

Divine Control & Human Freedom: Part 3

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Outline

- # What is Arminianism?
- # Theology of Arminianism
- # Incompatibilist (libertarian) freedom
- # Divine control
- # Criticisms
- # Implications

Some History

- # Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), Dutch theologian.
- # Arminius rejected Calvinism.
- # Remonstrants: early Arminians.
- # Synod of Dort (1618): condemned Remonstrants as heretical.
- # John Wesley: most significant proponent in 18th century.

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TCURP?

- # **T**otal depravity
- # **C**onditional election
- # **U**nlimited atonement
- # **R**esistible grace
- # **P**resent assurance of salvation.

[www.xenos.org/classes/principles/cpu1w6.htm]

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Depravity and Inability

- # Both Calvinists and Arminians affirm human depravity and original sin.
- # But there is a difference: In Arminianism, depravity refers to “the natural man” [Wesley], one who is utterly without God’s grace. But no such person exists. (In Calvinism, depravity is the condition of actual humans.)
- # Arminian “inability” is hypothetical.

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Election

- # God “wants” all to be save:
2 Pet. 3:9, 1 Tim. 2:4, Ezek. 18:23
- # Salvation conditioned on human act of belief:
Eph. 1:13, Gal. 2:16, Rom. 4:4,5
- # Predestination
 - Corporate
 - Service, not salvation
 - Conditional upon faith in Christ
 - Temporal

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Atonement

- # Traditional view: Christ's atonement is "substitutionary."
(Even Wesley affirmed this.)
- # Arminian view: atonement is "governmental" (Christ's death was not our *penal* substitution).

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Grace

- # Prevenient grace: God's grace that precedes salvation.
- # In Arminianism, prevenient grace is universal and overcomes hypothetical inability.
- # Hence, grace is resistable.

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Perseverance

- # Perseverance of the saints incompatible with apostasy passages in Hebrews?
- # Heb. 2:1-4; 3:7-4:11; 5:11-6:12; 10:26-39; 12:14-29.
- # What about Heb. 6:17-20, 7:23-25?

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Distinctives of Arminianism

- # Human freedom is “libertarian.”
- # Divine control is limited.
- # Divine foreknowledge is “simple.”

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Freedom in Arminianism

- # Libertarian freedom: Free acts are not caused by any sufficient conditions.
- # Most affirm the Principle of Alternative Possibilities.
- # Jer. 7:1-29 — God urges his people to repent, but they don't. (Surely they had the option of repenting or not.)

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Simple Foreknowledge

- # God has complete and infallible knowledge of the future.
- # How?
- # Innate knowledge.

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Divine Control in Arminianism

- # God uses His foreknowledge to exercise control over His creation, taking into account human free acts.
- # God's hands are "tied" by the free acts of humans.
- # Problem of divine agency.
- # Problem of divine providence.

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Some Criticisms

Libertarian Freedom?

- # “No verse in Scripture says that God decided to relinquish use of his power or control to make room for our free will.” [John Feinberg, “God, Freedom and Evil,” 2:466]
- # “Scripture never suggests that libertarian freedom, or lack of it, has any relevance at all to moral responsibility.” [John Frame, *No Other God*, p. 125]

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Libertarian Freedom?

- # Libertarian freedom: Indeterministic.
- # But does this really help?
- # If indeterminism is unrelated to human condition, then is freedom any different from a random event?
- # If indeterminism is related to human condition (e.g., given prevailing conditions, Adam is *likely* to sin), then have we really solved the culpability problem?

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Divine Providence?

- # Libertarian freedom enhances the free-will defense against the problem of evil.
- # But equipped only with simple foreknowledge, God's control seems very limited.
- # Can God really answer prayers?
- # Can God really choose to do good things for those who love him?

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Evangelism in Calvinism

- # Positive: **“Since Christ has elected people to salvation, I can persevere in witnessing with the confidence that I will be fruitful.”** Bill Bright, and many other effective missionaries have been motivated in this way.
- # Negative: **“If God has already decided who will be saved and irresistibly calls them, does it really matter whether I witness or not?”** This was the logic of those who told William Carey, “Sit down, young man! If God wants to save the people in India, he can well do so without your help.”

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Evangelism in Arminianism

- # Positive: **“I am motivated to share my faith because I know that more will be saved if I am faithful as Christ's ambassador.”** Arminianism makes it easy for Christians to believe that evangelism is both a privilege and a responsibility.
- # Negative: **“Evangelism is a heavy burden since my friend's salvation depends on my witness.”** Arminians need to be careful to fully emphasize God's will and non-Christians' responsibility as they evangelize.

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Summary

- # Arminianism: Full human freedom (libertarianism).
- # Divine control is limited.
- # Divine foreknowledge is simple.
- # Theological issues.

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Further Reading

- † R. A. Peterson and M. D. Williams,
Why I Am Not An Arminian,
InterVarsity Press, 2004.