



University of Tabriz-Iran
Journal of *Philosophical Investigations*
ISSN (print): 2251-7960/ ISSN (online): 2423-4419
Vol. 13/ Issue: 28/ fall 2019
Journal Homepage: www.philosophy.Tabrizu.ac.ir

Plantinga on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will*



Abdurrazzaq Hesamifar

*Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Imam Khomeini International University (IKIU), Iran,
E-mail: abesamifar@hum.ikiu.ac.ir*

Abstract

In each one of the well-known Abrahamic religions, notably Islam, Christianity and Judaism, there are two important doctrines which seem to be inconsistent, but nonetheless some religious philosophers like Plantinga try to show that there is no conflict between them. The first doctrine is that God is Omniscient and He has foreknowledge of all that will happen in the future and thus all human actions are determined in His knowledge. The second doctrine is that human beings have free will and they are responsible for all of their voluntary actions. The problem is that if all future actions of a person are determined in divine knowledge, it is impossible for him to change his future and so he is not free. This article will assess some of the solutions given to the problem and it will focus on Plantinga's solution to the problem and then it will unravel some defects of his solution. At the end of this article, a new solution to the problem will be given, in which the free will of human being is confirmed while the nature of divine knowledge is regarded ambiguous to the extent that its changeability or unchangeability is left unknown.

Keywords: foreknowledge, free will, determinism, inconsistency, providence, divine knowledge

Introduction

In the well-known Abrahamic religions, namely Islam, Christianity and Judaism, there are two important doctrines which look like inconsistent doctrines when are regarded together, but if we look at each one overlooking the other, we see ourselves as religious people obligated to accept it. One of those doctrines is that God is Omniscient in the sense that His knowledge is unlimited and He knows everything. According to the Abrahamic religions, all attributes of God are absolute and He is supremely perfect being. So He is Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Omniscient. The second doctrine is that human beings have free will, that is they can do everything they like and their acts are not determined. The problem is with the fact that if both of those doctrines are confirmed in Abrahamic religions why each one contradicts the other and is that inconsistency due to the inconsistency of religion itself. If God is Omniscient, He forever knows everything about all things. And if it was the case that He knows eternally all actions of all people that will be done by them, how human beings can have free will and ability to perform their acts or to refrain from undertaking them? In his “divine foreknowledge and human freedom” Plantinga says that this problem “as every twelve-year-old Sunday school student knows, can seem to be incompatible” (Plantinga, 1987, p. 170). He adds that the question about the conflict between these two doctrines has been pondered by philosophers and theologians from the fifth century (Plantinga, 1987, p. 170). This paper will assess some of the solutions given to the problem and it will focus on Plantinga's solution to the problem and then it will try to unravel some defects of his solution.

Existence of God and His Necessary Knowledge

Plantinga is regarded as the major spokesman of orthodox Christianity which includes such traditional doctrine as the Trinity, God's omnipotence and perfect goodness, the infallible inspiration of the Bible, everlasting torment in hell for the unredeemed (Barnhart, 1977, p. 439). The first writing of Plantinga in which he has discussed the problem is his *God, Freedom and Evil* (Plantinga, 1977). In this book he criticises Nelson Pike article, “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action” (Pike, 1965, pp. 27-46). At the beginning of his article, Pike refers to Part 3 of Section 5 of *Consulatio Philosophiae* in which Boethius (480-524) entertains the claim that if God is Omniscient no human action is voluntary. Of course he later rejects this view. Pike says that though Boethius's claim has a sharp counterintuitive ring, but he is right in thinking that there are some doctrines and principles about the notions such as knowledge, omniscience, and God which, when brought together, demand the conclusion that if God exists, no human action is voluntary. Pike says that since Boethius's discussion in that book is incomplete, so his effort is to develop it in his article. He makes it clear that his purpose in rearguing the thesis is not to show the truthiness of determinism or to deny the existence of God or to show that either determinism is true or God does not exist. And following Boethius he shall not claim that the items needed to generate the problem are adequate. He wants just to

Plantinga on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will /249

concentrate attention on the implications of some assumptions whether they are acceptable or not acceptable (Pike, 1965, pp. 27-28).

