianity is built.<sup>2</sup> Does openness reject classical theism? Was Christianity built upon it? Classical theism is a view of God begun by Philo of Alexandria, developed further by Augustine,

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<sup>1</sup> Please note, there is much in the Reformed tradition that I appreciate. My quarrel is with this particular Calvinism that attempts to control evangelical thought.

<sup>2</sup> See R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "The Eclipse of God at Century's End: Evangelicals Attempt to do Theology Without Theism," *SBJT* 1/1 (1997) 6–15.

reaching its apex in the Medieval Jewish, Muslim, and Christian thinkers Maimonides, Al-Ghazzali, and Thomas Aquinas. Hence, it is clear that Christianity was founded upon Jesus, not classical theism. According to classical theism God is simple, impassible, immutable, absolutely unconditioned by any external reality, controls all that happens, never takes any risks, has no emotions, and never responds to creatures. Clearly, open theism conflicts with classical theism on many points, but then so do all versions of freewill theism, including traditional Arminianism. Today, there are exceedingly few evangelicals who are actual classical theists, even though they continue to use the title of themselves. Though Ware classifies himself as a classical theist, he rejects the traditional notion of immutability. Wayne Grudem rejects impassibility as being clearly unbiblical. Millard Erickson says that “the traditional doctrine of impassibility is not the current one” among contemporary evangelicals.<sup>3</sup> These thinkers have modified classical theism in ways that Aquinas and Calvin would find logically inconsistent. The great classical theists understood that it was a package deal, you cannot change one of the attributes without affecting the others. When you begin to pull on the thread of a knit sweater, it will eventually unravel on you. So, beware of Ware, for his minor revisions to classical theism will, *mutatis mutandis*, lead to many more alterations.

Before responding to specific criticisms that Ware raises, I would like to mention a general point about the way he carries on his argument. On many occasions he conflates our view with his own speculation about what we believe. It may be likened to someone informing a Lutheran that “since you Lutherans believe that all baptized infants who die are saved, you believe that all unbaptized infants who die are damned.” Or, someone might assert that Calvinists have no motivation to evangelize, since God has elected certain people no matter what we do. Or again, someone may claim that Arminians believe that they daily are saved and lost and so live in a constant state of anxiety. The accuser in these cases simply does not understand from the inside the position he is criticizing. This is the case with Ware on many of his points. Even though he explicitly claims to know how we might respond to his criticisms, in his writings to date he has shown a singularly unimaginative and unsympathetic attitude as to how we might answer. He never gives us the benefit of the doubt as to what we might mean and typically reads our statements in the worst possible light.

Now on to some specific points.

First, in his introduction Ware claims that open theism denies what God knows or can know. It is correct that most open theists hold that the future actions of creatures with libertarian freedom are intrinsically unknowable. It is simply impossible, even for God, to have such knowledge. But not all open theists make this claim. Some are content simply to say that the biblical revelation teaches that God does not have such knowledge. These folks have no explanation as to *why* God does not know our future free actions. They simply go with the biblical description. Other open theists believe that

<sup>3</sup> Erickson, *God the Father Almighty: A Contemporary Exploration of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 155.

God could know our future free actions, but God chooses not to know them. This may be called “dispositional omniscience” corresponding to dispositional omnipotence. This is the view of Dallas Willard.<sup>4</sup> He argues that, just as God has all power but chooses whether to utilize it or not, so God could know our future actions but chooses not to know them. Willard believes that, for God to have truly personal relationships with us, God cannot know what we will do. My reason for raising this clarification is simply to note that not all open theists agree as to *why* God does not know our future free actions.

