

THE MODE OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE IN REFORMATION ARMINIANISM AND OPEN THEISM

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In recent years, open theism has engendered a plethora of critical interactions. One recurring criticism is that the movement is a theological novelty without precedent in the history of Christianity.¹ Although at times it is recognized that many open theists began as Arminians, it is argued that their adoption of open theism moves them beyond the scope of Arminian theology and some suggest altogether outside the pale of the Christian theological traditions.² Arminian theologian Robert E. Picirilli argues that open theism's rejection of exhaustive divine foreknowledge is "too radical a break with classic Arminian theism to maintain a 'family' relationship."³ Even Clark H. Pinnock seems uncertain, given its modifications of Arminianism, whether it stands within or without of the Arminian tradition.⁴ The theological controversy over open theism has also provoked institutional struggles, not least in our very own Evangelical Theological Society.

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¹ For presentations of open theism, see David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996); Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Didsbury Lectures, 2000; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); Pinnock, ed. et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994); and John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998).

I use the term "open theism" to refer to the controversial movement in North American evangelicalism rather than the Openness of God, Free-Will Theism, and the polemical and pejorative Neotheism and Neo-Arminian because those theologians that adopt the tenets of this theological movement use the term, it is one of the shorter options, and it bears no uncomplimentary connotations.

² For examples, see Norman L. Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man? The New "Open" View of God: Neotheism's Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1997) 11–12, 126, and 145 and "Norman Geisler's Response," in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (ed. David and Randall Basinger; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986) 170; Tony Gray, "Beyond Arminius: Pinnock's Doctrine of God and the Evangelical Tradition," in *Reconstructing Theology: A Critical Assessment of the Theology of Clark Pinnock* (ed. Tony Gray and Christopher Sinkinson; Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2000) 138–42; and Bruce A. Ware, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Theologically: Is Open Theism Evangelical?" *JETS* 45 (2002) 194; and idem, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000) 31–33.

³ Robert E. Picirilli, "An Arminian Response to John Sanders's *The God who Risks: A Theology of Providence*," *JETS* 44 (2001) 471.

⁴ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover* 106, 143, and 149.

In the following, I reconsider the “family” relationship between Arminianism and open theism particularly in light of Picirilli’s charge that they are incompatible theologies.⁵ The relationship of open theism to Arminianism is important, because the conclusion reached on this issue has the potential to further divide or unite evangelicals. On the one hand, if open theism is part of the Arminian theological tradition and criticisms of open theism apply more broadly to Arminianism, then this controversy could further divide evangelicals—i.e. Reformed groups versus open theists *and* Arminians. Yet on the other hand, if open theism is part of the Arminian tradition, then perhaps recognition of this point can assist in transcending the categories of heterodoxy and orthodoxy that frequently characterize this debate.

I support the latter option by arguing that open theism is part of the Arminian theological trajectory, because they share identical theories of the mode of divine knowledge. I focus on the mode of divine knowledge in respect to libertarian choices and actions, because it gets to the heart of the theological controversy over open theism and its relationship to Arminianism. The mode of divine knowledge refers to the manner in which or how it is that God knows libertarian choices and their consequent actions. I argue further that since Arminianism’s affirmation of divine foreknowledge of future libertarian choices and open theism’s rejection of the same both derive from an epistemological disagreement over whether future libertarian choices are legitimate objects of knowledge, this is not at root a theological disagreement. Moreover, this epistemological disagreement is secondary to their more fundamental theological consistency concerning the mode of divine knowledge.

Before proceeding further, a clarification of the term “Reformation Arminianism” is in order. I use the term because Picirilli uses it. He has defined it as that form of Arminian theology that reflects the thought of Jacob Arminius.⁶ It is called “Reformed” in a broad sense that denotes Arminius’s commitment to central doctrines of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers.⁷ I selected Picirilli’s description of Reformation Arminianism because it

⁵ Picirilli, “Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future,” *JETS* 43 (2000) 259–71 and “An Arminian Response to Sanders” 467–91.

