

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Reformation & Revival* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ref-rev-01.php



Reformation
& **REVIVAL**
JOURNAL

PREDESTINATION

A Quarterly for Church Leadership

VOLUME 12 · NUMBER 2 · SPRING 2003

*An Early Response to Open Theism:
Edward Taylor's Gods Determinations,
and the Puritan View of History*



Stephen J. Nichols

Calvin at first discussed predestination and providence together, but in the final edition of the Institutes, he discussed predestination at the conclusion of the Christian life. This location seems to suggest his conviction that predestination is best understood as one looks back over one's experience and reflects that God's grace preceded every human action.

JOHN H. LEITH

And although God knows who are his, and here and there mention is made of a small number of elect, yet we must hope well of all, and not rashly judge any man to be reprobate.

CHAPTER TEN, SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION

Much of the appeal of openness theology as perceived by its proponents concerns the comfort and encouragement that it brings by recasting God's work in the world as responsive relationship. Critics demonstrate, however, the despair and eschatological uncertainty that openness theology actually engenders, which very well mitigate that comfort and encouragement. Various critics have challenged openness concerning its misreading of texts, most especially the Old Testament "repentance" passages, or its affinities with process theology, or its assault on the attributes of God, or its overzealousness in promoting human freedom, or its inconsistent or perhaps simply untenable eschatology. This study explores a further weakness of openness by contrasting its philosophy of history with the epic poem of colonial Puritan minister Edward Taylor, *Gods Determinations* (1680s). Taylor's poem, guided by the dominance of God's absolute sovereignty, vividly portrays the comfort and hope that derives from God's sovereign direction of history, while at the same time it highlights the meaningful interaction between God and his people.

We begin with constructing an openness philosophy of history. By drawing on openness literature, a picture of the how and why of events in history, both on a macro and micro scale, will be clear, as well as that of the aim or goal of history.

An adequate philosophy of history must give an account of these issues. It should further help one on an existential level make sense of what's happening in his or her life and also offer direction for life in relation to the grand scheme. We will examine openness through this grid.

This grid will also help us analyze Taylor's poem. Taylor may not be a household name among contemporary evangelicals—he may not even be known at all. Nevertheless, this often overlooked colonial poet and minister has a probing mind and an accompanying adept literary expression unlike nearly all of his peers. Theological dexterity and pastoral sympathies, coupled with a profound sense of God's all-permeating presence in this world, fill the lines of Taylor's poem with meaning and relevance. His poem is not, however, an isolated piece of literature, but represents many Puritan attempts at communicating a comprehensive vision of God's grand scheme of redemption and recreation, a "closed" story from creation to consummation. *Gods Determinations*, as well as these other Puritan works, challenges the openness view on the very existential level that its adherents propose to be its strength. To state the connection between Taylor and openness in a rather direct manner, Taylor presents a meaningful and cohesive philosophy of history, whereas openness struggles to account adequately for the past and present and it fails to provide certainty for the future.

AN OPENNESS PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Richard Rice, writing from an openness perspective, defines history as "the combined result of what God and his creatures decide to do."¹ "The course of history," he contends, "is not the product of divine action alone. God's will is not the ultimate explanation for everything that happens; human decisions and actions make an important contribution too."² Clark Pinnock echoes Rice's understanding as he emphasizes "mutuality and relationality in both the triune God and the God-human covenant."³ Pinnock proceeds to contrast two models of God that "people commonly carry around in their minds": the traditional view, which he, drawing upon the

work of John Sanders, refers to as the God of Greek philosophy; and the "God of the Bible," also known as the openness view.⁴ Consequently in the open view, the future is open and the world is dynamic as opposed to static.⁵

Bruce Ware, John Frame, and others regard Pinnock's view as a caricature of the traditional view and criticize his understanding of Scripture, as well as overall criticism of openness thought.⁶ My intention here is to explore the implications of this understanding of the openness view for a philosophy of history. To do so, I turn to Gregory Boyd's *God of the Possible*, extrapolating a philosophy of history from this work. This includes Boyd's understanding of the future, of God's decrees, which is to say God's action within history, and of the book of Revelation, which come from his discussion of divine foreknowledge. Additionally, Boyd applies his philosophy of history in a case study that he presents and in a brief discussion of quantum theory. In other words, Boyd offers us quite an amount of material to work with and he also engages the issue on various levels.

