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AN ACTUAL-SEQUENCE THEOLOGY

There may be outward impediments even whilst [an agent] is deliberating, as a man deliberates whether he shall play at tennis, and at the same time the door of the tennis court is fast locked against him

Bishop Bramhall, *Defense of True Liberty*

INTRODUCTION: PERFECT BEING THEOLOGY

In perfect being theology (PBT), God is understood as having a set of attributes—“perfections”, essentially. If an individual possesses an “essential attribute *A*”, then anyone who does not, or would not, possess *A* is not identical to that individual. These typically are thought to include creating the universe, eternity (either sempiternality or atemporality), necessary existence, omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection (among others). One of the big challenges for PBT is to give plausible accounts of these divine attributes, with reference to which they could fit together coherently as a package.

Some difficulties surround God’s essential omniscience, and the focus in my paper will primarily (although not exclusively) be on this attribute, rather than other divine perfections (which come with puzzles of their own). If God is sempiternal (everlasting) and omniscient, presumably He can know in advance what we will do in any circumstance; but if so, how can we be free in our choices and actions? If we are not free, how could we freely accept God’s grace or freely reject it? If we are mere automata, how are our lives

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meaningful, and why would God choose *this* kind of world, given that He must create the best of all possible worlds (BPW), if there is one?

It is also puzzling how ours could be the BPW, given the nature and extent of evil and suffering. An important answer is that God had to create free creatures who could have avoided evil but nevertheless did not, where these free actions could not have been known in advance by anyone, including God. Or perhaps the evils, although known in advance, could not have been prevented without a significant cost to the possibility of a coherent set of divine attributes. If we are not free, how can we explain the evil in our world? Further, how is it fair to consign a person to Hell, if they couldn't have behaved differently?

Because of these questions (and more), most theologians and philosophers of religion who wish to defend PBT maintain that human beings must be free in the sense that involves the freedom to choose and do otherwise, and thus (according to them) implies causal indeterminism. The proponents of PBT must find a way to reconcile God's omniscience with human freedom.

In this paper my project is to explore (in a preliminary way) the possibility of a PBT that does without human freedom to choose and do otherwise. The keystone of an actual-sequence theology is a pair of claims. The first is that our freedom need not involve access to alternative possibilities with respect to choice and action. One might be free in the sense of acting freely, without being free to choose and do otherwise. The second is that this freedom is the *only* freedom required by PBT. I will seek to defend an actual-sequence PBT.

As I develop my defense of the coherence of an actual-sequence PBT, I will give an account of God's foreknowledge of future contingent truths involving free human actions in an indeterministic world. In so doing, I will contrast my approach both with those who hold that God possesses *comprehensive* foreknowledge (including foreknowledge of all such truths), and Open Theists, most notably William Hasker, who argue that God cannot have *any* knowledge of future contingent truths involving the free actions of human beings in an indeterministic world. I will stake out a new view in between these two extremes.

THE CHALLENGES FROM CAUSAL DETERMINISM

Some have maintained that the only way God could know about the future actions of human beings is if causal determinism were to obtain (BYERLY 2014). We will return to this point below. In any case, and apart from this specific view, it might be that God created a causally deterministic world. We cannot (at this point in the development of science) be sure that this view about the natural world is false.

Although the main worry about causal determinism pertains to freedom, I start with a concern about evil. (I employ the term ‘evil’ broadly to include not just moral evils, but suffering and death as well.) Some have thought it highly problematic that God created a *causally deterministic* world, because He would then be the author (or initial causal source) of all evil. How, then, could God be morally perfect? On the contrary, such a God would seem to be very bad. Here, “being the creator of the universe” and “being morally perfect” collide, given causal determinism. Note that the perfections in question are not *in themselves* inconsistent, but they might be, given causal determinism. It may turn out that PBT requires indeterminism, but let us think a bit more carefully about this.

Assuming causal determinism, God would indeed be the initial causal source of all evil. Let us simply assume two claims that are not uncontroversial: that causation is transitive and that “voluntariness does not negate causation”. The claim that voluntariness does negate causation was defended by Hart and Honoré in their famous book, *Causation in the Law* (1978). It holds that if some event causes a free agent to deliberate and choose to do *X*, the event (as opposed to the free action) does not cause *X* or its consequences. On this view, causation is not transmitted across voluntary action. If one were to agree with Hart and Honoré here, or deny transitivity, one could block the “author of all evil” worry. Transitivity of causation, however, is plausible, and even if Hart and Honoré were correct (which is not at all evident), this would only apply to “moral evils”, i.e., those caused by wrong actions of free agents. There are also many “natural evils”.

I believe that there is a more promising strategy available for assuaging the worry about authorship of evil. The first step is to distinguish *causal* from *moral* responsibility. Under the assumptions accepted here, God would indeed be causally responsible for all evil. But would He thereby be morally responsible for it? Causal responsibility clearly does not entail moral responsibility. It is plausible, however, that on the assumption of causal deter-

minism, God is indeed morally responsible for all evil, insofar as He has freely created what He takes to be the BPW, and thus freely and (perhaps) knowingly caused all evil.

The second step is to distinguish moral responsibility from (say) blameworthiness. As I see it, moral responsibility is the “gateway” to a range of moral judgments (and attitudes), including blameworthiness. It does not, however, *in itself* imply any such judgments or attitudes. The question then is whether God is blameworthy for causing all evil. At best, “yes” would be controversial, and thus the worry cannot be invoked as an obviously decisive objection to the coherence of PBT, on the assumption of causal determinism. After all, a whole suite of considerations is typically invoked in attempts to provide theodicies (responses to the problem of evil), and these are available just as much to a proponent of a deterministic theodicy as to a proponent of an indeterministic one (BYERLY 2017).

These theodicies contend that, despite initial appearances, this is indeed the best of all possible worlds (BPW), or perhaps the best of all possible worlds logically possible for God to have created. Given this, God would not be blameworthy for having created it, assuming that the existence of some (minimally decent) world is better than none. Of course, we cannot sort through and evaluate all these considerations and come to an all-things-considered judgment about the problem of evil, but we can note that it is simply not obvious that God is blameworthy for creating our world, even with all its heartbreak.

CAUSAL DETERMINISM AS RULING OUT HUMAN FREEDOM

Some will point out that at least some element—typically a central element—of the “standard” theodicies presupposes human freedom, and that causal determinism threatens such freedom. So if God had created a causally deterministic universe, and such determinism does indeed rule out the relevant kind of freedom, it would not have been the BPW. We can thus conclude that the universe is causally indeterministic.

This strategy is problematic in various ways. Note, first, that it would imply that the theoretical physicists never will be able to establish a certain truth about the physical world, and that we know this from our armchairs, as it were, or perhaps from our comfortable benches in church. We would have

a decisive *a priori* refutation of causal determinism, which just seems very intellectually unappealing.

