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## MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE AND CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

To say that God is omniscient, most philosophers and theologians agree, is to say that he knows all true propositions and none that are false.<sup>1</sup> But there is a great deal of disagreement about what is knowable. Some believe that God's knowledge is limited to everything that is (or has been) actual and that which will follow deterministically from it. He knows, for example, exactly what Caesar was thinking when he crossed the Rubicon and how many horses he had in his army that day. And he knows exactly how Gorbachev feels about the use of nuclear weapons. And since he knows how the 'laws of nature' (which he has purportedly created) function, he knows, for example, how certain weather systems will develop and what their effects will be on certain natural environments. But with respect to any future state of affairs which includes free human decision-making as a causal component, God is said not to know what will occur. God, as the ultimate psychoanalyst or behaviourist, can with great accuracy predict what we will freely decide to do in the future in many cases. He might well, for example, be able to predict quite accurately who will win the 1988 Presidential election. But a God who possesses only 'present knowledge' (PK) cannot know who will win. Given that the election in question is dependent on free choices which have yet to be made, there is presently nothing for God to know.<sup>2</sup>

Proponents of what we shall call 'simple foreknowledge' (SFK) disagree. Statements describing what will actually happen, they argue, including those statements describing events related to what humans will freely choose to do, are true *now*. It is now true or false that 'Gary Hart *will* be elected in 1996 in the actual world.' The relevant decisions have, of course, not yet been made. But Hart will either choose to run or choose not to run, he will either be nominated or not be nominated, and he will either be elected or not be

<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, other ways of defining omniscience. Some say, for example, that God's omniscience does not necessarily consist in his knowing all true propositions but rather in his knowing everything that it is logically possible from him to know. Such conceptions of omniscience, however, yield the same basic categories of divine knowledge with which I will be concerned, so I have chosen not to explicitly identify and discuss them in the text.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Clark Pinnock, *Predestination and Free Will*, ed. by David and Randall Basinger (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986), pp. 141-162. Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Harper Row, 1978), pp. 29-30.

elected. Thus, since God knows all true propositions, he knows now if Hart will be elected President in the actual world in 1996.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to add parenthetically that timeless knowledge also normally fits into this category. The proponent of timeless knowledge usually maintains that God's knowledge of all actual occurrences (those which are from *our perspective* past, present or future) is not 'in time'. All occurrences are being viewed by him in the 'eternal now'. This differs from SFK in that God is not said to *foreknow* anything. But it is similar in that both models maintain that God knows all that which *from our perspective* was, is or will be actual.<sup>2</sup>

But what about counterfactual claims? What, for example, should we say about the following statement: 'If Ted Kennedy had won the Presidential election in 1980, he would have run again in 1984.' The antecedent is false, so that statement cannot be true by virtue of the fact that it describes what has occurred or will actually occur. But is it not either true or false that *if* Kennedy had won in 1980, he would have run again? And, thus, ought we not maintain that God knows the truth or falsity of such hypothetical propositions?

There are many philosophers and theologians who believe that God has such 'middle knowledge' (MK). They believe, that is, not only that God knows what *will* in fact happen in the actual world or what *could* in fact happen in all worlds, but also what *would* in fact happen in every possible situation, including what every possible free creature would do in every possible situation in which that creature could find itself. They believe that God does know, for example, whether Ted Kennedy would have chosen freely to run again in 1984 if he had been elected President in 1980. We as humans, as Alvin Plantinga states it, 'may now know what the answer is' in such a case. But 'one thing we would take for granted,' he argues, 'is there is a right answer here... we would reject out of hand... the suggestion that there simply is none.'<sup>3</sup>

A proponent of timeless knowledge, it should be added, could in principle also affirm a version of MK although I am not aware of any who do. It could be claimed that in addition to 'timelessly' seeing the actual world in its entirety, God timelessly 'sees' not only all other possible worlds in their entirety, but can identify which of these worlds would have been actual, given that other creative decisions had been made.

Does the model of divine omniscience one affirms make much difference? Specifically, do such models have important implications for God's ability to influence earthly affairs? The answer depends in part on the perceived relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom. Some orthodox

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Bruce Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God* (New York: Fordham Press, 1982), pp. 14-16, 68-74.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Norman Geisler, *Predestination and Free Will*, pp. 11-84.

<sup>3</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 180.

