Divine Foreknowledge, Divine Control, & Human Freedom: Part 2

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Outline

- What is Calvinism?
- Theological determinism
- Theological fatalism
- Some criticisms
Some History

- John Calvin (1509-1564): proponent and articulator of a particular theological tradition.
- Also: Augustine (354-430), Martin Luther (Calvin’s contemporary in the Reformation).
- “Augustinian-Calvinist” view.

Distinctives of Calvinism

- Divine control is absolute.
- Divine foreknowledge is a result of absolute divine control.
- Human freedom is not “libertarian.”
Calvinism’s Comeback

“…in the past two years Calvinism began emerging as an issue everywhere … this particular doctrine is being promoted far more widely and aggressively now than I was ever aware in the past.” [D. Hunt, 2002]

TULIP

- Total depravity
- Unconditional election
- Limited atonement
- Irresistible grace
- Perseverance of the saints

[www.mslick.com/tulip.htm]
Total Depravity

- Desperate condition of fallen sinners apart from God (Eph. 2:1)
- Human condition: Mark 7:21-23; Jer. 17:19; Rom. 6:20, 3:10-12; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:15, 2:3
- Only by God’s will: Jn. 1:12-13; Phil. 1:29; Jn. 6:28-29; Acts 13:48; Eph. 1:1-11; Rom. 8:29, 9:9-23
- Not much dispute among many Christian traditions.

Unconditional Election

- In His sovereign grace, God has chosen to rescue certain sinners.
- Eph. 1:4-8, Rom. 9:11, Rom. 9:15,21
- Unconditional: independent on God’s foreknowledge of person’s faith, obedience, etc.
Limited Atonement

 Christ died only for the elect.
 Matt. 26:28; Is. 53:12  ("many", not "all")
 John 10:11,15; Matt. 25:32-33; John 17:9; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25-27
 Hard Calvinists also affirm “double predestination.”

Irresistible Grace

 The elect cannot resist God’s grace.
 Rom. 9:16; Phil. 2:12-13; John 6:28-29; Acts 13:48; John 1:12-13
 Calvinists deny that God “forces” Himself on us, and that humans are still free.
Perseverance of the Saints

- The elect are eternally secure.
- John 10:27-28, 6:47; Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 10:13; Phil. 1:6
- Some non-Calvinists also affirm this notion.

Crux of Calvinism

- Theological determinism: The universe and everything in it (including humans and their free acts) are determined by God.
- Determined in what sense?
- Certainly not in the “naturalistic causal” sense, for this would destroy any meaningful free will.
Free Will: An Illusion?

DILBERT

By Scott Adams

MY MEDICATION MAKES ME HAPPY. DESPITE MY EXOSKELETON, BAD JOB, AND SOCIAL LIFE.

IF CHEMICALS CAN CHANGE THE WAY I THINK AND WHAT I ENJOY, THEN FREE WILL MUST BE AN ILLUSION.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR SOUL?

I'M AN ENGINEER.

Main Problem: Freedom

- In Calvinism, in what sense do humans have freedom?
- Whatever freedom means in Calvinism, it must be compatible with determinism.
- *Compatibilist* freedom.
- What is it, and what support is there for such a notion of freedom?
Compatibilist Freedom

- Claim: All actions are caused, even human free acts. (Principle of universal causality.)
- Martin Luther's *Bondage of the Will* and Jonathan Edwards' *Freedom of the Will*.
- Causes could be external or internal (e.g., a belief or a desire).
- Some argue that free acts are "self caused." (Doesn’t seem to help.)

Divine Control in Calvinism

- If compatibilist freedom is true, God can control everything but still allow human free acts.
- Basically, God sets up the conditions that causes people to act the way He wants.
Theological Fatalism

Claim: Divine foreknowledge rules out incompatibilistic freedom.


Divine foreknowledge not temporally necessary: power over the past.
[Okham, Plantinga, Fredosso]

Problem of Evil

Calvinists deny that God causes evil, but that He allows evil free acts.

But why? Why not set things up so that no evil free acts occur?

Standard answer: “free-will defense.”

Free-will defense is weakened by compatibilism.
Free Will and Culpability

- If compatibilist freedom is true, then why are humans morally responsible?
- Standard answer: it’s a mystery. But why isn’t it just a plain contradiction?
- What about 1 Cor. 10:13? Humans must have freedom to refuse God’s way out.

Summary

- Calvinism: Full divine control (theological determinism).
- Freedom is compatibilist.
- Theological fatalism: divine foreknowledge entails compatibilism.
- Problem of evil.
- Problem of culpability.
Final Remark

“All Christians are thorough Calvinists when they come to singing and praying!”

Further Reading