

**ALL THAT THE FATHER GIVES ME SHALL COME TO ME: RE -
INTERPRETING THE TENSION BETWEEN DIVINE PREDESTINATION
AND HUMAN FREEWILL**

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DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.28191.89765

Abstract

The tension between divine predestination and human freewill is perennial and hydra headed because of its unending controversy in theological and philosophical discourses. Various scholars have attempted to resolve this tension but their efforts seem not to yield the desired result. The tension arises as to whether God could predestine an individual to a particular fate and the individual is still free to choose, perhaps, a different fate for himself. In other words, is there no dissonance when we say that a thing is bound to happen and that the actor is not bound to act? Again, if the omnipotent God wills all men to be saved, does this not contradict the position of some philosophers and theologians that God has predestined some people to be saved while the rest of mankind is consigned to damnation? Or does he will that only a certain set of people (the elect) would be saved and the rest to be damned? Several Biblical texts contain these divergent positions which pose some epistemological problems. Some are in favour of predestination while others convey the notion of freewill. In other words, some can be said to advocate divine predestination while others could be alleged to defend human freewill. This has given rise to different schools of thought. Some hold on to predestination while others hold on to freewill. But holding on to either of the positions seems to be holding on to half truth and the danger is that one may be holding on to the wrong half. This paper is intended to re-examine this controversy in order to see if it is possible and tenable to propose a hallowed relationship between divine predestination and human freewill. The paper would be of great benefit to man who is always curious about metaphysical issues. It would also provide a framework for the right action for the anthropos in the cosmos.

Key words: Predestination, Freewill, Determinism, Election, Foreknowledge

Introduction

The tension between divine predestination and human freewill is perennial and hydra headed because it seems to defy all theological and philosophical approaches. Various scholars have attempted to resolve this tension but their efforts seem not to yield the desired result. The tension arises as to whether God could predestine an individual to a particular fate and the individual is still free to choose, perhaps, a different fate for himself. This tension is clearly portrayed in the Gospel of John 6:37 as found in the Judeo - Christian Bible where Christ said, "All that the father giveth me shall come to me and he that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out" (KJV). The passage, no doubt, conveys the notion of predestination and freewill. But is it possible to reconcile these concepts? Can we propose a union, perhaps, a hallowed one between them? According to the first part of the passage, if the father chooses me, I will come. But the second part claims that if I come, I would not be cast out. So whether I am chosen or not, if I come, I would be accepted. Could this second part also mean that if I come, I am chosen? But can one come when he is not predestined or chosen? Some scholars have taken the first half of this Biblical text while others adopted the second half. Those who have pitched their tents with one half have clung to half truths. And half truth is dangerous because the individual may be clinging to the wrong half. These are some of the controversies we intend to examine in this paper. A proper interpretation of these concepts is important to guide man in his relationship with the divine and in his approach to life's endeavours.

Conceptual Framework

One of the concepts in our subject matter is predestination. This concept of predestination is usually approached from theological, philosophical and traditional perspectives. The word "Predestination comes from the Latin word *praedestino* which is used in the Latin Vulgate to translate the Greek word *Poorizo*, which means, essentially, "to decide upon beforehand" (Chad Brand, 2003). The implication of the above definition is that there are causal laws or events that precede an individual's action and determine those actions. In other words, what an individual would do and would become had already been determined before the individual was born. By extension, it means that what must be must be in spite of prevailing circumstances. For Adegbite (2015) predestination means that some people were bound to be saved while others were bound to perish.

As we mentioned earlier, there are philosophical, theological and traditional perspectives on predestination. The philosophical perspective sees predestination as a form of determinism which means that every event is determined by antecedent events or factors. That is, whatever we do today is not up to us because it was not up to us yesterday. The theological perspective views predestination as God's purpose in grace directed toward those whom He will ultimately save to the uttermost (Chad Brand, 2003). This position makes allusion to Romans 8:29-30 and Ephesians 1:3-6. It may be proper to state the passages hereunder:

For those He foreknew He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His son, so that He would be the first born among many brothers. And those He predestined He also called, and those He called He also justified, and those He justified, He also glorified. Romans 8:29-30 (KJV).

