



Elucidating open theism

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Abstract

In this article, I seek to provide a philosophical elucidation of the thesis of open theism. This task will be performed by utilising the conception of open theism, Generic Open Theism, provided by Alan Rhoda (and precisified in part by William Hasker). This conception will then be further elucidated through the employment of the notion of libertarianism, as proposed by Robert Kane, which will enable the thesis of Generic Open Theism to be shown to not be subject to two important challenges: the Prophecy Challenge and the Divine Bodgery Challenge—which are challenges that focus on showing the incompatibility of perfect being theism, scripture and providence with the central tenets of Open Theism. Thus, in the end, one will be able to affirm the veracity of Open Theism within a scripturally grounded, perfect being theistic framework.

Keywords God · Open theism · Libertarianism

Introduction

According to Alan Rhoda (2008, 2011, 2013), the notion of open theism refers to a form of theism that has a number of variants that are tied together by certain theses that make up what has been termed *Generic Open Theism* (hereafter, GOT). The central theses of GOT, following Rhoda (2013), can be stated succinctly as such¹:

(1) Generic Open Theism

- (i) Perfect Being Theism: There is a maximally great being, God.
- (ii) Causal Openness: The future is causally open.

¹ Rhoda (2008) also holds to the alethic openness of the future. However, as this is not a basic tenet of GOT, but a controversial point debated by various adherents of GOT, this thesis will be left out.

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- (iii) Epistemic Openness: The future is epistemically open.
- (iv) Providential Openness: The future is providentially open.

For (i) of (1), Perfect Being Theism, the conception of God within GOT is that of there existing an entity that essentially possesses the maximal set of compossible great-making properties. God is thus, first, maximally powerful by having the power (or ability) to cause any event that is logically possible for him to cause. Second, maximally knowledgeable as he would know of all true propositions (concerning the past and present), that they are true. Third, maximally good, as he will always perform the best action (or kind of action) if there is one, many good actions and no bad actions. GOT thus affirms a *robust perfect being theistic* conception of God and, hence, rejects any limitations on God's nature that are found within a polytheistic, pantheistic or process theistic framework. GOT thus posits a theistic model that shares similarities with that of Classical Theism (hereafter, CT)—as expressed by individuals such as St. Thomas Aquinas—with one of the central shared elements of these two conceptions of God being, as noted by Rhoda (2008, 226), with 'respect to creation *ex nihilo* and the power of God unilaterally to intervene in the created order as He desires'. The distinction between GOT and CT is thus focused on what the maximal set of compossible great-making properties consists in—and thus not on whether God exemplifies this maximal set of properties (Rhoda, 2008). In short, GOT is to be conceived of as a variant of theism that sits firmly alongside that of CT and other conceptions of God.

For (ii)—(iv) of (1), an emphasis is now placed on the term 'open' in GOT, where the focus is on that of the openness of the future, which can be simply understood as the future not being fully fixed; rather, it is, as Rhoda (2013, 289) notes, 'progressively taking shape as events unfold, choices are made, and contingencies are resolved one way or another'. Moreover, on the basis of this openness of the future, there is also an *openness to God*, as, given his maximal goodness, God desires to enter into a dynamic and ongoing relationship with his creatures that are part of this open world. That is, an open future, as Rhoda (2013, 289) further writes, 'requires a degree of openness in God. As an essentially perfect knower responsible for creating and sustaining an open-ended world, God's knowledge and experience of the world must change so as accurately to reflect changes in the world'. Conversely, the openness that God has towards entering, and maintaining, a mutual relationship with his creatures requires an open future in which these creatures' free contributions can play a role in determining the future (Rhoda, 2013). Thus, for (ii) of (1), Causal Openness, the future is causally open, which, according to Rhoda (2011, 73), can be defined as follows:

- (2) *Causal Openness* The future is causally open relative to time t if and only if there is more than one causally possible future relative to t .

The future is casually open in the sense of there being future contingents—that is, there is more than one causally possible future, which, as Rhoda (2013, 289) writes, 'is a complete, logically possible extension of the causally relevant actual

past, compatible with holding fixed the laws of nature and concurrent divine causal contributions to creaturely events'. The central type of future contingency that is affirmed within the framework of GOT is that of creaturely libertarian freedom. That is, the future is causally open *because* God has created creatures that possess libertarian freedom.² A preliminary definition of the notion of libertarian freedom, according to Hasker (1994, 137),³ can be stated as follows:

- (3) *Free Will* It is within an agent's power to perform the action and also in the agent's power to refrain from the action.

In line with this understanding of libertarian freedom, a free creature could always have done otherwise, and thus if an individual is free in this sense, then it is up to the individual whether or not one action is performed over that of another other at a given time—and thus the future is causally open up until the point of that action being performed.

For (iii) of (1), Epistemic Openness, the future is epistemically open for God and all creatures, which, according to Rhoda (2011, 75), can be defined as follows:

- (4) *Epistemic Openness* The future is epistemically open at time t if and only if for some state of affairs X and some future time t^* neither nor (nor their tense-neutral counterparts) is infallibly known either (i) at t or (ii) timelessly.

For an adherent of GOT, there is an incompatibility between God's foreknowledge, and the future being 'epistemically open'—that is, there being more than one causally possible future identified as the actual causal future (Rhoda, 2008). Why this is the case is due to the fact that God is a perfect being—and thus one that possesses maximal knowledge, and so if it possible for God to possess knowledge about something, then he *must* possess this knowledge. So, as Rhoda (2008, 227) writes, 'if the future is causally open with respect to whether X obtains at t^* , and if it is possible for God to know either " X will obtain at t^* " or " X will not obtain at t^* ", then He knows one of those, and the future is not epistemically open for Him in that respect'. Hence, the reason why an adherent of GOT would affirm the veracity of (iii) is because they would affirm the further fact of it being impossible for the future to be causally open in some respect at a certain time and for it to be epistemically settled for God in that same respect at that time (Rhoda, 2008). One can understand this issue again by focusing in on libertarian free creatures, as Richard Swinburne (2010, 9) writes, 'It seems to me that it is logically impossible to know (without the possibility of

² Though it could also be open because of things such as quantum indeterminacy, however, as the fact of causal openness is seen to be primarily grounded on the fact of there being libertarian free creatures, this article will solely focus on the issues that are presented by that. Moreover, there will be an interchanging throughout between the terms 'free', 'freedom' and 'free will' without any change in meaning, except as will be indicated at certain points.

³ Hasker has developed his take on open theism in various other subsequent writings; however, as the focus of this article is on elucidating a generic form of open theism, it will suffice to focus on his earliest writings on the topic.

mistake) what someone will do freely tomorrow. If I am really free to choose tomorrow whether I will go to London or stay at home, then if anyone today has some belief about what I will do (e.g. that I will go to London), I have it in my power tomorrow to make that belief false (e.g. by staying at home). So no one (not even God) can know today (without the possibility of mistake) what I will choose to do tomorrow'. If the future is really causally open—such that one could freely choose to perform an action tomorrow or refrain from doing so—then it must also be epistemically open for God and all of his creatures. That is, a causally open future is incompatible with an epistemically settled future. Hence, if the future is causally open, then it must be epistemically open for all entities—including that of God—where, from an epistemic perspective, as Rhoda (2013, 290) writes, ‘there are multiple causally possible futures that might come to pass and no one of them that certainly will come to pass. For God, and others, the future is a “garden of forking paths”’.

