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The Providential Advantage of Divine Foreknowledge
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Classical Theism is committed not just to divine *omniscience* but also to exhaustive *foreknowledge*: for everything that happens, there was no time at which God didn't know that it would happen.¹ If God is an unexcellably perfect being, one compelling reason for attributing to him exhaustive knowledge of the future is that this would make him *smarter* than he would be if he lacked it. This reason has force in the logic of perfect being theology whether or not such foreknowledge would endow God with any further advantage—for example, by equipping him to do things he couldn't do if he lacked such knowledge.

Of course this reason for ascribing exhaustive foreknowledge to God presupposes that this attribute is coherent and, if coherent, that it doesn't conflict with more important desiderata. Divine foreknowledge has in fact been challenged on both scores. The controversy centers on God's knowledge of *future contingents*: propositions about the future whose truth isn't determined by anything that has *already* happened, but only by what happens *later*. (Example: tomorrow I come to a fork in the road and it's genuinely open to me to go left or right; suppose I in fact go right; then relative to today, when my going right at that fork is still future, the statement *I will go right when I come to that fork in the road* expresses a future contingent.) If there are future contingents and these are (while future) *neither true nor false*, there cannot be such a thing as truly *exhaustive* foreknowledge, for some of the future (the contingent part) will be unknowable.² And if a world with future contingents is the kind of world a perfectly good God prefers (perhaps because this is a precondition for the good of libertarian free agency) and foreknowing such facts would leave them *noncontingent*, then it's arguable that God would be more excellent for *not* knowing them, even if there are such truths to be known; for God would then be in a position to create a better world (one with genuine future contingencies) than if he knew everything in advance.³ Both of these challenges are subjects of ongoing debate. Classical Theists, of course, must hold that both challenges fail, while so-called "Open Theists," who deny exhaustive foreknowledge, are convinced that one or both succeed.

What is at stake in this debate? Certainly there are *logical* and *metaphysical* issues at stake. Does the Law of Excluded Middle apply to propositions about the future? In what sense is the past (now) *necessary*? Can free agency exist in the absence of alternative possibilities? There is a vast literature on such questions, and I don't propose to add to it here.

What I would like to explore instead are the *theological* stakes. What are these? One issue that is *not* at stake is divine perfection: the debate isn't over whether God is maximally great, but whether maximal greatness includes exhaustive foreknowledge.⁴ What *does* seem to be at stake theologically is the issue raised in the first paragraph: whether foreknowledge would endow God with any "further advantage." Open Theists are at pains to deny that exhaustive foreknowledge would render God more capable than

if he lacked it. This is the thesis argued in the selection by John Sanders, and it's the thesis that I mean to dispute.

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What could be more useful than knowing the future? Action is future-oriented, and the success of our actions depends on how events unfold. What's going to happen to the stock market over the next few days? If only I knew! Is my tennis opponent about to rush the net? Then a lob would be in order. Will George be in the audience tomorrow? Then I'd better spend some time anticipating the objections he will surely raise. Will Sue show up as promised to drive me to the airport? If not, it would be nice to know now, so I can order a cab; if I wait to find out, it may be too late.

The claim by Sanders and other Open Theists that foreknowledge would nevertheless be useless is rather surprising. There appear to be a number of worries here, which don't always get clearly distinguished. The cleanest way to proceed, given the immense confusion surrounding this topic, is to describe a single case—the simpler the better—in which foreknowledge *prima facie* enables God to secure a result he couldn't secure without it. We can then see how this case compares with Sanders' own characterization of the Classical Theist's position and whether his objections to the providential utility of divine foreknowledge raise any genuine difficulties for it.⁵

Let's begin the construction of this simple scenario with a single contingent event, an event that can be foreknown by the God of Classical Theism but not by the God of Open Theism. Call this event 'E'. Next, God must actually know that E will occur. Let 'K(E)' designate God's knowledge of E. Finally, God must put this knowledge to use by doing something. Call this divine action 'A'. E, K(E), and A are the three constituents of our simple scenario for the providential employment of divine foreknowledge.

In constructing this scenario, I followed the logical or explanatory order of its three constituents. E *explains* K(E); in other words, the fact that E will occur explains why God knows that E will occur. (This distinguishes "simple foreknowledge," the subject of Sanders' essay, from other models of divine foreknowledge—see the beginning of the next section.) Moreover, K(E) *explains* A: God's knowledge that E will occur explains why God does A. (If it doesn't, K(E) is idling.) In sum, God does A *because* he knows that E will occur, and he knows that E will occur *because* E will in fact occur.

