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CLOSING THE DOOR ON LIMITED-RISK OPEN THEISM

Johannes Grössl and Leigh Vicens

This paper argues against a version of open theism defended by Gregory Boyd, which we call “limited risk,” according to which God could guarantee at creation at least the fulfillment of His most central purpose for the world: that of having a “people for himself.” We show that such a view depends on the assumption that free human decisions can be “statistically determined” within certain percentage ranges, and that this assumption is inconsistent with open theists’ commitment to a libertarian conception of human freedom.

In his recent work on open theism, Gregory Boyd has been at pains to show that his open theist view meets the “christocentric criteria by which models of divine providence should be assessed.” One of these criteria is that “[God] wins in the end,” and indeed that “through Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection, God has in principle *already* won and *already* accomplished all of his purposes for creation.”¹ Boyd suggests that God’s central purpose for creation is the participation of the human community in the “loving community of the triune God.”² He writes, “God created the world . . . for the purpose of inviting others to share in his love.” However, Boyd says, sharing in God’s love requires being free, “with the capacity to choose to love *or not*.”³ In other words, in order for it to be *possible* for humans to love, and so for it to be *possible* for God’s central purpose for creation to be fulfilled, humans had to be given libertarian freedom with respect to their decision to love God.

We argue in this paper that there is a tension between Boyd’s commitment to libertarian freedom, his assertion that the realization of God’s central purpose for creation is guaranteed, and his further insistence that God lacks middle knowledge. It is, of course, a fundamental tenet of open theism that God does not know, before deciding to create a possible human being, what choices she would freely make if created; for, according to Boyd and other open theists, there are no such counterfactual truths to be known. Rather, God knows only what free choices the possible human

¹Gregory Boyd, “God Limits His Control,” in *Four Views on Divine Providence*, ed. Dennis W. Jowers (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 184.

²*Ibid.*, 186.

³*Ibid.*, 188.

beings He could create *might possibly* make and (perhaps—we grant for the sake of argument) the *probability* that they will make each such choice. But then, we argue, since it is possible for every human being God could create to freely refuse to share in His love, God cannot guarantee, at creation, that His central purpose for the world will be fulfilled. Thus, Boyd's open theism is riskier than he admits.

We think this is important to point out since many people find Boyd's version of open theism (which, below, we categorize as "limited-risk") compelling precisely because of its claim that God *could* guarantee the realization of His central purposes. Indeed, perhaps the most common objection to *other* versions of open theism (which we categorize as "high-risk") is that a rationally and morally perfect God would not engage in the risk of creating a world in which His central purposes were *not* realized.⁴ Even those who ultimately defend high-risk open theism often admit that such a risk is, in itself, a bad thing that God would avoid if He could do so without losing a greater good.⁵ So Boyd's limited-risk version of open theism has intuitive appeal and seems worthy of closer examination and scrutiny.⁶

In Section I of this paper, we discuss different levels of risk that might be involved in God's creation of the world, and the reason Boyd opts for a "limited-risk" rather than a "high-risk" version of open theism. We then consider, in Section II, how Boyd responds to the objection raised by Bruce Ware, that on Boyd's view there is no guarantee that God will indeed "win" in the end—or in other words, that his view is high-risk after all. In response to this objection, Boyd offers several arguments and analogies appealing to God's infinite intelligence in an attempt to show that Ware's concern is unfounded. We argue, however, that Boyd's reasoning is flawed and his analogies misleading with respect to the question of whether God could guarantee the realization of His central purpose for creation. Moreover, we go on to point out in Section III that the sort of game-theoretic tools Alan Rhoda proposes using for modeling God's creative decisions do not help to resolve the tension in Boyd's view. In Section IV, we show that

⁴For instance, in their summary of common objections to open theism, Michael Peterson et al. write, "Molinists sometimes claim that the divine risk taking postulated by open theism is morally intolerable: if God could not be guaranteed the precise outcome of his creative activity, he would not have created at all." *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion*, Fourth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 187.

⁵Following the above-cited objection, for instance, the authors write, "Open theists reply that God does not take risks for their own sake, but for the sake of the very great good that is made possible through God's generous act of creation" (ibid., 187)—thus suggesting that if God could avoid the risks without losing this very great good, He would.

