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“Only Wise God” by: William Lane Craig

**Systematic Theology 601
Dr. McCall
12/28/06**

When we consider the understanding of God's divine foreknowledge we are also led to grapple with whether we, as human beings, have ultimate freedom to choose our actions. If God has foreknowledge of everything we will do then it seems that God is the one who controls our decisions to do certain things, because he already knows what we will do before we do it. However, William Lane Craig proposes that God's divine foreknowledge and human freedom is compatible. Understanding that God is all knowing or omniscient does not lead to throwing out the concept of human freedom. Craig explains in his book, "The Only Wise God," the compatibility of God being perfectly omniscient and human beings as genuinely free to choose. God simply possesses an innate knowledge of all truth, including truth about future free acts. Craig presents a premise that God knows all possible worlds or outcomes of decisions people freely make under any circumstance prior to God's decree. In this review of Craig's book I would like to explore the possibilities that are derived from the understanding of God's divine foreknowledge. I would like to explore this question; in light of God's divine foreknowledge of all events throughout time do human beings truly have freedom?

In understanding the compatibility of God's divine foreknowledge and human freedom we must examine what fatalism entails and how it affects the view of who God is. In his book Craig focuses on the fact that Christians should not come to the resolution that fatalism is the answer to understanding God's divine foreknowledge and it especially has no place in understanding human freedom.

Fatalism is the basic belief that what will be must be, focusing on the later part of the sentence, “must be”. There is no exception. It is not “que sera sera” – whatever will be will be. That statement is a redundant repetition of meaninglessness. Its true meaning is “who cares” or “whatever.” It does not lay down the hard and actual statement of what must occur. Fatalism is the idea that what will happen is determined to happen or fated to happen and there is nothing we can do to make a difference. Fatalism is not a form of determinism, which is the view that all of our choices and actions are determined by prior causes. Fatalism gives no freedom to act or allow any series of deterministic choices to get us to a certain point of decision. All events have been predetermined in advance for all time and human beings are powerless to change them. Humans’ deliberation and actions are pointless because things must be the way they have been predetermined. Fatalism is thus a denial of human freedom. It truly denies that we can do anything other than what we have been destined to do. We cannot act in such a way that a statement about the future would have a different truth-value or outcome other than the one it must have.

The philosophy of fatalism may be supported in various ways. One is to appeal to the logical laws; this argument is referred to as Logical Fatalism. There is also an argument referred to as the Theological Fatalism which appeals to the existence and nature of God. Craig presents an overview of theological fatalism, and explains how we should view this theory.

Fatalism becomes Theological Fatalism when it focuses on the idea of God's foreknowledge. It is in essence an attempt to demonstrate a logical contradiction between an omniscient God and free will of human beings. If God foreknows that something will happen at a certain time, when that given time arrives, the event must happen, otherwise God's foreknowledge would be erroneous.

Theological fatalism can be viewed as such:

1. God is omniscient
2. Since God is omniscient, God has infallible or perfect foreknowledge
3. If God has infallible foreknowledge that tomorrow I will engage in event X
4. Then I must without choice engage in event X

Therefore, free will is not possible since there is no alternative except to engage in event X. In the occurrence that I do not fulfill event X, then God is not omniscient. Also, if I engage in event X, I don't have free-will on account of the inability to choose an alternative outcome. Craig states in the beginning of his book that, "For the Christian then, the issue of fatalism-more particularly, theological fatalism-cannot remain a matter of indifference. If the fatalist is correct, then the Christian must deny either divine foreknowledge or human freedom" (Craig, p. 15). Craig desires to prove that there is a compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. The two go together. Craig does not want his readers to resort to any type of fatalism to understand God's foreknowledge. I agree with Craig's viewpoint and would not so quickly give

into the theological fatalistic conclusion resulting in throwing out either divine foreknowledge or human freedom. There are many biblical references to God's foreknowledge of events. In Isaiah 48:8b it states, "For I knew that you would surely deal treacherously, and that from before birth you were called a rebel." This clearly shows that God knew how these people would act in the future. Also in Genesis 6:6 and 1 Samuel 15:11 God grieved or repented after seeing His creation act against Him. If humans were not free to make the decision to turn from God then He would have known about their rebellion and would not have been moved to repent or grieve over their actions.