According to Pike, what is inconsistent with the free will of human being is the existence of God who is essentially Omniscient and not just the existence of Omniscient God. He refers to two quotations from Frederick Schleiermacher and St. Augustine in which they assimilate God's foreknowledge to the intimacy between two friends when the foreknowledge one has of the action of the other does not endanger the other's freedom. In contrast to this point, he says: 'Even if one holds that an intimate friend can have foreknowledge of another's voluntary actions one ought to think that the case is the same when dealing with the problem of divine foreknowledge' (Pike, 1965, pp. 40-41).

At the end of his article Pike says that if someone believes in God, and accepts, from Christianity dogmas, that God is Omniscient and His attributes including Omniscience, have necessary connection with His nature, an Omniscient being has no false belief and an Omniscient being knows the end of human actions before they perform them, he should confirm that none of human actions is voluntary.

In his *God, Freedom and Evil*, Plantinga assesses the atheistic arguments against the existence of God and the last and mildly atheological argument he discusses is the claim that God's omniscience is incompatible with human freedom and he tries to show that there is consistency between them (Plantinga, 1977, pp. 66ff). To illustrate the argument of opponents on the inconsistency between foreknowledge and free will, he says that if God knows in advance that Paul will have an orange tomorrow, then it must be the case that he will have it tomorrow and if it is so, then he cannot refrain from doing so. Thus the argument (in Plantinga's words) goes as follows:

(1) If God knows in advance that **X** will do **A**, then it must be the case that **X** will do **A**

and

(2) If it must be the case that **X** will do **A**, then **X** is not free to refrain from **A**.

Of these two propositions why should we think that (1) is true? The answer may be that if God knows that **X** will do **A**, it logically follows that **X** will do **A**. If God knows that **P**, then **P** is necessarily true. This defence of (1) shows that (2) is ambiguous.

The proposition (1) may have one of these two meanings:

(1a) Necessarily, if God knows in advance that **X** will do **A**, then indeed **X** will do **A**

(1b) If God knows in advance that **X** will do **A**, then it is necessary that **X** will do **A**

What the atheological argument needs is the truth of (1b) while the above defence of (1) confirms just (1a). In other words if God knows that the proposition P is true, then P is true, but it does not follow that if God knows P, then P is necessarily true. If I know that Henry is a bachelor, then it is a necessary truth that he is a bachelor; it does not follow that it is necessarily true that he is a bachelor. So the claim of incompatibility between divine omniscience and human freedom seems to be based upon confusion (Plantinga, 1977, pp. 66-67).

But the Plantinga's analysis seems to be challengeable and what can be said against him is that the deference between God's knowledge and human knowledge is that while the former is necessary, the latter is contingent. It is indeed necessarily true that if God or anyone else knows that P is true, it does not follow that P is necessarily true. But since God's knowledge is a necessary knowledge due to his omniscience, not contingent one, so what he knows should be necessarily true, not contingently. Thus what God knows it to be true, it is necessarily true. In other words the contingent propositions are contingent propositions just in relation to human knowledge, but in relation to God's knowledge they are necessary propositions.

Plantinga then goes to the aforementioned claim of Pike which is a new revision of an old claim, and tries to show some defects of it. Human freedom, according to Pike, is incompatible not with God's being Omniscient, but with God's being essentially Omniscient (Plantinga, 1977, pp. 67-68). As an example, Pike considers the case of Jones who mowed his lawn at T₂ and God knows at any earlier time T₁ (80 years ago, for example) that Jones will do that act at T₂. So if God knows in T₁ that Johns will perform the act in T₂, it does not follow that if Johns did not perform the act it means that the knowledge of God will be false (Plantinga, 1977, pp. 68-69). Because if Johns did not perform the act, it can be concluded that his refraining from performing the action is registered in knowledge of God. But in spite of Plantinga's view it seems to me that the problem will remain unsolved; because the problem is not related to reconciliation of foreknowledge and human free actions. But it is related to what has been determined in divine knowledge about future action of a certain person and since it is unalterable the person has no power to change it.