For (iv) of (1), Providential Openness, the future is providentially open, which, according to Rhoda (2011, 76), can be defined as follows:

- (5) *Providential Openness* The future is providentially open if and only if no agent S has acted in a way that guarantees that a unique causally possible future F shall come to pass while knowing for certain that in so acting, F is guaranteed to come to pass.

The future is providentially open in the sense that a particular causally possible future has not been ordained by God. That is, God has not providentially settled the future, as if this was the case, then it would also have to be epistemically settled as well—as, in ordaining a particular causally possible future, God would know that *this* particular causally possible future would come to pass, rather than any other. In short, epistemic openness entails providential openness. Importantly, however, as Hasker (1994, 151) writes⁴:

God could have created a world in which he would have full foreknowledge of every detail, simply by creating a world in which everything that happens is fully controlled by his sovereign decrees. But it seems to us that God found such a world less desirable—less appealing to his Creative goodness—than a world that contains genuinely free creatures.

It is thus based on God’s desire to bring about creatures that have libertarian freedom that he allows the future to be providentially open, which is made possible by him creating a world that is causally open. God thus lacks knowledge concerning how exactly his free creatures would exercise their freedom. Rather, instead, as Hasker (1994, 151, emphasis in text), ‘God has a vast amount of knowledge about the *probabilities* that free choices will be made in one way rather than another’.⁵

⁴ From this point on we go beyond the work of Rhoda and utilise other concepts found within open theism—such as the notion of probability—which I believe are at home within the basic framework provided by Rhoda’s GOT.

⁵ For a detailed explanation of the notion of probability within an open theistic framework, see (Boyd, 2000, 2011 and 2015).

Thus, even though God does not know the future, he has some form of providential control over creation on the basis of information that is provided in the form of probabilities concerning how his free creatures will exercise their freedom.

Each of the tenets of (1) is thus at the foundation GOT framework; however, an issue can indeed be raised against the cogency of these elements—specifically, the combination of (ii)–(iv) concerning the openness of the future and God. Various challenges can, and have been, raised against these tenets of the GOT position. Two important challenges are that of the *Prophecy Challenge* and the *Divine Bodgey Challenge*. These two challenges have been stated in various forms; however, we will focus in now on the forms of the challenge provided by Flint (1998) and Timothy Mawson (2018).

Focusing first on the Prophecy Challenge (hereafter, PC), this challenge raises an issue concerning the correspondence between the denial of God’s foreknowledge—that is, the epistemic openness of the future—and the reality of prophecy. That is, as Flint (1998, 100) writes, ‘Scripture abounds with passages where God seems to reveal events (for example, Peter’s denial of Christ) before they occur’. We can thus state this challenge more succinctly as follows:

- (6) *Prophecy Challenge* There is an incompatibility between the notion of an open future and the reality of prophecy, as attested to by scripture.

One could ask how such revelations, such as that of Peter’s denial of Christ, or certain prophecies of judgement, could be provided if, as the adherent of GOT insists, God is uncertain of the actions of his libertarian free creatures’ actions? Though there might be ways to account for this prophecy, as Hasker (and others) has focused on doing. First, these prophecies could (at times) be implicit conditionals, such that, as Hasker (1998, 194), writes, ‘prophecies are to be interpreted as conditional even when this is not explicitly stated’. An example of this would be prophecies of judgement, which Hasker (1998, 194) believes is expressed in Jeremiah 18:7–10:

At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it.

This prophecy of judgment, according to Hasker (1998, 194) is a conditional that would take the form: “if you do not repent of your sins, then disaster will be brought upon you”, and would thus not presuppose any detailed non-conditional knowledge about the future. Second, these prophecies, if non-conditional, can also take the form, as Hasker (1998, 194), writes, of ‘predictions based on

foresight drawn from existing trends and tendencies'. This is seen by Hasker (1998, 194) in Luke 22:31:

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.

This specific prophecy, in Hasker's thought, is also conditional and takes the form: "if present trends continue, then something will occur". That is, Jesus was able to provide this prophecy based on his knowledge of Peter's character, the likelihood that he would be in this situation, and that this would make it likely that Peter would perform the action of denying him. So, for example, Jesus' prediction that Peter would deny him three times was based on God's knowledge of Peter's character, a character that made it likely that Peter would deny Christ in the circumstances which God saw were likely to occur. Third, prophecies can, as Hasker (1998, 195) writes, also be 'things that are foreknown because it is God's purpose to bring them about'. This type of prophecy is expressed in Matthew 26:24:

The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.

This type of prophecy is genuinely nonconditional; God did not foresee the sacrifice of Christ, as he had declared this event as something that was going to happen, due to the fact that he intended to directly bring it about. These three ways of understanding prophecy do enable one to bring the position of GOT in line with that of the reality of prophecy; nevertheless, these options seem to provide a strained reading of the text. For example, as Flint (1998, 101) writes:

In the case of Peter, how likely was it that Peter was going to end up in those circumstances in which he did in fact deny Jesus? It doesn't seem to me that the odds, even knowing the characters of Peter and of everyone else involved, would be particularly high. So one does have to wonder whether a God with only knowledge of tendencies (with only, as we might call it, trendy knowledge) would have ventured such a prediction.

Moreover, scripture also seems to include passages that seem to imply that epistemic settledness of the future (i.e., foreknowledge of future free actions) even in certain cases where prophecy is not involved, again as Flint (1998, 102) writes, 'For example, John 6:64, explaining Jesus' saying "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe," further states that: "For Jesus *knew* from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him." An adherent of GOT, who grants Jesus' sole knowledge of tendencies, would thus have to take Jesus to have

had a good guess concerning who would have handed him over (Flint, 1998). Yet to say that this is all that the writer of John was trying to express by this passage would be to provide a strained reading of the text. Given these issues, one would thus want a way for GOT to provide a means for one to be able to affirm the reality of prophecy, without, however, having to commit to a controversial reading of the texts. As it stands, GOT thus seems to be incompatible with scripture.

Focusing now on the Divine Bodgegy Challenge (hereafter, DBC)—raised by Timothy Mawson (2018),⁶ there is now a challenge that is raised, not against that of divine foreknowledge, or lack thereof, but rather that of the providential control of God.

More precisely, as noted previously, for the adherent of GOT, God's knowledge of the future is probabilistic, in the sense that God knows that it is likely that a certain event will occur; however, he does not know that this event will, in fact, occur. Thus, within the framework of GOT, God is conceived of as having beliefs about the probabilities that his actions will fulfil his intentions; yet, God cannot know with certainty that these intentions will, in fact, be fulfilled—as, given the causal openness of the future, whether God's actions do fulfil his intentions would depend on the future free actions of God *and* his creatures. The openness of the future (in a causal and epistemic sense) thus itself opens up the possibility for God's actions to *fail* to fulfil his intentions—that is, for God to 'bodge'. For someone to 'bodge' an action up, according to Mawson (2018), is for them to perform an action under an intended description that it does not end up fulfilling. In other words, for an individual to bodge is for them to perform an action and have an intention that that action achieves a certain end, and that it does not achieve that end—and thus, the intention goes unfulfilled. A helpful illustration, provided by Mawson (2018, 41), of a bodge-ging situation can be stated as follows:

You are a doctor in a hospital's emergency room. You need to make a quick decision on how to treat a patient in front of you; if you do not act immediately, he will surely die within the next minute. You can administer either drug A or drug B. The efficacy of each depends on its radioactive properties, the effects of which have the following physical probabilities, which you know about. You know that drug A has a 60 per cent chance of saving him and a 40 per cent chance of killing him all the sooner; and drug B has a 40 per cent chance of saving him and a 60 per cent chance of killing him all the sooner. You therefore choose drug A, intending thereby to save your patient. In fact, you are unlucky (and the patient even more so); that which was objectively unlikely to happen under the drug A regime in fact happens. You have unintentionally killed your patient while intending to do the opposite. In this case then, you have boded.