First, in Boyd's discussion of divine foreknowledge he offers some insight into the contours and shape of an openness philosophy of history. To begin with, Boyd understands the future in a manner consistent with his openness colleagues. Actually, the future is only partly open and, consequently, partly settled. He acknowledges that this apparent contradiction will likely confound some people. He counters by observing: "This all-or-nothing way of thinking about the future is misguided. Far from being contradictory, or even just unusual, the view that the future is partly open and partly settled is the view we all assume unconsciously every time we make a decision."⁷ Boyd's presumption to speak for all of us aside, his understanding of the future here also applies to his understanding of history. Some things happened because they were settled and predetermined, while others were the result of free creatures.

What helps Boyd here is the distinction that he makes between God's intentions and God's decrees. In his discussion of Psalm 139:16—"All the days ordained for me were written

in your book before one of them came to be (NIV)—and the use of *yatsar*, NIV “ordained” NRSV “formed,” Boyd notes that this word “can be interpreted in a strong sense of ‘determined’ or in a weak sense as ‘planned.’”⁸ He concludes that “it seems best to understand the term *yatsar* as well as the writing in God’s ‘book’ as referring to God’s *intentions* at the time of the psalmist’s fetal development, not an unalterable decree of God.”⁹ By recasting the traditional theist’s understanding of God’s decrees as intentions, openness, consequently, puts forth a radically different understanding of history, as well.

If events that have not taken place yet are more a matter of the intentions of God than his decrees, then it necessarily follows that once those events occur, they may not be entirely what God had in mind. In other words, consistency demands that as God analyzes history, he sees things that he regrets, that he wishes had not happened. This is precisely how open theism interprets the divine “repentance” passages. Again, I will leave the criticism of open theism’s hermeneutics to others. What I am after here is the application of this to history. Openness proponents are further compelled to interpret extra-biblical historical events as they interpret biblical historical events. Consequently, what happens in extra-biblical history may very well not be what God had in mind. We will return to this point shortly. For now we need one more piece of the puzzle from Boyd; we find it in his understanding of the book of Revelation.

Boyd does not want to interpret the book of Revelation in a way that requires “that we believe that the future is exhaustively settled.”¹⁰ He proceeds to offer a rather preterist interpretation of the book. He concludes that the book has a “basic message” that “applies to all times and all places. God is in the process of defeating his foe and judging the world. Hence, believers should take courage and persevere in the face of persecution.”¹¹ This broad interpretation of Revelation allows Boyd to reiterate his main emphasis: the future is partly settled, partly open.

Beyond these principles that derive from his understanding of divine foreknowledge, Boyd also reveals the openness

philosophy of history in his presentation of a case study involving a young woman he names “Suzanne.” Suzanne, coming from a Christian home, aspired to be a missionary to Taiwan. She met a fellow Christian at a Christian college who shared her vision. After some misgivings on her part as to whether or not the marriage was God’s will or not, they married. Two years into the marriage her husband had an affair with a fellow student at missionary school. Three years later the relationship deteriorated, the “husband’s spiritual convictions disappeared,” and the husband became abusive.¹² Boyd then concludes that “the whole sad ordeal left Suzanne emotionally destroyed and spiritually bankrupt.”¹³ And the ordeal fractured her relationship with God. Various attempts to counsel Suzanne by Christians had failed to answer her questions, leaving Suzanne disillusioned and angry at God. Boyd then offered his counsel from an openness perspective. His counsel is given in his own words:

I suggested to her that God felt as much regret over the confirmation as he had given Suzanne as he did about his decision to make Saul king of Israel (1 Samuel 15:11, 35; see also Genesis 6:5-6). Not that it was a bad decision—at the time, her ex-husband was a good man with a godly character. . . . Because her ex-husband was a free agent, however, even the best decisions can have sad results. Over time, and through a series of choices, Suzanne’s ex-husband had opened himself up to the enemy’s influence and became involved in an immoral relationship. Initially, all was not lost, and God and others tried to restore him, but he chose to resist the prompting of the Spirit, and consequently his heart grew darker. Suzanne’s ex-husband had become a very different person from the man God had confirmed to Suzanne to be a good candidate for marriage. This, I assured Suzanne, grieved God’s heart as least as deeply as it grieved hers.¹⁴

