

“Clear as Day: Metaphorical and Literal Readings of Scripture in the Open Theism Debate” Paper given at the annual meeting of the AAR, Washington, D.C., Nov. 20, 2006.

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A few years ago the Evangelical Theological Society debated open theism and passed the following resolution: “We believe the Bible clearly teaches that God has complete, accurate and infallible knowledge of all past, present and future including all future decisions and actions of free moral agents.” In this paper I will focus on the claim that the Bible “clearly teaches” that God has exhaustive definite foreknowledge. I will begin with a brief overview of the open theist position and the sorts of biblical texts commonly cited in its support. Then I will examine two key issues underlying the debate: the nature of metaphor and the nature of prototypes. This will show that what one takes to be “clear as day” biblical teaching depends upon the stance one takes on these issues.

Open theism is a model of the God-world relationship that views God in dynamic give-and-take relationships with creatures. The emphasis is on relationality rather than control. In this respect, it is a member of what I call the “freewill tradition” that includes: the early church fathers, Arminians, Wesleyans and others. Open theists, however, seek to modify the freewill tradition on two points: (1) God is temporal rather than atemporal and (2) God has dynamic omniscience rather than exhaustive definite foreknowledge. The term “dynamic omniscience” (which I believe I coined) means that God knows the past and present with exhaustive definite knowledge and knows the future as partly definite (closed) and partly indefinite (open). God, together with creatures, creates the future as history goes along. Hence, God’s omniscience is dynamic in nature. God knows all that can possibly happen at any one time and through his *foresight* and wisdom God is never caught off-guard.

Proponents of dynamic omniscience find support for their view in a number of different types of biblical texts; a few of which will now be surveyed.

1. The Bible portrays God as authentically responding to His people's petitions.

God had the prophet Isaiah announce to King Hezekiah that he would not recover from his illness. However, Hezekiah prayed and God responded by

sending Isaiah back to announce that God had changed his mind, Hezekiah would recover and not die (2 kings 20).

In the New Testament, Jesus is said to heal a paralyzed man because of the faith of his friends (Mark 2:5). He responded to the faith of this small community by granting their request. People's faith, or lack of it, deeply affected Jesus and his ministry. Mark says that Jesus could not perform many miracles in Nazareth due to the lack of faith by the people in the community (6:5-6). Oftentimes, what God decides to do is conditioned upon the faith or unbelief of people. As James says, we have not because we ask not (4:2).

2. The Bible portrays God as being affected by creatures and as sometimes being grieved by what they do.

Genesis 6:6 says that God was grieved because humans continually sinned. Why would God grieve if God always knew exactly what humans were going to do? God is portrayed as saying "perhaps" the people will listen to my prophet and "maybe" they will turn from their idols (e. g. Ezek. 12:1-3; Jer. 26:2-3). Furthermore, God makes utterances like, "if you repent then I will let you remain in the land" (Jer. 7:5). Such "if" language--the invitation to change—seems ingenuine if God already knew they would not repent.

Moreover, God says, "I thought Israel would return to me but she has not" (Jer. 3:7; cf. 32:35) and that God planted cultivated vines and did not expect that they would produce "wild grapes" (Isa. 5:1-4). In these texts God is explicitly depicted as not knowing the specific future.

3. The Bible portrays God as testing people in order to discover what they will do.

God puts Abraham to the test and says, "now I know that you fear me" (Gen. 22:12). God puts the people of Israel to the test to find out what they will do (Ex. 15:25; Deut. 13:3). Why test them if God eternally knew with certainty exactly how the people would respond? One could say the testing was only for the benefit of the people since it added nothing to God's knowledge but that is not what the texts themselves say.

4. The Bible portrays God as changing his mind—altering his plans—as he relates to his creatures.

God announced his intention to destroy the people of Israel and start over again with Moses but Moses said that he did not want to do that and so God did not do what he had said he was going to do (Ex 32). Sometimes God

made promises that were stated in unconditional terms but God changed his mind due to human rebellion. For instance, 1 Samuel 13:13 states that God's original plan was to have Saul and his descendants as kings forever in Israel. In other words, there would have been no "Davidic" kingship. Later, however, due to Saul's sin, God changes his mind and rejects Saul and his line (1 Sam. 15:11, 35). Though Samuel and Saul plead with God to change his mind back to the original plan and go with Saul and his son's God declares that he will not change his mind again on this matter (1 Sam. 15:29). If God always knew that he was never going to have Saul's line be kings, was God deceitful?