⁶ Mawson's (2018) main focus with the challenge that will be explicated here concerns the cogency of the concept of a temporal God, over that of a timeless God. However, as the argument presupposes an open-theistic conception of God in fleshing out his temporality (as is noted by (Mullins, 2021, 154)), we will now raise this challenge against the cogency of the GOT.

Analogous to this situation, God (as conceived of through GOT) could regularly be in a situation where he makes mistakes concerning his libertarian free creatures by intending certain effects to be brought about by an action that he performs, yet there is a different outcome that actually results from this action. More specifically, as the future is causally open, on the basis of there being libertarian free creatures, then it must also be epistemically open, which is to say that God cannot infallibly know the outcome of his actions, and thus he could, in fact regularly bodge things up. This possibility, according to Mawson (2018), is incompatible with God's maximal power, as it seems to place a limitation on God's actions. Moreover, it is incompatible with his maximal goodness, as God cannot ensure that the consequences of his actions will, in fact, be good rather than bad. Following Mullins (2021, 155), we can formulate the challenge that has been raised by Mawson as an argument⁷:

(7) Divine Bodgeger Challenge

- (i) A being who cannot bodge things up is more powerful and good than a being who can bodge things up.
- (ii) If God does not infallibly know the future, then God can bodge things up.
- (iii) If God does infallibly know the future, then God cannot bodge things up.
- (iv) A non-open theistic God infallibly knows the future.
- (v) Thus, a non-open theistic God cannot bodge things up.
- (vi) An open theistic God cannot infallibly know the future.
- (vii) Thus, an open theistic God can bodge things up.
- (viii) Thus, the non-open theistic God is more powerful and good than the open theistic God.

The creation of libertarian free creatures requires the future to be open (i.e., causally, epistemically and providentially open), which then leads to the possibility of God bodgeger. One can thus ask the question of if the ability to bodge things is a power or a limitation? Well, it seems quite clear that that the possibility for one to bodge things up is a limitation, as it seems to limit the range of control that this being can have. More specifically, if God creates libertarian free creatures, and thus the future is open, then God would be able to bodge things, given that his control of the world—especially his 'long-range' control of it—would be very limited. That is, if one assumes what Grössl and Vicens (2014) term 'high-risk' open theism,⁸ and as long as the 'long-range' probabilities (i.e., the probabilities of events that will take place further down the timeline from the creative action performed by God) are a function of the 'short-range' probabilities (i.e., the probabilities of events that will take place closer to the creative action performed by God), then when these probabilities are multiplied, they would swiftly depreciate in value, which will present

⁷ As with Mawson's (2018) take on the argument, this version provided by Mullins (2021) has been modified to fit within the present context of assessing the GOT, rather than the temporality of God.

⁸ Grössl and Vicens (2014) take John Sanders and Hasker to be the main proponents of this 'high-risk' view.

a serious problem for God's control over his creatures, and the world as a whole. Hence, for example, as Flint (1998, 104) notes:

The probabilities God knows (in 1997) concerning who will be elected President of the United States in 2004, being dependent upon so many specific probabilities concerning the likely free actions of so many people, are sure to be minuscule—indeed, not much better than our own.

Thus, if we focus on the moment of the creative event—that is, the time in which God created the world out of nothing—and the subsequent moments of time in which the vast amount of libertarian free creatures exist and perform actions, then one could see that God would possess a small amount of information of what will actually occur in the world. Now, God might try to guide his creation and work through his plan of action in response to them, but it would be difficult to see how the knowledge of the probabilities of these events will provide him with the needed information for guidance. Indeed, as Flint (1998, 104) further writes, 'any long-range plan, or even any short-range one that involves many free creaturely actions, will be such that God will have little idea as to whether or not he can really bring it off'. Hence, the specific degree of providential control that God would have over the world would be remarkably weak—and thus, he would frequently be open to bodge things up—which seems to fall short of the ideal of maximal power. In response to this, however, one could assume the position of what Grössl and Vicens (2014) term 'low-risk' open theism,⁹ and take God's knowledge of the future actions of creatures to be one of near certainty. If God's knowledge of probabilities was in this way, then his providential governance of the world would be secured. However, if this was the case, as Flint (1998, 103) writes, 'it simply seems extremely implausible (at least from a libertarian perspective) to think that, in every situation, the factors influencing a free agent in one direction vastly outweigh those inclining him toward some other action'. In certain circumstances it might be the case that an individual's reasons determine their action in this specific way; however, for one to hold to this always being the case seems to be a position that lacks any credibility. Thus the adherent of GOT is presented with a dilemma: lessen the probabilities that God knows as a near certainty, and then open him up to the possibility of bodge things, or increase the probabilities and affirm a position about the actions of individuals that seems to lack plausibility.

Yet, if one denies the veracity of GOT, and thus affirms a 'non-open theistic' conception of God—that is, a God who does not create libertarian free creatures, and thus does not bring about a (causally, epistemically and providentially) 'closed' future—then it would be impossible for God to bodge things up—as all of the intended effects of his actions will be infallibly known with certainty. Whereas, if one affirms the veracity of GOT, and thus affirms an 'open theistic' conception of God—that is, a God who does create libertarian free creatures and thus brings about a (causally, epistemically and providentially) open future—then the intended effects of his actions would not be infallibly known, and so it would be a matter of uncertainty whether they come about as God desires or not. Hence, as Mawson (2018, 49) writes,

⁹ Grössl and Vicens (2014) take Gregory Boyd to be the main proponent of this 'low risk' view.