Second, Ware claims the denial of exhaustive definite foreknowledge is “defended only in open theism and in no other branch of orthodoxy or evangelicalism.” I am unsure what to make of this claim. I do not know of any other branch of evangelicalism that affirms dispensationalism except for dispensationalists. So? Does more than one branch of evangelicalism have to affirm a belief in order for it to be evangelical? No *other* branch of orthodoxy? At least Ware considers us one of the branches of orthodoxy! But what is one to make of the claim? Does it mean that a belief has to be stated “officially” as doctrine of a Protestant denomination, the Roman Catholic Church, or Eastern Orthodoxy in order to be “orthodox”? If so, then most of our theological beliefs do not qualify. At the time of the Reformation, both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches affirmed infant baptism as “orthodox” and the rejection of paedobaptism unorthodox. Being a Baptist, it is doubtful that Ware means that believer’s baptism should not be considered “orthodox.” But on what grounds can it be? Ware can appeal to many Protestant groups that reject paedobaptism today, but he could not have done so for over thirteen hundred years of church history. Hence, if Ware means to imply that new theological ideas cannot be put forth because no orthodox group as yet approves them, then no theological development is possible. On what grounds would Ware defend the rejection by the Reformers of the traditional view of justification that began with Augustine and dominated the church for over a millennium? How dare they overturn eleven hundred years of church doctrine! Perhaps Ware simply means that no “big name” theologians in history have affirmed our view of foreknowledge called presentism. Though a number of reputable people in history such as the fifth-century Christian writer Calcidius, the medieval Jewish theologians Gersonides and Ibn Ezra, the nineteenth-century Methodist L. D. McCabe, and a host of twentieth-century Christian philosophers, to name a few, have affirmed presentism, it is correct that this view has not been widely affirmed up to now.<sup>5</sup> But what does this prove? Did believer’s baptism have many big names affirming it in church history until the Anabaptists—the same Anabaptists who were murdered and condemned as unorthodox by both the Roman Catholics and the magisterial reformers alike!

Third, Ware says that, according to open theism, “God must, at any and every moment, possess innumerable false beliefs about what will happen in

<sup>4</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998) 244–53 and a personal letter.

<sup>5</sup> For a listing of names see my *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998) 162–64 and 324 n. 125.

the future.” This is an erroneous accusation, and several points need to be made in response.<sup>6</sup> To begin, Ware claims we say this, but his quote of me is taken out of context. The statement occurs in the context of a critique of simple foreknowledge. I am not stating a position but asking how simple foreknowledge handles a set of biblical texts that we all must address. What do we do with those texts where God says (unconditionally) that something will happen and then it does not happen? For example, God made an unconditional announcement that Nineveh would be destroyed (Jonah), and God made an unconditional announcement to Hezekiah that he would shortly die (2 Kings 20), but neither of these came to pass. As an aside, it is interesting that what really offends Ware is that we actually believe what the Bible says in such passages! For Ware, anyone who believes these biblical texts mean what they say is a heretic and should be thrown out of the assembly.

Though I did discuss this issue in my *God Who Risks*, there is always room for improvement in stating one’s case, so I will take this opportunity to clarify my view. I claim that God is “surprised” at the responses of the Israelites (e.g. Jer 3:7). It is extremely disappointing that Ware, trying to make us look as bad as possible, never mentions the qualifications I, or others, make regarding God being surprised. One of the qualifications I made was to say that, for God to be mistaken or to hold a false belief, it would have to be the case that God “declared infallibly that something would come to pass and it did not. God would never be mistaken so long as he never said that X (for example, Adam will not sin) would infallibly come to pass and it did not.”<sup>7</sup> God will not *definitely believe* that something will occur unless it is *certain* to occur. If an event is not certain to occur, then God knows the degree of probability that something will happen in a particular way. But God will not hold that belief as absolutely certain if human freedom is involved, because our decisions, though somewhat predictable, are not absolutely so. With humans, the improbable may happen. So it was with Israel’s lack of repentance in Jeremiah’s day. In such cases, we may say that God was “surprised” at what happened, but it would be incorrect to say God held a false belief.

Ware claims that the open view makes God “ignorant” of many beliefs. Again, this is false. If the future conditionals do not exist, then there is nothing about which to be ignorant. To be ignorant of a nothing is not to be ignorant. Perfect knowledge does not include knowing what is inherently unknowable. Ware simply begs the question by assuming his own view in making his accusation. Ware seems to assume the B-theory of time whereby the future already exists—that is, Superbowl LX already exists, it is real now. Hence, is not surprising that the B-theory of time is popular among theological determinists.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> I would like to thank my colleague, William Hasker, for providing many insightful comments for this section.

