

Augustine on will, freedom, and foreknowledge: *De libero arbitrio*, III, 1–3

CHRISTOPHER HUGHES

Department of Philosophy, King's College London Strand, London WC2R 2LS, UK
e-mail: christopher.hughes@kcl.ac.uk

Abstract: Towards the beginning of the third book of *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine defends the compatibility of human freedom and divine foreknowledge. His defence appears to involve the idea that the will is essentially free. I discuss and evaluate Augustine's reasons for thinking that the will is essentially free, and the way that Augustine moves from the essential freedom of the will to the compatibility of human freedom and divine foreknowledge.

Evodius' worry formulated and reformulated

At *De libero arbitrio* (henceforth, *DLA*), III, 2, Augustine's interlocutor Evodius asks Augustine:

[H]ow can it be that God has foreknowledge of all future events, and yet we do not sin by necessity? . . . Since God foreknew that a man would sin, the sin was committed of necessity, because God foreknew that it would happen. How can there be free will, where there is such inevitable necessity? (Augustine (1961), 88)

Evodius seems to have in mind something like the following line of thought: (i) if God has foreknowledge of all the future movements of our will (sinful or otherwise), those movements are inevitable. Moreover, (ii) if all the future movements of our will are inevitable, then those movements are not free, and we do not have free will. But (iii) God does have foreknowledge of all the future movements of our will. So (iv) we do not have free will.

Various contemporary philosophers would oppose this argument by saying that although (i) and (ii) are true, we still have free will, since not even God has foreknowledge of all the future movements of our will (so that (iii) is false). But Evodius (like Augustine) takes the thesis that God has foreknowledge of all the future movements of our will to be theologically non-negotiable. He is committed to

the truth of (iii), but he finds (i) and (ii) compelling. So he is (in Augustine's words) 'troubled and perplexed' by the argument under consideration, because he is inclined to accept the truth of its premises, and to concede that its premises imply its conclusion, but loth to accept that conclusion.

At *DLA*, III, 3 Augustine addresses Evodius' perplexity concerning divine foreknowledge and the freedom of the will as follows:

Surely this is the question that troubles and perplexes you: how can the following two propositions, that (1) God has foreknowledge of all future events, and (2) we do not sin by necessity but by free will, be made consistent with each other? 'If God foreknows that a man will sin', you say, 'it is necessary that that a man will sin'. If a man must sin, his sin is not a result of the will's choice, but is instead a fixed and inevitable necessity. You fear now that this reasoning results either in the blasphemous denial of God's foreknowledge, or, if we deny this, the admission that we sin by necessity, not by will. (Augustine (1961), 90)

The first sentence of this passage captures Evodius' worry exactly: how can we consistently hold that the (sinful) future movements of our will are both foreknown and free (freely willed)? But later on in the passage, Augustine arguably misrepresents the exact nature of Evodius' worry. Evodius is worried that if (or since) God has foreknowledge of all our future choices, it will turn out that we sin by necessity, and not of our own free will. In the last sentence of the passage, however, Augustine represents Evodius as worrying that if (or since) God has foreknowledge of all our future choices, it will turn out that we sin by necessity, and not by will.

This is not obviously the same worry.

After all, in chapter 1 of book III of the *De libero arbitrio*, Evodius appears to accept that sinning necessarily involves using the will a certain way (*viz.*, misusing the will to turn away from greater goods towards lesser ones). If sinning necessarily involves the use of the will, it could never be that we sin, by necessity and not by will. What might be true (and implied by divine foreknowledge) is that we sin by necessity *as well as* by will.

Suppose, however, you thought that our will was essentially free – that our will, *qua* will, was free. Then you would also think that divine foreknowledge is incompatible with our free will if and only if divine foreknowledge is incompatible with our will, and that the worry about whether divine foreknowledge is compatible with our having free will was at bottom the same as the worry about whether divine foreknowledge is compatible with our having a will (in the sense that meeting either worry would meet the other).

In fact, at *DLA*, III, 3, Augustine seems to assert that our will, *qua* will, is in our power and thus free:

Our will . . . is not a will unless it is in our power. And since it is indeed in our power, it is free in us. (Augustine (1961), 93)

The will is going to be a will, because God has foreknowledge of it. Nor can it be a will if it is not in our power. (*ibid.*)

If our will 'is not a will' unless it is in our power, and free, then it is in our power, and free, in so far as it is a will. If our will 'cannot be a will' unless it is in our power

(and is accordingly free) then our will is essentially in our power (and essentially free).