It is, however, not uncontroversial that causal determinism rules out human freedom. As pointed out above, the almost universal assumption of theists is that human beings must have freedom in the sense that involves freedom to choose and do otherwise. We might call this “alternative-possibilities freedom” or “regulative control”, and we will first consider the relationship between causal determinism and this kind of freedom.¹

ALTERNATIVE-POSSIBILITIES FREEDOM

Does causal determinism rule out freedom to choose and do otherwise? This is highly contentious (despite its acceptance by the majority of theists and, in general, those who have considered the relationship between God and human freedom), and, in my view, cannot simply be invoked as an obvious and indisputable strike against a deterministic PBT. Given this, a causally deterministic PBT remains an open possibility.

Consider (briefly and in simplified form) the “Consequence Argument” for the incompatibility of causal determinism and freedom to do otherwise.² We start by assuming causal determinism. Whatever else it implies, this doctrine implies that all events (after the initial event, if there is one) are caused, and that the total state of the universe at any time, together with the laws of nature, entails the total state of the universe at all subsequent times. (Over)simply put, causal determinism is universal causation plus entailment.

Suppose that some human being *A* were to do *X* at time *T*₂. We ask: Did *A* have it in their power, at or just before *T*₂, to refrain from doing *X* at *T*₂? We note that, given the implications of causal determinism, there is no possible world with the actual past (relative to *T*₂ or just before) and actual laws of nature in which *A* refrains from doing *X*. It follows that *A* cannot at *T*₂ refrain from doing *X* at *T*₂. This assumes, what is surely plausible, that it is a necessary condition of an agent’s being free relative to or “in” possible world *W* at some time *T* to do *Y* at *T* (or after) that there be a possible world with the same past relative to *T* as in *W* and the same laws as *W* in which *S*

¹ I introduce the term “regulative control” for alternative-possibilities freedom in FISCHER (1994, 135).

² Peter van Inwagen coined the name “Consequence Argument” in VAN INWAGEN (1983), in which he presented the argument in a particularly accessible way. For a precursor (in contemporary philosophy), see GINET (1966), further developed in GINET (1990).

does Y at T . This is a very rough and ready presentation of an argument that can be rendered more precise and defended.

“Classical Compatibilism”, the view that causal determinism is consistent with alternative-possibilities freedom, must reject the Consequence Argument. The various approaches to defending Classical Compatibilism are not obviously untenable, and this leaves open a deterministic PBT. The resistance of many theists to Classical Compatibilism, in its various forms, is not advantageous to their case—it makes their job much harder. If possible, though, it would be good not to have to hang our theological hats on the defensibility of classical compatibilism. It is thus prudent to consider another interpretation of the freedom possessed by human beings in the BPW, which also leads to the possibility of a deterministic PBT.

ACTUAL-SEQUENCE FREEDOM

There is a venerable tradition going back to Chrysippus (and his cheery dog running along on a long leash), going through Bishop Bramhall (in a passage not often noted, appearing as the epigraph to this paper) and John Locke, to the present, which holds that we can act freely without having access to relevant alternative possibilities. The contemporary philosopher Harry Frankfurt has offered a template for a kind of case in which it seems that an agent is acting freely, although she does not have the requisite sort of alternative possibilities of choice and action (FRANKFURT 1969). These have come to be called the “Frankfurt-Style Cases” (FSCs).³

The signature structure of these cases involves pre-emptive overdetermination; some failsafe device functions as a “counterfactual intervener” (or perhaps “counterfactual blocker”) that ensures a certain result but does not do so by playing any role in the unfolding sequence of actual events. The parade goes on, uninterrupted. Locke’s person in the locked room stays voluntarily, unaware of the fact that the door is locked. Bramhall’s person voluntarily fails to play tennis, unaware that the door to the court is locked. Frankfurt and his followers essentially brought the locked door into the mind.

The proper interpretation of the cases, and the issue of whether they succeed in their “mission” of refuting the principle that moral responsibility requires alternative possibilities, are highly contentious and vigorously disputed. I fully concede this, but at this point in the discussion I will accept

³ These cases have elicited great interest and have led to copious literature, too voluminous to detail here. For a start, see WIDERKER and MCKENNA (2003).

that the FSCs help to show that moral responsibility is a matter of the actual sequence and does not require access to alternative possibilities of choice and action. There are other considerations, besides the FSCs, that also support an actual-sequence approach.⁴ This all adds up to a strong (but, admittedly, not decisive) case for acting freely as the freedom-relevant component of moral responsibility.

We will accept this case here, as my point in this paper is not to add to or further defend it, but to explore the implications of accepting it. The point of my discussion in this paper is to see how far we can get in addressing certain *theological* issues, given acceptance of the actual-sequence view of the freedom implicated in moral responsibility. Notably, we would have a way of *bypassing* the Consequence Argument, because this argument shows (if sound) only that causal determinism is inconsistent with alternative-possibilities freedom (freedom to choose and do otherwise), *not* actual-sequence freedom (acting freely).

Different compatibilists give different accounts of “acting freely”, some involving a mesh between different “levels” or “sources” of preferences, and others requiring acting from a capacity for “reasons-responsiveness” (among other resources). Although nothing in what follows depends on adopting a particular account, I am partial to the last sort of approach, according to which an agent acts freely (exhibits “guidance control”) just in case they act from their own, suitably reasons-responsive mechanism. An individual can exhibit such control, I argue, in a causally deterministic world.⁵

Moral responsibility may not require the kind of freedom threatened by the Consequence Argument.⁶ This opens the possibility of another route to a deterministic PBT (as opposed to an approach that adopts Classical Compatibilism). God has to create the BPW, and it must contain individuals with freedom and moral responsibility. This does not, however, require that the world be causally indeterministic.

⁴ See (among others) FRANKFURT (2003).

⁵ I introduce the term “guidance control” in FISCHER (1994, 135), and I (with my co-author) argue that this sort of “actual-sequence” control is compatible with causal determinism in FISCHER and RAVIZZA (1998).

⁶ A more thorough defense of the compatibility of causal determinism and moral responsibility would address the “sourcehood” worry, based on the fact that, if causal determinism were true, there would be an external determining causal source of one’s behavior. A noteworthy proponent of Source Incompatibilism is Derk Pereboom (2007, 2014), and I have offered a critique in FISCHER (2007). It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this view, but note that this problem does not arise in the context of God’s foreknowledge, assuming indeterminism. This is an important difference between causal determination and God’s foreknowledge.