<sup>7</sup> My *God Who Risks* 132.

<sup>8</sup> See Gregory Ganssle, ed., *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

Moreover, the specific things that Ware claims God would not know according to the open view overlooks two points. First, God's knowledge of our makeup, motivations, etc., enables God to rule out some of the outcomes Ware envisages. Second, God does have the power to affect events, and he exercises that power. God is not sitting idly by.

Finally, on this issue Ware believes that the open view denies God's perfect wisdom. Again, Ware fails to understand our view on its own terms and smuggles his own determinism into the accusation. According to the open view, God's decisions and actions will be the wisest decisions and actions that are possible under the circumstances—that is what perfect wisdom means. This does not mean, however, that God's actions always have their intended results. If we believe the Bible, we will have to say that sometimes they did not achieve their intended results. God did not want humanity to sin, for instance. Ware, however, rejects this and assumes his own deterministic viewpoint. He rejects any view of God's wisdom that allows that God does not achieve everything he specifically intends to achieve. That is, any view that does not affirm meticulous providence such as Arminianism does not, according to Ware, really uphold God's perfect wisdom. Hence, Tom Oden's talk of God going from "plan A" to "plan B" and to "plan C" if necessary is heretical according to Ware, because it means that God's original plan did not achieve its intended results, and that means that God must lack perfect wisdom.<sup>9</sup> What a delicious irony that Ware uses Oden to call us heretics, when Ware's own arguments end up making a heretic of Oden.

Fourth, what the previous point bring out, is that Ware fails to see that many of his sharpest criticisms apply just as well to traditional Arminianism. For instance, he says that a God lacking exhaustive definite foreknowledge would not be able to guarantee the results he wants to see in our lives. But this is true of any view that affirms libertarian freedom. For instance, in middle knowledge God knows what each of us would do if we were placed in different circumstances (counterfactuals of freedom) than we actually are. God knows everything that would be different if Abraham Lincoln had not been assassinated. Let us suppose that the United States would be a far better country if Lincoln had served out his second term and that God really wanted Lincoln to do so. Why did God not create that world? Perhaps because in every feasible world God could select to create someone assassinates Lincoln. Since, for middle knowledge, what we do is not under God's control, God cannot guarantee that everything he wants to happen will happen.

The case is very similar for simple foreknowledge (Arminianism). According to this view, once God decides to create humans with genuine freedom, God "previsions" all that will actually (not might) occur in history. God passively "sees" what we will do. Once God has foreknowledge that Lincoln will be assassinated, God can do nothing to prevent it. God has given us free will, so he cannot guarantee that we will not do things that he does not

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Oden, *The Living God* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987) 306.

want us to.<sup>10</sup> Once God “foresees” someone actually murdering Lincoln, he cannot change it to make it non-actual, since this would render his foreknowledge incorrect. It is like God taping a TV show. Once it is taped, it cannot be rewound and taped over so that it has a different ending. The point is that simple foreknowledge is useless for providential control. Recently, David Hunt has attempted to defend simple foreknowledge from this objection.<sup>11</sup> He says, suppose that a wealthy person decided to give a billion dollars to a mission organization, provided the mission organization select the correct number between 1 and 100 that he will write down on a specific day. God, knowing that the billionaire will select the number 47 on that day, can inform someone, say Charity, ahead of the date to write down the number 47. This solution fails, however, because, in the logical order of knowing, when God previsions the number the billionaire will write down God has also provisioned everything that has happened in life up to that event—which includes foreseeing the number Charity had already written down. If Charity had already written the number 83 down, God cannot change this, as it would render what he foresaw incorrect. So, whether God has simple foreknowledge or middle knowledge does not help him guarantee what will happen. Thus, Ware’s criticism is just as applicable to these views.

Ware makes the same criticism in a different way when he says that for open theism God’s decision to save from sin could have been no more than a “contingency plan.” Again, Arminians are beset with the same “problem” (if it is a problem!). For simple foreknowledge, in the logical order of knowing, God does not know that humans will actually sin until he decides to create this type of world. Once God previsions that we will sin, he responds with a redemptive plan. But was this redemptive plan a contingency plan? Since the God of Arminianism does not know, prior to his decision to create humans with libertarian freedom, whether we will sin, then, at best, God could only have had a contingency plan ready.<sup>12</sup> The Arminians can say that once God creates, he foreknows all about actual sin and redemption, but it does not do God any good, since he did not want us to sin, and we did sin, so God cannot guarantee the results he wants.