⁶ Picirilli, “Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future” 259–71 and “An Arminian Response to Sanders” 467–91. However, it is surprising that in his attempt to portray his views in continuity with Arminius’s theology he does not utilize middle knowledge to reconcile divine providence and foreknowledge with human libertarian freedom, as did Arminius. For Arminius’s use of middle knowledge, see *The Works of Arminius: The London Edition* (3 vols.; trans. James Nichols and William Nichols; vol. 1 1825, vol. 2 1828, vol. 3 1875; reprint with an introduction by Carl Bangs, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 1.653–54 and 2.120, 122, 124, 342, and 719. For scholarship on Arminius’s use of middle knowledge, see Barry Bryant, “Molina, Arminius, Plaifere, Goad, and Wesley on Human Free Will, Divine Omniscience, and Middle Knowledge,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 (1992) 93–103; Eef Dekker, “Was Arminius a Molinist?” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27 (1996) 337–52; Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 154–63; and William G. Witt, “Creation, Redemption, and Grace in the Theology of Jacob Arminius” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1993).

⁷ According to Picirilli, these doctrines are “that guilt, condemnation, and depravity passed to the whole human race by means of Adam’s sin; total depravity; the absolute sovereignty of God;

is a contemporary Arminian interaction with open theism and it also reflects a common Arminian position in North American Evangelicalism. In addition, he directly engages open theism and, as noted, wants to excise it from the Arminian theological family tree.

I. THE MODE OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE IN REFORMATION ARMINIANISM

Picirilli outlines the basic affirmations of Reformation Arminianism as adherence to the notions that “the future is certain and foreknown by God,” and that the certainty of the future and God’s foreknowledge of it in no way undermines human freedom and moral responsibility.⁸ In order to consistently maintain that the future is certain, that it is foreknown by God, and that human beings are free, he adopts libertarian freedom, the consequential and historical nature of divine knowledge relative to libertarian choices and actions, and the timeless nature of God’s knowledge.

According to Picirilli’s libertarian view of freedom, free choices are contingent. Contingency means that no causal conditions are involved in a choice so as to make it unavoidable. The person always remains free to choose otherwise.⁹ Yet given Picirilli’s affirmation of the certainty of future events and God’s foreknowledge of those events, his acceptance of libertarian freedom might appear to be inconsistent.¹⁰

To reconcile God’s foreknowledge with future free activities of human beings, Picirilli posits that God’s knowledge is subsequent or consequential to those choices and events. The subsequence of divine knowledge means that knowledge of an event necessarily presupposes its occurrence. Picirilli illustrates the consequential order between event and God’s knowledge of event with the example of a car accident. He states, “the accident remains a contingency that may or may not occur until it actually happens. The knowledge of it grows from its actual occurrence (even though future to God), not vice-versa.”¹¹ Hence, in Picirilli’s view, God’s knowledge follows or depends

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” (“Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future” 259).

⁸ Ibid. 271.

⁹ Ibid. 262 and Picirilli, “An Arminian Response to Sanders” 474.

¹⁰ However, it must be noted that Picirilli also allows for instances of necessity. At times and based on predetermination, God may act in such a way that it necessitates particular events (Picirilli, “Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future” 262–63).

¹¹ Picirilli, “An Arminian Response to Sanders” 477. Picirilli uses several additional examples to illustrate the subsequence of God’s knowledge to the actual occurrence of the historical event. He refers to a woman seeking guidance on the selection of a suitable husband. Regarding her selection of a husband, Picirilli argues that, “God’s knowledge of what the young lady will do is logically dependent on her choice, not vice-versa” (Picirilli, “An Arminian Response to Sanders” 477; Picirilli is interacting with Sanders’s earlier use of the woman seeking divine guidance in the selection of a husband; see Sanders, *The God who Risks* 204). Thus, the mode of divine knowledge

on something actually happening. The consequential order between event and God's knowledge is not only logical, but it is ontological. The relationship is ontological because God's knowledge depends on the event's actual occurrence. The event itself comprises the content of God's foreknowledge. If nothing has happened, there is nothing to know. The event must precede God's knowledge such that God's knowledge is subsequent to it.¹² The language used here to express the ontological and consequential relationship between God's knowledge and historical occurrences must be placed within Picirilli's adoption of divine timelessness. The ontological order of God's knowledge does not entail a temporal sequence. When the drama of history is acted out, it includes a temporal and an ontological order, but from God's perspective it is only an ontological order.

