

Dr. James S. Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 15, Divine Providence Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 15, Divine Providence, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Jim Spiegel's Philosophy of Religion lecture, Session 15, focuses on divine providence, which concerns God's care or control of the world and raises questions about human freedom and evil. The lecture outlines four major views of providence: **Augustinian Calvinism (God ordains all)**, **simple divine foreknowledge (God knows all but doesn't predetermine)**, **divine middle knowledge (God knows what free creatures would do)**, and **open theism (God doesn't fully know the future)**. Spiegel then clarifies three main perspectives on human freedom: **hard determinism (no freedom)**, **libertarianism (freedom exists, denying universal causation)**, and **compatibilism (freedom and causation are compatible)**. Finally, he discusses each view of providence in more detail, highlighting their implications for human freedom, the problem of evil, and scriptural interpretation, while also noting potential criticisms and Spiegel's own defense of the Augustinian Calvinist perspective in his book.

**2. 25 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 15 – Double click
icon to play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (Theology → Apologetics → Philosophy of Religion).**



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3. Briefing Document: Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 15, Divine Providence

Briefing Document: Divine Providence

Overview: This briefing document summarizes the main themes and arguments presented by Dr. Jim Spiegel in his Philosophy of Religion session on Divine Providence. The session explores different theological perspectives on how God cares for or controls the world, focusing on the implications for human freedom and the problem of evil. Dr. Spiegel outlines four major views of divine providence and three key perspectives on human freedom, analyzing their strengths, weaknesses, and interrelationships.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Defining Divine Providence:

- The doctrine of providence concerns the idea that "God cares for or controls the world."
- This concept raises fundamental philosophical questions regarding the extent of God's control, the predetermination of human events, and the compatibility of divine providence with human freedom and the existence of evil.

2. Major Views of Divine Providence:

- **Augustinian Calvinist View:** God "ordains all things that come to pass," implying absolutely complete control over the world, including human lives.
- Providence is "meticulous," controlling all details of the cosmos.
- This view aligns with a **Compatibilist** understanding of human freedom.
- **Simple Divine Foreknowledge:** God "only foreknows all of the things that will occur" without predetermining them.
- This view is often defended to "protect a certain conception of human freedom," typically **Libertarianism**.
- **Divine Middle Knowledge (Molinism):** God "knows all things that free creatures would do, and he decrees accordingly."
- This involves God's knowledge of "counterfactual conditionals" - what would happen under various circumstances.

- **Open Theism (Free Will Theism):**A "less orthodox view" suggesting that "God does not know the future in its entirety, and he might even be surprised that certain things have happened."
- God "takes risks in making humanity, not knowing what the outcome of many events and human choices will be."
- This view is strongly motivated by a commitment to **Libertarian** human freedom and addressing the problem of evil.

3. Major Views of Human Freedom:

- **Hard Determinism:**Affirms "universal causation and denies human freedom."
- Claims that "every effect and every event in the world has a sufficient cause," including human choices.
- Consequently, "human beings must not be free" and lack moral responsibility.
- **Libertarianism:**Affirms "human freedom" by denying "universal causation," asserting that "the human will is an exception to this law of causal determination."
- Emphasizes the "power of contrary choice" - the ability to have chosen differently in the exact same circumstances.
- **Compatibilism (Soft Determinism):**Maintains that "human freedom and universal causation are logically compatible."
- Argues that freedom exists when the causes of our choices are "within us" (our psychological state, desires, motives) and we are not externally compelled.
- "So long as I'm not being compelled from without... I am able to act according to my choice, and that secures my freedom..."

4. Critique of Open Theism:

- Open Theists argue that exhaustive divine foreknowledge is incompatible with libertarian freedom, as "if God knows that I'm going to choose the chocolate cake, then when the moment of choice comes, I really can't choose the bread pudding, can I? Because I can't make God's apparent knowledge mistaken."
- They also suggest that exhaustive foreknowledge would eliminate God's freedom and genuine divine emotion.