Boyd then concludes that “by framing the ordeal within the context of an open future, Suzanne was able to understand the tragedy of her life in a new way,” adding, “[W]ithout having the open view to offer, I don’t know how one could

effectively minister to a person in Suzanne's dilemma."¹⁵ Again, Boyd understands events as surprising to God. Thus, the why and how of events has much to do with free agency, and, as Boyd only hints at here, Satan and the powers of evil.¹⁶ Actually, in this isolated scenario God seemed to have the least input into the outcome; the only role that God played was to miscalculate and consequently to misinform.

Boyd presents this scenario in such a way as to favor the openness view. One wonders if Suzanne might just as well have been equally disillusioned by the God of the openness perspective, a God who, as Boyd presents him, is not unlike herself, an equal victim of the whole sad ordeal. Also, one can easily see the implication of the openness view as a lack of trust in God for future events and at the very least as providing grounds for suspicion of his promises. Boyd might very well counter by drawing attention to his view as partly open, partly closed. But, just by way of a quick response, it is not too much to assume that if God missed it when it came to Suzanne and her husband, a relatively small piece of the grand, cosmic puzzle, then perhaps he will miscalculate events related to the consummation of redemption.¹⁷ You might say that at the least a great deal of trust is needed to hope that his will shall prevail.

One final piece to the puzzle of Boyd's philosophy of history concerns, from his perspective, the affinity of openness with the contemporary paradigm shift in physics which understands reality in a much more dynamic fashion than did older models. The main problem that this paradigm shift presents for the traditional view of God concerns his immutability, the classical view which holds that God is "eternally unchanging in every aspect (and thus as possessing an eternal unchanging knowledge of all of world history)," and that the future is "eternally settled in God's mind."¹⁸ Quantum mechanics demonstrates that uncertainty "is actually rooted in the nature of things."¹⁹ He goes on, however, to illustrate this in the predictability of large groups of ants, versus the particular actions of individual ants, large herds of mammals, versus any individual within this group, the general form of a tornado, versus its specific activity.

Boyd then applies this to God's character, noting that in some respects God's being is "determinate" and even "necessary." Yet, "he is free in many other respects."²⁰ Further, "his providential involvement in the world exemplifies the same balance. Whatever is necessary to preserve God's plan for creation is predestined, but within this predestined structure there is room for significant freedom."²¹ This might strike us as paradoxical, yet it is "no more paradoxical than our ability to predict."²²

Two responses are in order. First, Boyd's analogy could not be more false. Simply because we can only predict what groups of ants will do while being unable to predict the actions of an individual ant is only illustrative of our limitations and not of how God rules his world. To connect the paradox of his view of God and his abilities to the paradox of our abilities is the most striking evidence of the smallness of the God of openness. Ware's title, *God's Lesser Glory*, could not be any more accurate in depicting the view of God in openness.

Second, Boyd's understanding of events and history is rather naïve. His understanding requires that we isolate events from one another, those which are certain and closed, and those which are uncertain and open. For instance, Suzanne's plans and marriage evidently have nothing to do with God's grand scheme or his "plan for creation." The irony here is the way that Boyd minimizes humans and human events in a scheme which otherwise thinks quite highly of humanity. The point stands, however, that events are not isolated things, unconnected to one another. Think of all the events that had to take place for the singular event of the incarnation. How many free choices had to be overridden to bring about that event? How many free choices will have to be overridden for God to bring about the consummation of his plan of redemption? What are the repercussions of Suzanne and her husband's failed marriage for their children, grandchildren, friends, and those in Taiwan? Boyd's view of a partly open, partly closed future and history may sound good in theory, but practically it breaks down.