From the above Biblical text, God predestined those He foreknew, justified them and glorified them. This position poses some philosophical problems. In the first place, is it those God foreknew would do good works that He predestined to be saved? Or he chose those to be saved out of his own volition while condemning others in eternal damnation? If the second poser is true, then it means that He gave some reprobate minds so that they would not repent and be saved. Perhaps, Apostle Paul's statement in Ephesians 1:3-6 may answer some of these posers. In this text Paul uses both the term "predestine" and "chosen" (*eklogomai*) in a synonymous fashion. First, in verse four he observes that God chose "us", in this instance, believers in Christ before the foundation of the world. Second, Paul says this election was in Him" (That is Christ). Third, this election has the goal "to be holy and blameless in His sight." Fourth, He predestined us in love" (v.5). Fifth, this predestination was unto our adoption as children. Sixth, the predestination was "according to His favour and will" (v.5). Seventh, such predestination causes us to praise "His glorious grace" (Chad Brand, 2003). The implication of Brand's view is that predestination is an act of God's choice.

Similarly, St Augustine conceives predestination as the destination of one who is. It is therefore of one who actually exists, and it thus places something on the one who is predestined. He further maintains that predestination is the fore

knowledge of God's benefits. But foreknowledge is not in the things foreknown, but in the person who foreknows them (*De Praed Sanct.* 11.14). Therefore, predestination is in the one who predestines, and not in the predestined. For Augustine, there is a relationship between predestination and grace for grace does not come into the definition of predestination, as something belonging to its essence, but inasmuch as predestination implies a relation to grace, as of cause to effect, and of act to object whence it does not follow that predestination is anything temporal (*De Confesiones* 1.9.3). On whether God reprobates any man, St. Augustine argues that God does not reprobate any man, adding that "To no one ought anything to be imputed which he cannot avoid." But he posits that God reprobates some, for as God ordained some to eternal life through His providence, it is likewise part of that providence. This is the notion of double predestination enunciated by St Augustine. This proposal was designed to maintain Augustine's view of divine grace while attempting to free God from being responsible for evil deeds and imposing on freewill. But why God chose to redeem some men and consign others to damnation (even if it was done of his freewill) is still in the realms of mysteries

This notion of double predestination could be traced back to his early exegesis of the Epistle to the Romans written in 394/5, *Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistula ad Romanos* (Tianyue Wu, 2018). In the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, Paul clearly mentions that God calls and foreordains those who are to be saved. He said:

For those whom he previously (*ante*) foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, in order that he might be the first born among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified (Romans 8:29-30, New Revised Standard Version).

According to Tianyue Wu (2018), the temporal adverb "previously" (*ante*) in St Paul's words suggests a logical (if not a temporal) difference between divine foreknowledge and predestination. In contrast, St Augustine prefers to emphasize the unity between these two different descriptions of divine agency upon human affairs: "He does not predestine anyone unless (*nisi*) he foreknows that this person will believe and follow his call, and he calls them the elected. It

shows, from Augustine's perspective, that the operation of predestination not only presupposes foreknowledge but is completely based upon the divine foreknowledge of future belief. With respect to the effective role of divine agency upon human freedom, St Augustine does not seem to assign a specific role to the predestined. The problem with St Augustine's view is that Jacob would be blessed whether he does something or not. Also, predestination works like manipulation.

St Augustine further contends that unlike faith and good works that are brought about by divine providence, our sins are based on blameworthy dispositions of the will which are foreknown but not predestined by God. It is certain that we will when we will, but he causes us to will what is good, for the will is prepared by the lord (Augustine, *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, 16, 32). However, in evil doing the divine agency limits itself to the pure cognition of what happens in the world, which is causally external to our decisions and actions. God is not the author of evil doings. An evil will is the efficient cause of an evil action, but nothing is the efficient cause of an evil will (Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XII, 6). A good will to believe is always a direct result produced by prevenient grace, he said.