Did the authors of the Hebrew Bible espouse dynamic omniscience? Ask Jewish scholars and they look at you with a puzzled expression and reply: "Of course, how could anyone think otherwise?" Among Hebrew Bible scholars in the Christian community, luminaries such as Terence Fretheim, Patrick Miller and Walter Brueggemann affirm that the Hebrew Bible teaches dynamic omniscience. Recently, a major work by John Goldingay, an evangelical Hebrew Bible scholar at Fuller Theological Seminary, claimed that dynamic omniscience is a major theme in the Hebrew Bible.¹

Naturally, others disagree. Evangelical Calvinists have taken the lead in arguing that the Bible "**clearly teaches**" God's exhaustive definite foreknowledge. Steven Roy claims that there are 4,017 texts that clearly and explicitly teach exhaustive foreknowledge.² For example, Psalm 139: 4, 16 where God is said to know what we will say before we utter it and that God knows all of our days before they existed. Isaiah chapters 41-8 are interpreted as Yahweh basing his claim to be a real god on his ability to declare beforehand what will happen. He takes this to mean that if Yahweh does not have foreknowledge, then he cannot be divine. In 1 Kings 13: 1-3 a prophet predicts long in advance that a king named Josiah will desecrate an idolatrous altar. Isaiah 44:28 says that Cyrus will allow the temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt. Proponents of exhaustive definite foreknowledge ask how such predictions could be made unless God knows the future as completely definite. Hence, it seems clear as day that the Bible teaches exhaustive foreknowledge.

In part, the disagreement concerning what the Bible teaches about divine foreknowledge arises out of a debate about which texts of scripture are literal and which are metaphorical. Open theists have sometimes claimed that they read the Bible literally or in a straightforward fashion.³ Calvinist

critics have claimed that open theists are inconsistent when they interpret the God changed his mind texts literally but do not take the texts about God's body parts literally.

Millard Erickson and Bruce Ware put forth the following criterion: we should take all the biblical texts literally unless there are compelling reasons that the biblical author did not intend the text to be taken literally.⁴ Ware concedes that the texts used by open theists “*when interpreted in a straightforward manner* yield the conclusion that God lacks exhaustive knowledge of the future.” But, he adds, “the issue is whether the authorially intended meaning is the straightforward meaning.”⁵ According to Ware's hermeneutical principle, if the individual biblical writer intended his remarks to be taken literally, then we should take them literally and if he intended them metaphorically, then we should read them metaphorically. Ware immediately proceeds to examine several texts used by open theists such as Genesis 22:12 where God is depicted as saying “now I know.” Ware concludes that such texts cannot be taken literally for two reasons. First, he says open theists are inconsistent for they maintain that God knows all the present. But if God says he now knows Abraham's heart then God would not even have exhaustive knowledge of what is going on at present. Ware's second reason is that if we took Genesis 22:12 literally then it would conflict with other biblical texts such as 1 Chronicles 28:9 which Ware takes to mean that God knows what is in human hearts before he tests people.

We should note here that the two reasons Ware gives for not taking Genesis 22:12 literally have nothing to do with what the author of the Genesis 22 intended. In other words, Ware is not following his stated hermeneutical criterion. Instead, his reasons are: (1) if open theists took this text literally then it would conflict with another belief of open theism and (2) if we took the text literally then it would contradict, in his opinion, other biblical texts.⁶ Ware has given us no reason to believe that the author of Genesis 22:12 did not intend us to take the “now I know” in a straightforward sense. His real reason for not taking the text literally is that he thinks that other biblical texts clearly teach that God knows the human heart. Hence, Genesis 22:12 cannot mean what it says despite the fact that everything *in the text itself* would lead one to conclude that the biblical writer meant that God did not know Abraham's heart until then.⁷

Other evangelical Calvinists make this same move. Paul Helm, for example, follows the lead of John Calvin when he asserts that we must take the texts

that say that “God does not change” (Num. 23:19, 1 Sam. 15:29) as the clear teaching of Scripture and read the “God changed his mind” texts as anthropomorphic.⁸ He reasons that we must allow the “stronger” (the literally true) passages of Scripture to control the reading of the “weaker” passages.⁹ Elsewhere Helm distinguishes between what he calls the “all things” texts where God is said to know all things and what he calls the “dialogue” texts in which God is portrayed as interacting with his people in very humanlike ways.¹⁰ Helm claims that we must take the all things texts as the literal truth about God and render the dialogue texts as anthropomorphic expressions lest we reduce God to human proportions and fail to exalt the divine glory. Thomas Weinandy, a Roman Catholic theologian, arrives at the same conclusion: “Undeniably the Old Testament speaks of God as though He did undergo. . . emotional changes of state. . . . However, I believe that such passages must be understood and interpreted within the deeper and broader revelation of who God is.”¹¹ Weinandy proceeds to cite what he takes to be “deeper” biblical texts which he believes teach that God is strongly immutable and impassible.