Aquinas's Two Arguments

In his "On Ockham's Way Out" Plantinga evaluate two lines of argument for the incompatibility thesis about these two doctrines. At the end of article he concludes that they are both failures (Plantinga, 1987, p. 200).

The first argument is what Augustine puts it in the mouth of Evodius in *De Libero Arbitrio* and Plantinga puts it as follows:

- (1) If God knows in advance that **S** will do **A**, then it must be the case that **S** will do **A**.

- (2) If it must be the case that **S** will do **A**, then it is not within the power of **S** to refrain from doing **A**.

Plantinga on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will /251

- (3) If it is not within the power of **S** to refrain from doing **A**, then **S** is not free with respect to **A**.

Hence

- (4) If God knows in advance that **S** will do **A**, then **S** is not free with respect to **A** (Plantinga, 1987, p. 172).

Plantinga then goes to the argument which has been presented by Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Contra Gentiles*. In this argument, Aquinas says “If each thing is known by God as seen by him in the present, what is known by God will then have to be” (Plantinga, 1987, pp. 172-173). The necessity here is not absolute necessity or necessity of consequence. It is a necessary conditional proposition like this proposition: “if Socrates is seen seated it is necessary for him to be seated”.

Referring to the first premise of Evodius, Plantinga puts the Aquinas's point as follows: (1) is ambiguous between

- (1)(a) Necessarily, if God knows in advance that **S** will do **A**, then **S** will do **A**.

And

- (1)(b) If God knows in advance that **S** will do **A**, then it is necessary that **S** will do **A**.

Plantinga then asks us to consider this

- (1)(c) If God knows in advance that **S** will do **A**, then **S** will do **A**.

According to Aquinas (1)(a) is clearly true but it has nothing to do with argument. And (1)(b) is what the argument needs but it seems flatly false. In fact (1)(b) shows the necessity of the consequent and what it says, implausibly, is that the necessity of the consequent of (1)(c) follows from its antecedent.

The second argument which was also considered by Aquinas, is what has been formulated by Janathan Edwards in brief as follows:

1. The past existence of the things which are past is now necessary and it is now impossible for the news about their existence to be otherwise than true.
2. If there be a divine foreknowledge of free actions of agents in the past, it is now utterly impossible to be otherwise.
3. It is very manifest that those things which are indissolubly connected with necessary things are themselves necessary. As that proposition whose truth is necessarily connected with another proposition, which is necessary true, is itself necessary true. Otherwise it makes a contradiction.

4. It is evident that if there be an infallible foreknowledge of the future free actions of agents, then there is an infallible connection between the foreknowledge and those actions. And so the actions are necessary (Plantinga, 1987, pp. 173-174).

In this argument Edwards concludes from infallible prescience of God the necessity of future events. And this necessity is the same necessity that we see in what is now past. Plantinga says that this argument resorts to two intuitions. "First, although the past is not necessary in the broadly logical sense (it is possible, in that sense, that Abraham should never have existed), it is necessary in some sense: it is fixed, unalterable, outside anyone's control" (Plantinga, 1987, p. 174). It seems to me that there are some defects in what Plantinga says about the first intuition. Firstly, the past is entirely necessary and not in some sense. Because for what has been happened, it is impossible to be otherwise. What can be said that it is unnecessary about past, is not the past itself but the news about the events of the past. We have learned from Frege, that the truth or falseness of any proposition is forever and if any informative proposition about any person or event of past, present or future is false, it is false eternally. So if there was no Abraham existed in the past, he would not belong to the past and all news about him were false. Secondly, what the argument apparently is based on it, is the entire necessity of the past not the relative necessity of it.

The second intuition is that what is necessarily connected with what is necessary in some sense, is necessary in that sense; "if a proposition A, necessary in the way in which the past is necessary, entails the proposition B, then B is necessary in that same way" (Ibid). What seems wrong with this example is that it is not appropriate to the intuition because it does not require the necessity of B, and to correct it we should say 'if a proposition A is necessary and it entails a proposition B, then B should be necessary'.

As an example Edwards says "suppose God knew, eighty years ago, that I would mow my lawn this afternoon", it is logically necessary that I will mow and I have no power to refrain from mowing. So in this argument which is called theological determinism by Plantinga, Edwards concludes from the foreknowledge of God of voluntary actions of agents, that these actions are necessary in just the way the past is.

