

## The Compatibilism of an Omniscient God and Human Will

The relationship between free will and determinism is a matter of enormous existential significance that has long been examined by philosophers. While some reject the possibility of free will altogether, claiming that forces out of our control, such as the laws of nature, determine everything we do, others contend that, at the very least, free will cannot coexist with the omnipotent, omniscient being we call God. In his book, *The City of God*, early Christian writer St Augustine provides a succinct rebuttal to this mutually exclusive notion of human freedom and God, particularly with respect to the conjectured incompatibilism of God's foreknowledge and human freedom. In essence, St Augustine's argument soundly demonstrates that although freedom of human will and the existence of an omniscient God are not certain, both can coexist.

God's foreknowledge does not necessitate fate as it is commonly conceived of by philosophers. In *Human Freedom and Divine Providence*, St Augustine refutes the argument that prescience and human will cannot coexist, primarily as presented by Cicero, a believer in human free will but not of an omniscient God. Cicero draws his conclusion for God's inexistence by working backwards from the existence of free will. His argument, as explained by St Augustine, is that "if free will exists, then all things do not happen according to fate; if all things do not happen according to fate, there is not a certain order of causes; and if there is not a certain order of causes, neither is there a certain order of things foreknown by God" (Augustine 2007, 309). Cicero's notion of fate is that of an unavoidable chain of causes in which every event is determined by some former cause with no room for human will. However, as St Augustine shows, God's foreknowledge does not necessarily imply this sort of fate. St Augustine does not deny that foreknowledge implies a chain of causes and events, but that human will can be included in such a chain so that all efficient causes revolve around will. St Augustine provides religious support to this interpretation of God's foreknowledge and fate by explaining that "fate" is derived from the word "fari," to speak, and that according to the sacred Scriptures, "God hath spoken once; these two things have I heard, that power belongeth unto God..Thou wilt render unto very man according to his works." As St Augustine explains, "Once God Hath spoken" means he speaks immovably just as he knows unchangeably what will happen (Augustine 2007, 310). So God's "spoken word," His will, creates this causal order in which human wills are included. To put into other words, our will is not impacted by God's prescience because our wills, guided by our own desires and inclinations, are themselves included in God's foreknowledge and its resulting chain of causes; God's foreknowledge is not ignorant of our wills. Since God foreknows the power of our wills, and God does not foreknow nothing, then our wills must have power (Augustine 2007, 311).

Foreknowledge does not imply the preordination of will. It is certain that everything that will happen will happen; there is only one chronology of events that will occur, while an infinite amount of timelines of events that won't. This notion is evident when examining the past instead of the future. There is only one, albeit undoubtedly complex, narrative of everything that has happened. So how would having knowledge of a particular timeline of events before they happened change, or strip, the human wills exercised to make these particular events come to fruition? The answer is that it wouldn't. Cicero, a believer in the freedom of human will but not in that of a prescient God, would surely hold that human-involved events, such as World War II, are a result of human wills and inclinations. If I were to time travel to the period preceding World War II, effectively giving myself foreknowledge of events that have yet to happen, how would I have any effect on these same human wills postulated by Cicero? The answer, again, is that I wouldn't. The predominant idea in this analogy is that foreknowledge does not imply preordination. My foreknowledge of World War II would not imply that I ordained the human wills of those involved. This notion is consistent with St Augustine's conception of God's foreknowledge and will as he describes God as He who "is believed to know all things before they come to pass and to leave nothing ordained" (Augustine 1950, 8). Thus Cicero's contention that human will, if it exists, is threatened by foreknowledge, is once again shown to be absurd.

God's existence does not subject our wills to any "necessity" incompatible with the freedom of our wills. In analyzing St Augustine's literature I have shown that the power of our wills, if they exist, would not be influenced by the existence of God. However, one may still contend that the aforementioned causal order implicit in God's existence, would subject our wills to a necessity that would inhibit their freedom. For instance, if God foreknows a future action of mine, and that I will have the will to do it, doesn't this imply that I *must* will to do said action? The subtle distinction between this objection and those formerly addressed, is that this one emphasizes the necessity of the will, instead of the outcome. In other words, if I must commit an action regardless of my will, then my will has no power, but if I must will to commit an action, then my will has no freedom. Just like there are sophisms embedded in the former as it relates to God's existence, the latter is also not an accurate reflection of how God's existence would influence my will. In the same piece, St Augustine counters this view in explaining that what we are subject to do by necessity "is not in our power" (Augustine 2007, 311). For example, despite my will to do otherwise, it is necessary that I will die; it is not in my power. However, the objection under review is inherently paradoxical because my will, by definition, is my power. Therefore attempting to attach necessity to my will is equivalent to stating that which is within my power, is not in my power: a nonsensical statement. In essence, St Augustine cogently wraps up this matter by saying "we do not do by will that which we do by will because [God] foreknew that we would do it" (Augustine 2007, 309).

In conclusion, in his "Human Freedom and Divine Providence," St Augustine demonstrates the compatible nature of the existence of God and the freedom of human will. While he provides no proof for either in this piece, he shows that the two are not existentially contradictory. Without the ideas presented by St Augustine, believers in the existence of God would be forced to accept that human will is an illusion, and that they therefore have no moral responsibility for their actions. Such is contradictory to the concept of God, as it is not in His nature to punish those for actions which they have no control over.