Other perspectives of the implications of quantum and chaos theories would hold that there is order amidst the chaos. In fact, it may be better stated to see order as overriding the chaos or as prevailing over the chaos. Further, one could dispute Boyd's hinting that reality is best understood as pure energy to the exclusion of particles. At any rate, he seems to commit the either/or fallacy that his partly open, partly closed model claims to escape. His interpretation of the implications of quantum and chaos theories favor a mostly, if not completely, open view. Further, one may conclude that God is not only at the mercy of free agents and Satan, but also now he has the very universe itself to contend with. Once Taylor is in place we'll have more to say by way of criticism of Boyd's philosophy of history. So now we turn to the colonial minister.

EDWARD TAYLOR'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

As mentioned, few contemporary evangelicals know much, if anything, about Edward Taylor (1642-1729).²³ On July 5, 1668, after a long and eventful voyage from old England that he spent reading his Greek New Testament and leading fellow passengers in worship, Edward Taylor reached the shores of New England and the house of Boston's eminent clergyman, Increase Mather. Within three weeks he was a student at Harvard. He completed his studies of both medicine and divinity and then started on a long and treacherous journey to the recently established frontier town of Westfield, Massachusetts, in November of 1671. As he records in his diary, he

set forward, not without much apprehension of a tedious and hazardous journey, the snow being about mid-leg deepe, the way unbeaten, or the track filled up againe, and over rocks and mountains, and the journey being about 100 miles; and Mr. Cooke of Cambridge told us that it was the desperatest journey that ever Connecticut men undertook.²⁴

Just after he arrived he preached his first sermon at Westfield on December 3, 1671. That Friday night one of the houses burned to the ground, and a little girl would have died in

the fire if she had not been barely saved by her brother. Taylor himself would eventually marry. Not only did he bury his first wife, but he also buried five of his eight children who died in infancy. In other words, Taylor's ministry out on the frontier was not a romanticized, charmed existence. Nevertheless, Taylor persevered and spent his entire ministry spanning fifty-eight years at Westfield.

But we are also interested in Taylor the poet. During his lifetime nothing was known of Taylor's poetry, except a few lines of eulogy that were published on occasion in the Boston papers. His poetical works, consisting of the first and second series of *Preparatory Meditations* (on the Lord's Supper), the 19,864 lines of *Metrical History of Christianity, Gods Determinations*, and numerous occasional and shorter poems went unknown and unnoticed. In his will, he forbade the publishing of his poetry, and so his grandson, Ezra Stiles, kept his wishes and had them deposited inconspicuously at Yale library. Thomas H. Johnson's discovery of the material in 1937 ended the anonymity and Taylor emerged as America's great colonial poet, rivaled only by Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672). Since Johnson's discovery, Princeton University Press and Yale University Press have published authoritative editions of his poetry, and numerous scholarly studies have followed.²⁵ In addition to his poetry, recent scholarship has also engaged his sermon series *Christographia*, a thorough and rather scholarly sermon series concerning two-nature Christology preached at Westfield.

Since Taylor's poetry writing was such a secret activity, scholars must piece together the occasion of his works. Interpretations, as one might expect, abound. Such is the case with *Gods Determinations*. Most likely written during the decade of the 1680s, *Gods Determinations* ranks among the finest of Puritan epic poetry, on par with Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1658-1663) and *Paradise Regained* (1665-1667) and exceeding Michael Wigglesworth's *The Day of Doom* (1662). It is also comparable to more prosaic works, such as Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) or Jonathan Edwards' sermon series, *History of the Work of Redemption* (1739, published 1774).

Critics have focused on Indian warfare, the Half-way Covenant, and even the influence of reading Horace as the occasion for Taylor's poem.²⁶ J. Daniel Patterson has recently argued that both the structure and rhetorical strategies of *Gods Determinations* reflect the classic Puritan sermon form.²⁷ Patterson's thesis is worth pursuing as it reveals that Taylor's "abundant use of dialogue" reveals "the hopes and fears of those in his congregation"²⁸ as reflected in the "use" or "application" section of Puritan sermons. This focus on application allows Taylor to express poetically his pastoral concerns for his congregants as they engage the sovereignty of God and his working in the world.