This also applies to Ware’s claim that, in the open view, God could not, at the time of Jesus’ death, have known all the specific individuals for whom Jesus would die. Again, in the logical order of knowing, God foresees Jesus’ death “before” he foresees those humans who will respond in faith to Jesus. That is, God does not know “at the time” of Jesus’ death if anyone will respond in faith until God “rolls the tape” forward to provision the rest

<sup>10</sup> I explain this at length in my “Why Simple Foreknowledge Offers no more Providential Control than the Openness of God,” *Faith and Philosophy* 14/1 (1997) 26–40. See also *The God Who Risks* 200–206.

<sup>11</sup> David Hunt, “The Simple-Foreknowledge View,” in James Beilby and Paul Eddy, eds., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001) 97–98.

<sup>12</sup> Louis Berkhof argues that infralapsarians are no better than Arminians, because both imply that sin is not something that God wanted—God is not guaranteed to get the results he wants. See my *God Who Risks* 239.

of history. Moreover, this also applies to Ware's claim that the open view cannot give us absolute confidence in divine guidance for the Christian life, because simple foreknowledge cannot provide the sorts of guarantees that Ware wants. Hence, *if* Ware's indictment counts at all, it counts just as much against Arminianism as open theism. The only view that can meet Ware's desire for guarantees is his own theological determinism.

Fifth, one of my comments on the flood narrative obviously put a burr under Ware's saddle, since he comments on it repeatedly in his writings. My comment was to the effect that God grieves over the fact that humanity continually sins (Gen 6:6) and seems to grieve again after he destroys the world.<sup>13</sup> Ware interprets this to mean that I believe God says something to the effect: "Oops, I wish I had not done that." Let me make a couple of points. First, this passage is an insignificant one in my book. Nothing of the openness argument hangs on it. Second, here is an example of Ware putting the worst possible spin on my work. Though I do believe it grieved God to destroy the world, I also said that the divine judgment was righteous. What I had in mind, and perhaps did not say clearly enough, is that, just as parents may know it is best to punish a child in a particular situation but it may grieve the parents to carry out the punishment, so God was grieved to carry out his righteous judgment.

Sixth, Ware seems to believe we practice a naïve hermeneutical literalism when reading the biblical text. He believes that, if we were consistent, we would believe God has a faulty memory as well as arms and eyes. In my own writings I have stressed the metaphorical nature of the biblical language, whereas Boyd has emphasized the term literal. Given the baggage the word "literal" carries with it, perhaps the word "referential" would be better. The key issue between Ware and us is what the biblical statements such as God changing his mind, saying "perhaps," extending his arm, and the like, refer to. For me, all of these statements are conceptual metaphors used to provide meaning to aspects of our experience.<sup>14</sup> The metaphorical concept "the arm of the Lord" refers to God's ability to deliver from danger. The conceptual metaphor "the Lord changed his mind" refers to God enacting a different course of action than the one previously stated. For me, these metaphors refer to the nature of God and God's relationship to humanity. One of the key issues becomes, to what do the divine statements "perhaps," "if," "change of mind," "I thought," and the like refer? We have explained our interpretation of them without simply categorizing them as anthropomorphism. Another key issue is how to hold together the various biblical statements in a logically consistent way (e.g. how can a timeless being be thought to make such statements?). We are attempting to develop a theory that better explains the biblical material. Ware's Calvinism has well-worn approaches to some of the passages we raise in support of open theism, but,

<sup>13</sup> See my *God Who Risks* 50.

<sup>14</sup> Here I find the field of cognitive linguistics extremely helpful. See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

to date, many of our most important texts have yet to be satisfactorily explained by our critics.