the adherent of GOT 'believes in a partially ignorant God; one who is subject to the vagaries of luck for the efficacy of at least some of His actions; one who almost certainly bodes; and one who is dependent on chance for whatever goodness He might happen to have'. Within the framework provided by GOT, it thus is very unlikely that God would not bodge, and so any goodness that God possesses would be a matter of luck—as some of the consequences of his actions might bring about good for his creatures, and some of his actions might have the unintended result of bringing about bad as well. Hence, as with God's power, the possibility for God to bodge seems to fall short of the ideal of maximal goodness. Thus, it is starting to look like a God who does not create the world with an open future—that is, a non-open theistic God, who creates a unique, causally possible future, and thus causes the future to be causally, epistemically and providentially closed/settled—seems to be one that fits the conception of God provided by perfect being theism. More specifically, there appears to be an apparent incompatibility between perfect being theism—(i) of (1)—and the openness of the future—(ii)–(iv) of (1). As the God of perfect being theism is maximally powerful and good; yet, a God that creates libertarian free creatures, and thus permits an open future, is less than maximally powerful and good, due to the possibility of him boding—that is to say, him performing actions which he reasonably intended (and expected) to bring about a certain result, but which, nevertheless, end up not doing so. Thus, *if* one desires to affirm the veracity of (i) of (1), then they should deny (ii)–(iv) of (1). In other words, a perfect being theist should deny the veracity of GOT, which is to say that they should affirm the veracity of the conception of a non-open theistic God that knows, and providentially ordains the future. One could now ask, however, if there is any way to prevent this conclusion from being reached?¹⁰ That is, is there a way to counter one of the premises featured in (4)? Moreover, is there also a way to affirm the reality of scriptural prophecy within this specific framework? I believe that there is, by, for the latter question, one providing a way for God to have foreknowledge concerning the actions of his creatures; yet, these creatures still having libertarian freedom. And, for the former questions, raising an issue with (ii) of (4): *if God does not infallibly know the future, then God can bodge things up*. That is, one can indeed show that even though God does not exhaustively (infallibly) know the future—and thus does not know (a certain set of the actions) that his libertarian free creatures will perform—this does not mean that it is also possible for him to bodge things up concerning these creatures.¹¹ The manner in which both of these things will be shown—that is, the reality of prophecy, and the impossibility

¹⁰ One way to deal with this problem would be to deny that the creation of libertarian free creatures requires God to also permit an open future. This route is taken by adherents of Molinism (i.e., Molinists). However, as Molinism faces some significant challenges, such as that of grounding the existence of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, it will be good to provide a solution that does not have to face these challenging issues, or does not have to take on a lot of metaphysical baggage to deal with them. For example, in earlier writings, I sought to deal with the 'grounding objection' to Molinism by assuming a heavy-duty realist view of modality. I do believe that this response to the objection is successful. However, it would be good to have another possible avenue for affirming the reality of libertarian freedom in a world that is providentially controlled by God within, however, a less metaphysically-loaded framework. Nonetheless, for a statement of some of these challenges against Molinism, and potential responses to them, see (Perszyk, 2012).

¹¹ I do leave it open whether God could bodge things up in other contexts of indeterminism.

of divine boding, within the GOT framework—will be through focusing on ‘re-thinking’ the nature of the notion of libertarian freedom, and the openness of the future, that has been assumed within GOT. This task will be accomplished within the context of an explication and application of the re-conceptualisation of libertarian freedom proposed by Robert Kane. And thus, by doing this, one can then see that even if God creates libertarian free creatures (and thus the future is causally open (and thus epistemically and providentially open) in ‘part’ because of this creative act) the specific restrictions that are inherent within this conception of libertarian freedom will allow God to know certain free actions that his creatures perform—which will provide a basis for prophetic statements—and ensure that the actions that he performs with respect to these creatures will always bring about their intended effect—which is to say that he would not be able to bodge things up. Hence, one will thus be able to affirm the compatibility of a perfect being theistic conception of God, scriptural prophecy, *and* a future that is open in all of the ways that are required by GOT.

Thus, the plan is as follows: in section two (‘The nature of libertarianism’), I provide an explication of the re-conceptualisation of libertarian freedom provided by Robert Kane. In section three (‘The compatibility of perfect being theism and an open future’), I apply the conception of libertarian freedom detailed in the previous section within a theological context to show that, despite the openness of the future (i.e., causal, epistemic and providential openness), it would still be possible for God to know the future free actions of his creatures and also it not be possible for God to bodge. Hence, (ii) of (4) is false, which is to say that the perfect being conception of God, in combination with scriptural prophecy, is indeed compatible with the open future. An adherent of GOT can thus retain their perfect being theistic card. Finally, there will be a concluding section (‘Conclusion’) that will summarise the position that has been argued for in this article.

The nature of libertarianism

According to Robert Kane (2007, 2009, 2011, 2016, 2017), adherents of the traditional view of libertarian free will (hereafter, libertarianism) have the task of showing that, first, free will is incompatible with determinism—which is termed the Compatibility Task. And, second, they must show that a libertarianism that requires indeterminism can be rendered intelligible—which is termed the Intelligibility Task.¹² In addressing these two tasks, one must first ‘re-think’ them and the traditional solutions that have been provided for them. As, for example, with the Compatibility Task, one is focused on answering the question of, “is freedom compatible with determinism?”. In attempting to answer this question, Kane (2011, 384) notes, that this question “is altogether too simple and ill-formed. The reason is that there are many meanings of ‘freedom’, and many of them are compatible with determinism’. And thus, adherents of libertarianism should concede this point, accept that ‘freedom of action’ is compatible with determinism, and move on. Thus, instead,

¹² Kane prefers to call these the Compatibility and Intelligibility ‘Problems’, rather than ‘Compatibility and Intelligibility ‘Tasks’.

what should be insisted upon is that of there being a specific kind of valuable freedom that is indeed incompatible with determination. This significant form of freedom is “free will”. At a general level, the notion of free will captures the fact of one forming purposes by making various choices and decisions that are the formations of intentions—and one sustains these purposes by making efforts of will and striving through challenges (Kane, 2011). More specifically, we can follow Kane (2011, 383) in re-defining the notion of libertarian freedom—that is, free will, as follows:

- (8) *Free Will** The power to be the ultimate creator and sustainer of one’s own ends or purposes.

Free will, rather than simple freedom of action, is the ability for one to form themselves, their wants, desires and purposes. And it is *this* ability which seems to be incompatible with determinism. Moreover, in continuing to re-think the Compatibility Task, a further focus has been on the question of whether determinism is compatible with the notion of ‘alternative possibilities’, which is the specific requirement that *one could have done otherwise* (Kane, 2007). Most arguments for incompatibilism have often appealed to the notion of alternative possibilities to answer questions of whether the power for one to do otherwise is compatible with determinism. However, a stalemate concerning these questions has been inevitable based on the different interpretations that can be provided for the words ‘can’, ‘power’ and ‘ability’ and ‘could have done otherwise’ (Kane, 2016). However, in continuing to re-think the Compatibility Task, Kane (2016) sees that the way forward out of this stalemate is to focus on another condition—the condition of *ultimate responsibility*—which can be stated more succinctly as follows:

- (9) *Ultimate Responsibility* To be ultimately responsible for an action, an agent must be responsible for anything that is a sufficient reason, cause or motive for the action’s occurring.

If an individual’s choice can be sufficiently explained by their character and motives (together with certain background conditions), then for them to be ultimately responsible for that choice, they must be at least in part responsible—by choices or actions that they have made in the past—for having the character and motives that they have now (Kane, 2016). Importantly, however, the condition of ultimate responsibility does not require that one could have done otherwise for *every* action that stems from one’s own free will; rather, instead, what is required by this condition is that there are *some* actions—termed *self-forming actions* (hereafter, SFAs)—that are not like this. More specifically, in following Kane (2011), we can state the nature of an SFA as such:

- (10) *Self-Forming Actions* A set of actions in an individual’s past history, in which they could have done otherwise, and which has played a fundamental role in forming their present character.