The argument of St. Augustine can be stated logically as follows:

- (1) Yesterday God infallibly believed T. (Supposition of infallible foreknowledge)
- (2) If E occurred in the past, it is now - necessary that E occurred then (Principle of the necessity of the past).
- (3) It is now-necessary that yesterday, God believed T. (1,2)
- (4) Necessarily, if yesterday God believed T, then T (Definition of infallibility).
- (5) If p is now - necessary, and necessarily (p-----q), then q is now - necessary (Transfer of Necessity Principle)
- (6) So it is now - necessary that T. (3, 4, 5).
- (7) If it is now -necessary that T, then you cannot do otherwise than answer the telephone at 9am. (Definition of necessity)

- (8) Therefore, you cannot do otherwise than answer the telephone at 9 am tomorrow (6, 7).
- (9) If you cannot do otherwise when you do an act, you do not act freely (Principle of Alternative Possibilities)
- (10) Therefore, when you answer the telephone tomorrow at 9am, you will not do it freely (8,9)

According to O'Connor Timothy and Christopher Franklin (2017), this argument is formulated in a way that makes its logical form as perspicuous as possible, and there is a consensus among many philosophers that this argument or something close to it is valid. That is, if the premises are all true, the conclusion follows. The compatibilist about infallible knowledge and freewill must therefore find a false premise. There are four premises that are not straightforward in definitions. These are premises (1), (2), (5) and (9). Premises (1) and (2) have been severely attacked in the history of discussion of theological fatalism. Premise (1) has been denied by Boethius and Aquinas on grounds that God and His beliefs are not in time, a solution that has always had some adherents (O'Connor Timothy *et al* 2017). The Ockhamist solution proposed by William of Ockham denied premise (2) on the grounds that the necessity of the past does not apply to the entire past, and God's past beliefs are in the part of the past to which the necessity of the past does not apply. That is, God's past beliefs belong to the soft past and not the hard past. This solution, like others have some contemporary proponents. Some contemporary philosophers have argued against premise (9) by maintaining that the denial of (9) is consistent with maintaining that human beings have libertarian freewill, the kind of freewill that is incompatible with causal determinism (Zagzebski, 2002). It has been proposed that St Augustine had a form of this solution (Hunt 1999), although it was not attributed to him historically. The denial of (9) is due to the contemporary debates on the relation between freewill and the ability to do otherwise. Premise (5) has rarely been disputed and it is an analogue of an axiom of modal logic. It seems premise two may be denied in a more radical way than the Ockhamist solution.

In a related development, Florus of Lyons proposed seven rules of faith which are in support of St Augustine's doctrine of divine foreknowledge and

predestination. They are: God's foreknowledge and predestination are eternal and unchangeable, no act of God was not foreknown and foreordained, God did not foreknow some but foreordain others, good works belong to the creature in a way that are altogether the works of the creator while evil works are foreknown but not predestined, and God did not impose necessity on anyone by his foreknowledge and predestination (*On three Epistles* 1-3).

Let us now turn our attention to the concept of freewill. Freewill has been conceived differently by different scholars. For Uduigwomen and Ozumba (2005) freewill is the philosophical and ethical explanation that holds the freewill of man. It holds that man is free to choose from alternative course of action. A freewill action, according to them, is characterized by (i) Absence of constraints (ii) Presence of alternative courses of actions, and (ii) the rationality of the agent. Vanarragon (2010) sees freewill as the ability to make choices in such a way that we are the authors of them and are morally responsible for making them. The view enunciated by Vanarragon here is that man is the architect of his actions and should be liable for them. Therefore, to trade blames or to consign one's actions to an influence beyond the individual's ability is a nullity. The ability to make choices presupposes that the will is free.

Mautner (1996) illustrates the idea of freewill, thus: I am not free to pick an apple from this tree if an angel with a flaming sword blocks my path. Again, in a different setting, I am not free to do so this time because there is no apple. In the first instance, there is interference and in the second there is no opportunity. The above illustration elucidates part of the controversy that trails the definition of a free human action. In the view of Adegbite (2015), freewill is often used to describe a state of the will, which is regarded as poised between choices, uninfluenced by external pleasures. Some refer to this as the torment of indecision and hence define freedom as the ability to be one's true self. Many freewill defenders are opposed to determinism, hence, see determinism as an illusion. These scholars hold that human actions are free or that freedom of human action is possible. They believe in the existence of human freedom. For Omoregbe (2012), freedom is the capacity of self-consciousness, that is, the capacity to decide what to do. He contends that man is by nature free; freedom is part of his very nature as a rational being, and to lose one's rationality (for instance by insanity) is to lose one's freedom. He further states that a free action is an action which man chooses to perform and which he could also choose not to

perform. The existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre (1903-1980) was an avowed proponent of the freedom of human actions. His statement in (Uduigwomen & Ozumba, 2005) that “Man has been condemned to be free and is not free to cease being free” is the extent to which he believed in human freedom. At the core of his philosophy is the strong view and unbending stance on human freedom and personal responsibility. He agrees with the determinists that every action has a cause, but disagrees with the view that it is caused or determined. This is because everybody freely decides how to respond to the cause (Omoregbe, 2011).

