

## God's Omniscience and Free Will

According to the traditional Western concept of God, God is omniscient—that is, God is all-knowing. But does God's knowledge leave any room for free will? Many people believe it does not. If God is all-knowing, they claim, then humans cannot be free. Here is how they argue:

1. Suppose God is all-knowing.
2. If God is all-knowing, then God knows what I will do in the future.
3. God cannot be wrong, so if God knows what I will do in the future, then it has to happen.
4. So what I will do in the future has to happen.
5. But if what I will do in the future has to happen, then I am not free to do anything else.
6. So I am not free—I am not able to do anything other than what God now knows I will do.

But this conclusion is distressing to believers. For if our actions are not free, then we cannot be held responsible for them. That is, I cannot be blamed for doing something if I was not able to do anything else. But if we can't be blamed for anything we do, then what of traditional doctrines of heaven and hell? How can we

be punished for something if we couldn't do anything else? How can we "repent" if we never had the ability to avoid any sinful action? How can I be blamed for what I had no power to change?

To avoid these conclusions, believers have rejected one or more of the premises of the argument above. Some reject (1) and say God is not all-knowing—his knowledge is limited. Others reject (2) and say God does not know now what I will do in the future because I have not yet decided what I will do. Others reject (3) and say that God can be wrong because God is a fallible God. But, obviously, none of these options is very attractive to the believer.

### QUESTIONS

1. If you are a believer, do you agree with the argument above? If you don't agree with it, which premise do you think you should reject?
2. Suppose that instead of "God," the argument above was about a supercomputer that knew everything that would happen in the future. Assuming such a supercomputer is possible, would the argument above still work?