An interesting question is whether, in addition to specifying the explanatory relations that *do* obtain in this scenario, it is also important to specify that a certain explanatory relation does *not* obtain, namely, that A *does not explain* E. If God's action A *did* help explain why event E occurs, we would appear to have an explanatory circle on our hands: A because K(E), because E, because A. Whether such explanatory circles are possible is a difficult question. I'm not sure that they aren't possible—the philosopher David Lewis, for example, maintained that they are *inexplicable* but nevertheless *possible*.⁶ Still, providential scenarios that generate explanatory circles would raise serious concerns that are best avoided. Let's therefore stipulate that A does *not* explain E.⁷

A further question is how this scenario embodies providential utility. For divine foreknowledge to be useful, God must have some objective—call it 'O'—which his foreknowledge puts him in a better position to achieve than if he lacked that knowledge. The limit case is where, given his foreknowledge, God knows *exactly* what to do to

guarantee that O is achieved. When O depends in part on the libertarianly free actions of agents other than God, however, this ideal of providential control will often be out of reach, and divine foreknowledge will show its providential utility only by providing God information that *increases the likelihood* of O coming about. In keeping with the simplicity of our scenario, let's suppose God's objective O is simply this: that he shall have done A, if E will occur. Our scenario then embodies the limit case in which, given his foreknowledge of E, God knows exactly what to do (namely, A) to guarantee the achievement of O. Near the end of the paper, after we've spent some time thinking as clearly as we can about this simple scenario, I will introduce a probabilistic version involving another free agent and we can see whether this raises any additional difficulties that haven't already been dealt with.⁸

The last thing we need to do is assign times to the three constituents in the scenario. K(E), of course, must *precede* E in time; otherwise it won't amount to *foreknowledge* and the scenario won't capture the providential advantage that an omniprescient deity is supposed to have over one who lacks exhaustive knowledge of future contingents. As for A, it must come *after* (or at least *no earlier than*) K(E), since God does A *because* of K(E). But A must also *precede* E; otherwise God's performance of A could be informed by a knowledge of E acquired *after* the occurrence of E, and that's a knowledge that would be available to the God of Open Theism as well as the God of Classical Theism. The temporal order, then, is this: K(E) at T1, A at T2, E at T3, where $T1 < T2 < T3$. In contrast, the logical or explanatory order, as outlined two paragraphs earlier, is this: E at T3, K(E) at T1, A at T2.

Call this scenario 'The Basic Schema'. Because The Basic Schema is so abstract and, well, *schematic*, it might be helpful to the reader to have in mind a more concrete case that exemplifies The Basic Schema. Suppose, then, that Satan challenges God to a game of rock-paper-scissors. Satan realizes, of course, that he's taking on *the Supreme Being*, and he's understandably concerned that he may not face a level playing field. In particular, he fears that if he and God declare at the same time T, there might be no lag in God's knowledge of and reaction to what Satan declares, so that if Satan declares, e.g., "paper" at T, God will know this at T and can declare "scissors" at T. Satan won't have a chance under such conditions. Satan therefore asks that God go *first*; but in order that the playing field be genuinely leveled, and not stacked in Satan's favor, God is to make his declaration of rock, paper or scissors *mentally*, revealing it only after Satan declares.⁹ (The Father of Lies is confident that the Father of Truth won't deceive him when it comes time to reveal what he declared!) God agrees to this handicap and the game commences. Unfortunately for Satan, in correcting for God's unexcellably quick reflexes, he overlooked God's foreknowledge of future contingents. Knowing beforehand what Satan will declare, God is able to win every round.

The foregoing scenario is a clear instance of The Basic Schema. Consider a round in which Satan declares rock. Then E=Satan's declaring rock, K(E)=God's foreknowing that Satan will declare rock, and A=God's (mentally) declaring paper. The explanatory order is the one just given, while the temporal order is God's foreknowing at T1 that Satan will declare rock, God's (mentally) declaring paper at T2, and Satan's declaring rock at T3. O=God's winning the game. K(E) is providentially useful because God's chances of achieving O, given K(E), are 100%, whereas his chances without it are

no better than 50% (perhaps a bit higher, given God's superlative knowledge of Satan's psychology and past choices).¹⁰

Here then is an instance of The Basic Schema—call it 'The Game'—in which a God with exhaustive knowledge of future contingents appears to enjoy a clear advantage over a God who lacks such knowledge. We must now turn to Sanders' reasons for holding that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, there can be no such cases.

