

Can God Know the Future – and Share his Knowledge with Human Beings?

An Open and Relational Account of Prophecy

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I. Introduction

This article will evaluate whether it is logically possible and plausible for a theist to claim that God provides *believers* with knowledge about the future. For this, it is necessary to discuss whether it is logically possible for *God* to partially or exhaustively know the future and whether it is plausible to believe that God intervenes in history in order to provide us with such knowledge. Only if these questions can be positively answered, a traditional account of prophecy can be upheld. As will be shown, even free will theists are able to maintain traditional prophecy, however with certain limitations.

Before dealing with the subject matter, it is advisable to provide the reader with some methodological preliminaries. Theologians sometimes dare to make positive statements about God. Even those who try to maintain God's incomprehensibility make some positive statements about God's relationship to creation, or at least about the relationship of creation to the divine. The platonic intuition that human reason participates – or is an instantiation of – divine universal reason leads some theologians to attribute human concepts to God. If it is true that humanity is created in God's image, there must be some similarity between creator and creature, and, if one is optimistic about human cognitive powers, this similarity can be expressed in propositions with a truth claim. Of course, every model of God and his relationship to the world must be thought of as preliminary: We cannot have ultimate knowledge about the divine, since this would either require a perspective outside of God or God would need to provide us with infallible knowledge. The former is impossible, and the latter leads to a circular argument: How do we know that our knowledge about God truly comes from God and is not just an illusion or deceit?

Assume the predicate 'being a person' can be univocally attributed to God. This does certainly not imply that God is a created or spatio-temporal being. The concept 'person' does not require possessing a body or having a first moment of existence. Personhood only requires being a rational agent with a first-

person-perspective.¹ An agent is defined as a subject of action, who has the power to willingly and intentionally bring about certain states of affairs. It is disputed whether free will is a necessary attribute of personhood, but even if it is not, God is usually defined in an Anselmian tradition as a person with all kinds of great-making attributes, including omnipotence, omniscience, rational agency, and absolute freedom.²

II. God's Foreknowledge

It seems to be obvious that an omnipotent and omniscient God knows everything, including the future. However, many philosophers and theologians, especially within a theological paradigm called 'open theism,' have disputed this claim, notably without compromising God's great-making attributes. This is the argument they bring forth: God created beings with the power to act according to or against his will; possessing such a power requires that the future does not (yet) exist; if the future does not exist, propositions about the future do not possess a truth value; thus, not even an omniscient being can know the truth value of a proposition about the future.³

An often-heard reply by classical theists to this kind of argument emphasizes God's timelessness: If God is outside of time, he is not in a position to know past or future, God simply knows everything that happens in the 4-dimensional cosmos, since he exists eternally simultaneous to every instance of creation.⁴ Personal theists (among those open theists as a subset) reject this solution to the problem of reconciling divine omniscience and human freedom, because personhood and agency, they argue, is incompatible with immutability.⁵ Open

¹ Cf. LYNNE RUDDER BAKER, "First-Personal Aspects of Agency," *Metaphilosophy* 42, no. 1–2 (2011), 1–16, here 4: "[I]t is definitive of persons that they have first-person perspectives essentially. ['Robust' persons] have the conceptual ability to think of [them]selves without the use of any name, description or other third-person referring device." Baker even suggests that only agency, but not *rational* agency is an essential attribute of persons: "On the one hand, all persons are agents, but not all agents (e. g., chimpanzees, dogs) are persons; on the other hand, all rational and moral agents are persons, but not all persons (e. g., human infants) are rational and moral agents."

² Cf. RICHARD SWINBURNE, *The Existence of God*, Revised Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 7: I take the proposition 'God exists' to be logically equivalent to 'there exists necessarily a person without a body (i. e., a spirit) who necessarily is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good and the creator of all things.'

³ Cf. DALE TUGGY, "Three Roads to Open Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (2007), 28–51.

⁴ Cf. ELEONORE STUMP and NORMAN KRETZMANN, "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78, no. 8 (1981), 429–458.