In normal, everyday life, individuals usually act of their own free will in the sense of a will that has *already been formed*. Yet, on such occasions, as Kane (2016, 3) notes, ‘the will (i.e., character, motives and purposes) from which we act is “our own free will” to the extent that we had a role in forming it by earlier SFAs that were not determined and with respect to which we could have voluntarily and rationally done otherwise’. If this was not the case, then there would be nothing that an individual could do differently in their entire lifetime, that would make their will be other than what it is—in other words, one could not act of their own free will in the sense of them having a will that is of their own making (Kane, 2016). Thus, on the basis of this, one can, again, understand that free will is not so much about freedom of action—as to reduce it to this would be to oversimplify the matter—rather, free will is about *self-formation*, which, as Kane (2016, 3) writes, is ‘about the formation of our “wills” or how we got to be the kinds of persons we are, with the characters, motives and purposes we now have’. The question that can be posed is thus whether one is ultimately responsible, in some part, for having the will that they have, or, as Kane (2011, 384) further writes, can ‘the sources of our wills be completely traced backwards to something over which we had no control, such as Fate or the decrees of God, or heredity and environment or social conditioning or hidden controllers, and so on?’ Thus, the incompatibility that is to be had with free will and determinism is not to be grounded solely on that of the condition of alternative possibilities, but on that of the conditions of ultimate responsibility *and* alternative possibilities. As, according to the latter condition, if one is to be responsible for anything that functions as a sufficient cause or motive for their action (such as their character), then one would be subject to an infinite regress of past actions, unless there were, in fact, actions in the individual’s life history—namely, that SFAs—that themselves are self-forming and undetermined by not having a sufficient cause or motive for their performance. Following Kane (2009), we can see that there are thus three types of free actions found within the framework posited by libertarianism:

(11) Types of Free Actions

- (i) *Voluntary Actions* Actions done voluntarily, on purpose and for reasons that are not coerced, compelled or otherwise constrained or subject to control by other agents.
- (ii) *Responsible Actions* Actions of type (i) that are performed of one’s own free will, in the sense of a will that they are ultimately responsible for forming.
- (iii) *Self-Forming Actions* Actions that are “will- setting”, in the sense of acts by which one forms the will from which one performs actions of type (ii).

In further understanding these types of free actions, one can see that, first, Voluntary Actions are actions that are compatible with determinism—that is, they are actions of compatibilist freedom—as one can freely act (in the sense of voluntarily on purpose and for reasons) even in a deterministic world, so long as they are not the result of one being coerced, or by one being compelled or controlled by

others (Kane, 2007). However, Responsible Actions and Self-Forming Actions are actions of incompatibilist freedom—as they could not be performed in a deterministic world; yet, however, it is only the latter type of actions that are undetermined. Hence, second, Responsible Actions *may be causally determined* and thus may be such that an individual could not have done otherwise.¹³ These actions, however, would be actions of libertarian freedom because, even though these actions may be determined, they presuppose the performance of actions that are undetermined—namely, SFAs—and thus, these actions could not exist in a deterministic world. An example of this type of action that is provided by Kane (2007), is that of Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms, during the time of the Protestant Reformation where Luther uttered (the now (in)famous words), “Here I stand, I can do no other”. At that specific point in time, it could be such that Luther could actually have not done otherwise—and thus, his action was determined. However, this would still be a libertarian free act, as it could also have been the case that Luther was ultimately responsible for the present character (or motives) that he had, which were a result of facing, at earlier points of his life, certain struggles that enabled him to perform SFAs. In this case, there is a will already formed—and thus determined—in virtue of past SFAs for which one could have done otherwise (Kane, 2007).

Finally, Self-Forming Actions (SFAs) are the actions, the performance of which, allows one to form (in an undetermined manner) the way that their wills—which guide their later actions—will be formed. In short these actions play a fundamental role in making a person the type of person they are. Thus, in summary, freedom of the will entails the holding of the condition of ultimate responsibility, which, in turn, require the existence of SFAs—actions that enable the condition of alternative possibilities to hold. These three types of actions make up a network of actions by each of them being connected to one another. That is, SFAs are free actions in the sense of Responsible Actions, as, though undetermined, they are still responsible actions of free will of a special kind. Responsible Actions and SFAs are Voluntary actions, as acts that are done of one’s own free will, are thus also actions that are not coerced, controlled, or compelled etc. There is thus a nesting of the three types of actions within the framework of libertarianism.

One could, now, ask the important question—which expresses the Intelligibility Task—of how actions that lack both sufficient causes and motives—and thus are determined—could be actions that are, in fact, responsible and free actions rather than the result of luck or chance? In answer to this question, one can first understand that SFAs are actions that occur at *specific* times in individual’s lives—namely, as Kane (2017, 148) writes, those ‘difficult times of life when we are torn between competing visions of what we should do or become, say, between doing the moral thing or acting from ambition, or between powerful present desires and long-term goals, or faced with difficult tasks for which we have aversions’. In this type of scenario, one is faced with competing motivations that require one to put in some effort to overcome the temptation to do something else, which one also strongly desires to do. That is, there is a specific tension and uncertainty within the mind about which particular actions should be performed, which, as Kane (2017, 148) further writes,

¹³ Though Kane (2007) notes that this might not always be the case.

‘is reflected in appropriate regions of our brains by movement away from thermodynamic equilibrium—in short, a kind of “stirring up of chaos” in the brain that makes it sensitive to micro-indeterminacies at the neuronal level’. From an experiential perspective, the uncertainty and tension that one feels in the difficult times in which an SFA presents itself would, from a neurophysiological perspective, be reflected in the state of indeterminacy had by the neural processes of the individual (Kane, 2016). That is, when an individual makes a decision to perform an action under those conditions, the outcome is not determined, based on the fact of the indeterminacy that has occurred; however, this outcome would still be willed—and, therefore, rational and voluntary, based on the fact that, in performing an SFA, the individual’s will is divided by motives that are in conflict. A helpful example of this has been provided by Kane (2016, 5) and goes as follows:

A businesswoman on her way to an important meeting who observes an assault in an alley. An inner struggle ensues between her conscience, to stop and seek help, and her career ambitions, which tell her she can’t miss this meeting. She has to make an effort of will to overcome the temptation to go on.

In this scenario, if one overcomes the temptation that she is facing, this would be a result of effort that she has put in. However, if she fails to overcome the temptation, this would be because she did not allow the effort that she put in to succeed—as, even though she willed to overcome the temptation that she was facing and do what was the right, or moral thing—namely, that of helping the victim—she also, at the same time, willed to fail, for reasons tied to her ambitious motives. There is thus an ‘indeterministic noise’ that is presenting an obstacle for the woman overcoming her temptation. More specifically, in utilising the notion of quantum theory and neuroscience, one can understand where this indeterminacy comes from, as Kane (1998, 130) writes, that the ‘indeterminate efforts of will...are complex chaotic processes in the brain, involving neural networks that are globally sensitive to quantum indeterminacies at the neuronal level’. That is, a conflict in an individual’s will causes their brain to cease being in a state of ‘thermodynamic equilibrium’, which, in turn, then amplifies the effects of quantum indeterminacies at the neuronal level. This is then experienced by the individual as conflicting efforts of will and a feeling of indecision. This indeterminacy, that is present in cases of inner conflict, and thus provide the grounds for SFAs, is, as noted by Kane (2009, 40), ‘not coming from an external source...but is coming from her own will, since she also deeply desires to do the opposite’. Focusing again on this through a neuroscientific perspective, one could thus imagine that there are two neural networks that are involved in this case, with each influencing the other and representing the conflicting motivations that she has—one having as input the woman’s reasons for acting morally by stopping and aiding the victim, and the other having as input the ambitious motivations had by the woman to carry on to her meeting. The neural networks are connected in a manner that the indeterministic noise—that presents an obstacle for her making her choice—is provided by each of the desires to perform the conflicting actions, and the tension creating conflict in their will to perform these actions. A choice would thus be made when either of the pathways reaches a specific ‘activation threshold’. That is, if the woman succeeds in performing an action, this would be because, as Kane (2009, 41) writes, the ‘neural pathway through which the woman succeeds