Christians are theological determinists. They, like their non-theistic counterparts, argue that an action is voluntary (free) as long as the action is willed or chosen by the agent herself – i.e. as long as the agent is not forced to perform the action against her will. Thus, they see nothing inconsistent in claiming that, although God irresistibly influences the desires (will) of his created moral agents in such a manner that he can insure that they will perform the exact states of affairs he desires, such moral agents are still acting freely. For such actions are still seen as willed by the agents in question.<sup>1</sup>

In such a universe, God does in fact have a form of MK. That is, in addition to knowing what has happened and will happen in the actual world, he knows exactly what would have happened in any other world he could have actualized. But his decisions are not based on what he foreknows. He does not, in other words, utilize his MK when deciding how to act. For the compatibilistic God just the opposite is true. His knowledge is based on his decisions. Since he can create any self-consistent state of affairs of which he can conceive, he knows what will or would happen in any context because he knows how he has decided or would have decided to respond to that which he encounters. Accordingly, for the Christian compatibilist, the nature of God's knowledge is irrelevant to his ability to control earthly affairs.

Theistic indeterminists strongly disagree with a deterministic conception of human freedom. They insist that a person (*P*) can only be free with respect to an action (*A*) if God does not bring it about (casually determine) that *P* do *A*. Most, therefore, openly acknowledge that in a world containing significantly free individuals, God cannot retain total control over all earthly affairs regardless of the type of knowledge he possesses.<sup>2</sup>

But in a world containing indeterministic freedom, the nature of God's knowledge is extremely relevant to the amount of influence God can wield. The purpose of this paper is to document this fact and draw out some of its implications for classical Christian thought. I shall conclude that classical Christian theism (in its indeterministic forms) is much more dependent on MK than most realize and, thus, that recent attempts to criticize this form of knowledge must be taken seriously by those in the classical camp.

## I

Let us first assume that God has only PK. It might appear that this would greatly limit his ability to control earthly affairs. For if God cannot make people freely do what he wants and he does not know what they will freely do, then it appears that to the extent to which he makes them free, he is committed to accepting the unknowable results of their actions. To the extent, for example, to which God has decided to give individuals the

<sup>1</sup> John S. Feinberg, *Predestination and Free Will*, pp. 99–124.

<sup>2</sup> See Plantinga, pp. 169–84.

freedom to treat their spouses and children as they wish, it seems that he has committed himself to living with an unknown amount of family happiness and/or spouse and child abuse. It seems, in other words, that to the extent to which a God with PK gives humans freedom, he becomes a 'cosmic gambler'.

But this assessment is open to challenge. We can logically and chronologically separate a person's decision to perform a certain action from the performance of that action, itself, and the performance from the consequences it will produce. For example, we can logically and chronologically distinguish a person's decision to fire a gun from the actual firing and the actual firing from that which the firing will bring about – e.g. someone's death, a dent in a tin can, etc. Accordingly, it appears that even a God with just PK would know what a person had chosen to do *before* the decision resulted in the desired action and thus before the consequences of the action occurred. But if this is so, then it appears that he could 'veto' any human action or modify its natural consequences even the relevant decision, itself, has been *freely* made. It appears, for example, that he could protect a bank employee whom he sees a robber has freely decided to shoot by distracting the robber before the gun is actually fired or by making the gun jam or by changing the angle of the bullet. And if this is so, it might be argued, then it appears that even a God with PK can be said to retain control over all earthly affairs in the sense that no state of affairs occurs which God does not desire to occur.<sup>1</sup>

This line of reasoning, however, is subject to serious criticism. For most theistic indeterminists, to say that a person is significantly free does not mean only that such a person has it within her power to choose to perform actions not in keeping with God's will. It also means that this person has it within her power to bring it about that events not necessarily desired by God will actually occur. But if this is so, then God cannot stop the actualization of a *freely* chosen decision or modify its consequences. He must tolerate the results or be considered guilty of 'determining' human behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

However, let us grant for the sake of argument that a God with PK does have the power to 'veto' the actualization of any free choice. It does then follow that no human action (as distinguished from a human choice) will ever occur which God does not desire to occur. But a God with only PK still does not know with certainty what free choices will be made in the future or how his 'present' choices will effect the future. And this has significant implications for classical Christian thought.

Consider, for example, God's initial creative act. According to classical theism, there was once a time (chronologically or logically) when only God existed. Everything else was created by God *ex nihilo*. But what kind of

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Susan Anderson, 'Plantinga and the Free Will Defense', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, LXII (1981), 274–81.