Plantinga then refers to the objection that a Boethian bystander might have. Many theists believe in God's eternity which means that everything is present for him and there is no past or future for him, so he does not know that 'Paul will mow in 1995', he knows just that 'Paul mow in 1995'. Further, the eternity of God requires his being atemporal that is outside of time, so it is wrong to speak about his knowledge of an event at a certain time. After assessing the objection, Plantinga shows that the claim that God is atemporal is essentially irrelevant to Edwardsian argument. He assumes that God has foreknowledge and we can speak of him both as holding a belief at a time and as having held beliefs in the past (Plantinga, 1987, p. 177).

Plantinga on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will /253

Plantinga then goes to assess Ockham's response to the theological determinism in which Ockham distinguishes hard facts about the past-facts which are genuinely and strictly about the past, from soft facts about the past. Among these two kinds of facts, just the former is necessary. Plantinga says that Ockham's response is plausible and it is difficult to say precisely what it is for a proposition to be strictly about the past and to say what it is for a proposition to be accidentally necessary. According to Ockham, a proposition is strictly about the past if and only if it does not entail a proposition about the future and a proposition about the past is accidentally necessary if it is true and strictly about past (Plantinga, 1987, p. 185).

The Free Will Defence

The atheistic argument against the existence of God is as follows: A world created by an Omnipotent, Omniscient and perfectly good being, say God, should not be containing evil. Since the world contains evil, it follows that the world was not created by such being. One of the replies given to this argument is that the world contains evil only because it was impossible to create creatures with free will, which cannot perform morally wrong actions. This is the main point of so-called "Free Will Theodicy" which has been proposed by theologians such as Thomas Aquinas (Pike, 1979, p. 449).

"The heart of the 'Free Will Defense [FWD]'" Plantinga says "is the claim that it is possible that God could not have created a universe containing moral good (or as much moral good as this world contains) without creating one that also contained moral evil. And if so, then it is possible that God has a good reason for creating a world containing evil" (Plantinga, 2008, p. 551).

In his article, "Evil and Omnipotence", J. L. Mackie has argued that if an Omnipotent, Omniscient and perfectly good being has created a world containing free creatures, they would "go right" with respect to freely chosen action. There is inconsistency between believing in such being and creature that perform moral evils (Mackie, 1955). Anthony Flew and J. L. Mackie claim that the proposition 'God is Omnipotent, Omniscient and perfectly good' entails the proposition 'God creates no person who perform morally wrong actions' (Flew, 1955, and Mackie, 1955). But Plantinga disagree this view. According to him, the statement 'God is Omnipotent, Omniscient and perfectly good' does not entail any free creature always does what is right. God can have all those properties and still create creature that can perform good or bad acts. In this regard, Plantinga says:

"God can create free creatures, but He cannot cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they are not significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely" (Plantinga, 2008, p. 551).

The main problem is that why God as a being with perfect goodness permits us to have a capacity for moral wrongdoing? The answer given by the proponents of the FWD was: A world in which people are able freely to avoid wrongdoing is better than any world in which people lack this ability. If it is so the second question is

proposed: Since God knows (in his omniscience) all future acts of his creatures why He does not actualize only possible people about whom He foresees that, though they are able to do what is morally wrong, they will never, when actualized, in fact do so (Dore, 1971, p. 690)? In his *God and Other Minds*, Plantinga attempts to provide a theistic solution for this problem (Plantinga, 1967, pp. 135-149).

In his “free will defence” Plantinga shows that there is no logical inconsistency between these two propositions: (1) God is Omniscient, Omnipotent, and wholly Good and (2) evil exists. The core of his demonstration is that, though God is Omnipotent, there are some “possible worlds” that is impossible for God to actualize them. To have a world containing free will of human being, it is impossible for God to create a morally good universe without any moral evil. And this is the reason that God has for creating a world which contains evil. This demonstration provides a theistic solution for the logical problem of evil (Plantinga, 2008, p. 550)

According to Plantinga, freedom as having ability to perform or refrain from an action does not entail unpredictability of that action. He says:

“You might be able to predict what you will do in a given situation even if you are free, in that situation, to do something else. If I know you well, I may be able to predict what action you will take in response to a certain set of conditions. It does not follow that you are not free with respect to that action” (Plantinga, 2008, p. 551)

In this article, Plantinga claims that “it is possible that God could not have created a universe containing moral good (or a much moral good as this world contains) without creating one that also contains moral evil” (Plantinga, 2008, p. 551). He thinks that this is why it is possible for God to have a good reason for creating a world containing evil.