⁵ JOHN LUCAS, *The Future: An Essay on God, Temporality, and Truth* (New York: Blackwell, 1989), 213: "If we are to characterize God at all, we must say that He is personal, and if personal then temporal, and if temporal then in some sense in time, not outside it."

theists go even further and reject that 4-dimensionalism is at all compatible with libertarian free will, i.e. free will with the power to do otherwise.⁶ Even if their counterarguments fail, there is another great worry about divine timelessness, namely that God acquiring all of contingent facts at once implies at least one change in God. Even if this ‘receptive eternalism’ can be defended, a relatively timeless God would still not be able to *react* to contingent facts such as petitionary prayers.⁷

Open theists and most personal theists claim that God is temporal and not outside of time, but they also do not claim that God is ‘in time’ in the sense that God is bound by creaturely time. God’s time is a measure of change in God, and only relates to physical time. When God creates, he is absolutely free in how to relate himself to the world. He can decide to create a deterministic world without free will and know in a (divine) instance everything that has happened within billions of (worldly) years. He can also decide to create an indeterministic world with chance events, or even an indeterministic world not only with chance, but also with free agents who control a tiny portion of indeterminate events.

In this model of God-world-relation, God successively acquires information about the progression of creation. God does possess foreknowledge, but not exhaustive foreknowledge: He knows the future to the extent it is determined by natural laws and does not know the future to the extent it depends on chance or free agency. But how much foreknowledge does that leave to God? Most physicists favor the theory of decoherence regarding the relationship between classical mechanics and quantum mechanics, according to which randomness plays almost no role in macroscopic events.⁸ If this is true, randomness might impair God’s foreknowledge in the first seconds after the big bang or in artificially set-up quantum experiments, but not necessarily regarding the functionality of organisms, weather events or planetary movements. Free will is more crucial, but also has less impact on God’s foreknowledge than we might expect. Psychological research affirms what most people understand by introspection: that we are unfree in much of our behavior, often controlled by our super-ego

⁶ Cf. ALAN RHODA, “The Philosophical Case for Open Theism,” *Philosophia* 35, no. 3–4 (2007), 301–311.

⁷ Cf. LINDA ZAGZEBSKI, “Eternity and Fatalism,” in *God, Eternity, and Time*, eds. EDMUND RUNGALDIER and CHRISTIAN TAPP (Farnham: Ashgate 2011), 65–80; JOHANNES GRÖSSL, “Schöpfung, Ewigkeit und Allwissenheit – eine Antwort auf Thomas Schärfl,” *Theologie und Philosophie* 89, no. 2 (2014), 200–214.

⁸ HUBERT Z. WOJCIECH, “Decoherence and the Transition from Quantum to Classical – Revisited,” in *Quantum Decoherence: Poincaré Seminar 2005*, eds. BERTRAND DUPLANTIER, JEAN-MICHEL RAIMOND, and VINCENT RIVASSEAU (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2007), 1–31; ANNA IJJAS, *Der Alte mit dem Würfel. Ein Beitrag zur Metaphysik der Quantenmechanik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 78–82.

(our upbringing and culture), our habits, our drives, our neuroses.⁹ If we are free, we are very *rarely* free.¹⁰ If this is true, free agency only partially impairs God's foreknowledge. God might know what I am having for dinner tomorrow, he might know that I will not commit murder within the next weeks, but he might not know what kind of person I will be ten years from now. Such a restrictive account of free will enables a gradual, non-exhaustive view of divine foreknowledge, through which a traditional interpretation of prophecy as disclosure of divine foreknowledge to creatures can be maintained.

III. Prophecy as Disclosure of Foreknowledge

A prophet is a person with a special relationship to God. Prophets claim to have received direct knowledge or inspiration from God or were given special powers by God which give them a privileged access to religious and ethical truths or even facts about the world.¹¹ Some theists defend an even stronger account of prophecy and claim that God speaks through prophets. Often, prophecies aim to the future, connected with a request for a change of one's conduct of life.¹² Thus, prophecy cannot be reduced to, but includes foreknowledge of the future. The prophet Daniel ascribes anyone's ability to predict the future to God's act of making things known: "[T]here is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days" (Dan 2:28). According to biblical narratives, God knows the character, abilities and fate of certain persons even before they were born: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5). In psalms and wisdom-literature this characterization is especially emphasized. One sentence in Psalm 139 is often recited: "Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, o Lord, You know it all" (Ps 139:4). When it comes to Christ's salvific work in Christianity, the life and death of Christ, even specific details, are regarded as

⁹ Cf. ROY BAUMEISTER, "Free Will in Scientific Psychology," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3, no. 1 (2008), 14–19; WOLFGANG TRESS and RUDOLF HEINZ (eds.), *Willensfreiheit zwischen Philosophie, Psychoanalyse und Neurobiologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

¹⁰ Van Inwagen and Robert Kane defend a restrictive account of libertarianism: Only a small fraction of our decisions is genuinely free. According to Van Inwagen, these are instances with closely balanced alternatives, according to Kane these are moral dilemmas or, what he calls, character-forming actions. Cf. PETER VAN INWAGEN, "When is the Will Free?," *Philosophical Perspectives* 3 (1989), 399–422; ROBERT KANE, *Free Will and Values* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985).