I wish to emphasize that my conclusions here, although often rejected by theists, are highly congenial to the project of defending PBT. They would be a first step toward this goal, and I will go on to argue that one can take the next steps too. Why make one's job more difficult than it needs to be? It would be preferable to have a theology that does not *require* the falsity of an empirical doctrine that could turn out to be true. Otherwise, one's belief in God would hang on a thread—it would have to be abandoned, if causal determinism were discovered to be true. An actual-sequence theology should be hugely attractive to a theist.

GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE AND HUMAN FREEDOM

A sempiternal God's omniscience threatens human freedom in a way parallel to the way in which causal determinism does. The Consequence Argument is isomorphic to an ancient argument for the incompatibility of God's foreknowledge and human freedom (interpreted as alternative-possibilities freedom), regimented in recent times by Nelson Pike (1965). William Hasker has given the argument a different and very powerful articulation (HASKER 1989, 2013). Both presentations of the argument rely principally on the notion of the fixity of the past, and, in particular, the fixity of God's prior beliefs.

As with the Consequence Argument, I present a rough and ready characterization of the argument for theological fatalism: Assume that the God of PBT exists, with eternity construed as sempiternality. Suppose, further, that some human being *A* were to do *X* at time *T2* (or after—this qualification suppressed in what follows). We ask: Did *A* have it in their power, at or just before *T2*, to refrain from doing *X* at *T2*? We note that, given God's essential omniscience, there is no possible world with the actual past relative to just before *T2* (including God's belief at *T1* that *A* would do *X* at *T2*) in which *A* refrains from doing *X* at *T2*. As in the presentation of the Consequence Argument above, it follows that *A* cannot at or just before *T2* refrain from doing *X* at *T2*. Here we rely on the fixity of the past and God's essential omniscience, but the fixity of the natural laws is not required.

This sketch can be filled in to yield a valid argument, but its soundness is, as with the Consequence Argument, highly contentious. Some of the compatibilist replies to this sort of argument for theological fatalism are parallel to the replies to the Consequence Argument. These open the door to an

alternative-possibilities model of the freedom involved in a PBT, although they are controversial (as in classical compatibilism).

As with the challenge from causal determinism, it is prudent to consider the relationship between God's foreknowledge and actual-sequence freedom. I contend that, as with causal determinism, God's foreknowledge is compatible with actual-sequence freedom. Although God's prior belief threatens *A*'s freedom to refrain from doing *X* at *T2* (regulative control), it does not thereby cast doubt on *A*'s acting freely in doing *X* at *T2* (guidance control). This will be so on *any* compatibilist account of acting freely, and, in particular, the guidance-control model I have proposed: given God's prior belief, *S* can still act from their own, appropriately reasons-responsive mechanism. Parallel to the point about causal determination, given God's prior belief, *S* can act from an appropriate hierarchy in their motivational states, their values, their normative competence, and so forth.

Despite its various advantages, I do not claim, nor do I wish to, that an actual-sequence PBT is the *only* or even the *best* PBT. I contend, rather, that such a PBT is *available* and plausible, at least in light of the worries we have considered so far.⁷ I will now turn to some salient challenges for an actual-sequence PBT.

THE FAIRNESS OF GOD'S PUNISHMENT OF HUMAN BEINGS

There are well-known problems with the notion of a morally perfect being consigning some human beings to Hell—a place of eternal torment. How could this kind of endless torture be justified, even for the worst of us? How could it be justified for a sincere individual who simply cannot find it warranted to accept God's grace? The punishment does not "fit the crime". This problem motivates some to accept doctrines such as universalism (everyone is saved) or annihilationism (the bad are annihilated, but not tortured eternally), in some form or other. Some interpret Hell as the separation from God; this is considered a terrible status, but not eternal torment. Others have defended the potential justifiability of God's consignment of some to Hell.

I wish to put these debates aside here. Let us simply employ the phrase "God's punishment" to mean God's imposing some significantly bad thing (possibly, but not necessarily, eternal torment). Let us simplify and focus on

⁷ I am not the first to explore this idea. It was actually suggested in a footnote in PIKE (1965) and further developed in ZAGZEBSKI (1996).

someone who fails to accept God's grace; the same considerations will apply to those who are morally bad in general. For an individual who refrains from accepting God's grace, I will use the term "denier". How is it fair for God—a morally perfect being—to punish a denier, if they *could not* have accepted God's grace?

The proponent of an actual-sequence PBT has an answer: the denier *freely* refrains from accepting God's grace. They exhibit all the freedom required for moral responsibility, and there is no fundamental difference between *God's* punishment of a denier and punishment in general (in the relevant respect). The denier, we suppose, was not deceived, coerced, manipulated significantly, or otherwise subject to "responsibility-undermining factors" in the actual sequence leading to their denial. When an individual acts freely—say, they exhibit guidance control—and the fact that they couldn't have done otherwise plays no role in their decision or action, it is not unfair or unjust to punish them. I do not see that God would be excluded from punishing such an individual.

In the Frankfurt-Style Cases, the relevant individual acts freely—exhibits guidance control—and the fact that they could not have done otherwise plays no role in their deliberations and actions. They can be held morally responsible and punished if they do the wrong thing. Why is it any different in the context of an individual who *freely* refrains from accepting God's grace?

Perhaps it *is* different. After all, God created the world (arguably) knowing in advance that the individual would deny Him. The denier might feel that "this was all a set-up", and thus it would be unfair for God, in particular, to blame or punish him. He would hold that God does not have the "standing to blame".⁸

It is not, however, clear why God lacks standing here. We can understand God's blaming the denier as judging that he has freely and knowingly done the wrong thing. God's punishing him is seeking to achieve justice by ensuring that he is punished in a way that fits the crime. God does not have vengeful or retributive emotions; He is simply ensuring that justice is done. It is implausible to suppose that God lacks standing to make these judgments and to achieve justice in light of them.

I do not pretend to have given a decisive defense of the claim that God has standing to blame and punish. I hope, however, that I have sketched

⁸ Recently there has been much interest in the notion of "standing to blame", including its status in relation to God. Important papers include WALLACE (2010) and TODD (2012, 2017, 2018).

a path toward rendering it plausible. More work needs to be done, but it is a first step.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL: AN ACTUAL-SEQUENCE THEODICY

A perfect God had to create the BPW (if there is one), if He had to create a world at all. A tremendous amount of ink has been spilt on this problem, and rest assured that I will only provide a roadmap for further reflection, rather than offering and thoroughly defending an answer. Many distinguish, following Alvin Plantinga, between a “defense” and a “theodicy”, where a defense simply presents an answer to the “logical problem of evil”, the challenge of showing that God’s attributes are *logically* consistent with the suffering in our world. A theodicy provides more than a mere defense—it addresses the “evidential problem of evil”, the challenge of showing that the evil in our world does not render God’s existence improbable or, perhaps, highly improbable (PLANTINGA 1977). In this paper I will be discussing theodicies in this sense, and not mere defenses.

