

The compatibility of God's foreknowledge and human free will

- And why the Calvinist "God" is a smaller God

In the Calvinistic-Deterministic worldview God determines everything, including the choices of every human being. God's foreknowledge of future events is complete, because God determines everything. Calvinists (Determinists) therefore deny Free Will, sometimes called Libertarian Free Will (LFW).

According to the proponents of LFW, a human being's choices are not coerced. If a human being makes a choice to act in a certain way, he *could have* refrained from doing so.

Calvinists deny the existence of LFW, because in their view God determines everything, which means, God, not man, also decides what any human being will choose to do.

One argument, frequently used by proponents of Calvinistic Determinism, is that Libertarian Free Will is incompatible with God's foreknowledge. *God knows what you are going to do tomorrow*, and therefore, *you are inevitably and necessarily going to act this way*. This is a logically incorrect argument, as I will try to show in this article.

The flow of this argument, often made by determinists, could be as follows:

The (flawed) argument against foreknowledge and free will:

Flawed Argument (I):

1. A certain person P is going to do a certain action A tomorrow.
2. God foreknows everything.
3. Therefore, God foreknows that P will do A tomorrow.
4. Therefore, P will necessarily do A.
5. Therefore, P cannot refrain from doing A.
6. Therefore, P has no Free Will.

Let us formulate the argument with an example instead of using "P" and "A", so it will be a little more easy to read:

Flawed Argument (II):

1. Adam is going to eat the fruit.
2. God foreknows everything.
3. Therefore, God foreknows that Adam is going to eat the fruit.
4. Therefore, Adam will necessarily eat the fruit.
5. Therefore, Adam cannot refrain from eating the fruit.
6. Therefore, Adam has no free will.

And now I will try to boil it down to just 3 statements to make the essence of the flawed argument easier to understand:

Flawed Argument (III):

1. It is necessarily true, that if God foreknows that Adam is going to eat the fruit, Adam is going to eat the fruit.
2. God foreknows that Adam is going to eat the fruit.
3. Adam is necessarily going to eat the fruit (he could not do otherwise!).

Now while proposition (1) is true, and given that (2) is true, (3) *does not follow!*

The *correct* conclusion would not be, that Adam is going to eat the fruit, but not that he necessarily is going to eat the fruit.

The Correct Argument (IV):

1. It is necessarily true, that if God foreknows that Adam is going to eat the fruit, Adam is going to eat the fruit.
2. God foreknows that Adam is going to eat the fruit.
3. Adam is going to eat the fruit.

It is correct to say, that because God foreknows that Adam is going to eat the fruit, Adam is going to eat the fruit, but not necessarily so!

The mistake made in the flawed argument is called the *fatalist fallacy*. To understand it correctly, we need to know a little bit about modal logic. In modal logic, statements that are necessarily true are preceded by a " \Box ". We assume also that an implication between two statements A and B is written as " $(A \rightarrow B)$ (A implies B)".

The faulty argument, stated with logical symbols (and its explanation) would be like this:

1. $\Box (A \rightarrow B)$ it is necessarily true, that if A is true, this implies B is true.
2. A A is true.
3. $\Box B$ therefore, B is necessarily true.

The conclusion " B is necessarily true" is false. The only thing we can safely conclude according to the rules of modal logic, is that B is true, but not that B is necessarily true.

The correct argument, stated with logical symbols is:

1. $\Box (A \rightarrow B)$ it is necessary, that if A is true, this implies B is true.
2. A A is true.
3. B therefore, B is true.

There is a confusion between two kinds of necessity, as Alvin Plantinga writes in his book "The Nature of Necessity". If God foreknows that Adam is going to eat the fruit, Adam is going to eat the fruit. This is necessarily true. Plantinga calls this necessity *de dicto*. "*It is necessarily true, if God foreknows that Adam is going to eat the fruit, then Adam is going to eat the fruit.*"

But "*Adam is necessarily going to eat the fruit*" is another form of necessity, which Plantinga calls necessity *de re*. If Adam would possess that kind of necessity, *he would not be able to refrain from*

eating the fruit. But in the argument, necessity *de re* does not follow from necessity *de dicto*, and therefore Adam's freedom to eat or not eat the fruit is not taken away by the fact that God foreknows, that he is going to do it.

The correct argument:

4. Premise 1: It is necessarily true, that, if God foreknows that Adam is going to eat the fruit, then Adam is going to eat the fruit.
5. Premise 2: God foreknows that Adam is going to eat the fruit.
6. Conclusion: Adam is going to eat the fruit (but he *could have done otherwise*).

The thing is that God's foreknowledge that Adam is going to eat the fruit *does not determine* that Adam is going to eat the fruit! It is actually the other way around: the fact that Adam is going to eat the fruit determines God's foreknowledge of that fact. So Adam does not eat the fruit because God knows that he is going to; on the contrary: God knows it, because Adam is going to eat the fruit.

It is a problem of what is the *cause* and what is the *effect*: God's foreknowledge does not cause Adam's free decision, but Adam's free decision causes God's foreknowledge of that decision. And if Adam would decide otherwise, God would also have known that in advance too!

When I was a kid I sometimes fell into the fatalist fallacy. Sometimes, when I had to make a decision about an action, I reasoned as follows: God knows already whether I am going to do A or not. Therefore A will happen or not happen. Therefore, it does not really matter what I do, because God already knows it anyway. God's knowledge would (within my mind) become the determinator which fixes the action because of God's foreknowledge. That was a mistake, as the reader hopefully understands now.

I have seen the fatalist fallacy frequently being used by Calvinists to argue for the impossibility of human freedom given God's foreknowledge of human choices. It is not a sound argument, so do not be intimidated by it anymore!

There is no logical contradiction between God foreknowing a human free act and man's free will in doing so. The argument of Determinists or Calvinists does not hold. The only thing left for the Calvinist to say is, then: "How does God foreknow the actions of truly free human beings?" Does their true freedom not imply, that God cannot know their choices in advance?

It is here, that those who believe in Libertarian Free Will, would appeal to *mystery*. *We don't know how God knows*, it is a mystery to us. But God knows, because he is all-knowing.

For the Calvinist, the "how" is quite easy to answer: God foreknows all, because he determines all. That is the end of it. Easy.

So to accept that there are human beings, who are able to make free will decisions, not caused by God, complicates the matter in a way. But that in itself is not a reason to reject it.

The Determinist (Calvinist) has a more difficult question to answer: How can God be good, if He determines everything, including the evil choices of every human being? Doesn't that make God

the author of evil? There is plenty of scripture that states that God is not the author of evil. But how can that be, if God determines everything, including the evil actions of devils and human beings? It is here, that Calvinists appeal to mystery: *We don't know*, but we believe that God is good, and not the author of evil, even if he determines evil to happen.

The two metaphysical choices we have is:

1. God has created human beings with Free Will, and God does therefore not determine everything. It is a mystery how God knows what free human beings will choose.
2. Human beings do not have Free Will, because God determines everything. It is a mystery why and how God is not the author of evil.

Now which of these two possible worlds has a more *powerful and sovereign* God? The God who knows everything because He determines everything or the God who does not determine everything, but nonetheless knows everything, even the free choices of human beings?

And which of these two worlds displays a *morally better* God? The God who determines everything and therefore somehow causes human beings to make evil choices, or the God who gives human beings the ability to choose between good and evil themselves?

I believe the answer to both questions must be: the God who endowed human beings with free will, seems at the same time more powerful *and* morally better. And therefore I do believe, and I desire to believe, that the God who created the universe, who is *all-powerful, all-knowing and all-good*, must be the God who chose to create human beings with Free Will.