

Does Foreknowledge Constitute Determinism?

We, at *CFE*, make a distinction between *certainty* and *necessity*. This enables us to affirm both *exhaustive foreknowledge* and *libertarian free-will*. The fact that something is foreknown by God makes it certain, but it does not make it necessary.

Open Theists have argued that if we really have libertarian free-will then God does not have foreknowledge of these freely chosen events. The *Open Theist* argues that if God foreknows a future action by a human person, then, since God foreknows that event, it must occur, and if it must occur, then the person could not have done otherwise, and so does not have libertarian free-will.

Calvinists argue that God cannot have foreknowledge of freely chosen actions because we could then do otherwise, and make God's belief about the future foreseen event false (*since none of God's beliefs, including those of the future, can be false*), if we have libertarian free-will.

The common denominator between these strange bedfellows is that divine *exhaustive foreknowledge* and *libertarian free-will* cannot simultaneously coexist.

For the sake of discussion, let's refer to an event in which a particular possibility is actualized as an *Outcome*. An *outcome*, once it occurs, becomes a *fixed event* (*a past event which cannot be undone*). *Outcomes* are fixed, irreversible, and immutable events, in that once they occur they cannot be changed and remain whatever they are. An *outcome* occurs at the transition time-period when the immediate present becomes the immediate past.

Free-will, in the libertarian sense, is a phenomenon which exists before an *outcome* occurs. The process of considering various alternative possibilities and then arriving at a choice of one alternative (*and then actualizing that possibility while excluding others; the time period in which we*

have a choice between different possibilities up until a choice is made, actualizing one possibility and excluding others), exists only in the immediate present. Put simply: outcomes (*involving human volition*) are a result of the process of making a choice, and the realm in which this process takes place is in the time/moment(s) before the *outcome*.

Thus *free-will* exists in the time-frame preceding the *outcome* of making a choice. With respect to a particular action, once the agent performs that action it becomes an *outcome*. The time-frame in which the agent is considering alternative possibilities before him, deciding which possibility to actualize, is the immediate present (*i.e. the 'realm of choice-making'*) And this “realm of choices” exists in the time frame before an *outcome* occurs.

“In understanding this, I think it is very helpful to distinguish between two types of priority. *Chronological priority* which would be something being earlier in time. If something is chronologically prior to something else, it is earlier than it in time. *Logical priority* is where something is explanatorily prior to something else. These are not the same thing. Something can be *logically prior* to something else without being *chronologically prior* to it. I think that is exactly what we have in the case of divine foreknowledge and the events foreknown by God. Chronologically God’s foreknowledge comes before the event. First God foreknows it, then the event occurs. So the foreknowledge is chronologically prior to the event foreknown. But logically the event is prior to the foreknowledge. God’s foreknowledge is what it is because the event is what it is. It is because you will choose pizza for lunch that God foreknows it. It is not that you eat pizza for lunch because God foreknows it. That is to confuse *chronological priority* with *logical priority*. As long as we understand that the object of God’s foreknowledge is *logically prior* to what he foreknows, it doesn’t really matter that God’s foreknowledge is *chronologically prior* to the event foreknown. What that means is that if the event were to be different then God’s foreknowledge would be different.”

—William Lane Craig¹

Skeptics of free-will often write things such as, “*If John is going to perform the action of mowing his lawn next Saturday, and if God knew via foreknowledge that John would perform that action next Saturday, then John*

¹ Williams Lane Craig, *Doctrines of God*, Part XIV, *Divine Foreknowledge & Human Freedom*.

did not have free-will with regard to mowing or not mowing his lawn next Saturday. He could not have done otherwise than to mow the lawn next Saturday.” It should be carefully noted that whenever the skeptic of free-will makes this point, their every reference to some future event (*such as John performing [x] or refraining from performing [x] in each and every case*) is reference to an actual *outcome*.

Take John mowing the lawn, for example. If John mows the lawn, his mowing the lawn (*or refraining from mowing the lawn*), if it is an intentional and voluntary action, *is an outcome*. John will be deliberating between alternative possibilities open to him preceding the *outcome* of choosing to mow the lawn or the outcome of choosing not to mow the lawn. But free-will, if it ever existed in regard to his mowing the lawn or not mowing the lawn, had to exist prior to the outcome—which was him actually mowing the lawn.

So, it's inaccurate and false to say that if God foreknew a particular outcome (*say John mowing the lawn next Saturday*), then John's free-will is eliminated and he did not act freely. If God foreknows all future outcomes (*including choices*) and does not tamper with the deliberative process which results in a particular outcome, then how does His foreknowledge eliminate free-will? It doesn't. And if God interferes in this area in such a way as to directly control the mind of the person so that they no longer have a choice, before the process of choice-making culminates in the actual choice made, then the person is not acting freely in the libertarian sense (*and it must be kept in mind that the argument of the skeptic is that if God simply knows what the person will do—knows what outcome will occur and God has simple foreknowledge of a future event, that this alone eliminates libertarian free-will*). The truth is, the prediction depends on the foreknowledge, and the foreknowledge on the event itself. The error of the Necessitarians on this subject is, they put the effect for the cause, and the cause for the effect. They make the foreknowledge the *cause of the event*, whereas the event is the *cause of the foreknowledge*. No event ever took place merely because God foreknew it; on the contrary,

the taking place of the event is the cause of His having foreknown it. Let this distinction be kept in mind, that, in the order of nature, the event does not depend on the knowledge of it, but the knowledge on the event, and we may readily see a distinction between certainty and necessity. It is certain with God who will be saved, and who will not; yet it is also certain that salvation is made possible to all and likewise many who, of their own free choice, never will embrace it. Indeed, God knows who will, under the influence of Gospel preaching and Holy Ghost conviction, choose salvation and those who will reject it, however, though God *foreknows* He does not *cause* these *outcomes*. God has made some things necessary, and some things contingent. Necessary events he foreknew as necessary—that is, he foreknew that they could not possibly take place otherwise. Contingent events he foreknew as contingent—that is, he foreknew that they might take place otherwise (*for example: 1 Sam 23:9-13*). And thus, we think, foreknowledge and free agency may be harmonized, human responsibility maintained, and the divine government successfully vindicated.

—B.W.