Historically, this has been a common maneuver put forth by notable figures such as Philo of Alexandria and Augustine who claim that the biblical texts that say God changed are for the “duller folk” and “babes” who cannot grasp what God is really like.¹²

However, I will argue that open theists are neither stupid nor infantile in their reading of the Bible. Though there are many reasons that account for the different approaches to the biblical texts by open theists and classical theists, I want to focus on two key ones.¹³

A. Different Understandings of the Nature of Language.

Evangelical Calvinists claim that the “didactic” (descriptive) texts are a better guide for discerning scriptural truth than the “narrative” or poetic texts. Erickson says we should stick with “the more traditional approach of giving primacy to the didactic statements of Scripture and interpreting the narratives in light of these.” “I would contend that the didactic portions, not the narrative passages, should be determinative of the meaning.”¹⁴ For Erickson and others, we should seek the universal timeless propositional truths taught in the didactic passages.¹⁵ Open theists, according to these critics, take the metaphorical texts literally because they rely heavily on the narrative texts instead of the didactic texts.

I have a number of responses to this charge. To begin, it seems to me that our critics want to “get past” or “behind” the metaphorical to see the literal truth. For them, truth is only propositional so the various forms of divine revelation such as narrative and poetry must be transposed into literal language in order to state the truth. Keven Vanhoozer, an evangelical theologian, criticizes this approach for relying solely on the informative function of language and the picture theory of meaning. He calls it the “heresy’ of propositional paraphrase.”¹⁶ In general, open theists have a different approach to language that acknowledges its many functions and they value the metaphorical nature of language. My proposal is that language is better understood as a vehicle for conceptual understanding rather than as a descriptive devise.

Several years ago when I was speaking on open theism at Brigham Young University I was asked why I took the God has emotions texts literally but not the God has a body texts literally. I replied that I did not take either of these texts literally. My approach is shaped by the theory of conceptual metaphor. A central claim of this theory is that the traditional way of understanding language involves a number of false assumptions: (1) That metaphors are figurative ways of stating what could otherwise better be said literally; (2) Definitions and conventional everyday language are literal; and (3) Only literal language can be true or false.¹⁷

That these longstanding assumptions are erroneous may be illustrated in the following way. We commonly speak of our relationships in the following ways: “Our relationship hit a dead end” and “Our love broke down.” The traditional view of language says these are literal statements when, in actuality, they are metaphorical ways of conceiving our experience. Such statements “map” our experience of love in terms of our experience of going on a journey and driving into a dead end street or having our car stop working. We are conceptualizing our love relationship in terms of a journey where the lovers are the travelers, the relationship is the vehicle and their common goals correspond to the destination on a journey. Hence, “our relationship hit a dead end” is a conceptual metaphor.

When the critics speak about the “strong and clear” texts of Scripture they fail to realize that they are using conceptual metaphors. In this case, “clear” utilizes the “knowing is seeing” metaphor. The source domain of seeing an object is mapped onto the target domain of knowing. Just as a clear window makes it easier to see an object on the other side, so we “see” certain texts as

easier to comprehend than others. “Strong” refers to the ability of one object to support another. Again, we see that we cannot “escape” using conceptual metaphors since it is through these that we understand abstractions. Also, though windows may be literally clear and steel beams strong, texts are not literally clear and strong. If the language about “clear and strong” texts is itself metaphorical rather than “literal” then the very dichotomy, figurative-literal, upon which the critics rely, is false.