¹¹ Both in Judaism and Islam, a prophet (*nabi*) is considered to be a receiver of divine revelation.

¹² Cf. BÄRBEL BEINHAUER-KÖHLER, "Prophet / Prophetin / Prophetie – Religionswissenschaftlich," in *GGG*⁴, vol. 6 (2003), 1692–1694.

predicted by prophets: “But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:18).

One common way to give an alternative explanation of predictive prophecy is by referring to retrospective theologizing: Knowledge of the future is attributed to a prophet at a time when this future has already taken place.¹³ For an editor such as Esra or the evangelists, it was easy to add prophetic knowledge to a historical figure, such as knowledge about the upcoming Babylonian Exile in the Old Testament or the upcoming destruction of the Temple in the New Testament.¹⁴ This is why predictions of the future are not used anymore as evidence for the truth of a revelation, as defended by the First Vatican Council.¹⁵ But arguments saying that all predictions of the future must be reduced the retrospective theologizing are usually based on the assumption that predictive prophecy is impossible, similar to contemporary arguments against miracles, which merely presuppose a naturalistic worldview and derive from this that an abrogation of natural laws is impossible.¹⁶

As C. Stephen Evans argues in his works on the concept of revelation, the liberal attempt to reduce revelation to a communicative paradigm fails.¹⁷ Similarly, in Catholic theology it becomes more and more clear that *Dei Verbum* (2nd Vatican Council) is not a complete paradigm shift from *Dei Filius* (1st Vatican Council), but still defends what can be called ‘propositional revelation.’¹⁸ Interventionists, who believe that God can unilaterally intervene in the natural order of events, argue that God can simply give information to a human being, as long as this does not undermine the freedom and autonomy of the human being. This limits God to only give information to those who have already come to faith, freely decided to be messengers of God, and are able to deal with the

¹³ A pre-dated prediction of an event that has already happened is, according to exegetes, common to biblical writings; it is called *vaticinium ex eventu*.

¹⁴ A common example is the prediction of the destruction of the Temple in gospels that were written after the Siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

¹⁵ Cf. “Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, 1870,” in NORMAN TANNER, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), Vol. 2, 804–811; PETER HÜNERMANN (ed.), *Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2017), 3000–3045.

¹⁶ Cf. WILLIAM J. ABRAHAM, *Divine Agency and Divine Action: Vol. I: Exploring and Evaluating the Debate* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); KEITH WARD, *Divine Action: Examining God’s Role in an Open and Emergent Universe* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2007); CRAIG KEENER, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Account* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 83–208.

¹⁷ C. STEPHEN EVANS, “Faith and Revelation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. WILLIAM J. WAINWRIGHT (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 323–343.

¹⁸ See GERALD O’COLLINS and MARIO FARRUGIA, *Catholicism: The Story of Catholic Christianity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 102–103.

received information. But even a non-interventionist can defend traditional prophecy by meticulous fine-tuning: Possibly, God has built a special mechanism into the natural laws so that certain human beings come to know certain ideas at a certain time in history – a mechanism which cannot be explained naturalistically, but also may not be distinguishable from complex randomness.¹⁹

In the second section of this paper, it was shown that a personal God can have some knowledge about the future, even if the future is *ontically open*²⁰ due to creaturely free will. Even if the future is indeterminate, God always knows the set of all possible futures. As argued above, the less free our wills are and the less macroscopic random events happen, the more God knows about the future. One can imagine God's foreknowledge as a branching-tree of possible futures. Open theists argue that God knows the future not only insofar as it is determinate, but also when it comes to facts that are true in all possible futures and, given interventionism, when it comes to facts that God decides in advance to bring about.²¹

