

# Science & Providence

*Science & Religion* conversation  
Episcopal Diocese of VA, Region IV



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Slides available at  
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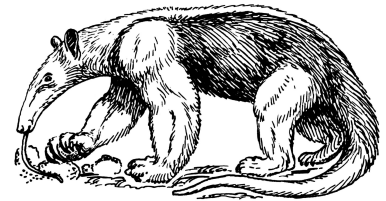
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# Outline: We will wrap our theological discussion in practical questions.



**Preparations: What is providence?  
Why is it important?**

**Models: How do theologians  
think about providence?**



**Takeaway: What do these  
ideas mean for my life of faith?**

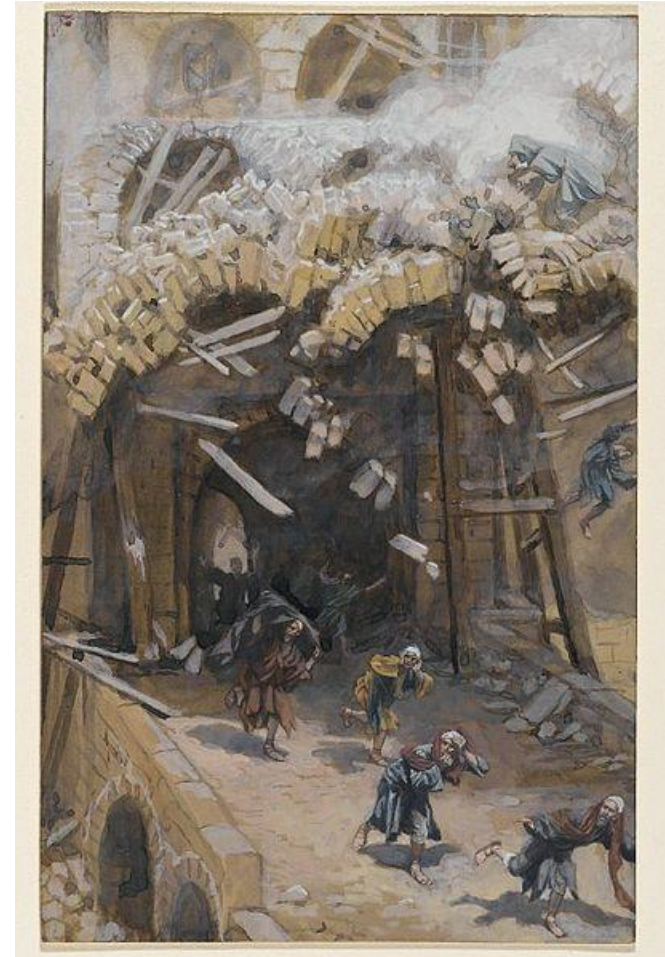
**Why care about  
providence?**

# Doctrine of providence examines 'relation of God to general experience.' [43]

**Q: How is God at work in the universe throughout history?**

**Q: How is God at work in *your life, right now?***

**Think of last week's session on miracles as a "case study" in providence & science.**



# Activity: Please share a story of God's work in your life.



**Connect with a neighbor and tell him or her about a time God "did something" in your life (10 minutes).**

# Providence matters because critics of faith attack it on scientific grounds.

Dawkins's critique: The universe (e.g., evolution) follows reliable physical laws; how could God "intervene"?



The image is a screenshot of a YouTube video player. The video is titled "Dawkins interviews Rowan Williams" and is uploaded by the channel "sdanaher". The video has 66,806 views, 364 likes, and 38 dislikes. The video player shows a progress bar at 0:11 / 4:43. The video content shows a man with grey hair, wearing a light blue shirt and a tan jacket, standing outdoors in a residential street. The video player interface includes a play button, volume control, settings, and a share button. Below the video player, there are buttons for "Like", "Storify", "About", "Share", and "Add to".