A sophisticated contemporary attempt to provide a theodicy is in VAN INWAGEN (2008).⁹ His approach employs a portfolio of ingredients, one (but not the only one) of which is the “free will defense”. Pretty much everyone agrees that invocation of free will cannot explain *all* suffering and death, and most employ other ideas, perhaps in combination with the necessity of free will; any promising theodicy is an exquisitely balanced portfolio. Van Inwagen’s multifactorial theodicy involves, as a central component, the idea that the BPW must contain “free will”, where this involves freedom to choose and do otherwise. Such free creatures will inevitably sometimes do bad things, perhaps unpredictably in advance.

Van Inwagen writes:

Unfortunately, if I go so far as to agree that God must be omniscient and that divine omniscience is incompatible with creaturely free will, I thereby create for myself a *prima facie* difficulty that I cannot evade simply by ceasing to believe in creaturely free will.... This difficulty ... can be summed up in an argument. The argument turns on the importance of the free-will defense to an adequate response to the argument from evil. The argument is simplicity itself. The single most important reply to the argument from evil turns on the possible truth of the story called the

⁹ Another excellent and detailed treatment is in STUMP (2012).

free-will defense, and that story entails both that God exists and (of course) that at least some creatures have free will [alternative-possibilities freedom]. (VAN INWAGEN 2008, 217)

Indeed, most in the history of philosophical reflection on the problem of evil (including the contemporary discussions) maintain that the freedom in question is alternative-possibilities freedom. Here is another example:

By an agent having free will in the libertarian sense... I mean that which intentional action he does is not fully caused—either through some process of natural causation (i.e., in virtue of laws of nature) or in some other way (e.g., by an agent such as God acting from outside the natural order). In that case whatever the current state of the Universe (including the agent's beliefs and desires) and the causes at work in the Universe (including those whose operation is codified in laws of nature), it remains possible either that the agent will do the action in question, or that he will refrain from doing it. (SWINBURNE 1998, 39)

It will be helpful to have the reason for the insistence on the inclusion of a requirement of alternative-possibilities freedom in a multi-factorial theodicy before us here. God had to create the BPW (if He created a world at all), and thus He had to give human beings freedom and moral responsibility. The best (and perhaps only) way to explain the nature and extent of at least some evils ("moral" evils) is to suppose that God created beings who had the freedom (at least on some occasions) to do either good or evil. On some versions of the theodicy, God cannot predict in advance what human agents will freely do. Another approach is to point out that sometimes free agents perform evil acts, and God couldn't have prevented them from doing so without interfering significantly with their freedom. If God were to pick out some, but not all, such acts with which to interfere, this would introduce significant and unexplained "irregularities". And where would He stop? There is no non-arbitrary stopping point.

This is obviously rough and over-simplified, but it captures the gist of the "free will theodicy", as often presented. God knew in advance that sometimes (indeed, all too often), genuinely free creatures (in the sense required, on this picture, for moral responsibility) would do bad things. He chose, however, the world with the best *package* of features. In solving this "optimization" problem, He could not avoid such evils altogether. This putatively explains much of the suffering and harms in the world, and other elements of the package are invoked to explain the other evils. This package typically

includes “soul-making”, in Hick’s term, and “skeptical theism”, briefly discussed below.

Such approaches maintain that much evil comes from the necessity of a certain sort of freedom—a freedom that puts both good and evil in reach. But now the challenge of incompatibilism about God’s foreknowledge and human freedom to choose and do otherwise emerges again—with a vengeance.

We can seek to avoid this challenge by adopting an actual-sequence account of the freedom component of our envisaged complex theodicy. As we have seen above, not everyone will accept the argument for incompatibilism about God’s foreknowledge and human freedom to do otherwise. Many, however, think that it is sound, and thus it is very helpful to have an approach that sidesteps it. On an actual-sequence approach, we contend that acting freely (exhibiting guidance control) is *all* the freedom required for moral responsibility. We can have everything that we care about with respect to human dignity and personhood (with its key element of moral responsibility) with this sort of freedom, even in the absence of alternative-possibilities freedom (regulative control).

So, in creating the BPW, God did not have to give us freedom to do otherwise, and, importantly, such freedom is unnecessary as part of a multifactorial response to the problem of evil. In creating the BPW and giving human beings the capacity to act freely, He knew that they would sometimes (all too often) freely choose and do evil, thus causing suffering and harm. God could only prevent these consequences if He were to interfere significantly with human freedom, which would introduce problems of its own—for example, unexplained and bizarre interruptions of the natural course of things.

An actual-sequence theodicy can accept all the other (non-freedom) components of a multifactorial theodicy, including “skeptical theism”.¹⁰ It can be just like an alternative-possibilities theology, except we adjust the freedom component, switching out freedom to do otherwise for acting freely. I see no reason why “acting freely” will not work just as well as “freedom to do otherwise”, as part of a plausible (even if not ultimately persuasive) theodicy.¹¹

Why did God create a world in which there is *so much* evil, including evil caused by human free actions? Perhaps this is where a proponent of an ac-

¹⁰ For developments of skeptical theism, see (among others) WYKSTRA (1984, 1996) and ALSTON (1991).

¹¹ For a similar contention and helpful discussion, see BYERLY (2017).

tual-sequence theodicy would need to invoke skeptical theism: we just do not know enough to rule it out that God had to create a world with this much freely-caused evil. Note that the proponent of an alternative-possibilities theodicy may well need to invoke skeptical theism to explain why there is *so much* natural evil—much more than is required for soul-making, and so forth. I do not see that the invocation of skeptical theism is *worse* for an actual-sequence approach than it is for an alternative-possibilities model. After all, both must contend that there are indefinitely large amounts of evil, moral and natural, and we cannot explain why God created a world with *so much* evil. The alternative-possibilities model will have to invoke skeptical theism extensively, and it is not at all clear that its invocation is any more problematic in the actual-sequence approach. Note that I am not claiming that either of these theodicies “works”; my contention is that an actual-sequence model is not more problematic, contrary to what is typically claimed (or presupposed).

On my proposed approach to God’s foreknowledge, He knows in advance what human beings will freely do. Given this, why did He not create a world in which everyone always freely and does the right action (and thus never sins)?¹² Famously, John Mackie (2009) raises this question, and it becomes pressing when one allows at least more comprehensive foreknowledge than permitted by Open Theism.¹³ The question does not admit of a simple answer, but this is the direction in which I would go.