- William Hasker's parallel between divine omnipotence and omniscience is discussed, suggesting God knows everything that *can* be known, but foreknowledge of truly free creaturely actions is logically impossible.
- Dr. Spiegel critiques Hasker's three-fold approach to predictive prophecy (conditional prophecies, predictions based on trends, and announcements of God's intentions), finding the second category problematic for reliably predicting the future given libertarian freedom.
- The most significant problem identified is the suggestion that "God is sometimes mistaken in his views," which seems "foreign to a biblical portrait of God."

5. Analysis of Simple Divine Foreknowledge:

- David Hunt is presented as a major proponent. He argues that a God with exhaustive foreknowledge *is* greater and that this knowledge is useful for providential action, illustrated by the rock-paper-scissors analogy with Satan.
- Hunt's view of "complete, simple foreknowledge" suggests God knows the entire future at once, with God's knowledge of an event being "explanatorily dependent on E."
- John Sanders' criticism highlights that this view seems to imply God cannot prevent events he foreknows, and that God would know his own future actions before deciding, undermining divine deliberation.
- Dr. Spiegel notes that while protecting human libertarian freedom, this view "seems to handcuff God."

6. Examination of Divine Middle Knowledge (Molinism):

- This view focuses on God's knowledge of "what would be" (counterfactual conditionals) given various circumstances.
- Molina posits three types of divine knowledge: natural knowledge (necessary truths/possible worlds), free knowledge (contingent truths of the actual world), and middle knowledge (what free creatures *would* do in different situations).
- The example of Peter's denial of Christ is used to illustrate how God could know Peter's action via middle knowledge without decreeing the act itself.
- Criticisms include the "grounding objection": "given a libertarian view of freedom, God cannot know what free creatures will choose or what they would choose in

various situations because there's nothing that exists to make them true or to ground their truth."

- Dr. Spiegel finds Craig's response to the grounding objection (rejecting the truth-maker theory) unconvincing and argues that Molinism subtly assumes a kind of determinism ("if plus must").

7. Consideration of the Augustinian Calvinist View:

- This view asserts that "God foreordained all of the events of nature in human history."
- It is consistent with **Compatibilist** freedom, defined as "the freedom to act or not according to one's choices," even if those choices are determined by internal factors.
- Strengths of compatibilism include avoiding the inconsistency between exhaustive foreknowledge and libertarianism, aligning with ordinary language about choices, and providing a framework for understanding freedom and obedience in heaven.
- A major problem is the "more serious problem of evil," as it "appears to make God the author of sin."
- The typical Augustinian Calvinist response involves the "greater good" theodicy, arguing that God permits or ordains evil for ultimate positive purposes, exemplified by the crucifixion.
- Dr. Spiegel's book, *The Benefits of Providence*, is mentioned as a further exploration of this viewpoint.

Quotes:

- "The doctrine of providence pertains to the notion that God cares for or controls the world."
- "God ordains all things that come to pass." (Augustinian Calvinist view)
- "God only foreknows all of the things that will occur. He does not predetermine them." (Simple Divine Foreknowledge)
- "God knows all things that free creatures would do, and he decrees accordingly." (Divine Middle Knowledge/Molinism)

- "God does not know the future in its entirety, and he might even be surprised that certain things have happened." (Open Theism)
- "Every effect and every event in the world has a sufficient cause, and that includes the human being who makes choices..." (Hard Determinism)
- "...the human will is an exception to this law of causal determination." (Libertarianism)
- "...human freedom and universal causation are logically compatible... So long as I'm not being compelled from without... I am able to act according to my choice, and that secures my freedom..." (Compatibilism)
- "If God knows that I'm going to choose the chocolate cake, then when the moment of choice comes, I really can't choose the bread pudding, can I? Because I can't make God's apparent knowledge mistaken." (Open Theist argument against exhaustive foreknowledge)
- "...given a libertarian view of freedom, God cannot know what free creatures will choose or what they would choose in various situations because there's nothing that exists to make them true or to ground their truth." (Grounding Objection against Molinism)

Conclusion:

Dr. Spiegel's session provides a comprehensive overview of the major philosophical and theological perspectives on divine providence and their intricate relationship with different understandings of human freedom. The session highlights the challenges and complexities inherent in reconciling God's sovereignty with human agency and the problem of evil. While each view attempts to offer a coherent framework, they also face significant criticisms and raise further questions for theological and philosophical inquiry.