Accordingly, divine knowledge is *consequential* and *historical*. The consequential nature of divine knowledge denotes that it follows the historical incidents. The historical nature of divine knowledge indicates that it presupposes the concrete historical occurrence of something. "Historical" does not mean that God's knowledge is necessarily temporal, although it is in open theism. Divine knowledge is historical, not because God learns in a temporal chronology, but because God's knowledge presupposes the occurrence of something in time or that it will occur in time. Even a timeless God knows things in a historical continuum, but the phenomena that constitute that knowledge exist eternally before God. Historical proceedings that are past and no longer extant or are future and do not yet exist from a temporal perspective are eternally present to God. The eternal presence of the history of

or the way that God knows an event contingent on libertarian freedom is consequential and historical, because it follows or is the consequence of the event known.

Picirilli also points out that God's foreknowledge of events is analogous to human knowledge of past events. Human knowledge of past events does not cause events, but rests on the fact that they occurred. Likewise, God's knowledge is not causative, but rests on the occurrence of events (Picirilli, "Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future" 263). Picirilli further applies this logic to the relationship between foreknowledge and predestination. God predestines, because he foreknows those who will accept Christ. In other words, the order is the person's decision to accept Christ, God's foreknowledge of that choice, and predestination. Predestination presupposes God's foreknowledge of the decision to accept Christ, and foreknowledge presupposes the person's decision to accept Christ (p. 267).

¹² Ibid. 263 and Picirilli, "An Arminian Response to Sanders" 473–75 and 477. Picirilli's notion of the consequential and historical nature of divine knowledge in regard to events linked to libertarian freedom is not unusual in the Arminian theological tradition. For instance, not only did Arminius affirm it (*The Works of Arminius* 2.368 and 3.65), the contemporary Arminian theologian Jack Cottrell does as well. Cottrell teaches that "it is part of the self-limitation of the Creator that his own knowledge of his creation is in a sense *derived* from the creation. Even though his knowledge is eternally the same we may say that his knowledge of the contingent events of his creation is *logically dependent on their actual occurrence*" (Cottrell, *What the Bible says about God the Creator* [What the Bible Says; Joplin, MO: College Press, 1983] 285 [emphasis added]). Cottrell's notion that God's knowledge is "derived" and "logically dependent on their actual occurrence" reflects a consequential and historical mode of divine knowledge. Thomas Oden also affirms the consequential nature of divine knowledge in *The Living God: Systematic Theology: Volume One* (Peabody, MA: Prince, 1987) 71. Thus, Picirilli's theory of the mode of divine knowledge stands in continuity with Arminian theology past and present.

the world to God means that all history bears the same ontological status before God.

The principle that knowledge presupposes the occurrence of an event should be understood in relation to the general Arminian rejection of the Reformed concept of foreordination. According to foreordination, God foreknows because God foreordains. Picirilli maintains that the mode of foreknowledge through foreordination is inconsistent with genuine human freedom and moral responsibility.¹³ He also insists that foreknowledge can neither be causative nor the basis of the certainty of future occurrences.¹⁴ On the contrary, he proposes that the certainty of an event resides in the fact that it will occur. Although Picirilli's theory of divine knowledge is consequential and historical, it still seems to conflict with the notion of libertarian freedom. This is because from the temporal perspective, future free choices are indeterminate. In other words, if God's knowledge follows events, how could God know future free choices of a libertarian sort?