It seems to me that the free will defence can justify just the moral evils which are related to human beings and in agreement with Plantinga we can say that to have a world in which human beings are free and they have ability to do evils, it is necessary for God to create a universe in which performing moral evils is possible and human beings are free in doing virtues or vices. So the problem of moral evils will be solved by the free will defence. But the problem of metaphysical or ontological evils remains unsolved. Because these evils are related to the structure of the universe and it has nothing to do with human will.

One answer to the problem which appeals to a new interpretation of omniscience is offered by Michael Tooley. In his article “Dose God Exist?” Tooley evaluate five a priori arguments for the non- existence of God. The third argument is related to the problem of whether an Omniscient being could have foreknowledge of the free human actions. The essence of this argument is that since it is impossible to have foreknowledge of the free actions of human beings, so omniscience is incompatible with omnipotence and morally perfection. This argument resorts to “the idea that an Omnipotent, Omniscient and moral perfect being would create agents who enjoyed libertarian free will” (Tooley, 2008, p. 86).

Plantinga on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will /255

Tooley says that both parts of this argument are problematic. The second part needs to resort to the consequentialist view that one is morally required to do acts which produce good states of affairs more than bad states of affairs. But he thinks that the consequentialism is open to serious objections.

In regard to the first part of the argument, Tooley says that there are many attempts of thinkers to show that foreknowledge of the free acts of human beings is possible. In his opinion all these attempts are unsuccessful, But there is a satisfactory answer to the argument, and the answer is that if the argument proves that foreknowledge of the free actions of human beings is logically impossible, from this it cannot be concluded that the absence of such knowledge entails that one is not Omniscient. He then concludes:

“Just as omnipotence is not the ability of performing any action, including one that it is logically impossible to perform, so omniscience is to be characterized, not as a matter of knowing every true proposition, but as a matter of knowing every proposition that it is logically possible to know at the relevant time” (Tooley, 2008, p. 87).

Though because of his FWD Plantinga is frequently regarded as the defender of orthodox Christian thought, it is questionable, whether the concept of God defended in FWD is the concept of God affirmed by orthodox Christian theism. Basinger says that Plantinga’s defence of the former is actually a strong argument against the self-consistency of the latter. And Plantinga’s FWD does furnish excellent philosophical support for the concept of God affirmed by Process theism (Basinger, 1982, p. 35).

In his formulation of FWD Plantinga relies on the possibility of true counterfactuals of freedom and God’s middle knowledge³ of them. Though Plantinga himself has said that he believes that God has middle knowledge and, hence, that there are some true counterfactuals of freedom, he says that this was a mere concession of atheologians and they, not FWD really need the assumption of middle knowledge. According to him, without the assumption of middle knowledge, it is much harder to formulate FWD on the assumption that the middle knowledge is impossible. But some critics like K. J. Perszyk do not think so. Perszyk thinks that in solving the problem of evil the atheologian’s task may be no harder (and might even be easier) without the assumption of middle knowledge and FWD without middle knowledge may fare no better (and might even fare worse) than its Molinist counterpart (Perszyk, 1998, p. 29).

Divine Providence

There are several views about divine providence among them three views are more important: The first view is Tomism which presents a maximally strong view of divine providence. According to this view God’s control over his creation is absolute and nothing has been left to chance and since there is nothing independent of the will of God, so everything is out of the hands of fallible free creation. The problem with this view is that "if God really disapproves of murder and desires that

all go to heaven and if ... nothing happens apart from the will of God, then why do murders take place? And why does it seem as though there are people who go to hell" (Rea, 2009, p. 2). In other words, if all things, acts, and activities go to God so all responsibility goes to Him; so human beings are not at fault and should not be taken to hell. Thus the main problem with this view is that it cannot justify the problem of evil and hell.

