

# Reinterpreting Classical Theological Concepts Through Modern Philosophical Lenses

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## ABSTRACT

The paper is devoted to the reevaluation of crucial classical theological concepts-through modern philosophical structures-on the nature of God, free will, and divine foreknowledge. The paper introduces some modern concepts-developed by existentialism, phenomenology, and analytic philosophy-showing new lights on these long-standing theological debates. The placing together of the above fields vividly reflects the possibility for modern philosophy to bring new lights to traditional religious doctrines, making them relevant to the modern philosophical debate.

**Keywords:** Theology, Philosophy, Divine Foreknowledge, Free Will, Existentialism, Phenomenology, Analytic Philosophy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Theological investigation has constituted for many centuries, and still does today, a handmaiden to the philosophical one. Indeed, debates about the nature of God, of existence, of morality, and of the universe are all substantive bases for either discipline. The great classical theological theories propagated by such minds as Augustine, Aquinas, and Maimonides formed the bedrock upon which religious and philosophical argumentation rested for centuries. These are the ideas that range from the omnipotence and omniscience of God, passing through the nature of free will, divine providence, to, finally, the problem of evil. The ideas have not only shaped theological doctrines but also philosophical thought.

However, the development of modern philosophy, especially since the Enlightenment, has brought new intellectual challenges and frameworks that could not be anticipated by classical theology. Existentialism, phenomenology, and analytic philosophy have rethought the concepts of existence, meaning, and human freedom. Each of these movements is impregnated with new questions, methodologies, and a critical distance from the religious traditions that once defined philosophical inquiry. Thereby, it slowly but surely becomes perceived that classical theological ideas must be reinterpreted in light of modern philosophy if they are to retain any relevance to contemporary discussions.

The paper shall further contend that such a rereading, in terms of modern philosophical paradigms, brings new life into theological thought and furthers the dialogue between faith and reason. Several present philosophical disciplines, such as existentialism, phenomenology, and analytic philosophy, allow the elaboration of traditional theological insights with much finer nuance for an engagement with intellectual and spiritual concerns befitting today's world.

For instance, existentialism makes one rethink the essence of faith and human freedom in light of uncertainty and absurdity. It is phenomenology that supplies the means for the understanding of human experience in its relation to the divine, setting the accent on how religious beliefs are lived and experienced rather than abstractly defined. Meanwhile, analytic philosophy brings rigorous tools of analysis and defense of theological claims, making them more coherent and accessible in modern philosophical debates.

It is within this background that the present paper will engage these three major strands of modern philosophy in the reinterpretation of some key theological concepts; the nature of God, divine foreknowledge, and human free will regarding the consideration of human agency within a providential framework. We will demonstrate how these philosophical movements can somewhat

resolve some of the longstanding tensions between theology while underlining the continuing relevance of classical theological thought in a post-Enlightenment world.

The intention of this paper is not to demean the importance of classical theology but to complement it by bringing it into a conversation with the philosophical currents of the modern era. This paper bridges the chasm between the ancient and the contemporary and allows theological ideas to speak powerfully to issues of meaning, existence, and morality in the 21st century.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

The research approach pursued in the paper is comparative and analytical, with the reinterpretation of key classical theological concepts in light of the modern philosophical framework. The main methodology will be based upon the literature analysis of the core theological and philosophical texts, underpinned by a theoretical synthesis combining insights from classical theology with modern philosophy.

### **2.1. Literature Review:**

This work first engages in a critical review of seminal works from within classical theology and modern philosophy. Theological texts from thinkers such as Augustine, Aquinas, and Maimonides are considered in concert with modern philosophical works, including those by Jean-Paul Sartre on existentialism, Edmund Husserl on phenomenology, and Alvin Plantinga on analytic philosophy. Such a comparative literature review lays the basis for understanding how theological concepts have traditionally been framed and how they are to be challenged or complemented by modern thought.

### **2.2. Philosophical and Theological Analysis:**

From the literature review above, the research goes on to conduct a close philosophical analysis of selected theological concepts, such as the nature of God, divine foreknowledge, and free will. Each of these dealt-with concepts is approached in its usual classical theological context first, then received anew through the prism of various modern philosophical theories. The key aspects under analysis touch upon:

- a. Existentialism: To explore themes of human freedom and the experience of faith under conditions of uncertainty.
- b. Phenomenology: To investigate how religious experience and divine attributes can be understood through the subjective human experience.
- c. Analytic Philosophy: To apply logical rigor in defending or reinterpreting theological concepts such as omnipotence and omniscience, making these concepts more accessible to contemporary audiences.

### **2.3. Conceptual Synthesis:**

The findings of this research synthesize these modernist philosophical lenses through which the theological ideas have been analyzed to propose a reinterpretation of the classical theological ideas. Such a synthesis aims at bringing forth the points of convergence in both classical and modernist thought, as well as areas where reinterpretation is necessary to address contemporary philosophical and theological concerns.

### **2.4. Critical Reflection:**

The paper finally engages in the practice of critical reflection regarding the implications of these reinterpretations. It considers the strengths and weaknesses modern philosophical thought will bring to classical theology given the wider intellectual and cultural context in which the ideas will be received.