Screen shot of Dawkins-Williams video at [bit.ly/dawkins-williams](http://bit.ly/dawkins-williams)

**Providence matters because God's action is at the heart of our spiritual lives.**



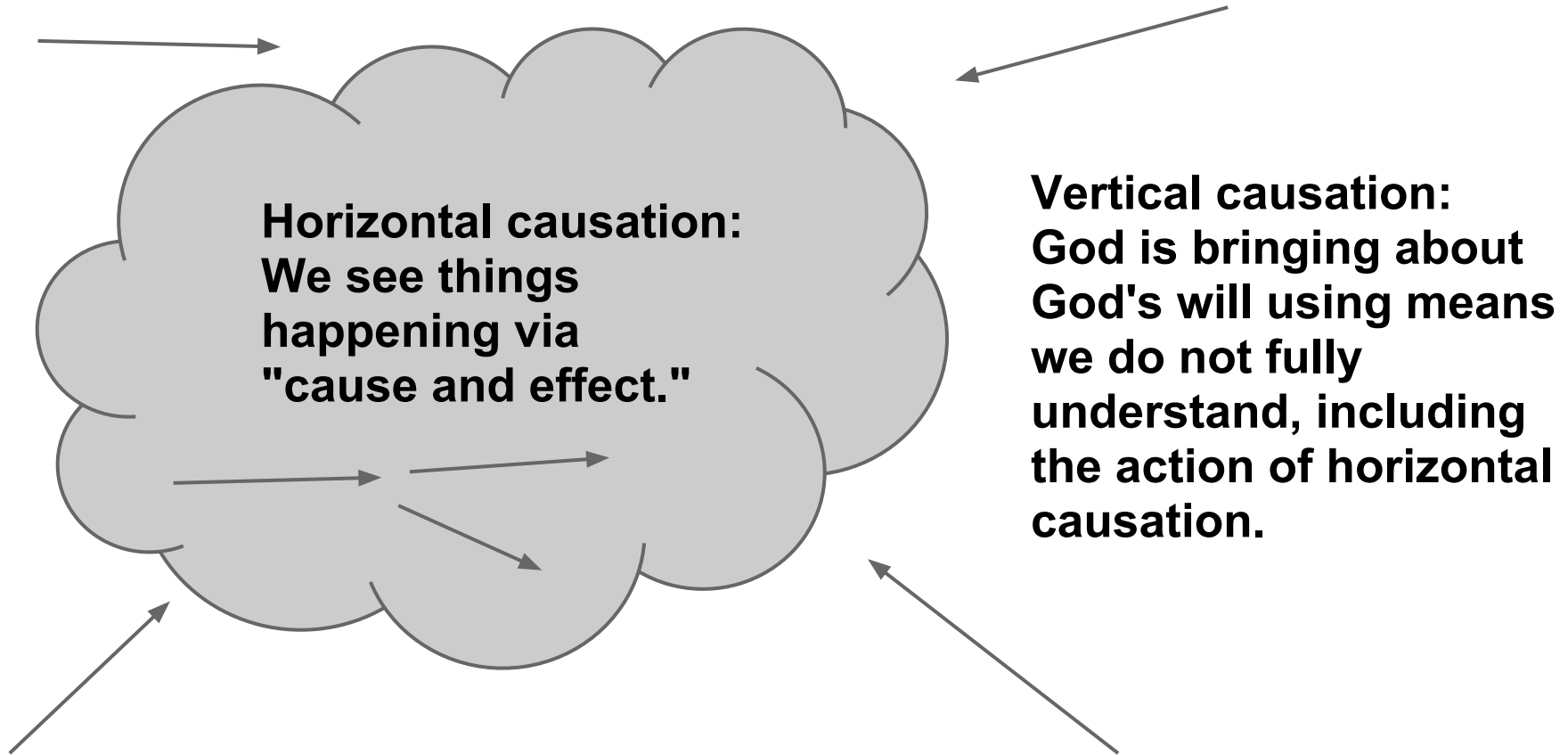
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# How might we think about providence?

3 models  
(though there are more)



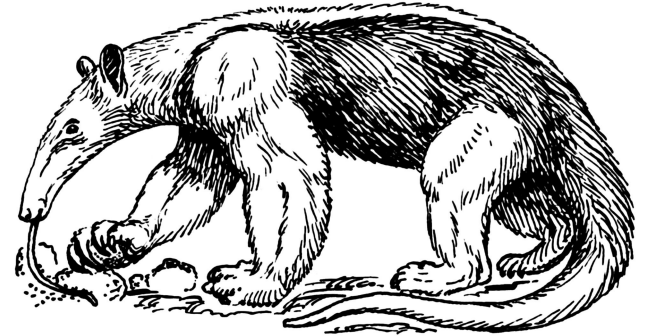
# ***Compatibilism: God is in complete control as primary cause of all that is.***



# Example: God doesn't 'meddle' in evolution; God directs it entirely.



Result of God's all-determining will =



## Pros

God always gets what God wants.

