

'God is omniscient so therefore we cannot have free will' Discuss.

The God of classical theism has many attributes including that of being omnipotent. By this we understand God to be all powerful and have no limits. This is that God is all powerful and have no limits. God is also regarded to be eternal in other words not affected by time and transcendent meaning God is above and beyond earthly existence. Further attributes of the God of classical theism are he is flawless as he is perfect and possesses the highest good and finite attributes and omniscience which means God has the ability to know everything. God being omniscient presents a dilemma that I will expand upon in this essay. The problem is that if God knows all things throughout time (as he must, if he is omniscient), then he knows every action I perform, every decision I make throughout my life, before make them. If God knows what I am going to do, then how can I do anything other than that? This raises the questions of whether we then are morally to blame for doing wrong actions or whether we were simply determined to do this action, if so there can be no sense of punishment or blame. This then implies that people such as Hitler cannot be blamed for their actions because they were simply pre determined.

If it is God's plan that humans can choose to do bad this does not seem consistent with the view that God is omni-benevolent. Would a benevolent 'beneficent' God want us to suffer. A possible solution is that free will arises as part of a greater plan. God knows how we will use our free will and this is how he determines who is saved in salvation. Morality also requires free will and our ability to choose right and wrong.

Free will and determinism can be viewed in different ways. A hard determinist view is that we do not have free will. Every choice that is made can be explained by its prior causes. Hard determinism is incompatible with free will and moral responsibility. John Hospers, a hard determinist, believed there is always something which compels us externally and internally to perform an action that we would believe to be the result of our own free will. Modern versions of hard determinism point to our behaviour and genetics, as it has been observed that in certain situations we may be manipulated to choose a certain action. This is known as behaviourism.

Psychologists Ivan Pavlov conditioned dogs to salivate at the sound of a bell. Skinner used Pavlov's experiment to develop his theory of Operant Conditioning. Skinner used positive and negative reinforcement on animals to encourage the specific behaviour he wanted decrease the behaviour he did not want. Teaching in classrooms today rests on this principle with children given praise, when they do something well and withdrawal of privileges for undesirable behaviour. Skinner believed that every human action is the product of conditioning. Richard Taylor said "*I regard it as reasonable, then that if determinism is true no man has ever been morally responsible for anything he has ever done*". However, Nietzsche believed that the only reason we accept freedom is so people become

morally responsible rather than God if we were determined. If conditioning is true, an omniscient God would know and therefore we would not be held responsible for anything bad that we did. Morality would be reduced to how well an action measured to our conditional preferences.

Another approach towards the idea of freedom is Libertarianism. This is the view that we have complete responsibility for the actions we make as each of us are autonomous moral agents. Liberationists believe we have free will and determinism is incorrect. Jean Paul Sartre (1905- 1980) believed that freedom is the goal and measure of our lives. David Hume also argued that hard determinism commits a post hoc fallacy in saying that for example that as in nature event B consistently follows event A, this implies event A is the cause of event B. A counter view to both of the stances is the Compatibilist approach which is to say that free will and determinism can both exist. Compatibilists believe our actions are determined but that we are still morally responsible.

A possible answer to the dilemma of omniscience and free will. Libertarians believe we are free to choose from an open future, since the future has not yet happened it does not exist in reality. Something that does not exist cannot be known, only predicted. This is a limitation of time, not God. God has given us free choice so that we can choose our destiny even though he can predict what our destiny might be. This was well put by Arthur Prior *"I cannot see in what way the alleged knowledge, even if it were God's, could be more than correct guessing."* A presentist, possibilist view of time is consistent with God being omniscient.

An eternalist view of time that God knows the past present and future with God's omniscience leads to a stronger problem. As God knows in advance of me what decision I will make, it seems I have no freedom to do otherwise, this removes my freedom and responsibility. But just because my behaviour can be predicted this does not mean I going to act in this way because of it. The soft determinist idea is that we could have still chosen differently if we wanted to. We chose to make the choice out of our own desires without pressure or constraints from God and this means we are still responsible whether God predicted or not we still wanted to make this decision. However, this ignores the fact that if we are determined we are completely determined. The way we think, so then it is not out of our own desires but our determined mind that we chose to do a particular thing.

William James believed that our futures will be the result of the past and present and no other future is possible. This is known as the 'iron block universe'. Life according to the view of cause and effect developed within the cosmological argument for God's existence. Life consists of a causal chain with each link determining the next. If this is universal, then our future is fixed inevitable and unchangeable. We would have no moral autonomy if life was explainable by cause and effect. This implies free will is meaningless and according to Kant's theories, morality requires free will or it is not true morality.

Pre destination a belief of John Calvin's (1509-1564), is that humanity is divided into two groups, the damned and elect. The group determines your destiny after death, either heaven or hell, and is decided before you are born. It does not make a difference how you act according to this theory, whether bad or good. Nobody knows which group they are in. People were to act good because it was a sign of the elect group and a person from the elect would want to be good.

I am not able to reconcile the concept of a benevolent God with the idea that God would decide our fate before even knowing us. Moreover, it does not seem just that a moral person could end up in hell just because they were in the damned group. I believe our future destiny should rely on our own free will and choice's in life, even if God already knows our destiny.

In conclusion, I believe the best solution is that of the Libertarians that the future is not fact therefore God cannot know but predict. I do believe we are determined and can be manipulated but I still believe we have a sense of free will, When I make a decision I feel as though I'm making it for myself and even if this could be determined. I don't think it makes much of a difference in that I wanted to chose this decision either way. I don't think the dilemma here can ever be answered successfully as it seems the God's omniscience by definition is what changes. From God being all knowing to what God can know that is possible. God in the view of Anselm being 'the greatest possible being' to me should mean he is an eternalist and knows everything regardless of time.