First, note that, if we take seriously (as I and most proponents of a theodicy do), Hick’s “soul-making” idea, we would lack many important opportunities for just this sort of development, if human beings always did the right thing. Certainly, the world would be very, very different from ours. In some ways it would seem to be better, but upon more careful consideration, it is not easy to grasp such a world, and to consider the lives in it to be recognizably human. Additionally, just as a more traditional theodicy, involving alternative-possibilities freedom, would still need to invoke skeptical theism at some point, it may be necessary for a defender of an actual-sequence theorist to invoke it here. One might point out that we simply may not know enough about the world, human nature and its physical realization, or a more encompassing morality, to comprehend why God would not make us such that we would always do the right thing. Again: I do not claim that the actual-sequence approach is clearly superior, but only that it is arguably

¹² I am grateful to Marcin Iwanicki for highlighting this challenge in very helpful comments.

¹³ For an elaboration of Hasker’s views, including his reflections on the “state of the art” of the discussions of the problem of evil, see HASKER (2008).

just as good as (or perhaps not more problematic than) an alternative-possibilities approach.

But is more freedom not more valuable than less, and would a world in which we have *both* kinds of freedom not have more freedom than one in which we have only actual-sequence freedom? The reply: more freedom is *not* necessarily better than less. What is relevant to assessing the relative goodness of possible worlds is not the *quantity*, but the *quality* or *value* of the freedom. Freedom to do more is not necessarily better than freedom to do the valuable. God must optimize the total package of elements of a possible world, in the sense of maximizing the *value* of those elements (taken as a whole). I do not see why higher quantities of freedom would necessarily lead to greater value of those freedoms, and thus I see no reason to suppose that maximizing quantity of freedom will be more promising than maximizing quality of freedom, in the sense relevant to optimizing the value of the total package.¹⁴

CODA: TAKING STOCK

Thus far I have defended the possibility of an actual-sequence PBT, on either a deterministic or indeterministic view about the natural world He created. I have suggested that in various ways the indeterministic model will likely be more attractive to theists, although there is no decisive argument against a deterministic model. If we continue developing an indeterministic PBT, we come to a big challenge. The worry is that no one could have knowledge *with certainty* of a future contingent truth involving free human behavior in an indeterministic world, and, since God's knowledge must be certain knowledge, God cannot have such knowledge. This implies a huge limitation on God's knowledge (with associated constraints on God's plans for us and selection of a possible world to actualize).

An indeterministic actual-sequence PBT would thus benefit from an account of God's foreknowledge of future contingents involving free human action in an indeterministic world. In the rest of this paper, I will offer my own attempt to provide (or, better, sketch) exactly this—the "Bootstrapping View". If it is ultimately defensible, this view will have significant consequences: it will render coherent a collection of major positions about God's essential omniscience and its relationship to human freedom, philosophical

¹⁴ For discussions, see RAWLS (1971) and HART (1973).

and theological positions that have been held for many centuries and are influential today. It will complete my *template* for an actual-sequence theology, especially as regards God's omniscience.

If my arguments thus far are correct, then an important and core view of William Hasker's is unwarranted (or, perhaps, not necessary to adopt). As noted above, Hasker defends a version of the argument for the incompatibility of God's foreknowledge and human freedom, and concludes (in part on this basis) that it is impossible for God to know future contingents truths about human free actions. It is not as though the relevant contingent propositions are not true—on Hasker's view, they can be. It is just that God cannot know them, if he is to create the best of all possible worlds. Hasker holds that creaturely freedom is required for the best of all possible worlds, that such freedom requires alternative possibilities, and thus it would be expunged by God's foreknowledge. This limits God's knowledge considerably, but only by applying (something like) the widely-held constraint that God knows only those propositions p , such that "It is possible for God to know that p " is true.

As should be evident, I deny that creaturely freedom is alternative-possibilities freedom, and thus I have no need to limit God's foreknowledge on this sort of basis. Further, my view does not entail Open Theism. As we shall see in the rest of my paper, this will result in a package of views that allows God to have more foreknowledge than in Open Theism, but less than what might be called Traditional Perfect Being Theology. The view I will chart out—a middle way—is Partially Open Theism.

PROPONENTS OF GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE OF FUTURE
CONTINGENTS INVOLVING HUMAN FREEDOM IN
AN INDETERMINISTIC WORLD

Many, although certainly not all, philosophers have thought that God can have foreknowledge of free human actions. Typically, they also hold that human free actions are incompatible with causal determinism. They are thus committed to maintaining that God's foreknowledge does not require causal determinism.

Ockham and Molina (and their followers) are examples (although not the only ones) of philosophers who have attributed to God foreknowledge of free human behavior in an indeterministic world. They argue that causal determinism would rule out human freedom, but that we are indeed free (in

the sense of freedom to choose/do otherwise). The Ockhamists and Molinists each put forward complex views, but they have this in common: God can have foreknowledge of free human behavior in an indeterministic world, where this knowledge is not gained from a direct gaze into the future (involving some sort of macroscopic backwards causation). The knowledge must be based on evidence that obtains and is available at the prior time—the time of God’s belief about the future.

How can this be possible? Since God’s knowledge requires *certainty*, such philosophers must accept that this sort of knowledge of future free actions is compatible with causal indeterminism. Many have thought it totally and obviously impossible for anyone, including God, to know with certainty contingent future facts about free human behavior. It will surely seem that any argument for this claim must employ a philosophical sleight of hand.

Various philosophers have vehemently asserted that God could not know future contingent truths in a causally indeterministic world. Consider this passage from Jonathan Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will*:

That no future event can be certainly foreknown, whose existence is contingent, and without all necessity, may be proved thus: ‘tis impossible for a thing to be certainly known to any intellect without *evidence*. To suppose otherwise, implies a contradiction: because for a thing to be certainly known to any understanding, is for it to be *evident* to that understanding: and for a thing to be evident to any understanding, is the same thing, as for that understanding to *see evidence* of it: but no understanding, created or uncreated, can see evidence where there is none: for that is the same thing, as to see that to be, which is not. And therefore, if there be any truth which is absolutely without evidence, that truth is absolutely unknowable, insomuch as it implies a contradiction to suppose that it is known. (EDWARDS 1957, 258–59)

Edwards emphasizes the problem of *evidence* for future contingents. How can anyone, including God, know future contingents about free human action in an indeterministic world? By the definition of indeterminism, the evidence prior to the time of the relevant behavior, together with the laws of nature, does not appear to entail that the behavior occurs. So it seems that God, in particular, cannot know these future contingent truths, since His knowledge must be *certain*. The evidence does not provide Him certainty; given the evidence, the behavior might not occur. As above I am assuming here that God does not have the capacity to see into the future and thus have “direct” knowledge of future free human behavior. This would imply macroscopic backward causation, and most have wished to avoid this picture of God’s

foreknowledge. God's evidence at *T-I* must include facts about *T-I* or before (together with the logical and metaphysical truths, and the laws of nature).