Seventh, Ware claims that our belief that God came to know that Abraham really trusted him when he raised the knife over Isaac (Gen 22:12) contradicts, first, God's perfect knowledge of our hearts; second, the statement on Abraham's faith in Romans 4 and Hebrews 11; and, third, Abraham's own belief while traveling to Moriah, that God would raise Isaac from the dead. Ware is wrong on all three counts. First, Abraham has displayed some trust in God throughout his life, but ever and again Abraham manifests a self-protecting disposition (e.g. he has Sarah say that she is his sister, so that the men do not kill him). Abraham has a big problem with being self-serving, and God has been working with him to overcome this. Abraham's heart is in the process of being formed, and the matter is not settled in a way that is satisfactory for God until Abraham goes through with God's command.<sup>15</sup> Second, Romans 4 and Hebrews 11 say that Abraham grew in faith during his life—this test was the key example of the degree to which Abraham had grown in faith. Third, yes, Abraham may believe that God will raise Isaac from the dead while he is traveling on the road, but will he believe it enough to do it when the moment comes? It is easy to say we will do thus and such if we were placed in a certain situation. It may not be so easy for us when we are actually called upon to do it. In light of these considerations, Ware's "contradictions" fail.

Eighth, Ware claims that presentism cannot explain the countless "inviolable" divine predictions concerning future free human decisions. What are "inviolable" predictions? Presumably, those that God states unconditionally will happen. It is quite common for us to take any divine prediction where God says X will occur and it does as an example of an unconditional/inviolable utterance—it could not fail to happen. However, clear counterexamples of this are easy to find. God's announcement to Hezekiah and Nineveh were stated in an unconditional/inviolable way. How do we know that they actually were not inviolable? Because what God said would happen did not happen. That is, it is only because they did not occur that we know that these seemingly "inviolable" predictions were, in fact, conditional upon what the human agents did. But what about seemingly "inviolable" predictions that did come to pass? Were some, even most of them, actually conditional upon the response of the human agents? The tendency is to think not, because they came to pass. However, I believe that there are actually very few such "inviolable" predictions.

Ware goes on to argue that, if God's inviolable predictions do not come to pass, then the authority of Scripture goes down the tubes. Well, then, does Ware believe that Scripture is not authoritative, because well-known invi-

<sup>15</sup> For further elaboration see my "Does God Know Your Next Move?" *Christianity Today* 45/8 (June 11, 2001) 52. It seems strange that Ware continues to voice certain objections when we have answered them in print. If he disagrees with our answers, fine, then address them. But to continue as though we have said nothing is simply unfair.



olable predictions that God stated would happen unconditionally did not, in fact, happen? To Hezekiah the prophet Isaiah said, “Thus says the Lord,” you will die shortly, but he did not shortly die (2 Kings 20). God inviolably announced to Nineveh that its doom was immanent when it turned out not to be (Jonah). God made an unconditional promise to Eli that his sons would be priests forever in Israel, but God subsequently destroyed them (1 Sam 2:30). Ezekiel made inviolable predictions regarding what Nebuchadnezzar would do to Tyre and Egypt, but Nebuchadnezzar did not do them (Ezekiel 26–29). Of course Ware does not reject the authority of Scripture because of these unfulfilled predictions. The problem is that the way Ware states his criterion renders the divine word untrustworthy if God states something in an unconditional way and then does not perform it.<sup>16</sup>

Ninth, Ware claims that divine guidance of Christians is suspect in the open view, because the guidance God gives cannot guarantee the results that God desires. Again, Ware fails to see that this applies just as much to traditional Arminianism. I argued above (my fifth point) that a God with simple foreknowledge cannot use such knowledge to change what he foresaw would actually happen, since that would render his foreknowledge incorrect. Also, the God of simple foreknowledge does not know, in the logical order of knowing, the results of God’s guidance on Rachel “at the time” that God counsels her. God does not know and does not control whether she takes God’s advice or not and what the outcome will be. What Ware is really doing is criticizing every view but his own, for only the God of meticulous providence can guarantee that the guidance he gives will result in precisely the conditions God desires. Again, Ware is ripping on Arminians just as much as open theists.