⁶Of course, if one has reason to think that some people already *have* chosen to enter a saving relationship with God, then one will have reason to conclude that God's central purpose has *already* been fulfilled. But this leaves open the question of whether the fulfillment of this purpose was *guaranteed*, or whether God got lucky. And the question of whether God's purposes were guaranteed is one which still has significance after the fact, since our trust in God to fulfill His promises in the future is deeply rooted in our understanding of His past deeds, and the extent to which we believe events are under His control.

Boyd's attempts to establish that God could guarantee a certain outcome involving the free response of humans seem to rely on the assumption that free human decisions can be "statistically determined" within certain percentage ranges—an assumption that is either too weak to establish this conclusion, or too strong to be compatible with open theism's commitment to libertarianism. Finally, in Section V, we discuss some implications of our arguments for Christology, and conclude that while a low-risk version of open theism is internally inconsistent, a high-risk version fails to meet Boyd's "christocentric criteria."

I. "Limited-Risk" Open Theism

Among open theists, there are various views about the scope and extent of creational risk. Previous typologies of open theism should therefore be extended to include a typology of risk.⁷ Although several intermediate positions are conceivable, one can distinguish between High-Risk Open Theism (HROT) and Limited-Risk Open Theism (LROT). HROT, as endorsed by John Sanders and William Hasker, ascribes to all human persons—or, more precisely, to those who have the capacity and opportunity to make such a choice—the ability to choose to accept or to reject the offer of a loving relationship with God. HROT proponents reason that since *each* such individual has the power to refuse God's offer, it is metaphysically possible that *every* such individual rejects God's love. Although they admit that this risk is unavoidable for God, many HROT proponents hold that the risk is "overwhelmingly improbable—so improbable that the risk of such an outcome is negligible" and therefore that it is rational for God to engage in this risk.⁸ We call this view "high-risk" not because the probability that the undesired outcome will occur is high (many HROT proponents insist that it is not), but because what is at stake is the realization of God's *most central purpose* for creation. One might similarly call a

⁷There are several other typologies of open theism. Alan Rhoda distinguishes between *omniscience* and *limited foreknowledge* (sometimes called *nescience*) models as well as between *bivalence* and *non-bivalence* models. Dale Tuggy calls the omniscience model the "wide road to open theism," the nescience model the "narrow road" and the bivalence model combined with omniscience the "short-cut." Hasker endorses *limited foreknowledge*, assuming that the future is alethically settled, but epistemically and providentially open; he thereby redefines "omniscience" to mean knowledge of everything which is logically possible to be known, but not of all truths. Most open theists, however, endorse non-bivalence and omniscience, postulating an ontologically and alethically open future and regarding propositions about future contingents as neither true nor false and therefore not known by a God who knows only all true propositions. See Alan Rhoda, "Generic Open Theism and Some Varieties Thereof," *Religious Studies* 44 (2008), 225–234; Dale Tuggy, "Three Roads to Open Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007), 28–51; William Hasker, "The Foreknowledge Conundrum," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 50 (2001), 97–114.

⁸William Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, ed. Clark Pinnock et. al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 153–154. God's evaluation of this risk as "negligibly small" at creation seems to presuppose that there are objective probabilities that humans will make particular free choices which God can foreknow at creation. If this assumption is false, then HROT is even "higher-risk" than Hasker admits.

game of Russian roulette “high-risk,” no matter how small the chance of death, since the undesired outcome is so serious.

Gregory Boyd opposes this view, suggesting that the possibility that God’s central purpose for creation might be thwarted is incompatible with divine sovereignty. Agreeing with opponents of HROT, Boyd maintains that in creating the world God could be “certain” that humans’ rejection of His love “would never be universal,”⁹ but that “his sovereign plan for the world [would] be accomplished.”¹⁰ Thus Boyd rejects HROT and instead defends LROT: the view that while God could not foreordain that certain *specific* events would take place, such as that specific individuals would accept His love, He could guarantee that certain *general* goals would be met, such as that He would “have a people for himself.”¹¹ We call this view “limited-risk” since the risks in which God engages are limited to certain specific undesirable events occurring, and not to the realization of His most central purpose for creation. Boyd maintains LROT by rejecting the HROT proponent’s reasoning, that “[i]f any particular individual can opt out of God’s plan, then every individual could conceivably opt out of God’s plan.”¹² He appeals to various analogies in order to illustrate how God could guarantee the realization of His general goals without determining particular outcomes. In the following section, we scrutinize these analogies—as well as one proposed game-theoretic improvement on them—before going on to examine an assumption on which Boyd’s reasoning seems to rely: that free human decisions can be “statistically determined.”