<sup>2</sup> This is argued more fully in David Basinger, 'Anderson on Plantinga: A Response', *Philosophy Research Archives*, VII (1982), 315–20.

creative options did God have 'before' creation if he had only PK? He could have conceived of many possibilities. And if he had not wanted to create a world containing free individuals, he could have known exactly what he would always bring about. But assuming that he desired to create a universe containing significantly free individuals, he did not know 'before' creation exactly what would happen. He knew he would veto anything he did not want. But he did not know with certainty which type of free will universe – i.e. which type of free creatures in which environmental context – would develop into a universe most closely approximating his ideal. He did not know how many times he would have to 'veto' human action in the type of world he did choose to initiate. And he did not know how such vetoes might ultimately affect his work. He did not even have the assurance that he would not need ultimately to remove freedom totally to 'save' his creation from destruction. In short, for a God with PK, the creative act was a significant gamble.

This characterization of the act of creation, however, hardly seems compatible with classical Christian thought. Even those classical Christians who affirm indeterministic freedom normally agree with Augustine that:

God is called almighty for no other reason than that he can do what ever he willeth and because the efficacy of his omnipotent will is not impeded by the will of any creature.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, the vast majority of classical theists, both past and present, have affirmed with William Craig that:

History is not an unpredictably unfolding sequence of events plunging haphazardly without purpose or direction; rather God...directs the course of world history toward His previsioned ends...God's salvific plan was not an afterthought necessitated by an unforeseen circumstance, but was an eternal plan brought to realization in history.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, for classical theism, God is definitely not a cosmic gambler. He may have voluntarily given humans some freedom to determine their own destiny. But even this is seen as a pre-ordained aspect of the creative plan God 'saw' and sanctioned in its entirety before creation.

The affirmation of PK also has significant implications for personal divine guidance – i.e. the process whereby God gives useful information to individuals about present or future events in their lives. A God with PK can give excellent personal and predictive advice based on what he now knows. He can promise to 'manipulate' or stop certain affairs if they happen to eventuate. But to the extent to which human choice will play a part in any future sequence of events, God does not know exactly how things will turn out. Thus, he cannot be certain that his advice will, if followed, actually lead to the best possible outcome (or even a good outcome). For example, let us

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion* xiv. 96.

<sup>2</sup> William Craig, 'Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingency', sermons (forthcoming in reader on Process thought).

assume that both Tom and Fred have proposed to Sue and that she has turned to God for guidance. A God with PK knows whether Tom or Fred would at present be a better partner for Sue. But he does not know all that Tom and Fred will encounter in the future or what they will freely choose to do in response. Accordingly, unless God is willing directly to manipulate the lives of those involved, he may not presently know which person would ultimately be a better partner. And Sue, accordingly, can never be sure that her choice was the best, even if she follows God's leading. She must be content with knowing that God will always be there to help her respond to that which eventuates, no matter which choice she makes.

Analogous limitations also apply to God's ability to make infallible public prophetic utterances which presuppose knowledge of future free choices. A God with PK could not, for example, have infallibly known before creation or even during the time the Bible was written to what extent people would freely choose to accept or reject Christ's teachings or anything concerning the 'end times' which involves human choice. He could only have predicted how humanity would freely behave. And such predictions would have weakened as they 'stretched' further into the future.

All this, however, will hardly do for classical Christian theists. Most have uniformly held that God's personal guidance and 'public' prophetic utterances are based on his total and infallible knowledge of what will (at least from our human perspective) happen in the future. Most, in fact, would agree with Stephen Charnock that:

If God knows not future things but only by conjecture, then there is no God, because a certain knowledge, so as infallibly to predict things to come, is an inseparable perfection of the Deity.<sup>1</sup>

Such 'problems' readily disappear if God possesses MK. A God with MK knew *before* creation what would in fact eventuate, given every option open to him. This does not necessarily mean that he had the ability to actualize the most desirable state of affairs of which he could conceive. For he may have desired to create a world containing individuals with indeterministic freedom and even God, as we have seen, cannot totally control all of the activities in such a world. But the fact that he knew *before* creation what would eventuate given any creative option does, of course, mean that no gambling was involved in the creative process. He did not have to worry about any surprises; he knew no second guessing would be necessary. For he had the ability to consider all the actualizable worlds and choose the one which best mirrored his creative options.