The second view is Molinism according which divine providence is based on God's middle knowledge¹. Medieval philosophers before 16th century distinguished between two kinds of God's knowledge: The natural knowledge which includes His knowledge of truths that are both necessary and independent of His will (such as logical and mathematical truths, and the free knowledge which includes His knowledge of truths that are contingent and dependent on his will (for example ordinary truths about the existent objects and events in the world).

The 16th century Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina attributed a third kind of knowledge to God and called it God's middle knowledge which includes knowledge of contingent truths (like objects of God's free knowledge) but nevertheless independent of God's will (like the objects of God's natural knowledge). Since this kind of knowledge is something between two other kinds, it is known as "middle knowledge". The objects of God's middle knowledge are truths about what free creatures would do in circumstances that are not yet or never to become actual that is the counterfactuals of freedom- claims like "if Fred were to propose marriage to Wilma, Wilma would freely accept". According to the Molinist view, such truths are contingent and the counterfactuals true in the actual world might have been false (Rea, 2009, pp. 1-2). Moreover God has extensive but not complete control of his creation and because of this, Molinists affirm a strong view of divine sovereignty and at the same time they offer some explanations for the existence of evil, for example they say evil was unavoidable, given God's desire to create free creatures who can do good or bad.

There are some serious objections against Molinism. It supposes that there are true counterfactuals of freedom and some philosophers reject this supposition. Since in the case of counterfactuals of freedom with false antecedents, it is hard to see what could possibly ground their truth. For example in the case of Wilma and Fred we can suppose that if Fred were to propose, Wilma would accept. But what makes this counterfactual true. There is nothing which can guarantee William's acceptance (Rea, 2009, p. 3).

The third view is the simple foreknowledge theory of providence which has been called Responsivism². This view, like Molinism, believes in human freedom and rejects the idea that freedom is compatible with exhaustive divine foreordination and physical determinism, but in spite of Molinism, it denies that providence operates by reliance upon middle knowledge.

The main objection against Responsivism is the fact that mere foreknowledge seems to be providentially useless. For knowing the future will include the

Plantinga on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will /257

consequences of God's actions. So when God knows what will happen in the world, it has already been decided how he will act. But if it has already been decided how he will act, God's foreknowledge cannot play a role in guiding his actions.

The final result, in short, will be that "on Thomism everything that happens is the produce of divine decree" and on Molinism, not everything is determined; but, even so, God makes use of his exhaustive knowledge of counterfactuals to insure that he gets precisely the feasible outcome that he desires. On Responsivism, God (apparently) has exactly the same range of control over the world as he does on Molinism, only without reliance on Middle knowledge (Rea, 2009, pp. 4-5).

It can be said in brief, however, that the main solvation given by theologians and philosophers of the West and the East for the problem of inconsistency between God's foreknowledge and human free will is that the Omniscience of God is not the cause of that acts which are done by creatures. Because when for example a teacher knows that a student will get low number in exam because of his laziness, it doesn't require that teacher is the cause of his being unsuccessful in exam. So given that God knows that which act will be done by a person in a certain time in future, since the act is caused by the will of person, God is not the agent of that act. I think that this answer cannot solve the problem. Because the problem of inconsistency between the omniscience of God and free will can be reduced to two problems: The first problem is related to the causality and the responsibility for that act and the second one is related to the truth and unalterableness of the foreknowledge of God which requires determinism. The solution that has been given by Plantinga and some other theologians deals with the first problem and ignored the second problem. So the second problem will remain unsolved. Explicitly speaking the second problem is that what God knows about our future is not flexible and what we will do in future is registered in His knowledge and we cannot do otherwise. In a poem, the Iranian mathematician, astronomer, and poet of 12th century, Omar Khayyam says:

*I drink wine and anyone who is expert like me,
Will regard my drinking wine with tolerate.
God was aware of my drinking wine eternally,
His knowledge will be ignorance if I do not drink wine.*

The answer that was given to him by Khawjah Nasir al-Din Tusi or Baba Afzal Kashani was:

*You drink wine and someone who is unfamiliar,
Will regard your drinking wine with tolerate.
To regard the eternal knowledge [of God] as the cause of sin,
Is regarded by the intelligents as the extreme ignorance.*

Though some theologians think that this answer solves the problem, but it seems to me that it just denies the God being the cause of act and doesn't deny the entailments of the foreknowledge of God. The fault of this demonstration is in

resorting to an allegory which is not appropriate to the foreknowledge of God and it is just appropriate to human knowledge. There are several differences between the foreknowledge of God and human knowledge. The former is certain, while the latter is not certain, so the acts which are known by the first are predictable certainly while the acts which are known by the second are predictable conjecturally. Since our knowledge about the future and its events is uncertain and changeable and about the past and its events is certain and unchangeable, so the best allegory for the foreknowledge of God is the later not the former. In other words we should assimilate the foreknowledge of God about future events to the past events. Is it possible to change the past events? We are sure that it is impossible to change any fact of past. Because the past, as opposed to the future is fixed, stable, unalterable, closed and outside of our control and the control of any Omnipotent being. But about the future is not the same. Since we have no certain knowledge about what will happen to us in future we cannot predict it confidently, but about God the situation is different; because there is no difference between his knowledge about past and his knowledge about future. He is at the same time Omniscient, Omnipotent and Omnipresent and because of his omnipresence he is conscious about the past, present and future events.

The other allegory which can help us to grasp the point about the second problem is the movie that has been produced in the past and we are watching it in a channel of TV now. Is it possible to change any scene of it? The answer obviously is no. And it is different from any live program in TV that can be changed anytime the producer wished. It is wrong if we assimilate the knowledge of God about future to a live program of TV because of its changeableness and we should assimilate it with the movie the process of its being produced has been finished. And as the movie is unchangeable the knowledge of God is unchangeable. So the second problem remains unsolved and we need to another way to solve the inconsistency between the knowledge of God and free will of human being.

To remove the inconsistency between two religious ideas we have at least two ways. The first way is to resort to the process theology according which the knowledge of God is changeable and so with the changes that will happen in the future events the knowledge of God about them will change. In this solution the free will of human being is confirmed while the foreknowledge of God is denied. The second way is to confirm the free will of human being and to be agnostic about the essence of the knowledge of God. In this way what is confirmed is as follows

1. God has created us.
2. In the Day of Judgment, He will judge about what we have done in this world.
3. In appropriate to our deeds, He will reward or punish us
4. God is the just

From these premises it can be concluded that human being is endowed with free will. Because if there was no free will for human beings it was injustice for God to put them on trial for what they have done in this world. So in short we can say that we are sure about the Day of Judgement and it requires us to be free in what we do

Plantinga on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will /259

and if we are determined for all of our acts and there is no way to change them, it will be injustice to be punished for what has been done determinately by us. Thus we are sure about our free will and we cannot reconcile this idea with a religious point of view about the foreknowledge of God which contains all news from past to future. And since the free will idea is inconsistent with the foreknowledge of God, we accept to be agnostic about the nature of foreknowledge of God.

Conclusion

In Abrahamic religions there are four doctrines at all in which we find inconsistency and it is impossible to confirm all of them:

- (A) God is Omniscient.
- (B) In the Day of Judgment all human beings will be judged for their acts.
- (C) Human beings have free will.
- (D) Since all events of future have been registered in Divine knowledge, human beings have no free will.

(A) and (B) are held by approximately all religious people but some of them believe in (C) and some others believe in (D). Though (A) and (D) in one side and (B) and (C) in the other side can be confirmed but the problem is with confirming all of them. If we accept (A) and (d) it means that we believe in determinism so we cannot confirm any of (B) or (C). And if we accept (B) and (C) it means that we deny determinism and so we cannot confirm any of (A) or (D). In other words (A) and (D) are consistent and (B) and (C) are consistent but there are no consistency between (A)(B)(C)(D), (A)(B)(D) (A)(B)(C), (A)(C)(D) and (B)(C)(D). In short the omniscience attribute of God entails determinism and believing in the Day of Judgment requires freedom of human being. If God has foreknowledge about all acts that we will do in future, so we are in illusion if we think of freedom. And if our future acts are not determined by Divine knowledge and we have all options of doing or refrain from any one of them, so God is not Omniscient and He is ignorant about our future acts.