II. “Infinite Intelligence” and its Limitations

Boyd reveals his conception of how God could guarantee the realization of His central purpose for creation in response to an objection raised by Bruce Ware,¹³ which Boyd summarizes as follows: “the open view of God portrays him as a ‘passive, hand-wringing God’ who can do little more than make guesses about the future and hope for the best. Since God can ‘only guess what much of the future will bring,’ Ware wonders if ‘a believer [can] know that God will triumph in the future just as he promised he will.’” In response, Boyd says, “I believe that this criticism is without merit—at least if we grant that God is *infinitely intelligent*.” He goes on to explain that unlike human beings, who have only a finite intelligence which they have to “spread thin” to keep track of the many possible events that might occur in the future and the many possible courses of

⁹Gregory Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil. Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 177.

¹⁰Ibid., 153

¹¹Ibid., 155.

¹²Ibid., 146.

¹³Cf. Bruce Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000).

action they might take if one or another of these events comes to pass, God can “perfectly anticipate, from all eternity, each and every possible decision free agents might ever make” and prepare for each “as he would . . . for a single future event that was certain to take place.”¹⁴ Boyd offers a chess analogy, first formulated by William James,¹⁵ to illustrate this idea. Boyd writes, “If you ever have the misfortune of playing God at chess, you will most certainly lose. For however you may choose to move, God has been anticipating that very move and preparing a response to it, as though you had to make this move, from the onset of the game—indeed, from before the foundation of the world.”¹⁶ Boyd concludes, “In the light of God’s unlimited intelligence, an open theist can affirm that every event happens *with* a divine purpose without having to assert that everything happens *for* a divine purpose. God brings an eternally prepared purpose to events, but God does not bring about (or specifically allow) all events for an eternal purpose.”¹⁷ Thus Boyd suggests that God would not need to wait anxiously to see if His central purpose for creation would be thwarted by creatures, but could be confident from all eternity that He would “win the game.”

Boyd also emphasizes that, although humans must have *some* libertarian freedom in order to enter a loving relationship with God, the open theist view “does not specify the extent to which agents in general or any individual agent in particular is free,”¹⁸ and so leaves open the possibility that God might limit humans’ options to make sure their decisions do not thwart His central purpose for creation. To reinforce this point, Boyd offers another analogy, to a “choose your own adventure” novel, in which the author “predetermines the overall structure of the adventure as well as the possible story lines and all the possible endings within the adventure,” and then allows the reader to choose, within these possibilities, how the “actual” story will go.¹⁹ He writes:

The God of open theism not only perfectly knows and anticipates all the possible story lines creation could take; he himself establishes the conditions and boundaries of those possible story lines. We may thus rest assured that if there were possible story lines that could not result in God’s bringing good out of evil, let alone story lines that threatened God’s objectives for creation as a whole, the Author of the adventure of creation would simply exclude them from the adventure.²⁰

¹⁴Boyd, “God Limits His Control,” 206.

¹⁵Cf. “The Dilemma of Determinism,” in *Writings 1878–1899* (New York: The Library of America, 1992), 592f.

¹⁶Gregory Boyd, “Two ancient (and modern) motivations for ascribing exhaustively definite foreknowledge to God: a historic overview and critical assessment,” *Religious Studies* 46, no. 1 (2010), 50.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁸Boyd, “God Limits His Control,” 192.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 200.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 207.

Boyd's analogies to a chess master or choose-your-own-adventure novelist certainly help us imagine how God might outsmart his opponents, by conceiving of and preparing His responses to their "moves" ahead of time, or control the damage they might do, by limiting their possible courses of action to begin with. However, when brought to bear on the question of whether God could guarantee that His central purpose for creation would be fulfilled, these analogies are deeply misleading. For with respect to a person's decision regarding whether to share in the love of God, there are only two options: to do so, or not. Thus, if God limited the person's options so that she could not choose *not* to share in God's love, the person's decision would no longer be libertarianly free; and so, since according to Boyd a necessary condition for love is libertarian freedom, the person could not truly be said to *love* God at all. But if God did not limit the person's options in this way, then there would remain the possibility that this person—and, *mutatis mutandis*, all people—would refuse to share in God's love. It would not matter how (infinitely) intelligent God is, or how He set up the "story" of the world in other respects; it still might have turned out that His central purpose for creation was thwarted by His obstinate creatures.

