

Preliminary reading quiz

Graded iClicker QUIZ: Select the best single answer

1. Augustine thinks that human beings act of their own free will when they choose to sin, even though God knows of necessity that they will sin.

- (A) True
(B) False

Lecture 5: Augustine vs. Pelagius on Freedom and Divine Foreknowledge

The problem of evil

Q: If you give a knife to a man you know is dangerous, and he kills someone with it, do you deserve blame for it? (A) Yes (B) No

Q: If God creates people knowing they'll commit evil acts, does he deserve blame for it? (A) Yes (B) No

■ Q: Why isn't God like the friend who gives the knife?

- God is supposed to be perfectly good
- so there *appears* to be a conflict between these:

ex. (1) God is perfectly good.
(2) God creates beings who do evil.

- this conflict is known as *the problem of evil*
- Q: How would you reconcile these two ideas?

The problem of evil

■ St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 A.D.)

- one of the most influential church fathers
- heavily influenced by Greek philosophy

■ Augustine's basic solution to the problem of evil:

- free will is good because it permits righteous action
- but more importantly: *human beings are responsible for evil, by their free choices—not God*

■ his solution to the problem of evil only sets the stage for a second, bigger problem...

The problem of divine foreknowledge

Q: Does a clock created by a clockmaker who knows it will strike twelve at noon have free will? (A) Yes (B) No

Q: Do human beings created by a God who knows their future have free will? (A) Yes (B) No

■ Q: Why think God would know the future?

- God is supposed to know *everything* (omniscient), including about the future (foreknowledge)
- so there *appears* to be a conflict between these:

ex. (1) God knows all things (including all future human decisions).
(2) Human actions are free.

- this conflict is *the problem of divine foreknowledge*

The problem of divine foreknowledge

■ This argument summarizes the problem:

- arg. 1. If God knows what human actions will occur, then human beings have no free will.
2. God is all-knowing and knows what human actions will occur.
3. Therefore, human beings have no free will.

- the conclusion follows
- are both of the premises true?

■ Augustine thinks one of them is false

- to see why, we need to explore his view of free will

Augustine's solution

- Augustine compares the (original) choice to sin to a *fall*:

“ [W]hen the will turns away from the unchangeable and common good towards its own private good, or towards external or inferior things, it sins. It turns towards its own private good when it wants to be under its own control . . . In this way one becomes proud . . . What is evil is the turning of the will away from the unchangeable good and toward changeable goods. And since this turning is not coerced, but voluntary, it is justly and deservedly punished with misery.

--Augustine, On Free Choice of the Will ”

- What causes this original choice to sin?:

- Augustine's first answer: *nothing* causes it
 - perhaps this is to emphasize that evil is a kind of nothingness
 - but then can blame for original sin be assigned?

Augustine's solution

- Evodius worries: *falling* things are subject to natural necessity
- Augustine reframes the question by asking: *whose motion is the movement to evil?*
 - the motion by which a stone falls is the *stone's* motion
 - and the movement of the soul is the *soul's* motion
 - so blame the soul whose motion it is; not God*
- Q: What's odd about comparing a blameworthy soul to a falling stone?
 - the stone *still* moves of necessity, we don't blame it
 - so Augustine must show the difference between the natural and the voluntary*

Augustine's solution

- The problem of divine foreknowledge: both of these don't seem like they can be true:

ex (1) God knows all things (including all future human decisions),
(2) Human actions are free.

- as with all such problems, can solve by:
 - rejecting (1)
 - rejecting (2)
 - or by showing that actually, both can be true (despite appearances)
- Q: Which strategy do you think Augustine uses?
- Augustine's solution depends on his concept of "free":

Lecture 5: Augustine vs. Pelagius on Freedom and Divine Foreknowledge (continued)

Augustine's solution

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- Augustine's solution depends on his concept of "free":

Augustine's solution

■ Augustine's solution depends on his concept of "free":

“ [T]he only thing that is within our power is that which we do when we will it. Therefore, nothing is so much within our power as the will itself, for it is near at hand the very moment that we will. So we can rightly say, 'We grow old by necessity, not by will'; or . . . 'We die by necessity, not by will,' and other such things. But who would be crazy enough to say 'We do not will by the will'? Therefore, although God foreknows what we are going to will in the future, it does not follow that we do not will by the will.