The answer that was given to the problem by some philosophers and theologians like Plantinga was that God's foreknowledge does not make certain the human acts and as our knowledge about the future acts of someone does not make it certain for him to do or to refrain from doing them, God's knowledge about our acts has the same condition. That is his knowledge does not compel someone to do or refrain from doing some act. According to Plantinga's view, in short, if God knows that the proposition P is true, then P is true, but it does not follow that if God knows P, then P is necessarily true. If I know that, for example, Tabriz is in the northwest of Iran, then it is a necessary truth that it is so but it does not follow that it is necessarily true that Tabriz is in the northwest of Iran. This proposition is a proposition which is synthetic, not analytic. So the claim of incompatibility between divine foreknowledge and human free will seems to be based upon confusion.

Plantinga's view comes in for criticism and the main defect of it, as has been showed in this article, is in confusing God's knowledge which is fixed and certain,

with human knowledge which is changeable and uncertain. At the end of this research, it seems to me that, the best solution for the problem is to interpret the foreknowledge of God as something in change, or to say that because of believing in the Day of Judgement which is a necessary belief in religion, we are sure that we have been endowed with free will and the nature of divine knowledge is an ambiguous and unsolvable problem.

Notes

1. This view has been labeled 'Calvinism' and 'Augustinianism' as well. See Rea, 2009.
2. for detail on this view see: Hunt, 2009, pp. 84-103.
3. This kind of knowledge will be explained later.

References

- Barnhart, J. E. (1977). Theodicy and the Free Will Defense: Response to Plantinga and Flew, *Religious Studies*, 13(4), 439-453.
- Basinger, David (1982). Plantinga's Free-Will Defense as a challenge to Orthodox Theism, *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, 3(2), 35-41.
- Dore, Clement (1971). Plantinga on the Free Will Defense, *The Review of Metaphysics*, 24(4), 690-706.
- Flew, Anthony (1955). Divine Omnipotence of Human Freedom. In A. Flew and A. MacIntyre (Ed.), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, New York, USA: Macmillan.
- Flint, Thomas P. (2009). Two Account of Providence. In Michael Rea (Ed.), *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology: Vol. 12: Providence, Scripture and Resurrection* (pp. 17-44). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Hunt, David P. (2009). Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge. In Michael Rea (Ed.) *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology: Vol. 12: Providence, Scripture and Resurrection* (pp. 84-103) Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Mackie, T. L. (1955). Evil and Omnipotence *Mind*, 64, 254, 200-212.
- Meister, Chad (2008). *The Philosophy of Religion Reader*, New York and Abingdon, USA and UK: Routledge.
- Perszyk, Kenneth J. (1998). Free Will Defense with and without Molinism, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 43(1), 29-64.
- Pike, Nelson (1965). Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action, *The Philosophical Review*, 74(1), 26-46.
- Pike, Nelson (1979). Plantinga on Free Will and Evil, *Religious Studies*, 15(4), 449-473.
- Plantinga, Alvin (1967). *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God*, Ithaca, USA: Cornell University Press.
- Plantinga, Alvin (1977). *God, Freedom and Evil*, Michigan, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, Reprinted 2002.
- Plantinga, Alvin (1987). On Ockham's Way Out. In V. Morris (Ed.), *The Concept of God* (pp. 171-200). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Plantinga, Alvin (2008). A Free Will Defence. In Chad Meister (Ed.), *The Philosophy of Religion Reader* (pp.550-563). London and New York, USA and UK: Routledge.

Plantinga on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will /261

- Rea Michael (Ed.) (2009). *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology: Vol. 12: Providence, Scripture and Resurrection*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, Richard (1983). *Metaphysics* (3rd ed.), Englewood Cliffs, USA: Prentice-Hall.
- Tooley, Michael (2008). Does God Exist? In Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley, *Knowledge of God* (pp. 70-150). Oxford and Cambridge, UK: Blackwell.