Nor need a God with MK rely on prediction when giving personal guidance. For example, in the case of Sue's marriage proposals, a God with MK is not limited to knowing what might or will in fact happen. He knows

<sup>1</sup> Craig, p. 5.

before he gives guidance to Sue exactly what would happen if she marries Tom, exactly what would happen if she marries Fred, and exactly what would happen if she marries neither. He knows, for instance, if Tom would still love her thirty years after their marriage or if Sue would meet someone better if she refused both proposals. Accordingly, Sue can be assured she is getting infallible, long-term advice. To the extent to which she believes she has correctly discerned God's guidance on this issue, and acted in accordance with it, she need never wonder whether she has made a mistake – i.e. whether things would have been better if she had acted differently. No matter what problems develop, she can steadfastly believe that she is pursuing the best 'life-plan' available to her.

And, of course, since a God with MK knows all that will happen in the actual world, he can make infallible public prophetic claims about future states of affairs. In fact, he can even make accurate conditional prophecies involving human choice. That is, he can say exactly what will happen *if* certain decisions are made and exactly what will happen if they are not. For he sees both possibilities with equal clarity.

But the concept of MK is coming under increasing criticism. Everyone agrees that if hypothetical conditions of freedom *were* true, God would have knowledge of them. But some philosophers deny or at least doubt, in the words of Robert Adams, that such conditionals 'ever were or ever will be true'.<sup>1</sup> Some, such as Adams and Bruce Reichenbach, hold this view because they do not see any comprehensible grounds on which such propositions can be true.<sup>2</sup> Others, for example, William Hasker, go even further, claiming that the concept of a true counterfactual of freedom is self-contradictory.<sup>3</sup>

Let us assume for the sake of argument that these criticisms hold – i.e. let us assume that God does not have MK. This fact would be extremely damaging to classical Christian thought if God were limited to either PK or MK for, as we have seen, PK is incompatible with a number of classical beliefs. But there is also the concept of SFK to consider. Thus, the crucial questions for the classical theist become: To what extent does SFK allow God to influence earthly affairs? And does this amount of influence resolve the problems inherent in assuming God only possesses PK?

I will begin my discussion of these questions by considering a scenario in which the amount of divine control inherent in MK, SFK, and PK can be compared. Let us assume that it is 1940 and that the Germans are freely beginning to create a very destructive weapons system of which the Allies are unaware. And let us further assume that God does not want this system to be used effectively against the Allied forces. If God is willing to intervene

<sup>1</sup> Robert Adams, 'Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, xiv (1977), 110.

<sup>2</sup> Reichenbach, pp. 68–74.

<sup>3</sup> William Hasker, 'A Refutation of Middle Knowledge', forthcoming in *Naus*.



unilaterally in this context – i.e. is willing to violate human freedom and/or his natural laws – then the type of knowledge he possesses is basically irrelevant. Whether he possesses MK, SFK, or PK, he can simply stop the Germans from continuing production or limit the system's effectiveness or let plans for the system fall into Allied hands.

But let us assume that God has chosen not to utilize unilateral methods of control. This still leaves him various options, one of which is to attempt to influence the Allies to begin to develop freely a form of weaponry which will serve as an effective counter. But should such an attempt be made? If God has MK, then he not only knows whether such an attempt would be successful, he knows whether such production, if begun, would freely be completed and whether such weapons, if actually produced, would be utilized successfully for their intended purpose. In short, a God with MK need not worry about encountering any surprises. He knows exactly what will result if he does or does not attempt to influence the Allies and can make his decision accordingly. Moreover, since God has always known all that he knows, he is not limited to *reacting* in 1940 to the German decision in question. He knew, for example, in 1935 (and at every moment before) what the Germans would freely choose to do in 1940. Accordingly, if he had foreseen in 1935, for instance, that the initiation of Allied production of a counter-weapon in 1940 would be too late, he could have attempted to influence the Allies to begin research into the appropriate technology in 1935.

A God with PK, on the other hand, is in a less advantageous position. First, since he has no foreknowledge, he *is* limited to reacting to what has occurred (or what he can predict will soon occur). He could not, for instance, have made decisions in 1935 based on what was freely to occur in 1940. Moreover, even though he could in 1940 attempt to influence the Allies to begin production, he does not know whether such production, if initiated, would be completed or later stopped, thereby causing a non-productive drain on resources. And he does not know whether the counterweapon, if produced, would be used properly or abused for personal gain. Thus, any attempt to influence the Allies to initiate such production is, for a God with PK, a significant gamble.

But what of a God with SFK? Is he limited, like a God with PK, to reacting to what occurs, or does his foreknowledge allow him, like a God with MK, to initiated responses to certain events before they actually occur? And can he be assured, like a God with MK, that his decisions concerning future states of affairs involving free choices will have the desired results? Or must he, like a God with PK, gamble to some extent?