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Sanders begins his critique of the providential utility of divine foreknowledge by distinguishing "two different versions of how God's foreknowledge is accessed." (27) Both are versions of so-called "simple foreknowledge." Simple foreknowledge (or *SF*) is a knowledge of the contingent future that is not arrived at by inference from other things that God knows. In particular, it does not rest on God's knowledge of his own intentions for the future (which wouldn't help him know what other agents will do), or his knowledge of deterministic connections between the past and future (which won't give him access to the *contingent* future), or his "middle knowledge" of so-called "counterfactuals of freedom" (a providentially rich resource whose coherence is a matter of considerable controversy). Rather, in SF God can "see" what is temporally distant (the future as well as past) in something like the way that we can see what is spatially distant. And just as, when we see things truly, our visual information depends on, and is explained by, what we see, so God's knowledge of future events is explanatorily dependent on those events: he believes that an event will occur *because* it will occur; it doesn't occur *because* he believes it will occur. It was to accommodate this feature of simple foreknowledge that the Basic Schema was set up so that K(E) is explanatorily dependent on E.

On the first version of "how God's foreknowledge is accessed," which Sanders labels 'Complete Simple Foreknowledge' (or CSF), God takes in the entire future "at once." Sanders briefly elaborates: "though he knows things will occur in sequence God does not acquire the knowledge in sequence. God simply sees the whole at once." (28) Sanders dismisses this version of divine foreknowledge in short order, on the ground that "there is no room for any providential activity if God sees the whole at once." (28) The second version of how God accesses his foreknowledge is 'Incremental Simple Foreknowledge' (or ISF), in which God "accesses the future *in sequence or incrementally*." ISF provides a better understanding of simple foreknowledge than does CSF, Sanders maintains, inasmuch as it appears to allow God to "weave his own actions into the flow of human history" (28). For this reason, it's ISF whose providential resources Sanders compares with those of Open Theism throughout the remainder of his essay.

Sanders' dismissal of CSF's providential possibilities occupies just one paragraph. He evidently thinks that its problems are so obvious that a single paragraph is all that's necessary; he also evidently thinks that Classical Theists will readily agree that ISF provides a superior model of simple foreknowledge, so that lingering over CSF is wasted effort. In fact, the whole argument of Sanders' paper turns on this one paragraph. We'll need to pay it more attention than Sanders does.

Why exactly does Sanders think that CSF has no room for God's providential activity? There appear to be two reasons offered in this paragraph. The first has to do with "the fact that what God provisions is what will *actually* occur." So consider some

future event E (Sanders' example is the Holocaust); God, given CSF, "knows it is going to happen and cannot prevent it from happening since his foreknowledge is never mistaken." In other words, were God to act so that E, a future event foreknown by God, does *not* happen, his foreknowledge would be mistaken; but that's obviously impossible; so God can't act so that E doesn't happen. The same argument applies to any future event, since a God with CSF knows all such events. Therefore God can't prevent *anything* from happening. So much the worse for divine providence, if CSF provides the right account of how God accesses his knowledge of the future.

There are at least a couple of problems with this first reason for dismissing CSF. The first is that *prevention* isn't the only point to providential intervention. Consider The Game. God doesn't use his foreknowledge to *prevent* something he foreknows from happening; rather, he uses his foreknowledge to *bring about* something, namely, his declaring paper. So CSF's alleged uselessness for preventative purposes doesn't warrant the conclusion that it is useless *simpliciter*.

The second problem is that Sanders' argument doesn't work against "preventative providence" in the first place. What is it to prevent some event E from occurring? Prevention doesn't involve doing something ("preventing it") to some actually existing event; after all, if the event exists, you didn't prevent it! Rather, preventing E means (roughly) doing something A which is such that E *does not* occur, where E *would have* occurred if one had not done A. In The Game, for example, God not only makes providential use of his foreknowledge by *bringing about* his declaration of paper; he also makes providential use of his foreknowledge by *preventing* Satan from winning the game. What God prevents here (Satan's victory) is not, of course, to be found either among future events or among the things that God foreknows; if it were, he didn't succeed in preventing it! Rather, God prevents Satan's winning the game because he does something—declaring paper—which is such that Satan does *not* win the game, whereas Satan *would have* won (or tied) if God hadn't declared paper.

In sum, Sanders draws the wrong moral from God's foreknowing "what will *actually* occur." Because this is indeed the *actual* future, it not only provides the material for God's foreknowledge; it also includes all the results of any providential actions (whether productive or preventative) that God undertakes. Far from defeating his providential aspirations, foreknowledge provides a record of God's providential successes.