Broadly speaking, conceptual metaphors have three characteristics. (1) They are vehicles for understanding our world—they structure the way we think about life experiences. (2) They only partially map reality for they do not say everything that can be said and consequently they constrain our understanding. For instance, the apostle Paul speaks about the Christian community as a body but since this conceptual metaphor does not communicate all aspects of the community he also speaks of believers as a building and as a farmer’s field. (3) They are culturally constrained since not all cultures use the same conceptual metaphors to give meaning to our experiences of love, anger, success, failure or truth.¹⁸

This means that the traditional way of understanding metaphors used by the critics of open theism is wrong headed. The assumptions made by the traditional theory are false because we erroneously think we are speaking literally when we are often using conceptual metaphors. Cognitive linguists have discovered a huge system of such metaphors by which we give meaning to our life experiences. In the words of George Lakoff, a preeminent proponent of conceptual metaphor theory: “It is a system of metaphor that structures our everyday conceptual system, including most abstract concepts, and that lies behind much of everyday language. The discovery of the enormous metaphor system has destroyed the traditional literal-figurative distinction, since the term ‘literal,’ as used in defining the traditional distinction, carries with it all those false assumptions.”¹⁹

B. Prototypes of Sovereignty.

The second main reason for the different approaches to the biblical texts by open theists and Calvinist evangelicals is that they have different “prototypes” of sovereignty. Why are certain texts strong and others weak? Why do some biblical texts tell us the literal truth about God while others are anthropomorphic? They do so because the person making this judgment has a particular understanding of the nature of God. Cognitive linguists

speak of “idealized cognitive models” or “prototypes.” We have ideal notions of events, emotions, relations and virtues. For example, we have ideal conceptions of what a wedding is like and if we attend one that fits our idealized cognitive model we say “Now that was a wedding!” We have idealized cognitive models of parenting, love, government, friendship, and care for the elderly. However, though every culture will have idealized cognitive models the content of the model might differ from one group of people to the next. For example, someone from another culture might claim that children in the United States do not love their elderly parents since the parents usually live in nursing homes instead of with the children. It does not fit their idealized cognitive model.

In terms of the debate over open theism, theologians have different ideal cognitive models of God’s relationship to the world.²⁰ Bruce Ware speaks of the “diminished God” of open theism and Paul Helm accuses open theists of “reducing God to human proportions.”²¹ Ware and Helm have very specific ideal prototypes of what they consider sovereignty to be. For them, an exalted conception of deity entails total control over human affairs and no risk taking. What is their source for this lofty understanding of God? Ware and Erickson say that it is what the Bible clearly teaches. Erickson claims there are 143 biblical texts which affirm God’s meticulous sovereignty.²² This claim is suspect, however, because freewill theists and theological determinists have been disputing the interpretation of those 143 biblical texts for nearly two millennia.²³

There are values that lie behind the different ideal models of sovereignty. Historically, natural theology has played a significant role in this debate. Philo of Alexandria, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin and many others argued that a perfect being could only change for the worse so God must be strongly immutable, impassible and atemporal. It was considered inappropriate for God to have changing emotions, switch to Plan B, or be influenced by human prayers. These theologians readily acknowledge that there are many biblical passages depicting God doing these very things but they claim that the Bible only “appears” to teach this. When the divine nature is properly understood, then we must interpret these in a way different from their plain sense. Consequently, natural theology determines what these biblical texts are allowed to mean.²⁴ Our prototype of divinity is one means by which we decide which texts teach the literal truth about God and which texts are figurative.

Yet, it may be asked why total control is a “better” and more exalted view of sovereignty than sovereignty understood as faithful, resourceful, wise and competent. The prototype of sovereignty affirmed by evangelical Calvinists does not allow them to consider any other view as genuine sovereignty. After delivering a paper at an Evangelical Philosophical meeting, a Calvinist challenged me: “You used the word sovereignty, but your God is not really sovereign.” For such folks God is a particular type of king: one who always gets his way even in the least details. After all God is the omnipotent potter shaping every human action as he wants it.

My response to this returns us again to the understanding of metaphor. First, God relates to us in ways that are conceptualized through multiple metaphors: father, mother, rock, vulture, shepherd, king, advocate, judge, husband and many more. No single metaphor is adequate to understand all aspects of God’s relations to us so we need multiple metaphors.²⁵

Another crucial point is the “blending” that takes place between source domains and target domains.²⁶ For example, take the statement: “George Bush and Dick Cheney are on the deck of the ship of state which is why it is listing to the right.” When we say this we are mapping from our experience of a ship veering to the right (source domain) to understand what is happening in our national government (target domain). However, not all aspects of the source domain actually apply since it simply is not possible for two people to stand on the right side of a ship and cause it to list to the right.²⁷ Yet, our minds have no difficulty understanding the point of the metaphor even though it is physically impossible because we selectively construct an image from the web of underlying connections. Within a single conceptual metaphor, such as “God is Israel’s husband,” not all aspects of the source domain (human husband) apply to the target domain (God). Though God can be a husband who loves Israel, God cannot be a sexual partner with Israel.