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) whose importance in the history of western philosophy cannot be undermined or overstretched is another advocate of freedom. Kant in Omoregbe (2012) sees freedom as a genuine concept and a necessity for morality. Hence, he said “I make sense of my existence when I am moral and I can only be moral when I am free.” What Kant means in his position on freedom is that the question of morality arises because man is free. In other words, if man is not free to choose from alternative courses of action, why then do we ask him to do the right thing when we know he couldn’t have done otherwise? Also why blame or punish an individual for doing something that is wrong but which he was compelled or constrained to do?

According to Corliss Lamont, the man who is convinced that he possesses freedom of choice or freewill has a greater responsibility than a person who thinks that total determinism rules the universal human life (Corliss Lamont, 2000). Determinism in the classic sense means that the flow of history, including all human choices and actions, is completely predetermined from the beginning of time. The problem with determinism is that anyone who believes that “whatever is, was to be” can attempt to escape responsibility for wrongdoing by claiming that he was compelled to act the way he did because it was predestined by the iron laws of cause and effect. But if free choice truly exists, men would clearly have full moral responsibility in deciding between two or more genuine alternatives, and the deterministic *alibi* would not have any weight. There is the immediate, powerful common sense intuition shared by virtually all human beings that freedom of choice is real. The intuition of free choice does not, of course, in itself prove that such freedom exists, but that intuition is so strong that the burden of proof is on the determinists to show that it is based on an illusion.

Finally, if determinism were true, many words would lose their meaning. Such words as *refraining*, *forbearance*, *self-restraint*, and *regret* would have to be expunged in our English lexicon or be redefined. You can truly forbear when only you can refrain from doing something that it is possible for you to do. It is not, Corliss opines, that nature necessarily conforms to our linguistic usages, but human language habits that have evolved over *aeons* of time cannot be neglected in the analysis of free choice and determinism (Corliss, 2000). He, therefore, asserts that the term moral responsibility cannot retain its traditional meaning unless freedom of choice exists.

The problem of determinism and freewill continues. But it is the notion of some philosophers that the problem is that of semantics. In their view, if you make use of the wrong definition, you would arrive at the wrong conclusion. When we say freewill is incompatible with determinism, these philosophers regard our position or judgment as deriving from an erroneous definition of the concepts. According to them, the dispute is just a verbal confusion about the meanings of words. Walter T. Stace holds this view tenaciously. Suppose, Walter said, someone believed that the word "man" means a certain sort of five-legged animal; in short that "five-legged" animal is the correct definition of man. He might then look around the world, and rightly observing that there are no five-legged animals in it, he might proceed to deny the existence of men. This preposterous conclusion would have been reached because he was urging an incorrect definition of "man" (Walter Stace, 2000). Walter continues.

All you would have to do to show him his mistake would be to give him the correct definition; or at least show him that his definition was wrong. Both the problem and its solution, would, of course, be entirely wrong. In the same way, the problem of freewill and determinism is verbal in exact sense. The problem is created by the wrong definition of freewill by learned men, including philosophers. Having taken a wrong definition of freewill, they expectedly, find nothing in the whole world that answers their definition. Their conclusion is as absurd as the man who denies the existence of men. The only difference is that the mistake in the later case is obvious and crude, while the mistake which the deniers of freewill have made is subtle and difficult to detect (Walter Stace, 2000).

From the foregoing discourse, it becomes obvious in the light of Stace's position that our inability to have a correct definition of these concepts informs our problems. For instance, let us suppose that a free action means an action has a cause but is not determined. Then, the controversy between determinism and freewill immediately vanishes from scholarship. This is what Walter Stace actually means. And there is some level credibility with this view.