This model can be exemplified by referring to the Babylonian exile. Prophets before the exile predicted that something bad would happen if people did not repent their sins or if the leaders did not stop blasphemy or establish social justice. For instance, pointing at the prophecies of *Amos*, before the Northern Empire fell in 722 the political situation was such that an omniscient observer might have known that in all possible futures the empire will be conquered by the more powerful empire, which was at that time the Assyrians. Maybe the situation was so obvious that intelligent and knowledgeable persons did not require divinatory practices in order to obtain this knowledge; if these people were also morally outstanding and highly courageous, they did not even need divine motivation to preach their warning to the public, even if this leads to

¹⁹ Cf. JOHANNES GRÖSSL, "Ewige Kontingenzpläne – Gottes Handeln in der Welt eternalistisch gedacht," *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 136, no. 4 (2014), 405–422; *ibid.*, "Open Theism," in *Oxford Special Divine Action Encyclopedia*, <https://sda.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/sda#!/themes/article/212> (last visited Sep 3, 2018).

²⁰ Cf. ALAN RHODA, "The Fivefold Openness of the Future," in *God in an Open Universe: Science, Metaphysics, and Open Theism*, eds. WILLIAM HASKER, THOMAS JAY OORD, and DEAN ZIMMERMAN (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 69–93. Ontic openness is distinguished from epistemic openness: In the former, a presentist or growing-block-theoretic model of space-time is adopted, according to which only the present (or the past and the present) exist. Epistemic openness on the other hand only describes the epistemic inaccessibility of the future.

²¹ GREGORY BOYD, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 30: "[God] foreknows that certain things are going to take place because he knows his own purpose and intention to bring these events about"; JOHN SANDERS, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 132: "Sometimes God simply discloses what God is going to do irrespectively of creaturely decision. God can bring some things about on his own if he decides to do so [...]. But this does not require foreknowledge, only the ability to do it."

unfavorable personal consequences. However, it is more likely that the political situation was too complex for an ordinary human being to make accurate predictions. In order to accurately predict the behavior of political leaders, one needs to know their upbringing, their culture, their character, their morality, their range of free will. Only an omniscient observer knows whether a certain event (such as the fall of the Northern Empire) comes to pass in all possible futures or whether it depends on random events or free choices of particular individuals.

Is there a logical problem with God disclosing *some* of his foreknowledge to us? If one rules out that God can have foreknowledge of free human actions, but only of natural events and unfree human actions, disclosing such foreknowledge would not lead to a causal-temporal paradox. If, however, God had such foreknowledge of free human actions and, for example, could tell me today that my best friend would freely decide to murder me tomorrow, I could change the circumstances of his decision or even act such that he is not capable of making this decision. I would do this in response to God's disclosing to me foreknowledge about a murder that never takes place. If I prevent the murder, there is nothing for God to know, and thus nothing for him to tell me, and thus no reason for me to prevent the murder. There is a theoretical way out of this paradox, but it requires the assumption that God possesses knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom, so called *middle knowledge*.²² There are, however, good reasons to believe that middle knowledge is not compatible with a libertarian account of free will, at least if one adheres to the important philosophical principle that truth supervenes on being.²³

Why is libertarian free will important? Most libertarians argue that only if we possess the power to do otherwise, can we be morally responsible for our actions. Libertarian theists often add three arguments based on sin, theodicy and love: (1) God cannot be responsible for sin; if God created beings without libertarian free will, possessing exhaustive foreknowledge of all of their future actions, God would be ultimately responsible for sin; thus, God created beings with libertarian free will. (2) God is not responsible for gratuitous evil; there is a

²² THOMAS FLINT, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998). Middle knowledge is a label of God's knowledge, logically independent of creation, of the free decisions that possibly existing beings would make in any possible set of circumstances.

²³ Cf. WILLIAM HASKER, "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge," *Noûs* 20, no. 4 (1986), 545–557; KEN PERSZYK (ed.), *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Other attempts to save Molinism include the rejection of certain metaphysical transfer principles or the adoption of a non-libertarian concept of free will, in the opinion of the author with great ontological or ethical costs; cf. CHRISTOPH JÄGER, "Molina on Foreknowledge and Transfer of Necessities," in *God, Eternity, and Time*, eds. CHRISTIAN TAPP and EDMUND RUNGGLADIER (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 81–96.

huge amount of suffering and evil in this world; only a free will theodicy provides adequate ways to show how the existence of a benevolent and omnipotent God can be reconciled with the amount of suffering and evil in this world; thus, God created beings with libertarian free will. (3) God is love, which means that God strives for loving relationships; genuine love requires the power to engage in or reject the offer of a loving relationship by at least one side; thus, God strives for creating a world with libertarian free will.