To answer these questions, we must determine exactly what information is available to a God with SFK before he makes his decisions. Proponents of SFK, remember, do not believe that hypothetical conditionals of freedom

can be known to be true.<sup>1</sup> Thus, to return to our scenario, a God with SFK, unlike a God with MK, cannot be said to know that any of the following are true.

(1) If God were to attempt to influence the Allies to produce a counter-weapon to the weapons system the Germans are developing, the Allies would freely begin such production.

(1') If God were to attempt to influence the Allies to produce a counter-weapon to the weapons system the Germans are developing, the Allies would not freely choose to begin such production.

(2) If the Allies were to begin production, they would freely choose to finish production.

(2') If the Allies were to begin production, they would not freely choose to finish production.

(3) If the Allies were to finish production, they would freely choose to use the counterweapon properly.

(3') If the Allies were to finish production, they would not freely choose to use the counterweapon properly.

But a God with SFK, it might be argued, would know *before* he decided whether to influence the Allies which of the following two propositions is true – i.e. would know which correctly describes what will happen in the actual world.

(4) The Allies will freely begin to produce a certain weapons system as the result, in part, of divine persuasion.

(4') It is not the case that the Allies will freely begin to create a certain weapons system as the result, in part, of divine persuasion.

And if (4) is true, he would know which of the following two propositions is true.

(5) The Allies will freely choose to complete production of the weapons system.

(5') It is not the case that the Allies will freely choose to complete production of the weapons system.

And if (5) is true, he would know which of the following two propositions is true.

(6) The Allies will freely choose to use the weapons system for its intended purpose.

(6') It is not the case that the Allies will freely choose to use the weapons system for its intended purpose.

And given such foreknowledge, the argument might continue, a God with SFK is obviously in a very strong position when deciding whether he should attempt to influence the Allies. His decision will not be a gamble for he, like

<sup>1</sup> Some proponents of SFK deny that hypothetical conditionals of freedom can be known to be true because they deny that such propositions have truth values; others deny their truth can be known because they believe all such propositions to be false.

a God with MK, knows *before* his decision what will eventuate. And since he has always known whether (4–6') are true or false, he is not, like a God with PK, left to react to what the Germans do in 1940. Rather he, like a God with MK, can begin to influence the Allies in 1935 or before. In short, it might be argued, God need not have MK to avoid the pitfalls inherent in PK. SFK is enough.

Such reasoning, however, is dubious. It is true that a God with SFK has always known what will occur, including what decisions he will make, the reasons for which they will be made and what the consequences of such decisions will be. But proponents of SFK do not want to claim that such foreknowledge controls God's activity in the sense that it limits him to acting out some eternal preset script over which he has no control. Rather, they argue, God makes meaningful, free decisions. He freely chose to create the earth. No provisioned scenario 'forced' him to. And he can freely choose to interact with his creation as he will. No provisioned scenario limits his options. Consequently, to return to our current scenario, although proponents of the SFK model acknowledge that God has always known whether he will attempt to influence the Allies in 1935 or 1940, they adamantly deny that such foreknowledge will force God to act in a certain way – i.e. will determine what he does. A meaningful, free decision, they believe, will be made in 1940 or before.

This qualification, however, raises severe conceptual problems. We are, remember, discussing the amount of divine control possible given an indeterministic understanding of freedom. But to say that a person (*P*) is free to perform an action (*A*), indeterminists believe, is to say that *P* has it within her power to choose to perform *A* or choose not to perform *A*. Both *A* and not *A* could actually occur; which will actually occur has not yet been determined. Accordingly, within this framework, to say that God is freely deciding whether to influence the Allies to produce a counterweapon is to say that what God will actually do – and thus what will be actual – has not yet been determined. But a God with SFK only knows that which will actually occur. Thus, it would seem that *until* God has decided to influence or refrain from influencing the Allies, he cannot know what will be actual – i.e. which decision he will make. But if this is so, what are we to make of the claim that a God with SFK has always known what will occur – e.g. has always known what his decisions will be?

In short, proponents of SFK who believe God makes meaningful (indeterministically) free decisions are faced with a seeming dilemma. If they maintain, as they must, that God has always known exactly what he will decide *before* his decisions are made, then it appears that such decisions are not truly free. For an agent can only be said to be making a meaningful, free decision if what will be decided has not already been determined. But if, on the other hand, they claim that God does make meaningful, free decisions,

then it seems they must acknowledge that God does not know what will be decided *before* his decisions are made and thus that God has not *always* known all that will occur.