So much for Sanders' first reason for dismissing CSF. His second reason is more complex. He introduces it this way: "if what God has foreseen is the *entire* human history *at once*, then the difficulty is to somehow allow for God's intervention into that history since, presumably, his prevision did not include his own actions." (28) This reason contains both (i) an assumption and (ii) a difficulty alleged to rest on that assumption. Let's begin with (i).

(i) CSF is supposed to be God's knowing *all* of the future *at once*. It is surprising, then, to find Sanders claiming that what God knows "at once" is *not* in fact all of the future: God's own future actions are not included. *Complete Simple Foreknowledge* turns out to be a misnomer. Since Sanders has already appropriated this name for his "gappy" version of simple foreknowledge, we'll need to introduce a new name—'*Really Complete Simple Foreknowledge*'—for the view that what God knows "at once" does indeed include *all* of the future. The more important question, though, is *why* Sanders

thinks that CSF should be qualified in this way. There is nothing in the main text, other than the word “presumably,” that so much as recognizes this question, let alone answers it. Such reasons as Sanders has for ignoring Really Complete Simple Foreknowledge are relegated to two endnotes.

In the first, endnote 5, he writes: “If a God with CSF possesses foreknowledge of his own actions, then the problem is to explain how the foreknowledge can be the *basis* for the actions when it already *includes* the actions.” But this “problem” is wholly an artifact of the careless way in which Sanders refers to “the foreknowledge” and “the actions.” *Which* foreknowledge, and *which* actions? Certainly God couldn’t make foreknowledge of his *own* action A the “basis” for that very action A; but there’s no reason why he couldn’t use foreknowledge of *other* events as the basis for A. In *The Game*, for example, God doesn’t use his foreknowledge that he is going to declare paper as the basis for his decision to declare paper. (“Why did you declare paper?” one of the angels asks. “Because I foreknew that I would declare paper,” God replies. What kind of reason is that?) Instead, God uses his foreknowledge that *Satan is going to declare rock* as the basis for his decision to declare paper. Endnote 5 is just confused about how God would make providential use of simple foreknowledge.

The second, endnote 7, raises a different difficulty: if CSF includes God’s own actions, “God would then know what he is going to do before he makes up his mind and God would be unable to plan, anticipate or decide.” How so? Sanders doesn’t tell us. As it happens, I have written extensively on this subject and have much to say about it, but Sanders’ silence regarding the reasons behind his claim leaves it unclear how best to proceed. Since it’s impossible to engage Sanders’ reasons without knowing what they are, I will simply summarize what I think is the right view of the matter and leave it at that. While there is little doubt that Sanders’ claim that God couldn’t make up his mind if he already knew what he’s going to do has some intuitive appeal, I believe that the intuition will dissipate upon further reflection.¹¹ There is a good theoretical reason why this is so. Foreknowledge of one’s own actions involves endorsement of the declarative proposition *I will do A*, while planning and deciding are oriented toward endorsement of the optative proposition *Would that I might do A*.¹² These are different propositions, and endorsement of the first proposition does not logically pre-empt endorsement of the second.¹³ A time traveler, for example, who has just returned from witnessing his own future suicide, may (sadly) be prepared to endorse the declarative proposition *I will kill myself* while not yet being ready to endorse the optative proposition *Would that I might kill myself*, because he does not (yet) *will* that he shall kill himself. For this reason, it is in principle possible to acquire the intention to perform an action (say, by deliberating) while already knowing that one will perform that action. Since this is possible, Sanders has failed to show that a God who already knows what he is going to do would be unable to do it in a planful and intentional manner.¹⁴

I see no reason, then, to join Sanders in his assumption that CSF does not include foreknowledge of God’s own actions. Let’s now turn to the difficulty that Sanders raises for CSF, given his understanding of it.

(ii) Sanders is clear in his statement of the difficulty: “if what God has foreseen is the *entire* human history at *once*,” where this did not include his own actions, “then the difficulty is to somehow allow for God’s intervention into that history.” What is not clear is what exactly Sanders takes this difficulty to *be*. Sanders’ reference to “God’s own

actions in Abraham's life which would alter Abraham's life and consequently change God's foreknowledge" suggests an answer. Start with God's Complete Simple Foreknowledge, understood not as *Really* Complete Simple Foreknowledge but as containing gaps into which God's own actions can be inserted. *Can* God interject his actions into these gaps, thereby making a contribution to history? Apparently not; if God were to do this, it would *make a difference* to history, consequently *changing his foreknowledge*. Once his CSF informs him of the entire and detailed course of human history, it's *too late* for him to do anything about it.