The argument why libertarian free will is assumed to be incompatible with exhaustive divine foreknowledge is based on Peter van Inwagen's famous consequence argument about the incompatibility of determinism and free will.²⁴ This argument can be modified to show that also God's foreknowledge is incompatible with free will:

- (1) No one has power over God's past knowledge about future actions.
- (2) It is necessary that if God has known that some future action will occur, it will occur.
- (3) If God had knowledge about a future action, no one has the power over this action.²⁵

From this argument follows that if God has exhaustive foreknowledge about all actions, no one has power over any of her actions. Thus, there would be no libertarian free will, no power to do otherwise. Accordingly, often-heard arguments that if someone acted differently, God's past foreknowledge would also have been different, fail – because they presume that we could have power over past state-of-affairs. If we had such a power (as Ockhamists claim²⁶), logical circles and paradoxes could again occur: God could prevent us from doing something based on his foreknowledge, which would render his foreknowledge different and preclude God from preventing us from performing our original action. To avoid such a circle, here again Molinism would be the only way out, but, as argued above, with severe ontological consequences.

²⁴ PETER VAN INWAGEN, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

²⁵ Cf. LINDA ZAGZEBSKI, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). This argument is only valid if a transfer principle with the no-choice operator is accepted: If no one has a choice about A, and if A necessarily implies B, then no one has a choice about B. For a defense of this intuitively plausible principle see TIMOTHY O'CONNOR, "On the Transfer of Necessity," *Noûs* 27, no. 2 (1993), 204–218.

²⁶ Cf. ALFRED FREDDOSO, "Accidental Necessity and Logical Determinism," *Journal of Philosophy* 80, no. 5 (1983), 257–278, here 257–258; EDDY M. ZEMACH and DAVID WIDERKER, "Facts, Freedom, and Foreknowledge," *Religious Studies* 23, no. 1 (1987), 19–28.

IV. Prophecy as Divine Guidance

Libertarian free will and an open view of God is rejected by many theists because they are not comfortable with God taking a risk with creation.²⁷ The assumption that God not only knows the future but can ultimately guarantee that everything will be good in the end gives great comfort to believers. The disputed question is whether divine sovereignty can be reconciled with divine openness. If God created beings with libertarian free will, they could eventually all reject God and thus render his creation a failure.²⁸ However, if God knew that this risk was logically unavoidable, this does not threaten his sovereignty, as long as God freely decided to create a world with free creatures.²⁹ Furthermore, if the temporal duration of creation is limited, free will is also limited, which means that there will be a time when no free beings exist anymore in this physical universe. Science confirms this: The second law of thermodynamics guarantees that the entropy of an isolated system always increases; thus, ultimately, all complexity including intelligent lifeforms will come to an end (unless God intervenes and changes the natural laws). Thus, God's will cannot be ultimately thwarted by creation.

The idea of providence in an open future is not determinism but rather divine guidance. If God knows all possible futures and the scope of creaturely free will, he can assist us by making it more likely that we follow a path that increases our chance for eternal loving community with God. Since private decisions can have large effects on society, God can also work through freely obedient human beings to increase other people's chances for eternal loving community with God, and eventually, in long-term, make the world a better place. John Sanders writes:

God graciously works with us, being creatively resourceful, to achieve his overall project of establishing loving relationships with significant others. God is yet working with us to open up new possibilities for the future. God faithfully works toward his overarching goals while remaining flexible as to how he brings these about.³⁰

If God knows all possible future histories and all moments in which future agent can make free decisions (but not the outcomes of these decisions), one is justified to say that God has a flexible plan about the future: God can evaluate

²⁷ Cf. MILLARD ERICKSON, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It? The Current Controversy Over Divine Foreknowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003); JOHN M. FRAME, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2001).

²⁸ JOHANNES GRÖSSL and LEIGH VICENS, "Closing the Door on Limited-Risk Open Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 31, no. 4 (2014), 475–485.

²⁹ Cf. JOHN SANDERS, *The God Who Risks*, 243: "If God wants a world in which the possibility exists that God may not get everything he wants, then in an ultimate sense the divine will is not thwarted."