When you said that you cannot make yourself happy, you said it as if I had denied it. Not at all; I am merely saying that **when you do become happy, it will be in accordance with your will, not against your will. Simply because God foreknows your future happiness . . . it does not follow that you will be happy against your will.** --Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will* ”

def (Augustine): **A free act is an act that is in accord with one's will**
[i.e. one's desires or wishes]

def (Augustine): **A free will is a will that is in accord with itself**
[i.e. one wants to want something]

Augustine's solution

■ Augustine's solution depends on his concept of "free":

- suppose we define "freedom" as follows:

def (Augustine): **A free act is an act that is in accord with one's will**
(i.e. one's desires or wishes)

- then the two propositions become:

ex. (1) God is all knowing (including about future human actions).

(2) ~~Human actions are free.~~

(3) Human actions are [(sometimes) in accord with human desires.]

- (1) and (2) may seem inconsistent, but (1) and (3) don't

- *so there's nothing illogical about the idea of God's knowing we will do what we want*

Augustine's solution

Q: Which premise of the argument does Augustine reject?

(A) 1 (B) 2

- arg. 1. If God knows what human actions will occur, then human beings have no free will.
2. God is all-knowing and knows what human actions will occur.
3. Therefore, human beings have no free will.

- he rejects (2): foreknowledge does not preclude free will
- we may will our happiness even if it is foreknown by God, *and not by us*

Pelagian free will

■ Pelagius (~354–420/440 A.D.)

- British (?) monk, active Christian scholar in Rome
- "Letter to Demetrias": advice for a young girl on maintaining her *virtue*

■ Q: Why would such a letter theorize about free will?

- she needs to be convinced that achieving virtue is *possible*
- he presumes that with no free will, that might not be possible

Pelagian free will

■ Pelagius thinks our ability to resist temptation is part of human nature:

“ [God] has made all the works of and within the world good, how much more excellent do you suppose that he has made man himself, on whose account he has clearly made everything else? And before actually making man, he determines to fashion him in his own image and likeness and shows what kind of creature he intends to make him. . . . For . . . he provided him with a better armament inside, that is, with reason and wisdom. . . . Moreover, the Lord of Justice wished man to be free to act and not under compulsion; it was for this reason that 'he left him free to make his own decisions' (Sirach 15.14) . . . [I]t is on this choice between two ways, on this freedom to choose either alternative, that the glory of the rational mind is based.

--Pelagius, Letter to Demetrias ”

- Q: How does this differ from what people sometimes mean by "human nature"

- it's often used to suggest the inevitability of corruption

Pelagian free will

■ Q: What is in this passage that lets us compare Pelagius to other philosophers we've studied?

“ [God] has made all the works of and within the world good, how much more excellent do you suppose that he has made man himself, on whose account he has clearly made everything else? And before actually making man, he determines to fashion him in his own image and likeness and shows what kind of creature he intends to make him. . . . For . . . he provided him with a better armament inside, that is, with reason and wisdom. . . . Moreover, the Lord of Justice wished man to be free to act and not under compulsion; it was for this reason that 'he left him free to make his own decisions' (Sirach 15.14) . . . [I]t is on this choice between two ways, on this freedom to choose either alternative, that the glory of the rational mind is based.

--Pelagius, Letter to Demetrias ”

- a definition of free will:

def (Pelagius): **Free will is the rational ability to choose one way or an alternate way.**

Implications of Pelagian free will

- Pelagius thinks *free will* implies the possibility of *moral perfection*

“ So much then by way of a cursory explanation of the good of nature, as it is also stated in another of my works. It was something which we had to provide in order to **pave your way to perfect righteousness** and make it more level and easier for you to run along in the knowledge that there is nothing uneven or unapproachable confronting you. Even before the law was given to us, as we have said, and long before the arrival of our Lord and Savior some are reported to have lived holy and righteous lives; how much more possible must we believe that to be after the light of his coming, now that we have been instructed by the grace of Christ and reborn as better men: purified and cleansed by his blood, encouraged by his example to **pursue perfect righteousness**. ”

--Pelagius, Letter to Demetrias

- Q: What traditional Christian doctrine does Pelagius seem to be rejecting here?:

- *original sin*, the idea that no one is morally perfect, that we're inherently sinful

Implications of Pelagian free will

- A reconstruction of Pelagius' argument against original sin

- arg.
1. God gave us free will.
 2. If God gave us free will, then choosing good is always possible.
 3. If choosing good is always possible, then it's possible to be good always.
 4. If it's possible to be good always, we are not inherently sinful.
 5. Therefore, we are not inherently sinful

- theological implication:

- Christ was not the only perfect man:
he was only an inspirational example

- Q: Do you agree with Pelagius that a good God would make us morally perfectable?
(A) Yes (B) No

Augustine's view of Pelagius

- But the church declared Pelagianism a heresy in 418 A.D!