The only viable way I see of attempting to resolve this tension is to separate, as many proponents of SFK do, the *chronological* and *epistemological* (logical) relationships which exist between God's decisions and his knowledge of them.<sup>1</sup> Since God has always had knowledge of all that will be actual, it is argued, it is true that his knowledge of what he will decide to do in any given situation *chronologically* precedes the actual decisions themselves. But his knowledge of what he will decide to do in any given situation has its basis in (is grounded on) the decision itself – i.e. he knows at time *t'* what he will do at time *t*<sup>2</sup> *because of* the decision made at *t*. Thus, epistemologically (logically) his decisions precede his knowledge of them.<sup>2</sup>

Or, to make the point less formally, to allow for meaningful, free divine decision-making, proponents of SFK must make a distinction between God's role as observer of all earthly affairs and God's role as participant in earthly affairs. They must claim that although God in his role as observer has always known what he as a participant in earthly affairs will decide to do, such knowledge is based on (and thus epistemologically preceded by) what he, as participant, actually decides.

But given this distinction, we can now expose the confusion in the claim that since a God with SFK has always had access to the truth or falsity of propositions such as (4–6'), he need neither simply *react* to the German decision to build a weapons system nor worry about the outcome of his response. To reason in this fashion, we can now clearly see, presupposes that God's knowledge of what he will decide and what will or will not happen as the result of his choice can be used by God in making his decision. But this type of 'privileged access' is not possible for a God with only SFK. In his role as observer of earthly affairs, he has always known whether he will attempt to influence the Allies. But since such knowledge does not epistemologically precede the actual choice, it is not available to God in his role as decision-maker. Moreover, since the truth values of (4) and (4'), and thus of (5), (5'), (6) and (6') are indeterminate until God's decision is actually

<sup>1</sup> An interesting alternative response has recently been proposed by Bruce Reichenbach, 'Omniscience and Deliberation', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, xvi (1984), 225–36. Omniscience, Reichenbach argues, is only incompatible with divine decision-making if we conceive of such decision-making in terms of deliberation – i.e. if we see God as weighing viable options before a decision is made. But intentional decision-making, he continues, can be non-deliberative – i.e. can simply be a decision to implement certain goals or objectives. Thus this type of intentional divine activity is not ruled out by the fact that God knows what he will decide to do before the decision is made. Reichenbach's argument, however, is only helpful if it is the case that God never has or will make a deliberative decision. But there appears to be no good theological basis for believing that this is the case. In fact, there appears to be a strong theological argument against this contention in that while most theists have wanted to claim that God's decisions are freely made, it is not clear that non-deliberative decisions are truly free.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Jock Cottrell, 'Conditional Election', *Grace Unlimited*, ed., Clark Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), pp. 68–70.

made, this information is also not available to God during his pre-decision deliberations. As decision-maker, the only relevant information available to him is knowledge of what has actually occurred and that which can be extrapolated from it.

This means, to generalize, that a God with SFK is no less a reacting, cosmic gambler than is a God with PK. He has, in his role as observer, always known how his gamble will turn out. But he, no more than a God with PK, has access to such information when making his decisions. Only a God with MK has this luxury.<sup>1</sup>

The same is true for a God who has 'timeless' knowledge of that which is actual. Such a God, remember, *foreknows* nothing. All is seen as existing in the 'eternal now'. But proponents of this model also want to affirm that God makes meaningful free decisions. Thus, the question we have just been discussing arises again: What information is known by God when he freely makes his decisions? And the same response must again be given. What cannot be seen by a timeless God in his role as decision-maker are the consequences of his decisions because until (in a logical sense) the decision is made, there is nothing actual for God as decision-maker timelessly to see. He, like a God with SFK, must base his decisions on prediction in such cases.

This fact, of course, has significant implications for our understanding of God's act of creation. In his role as observer of earthly affairs, a God with SFK knew before creation which creative option he would choose and what the exact outcome would be. But since, as we have seen, his 'foreknowledge' of his decisions and what they would produce were based on (epistemologically preceded by) these choices themselves, he, in his role as participant in earthly affairs, had no knowledge of what would actually occur until the relevant creative choices were made. Accordingly, he, no more than a God with PK, can be said to be 'directing the course of world history toward his previsioned ends'. Both can react to what occurs in an attempt to bring about desired goals. But neither, in his role as creator, was able 'before' creation to envision what would happen and use this information as a basis for determining the exact nature of the creative act. Both, in their role as creator, approached (and continue to approach) creation as cosmic gamblers.