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 248.

each possible future history and prioritize certain possible futures above others. There might be one or several most favorable paths, many less favorable paths, and quite some unfavorable paths. Sanders writes that “God has a goal for our lives, but there are numerous open routes to its achievement.”³¹ This should hold for the whole history of humanity, too. God can reduce the risk of creation if he assists us in decisions that have severe effects on our lives or on the societies we live in. However, if God has given us true autonomy and responsibility, he cannot and does not want to manipulate us, not even – as process theologians sometimes put it – by “luring us” towards the right decision. From a libertarian perspective, which I myself find most compelling, there must be three restrictions on divine guidance: First, in order to respect our freedom, God will not assist us if we do not want his aid. Second, in order to respect our moral responsibility, God will not assist us in decisions in which we have (or could have³²) the power to properly evaluate the outcomes of possible courses of action ourselves. Third, to guarantee divine hiddenness, which is important to maintain our freedom *not* to believe,³³ it is important that God’s help remains somewhat ambiguous, which means that we can never be sure whether a certain occurrence of divine inspiration is authentic.³⁴

There is still a difference between divine guidance and prophecy. Divine guidance is foremost personal: God helps with decisions about one’s own life, about one’s own personal choices. However, people sometimes find themselves in situations to make a choice whether to publicly criticize other people, the government, or the society. Especially in authoritarian systems this decision can have enormous negative personal consequences; even in liberal democracies, some publicly-held opinions can result in social exclusion and career disadvantages. In such choice situations, an evaluation of all possible consequences is nearly impossible: A person can have herself and her family killed without

³¹ Ibid., 286.

³² The addition that God will not assist us in decisions, in which we *could* have the power to properly evaluate the outcomes of possible courses of action, is important to maintain moral responsibility. According to the ethical theory of ‘moral tracing,’ we are also responsible for the failed opportunities resulting from culpable ignorance. Cf. HOLLY SMITH, “Culpable ignorance,” *The Philosophical Review* 92, no. 4 (1983), 543–571. For example, if I don’t make a decision to save energy based on my ignorance about the effects on climate change although this knowledge is widely accessible and sufficiently credible, God would undermine my moral responsibility in helping me make this decision. Furthermore, people are morally responsible for other people’s ignorance, e.g., parents or politicians about the ignorance of children or citizens. Here, too, a divine intervention would undermine moral autonomy.

³³ We can only freely believe in God if we are also free not to believe in God, which requires the vital option of a non-irrational atheism. This argument is based on John Hick’s *cognitive distance argument* in theodicy: cf. JOHN HICK, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985), 43.

³⁴ SANDERS, *The God Who Risks*, 287: “Christians should not attempt to read all circumstances as signs of God’s will for their lives. [...] In the risk model it is possible to mistake a divine action and misconstrue guidance.”

any positive consequences; one could start a civil war with thousands of dead innocent people; or one could initialize a process that leads to a better society. A prophet is a person who brought such a decision before God in prayer (possibly such as Jesus in Gethsemane) or even was inspired by God to make such a decision (possibly such as Abraham in Ur or Mohammed on Jabal an-Nour) or teach others to make adequate decisions. Prophets believe that their actions and words are supported or even wanted by God. They sometimes believe that God has given them partial knowledge about the future, as much as they need to know to make adequate decisions themselves and, even more importantly, to convince others to make the right decision. This partial knowledge need not be about future contingent free actions (which, as argued above, is impossible even for God to possess), but about certain events that take place in all or some possible future histories.

V. Conclusion

Even in free will-theism there is a way to reconcile traditional prophecy as revealing true propositions about the future with modern accounts of prophecy as divine inspiration and guidance. Free will theists can presume that God has partial knowledge about the future and evaluate possible future histories. Free will theists can be moderate interventionists who believe that God can covertly aid believers with major decisions and that he can strengthen their conviction that a certain future event will or will not take place.

The aim of such theological speculation about foreknowledge and prophecy is to provide logically coherent models of God's nature and the God-world-relationship which are also adequate for spiritual life. If one wants to avoid the fundamentalist dangers of fideism, one needs to claim that even God is bound by universal logical laws and that his omnipotence is thus severely limited: If God created free and autonomous beings, he can neither exhaustively know nor guarantee the future, which means that he must take risks in creation. Enriching the open-theistic paradigm with a theory of prophecy may help to understand how a sovereign God may limit the creational risk and exercise "general" instead of "specific" providence.³⁵

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 224–229.