That all aspects of the source domain do not map onto the target domain is vital for understanding the conceptual metaphor of the potter and clay in Jeremiah 18. The potter image might lead us to conclude that everything turns out exactly as the divine potter fashions it. Jeremiah, however, rejects that conclusion. In this passage God is the potter and Israel is the clay. God has produced a piece of pottery but it has turned out to have flaws. Our experience with potters and clay would lead us to conclude that either the potter (God) is not very skilled or the pottery turned out flawed because the potter wanted it flawed. One would presume that a tremendously skilled potter would be able

to create exactly what the potter wanted. Yet, Jeremiah makes it clear that God wanted the pottery to be different from what it is so it seems that God is an incompetent potter. However, we need not draw this conclusion because there is another option.

In this instance we are mapping from a source domain (e. g. potters and clay) onto a target domain (e. g. God and Israel). In doing this we utilize some aspects, but not necessarily all aspects, of the source domain. Just as some, but not all, elements of a ship listing to the right apply to our national government, so God is like a potter in only some respects and Israel is like clay in only some respects. Hence, when Jeremiah says the flaws are due to Israel's unfaithfulness, not God's lack of skill, we have no difficulty grasping that God is not an incompetent potter even though the clay did not do what he wanted it to do because only some aspects of the potter-clay domain map onto the God-Israel domain. We selectively blend information from the two domains so that we construct a meaningful image even though it is technically inconsistent with the source domain.

In his detailed study of divine kingship in the Hebrew Bible, Marc Brettler applies this same approach to the metaphors regarding God as king. He concludes that the Israelites drew upon the source domain of human kingship in order to conceptualize (understand) the target domain of God's relationship to them.²⁸ However, they were highly selective and did not apply all aspects of the source domain to the target domain. Though some aspects are used in the same sense, most aspects are qualified such that God is king in a special way that either surpasses or is contrary to human kings. Furthermore, some aspects of earthly kingship are not applied to God. For example, human kings and God are both called shepherds but only God uses his staff beneficially rather than for punishment. Also, though both have "power," God can use his power for peace and justice. Finally, God uses his strength to forgive and his right hand for righteousness whereas human kings often use their right hand for bloodshed.

Hence, for open theists, God is indeed a king and potter but not so in all respects. God is not exercising meticulous control over human affairs. Instead, God initiates and then humans respond and this is followed by innumerable responses from both sides as God works in human history to produce a peculiar kind of people. It may be asked what sorts of values lie behind the open theist prototype of sovereignty. Open theists appropriate the Cappadocian teaching on divine relationality in the trinity. Moreover, they

also readily accept the modern emphasis on relationality in Western culture. Hence, their understandings of what ideal fathers, husbands, and kings are is shaped by the value of nurture rather than control.²⁹ It is not surprising then when Millard Erickson says that the open theist conception of God contains “feminine” elements.³⁰ I guess he believes a God full of testosterone is a better prototype. At any rate, open theists are shaped by tradition and cultural trends just as much as their Calvinist counterparts have been.

Conclusion

Is open theism biblical? If we mean by this whether or not a case can be made for it from the biblical texts, the answer is yes. If, however, we mean whether or not biblical passages demonstrably affirm it then we have those who say yes and those who say no. The reasons for this different assessment are, in part, due to divergent understandings of the nature of language and prototypes of sovereignty.³¹ This should not surprise us since it is the same situation we find ourselves in concerning numerous other doctrines. Take the atonement, for example. All can agree that the Bible teaches that Jesus atones for our sins but there will be disagreement about the nature of that atonement. In the same way, all can affirm that the Bible teaches that God is wise and omniscient, but they will disagree on the content of omniscience. Given that the different readings of the biblical texts results from alternative conceptions of language as well as sundry underlying values, I see no way to bring it about that everyone will read the Bible in a way that is clear as day.³²

¹ Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 60, 136-7.

² Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow? A Comprehensive Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 312. See also, Millard Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004), 39-57. Roy claims that a “straightforward reading of the omniscience texts” requires exhaustive definite foreknowledge whereas the openness type texts do not require a rejection of foreknowledge (220-1).