in reaching a choice threshold will have overcome the obstacle in the form of indeterministic noise generated by the other pathway'. If an individual is presented with such a choice, it is thus that of them aiming to solve two competing tasks at once—such as that of the moral choice or the ambitious choice in the example before us. The individual's brain is thus functioning, as noted by Kane (2009, 41), as 'a parallel processor; it can simultaneously process different kinds of information relevant to tasks such as perception or recognition through different neural pathways'. Based on all of this, the individual (such as the businesswoman) is thus responsible for their SFA, as, even though the indeterminism that comes from the conflicting actions (motivations and reasons for performing the actions) might cause one of the actions to fail, if one of the actions is successfully performed, then the individual would have succeeded in performing an action that they wanted to be fulfilled. In other words, they want both tasks to be performed—and are endeavouring to make it the case that they are—thus, if, and when, one succeeds, the action that is performed was one in which they were endeavouring to make, and hence they are responsible for it. This type of experiential and neural complexity is what is needed for an individual to undergo genuine self-formation and have free will.

In summary, libertarian free will is incompatible with determinism, as it is a freedom that is focused on responsible self-formation, rather than simple freedom of action—that is, the ability to do otherwise (which was previously defined as such by Hasker). This type of freedom allows individuals to be ultimately responsible for the actions that they perform, even if they are causally determined by their character (and whatever else is a sufficient cause for their actions). As, at least some of one's prior actions that play a role in forming their character (or sufficient cause of their subsequent actions) must themselves not be causally determined—that is, one must be provided with the opportunities to perform self-forming actions. These types of actions are intelligible, as they are responsible actions that one is endeavouring to perform—where if they succeed in doing so, this will be a voluntary and intentional resolution of the conflict in will (and at the neural level as well). This is thus the framework of libertarianism that will now be applied within a theological context to further precisify GOT and deal with the issues raised by the PC and the DBC.

The compatibility of perfect being theism and an open future

According to GOT, God is a being that possesses a maximum set of compossible great-making properties—namely, that of maximal power, knowledge, and goodness. Moreover, reality is created *ex nihilo* by God and is sustained in being by him. In this creative act, God brings into existence libertarian free creatures, and thus the future state of reality in which they exist is open in three senses: first, causally, as there is more than one causally possible future for each of these creatures, second, epistemically, as, given that there is more than one causally possible future for each of God's creatures, then the future is also not epistemically settled for God concerning what actions these creatures would perform. Third, the future is providentially open, as God has not ordained any particular causally possible future to be *the* actual future for each of his creatures—there are thus many different causally open

futures that God might permit to come about, without him having actively selected any particular one of them for his creatures. On the basis of God's creation of libertarian free creatures, and thus the openness of the future, there is, first, a denial of divine foreknowledge, which, according to the PC, underwrites the prophecies found within scripture. Second, according to the DBC, there is thus also possibility that has opened where God can bodge things concerning these creatures.

Focusing first on the latter issue—that of the DBC—as the future is causally and epistemically open to God, there is a possibility for God to perform an action with the intention of bringing about a particular result; yet, those results do not end up coming about—and thus, God bodes things up. However, as the possibility of being able to bodge things up seems not to be becoming of the God of perfect being theism—that is, a being that is maximally powerful and good. Hence, as an open theistic God can, in fact, possibly bodge things, the affirmation of the fact of a God that permits an open future (by creating libertarian free creatures) is incompatible with the perfect being theism that the thesis of GOT is supposed to be grounded on. One thus must either abandon perfect being theism, or that of there being an open future. However, in applying the notion of libertarianism that was detailed in the previous section to this issue, we can, in fact, see that one can begin to dissolve this apparent dilemma. More precisely, within libertarianism, a given libertarian free creature would perform three kinds of actions throughout their life: Voluntary Actions, which are non-coerced actions, Responsible Actions, which are actions that may be causally determined, yet are grounded on previous undetermined actions, and Self-Forming Actions (SFAs), which are undetermined actions that form the will of an individual. Now, in creating libertarian free creatures, God would need to create a world that is *not* deterministic—and thus is causally open. Yet, despite this, for each individual created by God, the future would not need to be causally open at *every time* of their existence—that is, at a time t there would be more than one causally possible future relative to t . Rather, for there to be these libertarian free creatures, it would *only* require that the future be casually open during the times in which individuals are performing SFAs and thus forming their will—that is, if the individual is to perform an SFA at t there would need to be more than one causally possible future relative to t , but not necessarily after t . Hence, what is now rejected is the assumption (made by Hasker and others) that for God to create libertarian free creatures, he would need to ensure that these creatures possess the ability to have done otherwise for *every* act done of their own free will, which is to say that the future is *fully* causally open for each libertarian free creature throughout their life span. Rather, in assuming libertarianism (and the centrality of the notion of ultimate responsibility, over that of the notion of alternative possibilities), one is now able to emphasise the importance of the second type of free actions that a libertarian free creature can perform: Responsible Actions—actions that can be causally determined, yet are performed of one's own free will. Focusing on this type of free actions thus allows one to affirm a more 'restricted' view of the causal and epistemic

openness of the future—namely, that of a ‘*partial*’ openness. This partial openness of the future can now be construed succinctly as follows¹⁴:

- (12) *Partial Causal Openness* The future is partially causally open relative to times t and t^* if there is more than one causally possible future relative to t , but solely one causally possible future relative to a future time t^* .
- (13) *Partial Epistemic Openness* The future is partially epistemically open relative to times t and t^* if and only if for some state of affairs X and X^* , X (nor their tense-neutral counterparts) is not infallibly known t , but X^* is infallibly known at a future time t^* .