III. *The Inadequacy of Game-Theoretic Models*

Many open theists in addition to Boyd, including Peter Geach, Richard Rice, and John Sanders, have adopted James's chess analogy in defending their model of divine providence. Alan Rhoda has recently questioned the adequacy of this analogy by pointing to several limitations.²¹ First, Rhoda points out, chess has only two players, whereas the world has billions, with a constantly changing population and constantly shifting alliances. Second, the moves in chess are sequential, and at each turn there is a finite number of them, whereas "real world interactions . . . take place in real time, not in alternating sequence" and the range of "moves" available at any one time may be "vast, perhaps even non-denumerably infinite." Third, the rules and objectives of chess are fixed and the same for each player, whereas "players" in the real world vary in available opportunities, privileges, and personal goals. And finally, in chess only one player can win, whereas in creation we are not competing with God, and it should be possible that everyone wins.²² After criticizing other analogies as similarly failing to capture the "complex, dynamic, and interactive" nature of the "game" of life, Rhoda proposes that open theists move beyond such "inherently limited" analogies and avail themselves of the tools of game theory, which has more "flexibility to capture the strategic nuances of God's providential dealings."²³ By starting with a generic definition of "game" as an event

²¹Alan Rhoda, "Beyond the Chess Master Analogy: Game Theory and Divine Providence," in *Creation Made Free: Open Theology Engaging Science*, ed. Thomas J. Oord (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 151–175.

²²*Ibid.*, 155–156.

²³*Ibid.*, 175.

in which one or more players choose from available strategies in order to transform one state into another with an optimum expected pay-off, Rhoda suggests that we can avoid the limitations inherent in the rules of particular games such as chess and “make our analyses as fine-grained as we wish to accommodate whatever factors we deem relevant,”²⁴ and so model how God is “working in all situations to bring about the best results, not only for himself, but also for the other players.”²⁵

Rhoda seems right that game-theoretic modeling has some advantages over appeals to simple-game analogies. However, when it comes to conceiving of divine providence, the problem with Boyd’s use of the chess master analogy is one that the tools of game theory cannot solve. For the analogy seems to assume that God’s “winning the game” is independent of free human decisions. But if God’s primary goal for creation is what Boyd claims—that some persons will freely engage in a loving relationship with God—then there cannot be such independence. Thus God cannot avoid the risk of failing to reach this goal.²⁶ It is only the realization of secondary goals not necessarily involving the free decisions of creatures which God can guarantee. For instance, God can guarantee that humans will continue to live on earth until the time of the apocalypse, since, even if in every possible world in which they exist humans make an attempt to exterminate their entire race, God can prevent them from doing so by taking away their libertarian freedom in specific situations. The difference between humans’ living on earth until the time of the apocalypse and their accepting God’s offer of love is that only the latter, on Boyd’s view, *essentially* involves a libertarianly free decision.

IV. The Problem with “Statistical Determination”

Given the failure of Boyd’s arguments and analogies discussed so far to show how God could guarantee the realization of His central purpose for creation, we think that in offering them, Boyd must be relying on a further assumption—that free human actions can be “statistically determined.” In other words, while God cannot determine that any *particular individual* will freely decide to enter a loving relationship with him, He can determine that (if a fall were to occur) “a certain percentage range of people would, through faith and by means of his grace, accept his saving love.”²⁷ Boyd

²⁴Ibid., 168.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶It should be noted that Alan Rhoda is not necessarily a proponent of LROT, as Boyd is. Rhoda writes, “[reflection on creation and game theory] suggests that God would rather have a Creation Game in which there is some degree of genuine risk for him, such that there is no advance guarantee that all of his specific preferences will be met” (ibid., 174). If God’s “specific preferences” include humans’ free decisions to enter into a loving relationship with Him, then Rhoda may be categorized as a high-risk open theist. The limitation of his game-theoretic tools would therefore not be a problem for him, but only for those who try to use those tools to deny the creational risk resulting from the free decisions of creatures.

²⁷Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 156 (emphasis added).

makes explicit a similar assumption when he defends the predetermination of certain events in Jesus's life:

*That Jesus would be killed was predetermined. Who would do it was not. . . . In the case of the crucifixion, as long as God knew that in certain circumstances there would be a certain percentage of people who would act as the wicked people spoken of in these passages acted, he could predestine and thus foreknow that the Messiah would be crucified without undermining the freedom of any individuals.*²⁸