David Hume famously implored us to proportion our beliefs to the evidence (HUME 1748, sec. 10). William Clifford captured this Humean point by insisting that it is always wrong to believe on insufficient evidence and invoking his famous example of the irresponsible shipowner (CLIFFORD 1879, 177–86). The general thesis that we should proportion our beliefs to the evidence is often referred to as “Evidentialism”.¹⁵ Evidentialism is not universally accepted, and it will not be necessary to go into the debates surrounding it for our purposes here. It seems highly plausible that knowledge with (*absolute*) *certainty* requires entailing evidence.

For any agent *S*, if *S* knows that *p* with certainty, then *S* has available to her evidence that entails that *p*. When God believes (and thus knows) that *p*, He has absolute certainty that *p*. He therefore has evidence that entails that *p*. The problem is that if indeterminism obtains (and God cannot have direct knowledge of the future), evidence that entails that the relevant future contingent proposition is true is unavailable to Him.

David Lewis introduced the technical notion of a “crystal ball” as a problem for causal decision theory (LEWIS 1981). Jack Spencer writes:

A crystal ball ... need be neither round nor crystalline. The world is said to contain crystal balls whenever the present carries news of the as-yet-undetermined parts of the future. Images appearing in spheres made of magical quartz might be crystal balls, in the relevant sense, but so too might arrangements of magical tealeaves or neural states in the brains of time travelers or clairvoyants. (SPENCER 2020, 105)

Spencer argues that crystal balls are metaphysically impossible, contrary to Lewis's supposition. He thus defends a more specific version of Evidentialism, which is captured in the *Present Principle*, according to which “agents are rationally required to conform their credences to their expectations of the present chances, deferring to the present chances as they would to an expert” (SPENCER 2020, 105). If God has no crystal ball and adheres to the *Present Principle*, then He cannot know with certainty contingent facts about future free human behavior, or so it would seem. (Of course, if God did have a crystal ball, the “news of the future” would have to be encoded in His mental states, which are not neural states.)

¹⁵ For contemporary discussions and defenses, see FELDMAN (2014), CONEE and FELDMAN (2014).

FOREKNOWLEDGE WITH CERTAINTY: BOOTSTRAPPING

The difficulties for the possibility of God's foreknowledge of future contingents involving free human actions are significant, and they must be taken seriously. If they cannot be put to rest, the widely held doctrines discussed above simply could not even get off the ground: they would be fundamentally incoherent. I wish to provide an answer to the challenges to the possibility of this sort of divine foreknowledge—an answer that will open the way to a serious consideration (rather than an abrupt dismissal) of the doctrines. Even those who reject the doctrines typically do so for reasons other than fundamental incoherence.

Spoiler alert: here is a sketch of my overall strategy. Fallible human knowledge is possible. Human beings can have such knowledge by being in a certain sort of context, which I will call a “knowledge-conferring situation” (KCS). A human being with fallible knowledge knows that p without having evidence that entails that p . Thus, although she knows that p , she could have been wrong about p ; the evidence she possesses is compatible with the falsity of p . Further, I claim that a human being can have this sort of knowledge of future contingent truths about human free behavior. I know that my wife will go to her Pilates gym this afternoon (as she does every Friday). She *might* not go; but still, given that she goes, my justified belief that she will counts as knowledge. Of course, the warranted *attribution* of this piece of knowledge must await my wife's trip to the gym, but my prior belief counted as knowledge before the attribution would have been warranted.

Just as a human being can be in a KCS with respect to such truths about the future, so can God. How could God lack this capacity possessed by human beings? One of His attributes is essential omniscience, and consequently He knows that He has this attribute. In virtue of His knowing this, when added to the direct evidence He has available that a future contingent p is true, God has entailing evidence that p and thus absolute certainty that p .

It is plausible that human beings can know certain things without having evidence that *entails* those things. As above, I know that my wife will go to Pilates this afternoon, although something significant and unexpected might come up, resulting in her not going. Of course, knowledge entails truth, but one can lack knowledge in contexts in which one would have it, if the relevant believed proposition were true. *Fallibilism* about knowledge is at least a plausible and defensible doctrine.

There are various fallibilist accounts of knowledge. I assume, for the sake of the argument here, that *at least one* such approach, developed suitably, is an acceptable account of knowledge, at the very least as a working hypothesis. A human being gets into a KCS with respect to p when she meets the conditions (apart from the requirement of p 's truth) specified in our favored or designated such account of knowledge. When a *human being* who believes that p is in a KCS with respect to p , she thereby has knowledge that p , if p is true. Knowledge is "unified" in the sense that if *any* individual who believes that p is in such a context, that is, a KCS with respect to p , that individual has knowledge that p , if p is true. If God believes that p and is in a KCS with respect to p , He thereby has knowledge that p .¹⁶

But unlike human beings, God is *essentially* omniscient, and so He has *certainty* that p , when He knows that p . Whereas a human being can know that p by virtue of being in a KCS, even though the evidence does not give him certainty, God must have certainty. Unlike an ordinary human being, God knows that if He believes that p , then it follows of necessity that p is true. He knows this via His self-knowledge: He knows that He is essentially omniscient. So not only does God know that p , He knows it with certainty. God can thus "bootstrap" to certainty in this distinctive way. I will call this approach to God's foreknowledge the "Bootstrapping View".

God can know future contingent truths partly in the same way as ordinary mortals can know them, and partly *via* His self-knowledge. This explains why Jonathan Edwards was correct, but only in one sense, when he wrote that God only believes on the basis of sufficient evidence. One needs to distinguish evidence directly about the proposition believed (first-order evidence) from evidence about the believer (second-order evidence). God's first-order evidence that p does not entail that p . But God's having this evidence, in a KCS with respect to p , together with His self-knowledge of His essential omniscience, *does* indeed entail that p . God's first-order evidence plus his second-order evidence entails that p .

There is no violation of the strictures of Evidentialism here. Edwards was correct if we consider only first-order evidence, but not when we consider

¹⁶ The various proposed accounts of " S knows that p "—internalist (true belief with undefeated justification), externalist (reliabilist, tracking, causalist, and so forth), and virtue theory (in their various forms, and among others) can be construed as different ways of specifying a KCS. These accounts typically seek to capture intuitions about knowing within frameworks that accommodate the cases and assume some sort of solution to the problems of epistemic skepticism. There is of course a huge literature discussing these cases and developing different approaches to the analysis of knowledge, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to address it.

the totality of the evidence available to God (including His self-knowledge). Richard Feldman contends that “evidence *of* evidence is evidence” (FELDMAN 2014). For example, if I know that you have evidence for a claim, I can conclude that there is at least *some* evidence for it. Similarly, evidence *about* evidence is evidence; if I know that you are a trustworthy and reliable source, then this enhances the force of the evidence. In this sense God has evidence about his evidence—second-order evidence about his first-order evidence. In part through introspection and knowledge of His essential omniscience, He can gain absolutely certain knowledge of future contingents involving free human behavior in a causally indeterministic world. (I am here assuming, what does not seem contentious, that God has introspective knowledge of His own essence—the Divine Attributes.) Foreknowledge need not piggyback on causal determinism. In virtue of His distinctive capacity for this sort of bootstrapping, God can have foreknowledge of future contingents involving human freedom in our world.