In each libertarian free creature’s life, the future would thus be causally and epistemically open *solely* at the moments of their life where they are required to form their character and will by performing the third type of free actions: SFAs. These moments, however, would be few and far between as they would only occur at certain difficult times during the libertarian free creature’s life when they are torn between competing visions of what they should do or become—such as that of choosing a moral option or a self-centred option. Hence, at all the other moments of that individual’s life—which, plausibly, would form a collection of moments that would encompass the majority of their life span—they would be primarily performing Responsible Actions—actions from a will that is already formed—and thus *all* of these actions will be determined.¹⁵ Thus, at these times, the future would *not* be causally open—as there is a unique causally possible future that will be realised for that individual based on the decisions that they have made, as determined by the will that they have formed. There is thus a restriction being made here concerning the openness of the future, where the future would thus be, on the one hand, casually open for an individual solely at the times in which they are required to perform SFAs. And, on the other hand, it will be casually closed for an individual during the rest of the times in which their actions—that is, their Responsible Actions—are causally determined by their characters (motives, or any other cause that is sufficient for that action being performed). Hence, the future is thus ‘partially’ causally open; yet, as God is maximally knowledgeable, he would know the future as it is, and thus the future would also be partially *epistemically* open as well. That is, the open theistic God, so construed, would only *lack* infallible knowledge concerning all of the events occurring at the future times of the libertarian free creature’s life that are casually open—that is, God would not know what undetermined choice an individual would make during their times of self-formation—that is, the choice that will be made through the performance of an SFA. However, the open theistic

¹⁴ The following can also be extended to providential openness; however, for brevity’s sake, we will now solely focus on causal and epistemic openness.

¹⁵ Thus we affirm the determination of these actions, rather than the non-committal position concerning this favoured by Kane.

God, so construed, would *possess* infallible knowledge concerning all of the events occurring at the future times of the libertarian free creature's life that are causally closed—that is, God would know each of the determined choices that an individual will make, that stem from their character (or motives etc.). Given this, there are thus grounds for understanding how God could not bodge things up. As for each of the times in which the future is causally and epistemically open—which would be during times of an individual performing an SFA by making a challenging decision that will form their character—God would be able to have a 'contingency plan' for each of the possible undetermined choices that could be made at that time by the individual. That is, as God is maximally knowledgeable, he would know what reasons the person has for each action that they want to perform and the neural pathways that are being engaged during this process of deliberation, and so he would have a plan of action that would provide a suitable response to the action that is ultimately performed by the individual. Thus, if, for example, the businesswoman was to choose to help the victim in the previously detailed scenario, then God would have a plan in place to perform the action of rewarding her for her exemplification of moral virtue (which could be practically that of him bringing it about that she will be called into her boss' office and she will directly being offered the promotion). And if the businesswoman instead decides to go to the meeting and not help the victim, then God would have the plan in place to perform the action of punishing her for her self-centeredness (which could be practically that of him bringing it about that someone else is promoted instead of her, despite her delivering the presentation). However, once the SFA has been performed by an individual, the times subsequent to that moment would then be causally closed in the sense that the actions of each of the libertarian free creatures would be causally determined by their characters—there would thus be one unique causally possible future from that point forward up until the time of the next SFA. Thus, as God is maximally knowledgeable, he would, therefore, know with certainty what actions each individual would perform—by him having knowledge of the type of character that they have formed and what actions would be causally determined by one having that character—and so every action that God would intend to perform would successfully bring about their intended ends. Hence, in the causally open (and thus epistemically open) points of an individual's life, God would have contingency plans in place in response to the undetermined choices that are made. And, at the causally closed (and thus epistemically settled) points of an individual's life—which are taken to be the majority of that individual's life—God would infallibly know what actions each individual would perform—and so he would be able to perform actions that will bring about the results that God has intended. In either case, the DBC is not applicable to the GOT, so construed, given that God would thus not be able to bodge, as there would be no time that is either not correctly planned for (the undetermined moments of that individual's life), or is not infallibly known by God (the determined moments of that individual's life).

Thus, (ii) of (4) can indeed be taken to be false, as even if God does *not exhaustively* (infallibly) know the future—that is, even if the complete sequences of events that make up the future are not infallibly known by God—he still would not be able to bodge things as he would have the needed contingency plans in place for causally open parts of the future and he would know infallibly what would occur during the causally closed parts of the future.

Turning our attention now onto addressing the PC, the notion of prophecy is now also able to be shown to be non-problematic for the adherent of the GOT. As, within this conceptualisation of God, he is able to now possess foreknowledge concerning the future free actions of his creatures. That is, *all prophesised actions are now taken to be Responsible Actions*. Hence, for example, God, in Christ, can foreknow Peter's betrayal because he knew what character (and will) Peter had developed through his previous free actions (i.e., SFAs), and the fact that this character (motivations or other sufficient causes) would *causally determine* him to perform certain actions (i.e., Responsible Actions) in certain situations. Hence, based on this knowledge, Christ would know that *if* Peter, with the character that he has developed, was placed in that certain situation, he *will* perform the action of betraying him—with the 'will' here expressing an action that is causally determined. Moreover, concerning the statements of Christ concerning non-prophesised free actions—such as that concerning who would betray him—one does not have to also assume a predictive interpretation of this and take this prophecy to be based on knowledge of tendencies; rather, these actions can now also be taken to be Responsible Actions. Thus, for example, Christ possessed knowledge about who would betray him as this actions was causally determined by the character of the person that would betray him—namely, Judas—that he had previously formed through his performance of SFAs in the earlier stages of his life. Hence, for the prophecies concerning Peter's betrayal and statements about Christ's future betrayer (and the other prophecies and statements about the future scattered throughout scripture) one can take these to be part of the causally, epistemically and providentially closed (or 'settled') parts of the future, which God can truly foreknow. There is thus no PC that can rightly be raised against the GOT, so construed, as all forms of prophecy are now able to be affirmed by them being correctly categorised as denizens of the closed (or settled) parts of the future, rather than the open parts.

Thus, where both of these challenges (i.e., the PC and DBC) went wrong was in assuming that at each point of an individual's life, they could always do otherwise, without being causally determined with respect to their choice. That is, the future is *fully* causally (and thus epistemically open), with each of the actions performed by an individual thus being undetermined at that those times. This was an assumption, made by certain adherents of GOT, and the following illustration in Fig. 1. is helpful in demonstrating this situation (where 'LFC' stands for a 'libertarian free creature', 'black boxes' represent 'undetermined possible options to be chosen by the libertarian free creature', and the 'lines running from God to each option' representing 'God's knowledge of the undetermined possible options'):

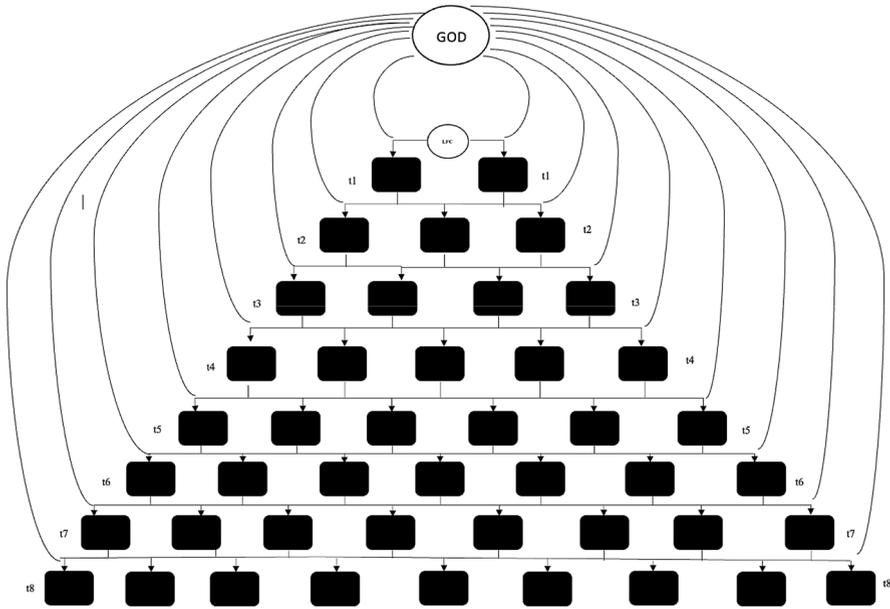


Fig. 1 God’s knowledge of possibilities (i)