The Dichotomy between Predestination and Human Freewill

St Augustine's doctrine of the compatibility between predestination and freewill brings the controversy under consideration to the fore. In his view, election does not preclude human freedom. By this argument he tried to bring two polar ends together. He attempted to reconcile what seems irreconcilable. His position has been severely criticized. The basic question is, "Does predestination preclude human freedom?" If things must be as they were predestined, are we wrong to say that predestination is a universal blocker? If what I would do had been determined long before I was born, am I free to do otherwise? When God chose Jacob instead of Esau at the time they were not yet born, was it not an act of partiality? If God had chosen those to be saved, before they were born, who is to blame if they were doomed? God or the individual? We shall do some evaluation in the section that follows to provide some plausible explanations to the above posers.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The statement "All that the father gives me shall come to me: and he that comes to me I will in no wise cast out" which portrays the idea of predestination and freewill can be reconciled. The first part, as we said earlier, portrays the notion of predestination while the second part depicts the idea of freewill. In our view, if God chooses an individual, the person would be saved. Also, if an individual comes to God of his own volition or freewill, then he is chosen. It is then clear that freedom is involved even in predestination. Why do we say so? Even the first part of the sentence that we alleged speaks of predestination still involves freewill, for there is a coming, and this implies human effort. But most importantly, if we come, we are chosen.

We contend in this study that most of us are freewillists in practice but determinists in theory. Most Church rules and regulations have freewill undertone but arrayed in predestination garb. Is there any Church that ever

acquitted a person who committed adultery and claims that he did so because he was predestinated? Under normal circumstances, the Church would mete the appropriate sanctions on the person. There are Churches whose articles of faith include this notion of double predestination. The Church of Nigeria, as we said earlier, is a glaring example. But the Church's liturgy regularly calls sinners to repentance with the hope that "Whosoever willeth, may come." There is therefore, the need for the Church to reconsider this article of faith.

Parents punish their children for lying or stealing or for disobeying their instructions and reject their excuses that their sins were determined. No father ever absolved a child who stole and claimed that he did not have the freewill to refrain from stealing; and he did not have the freewill because he was predestined to be a thief. Our laws and law courts are arranged with the freedom of the will in perspective. Prosecutions are carried out based on the acts of the individual in line with the laws of the land. Our customs reward and punish people on the basis of their choices and actions and not only the basis of predestination.

We reject the notion of double predestination enunciated by St Augustine of Hippo that God has predestined some persons to be saved and others to be damned. There is no logic in that assertion. If God predestines some persons to be damned, who would be responsible for their damnation? Would God be just if he punishes them for not being saved when they could not do otherwise? This argument may not be strong enough when we recall that God, according to St Paul, wishes all men to be saved (1Timothy 2:4). Is it possible for God to wish all men to be saved when he has predestined some to be doomed? Also, if God had elected those to be saved, why do we engage in evangelistic and missionary enterprise and pray for people to be saved? If election were true without our works, then all these efforts would be futile because the elected must finally come to him. Further, it is wrong to argue that atonement is for some people. Atonement is for all but appropriating the atonement is by faith in Christ.

Often times, the letter of St Paul in Romans 9:15-18 that God would have mercy upon whom he would have mercy, is referenced in support of double predestination. But this is a wrong use. The passage speaks of God's volition in deciding what the fate of the individual in terms of the circumstances of his life,

the level of attainments, among others would be. We cannot all be rich. We cannot all excel at the same degree. We may not be equally intelligent. We may be the last to begin a task, but God's mercy can distinguish us from others and we become the first to accomplish the task. The mercy and favour of God can make an individual who puts in little effort to achieve greater results than the one who puts in much. In the context of the text, Jacob and Esau had not yet been born, but God said the "Elder shall serve the younger." This is a clear example of distinguishing grace but not of election to salvation or to damnation. From our personal experiences, we have seen those who are younger than us do better under than us certain criteria. This is the reality of life and it is the kind of predestination that Paul spoke about.

We do not contend in this study that actions do not have a cause. But that between the cause and the effect, the will has the autonomy to make a choice. This is not to say that there are no predisposing factors like our environment, training and psychology and even predestination. But that what is learned can be unlearned; what is in the environment, can be discarded; what is in our psychology can be changed and what is predestined can only come into effect when we act. We may conclude our paper with the example of Malachi and his friend, John. Malachi borrowed the sum of N1, 500.00 from John. One day Malachi met his friend with the money in his hand and said, "Tell me, John, if it is God's will that I should repay this loan." John replied, "Put it in my hand and I will tell you." In other words, if we are predestined, we would act and if we act, we are predestined.

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