The Bootstrapping View shows that God does indeed have a crystal ball. His mind contains “news of the future”, but not *via* the future. His mental states encode evidence that obtains at a given time about future free human action, and His knowledge of His essential omniscience transforms His belief about the future into knowledge with certainty. He has no crystal ball, taking into account only first-order evidence, but He has a crystal ball, given the totality of His evidence.¹⁷

THE BOOTSTRAPPING VIEW: OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

HOW CAN GOD GET INTO THIS STATE?

It might seem impossible for God to get Himself into a state of believing at some time T that p , where He does not have at T decisive evidence about p . He would then have a belief without the required justification. And if He can’t get himself into this state of believing that p in the first place, then He cannot use his self-knowledge to bootstrap to certainty.

¹⁷ The possible existence of crystal balls, and their relationship to causal decision theory, has been a matter of considerable disagreement in discussions of causal decision theory. It should be noted that an evaluation of rational principles of choice in Newcomb’s Problem (and similar situations) raise interesting questions about infallible predictors. The relationships between the literature in causal decision theory about such cases, crystal balls, and God’s foreknowledge may be worth exploring in more detail than I can here.

The objection presupposes a *temporally sequential* picture of God's beliefs, according to which He would *first* formulate a belief that *p* based on evidence about *p* and *then* apply his self-knowledge of this essential omniscience to bootstrap to certainty. But a sequential picture is misleading, and we should assume that all of this happens simultaneously. That is, God simultaneously believes that *p* on the basis of first-order evidence that *p* and second-order evidence about this evidence. Thus He simultaneously believes that *p* and believes with *certainty* that *p*.

We can "crystallize out" or "analytically separate" God's belief that *p* from His belief about His own essential omniscience; but this does *not* imply that the one belief is temporally prior to the other. The bootstrapping here is *logical or analytical, not temporal*.

Note that God cannot form a belief arbitrarily or by "flipping a coin," so to speak. If He could, first-order knowledge would be inessential, and it would seem that He might be able to bootstrap to comprehensive knowledge. But God, so far as He is a perfect being, does not engage in epistemic irresponsibility. His beliefs must be generated via epistemically responsible paths.

HOW MUCH KNOWLEDGE DOES GOD HAVE?

On the Bootstrapping View, God cannot know at *T-1* all the truths there are at *T-1*. There are contingent propositions (say) about human free action at some time *T* that are true at *T-1* (by assumption in this dialectical context). God can know any of these truths that a human being can know by being in a KCS with respect to them, but there will no doubt be many future contingent truths that no human can know via being in a KCS with respect to them. This is because there is not enough evidence about the truth of the propositions under consideration—maybe none at all—at *T-1*. Thus, there are propositions true at *T-1* that God cannot know at *T-1*.

So God's knowledge is less extensive than it is sometimes thought to be, but more extensive than the lack of any knowledge of future contingents posited by Open Theists, such as Hasker. On my view, God's omniscience cannot be expressed as: For any proposition *p*, God believes at *T* that *p* iff *p* is true at *T*. Rather, it is regimented as: For any proposition *p* knowable by human beings at *T*, God believes at *T* that *p* iff *p* is true at *T*. (This includes some future contingent truths about free human behavior.) God does not know at a given time *all* propositions true at that time; there are some pro-

positions about the future that are true now but are not knowable by *any* human being, because there is not sufficient evidence.

On the Bootstrapping View, God *actually* knows anything *knowable* by human beings. Of course, any *particular* human being knows only a minute percentage of these propositions. The Bootstrapping View, then, posits an infallible God with a scope of knowledge vastly greater than any human being's.¹⁸ (It is thus plausible that a perfect being have this sort of omniscience.) Whereas the Open Theist contends that God fails to know at *T* *any* contingent propositions about human free actions in the future relative to *T*, I do not accept this view. I opt for a middle path between comprehensive foreknowledge and Open Theism: Partially Open Theism.

HOW DOES HE DO IT?

On a fallibilist approach to knowledge, there will be contexts in which a human believer believes that *p* on the basis of being in a KCS with respect to *p*, i.e., an epistemic situation that would confer knowledge, if *p* were true. Indeed, there may be a situation in which God notices that most or all the reliable human believers in this sort of KCS believe that *p*, and yet He does not believe that *p*. He would obviously conclude that, although the situation is a KCS with respect to *p*, *p* will not in fact turn out to be true. God himself has no direct (first-order) additional evidence about the proposition *p* on the basis of which He, unlike the human reliable believers, refrains from believing that *p*.

We then have *at least* a mystery. If His first-order evidence is exactly the same as that of the reliable human believers in the situation in question, why doesn't He also form the belief that *p*? On the Bootstrapping View, I concede that this must be thought of as a *bare difference* between God and reliable human believers; at least it is a difference that is not explained by differentially accessible evidence.

The Bootstrapping approach *is* committed to the possibility of contexts of the sort under consideration, and thus must accept that God will not believe that *p* in certain contexts in which all (or most) reliable human believers will believe that *p*, and there is no explanation of the difference in terms of evidence accessible to God at the time in question. This leaves it mysterious as

¹⁸ For an intriguing suggestion as to how the Bootstrapping View could actually generate more knowledge than I have supposed, see SWENSON (2017)

to how precisely it works, in the sense of how “from the inside” God is guided away from believing that p in such a KCS with respect to p .

Note, however, that *no* view of God’s knowledge of the future is without its problems or perhaps “mysteries”. For instance, can an atemporal God intervene in the world to achieve a specific effect? Better: How can God’s atemporal willing lead to an effect at some specific time in the spatiotemporal world? On an atemporal conception of God’s eternity, it is typically thought that God’s atemporal willings can have effects (miracles, warnings, and so forth) at specific times.¹⁹ It is tempting to ask how such a God can know *when* to will the effect, but this is nonsensical, given an atemporal God. How could He possibly do it? By what causal mechanism?