This raises two questions. First, why does Augustine think that our will isn't our will unless it's in our power and free? Second, why does Augustine reformulate Evodius' worry about God's foreknowledge and our free will as a worry about God's knowledge and our will? How, if at all, does that reformulation of Evodius' worry help Augustine meet it? I shall tackle the first question forthwith, and then move on to the second.

Unpacking Augustine's argument for the essential freedom of the will

At *DLA*, III, 3, Augustine writes:

[Y]ou could not deem anything else to be in our power except that which we effect when we will. (*Non enim potest aliud sentire essere in potestate nostra, nisi quod cum volumus facimus.*) Therefore nothing is so in our power as is willing (*ipsa voluntas*). For assuredly willing (*voluntas*) occurs, without any interval, as soon as we will (*volumus*). (Augustine, translated and cited by Hopkins (1994), 81)

[O]nly when we do not have what we will can we deny that we have power. (*Non enim negare possumus habere potestatem, nisi dum nobis non adest quod volumus.*) But when we will: if we do not have this willing (*voluntas ipsa*), then surely we do not will. Now if it is not possible that when we will we don't will, then (assuredly) we have this willing when we will. And nothing else is in our power except what we have when we will. Therefore our willing would not even be a willing, unless it were in our power. (*ibid.*)¹

In the first passage above, Augustine starts with the claim (a) you could not deem anything else to be in our power except what we 'effect' (as Hopkins translate 'facere') or do when (*cum*) we will. Just as *you could not deem anything else to be a badger except a mammal* is a roundabout of way of saying *only mammals are badgers, you could not deem anything else to be in our power except what we 'effect'/do when we will* is a roundabout way of saying *only things we do when we do will are in our power*. 'Cum', like 'when', can mean either 'while' or 'if'. So we might think either that here Augustine is saying that only things that we do/effect while we will are in our power, or that here Augustine is saying that only things that we do/effect if we will are in our power. On the first, but not the second construal, only things we in fact do are in our power (since one cannot *F* while one *G*s without *F*-ing, but one can *F* if one *G*s, without *F*-ing: compare 'I'll listen to music while I wash the dishes' with 'I'll listen to music if I wash the dishes'). Moreover, it is clear that Augustine thinks that we do not actually do all the things that are in our power to do (so that it's *not* the case that only things we actually do are in our power). Hence Augustine is saying that only things that we do if we will are things in our power (whatever exactly that means).

From (a) only things we do if we will are in our power, Augustine infers that (b) nothing is as much in our power as our will, inasmuch as (c) willing is present in us

as soon as we will. So he seems to be advancing the following (enthymematic) argument:

- (i) Only things we do if we will are in our power.
- (ii) Willing is present in us as soon as we will.
- (iii) So our will is (more) in our power (than anything else).

Now (iii) does not follow in any obvious way from (ii) alone. Presumably Augustine thinks that it is (ii) together with (i) that put us in a position to infer (iii) (cf. his use of ‘therefore’ in the second sentence of the first passage (and the last sentence of the second)). But if we cannot get from (ii) alone to (iii), it is difficult to see how we could get from (i) and (ii) to (iii). After all, (i) does not specify a sufficient condition for something’s being in our power, but only a necessary one. From the assumption that our willing is present in us as soon as we will, and the assumption that only things we do if we will are in our power, how can we reach the conclusion that our willing is (more) in our power (than anything else)? Even assuming that (iv) if our willing is present in us as soon as we will, then our willing is something we do if we will, so that (v) our willing is something we do if we will, it won’t follow from (i) and (v) that our willing is in our power. (Compare: it doesn’t follow from *only mammals are cats* and *Fido is a mammal* that Fido is a cat.)

So perhaps, despite what Augustine says, the argument Augustine has in mind is an enthymeme that could be fleshed out as follows:

- (i’) All (or perhaps, all and only) things we do if we will are things in our power.
- (ii’) Willing is always present in us as soon as we will.
- (iii’) If willing is always present in us as soon as we will, then willing is always a thing we do if we will.
- (iv’) Willing is always a thing we do if we will.
- (v’) So willing is always in our power.
- (vi’) So our will is (more) in our power (than anything else).