Tenth, Ware castigates our view of petitionary prayer as “arrogant” and “presumptuous” to think we could advise God, helping God achieve a “better plan.” The view of petitionary prayer we have put forward is not unique to openness, since it is likely the dominant view of evangelicals. Hence, Ware’s vituperate attack is really denigrating the prayer life of mainstream evangelicalism! Unfortunately, Ware shows no understanding whatsoever of this deep-seated piety. In Ware’s view of prayer, we are saying to God what God has ordained we should say. Our prayers of petition are not genuine dialogue with God, but simply the means by which God brings about what he has ordained. How different this is from biblical characters such as Abraham, Moses, and Hezekiah who dialogued and even argued with God. God is the one who invites us to speak with him in this way—it is no presumption on our part. God is the one who invites us to collaborate with him. We clearly say in our writings that God does not need our advice, but God asks for our input anyway because of the genuine personal relationship he wants to develop. God is the one who has chosen to make prayer a dialogue

<sup>16</sup> This is the same issue Ware raises in his #16 regarding the promise to Abraham. If God alters his promise in light of the human response, then Ware believes God is untrustworthy. But Ware does not apply this same principle for unfulfilled predictions.

instead of a monologue. Moreover, we have never said that, for instance, when Moses intercedes for the people (Exodus 32) and God accepts Moses' input, this results in a "better" plan. What we have said is that God has sovereignly decided that part of the plan-making process will be to include what Moses desires. God has decided that his "best" plan will involve taking our concerns into account, not because God must, but because God lovingly wants this kind of relationship. This represents the overarching Arminian view of petitionary prayer.

Eleventh, Ware claims that the open view of the future calls into question the Church's ultimate eschatological hope, because God cannot guarantee that things will result exactly as foretold in Scripture. Again, this is simply a take-off of Ware's complaint against any view that affirms libertarian freedom. Ware is opposed to all versions of Arminianism, because they cannot guarantee that everything will happen precisely the way God wants it to happen. Hence, the only view that can accomplish this is divine determinism—Ware's view.

Can the God of open theism guarantee our "blessed hope?" Elsewhere, I have explained why open theism has no difficulty affirming the core beliefs of Christian eschatology.<sup>17</sup> Here, some brief comments will have to suffice. Though many evangelicals have developed elaborately detailed eschatological schemes, most Christian eschatology has been far more modest. The Apostle's Creed affirms that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead and that there will be a resurrection of the flesh. The Scriptures speak of God bringing about a new heaven and earth, and Revelation refers to this as a place where God dwells and there is no darkness (21:25), curse (22:3), sea (21:1), death (21:4) or temple (21:22). We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2). Finally, God will achieve his purpose: we shall be his people, and he shall be our God, dwelling among us (Rev 21:3, 7). There is nothing in the openness model incompatible with these claims or the assertion that God can bring these about. God is omnipotent and can act unilaterally. Moreover, the great eschatological promises are not highly detailed. Rather, they are rather general, leaving God room to bring them to fruition in a variety of ways. We should not be so confident that we know exactly how God must fulfill his promises.

In conclusion, Ware has a number of criticisms but one main one—all forms of freewill theism sacrifice exhaustive divine control and thus the ability of God to guarantee the results—and he simply gives it many different applications. Hence, it is not surprising that I keep raising the same point in defense with different applications. Ware believes that any view affirming libertarian freedom renders God's promises suspect. Since simple foreknowledge is useless for providential control, Arminianism is just as subject to Ware's criticism as is open theism. The only view that can provide what Ware wants is theological determinism. The key issues in this debate

<sup>17</sup> See my "The Openness of God and the Assurance of Things to Come," in David Baker, ed., *Looking Into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) 281–94.

are whether God exercises meticulous or general providence, whether God is absolutely unconditioned by creatures or whether he can respond to us, and whether humans have libertarian or compatibilistic freedom. These are precisely the watershed issues that have long separated classical theism from freewill theism. These issues surfaced again in the debate between scholastic Calvinism and Arminianism, and once again they are surfacing in the debate between neo-evangelical Calvinists and open theists. Make no mistake, deep down these issues are where the real debate lies and this is why, though Ware attacks neo-Arminianism (open theism), his real assault is against all forms of Arminianism. So Arminians should be very wary of Ware's criticisms.