Boyd reasons that God can act through wicked people without taking away their libertarian freedom, since wicked people are those who already have given up their libertarian freedom by irrevocably forming their character in a certain way. Still, this assumption requires that God can somehow determine that a certain percentage of people will freely form their characters in such a way. Boyd refers to the statistical nature of quantum mechanics in order to explain how God could determine this. He writes, "From a quantum mechanical perspective, all regularity in the phenomenological world is *statistical*. . . . This does not undermine the real stability of nature's regularity, for within a range of possibilities the behavior of quantum particles is very predictable, and thus the behavior of large groups of such particles is highly predictable."²⁹ Although the "orthodox" (Copenhagen) interpretation of quantum mechanics presupposes causal indeterminacy at the quantum level, the more complex an aggregate of particles is, the more predictable its behavior becomes. Thus physicists sometimes speak of macroscopic events as "statistically determined," by which they mean that the events are predictable enough so as to be considered, *for all practical purposes*, determined (although strictly speaking they are not). In the same way, Boyd suggests that the decisions of large enough groups of free persons might be so highly predictable as to be considered, for all practical purposes, determined, even if the decisions of particular individuals are neither determined nor highly predictable. He writes: "If we grasp the general trajectory of the areas of science we have been discussing, we should in principle be no more confounded by the fact that God can guarantee certain outcomes without meticulously determining their means than we are at how we can rely on the stability of the desk in front of us even though it is composed of quantum particles that are to some extent unpredictable."³⁰

We argue, however, that God's *guaranteeing* that some percentage range of people will accept His love requires more than just statistical determination, if something's being "statistically determined" means only that it is highly probable. For, of course, there being a high probability that some percentage range of people will accept God's love is compatible with there

²⁸Ibid., 121–122.

²⁹Ibid., 152.

³⁰Ibid., 153.

being no people who actually do so; and if it is metaphysically *possible* that no people do so, then God cannot *guarantee* that some percentage range of people *will* do so. Thus if “statistical determination” implies only a *high probability* that some percentage range of people will accept God’s love, then Boyd’s view collapses into the high-risk open theism (HROT) characterized above. According to proponents of HROT, it is possible that every individual rejects God’s love, but since this risk is negligibly small, it is rational for God to engage in this risk.

Alternatively, if “statistical determination” is taken to imply something stronger—that God can *infallibly foreknow* that some percentage range of people will accept His love, then such determination is incompatible with Boyd’s own open theist commitments. To see why, some formalization will be helpful. Let X be a finite set of n persons such that each person $x_i \in X$ makes in her life a certain free decision f_i regarding whether to accept God’s love which is independent of every other person’s decision, where v_i —the value of f_i —is 1 if x_i decides to accept God’s love, and 0 if x_i decides not to do so.³¹ Suppose that all decisions in the world are chronologically ordered, so that an ordered set of person-decision pairs $\langle (x_1, f_1), (x_2, f_2), \dots, (x_n, f_n) \rangle$ can be construed such that for all $i < n$, f_i occurs temporally prior to f_{i+1} . Let S stand for $\frac{1}{n}(v_1 + v_2 + \dots + v_n)$, the fraction of people in this set who will decide to accept God’s love. On the interpretation of “statistical determination” as implying infallible foreknowledge, Boyd would be assuming that God can infallibly foreknow before f_1 occurs that $S > 0$.³² Our argument against such an interpretation, then, can be stated as follows. Assume that:

- (1) God *can* infallibly foreknow before f_1 occurs that $S > 0$. [Boyd’s assumption.]
- (2) Possibly, at the time of decision f_{n-1} , every $v_{i < n}$ is 0. [Assumption of open theists, given the indeterministic nature of libertarian freedom.]
- (3) Possibly, $v_1 + v_2 + \dots + v_{n-1} = 0$. [By (2).]

³¹Here we make four assumptions that might require some explanation. The first is that n is finite. Assuming the constancy of the second law of thermodynamics, there is good evidence that the universe will evolve toward a thermal equilibrium where no complexity (and therefore no persons) can exist, and thus that God cannot keep creating people *ad infinitum*. Even if this assumption is dropped, however (say, because God might keep creating new universes until He gets things right), our argument will still imply that on open theist assumptions, God cannot guarantee a “win” in the end—though it will *not* imply that He cannot guarantee avoiding a “loss.” The other three assumptions—that God can know the value of n , that the value of each is independent of every other, and that all such decisions are chronologically ordered, with no two happening at the same time—make our argument much easier to state, but are not essential to the basic line of reasoning. For instance, if the assumption that God can know the value of n is false, then the argument can be revised to state that God foreknows, for every possible future history h , the corresponding set X_h and the respective value of n_h , which any open theist would concede.