God's promises are entirely trustworthy.

Picture fits with what the Bible usually seems to say.

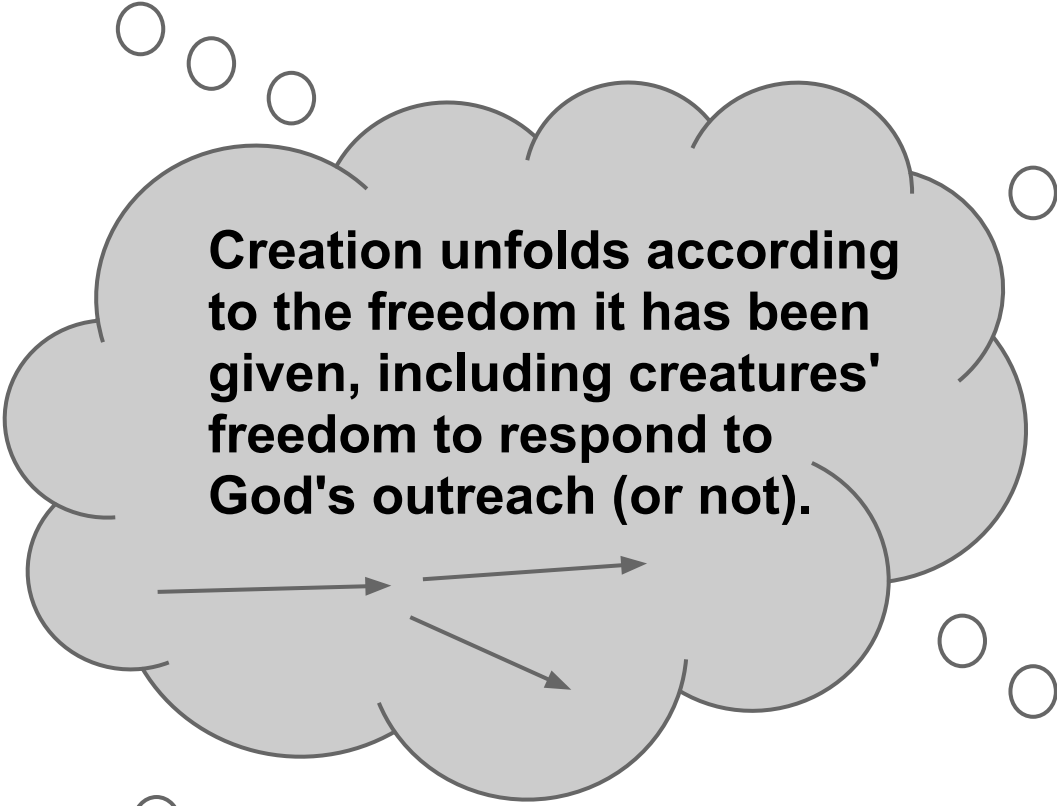
## Cons

God sometimes seems to want some cruel things.

Our experience of human freedom is untrustworthy.

**Picture conflicts with our observations of natural law.**

# ***General providence: God's will and action are universal, not particular.***



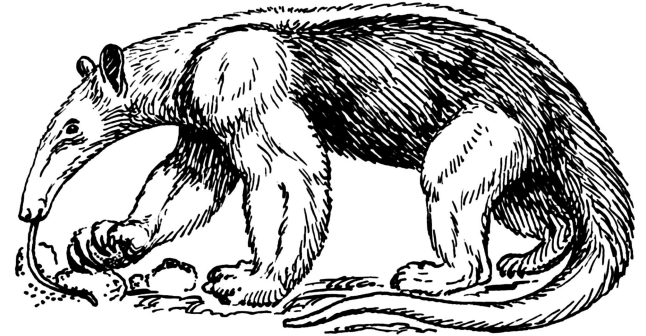
**Creation unfolds according to the freedom it has been given, including creatures' freedom to respond to God's outreach (or not).**

**God has universal purposes for creation and "broadcasts" a sense of divine spiritual outreach.**

# Example: God doesn't 'meddle,' but set evolution in motion and generally approves.



Result of a free physical process =



## Pros

God is not directly responsible for suffering.