Still many philosophers argue that divine foreknowledge and human freedom are not compatible. They believe that if you hold to divine foreknowledge then you cannot have human freedom and if you have human freedom then you cannot have divine foreknowledge. The argument is that if God knows something is going to occur then it must occur, theological fatalism. However, if a human states that he knows something will occur but it ultimately does not occur then we would say that the person was simply mistaken. Therefore, we imply that God's divine foreknowledge implies fatalism, but human foreknowledge does not. God is infallible and cannot be mistaken. If God knows that something will occur then it must occur according to God's nature. We cannot say that God's knowledge or belief in something to occur is false. If we did that would be in direct opposition to the infallibility of God. I believe Craig would agree that it seems that theological fatalism is simply a variation of logical fatalism. If a future tense

statement becomes true then the tagging on of God foreknowing the incident does not really add anything to the theory of fatalism. Fatalism is the belief that something must occur whether one involves God in the theory or not. I agree with Craig that we do not have to conclude that divine foreknowledge leads to fatalism, which leads to humans not being genuinely free to choose their path in life. God's control over the future does not automatically imply fatalism. The future is what "will be" and not what "must be". Our definition of how we look at the future will determine our ideology and belief of life.

Craig provides an alternative to fatalism in that it is possible for a human to act freely in a different way and if he were to act in that way God would have believed differently from that which occurred. It does not make what God knew to be true a false statement if one acts freely; God's foreknowledge is always true for God's knowledge is greater than just one possible outcome. God's foreknowledge encompasses all outcomes that could possibly occur. "They [humans] are free either to act or to refrain, and whichever they choose, God will have foreknown. For God's knowledge, though chronologically prior to the action, is logically posterior to the action and determined by it" (Craig, p. 74).

Why would we limit God in His awesomeness by thinking that He only knows one possible outcome that will occur in a given situation? Also, why would we say that this is the only world God could have possibly created? God could have created a world different from this one or no world at all and God being all knowing knows such possible worlds. God foreknows what will happen because

of the action a person may take however; this does not mean a person's action causes God's foreknowledge. "The word because here indicates a logical, not a causal, relation, one similar to that expressed in the sentence, 'four is an even number because it is divisible by two'" (Craig, p. 73). God is omniscient and this includes knowing all future-tense statements. Human freedom does not take away God's omniscience but rather reinforces it with the understanding that God truly knows all and every outcome we could ever choose.

Craig uses the phrase "Middle Knowledge" to explain that God's foreknowledge is logically prior to the actual events and actions that occur. In order to explain this concept of middle knowledge Craig breaks it down into three logical moments of God's knowledge which I will explain later. However, we must remember that we are trying to understand an omniscient, omnipotent, and uncreated being in a logical way with our finite minds. God's knowledge of all things does not have distinct moments that flow in a logical structure; rather He has knowledge of everything simultaneously. To wrap our minds around this concept we must, as Craig has done, break it down into a logical structure and realize that some aspects of God's omniscience are prior to others.

The concept of God's middle knowledge, also known as the Molinism, was named after a 16th century Jesuit theologian, Luis de Molina. He formed this concept to reconcile the omniscience of God with human free will. Middle knowledge shows that God allows us to choose our actions yet believes that He

knows in advance what course we will choose. The key is the idea that God possesses total knowledge of how any free agent would act in any given circumstance. God knows what action a person would freely choose. Craig explains this concept further by using three separate moments of God's knowledge that He had prior to His decree of an action or decision.

The first moment of divine knowledge is called natural knowledge. In this moment God knows all the outcomes that could possibly occur. This includes all the possible worlds or orders which He could create. This knowledge is true not by willing them to be true but because they are part of God's divine and omniscient nature. The second moment of divine knowledge is called middle knowledge. This is God's knowledge enveloping every possibility of what would happen and not just what could happen in any circumstance. In this second moment of divine knowledge God knows what worlds are possible for Him to create from the knowledge of the first moment given certain circumstances. Therefore the final stage or moment of His divine knowledge is then taking what He knows from His middle knowledge and selecting an actual possible world to occur. This is called free knowledge, which is God's knowledge of the actual world or what actually occurs. However, the content of both God's middle knowledge and free knowledge is not essential to God because humans are free to choose and therefore God's knowledge is vast and includes the different choices of human free will. The Molinist view of divine foreknowledge allows God to arrange for a person to carry out a specific act by arranging the

circumstances surrounding the choice so that the act is both freely chosen and providential, thus maintaining the free will of the person.