Picirilli resolves the divine foreknowledge-human free will conundrum by appealing to divine timelessness.¹⁵ From the vantage point of eternity, God timelessly knows all events, including those that are the product of libertarian freedom.¹⁶ Picirilli's appeal to divine timelessness reconciles the certainty of God's foreknowledge with the contingency of temporal events, because it can continue to maintain that divine knowledge is subsequent to events (although it does not answer the issue of whether future libertarian choices are even proper objects of knowledge). God's knowledge remains, like human

¹³ Picirilli, "Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future" 265–66. Note that Picirilli misunderstands the relationship between foreknowledge and foreordination in Calvinism. He states that Calvinism "makes foreknowledge and predestination synonymous and thus makes foreknowledge an active cause" ("Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future" 266). On the contrary, Calvinists do not conceive foreknowledge and predestination as synonymous concepts nor do they attribute causality to foreknowledge. In Calvinism, foreknowledge is the product of the divine decree and predestination and, therefore, foreknowledge is a distinct theological concept. Moreover, foreknowledge is not causal, but rather the effect of the divine decree or will. The divine attribute that exerts causal influence in historical events is not divine foreknowledge, but the divine will.

¹⁴ Picirilli misinterprets Sanders as teaching that proponents of simple foreknowledge believe that foreknowledge is causative ("An Arminian Response to Sanders" 472–73). However, Sanders expressly points out that simple foreknowledge is not causal (John Sanders, "Why Simple Foreknowledge offers no more Providential Control than the Openness of God," *Faith and Philosophy* 14 [1997] 37). The non-causative nature of foreknowledge in Arminian theology is widely noted: i.e. William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (ed. Clark H. Pinnock et al.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994) 149; Oden, *The Living God* 71; and Richard Rice, "Divine Foreknowledge and Free-Will Theism," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (ed. Clark H. Pinnock; Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1989) 125.

¹⁵ Laurence W. Wood argues that the Boethian view of eternity is a preferable solution to this problem than the common appeal to divine timelessness (Wood, "Does God Know the Future? Can God Be Mistaken?: A Reply to Richard Swinburne," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 56/2 and 57/1 [fall 2001 and spring 2002] 5–47).

¹⁶ Picirilli, "Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future" 262–64 and 266–77 and "An Arminian Response to Sanders" 471 and 478. Wood also maintains that in the Boethian view God's knowledge follows "real events" (Wood, "A Reply to Swinburne" 8–10).

knowledge, "after the fact."¹⁷ Therefore, while from a temporal perspective libertarian choices are uncertain, God knows them as accomplished because God sees the panorama of history in an eternal instant.¹⁸ Foreknowledge and libertarian freedom are consistent, because the mode of foreknowledge remains consequential and historical. The subsequence of divine knowledge to events is not a temporal subsequence, but a subsequence in the order of nature that is consistent with the timeless nature of God's foreknowledge. Moreover, timeless foreknowledge does not conflict with the indeterminate nature of libertarian freedom insofar as it retains the principle that divine knowledge follows the choices and acts deriving from libertarian freedom.¹⁹

In summary, Reformation Arminianism claims that God possesses foreknowledge, because God sees the train of contingent events from the standpoint of timeless eternity. The temporal train is eternally present to God and, therefore, contingent events, although future and not proper objects of knowledge for temporal beings, are eternally known by God. Furthermore, divine foreknowledge of future contingent events does not mitigate contingency, because that knowledge, wedded to the concept of divine timelessness, presupposes the occurrence of the events that are the objects of that knowledge. Finally and strictly speaking, God's knowledge is not *foreknowledge*, but eternal knowledge.²⁰ From the human perspective God's knowledge of the future is *foreknowledge*, but from the divine position of eternity, God's knowledge is eternal.

II. THE MODE OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE IN OPEN THEISM

The open theist theory of divine knowledge is often called *presentism* or present knowledge.²¹ Presentism includes specific theories regarding the extent and mode of divine knowledge, human freedom, and the relation between God and creation. In terms of the extent of divine knowledge, a God

¹⁷ Picirilli, "An Arminian Response to Sanders" 475.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 471 and Picirilli, "Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future" 262. Futurity is, strictly speaking, only applicable to temporal beings. For the timeless God, there is no future or past; God eternally or timelessly knows all the events that comprise the temporal history of the world.

¹⁹ At this point Picirilli is inconsistent on his theory of the mode of divine knowledge. On the one hand, God's foreknowledge is intuitive; that is, it is not discursive. According to intuitive foreknowledge, "God simply 'sees' all that will ever be, and this includes the contingencies that might be one way or another" (Picirilli, "An Arminian Response to Sanders" 471). On the other hand, he maintains that God's knowledge is analogous to human knowing, according to which there is a sequence between event and knowledge of the event. Although for human knowledge the chronology is ontological and temporal, for divine knowledge there is only an ontological order (Picirilli, "An Arminian Response to Sanders" 474-75).