But what does *all (or perhaps, all and only) things we do if we will are things in our power* mean? Perhaps: all (or perhaps all and only) things we do if we will (to do them) are things in our power.² That is: for any *F* *F*-ing is in our power if (or perhaps, if and only if) we *F* if we will to *F*. In which case, the argument Augustine has in mind can be fleshed out as follows:

- (i’’) Doing something is in our power if (or perhaps, if and only if) we do it if we will to do it.
- (ii’’) For any *F* willing to *F* is present in us as soon as we will to *F*.
- (iii’’) If willing to *F* is present in us as soon as we will to *F*, then willing to *F* is something we do, if we will to do it.
- (iv’’) For any *F* willing to *F* is something we do if we will to do it.

- (v'') For any F willing to F is in our power.
 (vi'') Our will is (more) in our power (than anything else).

But I doubt that this argument is (the unpacked version of) the argument Augustine has in mind in the passage under discussion. (iv'') says that whenever we will to will to do something, we will to do it. (iv'') might be true – vacuously, if willing to will is impossible, or non-vacuously, if willing to will to do something is possible, and always efficacious. But whether or not we will to F whenever we will to will to F , there doesn't seem to be any link between the trivial principle that whenever we will to F , willing to F is present in us, and the substantive principle that whenever we will to will to F , we will to F . (Compare: there is no link between the trivial principle that whenever we judge that p , judging that p is present in us, and the substantive principle that if we judge that we judge that p , then we judge that p .) So there is no evident reason to suppose that (iii'') is true, or that Augustine would regard it as true.³

All (or, perhaps all and only) things we do if we will are in our power might naturally enough be understood as meaning *all (or perhaps all and only) things we do if we will (to do them) are in our power*. But it might instead be understood as meaning *all (or, perhaps, all and only) things we do if we will (a certain way/the right way) are in our power* – where the certain way, or the right way of willing, is a way of willing sufficient for doing the thing in question. In other words, it might be understood as equivalent to: for any F F -ing is in our power if (or perhaps if and only if), for some way of willing, our willing that way is sufficient for our F -ing.

On this understanding of *all (or, perhaps, all and only) things we do if we will are in our power*, we can allow that creating the world is in God's power, since God's willing a certain way is sufficient for His creating the world – where we can take *willing to create the world* as that certain way of willing. Equally, though, we can allow that willing to create the world is in God's power, since God's willing a certain way is sufficient for His willing to create the world – where we can again take *willing to create the world* as that certain way of willing. And we can allow that Evodius' willing to be happy is within Evodius' power, inasmuch as for a certain way of willing, if Evodius wills that way, then Evodius wills to be happy – where *willing to be happy* is that certain way of willing. Evodius' willing to be happy is in Evodius' power, because for some way of willing – to wit, willing to be happy – Evodius' willing that way is sufficient for Evodius' willing to be happy (whether or not he *will* be happy, of course).

If we gloss *all (or perhaps all and only) things we do if we will* in the way just suggested, we could unpack the argument Augustine has in mind as follows:

- (i*) All (or perhaps, all and only) things we do if we will (a certain way) are in our power.
 (ii*) For any F our willing to F is present in us as soon as we will to F .

- (iii*) If our willing to F is present in us as soon as we will to F , then our willing to F is a thing we do if we will (a certain way).
- (iv*) Our willing to F is a thing we do if we will (a certain way).
- (v*) So for any F our willing to F is in our power (by (i*) and (iv*)).
- (vi*) So our will is (more) in our power (than anything else).

Is this a good way to unpack Augustine's argument? For reasons I shall endeavour to bring out it seems not.

(i*) says that doing something is in our power if (or, perhaps if and if) our willing a certain way is sufficient for our doing it. As logicians say, p is *materially sufficient* for q just in case p is not true or q is true. If the notion of sufficiency at play in (i*) is understood materially, then (i*)–(vi*) is not a good way of unpacking Augustine's argument.

For suppose there is a way that Evodius does not will. Then Evodius' willing that way is materially sufficient for his creating the world. So Evodius' willing a certain way is materially sufficient for his creating the world. So, if the notion of sufficiency in (i*) is material, then *there is some way Evodius does not will* and (i*) jointly imply *Evodius has it in his power to create the world*. But Augustine accepts *there is some way Evodius does not will*, and rejects *Evodius has it in his power to create the world*. Whence we may conclude that if the notion of sufficiency at play in (i*) is material, Augustine rejects (i*), and (i*)–(vi*) is accordingly not a good way of unpacking Augustine's argument.

Say that p is *counterfactually or subjunctively sufficient* for q just in case the counterfactual or subjunctive conditional, *if it were that p , it would be that q* , is true, and *strictly or absolutely sufficient* for q just in case the strict conditional, *if p , then it must be that q* , is true (just in case it's strictly or absolutely necessary that p is not true or q is true).