Let me make three points in response. First, the foregoing argument doesn't provide any reason to think that God couldn't interject his actions into history so long as they *make no difference* to what happens. But wouldn't such interventions, by making no difference, be non-providential, and thus irrelevant to the present issue? That depends on what counts as *making a difference*. Sanders appears to believe that God's providential acts, inserted into the gaps in his CSF where there are placeholders for his own actions, would "make a difference" by *changing* the surrounding events and his foreknowledge of them ("alter Abraham's life and consequently change God's foreknowledge"). Of course that is impossible. But this doesn't mean that a God with CSF can't intervene in history so as to "make a difference;" it only means that Sanders is operating with an incoherent concept of "making a difference." No one can make a difference to what happens by *changing* the future. Recall what was said earlier about *prevention*. You don't prevent an event by taking an event and then preventing it. Likewise you don't make a difference to the future by taking the future and then making a difference to it. You make a difference to the future, not by changing it, but by doing something that *brings it about*, where a *different* future would have obtained if you *hadn't* done that thing.

Second, Sanders' argument appears to be relevantly similar to fatalistic arguments like the following:

Either I will be struck by a car while crossing this busy road, or I will not; if I will be struck by a car, any precautions I take will be ineffective; if I will not be struck by a car, any precautions I take will be superfluous; so taking precautions while crossing this road is either ineffective or superfluous, and hence pointless; so I might as well throw caution to the wind.

The Stoics called this the "Lazy Argument" because anyone taken in by it would become terminally lazy about their actions. There are many things to be said about this argument, but I will limit myself to just one comment, which seems most relevant to the argument offered by Sanders. The Lazy Argument does not take into account my actions, only their outcome: either I will be struck by a car, or I won't be struck by a car. The claim is that I can't act, at least in any way that would "make a difference" to the outcome: what I do will be either ineffective or superfluous, and in any case pointless. What this overlooks is that the outcome—that I'm hit or not hit by a car—may obtain *because* of my actions in taking or not taking precautions. Likewise, given a set of historical outcomes foreknown by God, these may obtain *because* of any interventions made by God. There are no grounds here for divine laziness.

Finally, let's think about the force of such terms as "already," "at once," and "too late." On CSF, God "already" knows all of the future, "at once," making it "too late" to do anything about it. These are *temporal* terms that can also be used to indicate the *logical or explanatory* order of things. Which sense do they have here? Take the

temporal sense. Then it's undoubtedly true that God, in the Basic Schema, "already" (i.e., temporally prior to the occurrence of E at T3) knows that E will occur, because he *foreknows* it at T1; but then it's *not* too late in the temporal sense to do something about E: God has all the time between T1 and T3! So Sanders must intend such terms to indicate the logical or explanatory ordering of God's foreknowledge and providential efforts (something he explicitly confirms in endnote 9). But then it *isn't* true that God "already" (i.e., explanatorily prior to the occurrence of E at T3) knows that E will occur, for God's foreknowledge of E is *explanatorily subsequent* to E. Nor is it true that what God "already" knows, in light of his CSF, makes it "too late" for him to do anything about the future. Simple foreknowledge implies only that God's knowledge of everything is "already" in place in the temporal sequence, not that it is "already" in place in the explanatory sequence. Whether it is also already in place in the explanatory order depends on the details of the case. In *The Game*, God's knowledge that Satan will declare rock is "already" in place, in both the temporal and the explanatory sequence, when God decides what to declare at T2; it is then "too late" for God to make a difference to Satan's declaration of rock. But God's foreknowledge that the angels will throw a hosanna-fest in heaven at T4 to celebrate his victory over Satan is *not* "already" in place, in the explanatory sequence, as God decides what to do at T2, though it *is* in place in the temporal sequence. It is therefore *not* "too late" for God to do something at T2 that makes a difference to what happens in heaven at T4, despite God's already knowing at T1 how things will turn out. Sanders' critique of CSF, on which God's foreseeing "the *entire* human history *at once*" precludes "God's intervention into that history," is undermined by his failure to distinguish consistently between the temporal and explanatory orders.

To conclude our discussion of what Sanders has to say about CSF in that all-important paragraph of his paper: Sanders has given us no good reason to understand CSF as restricted (that is, as anything other than *Really Complete Simple Foreknowledge*), and no good reason to think that CSF (whether restricted or unrestricted) does not allow for, let alone enhance, divine providential control. Our initial judgment that divine foreknowledge contributes toward God's providential control in *The Game* is not affected in any way by the supposition that God is accessing the future via CSF, nor is it shaken by any of the objections to CSF that it's possible to tease out of Sanders' brief discussion.