²⁰ Others also note this, see William Hasker, "Foreknowledge and Necessity," in *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom* (ed. John M. Fischer; Stanford Series in Philosophy; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989) 226 and Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Contours of Christian Philosophy; ed. C. Stephen Evans; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991) 100.

²¹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover* 106 and Sanders, *The God Who Risks* 198-99 and "Why Simple Foreknowledge" 26-27.

with present knowledge knows all that is possible to be known. God possesses exhaustive knowledge of the past and present and all future possibilities and probabilities. In respect to knowledge of the future, God also foreknows future events that occur due to the necessity of physical forces—i.e. an earthquake that results from seismic activity—as well as events that are the result of pre-determined providential interventions.²² However, God does not possess knowledge of the future that is contingent upon human libertarian freedom. As contingent, such events are indeterminate and are not, therefore, proper objects of knowledge.²³

Like Reformation Arminianism, the mode of divine knowledge in open theism is consequential and historical. Yet, unlike Reformation Arminianism, open theism teaches that God's knowledge is ontologically *and temporally* subsequent to, or at least coincident with, temporal occurrences. Since future libertarian choices are indeterminate until the person actually chooses, no basis exists to foreknow these future choices. God must wait until the person makes the choice in order to know what choice the person will make. Thus, God's knowledge of a libertarian choice is the consequence of the choice, and since the choice is indeterminate, God must wait until that choice is temporally actualized before God can know it.

²² Gregory A. Boyd, "The Open-Theism View," in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001) 13–28; Jason A. Nicholls, "Openness and Inerrancy: Can They be Compatible?" *JETS* 45 (2002) 629–49; and John Sanders, *The God Who Risks* 75, 130–31, 133, and 173.

²³ Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) 23–24 and 32–33; Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective" 148; Pinnock, "There is Room for Us: A Reply to Bruce Ware," *JETS* 45 (2002) 216; and Sanders, *The God Who Risks* 198–99 and "Why Simple Foreknowledge" 26–27. Although open theism's denial that God knows future libertarian choices is sometimes presented as a modification of the traditional doctrine of omniscience, it more accurately stems from their belief that future libertarian choices are not proper objects of knowledge (Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective" 148 and Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* [ed. David and Randall Basinger; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986] 149–50 and 157). For instance, William Hasker defines omniscience as "at any time God knows all propositions such that God's knowing them at that time is logically possible" ("A Philosophical Perspective" 136). His definition is one that most Calvinists and Arminians could accept, for after all, Calvinists and Arminians do not maintain that God knows the logically impossible. Moreover, many Calvinists agree with open theists that future libertarian choices are not proper objects of knowledge and in this respect consider open theists consistent Arminians. For example, John S. Feinberg argues that the open theist theory of present knowledge is the most effective in resolving the tension between libertarian freedom and divine omniscience in contrast to the theories of Boethius, Ockham, simple foreknowledge, and middle knowledge (Feinberg, *No One like Him: The Doctrine of God* [The Foundations of Evangelical Theology; ed. John S. Feinberg; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001] 759–60 and 775). Stephen J. Wellum also notes open theism's "logically consistent" resolution of the divine foreknowledge-human freedom dilemma (Wellum, "Divine Sovereignty-Omniscience, Inerrancy, and Open Theism: An Evaluation," *JETS* 45 [2002] 263). In addition, Wayne Grudem remarks that open theism is the "most consistent Arminian position," albeit that it is nevertheless inconsistent with Scripture and deleterious for Christian spirituality (Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994] 348). In contrast, traditional Arminians accept that future libertarian choices are proper objects of knowledge. Thus, the difference is not the concept of omniscience *per se*, but the legitimate scope of knowledge.