4. Study Guide: Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 15, Divine Providence

Study Guide: Divine Providence

Key Concepts:

- **Divine Providence:** The doctrine that God cares for and/or controls the world.
- **Augustinian Calvinist View:** The belief that God meticulously ordains all things that come to pass, including human lives. This view typically aligns with compatibilism regarding human freedom.
- **Simple Divine Foreknowledge:** The view that God foreknows all future events but does not predetermine them. This view is often held to protect libertarian human freedom.
- **Divine Middle Knowledge (Molinism):** The view that God knows all things that free creatures *would* do in any given circumstance and decrees accordingly. This knowledge is considered "middle" because it falls between God's knowledge of necessary truths and his knowledge of contingent truths.
- **Open Theism (Free Will Theism):** The view that God does not have exhaustive foreknowledge of the future, particularly regarding free human choices. God is seen as taking risks in creation and can be surprised or even mistaken. This view strongly affirms libertarian human freedom.
- **Hard Determinism:** The philosophical view that universal causation is true and therefore human freedom is an illusion. All events, including choices, are determined by prior causes.
- **Libertarianism (regarding free will):** The view that human beings possess genuine freedom of choice, which requires the power of contrary choice and denies universal causal determinism over the will.
- **Compatibilism (Soft Determinism):** The view that human freedom and universal causation are logically compatible. Freedom is understood as the ability to act according to one's desires and choices, even if those desires and choices are causally determined.
- **Exhaustive Foreknowledge:** The belief that God knows everything that will happen in the future with complete accuracy and detail.

- **Power of Contrary Choice:** The ability to have chosen differently in the exact same circumstances. This is a central tenet of libertarian free will.
- **Grounding Objection:** A criticism of Molinism arguing that there is no basis or "ground" in reality for God to know what free creatures *would* do in counterfactual situations, especially given libertarian freedom.
- **Truth Maker Theory:** The philosophical idea that for every true proposition, there must be something in reality that "makes" it true.
- **Correspondence Theory of Truth:** The view that a proposition is true if it corresponds to a fact in the world.
- **Greater Good Theodicy:** An argument used to address the problem of evil, suggesting that God permits evil in order to bring about a greater good that would not be possible otherwise.

Quiz:

1. Briefly explain the core idea behind the doctrine of divine providence and why it is considered philosophically interesting.
2. What is the key distinction between the Augustinian Calvinist view of providence and the simple divine foreknowledge view regarding God's control and human freedom?
3. How does divine middle knowledge (Molinism) attempt to reconcile divine foreknowledge and human freedom, and what is a key characteristic of this type of knowledge?
4. Describe the central tenet of open theism concerning God's knowledge of the future and explain the primary motivation behind this view.
5. According to Hard Determinism, what is the status of human freedom and moral responsibility, and what is the basis for this view?
6. Contrast the Libertarian and Compatibilist perspectives on human freedom, highlighting their differing views on causation and the nature of free choice.
7. Explain the open theist argument that exhaustive divine foreknowledge is incompatible with libertarian human freedom, focusing on the concept of the power of contrary choice.

8. What is the grounding objection to Molinism, and why is it considered a significant challenge to this view of divine providence?
9. How does the Augustinian Calvinist view address the apparent tension between divine foreordination and human responsibility, particularly through the lens of compatibilism?
10. Briefly outline the greater good theodicy as a potential response by an Augustinian Calvinist to the problem of evil.