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Let's now turn to ISF, Sanders' preferred version of how God accesses his simple foreknowledge. On this version, as you may recall, God "accesses the future *in sequence* or *incrementally*." Sanders hastens to add that God does not do this "in a temporal sequence, but in what might be called an explanatory order." This sounds promising, especially given the way these two sequences were run together in Sanders' discussion of CSF.

As a helpful model of how ISF works, Sanders introduces the notion of a "tape of the future" that God can play. God's *possessing* the tape presumably models his *having* simple foreknowledge; his *viewing* the tape then models his *accessing* his foreknowledge. Let's see how this would work in *The Game*. At T1 God has in his possession a tape depicting everything that will happen. A God with CSF would somehow view the contents of the tape "at once," but the ISF God views its contents in their explanatory

order. In The Game this order begins at T3, when Satan makes a libertarianly free decision, undetermined by anything that preceded it, to declare rock. If God is to have this information at T1, it appears that he will need to fast-forward the tape to T3, where he views Satan's declaring rock. He can then rewind to T1 and let it play forward to T2, where God inserts his winning declaration of paper. (As I read Sanders here, God doesn't reach T2 in the explanatory sequence and just *find* the scene in which he declares paper. That scene is not already on the tape. Rather, when God reaches T2 there is a blank tract of tape waiting for him; he presses *Record* and *adds* that scene to the tape.)

At least this is how things would look if one takes seriously Sanders' claim that the ISF God accesses the future "not in a temporal sequence, but in . . . an explanatory order." When we turn to Sanders' own elaboration of the tape model, however, things look rather different:

God sort of atemporally rolls the tape of the future up to a certain point and then stops it in order to interject his own actions into the tape and then rolls the tape further to see what his creatures will do in response to his actions. Then God again decides what he will do and then rolls the tape further. (28)

Despite Sanders' remark that God views the tape "sort of atemporally," it is hard to know how to read this as anything other than God (atemporally) accessing the future *in its temporal order*. This reading is confirmed when Sanders applies this model later in the paper. Consider, for example, the story of Rajesh, who petitions God for information about the next winner of the Super Bowl.

Unfortunately, once God has "rolled the tape" up to the point where Rajesh makes his request, God does not yet know who the winner will be. And as God continues to prevision the future he does not foresee his answer to Rajesh until after he previsions which team actually wins the next Super Bowl. By this time, however it is too late for Rajesh to place his bet . . . (36)

Every scene God views on this account, he reaches with the *Play* button; he never fast-forwards or rewinds. While Sanders had claimed that the ISF God accesses events in their explanatory order, there isn't the slightest effort here to follow the explanatory rather than temporal sequence. Or if the Rajesh narrative *does* take events in their explanatory order, it can only be because the explanatory order *is* the temporal order. But in that case, ISF can't possibly capture the providential use of simple foreknowledge, since the latter requires that the two orders *diverge*.

Suppose God were to access his foreknowledge in The Game by following Sanders' recipe above. At T1 God has in his possession a tape of the future, including future contingents (except his own actions). This means that he *has* something not possessed by the God of Open Theism. But what advantage does this give him? To find out, we need to follow him as he accesses the tape. So he rolls the tape forward to T2, at which point he's required, under the rules of the game he's playing with Satan, to make a mental declaration of rock, paper or scissors. What does he do? If only he had a fast-forward button so he could peek ahead at Satan's declaration! Without it, he's stuck making a guess: *scissors*. He rolls the tape forward to discover Satan declaring rock. Ouch! He must now stop the tape so he can reveal that he had chosen scissors. No sooner has he pressed *Play* again than he observes a wave of disappointment passing through the assembled host; he immediately presses *Stop* so he can insert a reassuring word. The next round begins . . .

It is hard to see why any defender of simple foreknowledge would be drawn to ISF, as Sanders puts it through its paces. It's true that God knows the future, and he does it in such a way that it remains possible for him to act in and make a difference to history. But God gets no providential advantage out of his "preview of coming attractions" at T1 that he couldn't get by simply waiting until T2, T3, etc., and acting on the *present knowledge* (PK) available to him at that time. ISF, as Sanders deploys it, "results in explanations essentially identical to the openness model." (37)

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Sanders' paper is devoted to showing that simple foreknowledge provides God with no more providential control than he would have under Open Theism. Sanders' principal argument for this conclusion is spread out over the pages of his essay, as he applies SF and PK to seven different areas of divine providence. This argument is fundamentally flawed because Sanders has mistakenly rejected CSF in favor of ISF, and ISF has been set up from the beginning as a model of SF under which God accesses his foreknowledge in exactly the same explanatory order as the God of Open Theism. The Basic Schema for the providential use of divine foreknowledge requires that God's providential action A be explained by his knowledge of something E that happens *later*; this is precisely what ensures God's victory in The Game. It's no wonder, when this requirement is ignored, that SF comes out providentially equivalent to PK. Reviewing Sanders' comments under the seven areas of divine providence would simply recapitulate, seven times over, the flawed understanding of SF that he develops so quickly in the first two or three pages of his paper.

