

Philosophy 302

Mediaeval Philosophy

Lecture 6



Boethius in Prison Instructed by Philosophy

(A) Divine Providence = God's plan for the history of the world.

(B) Divine Foreknowledge = God's knowledge of what will
happen in the future.

The Issues:

[(P1) The simplicity of providence.]

[(P2) The temporal series of Fate.]

(P3) The nature of chance.

(P4) The possibility of knowledge (of the future).

(P5) The character of divine predestination.

(P6) The possibility of free will.

(i) PROVIDENCE is identical with divine mind which is entirely simple.

The providential plan is divine reason itself.

(ii) FATE is the providential plan realised in time.

CHANCE:

There is no randomness in the world.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason:

‘Nothing can come from Nothing’.

Aristotle’s Definition of Chance:

“A chance event is unexpected result of certain causes
in matters where there was another purpose.”

Freedom of Choice:

Freedom of choice is necessary for the use of reason.

Human beings are able to use reason.

Therefore **HUMANS HAVE FREEDOM OF CHOICE**

The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge:

**How is God's knowledge of the future
compatible with freedom of choice?**

The Argument:

- (a) God (= Providence) foreknows everything.
- (b) From eternity God has known how men will act.
- (c) If humans could act otherwise God would have only uncertain opinion.
- (d) This is impossible.

Therefore **HUMANS DO NOT HAVE FREEDOM OF CHOICE.**

Truth and the Order of Explanation

- (g) If X is the case, then the belief that that X is the case is necessarily true and if the belief that that X is the case is true, then X is necessarily the case.
- (h) The fact *explains* the truth of the belief rather than vice versa.

God knows which of any pair of contradictory claims about the future is true.

We cannot solve the problem by allowing him knowledge that one or the other is true but not which of them.

Therefore: Humans do not have freedom of choice

So

There is no point in reward and punishment

There are no virtues and vices

All evils are due to God

There is no point in prayer

Philosophy's Solution:

Humans have mistakenly imposed the limitations of their own mode of knowing on God.

Let a '**metaphysical**' feature of something be one which does not depend in any way on someone knowing that the feature is present.

- (1) suppose that when X not known to anyone it has metaphysical feature F ;
- (2) the fact that X is known cannot cause it not to have metaphysical feature F ;

Therefore (3) X can be known and have the feature F .

CLAIM: Being necessary or contingent are metaphysical features.

Iamblichus' (d. ~325 AD) Principle:

The character of knowledge depends on the character of the knower not upon the character of the object known.

Certainty and uncertainty are characteristics of the knower.

Necessity and contingency are characteristics of the object known.

Apply Iamblichus' Principle to God:

God is Eternal

Eternity is the *simultaneous* and *complete* possession of *infinite life*

Therefore God knows all the events that take place in time at once and simultaneously

God knows all events as present

God's knowledge is not properly speaking foreknowledge but knowledge of things as they presently are

God

Eternity

Everything is present



Past



Present



Future

Time

Conditional and Simple Necessity:

Knowledge of something as present does not affect its metaphysical character

But if something is known to be so in the present, it cannot be otherwise in the present

So what God knows to be so must be so

But this necessity is *conditional* necessity

Every event which occurs occurs with conditional necessity

An event occurs with *simple* necessity if it is determined by nature to occur

Human actions are not determined by nature

Human actions occur with *conditional* but not *simple* necessity

The Problem Boethius Does Not Address

Humans cannot affect Providence

However we choose to act, God knows that we (will) act in that way because he has decided that we will.

Aquinas:

[1] If A causes B and A is necessary, then B is necessary.

God's knowledge is the cause of what he knows

God's knowledge is necessary

Future contingents are not necessary

Therefore God does not know future contingents.

[2] The Consequence Argument

Suppose that A will occur

If God knew that A will occur, then A will occur

Necessarily God knew that A will occur (on the supposition that A will occur)

Therefore A will necessarily occur (on the supposition that A will occur)

Aquinas' Solution:

Distinguish:

(1) Knowledge of vision = Knowledge of things present

(2) Knowledge of things through their causes

Humans can only know the future with knowledge of type (2)

God knows everything to the extent that it can be known
in both ways

Crucial Distinctions

‘Possibly this black thing is white’ may be read

(a) DE RE (About the thing) : ‘This black thing might be white’

- True if the thing is not necessarily black.

Also called the DIVIDED reading.

(b) DE DICTO (About the proposition):

‘This black thing is white’ might be true

- False because ‘this black thing is white’ is always false’

Also called the COMPOSITE reading.

The claim ‘everything known by God is necessarily so’
may be understood:

(a) *de dicto*: ‘everything known by God is so’ is a necessarily
true proposition

or

(b) *de re*: Every thing known by God is such that it is necessarily so.

The claim is true read *de dicto* but false read *de re*.