

Editorial: Divine Providence and Models of Theism

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Much recent work in analytic philosophy of religion and philosophical theology has addressed the problems of divine providence and human free will either in isolation or through a narrow focus on particular divine attributes, most often foreknowledge or omnipotence. By contrast, comparatively little attention has been paid to the broader theoretical frameworks within which these debates take place, and in particular to the systematic connections between accounts of providence and free will, on the one hand, and more general models of theism, on the other, by which we mean both meta-theological models (Perfect Being Theology, Creator Theology, etc.) and general “pictures of God” such as Classical Theism, Neoclassical Theism or Open Theism. As a result, it seems clear that discussions of providence will benefit greatly from a deeper reflection on their underlying methodological commitments or on the broader pictures of God they presuppose.

The present special issue is a direct result of the research project *Providence and Free Will in the Models of Classical Theism and Analytic Theism* (PROLITECA: PID2021-122633NB-100), funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of the Government of Spain, which sought to address this gap by articulating two central and interconnected hypotheses. The first is that theories of divine providence and human freedom are partly shaped by meta-theological frameworks, including methodological approaches such as Perfect Being Theology, as well as more general views about the aims, scope, and limits of philosophical theology. The second is that different accounts of providence both presuppose and inform distinct pictures of God, especially with respect to divine attributes such as simplicity, immutability, impassibility, which are specific to Classical Theism. Together, these two dimensions suggest that debates about providence cannot be

adequately assessed in isolation from broader questions about method and about the nature of God.

These two lines of inquiry structured the main activities of the project. The first was the focus of the international workshop “*Providence, Free Will, and the Methods of Philosophical Theology*” (University of Navarra, June 2023), which concentrated on methodological and meta-theoretical issues. The second guided the workshop “*Providence, Free Will, and God’s Entitative Attributes*” (University of Navarra, June 2024), which examined how different models of theism articulate divine attributes and how these, in turn, constrain accounts of providence and freedom. While several of the papers collected in this special issue emerged directly from these meetings, the open call for papers also attracted additional contributions that were not discussed within the project itself but that engage closely with its guiding questions and significantly enrich the overall discussion.

Part I—Framing the Debate: Models and Methods

The first part of the volume gathers papers that address the general foundational questions of meta-theology on the one hand (especially the model of Perfect Being Theology) and the pictures of God on the other hand (especially Classical Theism). This sets the methodological and conceptual stage for the discussions that follow by examining the meta-theological frameworks within which contemporary debates about divine providence are conducted.

In “Perfection and Providence”, **Brian Leftow** investigates the relationship between Perfect Being Theology (PBT) and competing accounts of divine providence. After surveying a range of determinist and indeterminist models, he argues that PBT, understood as a method for identifying divine perfections, does not by itself determine any specific theory of providence. In particular, he maintains that PBT neither entails Molinism nor its negation, since it can at most yield claims about God’s essential attributes, while concrete modes of providential governance concern contingent divine choices.

In “The Slippery Slope of Perfect Being Theology”, **Enrique Romerales** offers a critical assessment of recent attempts to modify or weaken PBT in order to resolve alleged tensions among divine attributes. Focusing on proposals such as the “maximal God” view, Romerales argues that abandoning or downgrading traditional omni-properties undermines both divine uniqueness and the religious adequacy of the concept of God. He contends that such revisions risk yielding a conception of God that can no longer function as the proper object of core

monotheistic attitudes such as worship, trust, and petitionary prayer, and, in short, is not a Perfect Being Theology anymore.

The section concludes with **Rubén Pereda**'s "Problemas de la categoría 'teísmo clásico'", which shifts attention from the methodological debate to the debate about the pictures of God, especially the category of "classical theism". Pereda examines several influential contemporary definitions of classical theism and shows that, despite their apparent diversity, they converge on only one shared attribute: divine immutability. He argues that treating classical theism as a unified theoretical starting point is therefore methodologically problematic, and he suggests alternative approaches that attend more carefully to historical contexts, religious traditions, and the internal coherence of individual theological systems.

Part II—Divine Attributes and Metaphysical Constraints on Providence

The second part of the volume turns from methodological framing to substantive questions about some specific divine attributes that constrain and shape accounts of providence. The papers in this section examine how different conceptions of God—classical, neoclassical—articulate attributes such as simplicity, omniscience, immutability, and impassibility, and how these attributes bear on God's action, control, and knowledge of the world.

In "Aquinas on Providence, Control, and Divine Simplicity", **Agustín Echavarría** engages Joe Schmid's version of the "providential collapse" argument directed against classical theism. Drawing on Aquinas's doctrines of providence and causal control, he uses a three-step strategy to show that fixing all facts about God undermines neither God's providential control of contingent events in the world nor his control of the act of creation. The paper thus defends the coherence of divine simplicity within a classical account of providence.