Quiz Answer Key:

1. Divine providence is the doctrine that God cares for or controls the world. It is philosophically interesting because it raises questions about the extent of God's control, the nature of human freedom, and the problem of evil in light of a providential God.
2. The Augustinian Calvinist view holds that God completely controls and ordains all events, including human choices, while the simple divine foreknowledge view asserts that God knows the future but does not predetermine it, primarily to safeguard a certain understanding of human freedom.
3. Divine middle knowledge posits that God knows what every free creature *would* choose in any possible situation (counterfactuals) and then decrees the world accordingly, thus attempting to harmonize divine foreknowledge with genuine human freedom.
4. Open theism argues that God does not possess exhaustive foreknowledge of the future, particularly regarding free human actions. This view is primarily motivated by a desire to uphold libertarian human freedom and provide an explanation for evil that does not directly implicate God.
5. Hard Determinism asserts that human freedom is an illusion and that all human choices are determined by prior causes, whether we are aware of these causes or not. Consequently, they argue that humans lack genuine moral responsibility.
6. Libertarianism affirms that humans have genuine freedom, including the power to choose otherwise in the same situation, and denies that the will is causally determined. Compatibilism, on the other hand, argues that freedom and causation are compatible, defining freedom as the ability to act according to one's internal desires and choices, even if those are caused.

7. Open theists argue that if God exhaustively foreknows a future action, then that action cannot be otherwise, thus eliminating the power of contrary choice, which they believe is essential for libertarian freedom. If God knows you will choose chocolate cake, you cannot truly choose bread pudding.
8. The grounding objection questions how God can know counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (what free agents *would* do) if there is nothing in reality prior to their free choice to make these counterfactuals true or to ground God's knowledge of them.
9. The Augustinian Calvinist view embraces compatibilism, arguing that humans are free in the sense that they can act according to their choices and desires, even if those choices and desires are ultimately determined by God. This preserves a form of responsibility within a framework of divine sovereignty.
10. The greater good theodicy suggests that God permits evil, even ordains some terrible events like the crucifixion, because these evils ultimately serve a greater good, such as the salvation of humanity, that would not be achievable otherwise.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Critically compare and contrast two of the four major views of divine providence (Augustinian Calvinism, simple divine foreknowledge, divine middle knowledge, and open theism) regarding their implications for human freedom and divine sovereignty.
2. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of libertarianism and compatibilism as they relate to the problem of divine providence and human moral responsibility.
3. Analyze the open theist critique of exhaustive divine foreknowledge, considering the philosophical arguments presented and potential counter-arguments from proponents of other views.
4. Discuss the grounding objection to Molinism and assess the effectiveness of possible Molinist responses to this challenge.
5. Explore the problem of evil from the perspective of either Augustinian Calvinism or open theism, considering the theological and philosophical implications of each view's approach to suffering and divine agency.

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Divine Providence:** The theological doctrine concerning God's active involvement and governance of the world and its creatures.
- **Ordain:** In theological terms, to decree or establish something by divine authority and power.
- **Foreknow:** To know something before it happens.
- **Predetermine:** To decide or fix the outcome of something in advance.
- **Libertarian Free Will:** The belief that humans have the genuine ability to make choices freely, unconstrained by prior causes, and possess the power of contrary choice.
- **Universal Causation:** The principle that every event has a cause or causes.
- **Moral Responsibility:** The state of being answerable or accountable for one's actions and choices, typically implying a degree of freedom and understanding.
- **Counterfactual Conditional:** A statement that expresses what would have been the case if a certain condition had been different (e.g., "If I had studied harder, I would have passed the test").
- **Necessary Truth:** A proposition that is true in all possible worlds (e.g., mathematical truths, logical principles).
- **Contingent Truth:** A proposition that is true in the actual world but could have been false in another possible world (e.g., "The sky is blue").
- **Theodicy:** An attempt to explain the justice and goodness of God in the face of the existence of evil.
- **Divine Sovereignty:** The theological concept that God is the ultimate authority and has supreme power and control over all things.

5. FAQs on Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 15, Divine Providence, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Divine Providence

1. What is divine providence, and why is it a philosophically interesting topic? Divine providence refers to the theological doctrine concerning God's care for and control over the world. It is philosophically interesting because it raises complex questions about the extent of God's control in relation to human freedom and the existence of evil. Different perspectives on providence attempt to explain how God's sovereignty interacts with human agency and the reality of suffering in the world.