As briefly hinted at above, Taylor's personal trials prepared him well to anticipate both the fears and hopes of those he ministered to. In his short poem reflecting on the death of three of his infant children, Taylor concludes, "Griefe o're doth flow: and nature fault would finde/Were not thy will, my spell Charm, Joy, and Gem."²⁹ He also reflects such grief and loss at the death of his wife in "A Funerall Poem on the Death of my ever Endear'd, and Tender Wife":

*Some deem Death do the True Love Knot untie:
but I do finde it harder tide thereby. . . .
Oh strange Untying! it ti'th harder: What?
Can anything untye a True Love Knot?
Five Babes thou tookst from me before this Stroake.
Thine arrows then into my bowells broake,
But not they pierce into my bosom smart,
Do strike and stab me in the very heart (472).*

Edward Taylor understood loss, but he could not always understand the work or will of God in this world. This is the Edward Taylor behind *Gods Determinations*. The full title of this manuscript poem is: *Gods Determinations Touching His Elect: and The Elect's Combat in their Conversion, Coming up to God in Christ together with the Comfortable Effects thereof*. The first stanza begins with eternity past as the first line heralds, "Infinity, when all things it beheld/In Nothing, and of Nothing did build" (387), and the final stanza ends with eternity

future as he personifies the Church as the coach in which the saints "to Glory ride therein" (459). In between he offers thirty-three stanzas of varying lengths culminating in a monumental theological analysis of human history, primarily engaging, according to Charles Hambrick-Stowe, "the New England Way," extolling the benefits and demands of church membership.³⁰ He also offers a great deal of insight into the Puritan view of history.

To be sure, Taylor's philosophy of history emerges not only from *Gods Determinations*, but also from his other rather lengthy work, *A Metrical History of Christianity* (1692).³¹ For our purposes, however, we will primarily confine our review to *Gods Determinations*. First we begin, not surprisingly, with Taylor's emphasis on the sovereignty of God. Karl Keller observes that Taylor "for years tapped out his lines and hunted for his rhymes to make the hard will of God more delightful by means of his verse."³² What Keller intends as a criticism actually provides an insightful observation. Like his successor in the nearby town of Northampton a few decades later, Taylor also struggled with understanding and delighting in all of the aspects of the will of God. Jonathan Edwards recounts in his "Personal Narrative" that at first he stumbled over the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty as quite an obstacle to embracing God. His mind, he recalls, "was full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty."³³

Taylor expresses his personal struggle by personifying God's attributes of Justice and Mercy and placing them in dialogue. In *A Metrical History* he continues to use this device personifying Justice, Patience, and Grace. Returning to *Gods Determinations* Taylor begins his dialogue by placing justice and mercy in conflict:

*Offended Justice comes in fiery Rage,
Like to a Rampant Lyon now assailed,
Arrayed in Flaming fire now to engage
With red hot burning Wrath poore man unbaild.
In whose dreadful visage sinfull man may spy
Confounding Rending, Flaming Majesty (391).*

And then Mercy appears:

*Mercy takes up the Challenge, Comes as meeke
As any Lamb, on mans behalfe, she speakes
Like Newborn pincks, breathes out perfumed reech
And doth revive the Heart before it breaks.
Justice (saith Mercy) if thou Storm so fast,
Man is but dust that flies before the blast (390).*

By the end of the dialogue, Taylor finds that Justice is satisfied, exclaiming that "the court of Justice thee acquits" (398). He then concludes, "Justice in Justice must adjudge thee just:/If thou in Mercies Mercy put thy trust" (398).

But from a human perspective, Taylor confesses perplexity in trying to account for God and his work in this world. Humanity to Taylor "A Cripple is and footsore, sore opprest,/Can't track Gods Trace but Pains, and pritches prick/Like Poyson'd splinters sticking in the Quick" (399). The resolution comes, however, when humanity, in its lapsed estate gets a glimpse of God's glory as he graciously reveals it. "Hence his Eternall Purpose doth proclaim/Whereby transcendently he makes to shine/Transplendent Glory in Grace Divine" (399). Of course, Taylor here is referencing the effects of regeneration on our understanding. But if we examine this with a philosophy of history in view, we see the fundamental explanation of God's work in the world as his eternal will, which serves, for Taylor, to make sense out of life and to answer life's hard questions.