³ See, for example, Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000), pp. 14, 118.

⁴ Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2000), pp. 67, 85.

⁵ Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, p. 85. Emphasis is his. Steven Roy disagrees with Ware on this. He claims that open theists read their views into the Bible. Open theists do not have any “clear, explicit statements [read literal] of God's lack of certain and infallible foreknowledge. Rather this limitation on God's knowledge of the future is inferred from biblical statements about God's repentance, his surprise, his disappointment and so forth....But inferential evidence does differ from clear and explicit teaching.” Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow?* 220-1.

⁶ Ware uses the same reasons in the other “openness” passages he examines.

⁷ According to his criterion Ware is obligated to show reasons in each of the texts such as Genesis 22 that the authors did not intend the meaning open theists ascribe to them. Ware might respond by saying that God is the author of both Genesis 22:12 and 1 Chronicles 28:9. So the author's intended meaning in Genesis could not be literal. But this will not resolve the issue since we have to decide which texts God intended us to take literally and one could simply say that God intended us to take Genesis 22:12 literally and read 1 Chronicles 28:9 in light of it.

⁸ See his *The Providence of God, Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994) 51-4. See also Erickson, *What Does God Know?* pp. 79-81.

⁹ A significant problem with the claim that exhaustive definite foreknowledge is the "clear teaching" of the Bible is that in the past certain "clear" passages of scripture were used to justify a geocentric solar system, deny women any relief from the pain of childbirth, sanction persecution of the Jews, and legitimize slavery of blacks. In fact, until the 1800's the majority of Christians, including well-known conservative pastors and theologians, used the Bible to sanction slavery. In America, many southern clergy took up arms against the "infidel" northern clergy because they believed the Yankee Christians were rejecting the clear truth of the Bible. See Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 388-9 and Kevin Giles, "The Biblical Argument for Slavery: Can the Bible Mislead? A Case Study in Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (Jan. 1994): 3-17.

¹⁰ Paul Helm, "An Augustinian-Calvinist Response" in James Beilby and Paul Eddy, editors, *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), pp. 61-64.

¹¹ Weinandy, "Does God Suffer?" *First Things*, 117 (Nov. 2001): 37.

¹² *The Works of Philo*, edited C. D. Yonge (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993), p. 386. Augustine, *On the Trinity*. 1.1.2. Also, this distinction is found in several religious traditions such as Hinduism where some distinguish between saguna and nirguna Brahman and the Buddhist doctrine of the double truth. Al-Ghazali in Islam and Maimonides in Judaism both use the *via negativa* to arrive at the same conclusion as Philo and Augustine.

¹³ For a helpful discussion of the hermeneutical, theological and philosophical presuppositions underlying the debate see Amos Yong, "Divine Omniscience and Future Contingents: Weighing the Presuppositional Issues in the Contemporary Debate," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 26.3 (2002): 240-264.

¹⁴ Erickson, *What Does God Know?* pp. 73, 75.

¹⁵ Erickson, *What Does God Know?* p.76. See also Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow?* 173, 221.

¹⁶ Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms," in Donald A. Carson ed., *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), pp.67.

¹⁷ George Lakoff, "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor" in *Metaphor and Thought*, second edition, Andrew Ortony ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 204-5.

¹⁸ Ken McElhanon pointed out to me that this can lead to significant misunderstandings of Scripture. For instance, Westerners commonly conceptualize *truth as an object* so we speak of "discovering," "exposing," "covering up," "twisting," and "stretching" the truth. Though it is legitimate to understand truth in this way, if we ignore other ways of conceiving truth we may miss important insights. For instance, John and Paul often speak of *truth as a journey* on a path signifying a way of life. Jesus is the path we are to follow (Jn. 14:6). We are to walk in the truth (3 Jn. 1:4) and the Spirit will guide us in the truth (Jn. 16:13). Paul warns us not to wander away from the truth (2 Tim. 2:18). All of these conceptual metaphors conceive truth as a path on which we are to walk (just as the Rabbis spoke of the *halakah*). Hence, it makes sense for Paul to instruct us to "truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). Paul's point is that we are to live in loving ways, following the way of Jesus, so that we grow up to become like him. Unfortunately, in English we tend not to think of truth as a journey but as an object that we possess so it is not surprising that most English translations read "speaking the truth in love" even though there is no verb "to speak" in the Greek text. The focus then becomes propositional beliefs rather than a way of living which has led many Western Christians to over-emphasize correct doctrinal formulations rather than proper living. For a more extensive treatment, see Kenneth A. McElhanon "Mired in the Basic Level: the Quagmire of Cultural Relativism." Paper presented to a symposium on Christian Perspectives on Anthropological Theory, Biola University – School of Intercultural Studies, La Mirada, CA. 6-8 April, 2000. ms. and "From Word to Scenario: the influence of linguistic theories upon models of translation." Paper presented to *Bible Translation 2001 Conference: International Conference on Bible Translation and Practice*. 45 pp. Published electronically on a CDROM in Acrobat PDF format. Dallas, TX: SIL International.