But perhaps the classical proponent of SFK can still salvage something. A God with SFK, it might be acknowledged, cannot in his role as participant in earthly affairs know 'beforehand' what decisions he will make and what will follow from them. But he can in his role as participant know some future states of affairs and share this information in a beneficial fashion. In other words, it might be argued, a God with SFK can at least give better guidance than a God with only PK.

<sup>1</sup> Some proponents of SFK may wish to hold that God's decisions are made 'outside of time' or 'before all worlds' rather than at the time at which he acts. But even granting this possibility, the basic point still holds: knowledge of the actual results of a decision *cannot* be presupposed in making the decision.

To test this thesis, we will return again to Sue's request for divine guidance concerning two potential spouses. Let us assume that one of the things God in his role as observer foresees is that Tom will become afflicted with a congenital brain disorder ten years in the future and spend the next 20 years of his life in a vegetative state in a hospital. Does God in his role as participant in earthly affairs have this information available when giving guidance to Sue? Since Tom's disorder does not appear to be in any way directly related to how God decides to counsel Sue or how Sue acts in response, it does appear to circumvent the previous line of criticism. God would not in this case be using 'foreseen' information that is dependent for its true value on the decision he is using it to make.

But even if we grant that God as participant has this information available when guiding Sue, little of value follows for the proponent of SFK. Let us assume, for example, that primarily because God foresees what will happen to Tom in 10 years, he is tempted to counsel her not to accept Tom's proposal. Would this be good advice? It depends on a number of variables which would be unknown to God as participant (information giver) in this context. First, since he has not yet given Sue guidance, he cannot yet know exactly how she will respond to it and thus cannot yet know what will happen as the result of her response. He cannot, for example, know with certainty if she will disregard his guidance and marry Tom anyway. Nor does he know exactly what kind of life Tom and Sue would have together before Tom's misfortune. And he does not know whether her life, on balance, would be happier, given 10 good years with Tom, than it would be, given 40 mediocre years with Fred. All he can do is make more or less accurate predictions based on what he does know of Sue's personality.

Accordingly, a God with SFK has little 'comparative advantage' over a God with only PK in this case. He *may* have one significant bit of information not available to a God with PK. [Such tentativeness is necessary because if the disorder is congenital, it may well be that a God with PK could predict accurately when it will strike.] But since he, no more than a God with PK, knows what would happen to Sue, given each of the various options open to her, he, no more than a God with PK, can know which option open to Sue would actually be the 'best' in the long run. Only a God with MK would know this.

All this of course also has implications for general prophetic utterances like those found in the Bible? Utterances of this type can be divided into at least three categories: conditional prophecies which leave the outcome open, temporally open-ended declarations of future divine activity and specific claims about what others will freely do in the future (and at times how God will in fact respond). The first two types are not of present interest since they do not necessitate 'foreknowledge' of any sort. God does not need foreknowledge, for example, to proclaim that if we call on the name of the

Lord, he will respond or to proclaim that if we are faithful to him, he will be faithful to us. Nor does he need foreknowledge to declare that in 'the fullness of time' Christ will be sent or that when Christ comes again, some of those who have died will meet him in the air.

But what of alleged prophetic claims which supposedly did (or do) presuppose foreknowledge of future free choices? 'The Romans will become a mighty power.' 'Christ will be rejected by those whom he will come to help.' 'In the last days, Jerusalem will again become a centre of political activity.' In one sense, a God with SFK has an advantage over a God with only PK at this point. He, in his role as observer, has always known all that will actually occur. But it is in his role as participant in earthly affairs that he allegedly reveals some such information to us in the Scriptures. Thus, the important question becomes: How much knowledge about the future can a God with SFK, in his role as participant, share with us?

The relevant principle has already been established: When making a decision, a God with SFK does not have available to him knowledge of what will happen as a result of the decision. Thus, for example, if the Old Testament prophecy that Christ would be rejected had no bearing on the fact that he was rejected, such information could, in principle, have been shared by a God with SFK. But if, for instance, prophetic utterances about what would happen in the 'last days' will influence how those in the 'last days' in fact behave, then such prophetic utterances could not have come from a God with only SFK. For, given our relevant principle, a God with SFK, in his role as the revealer of such information (participant), would not, when deciding what to share, have had such information available to him. Only a God with MK can utter this type of prophecy – i.e. prophecies which allow him to guide human behaviour.

