

The Spectrum of Christian Faith

*Does God plan everything that
happens?*

Three Related Questions

- How does God govern creation?
(God's providence)
- What does God know about the future?
(God's foreknowledge)
- How does God relate to time?

Four Views

- Arminianism – God knows everything that will happen but limits control offering space for human free will.
- Calvinism – God determines everything and exhaustively knows the future.
- Molinism – God knew every possible thing that could happen and then created the best possible world.
- Open Future View – Some things in the future are unsettled and God does not know what will happen because these things are based on human free will.

Should I wear a blue or green shirt?

- Arminianism – God knew I would pick the blue shirt but did not predetermine I would pick it.
- Calvinism – God predetermined I would wear the blue shirt.
- Molinism – God knew I would pick the blue shirt and created the world in which I would.
- Open View – God knows I could pick either and waited to see which one I would pick.

A Theological Note

All of these views are connected to other theological questions like, “Does God predetermine who gets saved?”, “What happens to the people who never hear about Jesus?”, “Can you lose your salvation?” and “If God is all-powerful and loving, why does evil exist?”

Arminianism

Arminianism is named after the Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius and was articulated in the theological statement, *Articles of Remonstrance* (1610) by Arminius's followers a year after his death.. John Wesley spread Arminianism in the 18th century through his Methodist movement. This view today is held by Methodists, Free Will Baptists, the Evangelical Free church and is popular with Anglicans and Pentecostals. This view is close to the Orthodox view of synergy between God's grace and human free will.

Calvinism

Calvinism was articulated by John Calvin in the 16th century in opposition to Roman Catholic theology and distinguished from Lutheran theology on things like the meaning of baptism and communion. Calvin's thoughts on predestination can be traced back to Augustine of Hippo. This view is today held by Presbyterians, Congregationalists, some Anglicans and many Baptists.

Molinism

Calvinism is named after the 16th century Jesuit priest, Luis de Molina. A debate between Jesuits and Dominicans over Molinism which led to Pope Clement VIII to setup a committee to settle the controversy in 1597. Pope Paul V ended the debate in 1607 by forbidding either side from accusing their opponents of heresy. Molinism and Arminian-like synergy exist side-by-side today in the Roman Catholic church. William Craig Lane (Protestant) and Thomas Flint (Catholic) are two current Molinists.

Open Future View

With roots in the 18th and 19th century, the Open Future view grew out of Arminianism and became fully articulated in the late 20th century. Agreeing with Arminians on divine providence, proponents of the Open Future view hold that most things in the future are not settled (divine foreknowledge). Theologians that hold to this view are Richard Rice, John Sanders, Clark Pinnock, Dallas Willard, Greg Boyd and Thomas Jay Oord.

Arminianism

- Total Depravity
- Conditional Election
- Universal Atonement
- Resistible Grace
- Perseverance through Assisting Grace

Arminianism

Biblical Examples – God knows the future but does not predestine it.

- Abraham would be the father of many nations. (Genesis 17:5-8)
- Abraham's descendants going down to Egypt and Moses leading the people out of Egypt (Genesis 15:13-15, Genesis 37:18-28, Exodus)
- Josiah (1 Kings 13:2-3, 2 Kings 22:1 and 23:15-16)
- Peter denies Jesus and Judas betrays Jesus (Matthew 26:34, John 13:18-19)
- See also Peter's sermon in Acts 2 especially 2:23.

Arminianism

Supporting Arguments

- Foreknowledge is implied in omniscience.
(God knows all things)
- Foreknowledge is implied divine sovereignty.
(God can guarantee the accomplishment of God's will which does not include evil.)
- Foreknowledge and foreordination are two different things. (God knows about future evil but does not cause evil.)

Arminianism

Objections

- Scripture does not explicitly state that God has exhaustive, definite foreknowledge.
- If God knows what will happen, why does God not intervene?
- What about the passages where God bargains with Abraham, Moses (multiple times), the Israelites, David, Elijah, etc.