If you like 'mundane' accounts of the truth conditions of subjunctive conditionals, you can say that p is subjunctively sufficient for q just in case either 'the closest possible world' to the actual world in which p is true is a world in which q is true (in which case p is non-vacuously subjunctively sufficient for q), or the antecedent p is 'unentertainable' (in which case p is vacuously subjunctively sufficient for q). If you like mundane accounts of the truth conditions of strict conditionals, you can say that p is strictly or absolutely sufficient for q just in case every possible world in which p is true is a world in which q is true (where p will be non-vacuously absolutely sufficient for q if there are worlds in which p is true, and vacuously absolutely sufficient for q otherwise).

Now if the notion of sufficiency at play in (i*) is construed subjunctively (or absolutely), then *there is some way that Evodius does not will* and (i*) do not jointly imply that Evodius has it in his power to create the world (since there is no way of willing such that Evodius' willing that way is subjunctively (much less absolutely) sufficient for his creating the world). This might suggest

that Augustine accepts (i*) on a reading involving subjunctive (and/or absolute) sufficiency.

In fact, I don't think that Augustine thinks *F*-ing is in our power whenever our willing to *F* is subjunctively sufficient for our *F*-ing. At *DLA*, III, 1, Augustine contrasts the movement of a stone falling towards the earth with the movement of a soul away from higher goods towards lower ones:

[T]he movement which, for the sake of pleasure, turns the will from the Creator to the creature belongs to the will itself. . . . [I]t is not natural, but voluntary. It is . . . like the movement of the stone that is carried downwards, because, as the one movement belongs to the stone, so the other belongs to the spirit. However, it is unlike the movement of the stone in that the stone does not have in its power to check its downward motion, whereas, so long as the spirit does not will to neglect higher goods and love lower ones, it does not move in that direction. Therefore, the movement of the stone is natural, while that of the will is voluntary. (Augustine (1961), 87)

The movement of the stone towards the earth is not voluntary, because the stone does not have it in its power to check its downward motion. But the movement of the soul away from higher goods towards lower ones is voluntary, because the soul does have it in its power to check its movement away from higher goods towards lower ones, inasmuch as it would not move away from higher goods towards lower ones, if it did not will to do so.

Suppose that we are going to *F*, however we will. Then we are going to *F*, and *a fortiori* could *F*. Nevertheless, I think Augustine would say, *F*-ing is not in our power. For Augustine, the things that are in our power are the things over which we have power. And our will is the locus both of our freedom and of our 'power over'. We have power over something's being so only if its being so depends on and is subject to our will; only if were we to will one way, it would be so, and if we were to will a different way, it would not be so. Thus we have power over turning away from higher goods towards lower goods, because we would not turn away from higher goods, if we willed to cleave to them; but we have no power over dying, because we would die, however we willed. Dying is something we will do, and *a fortiori* could do. Still, for Augustine, it is not something we have power over, and is not something in our power.

Now if the notion of sufficiency in (i*) is construed subjunctively, then (i*) straightforwardly implies that anything we are going to do (would still do) regardless of how we will (regardless of how we willed) is in our power. And if for Augustine, only things that depend upon and are subject to our will are in our power, then Augustine rejects this straightforward implication. In which case, assuming that the notion of sufficiency in (i*) is construed subjunctively, Augustine does not after all accept (i*) – or at least, would not accept it, given a bit of reflection on what it implies.

So perhaps the argument Augustine does not explicitly formulate but is aiming at in the passage we have been focusing on is not (i*)–(vi*), but rather something more like:

- (i**) For any F F -ing is in our power if (or, perhaps, if and only if) for some way of willing, our willing that way is (subjunctively or absolutely) necessary and sufficient for our F -ing.
- (ii**) (Given that willing is necessarily present in us as soon as we will and vice versa), for any F , there is some way of willing such that our willing that way is subjunctively (and absolutely) necessary and sufficient for willing to F .
- (iii**) So for any F willing to F is in our power.
- (iv**) So our will is (more) in our power (than anything else).

(Note that (i**)–(iv**) imply the natural and apparently Augustinian idea that only those things that counterfactually depend upon and are subject to our will are things in our power – that is, things we have power over.)