Curiously, Taylor next turns to Satan and his rage against the saints. Satan comes in a "red-hot firy rage/Comes belling, roaring ready to ingage/To rend, and tare in pieces small all those,/whom in the formal Quarrell he did lose" (403). Taylor resolves this conflict in Christ, of whom "We beg a Pardon, and a Remedy" (405). Taylor continues the next few stanzas to flesh out the quarrel, likening Satan's attacks to the barking of a dog, and, again, challenges his reader to take refuge in Christ. He also sees that Satan's attacks work quite efficiently through our lingering sinful nature.

Applying this to the mix of Taylor's philosophy of history, we see that he takes Satan seriously. He is careful, as well, to acknowledge one's responsibility for sin and its effects on ourselves and others. Here Taylor entertains the notion of our responsibility. Returning to that first stanza which begins with eternity past and the creation, Taylor there concludes with the fall, lamenting:

*But Nothing man did throw down all by Sin:
And darkened that lightsom Gem in him.
That now his Brightest Diamond is grown
Darker by far than any Coalpit Stone (388).*

This perspective reveals that while Satan and sin, which is to say we, ourselves, are destructive and disruptive, God's sovereignty nevertheless prevails. Again, God's eternal will is the determining and dominating factor in history, even though sin and its consequences and Satan and his conflict are a reality and need to be factored into our understanding of the why of events. Taylor does not appeal to sovereignty to excuse personal action. In fact, he clearly challenges the saint for his or her sin. At one point in *Gods Determinations* Taylor introduces another dialogue between the soul and the saint somewhat reminiscent of Paul's struggle in Romans 7. He chastises the soul for its sin.

These dialogues, between Justice and Mercy, between Christ and the saint, and between the saint and the soul, all take place "Before the Bench of the Almightyes Breast" (390). One could argue, given Taylor's understanding of sovereignty, that the playing out of these dialogues and the historic events they represent are rather gratuitous, the mere playing out of prerecorded states of affairs. Yet, Taylor's actual depiction of these events belies such an interpretation. While there is mystery here to be sure, Taylor nevertheless works out a philosophy of history that, while emphasizing the sovereignty of God, reveals a meaningful outworking of God's plan, one that involves meaningful interaction in real time between God and his people. Interpreters of Taylor often miss this element in his poetry. Keller bemoans Taylor's perspective on history as

"annoyingly antihumanistic," and Stanford labels the poem as "completely deterministic," replete with inconsistencies and grimness.³⁴ Such interpretations neglect a key category to Taylor that permeates his understanding of both God and history, namely, mystery. The Puritans did not neglect their hopes and fears, their desperation and their bewilderment, while simultaneously holding fast to a deeply-rooted belief in God's absolute sovereignty. They even ventured to express such thoughts audibly on occasion. But rather than resolve such tensions in either compromising God's attributes or overemphasizing human autonomy, they chose instead to leave the tension, perhaps unresolved in this lifetime, in mystery.

One final element to Taylor's philosophy of history concerns his focus on the end of history and his resting in God's bringing to consummation his plan for the world. As *Gods Determinations* ends, Taylor, his Westfield congregation, and the entire church find themselves on the way to heaven in Christ's coach, a personification of the Church (458-459). Taylor intends his celestial vision to fill his life on earth with meaning. Here is where all of the struggles that he portrays in the poem find their resolution. Looking elsewhere to his other poems, we also see how this eschatological hope enables Taylor to understand the death of his children and of his wife. This truth is "the little vent hole for relieve" as he endures his "bitter Griefe" (472). That other colonial poet, Anne Bradstreet, echoes Taylor's perspective in numerous poems, but perhaps nowhere more poignantly than in *As Weary Pilgrim, Now at Rest*. She declares:

*A pilgrim I, on earth, perplex
with sinnes and cares and sorrowes vex
By age and paines brought to decay
and my Clay house mouldering away
Oh how I long to be at rest
and soare on high among the blest . . .
Lord make me ready for that day
then Come dear Bridegrome Come away.*³⁵

In summary, Taylor presents a philosophy of history that turns to God's sovereignty and his eternal will as the basis for the why and how of the events of history. Further, he looks to God's "eternall plan" as that which directs history, and also as that which, in its culmination, serves as the aim of history. Now we will bring Boyd and Taylor into dialogue and we now turn to this by way of conclusion.