Calvinism

- Total Depravity
- Unconditional Election
- Limited Atonement
- Irresistible Grace
- Perseverance of the Saints

Calvinism

Biblical Arguments – God knows *and ordains* all things.

- I make known the end from the beginning,
from ancient times, what is still to come.
I say, ‘My purpose will stand,
and I will do all that I please.’ – Isaiah 46:9-10
- In him we were also chosen,[e] having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. – Ephesians 1:11-12

Calvinism

Supporting Arguments

- A believer's confidence implies foreordination.
- Only God can be the basis for God's foreknowledge of the future. (foreknowledge implies foreordination.)

Calvinism

Objections

- Humans are not free and morally responsible if our actions are predetermined.
- Does God really cause evil or is God responsible for evil?
- What about the passages where God repents? (Genesis 6:6, 1 Samuel 15:11, Exodus 32:12-14; 2 Samuel 24:16; 1 Chronicles 21:15; Psalm 106:45; Jeremiah 4:28; 18:8; 26:3, 13, 19; 42:10; Joel 2:13-14; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:9-10; 4:2)

- Radical Depravity
- Overcoming Grace
- Sovereign Election
- Eternal Life
- Singular Redemption

Molinism

Counterfactuals: If I had worn a green shirt today, then...

Middle knowledge: God's hypothetical knowledge of what would happen. This is between God's knowledge of what could be (natural knowledge) and what does happen (free knowledge).

Molinism

Biblical Arguments – Examples of counterfactuals.

- If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night.” - Jacob in Genesis 31:42
- Jesus answered, “My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world.” – John 18:36

Molinism

Supporting Arguments

- Divine foreknowledge: God's middle knowledge allows God to have exhaustive foreknowledge and humans to have complete free will.
- Divine providence: God completely controls a world of free agents.
- See also William Craig Lane's philosophical argument.

Molinism

Objections

- Counterfactuals are hypothetical and exist independently of God.
- God created a world in which evil existed.
- The arguments for Molinism are largely philosophical and not grounded in scripture.

Open Future View

Biblical Arguments – God does not *fully* know the future.

- Israel may, might, perhaps – Exodus 3:18-4:9, Exodus 13:17, Ezekiel 12:3. Jeremiah 26:3
- Going a little farther, he (Jesus) fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, *if it is possible*, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.
- Matthew 26:39
- God tests people to find out what they will do – Genesis 22:12, Deuteronomy 8:2 and 13:1-3, Judges 3:4, 2 Chronicles 32:31)

Open Future View

Biblical Arguments

- God changes God's mind – Exodus 32:14, Numbers 11:1-2, Numbers 14:12-20, Numbers 16:20-48, Deuteronomy 9:13-20, Deuteronomy 20:1-6, 1 Chronicles 21:15, Jeremiah 18:7-10, Jeremiah 26:2-3)
- “Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and *he relents* from sending calamity.” – Joel 2:2-3
- When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened. – Jonah 3:10

Open Future View

Supporting Arguments

- Humans are truly free and morally responsible for their actions.
- God does not cause or responsible for evil.
- Places importance on godly living and the urgency of prayer.
- We live and experience reality as if this view is true.

Open Future View

Objections

- Denies God's exhaustive foreknowledge.
- Undermines confidence in God's sovereignty.
- God cannot know only some of the future.
- The open view passages in the Bible are anthropomorphic.

Meet Some Nuns

Dominican Sisters of Mary Immaculate Province

<https://houstondominicans.org/>

(Also meet Dorothy Sayers!)



For Further Reading

- Four Views on Divine Providence by Paul Kjoss Helseth, William Craig Lane, Ron Highfield and Gregory A. Boyd, Zondervan Counterpoints, 2011
- The God Who Risks by John Sanders, InterVarsity Press, 1998
- God of the Possible by Gregory A. Boyd, Baker Books, 2000
- The Uncontrolling Love of God by Thomas Jay Oord, IVP Academic, 2018