Open theism rejects the traditional Arminian use of the theory of divine timelessness to solve the tension between exhaustive foreknowledge and libertarian freedom. Open theists often maintain that timeless foreknowledge seals the future and removes genuine freedom.²⁴ In contrast, it embraces the notion that future libertarian choices are unknowable and that God's knowledge of the world as it relates to the free activity of human beings arises from the temporal unfolding of human activities. Finally, open theism's rejection of timeless divine knowledge and affirmation of an open future in respect to future libertarian freedom should be understood in light of its more fundamental commitment to relational theism—according to which God created human beings for reciprocal relationships.²⁵

In summary, open theism believes that since future libertarian choices are indeterminate, they are not proper objects of knowledge. Consequently, God cannot know those choices until they are made in time and space. In contrast to some Arminian scholars, open theism also rejects the concept of timeless divine knowledge as a mechanism to reconcile divine foreknowledge and libertarian freedom. As a result, open theism repudiates the notion that God possesses foreknowledge of future libertarian choices and the actions that arise from those choices.

III. THE THEOLOGICAL CONTINUITY BETWEEN REFORMATION ARMINIANISM AND OPEN THEISM

As mentioned, the relationship of open theism to Arminianism is a point contested by Picirilli and doubted by Pinnock.²⁶ In contrast to Picirilli's rejection and Pinnock's uncertainty on this issue, I argue for a substantial theological continuity between Reformation Arminianism and open theism based on their identical theories of the mode of divine knowledge regarding choices and actions contingent on libertarian freedom. The important point is that both views agree that God knows events because they occur and they do not occur because God knows them or wills them. Furthermore, although their differing conclusions on the possibility of foreknowledge of libertarian choices is significant, it should not cloud the fundamental identity of their theories of the mode of divine knowledge.

²⁴ Boyd, *God of the Possible* 23. Open theists reject foreknowledge of future libertarian free choices primarily on the basis of Scripture and not philosophical considerations. However, they also frequently hold on philosophical grounds that the theory of timeless foreknowledge of future libertarian choices undermines genuine freedom because God's knowledge of those choices is certain and, thus, the person cannot really choose otherwise (William Hasker, "The Foreknowledge Conundrum," in *Issues in Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* [ed. Eugene T. Long; Studies in Philosophy and Religion 23; Boston, MA: Kluwer, 2001] 100). Although neither God's specific providential act nor God's knowledge necessarily causes the certainty, nevertheless it is certain that specific choices and actions will take place as specific points in time and space. Thus, the possibility of doing otherwise in a given circumstance is an illusion.

²⁵ Boyd, "The Open-Theism View" 23; Hasker, "The Foreknowledge Conundrum" 110–11; Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover* 79–107; and Sanders, *God Who Risks* 12 and 235–36.

²⁶ Picirilli, "An Arminian Response to Sanders" 471 and Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover* 106, 143, and 149.

Looking at one of Picirilli's examples helps to underline the theological continuity between these two positions. Picirilli cites God's testing of Abraham with the command to sacrifice his son to illustrate the consequential and historical nature of God's knowledge of events linked to human freedom. Picirilli notes that in the order of event and knowledge of an event, God does not know that Abraham will be faithful until he acts faithfully. That is to say, while God's knowledge of the temporal testing of Abraham is eternal, God's knowledge of the testing still, in terms of ontological order, follows the testing.²⁷ For instance, if it were possible to interdict God's eternal vision of temporal history at the moment just prior to Abraham's binding of Isaac, God would not know if Abraham would follow through with the command to sacrifice Isaac, because God does not know that Abraham will act faithfully in the continuum of events until Abraham acts faithfully.

Picirilli clarifies the consequential nature of God's knowledge of Abraham's faithfulness relative to his act of faithfulness with the following comment:

Comparing our own (after)knowledge of Abraham's situation. . . . We know both that he *could* have disobeyed God and that he *did* obey God and pass the test. The second we know only "after the fact," only because he did actually obey God when the time came. I would maintain that God's (fore)knowledge of the events bears exactly the same relationship to them, ontologically, as our (after)knowledge.²⁸