There are of course other mysteries in the philosophical neighborhood. To open (just a little) a big can of worms: How exactly can a non-physical being (even a sempiternal being) interact with the physical world? By what mechanism does this occur? Where there is causation, there is a mechanism (except perhaps in quantum mechanics, which is not relevant here). We often believe there is causation where we have not yet identified the mechanism that underwrites it. But how would we go about identifying the mechanism whereby the non-physical and physical realms interact? This seems like a more daunting—a deeper—challenge than the typical difficulty of identifying a causal mechanism in empirical phenomena.

These how-questions, and many others, have to be left unanswered here. But why expect an “under-the-hood” explanation of God’s mind? We cannot expect to have an operator’s manual for God’s mind! It is however important at this point to stop and notice the dialectical shift. The worry about God’s foreknowledge of future contingent truths about human free action with which we began, and the *fundamental* objection to it, comes from Evidentialism. This has energized and motivated the opponents throughout the history of the discussions of these issues right up to the present.

The main point I seek to make here is that the Bootstrapping View answers *this objection*. I think this represents intellectual progress. Of course, we are still left with a mystery, but this is a *different* worry from the one stemming from Evidentialism. In my view, the newly identified challenge is less daunting, as we can see it as similar to other gaps in our understanding of a perfect being. A gap is not (necessarily) a logical or epistemic impossibility, or an “absurdity”.

¹⁹ Stump and Kretzmann (1981, 1985) have offered a sophisticated framework that accommodates this possibility.

One might thus think of the Bootstrapping View of God's foreknowledge as *incomplete*. An evaluation of the various views about God's foreknowledge will presumably be a holistic philosophical cost/benefit analysis in which one weighs the pros and cons, where the cons will include these gaps. I suggest that the Bootstrapping View can at least hold its own in this sort of philosophical cost-benefit analysis.²⁰

Philosophers sometimes use the metaphor of the bulge in a rug: you flatten it here, and it pops up there. How can just moving the philosophical bulge be progress? Perhaps one moves it to a less conspicuous place (for the visit of the in-laws). This metaphor might however be unsatisfying; it can seem like "cheating" or "hiding" a problem. Think, rather, of a foggy morning in San Francisco. You look out the window, and most of your view is obscured by the fog. But later in the day, the fog has not entirely lifted, but it has switched to a location where it only blocks a smaller, more peripheral part of the view. You gaze out at the beautiful city, and you can even see the Golden Gate Bridge.

CONCLUSION: AN ACTUAL-SEQUENCE PERFECT-BEING THEOLOGY

The standard, classical view embedded in Perfect Being Theology is that human beings are free, in the sense that implies freedom to do otherwise. This is thought to follow from the idea that a perfect God—a God with all the Divine Perfections—would have to create a world with creatures, perhaps human beings, who possess this robust kind of freedom. Those who defend PBT typically hold that only by positing that God's creation contains persons with such freedom can we explain how the package of Divine Perfections fits together as a coherent whole.

William Hasker is the most influential proponent of Open Theism in contemporary philosophy, and he has been a leader in making this view more appealing to contemporary philosophers. He accepts this orthodoxy but also argues that it entails that God does not have comprehensive knowledge, as in a traditional PBT. Indeed, he argues that God cannot have *any* knowledge of future contingent truths about human free actions. I have challenged the orthodoxy in a different way—by offering a model of PBT that switches out alternative-possibilities freedom and substitutes actual-sequence freedom.

²⁰ David Hunt (2017) helpfully raises some of the objections discussed in this section, and I reply in FISCHER (2017, 82–84).

I have contended that objections thought to be fatal to any PBT that dispenses with freedom to do otherwise can be addressed with considerable success. My views imply Partially Open Theism—a view situated in the philosophical landscape between Open Theism and Traditional PBT.²¹

My actual-sequence version of PBT addresses and provides plausible answers to three important questions for alternative-possibilities PBT. How can this be the BPW, if human beings do not have freedom to choose and do otherwise? (That is, how can human beings who lack such freedom be morally responsible and possess dignity?) How can it be fair for God to punish persons who could not have done otherwise, e.g., who could not have accepted His grace? And how could we provide a theodicy, if human beings do not have free will in the sense of genuine access to alternative possibilities of choice and action?

Partially Open Theism certainly does not offer everything many theists want—a robust view of God’s omniscience that includes comprehensive foreknowledge. A theist should not however rest her case on the truth, or falsity, of causal determinism, lest her belief in God depend on physics in an unacceptable way. On my Bootstrapping View, we can develop at least a sketch of an actual-sequence theology for further consideration, a project that may deliver a result that should be warmly welcomed by a proponent of PBT, or, for that matter, almost any theist.

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²¹ I believe that the model I have sketched in this paper can be extended and developed further to yield a defense of Molinism (or a partial Molinism). Bootstrapping Supercomprehension is in the middle terrain between Open Theism and Comprehensive Supercomprehension, or “Superdupercomprehension”. The Bootstrapping View is a version of “Partial Supercomprehension”. This model would clearly need a treatment significantly beyond the scope of this paper, and I explore this possibility in FISCHER (in progress).

I have substantially revised and expanded material on God's knowledge that originally appeared in the introductory essay, "God, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility", in FISCHER (2016); a book symposium on FISCHER (2016); FISCHER (2017); and FISCHER (forthcoming).

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Finally, I am honored to be part of this tribute to the outstanding work of William Hasker. I have learned a great deal from his numerous publications, and I greatly admire their lucidity and brilliance. I am humbled by this opportunity.

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AN ACTUAL-SEQUENCE THEOLOGY

Summary

In this paper I develop a sketch of an overall theology that dispenses with "alternative-possibilities" freedom in favor of "actual-sequence" freedom. I hold that acting freely does not require freedom to do otherwise, and that acting freely is the freedom component of moral responsibility. Employing this analytical apparatus, I show how we can offer various important elements of a theology that employs only the notion of acting freely. I distinguish my approach from the important development of Open Theism by William Hasker. My view about God's foreknowledge is in-between comprehensive foreknowledge and no foreknowledge (Open Theism).

Keywords: theology; free will; freedom to do otherwise; acting freely; regulative control; guidance control; Open Theism; Problem of Evil; William Hasker.

TEOLOGIA AKTUALNEJ SEKWENCJI

Streszczenie

Autor w swoim artykule szkicuje obraz ogólnej teologii, która odchodzi od koncepcji wolności jako „alternatywnych możliwości” na rzecz wolności jako „aktualnej sekwencji”. Autor odróżnia swoje podejście od rozwiniętej teorii teizmu otwartego Williama Haskera. Pogląd autora na temat Bożej przedwiedzy mieści się pomiędzy ideą pełnej przedwiedzy a ideą jej całkowitego braku (teizm otwarty).

Słowa kluczowe: teologia; wolna wola; wolność czynienia inaczej; wolne działanie; kontrola regulująca; kontrola kierująca; teizm otwarty; problem zła; William Hasker.