The term counterfactual is used when explaining the philosophical idea that God knows all possible worlds or outcomes. This is the understanding of how things “would be”. As I explained earlier, God has a natural knowledge of how things could be and also a free knowledge of how things will be. The knowledge of counterfactuals is much different in that it is the knowledge of what would be or the understanding of all the possible outcomes that would occur when one freely chooses a certain way. It is not knowledge of what might possibly happen or will happen, but what would happen. We use counterfactuals in everyday life. For example: If I asked my friend, whom I already owe money, to borrow more money he would not give me any more money or if I were rich, I would buy a big house, or if Dr. McCall is teaching the systematic theology class, I would take the class.” God knows ahead of time every single counterfactual that can happen. It is knowing all the counter occurrences that would happen if a certain action were taken. It is part of God’s omniscience to know not only what will happen, but also what would happen if a different set of circumstance were to occur. “He [God] knows, for example, what would have happened if he had spared the Cannanites from destruction, what Napoleon would have done had he won the Battle of Waterloo, and how Jones would respond if I were to share the Gospel with him” (Beilby & Eddy, p. 120). God has complete knowledge of every truth that would occur. There cannot be any truths that are unknown to God. He cannot

exist in a state of ignorance or discover truths as they occur. However, to understand completely that humans are genuinely free to choose, the Molinist view shows how the counterfactuals are placed prior to God's divine decree. If you would place God's counterfactuals knowledge after His divine decree then you would ultimately take away human freedom by making counterfactual truths a consequence of God's decree. Craig explains this further in stating, "In the same way that necessary truths like $2 + 2 = 4$ are prior to and therefore independent of God's decree, so also counterfactuals truths about how creatures would freely choose under various circumstances are prior to and independent of God's decree... Thus, by employing his counterfactual knowledge, God can plan a world down to the last detail and yet do so without annihilating creaturely freedom, since what people would freely do under various circumstances is already factored into the equation by God. Since God's counterfactual knowledge lies logically in between his natural knowledge and his free knowledge, Molinists called it God's middle knowledge" (Beilby & Eddy, p. 122).

God has infinite knowledge and understanding of his creation in any given circumstance. God knows us so well that He even knows all that we do or would have done in a different situation. Since God's middle knowledge is prior to God's decree He, in His all-surpassing wisdom, comprehends every possible outcome or counterfactual in His mind before one would freely do or decide in a situation. God simply knows all true statements about how His creation would act in certain circumstances. The key to comprehending this

concept of middle knowledge is understanding that God knows everything prior to His decree. This is God's divine foreknowledge and human freedom working together.

There are other theological views of God's divine foreknowledge that disagree with Craig's conclusion that God's divine foreknowledge and human freedom are compatible. In the book, "Divine Foreknowledge, Four Views," Gregory A. Boyd, David Hunt, Paul Helm as well as William Lane Craig give great explanations of these differing views. Each view attacks Craig's conclusion, but I believe that in the end it is true that God is perfectly omniscient and human beings are genuinely free and these notions are entirely compatible.

Open theism is the view that the future is partly open to God, for God cannot foreknow the decisions that free humans will make. Of course this view would not deny God's omniscience, however, it holds to the understanding that what God perfectly knows is partly composed of possibilities. The future is open and God himself does not entirely know the future because of the free will of humans. Open theists would argue that this view makes sense to Bible passages where God changes His mind, relents, or regrets a decision He made (Jeremiah 3:19-20, Genesis 6:6, 1 Samuel 15:10 & 35). Craig's response to open theism is that God is omniscient and therefore knows all counterfactuals which makes sense of human freedom and God's divine foreknowledge. It would seem that open theism undermines God's nature of

being completely all-knowing of all past, present and future occurrences that could, would and will happen. It also seems, as Craig states, that if the open theist looks at such Biblical passages and says God changes His mind then one would assume that God holds a false belief. This is impossible for an infallible God. Not only does the open theist undermine God's omniscience they also make God less than perfect in His knowledge. The Molinist view, on the other hand, allows no open-ended possibilities.