EVALUATING OPENNESS VERSUS PURITAN PHILOSOPHIES OF HISTORY

We have observed that openness proponents recast God's work in this world as responsive relationship. Consequently, the traditional model, including the Puritan model, of God and his work in the world, falls short of providing such existential adequacy. Returning to Boyd's case study of Suzanne, the traditional model fails where the openness model prevails. The traditional tensions—holding to human responsibility, questioning God's actions, and expressing real and heart-felt sorrow over events while resting in God's sovereign plan and relinquishing human understanding to the divine plan that reverberates throughout Taylor's poetry—gets relaxed in the openness model. While openness adherents point to the lack of meaning in Taylor's pre-programmed world, the openness view is not without its problems either.

One main problem concerns Boyd's partly open, partly closed view. This view is subject to the criticisms that are lodged at soft determinism. Beyond these criticisms, however, there is the rather telling problem of the inconsistency of God's execution of his predestined plan. This inconsistency, that is to say that God intervenes and overrides human freedom to bring about his will at given points, may very well translate into a capriciousness and arbitrariness that may leave one less than satisfied with God. For instance, take the event of the holocaust. It seems more existentially satisfying to view this event as within God's predetermined plan, even if how we understand God escapes us, as opposed to viewing God helplessly watching free agents wreak havoc in his world. For a season comfort may be found in God's grieving alongside of us, but eventually

that comfort gives way to deeper questions about God's abilities and character.

In fact, Paul Helseth quite recently engaged the problem of particular instances of evil for openness. He concludes that this problem forces openness to present a new attribute of God: divine ambivalence. He observes how openness adherents prefer to speak of a "sovereignty of love" as opposed to a "sovereignty of control," and then counters by arguing, "But in the end his reign is administered only haltingly, for not all of his creatures are the recipients of his intervening mercies."³⁶

This inconsistency then leads to a lack of assurance concerning eschatological hope. Bruce Ware effectively lodged this criticism two years ago in Massachusetts.³⁷ His point, however, still stands. In fact, the erosion of eschatological hope infects our very conception of God's character. Ware states the matter directly in *God's Lesser Glory*: "While claiming to offer meaningfulness to Christian living, open theism strips the believer of the one thing needed most for a vibrant life of faith: absolute confidence in God's character, wisdom, word, promise, and the sure fulfillment of his will."³⁸

Finally, the traditional model best accords with absolute confidence in God's character. Luther expressed this well in his little pamphlet, *The Freedom of the Christian*, in the watershed year of 1520. He writes:

The very highest worship of God is this, that we ascribe to him truthfulness, righteousness, and whatever else may be ascribed to one who is trusted. When this is done, the soul consents to his will. Then it hallows his name and allows itself to be treated according to God's pleasure for, clinging to God's promises, it does not doubt that he who is true, just, and wise will do, dispose, and provide all things well.³⁹

The openness model struggles to provide a basis for such faith in God based upon his truthfulness. It further lacks the basis for such resignation and submission to his sovereign hand.

The traditional model may not offer entirely satisfactory

answers to all of the questions related to a philosophy of history. Not all may be satisfied with resolving matters in mystery and leaving unrelaxed tensions. One does need, however, to consider the alternative. Again, this article has a very narrow focus: an attempt to cull out from openness theology a philosophy of history and then contrast that with the philosophy of history underlying Edward Taylor's *Gods Determination*, as but one example among many of traditional theism. Other criticisms of openness are in order, including those addressing hermeneutical issues, and more directly, theological issues. The new model of open theism presents an inadequate philosophy of history that does not account well for the events of history and that provides little help on an existential level of making sense of one's life. At the very least, the ethos of Taylor's work should give pause to openness proponents who may be tempted to characterize the traditional view as unsympathetic or as unattuned to pastoral and existential concerns.