In "Divine Simplicity and the Theory of Action", **Clemente Huneeus** addresses the modal collapse objection by developing a general theory of action applicable to both divine and creaturely agents. He argues that divine willing and knowing of contingent effects can be understood as at least partially extrinsic, thereby preserving both divine simplicity and the genuine contingency of created outcomes without positing accidental intrinsic properties in God.

Kemal Kikanovic and Enis Doko's "Omnisubjectivity as a Divine Attribute from an Islamic Perspective" introduces the notion of omnisubjectivity as a way of

accounting for God's perfect knowledge of the subjective experiences of creatures. Drawing on Linda Zagzebski's work and Islamic philosophical and theological sources, the authors argue that omnisubjectivity offers a coherent solution to longstanding debates about omniscience while remaining compatible with core Islamic commitments.

In "Revisiting Kretzmann's Argument that an Immutable God Can't Know Mutable Reality", **Enric Fernández Gel and Patrick Flynn** re-examine a classic challenge to the compatibility of divine immutability and omniscience. They argue that Kretzmann's argument depends on controversial assumptions about belief internalism and content essentialism, and they contend that once these assumptions are rejected, the alleged incompatibility between immutability and knowledge of temporal reality dissolves.

The section concludes with **Ryan Mullins's** "Neoclassical Theism and the Problem of Foreknowledge and Passibility", which addresses a problem that arises for neoclassical theism, namely the often assumed incompatibility between passibility and foreknowledge. Whereas classical theists deny divine passibility and open theists reject exhaustive foreknowledge, Mullins challenges the assumption of incompatibility by drawing on recent accounts of emotion, and he develops a neoclassical model on which passibility and foreknowledge can be coherently maintained together.

Part III — Divine Providence and Human Freedom

The third part of the volume brings the preceding methodological and metaphysical discussions to bear on the problem of human freedom. The papers in this section examine competing accounts of divine providence under conditions of contingency, risk, and libertarian agency, addressing questions of foreknowledge, openness of the future, fatalism, and moral responsibility.

In "Une conception raisonnable du théisme ouvert ?", **Cyrille Michon** addresses a central objection to open theism, namely Kvanvig's claim that open theism entails a problematic asymmetry in God's knowledge of the future. Drawing on the Geach-Todd account of mutable future truths and on a distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge, he argues that God may possess extensive knowledge of future events grounded in divine intentions, even if such knowledge is defeasible. Michon suggests that the asymmetry identified by Kvanvig may point to a philosophical advantage of open theism rather than to a weakness.

Johannes Groessl's "Providence as Responsible Risk-Taking" develops an account of providence that places divine risk at the center of God's governance of creation. Working within an open-theist framework, and highlighting the methodological assumptions of each view, Groessl argues that genuine libertarian free will requires God to accept certain risks and that a coherent account of providence must therefore combine a strong conception of divine personhood with a restrained view of God's providential action, which is best understood as influencing history *through* creatures who freely cooperate.

In "Can Libertarian Free Will be Reconciled with Divine Providence?", **Katherin Rogers** defends the compatibility of libertarian freedom with a robust account of divine providence by appealing to divine eternity and an isotemporalist conception of time. Drawing on Anselmian themes, she argues that God's comprehensive knowledge and providential activity need not undermine the aseity of human free choices, even in the absence of an open future.

Linda Zagzebski's "The Incoherent Root of Theological Fatalism" (a *Précis* of her recently published *Fatalism and the Logic of Time*, OUP 2025) approaches the problem of freedom from a different angle by diagnosing the source of fatalist arguments in theology. She argues that such arguments ultimately rely on an incoherent notion of the necessity of the past and shows that the underlying problem generalizes beyond divine foreknowledge to any case involving infallible belief, thereby reframing theological fatalism as a broader metaphysical issue.

Concluding the last section, **James Dominic Rooney's** "Of Distributive Justice and Hellfire" challenges Laura Ekstrom's view that free will's value fails to justify the existence of evil, and proposes viewing free will as a moral transformer. This framework suggests that free agency allows persons to deserve their moral character and subsequent outcomes. By utilizing Thomistic thought, the author argues that the "value problem" relies on narrow views of distributive justice, concluding that God's permission of serious consequences remains compatible with divine love and just distribution.

It is worth noting that another contribution stemming from the same research project will be published soon in *TheoLogica*, although it could not be included in the present volume for reasons of timing. In "Toward a Logic of Molinism", **Ciro De Florio and Aldo Frigerio** develop a new formalization of the semantics of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, which are central to the Molinist solution for reconciling human free will and divine providence.