DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN CLASSIC ARMINIANISM
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I. Background to Classic Arminianism

    A. Jacob Arminius (1560-1609)

    B. The Remonstrance and the Synod of Dort (1618-1619)

    Five Points of the Arminian Remonstrance following Arminius's Death, and the Five Points of Calvinism (TULIP) Affirmed at Dort in response to the Remonstrance

    C. Definition of Classic Arminianism: Arminianism is "that form of Protestant theology that rejects unconditional election . . . , limited atonement, and irresistible grace because it affirms the character of God as compassionate, having universal love for the whole world and everyone in it, and extending grace-restored free will to accept or resist the grace of God, which leads to either eternal life or spiritual destruction" (Roger Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*, pp. 16-17).

II. Biblical Support

    A. Human Free Will (libertarian freedom) is assumed everywhere in the Bible

    Definition of Libertarian Freedom: We are free in choosing one thing if, all things being just what they are when we make our choice, we **could have chosen differently**. That is, libertarian freedom requires the so-called "power of contrary choice" or the "ability to choose otherwise."

    B. The Universal Love of God (e.g., John 3:16) rules out God selecting some and not others

    C. The Absolute Justice of God (e.g., Psalm 119:137; Hosea 14:9) means God can have nothing to do with evil

III. Arminian Understanding of Providence

    A. Nature of God's Relation to the World

1. The Arminian Argument

   God creates the world with **natural laws** and with moral creatures possessing **libertarian freedom**, which entails that God willingly and intentionally relinquishes some control that he might otherwise have over a significant portion of what happens both in the natural world and in human affairs.

2. Response

   God the "Gentleman" and implications to God's providential oversight of Natural Law and Human Affairs

   a. God's Gentlemanly Agreement in regard to **Natural Law** requires that God remain mostly "hands off" over natural disasters, since it trivializes natural laws to creates them as laws and then to micromanage them

   b. God's Gentlemanly Agreement in regard to **Human Affairs** requires that God remain mostly "hands off" over what free creatures choose to do, since it trivializes their libertarian freedom to first give them such freedom and then micromanage their use of it

   c. Who, then, is really in control of the world, over most of what happens in nature and what happens in human affairs? What kind of power does God exert in his providential oversight of human affairs?

B. Providence via Divine Foreknowledge in relation to Human Free Choices and Actions

1. The Arminian Argument

   "For if God foreknows all the choices that every person will make, he can make his own plans accordingly, fitting his purposes around these foreknown decisions and actions" (Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible Says about God the Ruler*, p. 208).

2. Response

   The Horns of the Dilemma for the Arminian view of Simple Divine Foreknowledge and Divine Providence

   a. If God exerts real and active providential control, then the future is "adjustable" and hence he cannot have known it

b. If God possesses real and actual exhaustive meticulous foreknowledge of every detail about the future of the world before he creates, then he cannot change any single feature since he **knows** precisely what every feature **will be**

c. The Pull toward Open Theism, "Middle Knowledge" Arminianism (Molinism), or Calvinism

C. Providence in relation to Good and Evil

1. The Arminian Argument

   Dealing with the Problem of (Moral) Evil: Two-Stage Argument

   a. Stage One: Free Will Argument – God cannot freedom (libertarian) to his moral creatures for the purpose of their using it for good without the possibility of their using their freedom, instead, for evil. This argument invokes the so-called "law of double effect."

   b. Stage Two: Greater Good Defense – Before God creates the world he knows that the use of freedom for good will be greater than its use for evil.

2. Response

   a. The Free Will Argument in relation to what might be called "the problem of goodness"

   b. Is the notion of Libertarian Freedom Coherent and Biblically justified?

   1) Coherence – If when we choose one thing, all things being just what they are when we make our choice, we could have chosen otherwise, this means that any reason or set of reasons we have for choosing one thing would be the **identical reason or set of reasons** for choosing, instead, its opposite.

   Libertarian Freedom reduces, then, to freedom that is arbitrary and random, what sometimes is called a "freedom of indifference"

2) Scripture – how can the many passages of Scripture indicating God's control over what free humans do be explained if the freedom we have is libertarian freedom? Indeed, how can the inspiration of the Bible itself be explained with libertarian freedom?

c. The Greater Good Defense and the Massive and Purposeless Evil of the Real World

D. Providence in relation to Salvation

1. The Arminian Argument

God's **Love** for all people and the **Justice** of His nature require that all people are able to accept God's gracious offer of salvation and God would not unfairly choose some while purposely overlooking others

2. Response

a. Response to the argument from God's Love – God's Love in the Bible is complex, not simple

b. Response to the argument from God's Justice – God's Justice alone would lead God to condemn all people to eternal punishment. That any is saved is grace, pure grace!

c. The Pull toward Inclusivism and a denial of the full reality of Hell

IV. Concluding Remarks

A. Facing the Unknown with the God who Knows but Doesn't Control the Future

B. Facing Suffering with the God who Knows but Doesn't Control the Future

C. Prayer and Hope with the God who Knows but Doesn't Control the Future