In other words, Picirilli teaches that God's knowledge of events is consequential, because it ontologically follows the event. The use of "ontological" is noteworthy, because it indicates that God's knowledge rests on historical incidences. Calvinism also affirms that God's knowledge has an ontological basis. But, it is based on the divine will, and not historical events. In the Calvinist ontological order, God wills, God knows, and then things happen, whereas for human beings, knowledge follows historical phenomena. For Picirilli, the relationship between an event and knowledge of an event is the same for God as for human beings; namely, knowledge of something follows its occurrence.²⁹ Again, the consequential nature of divine knowledge does not entail a temporal sequence. God's knowledge is eternal. God eternally knows that Abraham will act faithfully. The subsequence of God's knowledge of Abraham's faithfulness to Abraham's actual act of faithfulness in history is consistent with the eternal simultaneity of God's knowledge, because God sees the events of history in an eternal instant.

The result is that Picirilli's theory of the mode of divine knowledge matches that of open theism. For example, Sanders's statement that "God's knowledge of what creatures do is dependent on what the creatures freely decide to do" is the same as the theory revealed in Picirilli's comment that likens God's "(fore)knowledge" to human "(after)knowledge." Accordingly, Sanders maintains that God's knowledge of Abraham's faithfulness is, like human

²⁷ Picirilli, "An Arminian Response to Sanders" 474–75.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 475.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

knowledge, "after the fact."³⁰ In concert with Picirilli's theory of divine knowledge, open theists maintain that God does not know that Abraham will act faithfully until he acts faithfully. In other words, God's knowledge is consequential and historical. God's knowledge of Abraham's faithfulness is the consequence of his act of faithfulness; that is, it is subsequent to his act of faithfulness. The difference resides in that Picirilli affirms that God timelessly sees all events from eternity, whereas open theists maintain that God sees these in their temporal development. Yet, given that they agree on the mode of divine knowledge, why do they reach such different conclusions regarding the feasibility of foreknowledge of libertarian choices and actions?

IV. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISCONTINUITY BETWEEN REFORMATION ARMINIANISM AND OPEN THEISM

The critical point that divides Reformation Arminianism and open theism is not theological, but epistemological. Their primary difference resides in their contrasting opinions on the scope of epistemology; namely whether libertarian free choices are proper objects of knowledge. Reformation Arminianism accepts the principle that they are proper objects of knowledge. This supposition is the basis of its affirmation of exhaustive foreknowledge and its use of timeless divine knowledge to resolve the tension between divine foreknowledge and future libertarian choices. If Reformation Arminianism rejected future libertarian choices as proper objects of knowledge, then it would also reject God's foreknowledge of these and the timeless theory of God's knowledge as the solution to the foreknowledge-freedom dilemma. Indeed, if future libertarian choices are rejected as objects of knowledge, then a foreknowledge-freedom dilemma does not exist because foreknowledge of libertarian choices is impossible. However, because Reformation Arminianism affirms that future libertarian choices are cognizable, it can use the theory of timelessness to affirm that God foreknows those choices and that God's foreknowledge of those choices does not mitigate their contingent nature.

Open theism denies that future libertarian choices are proper objects of knowledge. As a consequence, it rejects timeless divine knowledge as a way to resolve the foreknowledge-freedom problem. The adoption of the principle that future libertarian choices are unknowable necessarily leads to the conclusion that the future is open, at least in so far as the future pertains to libertarian choices.

While the epistemological difference is not the only point of divergence between these two positions, it is the significant one in this debate. For instance, they posit differing theories regarding God's relationship to time—i.e. temporal versus atemporal. Nevertheless and without diminishing the importance of other variations, the primary theological controversy in this discussion has been the nature and scope of God's knowledge. Reformation Arminianism accepts future libertarian free choices as proper objects of

³⁰ Sanders, *The God Who Risks* 199.

knowledge and, therefore, knowledge of these is entailed in God's omniscience. Open theism rejects future libertarian free choices as proper objects of knowledge and, accordingly, it does not include these in God's omniscience.