¹⁹ Lakoff, "Contemporary Theory of Metaphor," 204.

²⁰ Yong, "Divine Omniscience," pp. 249-250, discusses this in different terms.

²¹ For discussion see my "On Reducing God to Human Proportions" in *Semper Reformandum: Studies in Honour of Clark Pinnock*, eds. Anthony Cross and Stanley Porter (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 111-125.

²² Erickson, *What Does God Know?* p.81.

²³ The same problem applies to Roy's claim that 4,017 biblical texts that teach God's exhaustive foreknowledge. Proponents of dynamic omniscience sincerely believe that these texts do not teach this

²⁴ This raises serious problems for those evangelicals who insist that we stick with what the Bible teaches. If, in fact, some texts teach that God has changing emotions then these evangelicals are rejecting the teaching of the Bible in favor of philosophical arguments. If there are texts that teach God is strongly immutable and other texts that teach God changes in some respects, then there are contradictions in the Bible and the doctrine of inerrancy is false. If it is claimed that these biblical texts only "seem" to teach divine passibility then why does the Bible contain so many misleading texts? Are they for the "duller folk" who cannot understand what God is really like? If so, then perspicuity of scripture has evaporated. It seems to me that these evangelicals are using sachkritik but this undermines their stated methodology. See the article by I. H. Marshall.

²⁵ See Vincent Brümmer, "Metaphorical Thinking and Systematic Theology," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 43 (July 1998): 222.

²⁶ Technically, this is called "conceptual blending" or "conceptual integration." On blending theory see Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). Fauconnier and Turner, "Metonymy and Conceptual Integration," 77-90 and Seana Coulson and Todd Oakley, "Blending Basics," *Cognitive Linguistics* 11-3/4 (2000), 175-196.

²⁷ Some evangelical Calvinists critics of open theism affirm something close to this when they argue from the doctrine of analogy that only some aspects of the analogy actually apply to God. However, they fail to acknowledge that they interpret the analogies in light of their prototypical understanding of the divine nature. They claim they are only reading the Bible. See Michael Horton, "Hellenistic or Hebrew? Open Theism and Reformed Theological Method," pp. 209ff. and Ardel Caneday, "Veiled Glory: God's Self-Revelation in Human Likeness—A Biblical Theology of God's Anthropomorphic Self-Discloure," pp. 172, 192 both in *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*, editors John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Helseth (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2003).

²⁸ Marc Zvi Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 76 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1989).

²⁹ George Lakoff distinguishes two main types of thinking about authority in our culture: the strict father and the nurturing parent. In many respects the characteristics he identifies that distinguish these types correspond to differences between evangelical Calvinists and open theists. The strict father prototype tends to emphasize firm boundaries, tight control, hierarchical structures, male over female, conceptual absolutism, and that the father initiates suffering in order to produce obedience. The nurturing parent prototype tends to emphasize learning as process, a centered set of values, guidance, reciprocal relations, equality of male and female, critical realism, and that the parent seeks to instill empathy as a key value. See Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

³⁰ Erickson, *God the Father Almighty*, p. 161.

³¹ There are other linguistic and hermeneutical issues that need to be addressed such as, the distinction between universal and historical truths and whether or not the biblical language portrays God as he actually is, but I cannot do so here. Ardel Caneday and Michael Horton, for example, claim that the Bible does not disclose God "as he truly is in himself." See Caneday, "Veiled Glory," 168, 198 and Horton, "Hellenistic or Hebrew? 208-211.

³² For elaboration see my "How Do We Decide What God is Like?" in *And God saw that it was good: Essays on Creation and God in Honor of Terence E. Fretheim*, ed. Fred Gaiser, (Word & World supplement series 5, April, 2006), 154-162.