Author

Steve Nichols is associate professor at Lancaster Bible College and Graduate School, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. His Ph.D. is from Westminster Theological Seminary. He has written *Jonathan Edwards: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (P & R, 2001), *Martin Luther: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (P & R, 2002), and coedited the forthcoming *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* (Baker, 2003). He and his wife Heidi and son Benjamin live in Lancaster.

Notes

1. Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 16.
2. Rice, "Biblical Support," 15.
3. Clark Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," *The Openness of God*, 101.
4. Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 103.
5. Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," 104.
6. Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000) and John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2001).

7. Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 32.
8. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 41.
9. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 42, emphasis his.
10. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 50.
11. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 51.
12. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 104.
13. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 104.
14. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 105-106.
15. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 106.
16. For more on Boyd's understanding of Satan's role, see his *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997).
17. John Sanders echoes the sentiment: "Though the Spirit may not get everything he desires, we have reason to hope because we have a God with a proven track record of successfully navigating the vicissitudes of human history and redeeming it. We have confidence that God will bring his project to the fruition he desires because God has proven himself faithful time and time again," *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 129.
18. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 109.
19. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 109.
20. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 110.
21. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 111.
22. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 111.
23. For biographical information, see Donald E. Stanford, *Edward Taylor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965); Charles Hambrick-Stowe, *Early New England Meditative Poetry: Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 38-62; and John Gatta, *Gracious Laughter: The Meditative Wit of Edward Taylor* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989).
24. *The Diary of Edward Taylor*, edited by Francis Murphy (Springfield: Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, 1964), 39.
25. *The Poetical Works of Edward Taylor*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943) and *The Poems of Edward Taylor*, edited by Donald E. Stanford (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960). For bibliographic material see Constance J. Gefvert, *Edward Taylor: An Annotated Bibliography, 1668-1970* (Kent State University Press, 1971) and Jeffrey A. Hammond, *Edward Taylor: Fifty Years of Scholarship* (Camden House, 1993).
26. Donald Stanford and Thomas Davis argue for Indian warfare, Michael Colacurcio argues for the poem as a critique of Half-Way membership, and Willie Weathers argues that Horace is responsible for the poem. See

- John Gatta, *Gracious Laughter: The Meditative Wit of Edward Taylor*, for a further discussion of these interpretations.
27. J. Daniel Patterson, "The Homiletic Design of Edward Taylor's *Gods Determinations*," *The Tayloring Shop: Essays on the Poetry of Edward Taylor in Honor of Thomas M. and Virginia L. Davis*, edited by Michael Schuldiner (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997), 131-150. Patterson also offers a helpful survey of various interpretations of *Gods Determinations*, 147.
 28. Patterson, "Homiletic Design," 139.
 29. "Upon Wedlock, and Death of Children," *The Poems of Edward Taylor*, edited by Donald E. Stanford, 469. Hereafter all citations of Taylor's poems will be in the body of the text by page number as found in the Stanford edition of his poetry.
 30. Charles Hambrick-Stowe, *Early New England Meditative Poetry: Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor*, 50.
 31. For an insightful discussion of this work, see Karl Keller, *The Example of Edward Taylor* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), 141-59.
 32. Keller, *Example*, 145. See also, 129-38.
 33. Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Volume 16, Letters and Personal Writings*, edited by George S. Claghorn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 790-804. For a full discussion of Edwards on sovereignty, see my *Jonathan Edwards: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2001), 71-85.
 34. Karl Keller, *The Example of Edward Taylor*, 159; Donald Stanford, "Introduction," *The Poems of Edward Taylor*, 1.
 35. Charles Hambrick-Stowe, *Early New England Meditative Poetry: Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor*, 96.
 36. Paul Kjos Helseth, "On Divine Ambivalence: Open Theism and the Problem of Particular Evils," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:3 (2001), 511.
 37. Bruce A. Ware, "Eschatological Hope in Classical and Openness Theologies," Evangelical Theological Society National Meeting, Danvers, Massachusetts, November 17, 1999. The ideas expressed in the paper are also in his *God's Lesser Glory*.
 38. Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 21.
 39. Martin Luther, *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 284-85.