

Religion and Ethics Eduqas A level Knowledge Organiser:

Theme 4C – The Implications of Predestination / Determinism

Key concepts:

- **Moral responsibility** means we can be held accountable for acting in a certain way. **Hard determinism** says that our actions are caused by events beyond our control, so it makes no sense to **blame** or **praise** ourselves for our actions.
- This means **punishment** and **reward** make no sense, since people do not choose their actions, they are compelled to perform them by prior causes.
- Alternatively, punishment or reward has some use insofar as being used to condition people's behaviour and keep society in order.
- To claim we **ought** to act in the 'right' way or avoid 'wrong' behaviour implies we have the freedom to choose. It is illogical to say we ought to act in a certain way if those actions are outside of our control.
- Right and wrong may still exist, but we cannot be held accountable for it if determinism is correct.
- If there is no right or wrong, **normative ethics** are meaningless since the choice to follow commands is illusory. If actions correspond with these norms, it is coincidence or luck.
- If behaviour is controlled by **genes**, no normative system in the world could ever change human action.

- **Soft determinism** implies we are morally responsible for our actions, even though our behaviour is caused.
- We are conscious of causation but provided we can act according to our desires, then we can be praised or blamed for that.
- This gives the idea of right and wrong a moral worth because the intention or will to behave is the basis on which we consider our actions to be free.
- Normative ethics can guide people according to what they 'ought' to will and can act as a **causal** factor without compelling people to act.
- Soft determinism implies that we *could* act differently and if we did, we would be praised or blamed accordingly.
- Normative theories do not compel us, but they do act as a causal agent. This makes ethics more meaningful because we could not be morally responsible for uncaused or random acts either.

- **Predestination** either suggests that our ultimate destiny is decided by God or that our actions throughout our lives are set by God.
- If God sets our ultimate destiny, as Augustine and Calvin suggest, His reward or punishment is arbitrary as it does not relate to our behaviour.
- God is the author of evil if He created hell knowing that He will use it. He created some of us purely for punishment, so he cannot be **omnibenevolent**.
- God could be a passive **apologist** for evil if he fails to elect anyone for heaven or if He elects some for heaven even if they have done evil deeds.
- If reward or punishment *do* correspond to our behaviour, this suggests God would not be **omnipotent**, since human action determines their fate.
- Religious people use prayer to **petition** God for things such as forgiveness, help, and strength. Prayer that cannot influence an omnipotent God is pointless.
- Miracles are unnecessary if God has planned every aspect of creation. Either they do not exist, or humans are able to thwart God's plans so that He must intervene.

Key quotes:

'Any other set of outcomes than the one fixed from eternity is impossible.' – James

'The action to which the "ought" applies must indeed be possible under natural conditions.' – Kant

'Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.' – Jeremiah 1:5

Issues for analysis and evaluation:

Key arguments/debates

Some argue that if determinism is correct, normative moral theories are pointless.

Other agree and say that this means punishment has no value.

Some point out that God cannot be omnibenevolent if He plans for some to go to hell as part of His plan.

Key questions

Do normative ethical theories require that humans have free will?

Are uncaused acts more morally worthwhile than caused acts?

Is God to blame for evil in the world?

Key words:

moral responsibility	hard determinism	blame	praise
punishment	reward	ought	normative ethics
genes	soft determinism	causal predestination	omnibenevolent
apologist	omnipotent	petition	