2. What are the four major views on divine providence discussed in the source, and how do they differ regarding God's control and knowledge? The four major views are:

- **Augustinian Calvinism:** This view posits that God meticulously ordains all things that come to pass, including every detail of the cosmos and human lives. It asserts God's absolutely complete control.
- **Simple Divine Foreknowledge:** This view holds that God knows everything that will occur in the future but does not predetermine these events. God simply has complete knowledge of what free creatures will do.
- **Divine Middle Knowledge (Molinism):** This perspective suggests that God knows not only what will happen (free knowledge) and what could happen (natural knowledge), but also what free creatures *would* do in any given circumstance (middle knowledge). God then decrees the world based on this middle knowledge.
- **Open Theism:** This view proposes that God does not know the future exhaustively and may even be surprised by certain events. Open theists believe God takes genuine risks in creation, as the future is not entirely knowable, even to God, due to libertarian human freedom.

3. What are the three major views on human freedom, and which one is generally considered incompatible with Christian theology? The three major views on human freedom are:

- **Hard Determinism:** This view affirms universal causation and denies human freedom, asserting that every choice is determined by prior causes.
- **Libertarianism:** This view affirms human freedom by denying universal causation, claiming the human will is an exception to causal determinism and that individuals have the power of contrary choice.
- **Compatibilism (Soft Determinism):** This view maintains that human freedom and universal causation are logically compatible. It argues that as long as the causes of our choices are internal (our desires, motives, psychological state) and we can act according to our choices without external compulsion, we are free, even if those internal causes are themselves determined. Hard Determinism is generally considered incompatible with Christian theology because it seems to undermine the biblical concept of human moral responsibility.

4. How does Open Theism attempt to reconcile divine providence with human freedom and the problem of evil? Open Theism prioritizes libertarian human freedom. Proponents argue that if humans have genuine libertarian free will (the power of contrary choice), then even an omniscient God cannot know with certainty what they will choose in the future. Consequently, they assert that God does not possess exhaustive foreknowledge. They explain evil as a result of humans' free choices and the abuse of their libertarian freedom, thus absolving God of direct responsibility for sinful actions.

5. What is the grounding objection to Divine Middle Knowledge (Molinism), and how do Molinists attempt to respond? The grounding objection questions the basis of God's middle knowledge, specifically His knowledge of what libertarian free creatures *would* do in various circumstances. Critics argue that if human choices are truly free in a libertarian sense, there is nothing that exists to make these counterfactuals true or to "ground" their truth. On what basis can God know Peter will deny Christ if Peter's choice is ultimately uncaused? Molinists like William Lane Craig respond by questioning the "truth maker theory," suggesting that the relationship between a proposition and its truth is not necessarily causal. They argue that God's middle knowledge is a primitive, ungrounded truth.

6. What is the main challenge that the Augustinian Calvinist view faces regarding human freedom and moral responsibility, and how do its proponents address this challenge?

The main challenge for Augustinian Calvinism is that its assertion of God's meticulous foreordination of all events seems to undermine libertarian human freedom, potentially leading to the conclusion that humans are not genuinely morally responsible for their actions. Proponents of this view address this by adopting a compatibilist understanding of freedom. They argue that freedom is the ability to act according to one's choices, even if those choices are themselves causally determined by one's internal states (desires, motives). As long as individuals are not externally compelled and can act on their will, they are considered free and morally responsible within a compatibilist framework.

7. What are some of the criticisms leveled against Simple Divine Foreknowledge? One key criticism is that if God has exhaustive simple foreknowledge (knowing everything that will happen), it seems to render God's own future actions predetermined, thus potentially limiting divine freedom and the purpose of divine planning or deliberation. If God knows He will do something, He must do it, seemingly removing the possibility of alternative actions. Additionally, critics like John Sanders argue that simple foreknowledge implies God cannot prevent events He knows will occur, potentially making prayer for prevention futile in such cases.

8. How does the Augustinian Calvinist view address the problem of evil? Augustinian Calvinists typically address the problem of evil by appealing to the concept of God's greater good. They argue that God permits evil, and even ordains seemingly horrific events, to ultimately bring about a greater good that would not be possible otherwise. The crucifixion of Jesus, the most significant evil in history, is often cited as the prime example, as God used this event to achieve the salvation of humanity. They contend that if God can redeem such profound evil for an ultimate good, then He can similarly redeem all lesser evils within His providential plan.