Our experience of freedom is trustworthy.

**Picture fits with our observations of natural law.**

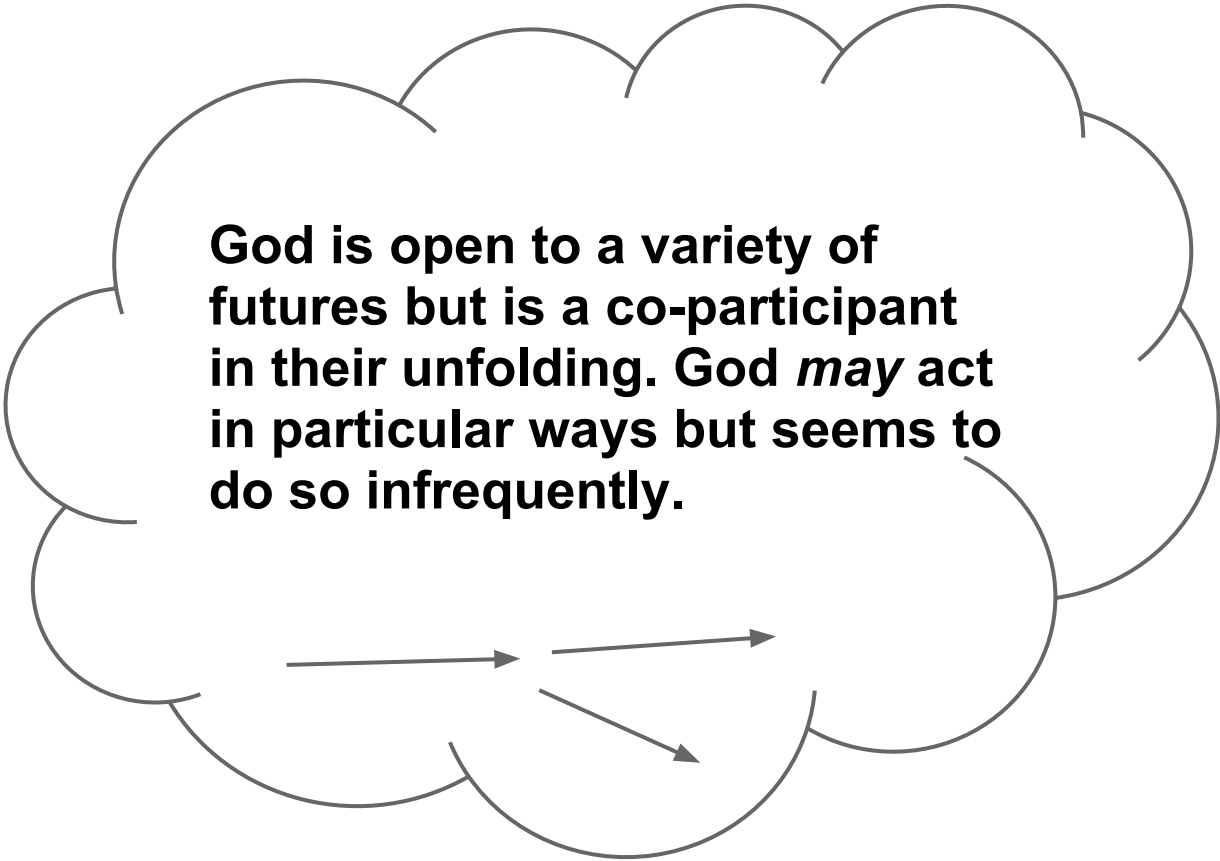
## Cons

God's will is sometimes frustrated.

God's promises seem to depend on free human action.

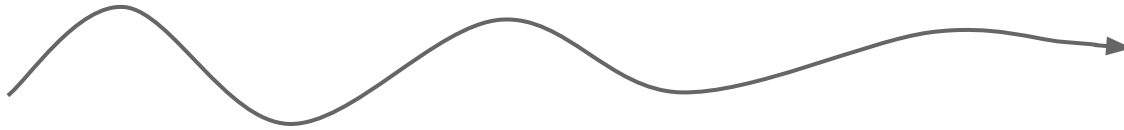
Picture conflicts with what the Bible usually seems to say.