This paper gives an overall reinterpretation of some of the key classical theological concepts in their relevance to modern philosophical discourses through literature review, philosophical analysis, conceptual synthesis, and critical reflection.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Through the elaborate comparison between classical theological doctrines and those relative to the philosophical structures of modern times, a number of important insights have emerged. They challenge not only the traditional interpretation but also give new light as to how these concepts could be understood under the address of contemporary philosophical thought.

### **3.1. Reinterpreting the Nature of God Through Analytic Philosophy**

The classic conception of God, understood as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, stays right at the middle of Christian theology. Modern analytic philosophy, however, most especially with modern modal logic and metaphysical analyses, understands these divine attributes in new ways.

Results:

An application of Alvin Plantinga's theory of possible worlds will make this clear: God's omniscience does not interfere with human free will. If God knows how all the different possible worlds could turn out, then human actions can still be free in the actual world, since God simply knows what would happen in other worlds. That would thus relieve the theological tension that exists in another important matter: divine foreknowledge versus free will.

Discussion:

This rereading enables the theologian to uphold the traditional attribute of divine omniscience in view of criticisms raised both from philosophical and theological quarters. Utilizing the facility of possible worlds, theologians can thus claim that God's knowledge of future events does not necessarily determine predestination, inasmuch as human acts remain undetermined until actualized. This solution further refines the theological argument for the coherence of free will with divine omniscience and provides a more philosophically rigorous apologetic for classical theology in current debate.

### **3.2. Free Will and Divine Foreknowledge: A Phenomenological Perspective**

It is the core of classical and modern theology, and how it combines with human freedom is a very open issue: how can people act freely if God knows the future? While most classical theories represent it as a paradox, the phenomenology aims to provide another look at how this issue should be approached and focuses on human experience.

Results:

The phenomenology that Edmund Husserl initiated and was further developed by Martin Heidegger shifts the level from an abstract metaphysical dilemma to the lived human experience of freedom. What phenomenology does is reframe this debate in terms of how humans experience choice and agency in a world that is presumably foreknown by God. On this view, human freedom becomes a matter of existential experience rather than logical contradiction.

Discussion:

This phenomenological rereading thus subverts the question of free will from a theoretical to a phenomenological one of human existence and consciousness. Rather than assuming that divine foreknowledge establishes a deterministic framework, phenomenology seems to say that freedom is in fact experienced and practised in the human condition, with no metaphysical constraints. The results thus allow new possibilities for theology to respond to the modern preoccupation with human self-determination without sacrificing traditional doctrines about God's foreknowledge.

### **3.3. Existentialism and Faith: The Leap of Faith in Modern Theological Thought**

The existential philosophers, most notably Søren Kierkegaard, took a very radical stance in regards to the nature of faith and the human existence. Kierkegaard's "leap of faith" challenges the rationalistic and evidentialist ways of doing classical theology and positions faith as a personally subjective choice in the face of uncertainty.

Results:

Faith has nothing to do with rational proofs or certainty; it is a matter of will—an existential leap into the void. This insight cuts through several traditional theological theories aiming to base faith on an objective sort of knowledge; instead, it places at the very center of faith the embracing of doubt and uncertainty as necessarily embedded in belief in God.

Discussion

It is with Kierkegaard's existentialist reinterpretation of faith that the ultimate, strong reply to the skepticism of modernity can be made. The existential approach gives faith in a world increasingly shaped by doubt and scientific inquiry one meaning—that rather than the avoidance of doubt, belief in it can be an act of tremendous courage: it completes the act of transcendence. And in that light, it has resonance with a modern human experience for which absolute certainty is beyond reach and faith must find its way through life's complexity. Kierkegaard's leap of faith, thus speaks

to a more fluid and dynamic explanation of belief which is, to date, far more relevant philosophically and theologically today.

### **3.4. The Problem of Evil and Suffering: An Existential and Theological Dialogue**

One of the most significant concerns in both theology and philosophy remains how a God who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good can possibly allow suffering. This is what is known as the problem of evil. Existentialism does directly address the meaning of suffering and the struggle of humanity to find meaning, particularly in the works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

Results:

The existentialist recasts the problem of evil in terms of the human response to suffering without trying to vindicate God's part in that suffering. It does not try to resolve the logical contradictions of the problem but underlines instead the human condition in confronting suffering and searching for meaning within an allegedly indifferent universe.

Discussion:

In conversation with classical theology, existentialism develops its complementary preoccupation with human agency and responsibility in response to suffering. While classical theodicies—be it Augustine's free will defense or Irenaeus's soul-making theodicy—attempt to explain why God allows evil, existentialism clears the way for finding meaning in suffering without appeal to metaphysical justifications. This existential dimension may help deepen theological reflections on the problem of evil by offering an answer that is more anthropological to one of the most perennially irritating challenges in theology.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

These research findings confirm that the new philosophical paradigms, particularly existentialism, phenomenology, and analytic philosophy, represent useful means for the reinterpretation of classic theological categories. In this respect, theology is in a position to engage contemporary philosophical issues without sacrificing the content of traditional belief by applying these modern lenses. Such continued engagement between classical theology and modern philosophy allows not only the enrichment of theological insight but also ensures its relevance in the modern intellectual context.

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