Threading through his discussion of these seven areas, but especially in the seventh, "The Guarantee of the Success of God's Plans," is a second argument for the conclusion that simple foreknowledge provides God no more providential control than SF. Unlike Sanders' flawed analysis of SF, crucial to his first argument, this argument rests on something true: "a God with SF is not in a position to guarantee success from the beginning." (37) At least this is true when the success of God's plans depends on what other agents with libertarian freedom choose to do, rather than when (as in The Game) it depends only on what God does. Let me illustrate with a variation on The Game. Suppose Satan again proposes to God a game of rock-paper-scissors, but this time God demurs. "Consider my servant Job," God suggests. Satan does consider him and agrees to a match, with God along as Job's coach. God again accesses his simple foreknowledge of Satan's future declarations and reveals it to Job. God wants Job to win—that's O—but access to Satan's future moves provides no guarantee. Job might doubt, misconstrue, or ignore God's leading; he might pridefully attempt to do it on his own; he might even throw the game to Satan just to frustrate God. In cases such as these, involving free agents other than himself, SF does not guarantee that God will get exactly the results that he wants.

So Sanders is certainly right that SF does not come with any guarantees. "Consequently," he continues, "a God with SF has no more ability to guarantee the success of his plans than does a god with PK." (37) The argument appears to be this:

SF cannot guarantee that God's plans will be successful.

PK cannot guarantee that God's plans will be successful.

Therefore, SF provides God *no more* providential control than PK.

This is of course a fallacious argument, as should be evident by comparison with the following:

Gathering evidence cannot guarantee that a detective will solve the case.

Consulting Tarot cards cannot guarantee that a detective will solve the case.

Therefore, gathering evidence provides the detective *no better* method for solving the case than consulting Tarot cards.

Sanders' argument against the providential benefits of simple foreknowledge is no more successful than this argument against the investigative benefits of evidence-gathering.

SF *does not* claim to provide as much providential control as Calvinism or Molinism, which deploy truly impressive resources (theological determinism and middle knowledge, respectively). SF is a contender only because these heavyweights may be subject to disqualification, on the grounds that they fail to accommodate robust free agency. With this possibility in mind, the match-up between SF and PK becomes more important. The question is whether SF can secure *more* providential control than is available with PK alone.

The fact that neither PK nor SF comes with a providential guarantee is irrelevant. The question concerns their *relative* usefulness. Who is in a better position to coach Job in a game of rock-paper-scissors played against Satan? A God who knows what Satan is going to declare but cannot guarantee Job's victory because Job might not act on the knowledge God shares with him? Or a God who doesn't have the knowledge to share in the first place? Neither one has a guarantee; but the answer should be obvious.

¹ A couple of comments on this opening statement are in order. First, Classical Theists would maintain that foreknowledge isn't something *in addition to* omniscience; foreknowledge is just omniscience with respect to the future, making it redundant to say that some being has omniscience *and* foreknowledge. But not everyone agrees with Classical Theists on this score. Many Open Theists, including John Sanders, maintain that God lacks exhaustive foreknowledge but is still omniscient, because the foreknowledge God lacks does not correspond to *truths of which God is ignorant* but to *gaps in what is now true about the future*. For God to be omniscient is for God to know all truths; where there are no truths to be known, God's ignorance doesn't count against his omniscience. It is therefore important to point out that Classical Theism is committed not just to divine omniscience—Open Theists also understand themselves to be upholders of divine omniscience—but also to exhaustive foreknowledge, which Open Theists deny.

The second comment is that this formulation is deliberately neutral between two different ways that Classical Theists have understood divine omniscience: as the knowledge at every moment of all truths by a God who is in time but without beginning and end; and as the timeless knowledge of all truths by a God who is *not* in time. On the latter understanding, God does not literally possess foreknowledge: since he does not exist in time, he obviously does not exist at earlier times, and so does not know *then* what will happen later. Nevertheless, he can be said to have foreknowledge of what will happen after a particular time T inasmuch as he knows timelessly all that is future relative to T.