# ***Open theism:* God's will and action can be particular, within self-imposed limits.**

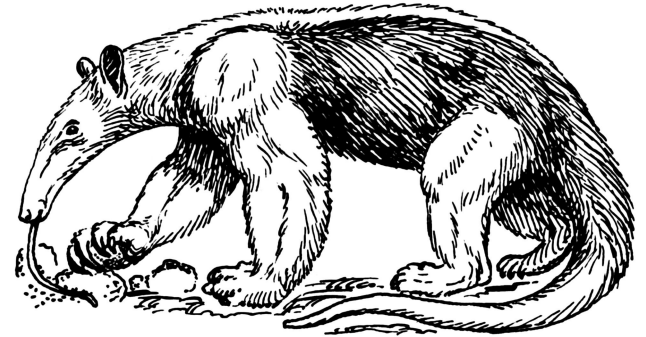


**God is open to a variety of futures but is a co-participant in their unfolding. God *may* act in particular ways but seems to do so infrequently.**

# Example: God might sometimes guide evolution, an indeterminate process.



Result of an *open* physical process =



## Pros

God is probably responsible only for necessary suffering.

Our experience of freedom and God's promises are probably trustworthy.

**Objective divine action may be possible within certain limits (think miracles last week).**

## Cons

God's will is sometimes frustrated.

**Certain divine actions still seem to require unusual manipulation of matter (incarnation, resurrection, etc.).**

**How should we live, given  
what we think?**

# Activity: Think back on your story from earlier.



**Does this divine action seem to "fit" with the model that resonates for you?**

**How does that feel?**



**We'll never know the "right answer." But each model suggests a virtue to cultivate.**

## **Compatibilism: Faith**

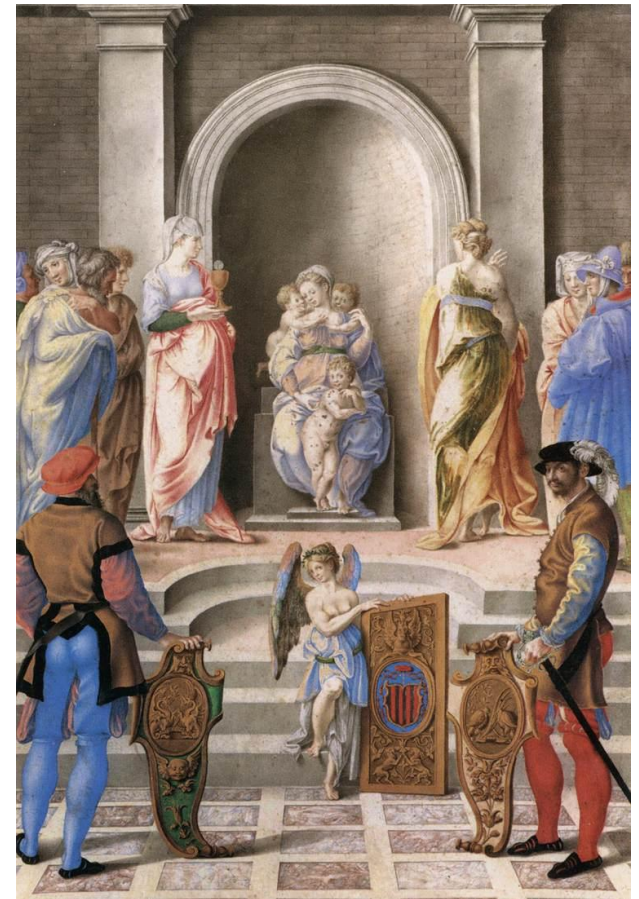
Hymn: "God is working his purposes out" (534)

## **Open theism: Hope**

Hymn: "Abide with me" (662)

## **General Providence: Love (*agape*)**

Hymn: "Come, labor on" (541)



# Check out these resources to learn more about science & providence.

- [Science & Providence](#) by John Polkinghorne
- [Divine Action](#) by Keith Ward
- Books I mentioned: [Helm](#), [Hick](#), [Hasker](#)
- [Counterbalance](#): "new views on complex issues"
- [BioLogos](#): "science and faith in dialogue"
- [My thesis](#): "Becoming truth about 'true becoming'"
- [My free online course](#): "Into a wider world"

# Check out the Center for the Ministry of Teaching for faith formation resources.



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