## II

We must conclude then that with respect to control of earthly affairs a God with SFK is much more similar to a God with PK than to a God with MK. To the extent he grants people freedom, a God with SFK, like a God with PK, is basically a cosmic *gambler* who must *react* to that which occurs in his creation. But classical Christians, as we have seen, reject this concept of God. Thus they must abandon the SFK model. Only a God with MK can accomplish that which classical Christianity requires. And, accordingly, those in this camp can no longer consider the concept of MK an insignificant philosophical curiosity. Since their system appears committed to it, it is crucial that they determine whether the concept is coherent.

Let me, therefore, in closing make a few comments about the current state of the 'MK discussion'. As stated before, MK is attacked on two grounds. Some reject MK because they do not see any comprehensible grounds on which counterfactual conditionals might be considered true. It cannot be

argued, for example, Adams tells us, that the state of affairs described by the consequent in a conditional hypothetical of freedom follows by logical or causal necessity from the state of affairs described by the antecedent for 'these suggestions are inconsistent with the assumption that the individual in question would have been free'.<sup>1</sup> Nor will it help, he argues, to claim that conditional hypotheticals of freedom are true because God knows 'the actual intentions, desires and character' of the individual in question and can, on the basis of these non-necessitating grounds accurately predict what would occur (or would have occurred) under the conditions in question. For 'a free agent may act out of character or change his intentions or fail to act on them'. The best God could do on the basis of his knowledge of non-necessitating factors, he points out, would be to predict that hypotheticals of freedom were probably true. And to grant this, he concludes, would be incompatible with the traditional theistic assumption that God's knowledge is infallible.<sup>2</sup>

And, of course, he adds, the proponent of MK cannot appeal to a correspondence theory of truth. For while the propositions which state what will in fact happen in the actual world are sometimes said to be 'true by corresponding to the actual occurrence of the events they predict', counterfactual conditionals do not describe anything actual and thus cannot be 'true in this way'.<sup>3</sup>

But why should we assume that MK (or even SFK), can only be considered possible if we can identify the 'grounds' upon which it is based? Why must MK be based on, or inferred from, anything else? Why can we not assume that such knowledge is simply a primitive, noninferential divine cognition? Or, to use more contemporary terminology, why should we not assume that MK is, for God, properly basic?

Adams acknowledges that this line of reasoning is the strongest defence for the possibility of MK but ultimately rejects it because he does not think he has any 'primitive understanding of what it would be for the relevant subjunctive conditionals to be true'.<sup>4</sup> But the fact that Adams does not have such a 'primitive understanding' does little to support the contention that MK should be rejected. For some philosophers like Plantinga do claim to have a primitive understanding of what it would be for MK propositions to be true or false. And since 'primitive understandings' are, by definition, not the sorts of things for or against which rational argumentation can easily be offered, it is difficult to see (as Adams himself acknowledges) how he could establish that his perspective on the 'primitive understanding' in question should be shared by the majority of rational individuals. Moreover, unless he can finally establish that God, not just humans, *could* not have the 'primitive understanding' in question, his argument fails.

Critics in the other camp approach the issue somewhat differently. They

<sup>1</sup> Adams, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 110.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 112.



do not ask whether there exists any good basis for believing counterfactuals of freedom *are* true; they argue that they *could* not be true. Consider, for example, the following claim by William Hasker:

If a counterfactual is true, than it is not in [an agent's] power to reject the offer, and she is not free in the required sense. And on the other hand insofar as an agent is genuinely free there are not true counterfactuals stating what the agent would definitely do under various possible circumstances. And so the doctrine of middle knowledge is untenable: *there are no true counterfactuals of freedom*.<sup>1</sup>

I, personally, do not find Hasker's argument (or the arguments of others) to this end convincing. But he has, I believe, identified the right 'battle ground'. What the critic of MK must argue is not simply that we as humans cannot understand how God could possess such knowledge. It must be argued that there is no such knowledge for God to possess.

Will attacks of this sort ultimately prove successful? That is, will a line of reasoning be developed which will show clearly to the satisfaction of most philosophers and theologians that the concept of MK must be rejected? I am not sure. But if the general thesis of this paper is correct, this question cannot be dismissed lightly or ignored by those interested in classical Christian thought. For what is at stake is the very coherence of classical Christian theism itself.

<sup>1</sup> Hasker, p. 16.