Another view that opposes the Molinist view is the simple-foreknowledge view which states that God simply knows what is going to come to pass. It holds to the belief that God does not choose which future to bring about based on His knowledge of how free humans would act in any possible world. God simply knows what free humans will do. This view does not focus on what they would or could do, but only on what they will do. Craig, points out that this is a form of fatalism, but it tries to combine fatalism and libertarian freedom, which cannot work. This leads to a self-contradiction. The one who holds to simple-foreknowledge would have to say that if someone can freely do something then that person could also fail to do that free act as well. However, the simple-foreknowledge view will not allow for the failure to do a certain act if God foreknew it. It is basically saying, I must do the act, and I must do the act freely. Again, it is inconsistent with the very concept of freedom. Simple-foreknowledge does not maintain that God knows

counterfactuals of human freedom, of which humans would do in any circumstance.

The final view I would like to explore is the Augustinian-Calvinist or the reformed view. This view believes that God knows all that will come to pass because He preordained it. This view denies human freedom. However, in this view it is believed that humans are led to believe they are free to do as they want and of course are morally responsible for their choices, but all their choices and outcomes are known and ordained by God. The Augustinian-Calvinist would say that it is inconsistent to believe in God's foreknowledge and in human freedom. Craig points out that this view, when looking at evil in our world, leads to an understanding that God is the author of evil. If God's foreknowledge of every act is based on his foreordination then it logically leads to God ordaining evil actions. Also, if decisions of free humans are indirectly caused by God, which the reformed view holds, every evil act that is done by a human is indirectly planned by God. In the following illustration Craig explains further the reformed view's beliefs regarding human responsibility and God's preordination of human actions.

“Thus, just as I am responsible for hitting the eight ball into the corner pocket when I strike the cue ball with the intention of hitting the eight ball into the corner pocket, so God is responsible for evil actions of creatures when he sets up causally determining circumstances that make such actions inevitable

for the creatures. Helm [Augustinian-Calvinist] cannot say that God did not intend for those evil acts to occur, for this would contradict God's universal providence" (Beilby & Eddy, p. 205).

Craig presents extensive Biblical proof in the first part of his book showing that God has great knowledge of the present, past and the future. Denial of this fact would be denying what the Bible proclaims as part of God's character. It is shown throughout the Scriptures that God's knowledge is inexhaustible and limitless (Psalm 147:5). Also, God doesn't only observe His creation but truly understands it and is involved with it. This is stated at the end of the book of Job when God questions Job and asks if he really understood the complexity and expanse of the universe. God knows and understands every aspect of His creation. God even knows the hearts and thoughts of men (Jeremiah 17:9-10). Craig refers to New Testament passages as well to reaffirm the notion of God's great knowledge of all events throughout time. Jesus, God in the flesh, predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, signs of the end of the world, His own death and resurrection, and also proclaimed with authority His return in the future as the Lord of all nations (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Mark 10:32-34, Luke, 21). Craig leaves no room for doubt that the God of the Bible is all knowing and possesses the power of foresight and foreknowledge of all events throughout time.

However, when we read Mark 13:32 and other passages where Jesus obviously stated that he did not know all things seems to lead a person to believe that this

Messiah did not have an understanding of the future. This should not lead a person away from the fact that the God of the Bible is all knowing or omniscient. These passages simply show the human side of Christ. There are far too many passages in the Gospels as well as in the epistles that state that Christ is all knowing of every event in time. In Matthew 17:27, Jesus tells Peter that with the first fish he would catch to, "open its mouth and you will find a four drachma coin..." this obviously points to Christ omniscience. Also, in Mark 14:13-15, Jesus was preparing for his final Passover meal, He told two of His disciples where to go and what and who they would encounter in the future. There are many other accounts throughout the New Testament that point to Christ's great foreknowledge. Denying this fact would be denying the deity of Christ. Craig in his book goes into even more detail of showing that in both the New and Old Testaments God is characterized as knowing all past, present and future events. This understanding is essential to comprehending the rest of Craig's argument of the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

Craig presents explanations of why the denial of God's foreknowledge and the denial of true free acts are not biblically accurate. Craig immediately states that the denial of God's foreknowledge is unbiblical. You cannot read the Bible in its entirety and say God is not omniscient. God knows the future in exhaustive detail. In Ephesians 1:11 it states that God "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11). Paul said all things, not some things or even most things but all things. God has planned all that will happen and He

works in history to bring it about. God knows what will happen because He is in active control. According to Isaiah, God's perfect knowledge of the future sets Him apart from the ignorant idols of the pagans (Isaiah 41:21-23, 42:8-9, and 46:9-11). These verses clearly state God's ability to declare the end from the beginning. This supernatural ability is a part of God's character, a unique distinctive of the true God which sets Him apart from false gods.