This view of reality affirmed by certain adherents of GOT is indeed problematic, as with all of the near infinite moments of indeterminism that would be present in a libertarian free creature’s life, God would plausibly be open to the possibility of some major boding and would not be able to foreknow the actions that were performed by these individuals, and thus would not be able to provide prophetic statements concerning them. However, if one assumes the framework provided by libertarianism, and thus the future being *partially* open (and thus partially epistemically open), then only a *certain subset* of a libertarian free creature’s actions would be undetermined—namely, the SFAs. The following illustration in Fig. 2. is helpful in demonstrating this situation (where, again, ‘LFC’ standing for a ‘libertarian free creature’, ‘black boxes’ represent ‘undetermined possible options to be chosen by the libertarian free creature’, ‘white boxes’ representing ‘determined possible options that will be chosen by the libertarian free creature’, and the ‘lines running from God to each option’ representing ‘God’s knowledge of the undetermined and determined possible options’):

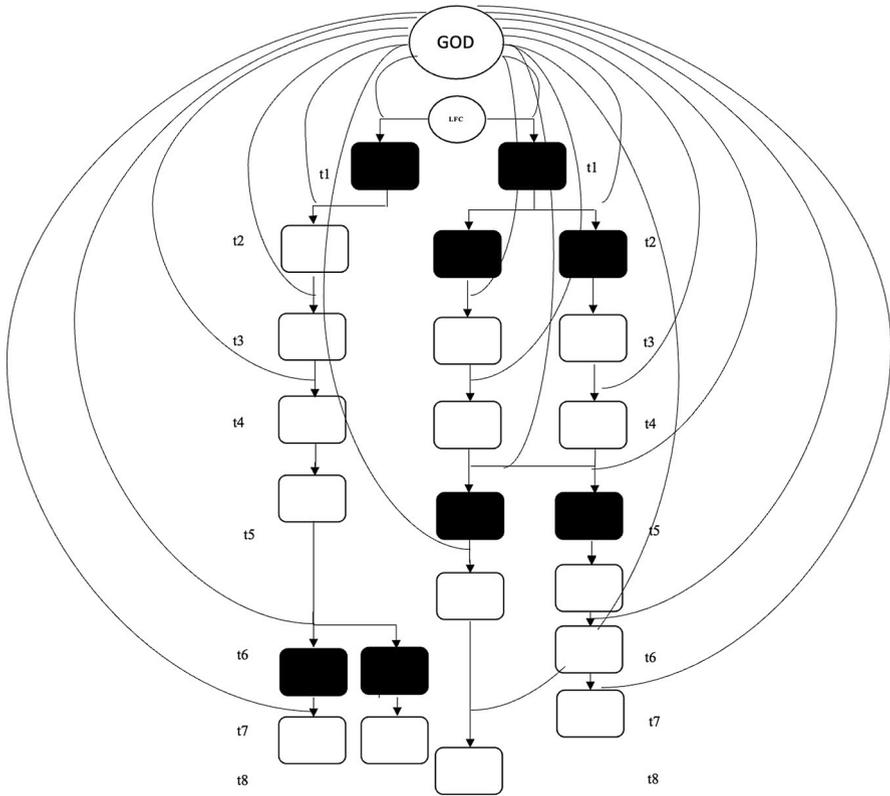


Fig. 2 God's knowledge of possibilities (ii)

Within this view of reality, there would thus only be a certain limited number of moments of indeterminism in an individual's life, which God could easily respond to by having a certain number of contingency plans in place in response to the actions performed in those situations. And, as the rest of a libertarian free creature's life will be causally determined (by their character's or motives etc.) God would infallibly know what would occur, and thus would be able to provide prophecies concerning his creatures' actions, and, most of all, he would not be able to bodge things concerning their actions. Hence, the issue raised by the PC is able to be dealt with, as the prophecies attested to in scripture are taken here to concern the Responsible Actions of his creatures—and thus the causally (epistemically and providentially) closed parts of the future. Second, concerning the DBC, God would have plans in place for the undetermined choices made by his libertarian free creatures, and he would possess foreknowledge of the determined choices that these creatures would make. Moreover, one can also diffuse the issue raised by the dilemma facing low and high-risk open theism: as, against 'low-risk' open theism the current proposal does not require one to increase the probabilities of the free action to certainty; rather these actions: the SFAs, before they are performed at a time by an individual have

an *equal* probability with the other possible actions that could be performed at that time. Thus, the future is truly open to God and his creatures concerning what the latter will, in fact perform. Furthermore, against ‘high-risk’ open theism, the current proposal does not require one to take probabilities to be a guide for God’s activity; rather, God is guided by his maximal knowledge concerning the types of characters that his creatures would develop and his foreknowledge of the actions that will be performed on the basis of their actions being determined by the character that they have. The creation and maintenance of the world of libertarian free creatures is thus not a risky affair. Given all of this, we can thus now provide a final re-statement of the thesis of GOT, within the framework of libertarianism, that takes into account the partiality of the openness of the future:

(14) Generic Open Theism*

- (i) Perfect Being Theism: There is a maximally great being, God.
- (ii) Partial Causal Openness: The future is partially causally open.
- (iii) Partial Epistemic Openness: The future is partially epistemically open.
- (iv) Partial Providential Openness: The future is partially providentially open.

Once the precisification of the openness of the future is made in light of the notion of libertarianism, it is thus clear that an open theistic God can have a substantial amount of providential control over the future. As if we, again, focus on the moment of the creative event and the subsequent moments of time in which the vast amount of libertarian free creatures exist and perform actions, by the future being partially (causally, epistemically (and providentially)) open, God would have an infallible knowledge concerning what will actually occur in the world, as a result of the causally determined actions—with him only lacking knowledge at a certain limited number of times, which would be those times in which the future is open (i.e., the times of the performance of an SFA)—which God would have a plan of action in place in response to what occurs during those times. God would thus be providentially in control of a (partially) open future, without any fear of him being liable to bodge things up. Moreover, he would be able to provide true prophetic statements concerning that future. Thus, there is no incompatibility between a God that has a maximally compossible set of great-making properties, scripture, and that of there being a (partially) open future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in section one, the thesis of generic open theism was explicated, and two challenges against this was raised, specifically that of the Prophecy Challenge and the Divine Bodgery Challenge, which raised an issue concerning the compatibility of the assumption perfect being theism, scriptural prophecy

and the openness of the future that is found within this thesis. In section two, an explication of a specific conception of libertarian free will was made, with the focus being on the notion of ultimate responsibility and self-forming actions. This all provided a means for further understanding the nature of the openness of the future. Thus, in section three, the notion of libertarian free will, which was detailed in the previous section, was applied to the thesis of generic open theism, which provided a means for showing how the Prophecy Challenge and the Divine Bodgery Challenge are not issues for this thesis—as understood within this specific libertarian framework. And thus, perfect being theism and scripture is compatible with an open future.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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