

Religion and Ethics Eduqas A level Knowledge Organiser:

Theme 4D Religious concepts of free will

Key concepts:

- To have **free will** means to be able to decide from more than one possible course of behaviour and having the capacity to choose differently.
- Believers try to balance human moral responsibility with God's **omnipotence** and **omniscience** for God to be blameless for human sin.
- This is a complex theological exercise, not a simple choice between whether we are free or predestined.

- Pelagius was a contemporary of Augustine. Most of Pelagius' writings are only accessible to us via Augustine and so he may be misrepresented at times.
- Their disagreement focused on how a human gains salvation – **soteriology** – through faith or works.
- Pelagius argued that Adam's sin only affected Adam. Adam's sin is a bad example, not an act that condemned the whole of humanity.
- Human tendency to sinfulness results from an ignorance of the good due to participation in a fallen world, not a fundamentally degraded human nature.
- All humans are born innocent not sinful. A person could die blameless if they led a sinless life, and infant baptism is not necessary to cleanse **original sin**.
- Humans are responsible for their sinful decisions, but this is good. As humans make mistakes they mature in wisdom, getting closer to God's image.
- Augustine's doctrine of original sin seems too close to the heresy of **Manicheanism**, allowing evil an equal status with God's goodness.
- Humans have a natural capacity to seek out God. Scripture asks humans to put effort into acting morally, suggesting that they are free to choose this.
- God's **grace** is given to all at birth – the gift of free will that enables humans to choose good. God makes forgiveness possible through Christ, but it is up to the individual to seek that forgiveness.

- Scripture speaks of both free will and predestination.
- Aminius taught **conditional predestination**, which is foreknowledge not determinism.
- Adam and Eve were created as righteous beings, dependent upon God's grace to make free choices.
- Original sin deprived humanity of that original righteousness, making the inclination to sin stronger as the world is more disordered.
- God cooperates with human choices, whether good or evil, through **divine concurrence**. This means he permits sin but does not approve of it.
- Through His **providence**, God supervises the world and sustains it, giving **prevenient grace** or **common grace** to people to freely choose the good and resist sin with help from the Holy Spirit.
- God knows who will choose good (the elect), because he has **middle knowledge**, (knowledge of any event that may come to pass) but the choice is not forced by God.
- After Arminius' death, the Arminians (his followers) presented **Five Articles of Remonstrance** to the Synod of Dort to challenge Calvinism:
 1. Election is conditional on humans accepting God's gift of grace.
 2. Salvation is available to all, but only some will choose it.
 3. It is only possible to have faith and resist sin through Christ.
 4. God's grace is resistible, and humans can reject him.
 5. Salvation requires our own efforts with assistance from the Holy Spirit.

Key quotes:

'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' – Matthew 5: 48

'That we are able to do good is of God, but that we actually do it is of ourselves.' – Pelagius

'A thing does not happen because it has been foreknown or predicted, but it is foreknown or predicted because it is about to be.' – Arminius

Issues for analysis and evaluation:

Key arguments/debates

Some argue that Pelagius and/or Arminius successfully account for free will without compromising any of God's characteristics.

Others argue Pelagius and/or Arminius challenge Christian theology by compromising God's omnipotence.

Some still ask whether good works are required for a person to gain salvation.

Key questions

Can humanity be free if God is omnipotent?

Does God's omniscience make it impossible for us to make a free decision?

Is God complicit in evil by failing to prevent it?

Key words:

omnipotence

omniscience

soteriology

original sin

Manicheanism

grace

conditional predestination

divine concurrence

Providence

prevenient grace

common grace

middle knowledge

Five Articles of Remonstrance