³²Because the open theist rejects Ockhamism, such foreknowledge cannot depend in any way on events occurring after the time of attributing such knowledge.

- (4) Necessarily, if $v_1 + v_2 + \dots + v_{n-1} = 0$, then God can infallibly foreknow at the time of f_{n-1} that $v_n = 1$. [By (1).]
- (5) Possibly, God can infallibly foreknow at the time of f_{n-1} that $v_n = 1$. [By (3) and (4).]
- (6) The possibility of God's having infallible foreknowledge of an individual x_i 's decision f_i is logically incompatible with x_i 's possessing libertarian freedom with respect to f_i . [Assumption of open theists.]
- (7) God *cannot* infallibly foreknow at the time of f_{n-1} that $v_n = 1$. [By (6).]

Since (5) contradicts (7), the open theist has little choice but to say that starting assumption (1) is false: God *cannot* infallibly foreknow before occurs that $S > 0$. We conclude that given Boyd's commitment to open theism, he cannot maintain what (1) entails: that God *can* infallibly foreknow that at least some people will freely decide to accept His love. Therefore, if an event's being "statistically determined" implies that God can have infallible foreknowledge of that event's occurring, then its being statistically determined that some percentage range of people will decide to accept God's love is incompatible with those people having libertarian freedom with respect to that decision.

V. Implications for Christology

Based on his theory of "statistical determination," Boyd assumes that God could guarantee the occurrence of certain events in human history, including "some of the central events that surround the life and death of Jesus Christ."³³ As we have shown, however, on the open theist view, if God is able to guarantee the occurrence of some event, then that event must not essentially depend on created people's libertarianly free decisions. But then Boyd faces a problem with respect to any of the events surrounding Jesus's life or death that *did* essentially depend on the libertarian freedom of created people. As mentioned above, for instance, Boyd supposes that it was predetermined that *someone* would put Jesus on the cross, just not *who* that someone would be. Since such predetermination (at least before the people were born and formed their own characters) is, on Boyd's view, incompatible with the libertarian freedom of those whose choices and actions were at stake, it follows that if they really *were* free, then God could not have predetermined or infallibly foreknown those choices and actions. Thus, even regarding such "central events" surrounding Jesus's life and death, Boyd cannot avoid a substantial risk. And if some of these events were necessary conditions for *enabling* human beings to enter a loving relationship with God, this risk adds to the risk discussed above.

³³Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 120.

VI. Conclusion

There is thus a significant risk inherent in Boyd's model of divine providence that he has refused to acknowledge: that God might have failed to realize His central purpose in creating the world, that of creating a loving community between Himself and His creatures. This purpose might not have been realized due to either a universal human rejection of His love or (depending on what events of Jesus's life one thinks essentially involved the libertarianly free choices of others) a prevention of Christ's salvific act in the first place. Since the former risk is independent of the latter, this also means (if God predetermined the Crucifixion before any created persons came to have faith) that God ran the risk of allowing Christ to die in vain—i.e., that Christ's death might not have fulfilled its central purpose, either. Boyd remarks at one point that Jesus “suffered and died for those who *would otherwise* be damned.”³⁴ However, if refusing to participate in the loving community of the triune God is enough to damn a person, then on the assumption that the Crucifixion *did* essentially depend on the free actions of some created persons, and that it *was* determined to occur before any created persons came to have faith, it was entirely possible on Boyd's view that Jesus suffered and died for *no one at all*. And this, we think, is high-risk if anything is.³⁵

University of Innsbruck (Austria)

Augustana College (Sioux Falls, SD)

³⁴Boyd, “God Limits His Control,” 204 (emphasis added).

³⁵Of course, even if God's central purpose for creation is left unfulfilled, this does not mean that God has *lost control* of His creation. For, first of all, on the open theist view, all risk is dependent on God's willingness to engage in such a risk. This is why God's sovereignty is never undermined: if, by a higher-order will, the Creator freely engages in a risk, He thereby wills a real possibility that any lower-order will is not actualized. For open theists, the higher-order will is the *possibility* of genuine loving relationships, and the lower-order will is that such loving relationships *actually* take place. Thus John Sanders writes: “If God wants a world in which the possibility exists that God may not get everything he wants, then in an ultimate sense the divine will is not thwarted.” See John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 243. Moreover, as already mentioned, apart from the impossible guarantee of certain free responses of God's creatures, the open theist is able to affirm numerous creational guarantees, since not all risks are unavoidable.