- largely because of arguments from *Augustine*

- Q: Why would rejection of original sin look heretical?

- it suggests *sole* human responsibility for virtue
- but *all* good things come from God
- so rejecting original sin is the sin of pride!:

“ These and similar testimonies of Holy Scripture . . . in the maintenance of free will . . . leave no room for God's assistance and grace in leading a godly life and a good conversation, to which the eternal reward is due; and lest poor wretched man, when he leads a good life and performs good works (or rather thinks that he leads a good life and performs good works), should dare to glory in himself and not in the Lord, and to put his hope in righteous living in himself alone [...] ”

--Augustine, Against the Pelagians

Lecture 5: Augustine vs. Pelagius on Freedom and Divine Foreknowledge (continued)

Augustine's view of Pelagius

- Pelagius argued for moral perfectability and so rejected original sin:

- arg.
1. God gave us free will.
 2. If God gave us free will, then choosing good is always possible.
 3. If choosing good is always possible, then it's possible to be good always.
 4. If it's possible to be good always, we are not inherently sinful.
 5. Therefore, we are not inherently sinful

- But Augustine rejected Pelagius as heretical:

- his views suggests *sole* human responsibility for virtue
- but *all* good things come from God
- so rejecting original sin is the sin of pride!:

Augustine's view of Pelagius

■ Q: What is the idea that God is responsible for our salvation?

- *grace*: an unearned gift from God of human salvation
- he gives us the power/faith to resist temptation
- sometimes he even pushes us *towards* temptation!:

“ [N]ot only men's good wills, which God Himself converts from bad ones, and, when converted by Him, directs to good action and to eternal life, but also those which follow the world are so entirely at the disposal of God, that He turns them wherever He wills, and whenever He wills,—to bestow kindness on some, and to heap punishment on others, as He Himself judges right by a counsel most secret to Himself, indeed, but beyond all doubt most righteous. . . . God works in the hearts of men to incline their wills wherever He wills, whether to good deeds according to His mercy, or to evil after their own deserts. . . . --Augustine, *Against the Pelagians*, pp. 46–47”

Augustine's view of Pelagius

■ Q: Is what Augustine says about God's direction of our wills consistent with his idea of free will?

(Augustine): Freedom is the ability to act in accord with one's will (i.e. one's desires or wishes)

“ [N]ot only men's good wills, which God Himself converts from bad ones, and, when converted by Him, directs to good action and to eternal life, but also those which follow the world are so entirely at the disposal of God, that He turns them wherever He wills, and whenever He wills,—to bestow kindness on some, and to heap punishment on others, as He Himself judges right by a counsel most secret to Himself, indeed, but beyond all doubt most righteous. . . . **God works in the hearts of men to incline their wills wherever He wills, whether to good deeds according to His mercy, or to evil after their own deserts.** . . . --Augustine, *Against the Pelagians*, pp. 46–47”

Augustine's view of Pelagius

■ You should carefully compare Augustine's and Pelagius' definitions:

(Augustine): Freedom is the ability to act in accord with one's will (i.e. one's desires or wishes)

(Pelagius): Free will is the rational ability to choose one way or an alternate way.

■ Note: the church still thinks Pelagius was a heretic!:

“ #406 The Church's teaching on the transmission of original sin was articulated more precisely in the fifth century, especially under the impulse of St. Augustine's reflections against Pelagianism. . . . Pelagius held that man could, by the natural power of free will and without the necessary help of God's grace, lead a morally good life; he thus reduced the influence of Adam's fault to bad example. . . .

#1993 . . . When God touches man's heart through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, man himself is not inactive while receiving that inspiration, since he could reject it; and yet, **without God's grace, he cannot by his own free will move, himself toward justice in God's sight.** --Catechism of the Catholic Church

Review quiz

Graded iClicker QUIZ: Select the best single answer

2. Augustine defines a free action as follows:

- (A) An act that is uncaused
- (B) An act that one has the power to do or do not in a given moment
- (C) An act that is in accord with one's will, i.e. one's desire
- (D) All of the above
- (E) None of the above

3. Pelagius claimed there is nothing stopping us from achieving “perfect righteousness”

- (A) True
- (B) False

Review quiz

Graded iClicker QUIZ: Select the best single answer

4. Augustine thought that human beings could resist the temptation to sin through nothing but their own free will.

- (A) True
- (B) False