There are passages in the Old Testament that seem to portray God as ignorant about future free reactions of his people (Genesis 18:20-21, Jeremiah 26:3 & 36:3 and Ezekiel 12:3). Craig states that isolating these passages to support the conclusion that God does not have foreknowledge of events is wrong. "The problem with trying to base a doctrine of God's knowledge on such passages, however, that some of them are clearly anthropomorphic in character, that is, God is described in human terms which are not intended to be taken literally" (Craig, p. 40). If we entertain this thought then we take God off the throne of being God, the all-powerful and all-knowing One. If He were not all-powerful and all-knowing God would not be God. These passages of Scripture, as Craig also states, are not to be viewed as showing that God does not know everything, but they show the compassion of God that He gives us a chance to repent for the evil we do. It is what makes the God of the Bible so real and relational in that God would allow, in the midst of evil, people to have a chance to repent and freely chose to live for Him. Another great passage of Scripture that shows both God's foreknowledge and human freedom is in Jeremiah 38:17-18.

“Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “This is what the Lord God of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘If you surrender to the Babylonian officers, you and your family will live, and the city will not be burned down. But if you refuse to surrender, you will not escape! This city will be handed over to the Babylonians, and they will burn it to the ground.’” The important part of this passage that relates to human freedom is the “if, then” statements. This passage does not imply that God did not know the choice that Zedekiah would make, which in turn does not deny God’s divine foreknowledge. God in passages such as the aforementioned and other passages where God relents from doing what He initially stated (Jeremiah 26:13 and Amos 7:1-6) gives a forecast of what could have happened, but never implies that God does not know the outcome. In the light of the Biblical texts we cannot deny that God has divine foreknowledge over free human beings.

The denial of human freedom seems to logically lead to an understanding that the Bible portrays humans as mere puppets in the hands of a controlling God. If there is a denial of human freedom then God is the one who controls all outcomes and therefore one would assume that we are just robots programmed to do exactly what God wants us to do. Throughout the Scriptures people are said to obey, believe, choose God, sin, and rebel against God (John 14:15, Mark 1:15, Romans 1:21, 1 Corinthians 8:12). All are products of humans freely choosing to do certain actions. “Even the most radical theologian who believes that God foreordains every action must allow human beings a certain freedom of thought and intention if God is not to be regarded as the author of sin” (Craig, p.

47). It would be a self-contradiction of who God is to say that God is the one who acts to make someone do evil or rebel against Himself. God is perfectly good (2 Peter 1:3). However, evil comes from His creation freely choosing to rebel against the good or misuse the freedom they were given by God. The Bible teaches that humans are genuinely free (John 17:17, Romans 7:18, James 4:4) if otherwise we would assume that God is the one who brings about evil acts.

Finally, the Bible states this concept of middle knowledge and God knowing all the counterfactuals simultaneously. 1 Samuel 23:6-13 can easily be proof for God's middle knowledge. David asked God, understanding He is the all-knowing Creator, if Saul would come to get him and would he surrender to Saul. God answers David with a firm yes to both questions. God knew if David were to remain at Keilah, then Saul would come and get David and his men. Even though God's answers to David did not come to pass it does not state that God's answers were false, on the contraire God's answers were indication of what would have happened if David did not flee Keilah. It is obvious David believed God whole heartedly and did not want to test to see if God really knew what He was talking about. David left Keilah because he believed in the omniscient power of God to know everything of what would happen. God's understanding of all counterfactuals is seen plainly in this passage. Also, in Matthew 11:20-24 we see how Christ exemplified this power as well. Jesus states in this passage that if His miracles had been performed in certain cities, which were unrepentant, they would have repented. God shows He has great knowledge in regards to all-possible outcomes if certain individuals would have acted in a particular way.

Again, this is another proof for God's divine middle knowledge.

Craig gives a thorough explanation of how divine foreknowledge and human freedom are compatible. This view of God's middle knowledge brings a better understanding to God's foreknowledge and even God's providence. God knows what humans would do in any situation and He is completely sovereign to have those actions achieve His purposes. There is nothing outside of God's control. He knows everything and when I say everything, I truly mean every possible thing. God allows humans to sin if they freely chose so. However, we know that God can even take sinful acts of humans and use them to serve His purposes as it is states in Genesis 50:20, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result."

Bibliography

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Bible verses taken from, *The Holy Bible, New International Version & New American Standard Version*.