² This is Sanders' own position. For a recent defense by three fellow Open Theists, see Rhoda, Boyd & Belt, "Open Theism, Omniscience, and the Nature of the Future," *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (2006), pp. 432-59.

³ This is the classic problem of divine foreknowledge *v.* human freedom, discussed by most of the great Christian philosophers beginning with St. Augustine. William Hasker is an example of an Open Theist who rejects exhaustive foreknowledge on the ground that future contingents cannot be foreknown; see his *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), especially chapter 10.

⁴ The principal reason one might worry that the Open Theist position on divine foreknowledge threatens God's maximal greatness is that it weakens omniscience. But virtually all Open Theists, Sanders included, affirm divine omniscience; I think, moreover, that they're entitled to do so, at least insofar as their position rests on denying that there are any true future contingents—see the first comment in endnote 1.

⁵ In my "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge," *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (July 1993), pp. 396-416, I distinguish two kinds of problems for the providential use of simple foreknowledge, which I term the "Metaphysical Problem" and the "Doxastic Problem." It's not clear where Sanders' critique falls relative to these two problems, making a test case all but indispensable as a way of clarifying the exact nature of his concerns.

⁶ David Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 13 (April 1976), pp. 145-52.

⁷ Some critics of simple foreknowledge argue that one can't just banish these concerns by stipulation. William Hasker, for example, maintains that an explanatory circle is unavoidable so long as A precedes E in time, while Michael Robinson argues that the mere *possibility* that a given scenario might generate an explanatory circle is grounds for rejecting that scenario. Hasker's is the classic version of what I call the "Metaphysical Problem" in my "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge" (*op. cit.*), while Robinson's is a modal version of that problem. Hasker's argument may be found in his *God, Time, and Knowledge*, *op. cit.*, chapter 3, and my reply in "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge." Robinson's argument may be found in his "Divine Providence, Simple Foreknowledge, and the 'Metaphysical Principle'," *Religious Studies* 40 (Dec. 2004), pp. 471-483; immediately following, in the same issue, is my "Providence, Foreknowledge, and Explanatory Loops: A Reply to Robinson," *Religious Studies* 40 (Dec. 2004), pp. 485-491. So the issue itself is an important one that can't simply be dismissed. Nevertheless, it can be ignored in the context of the present paper, on a couple of grounds. First, the providential test case I'm in the process of constructing is arguably immune to the sorts of worries pushed by Hasker and Robinson. Second, Sanders himself does not push this particular worry in his paper, at least in any clear and unequivocal fashion—and my job is to figure out and respond to what is worrying Sanders.

⁸ This is the Job scenario on pp. 19-20.

⁹ The idea that the odds could ever be *stacked against* a truly omnipotent being may strike some readers as oxymoronic. But games have *rules*, and so long as God's omnipotence does not equip him to do the logically impossible and he plays by the rules, it's not inconceivable that he might lose: it all depends on the game. (Even Thomas Aquinas, whose theistic credentials are beyond dispute, would agree that an omnipotent God cannot win a game of chess in which he's *already been checkmated*.)

¹⁰ I'm assuming that the game continues for a number of rounds. God's chances of winning a *particular round* of the game, unguided by simple foreknowledge, are closer to 33%, since there are always three possible moves open to him, one of which wins, one of which loses, and one of which ties.

¹¹ It's also unclear that divine agency must involve God's *making up his mind* about what to do in the first place. So that's another point in Sanders' argument about which we'd need to hear more. Since I happen to think that simple foreknowledge wouldn't frustrate divine agency even if the latter *did* involve God's making up his mind, this is the defense that I briefly pursue in the main body of the text.

¹² The optative mood is related to the subjunctive and conveys the speaker's wish or hope. Here it is used to express the speaker's practical commitment to a course of action rather than theoretical commitment to a future-contingent truth.

¹³ Alternatively, these are different propositional *attitudes* toward the same propositional *content*, and adopting the one attitude toward that content does not mean that one has thereby adopted the other attitude toward that content—whether one does so may be left as further business.

¹⁴ For much fuller statements of this approach, see my "Omniprescient Agency," *Religious Studies* 28 (September 1992), pp. 351-369; "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge," *op. cit.*; "Prescience and Providence: A Reply to My Critics," *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (July 1993), pp. 430-440; "The Compatibility of Omniscience and Intentional Action: A Reply to Tomis Kapitan," *Religious Studies* 32 (March 1996), pp. 49-60; and "Two Problems with Knowing the Future," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (April 1997), pp. 273-85.