The epistemological disagreement is secondary to the theological agreement, because the concept of libertarian freedom is derivative from the more fundamental theological issue of God's relationship to creation. The theological theory of the mode of divine knowledge gets to the root difference between the traditional theological trajectories of Calvinism and Arminianism. Calvinism affirms that God knows because he foreordains events, including those events deriving from human freedom. Arminianism affirms that God knows events deriving from human freedom because they occur. In other words, God's knowledge in Calvinism is not consequential to the event, but to the divine will. Arminianism and open theism affirm that God's knowledge is consequent to historical events. Thus, they both represent what is often called relational theism, according to which God's knowledge and interaction with creation are dynamic and not the products of the unfolding of a divine decree. The agreement on the mode of divine knowledge reflects their shared commitment to relational theism. God's knowledge is consequential, whether God sees timelessly as in Picirilli's Reformation Arminianism or temporally as in open theism. The disagreement over whether future libertarian choices are proper objects of knowledge is subordinate to their more fundamental agreement on the nature of God's relationship to human beings with libertarian freedom.

V. THE ECUMENICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THEOLOGICAL CONTINUITY AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISCONTINUITY BETWEEN REFORMATION ARMINIANISM AND OPEN THEISM

If we grant, for purposes of developing implications, the validity of the argument that open theism stands in fundamental theological continuity with Reformation Arminianism, at least two responses are possible. One could determine that since the theories of God's relation to creation taught by open theism are also present in Arminian theology, neither of them should be considered as valid forms of evangelical theology. This option may be improbable, but it should not be discounted as rhetorical obscurantism. The reason for this is that although Reformed (and Arminian) theologians often insist that their criticisms of open theism are not at the same time implicit criticisms of Arminianism, other scholars who are not entangled in this controversy do in fact locate open theism within the Arminian tradition.³¹ If these

³¹ Ware carefully notes that his criticisms of open theism in no way apply to Arminianism (Ware, "Rejoinder to Replies by Clark H. Pinnock, John Sanders, and Gregory A. Boyd," *JETS* 45 [2002] 248–49). Yet ironically, Ware insists that all providence-foreknowledge-human freedom models that include libertarian freedom entail a risk-taking God and detract from the glory of God (Ware, *God's Lesser Glory* 48 and 226). It seems that he is willing to fellowship with Arminians who are blind to the implications of their theology, but not with open theists who have drawn

latter scholars are correct, and the argument presented here suggests that they are, then criticisms of the one do apply to the other. Although it would be unfortunate, recognition of this could further fracture evangelicalism.

However, an alternative, and one that is ecumenical in nature, is also possible. The case presented here that open theism and Arminianism share fundamentally compatible theologies of the mode of divine knowledge and diverge on a secondary issue of whether future libertarian choices are proper objects of knowledge promises to promote more civility and unity between the differing groups. For example, Bruce Ware is certainly correct that the open theist rejection of exhaustive divine foreknowledge is inconsistent with the traditional Arminian doctrine of foreknowledge.³² Yet, despite this they share the same theory of the nature of God's knowledge. Additionally, the doctrine of foreknowledge is not at the heart of either open theism or traditional Arminianism. More essentially, they both affirm that God's relation to creation is contingent to some degree on human reciprocation to divine initiative. I maintain that this essential theological unity can and should mitigate descriptions of them as opposed theological trajectories and foster a sense of kinship among the differing theological parties.

VI. CONCLUSION

Reformation Arminianism and open theism bear identical theories of the mode of divine knowledge. Reformation Arminianism's affirmation of and open theism's rejection of divine foreknowledge of future libertarian choices stems from an epistemological disagreement over whether future libertarian choices are proper objects of knowledge; hence, it is not at root a theological disagreement. Moreover, their epistemological disagreement is secondary to their more fundamental theological agreement regarding the mode of divine knowledge. It is so because the disparity over whether libertarian choices can be known is held within their more basic commitment to relational theism. Their continuity on the mode of divine knowledge means that open theism is neither a radical new theology nor a radical departure from traditional Arminian theology, but rather stands in theological continuity with the Arminian tradition. The theological continuity between them provides a basis for ecumenical rapprochement among the disputing groups within evangelicalism that already accept Arminianism as a viable form of evangelical theology.

the appropriate conclusions. In contrast, Roger E. Olson points out that the criticisms of open theism are often the same traditional Reformed arguments against Arminianism (Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002] 196).

³² Ware, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries" 194.