(i**)–(iv**) seems a promising way of unpacking Augustine’s argument. Perhaps Augustine has in mind something like the following line of thought: sometimes, an agent’s willing a certain way isn’t subjunctively or absolutely necessary and sufficient for an agent’s doing a certain thing: Evodius’ willing to live a happy life is not subjunctively or absolutely necessary and sufficient for his living a happy life. Other times, an agent’s willing a certain way is both subjunctively and absolutely necessary and sufficient for that agent’s doing a certain thing: God’s willing to create a universe is both subjunctively and absolutely necessary and sufficient for His creating a universe.

Now (Augustine may be thinking), if God’s willing a certain way is both absolutely necessary and absolutely sufficient for His creating a universe, then the total state of His will – that is, the (complete) truth about how He does and does not will – *determines* or *settles* whether or not He creates a universe. For the total state of God’s will either includes or precludes God’s willing to create a universe. If it includes it, then (given that God’s will is necessarily efficacious), the total state of His will strictly implies that God creates a universe, and thus determines or settles that He does. If on the other hand the total state of God’s will precludes God’s willing to create a universe, then (given that God could not create a universe without willing to), the total state of God’s will strictly implies, and thus determines or settles that God does not create a universe. So the total state of God’s will determines or settles whether or not God creates a universe. But this is another way of saying that (via His will) God settles, or determines, or decides whether or not to create a universe. In which case creating a universe is in His power.

It’s obviously not in our power to create a universe. Indeed, for Augustine, in our fallen state, it is not even always in our power to do what is right (i.e., cleave to greater goods). As Augustine says at *DLA*, III, 19, and underscores in the *Retractions*, we sometimes find ourselves in the Pauline predicament of willing to act rightly, but being unable to (see Romans 7:18: ‘to will is present with me; to accomplish that which is good I find not’). Even so, the Augustine

of *De libero arbitrio* thinks, there is at least one thing that is always and necessarily in our power – willing. Just as God’s willing a certain way is absolutely necessary and absolutely sufficient for creating a universe, our willing a certain way is absolutely necessary and absolutely sufficient for our willing that way. Just as God (via His will) settles or determines what He creates, we, via our will, settle or determine what we will. Since we are finite creatures, our doings/non-doings and our willings/non-willings are ‘misaligned’ in ever so many ways: we may do something, without willing to do it, or will to do something, without doing it. But when a doing just is a willing, there is no room for misalignment between the two: necessarily, we will only if we do. In this sense (for Augustine), although we are infinitely far from having God-like power over what we do, we do have God-like power over what we will.

Evaluating the unpacked argument

If we have (finally!) found a good way to unpack Augustine’s argument, have we also found a way to unpack a good argument of Augustine?

To answer this question, let’s start with some observations about absolute necessity and absolute sufficiency. p is absolutely sufficient for q unless, in some possible world, p is true and q is not. Hence p is absolutely sufficient for q whenever p is necessarily false or q is necessarily true. Also, p is absolutely necessary for q if and only if q is absolutely sufficient for p . Consequently, assuming a wills to F and a F s are both necessarily false, a ’s willing to F is absolutely necessary and absolutely sufficient for a ’s F -ing. (a ’s willing to F is absolutely sufficient for a ’s F -ing, in virtue of the necessary falsehood of a wills to F ; a ’s willing to F is absolutely necessary for a ’s F -ing, in virtue of the necessary falsehood of a F s (and the fact that p is absolutely necessary for q if and only if q is absolutely sufficient for p .)

But are there cases in which both a wills to F and a F s are necessarily false? Augustine thinks so. For, he supposes, both *God wills to do evil* is and *God does evil* are necessarily false. On these assumptions, God’s willing to do evil is absolutely necessary and absolutely sufficient for His doing evil. So if (i**) is true, and the notion of necessity and sufficiency in (i*) is absolute, then God has it in His power to do evil. But (assuming *God does evil* is necessarily false), this seems wrong. If *God does evil* is necessarily false, but God has it in His power to do evil, then God has a power that He cannot possibly exercise (a possible world in which God exercised His power to do evil would perforce be a possible world in which God does evil, and we are supposing there are no possible worlds in which God does evil). But the notion of a necessarily un-exercise-able power seems incoherent.

Note that it seems that one could not defend (i**) from the objection under consideration by saying that the necessity and sufficiency in (i**) should be understood as subjunctive necessity and sufficiency, or some other kind of less than absolute more-than-material necessity and sufficiency. Absolute necessity and sufficiency is the strongest kind of more-than-material sufficiency; so if God’s willing to do evil is absolutely necessary and sufficient for His doing evil, then it

is more-than-materially necessary and sufficient for His doing evil, however exactly more-than-material necessity and sufficiency is understood.

It is also arguable that, setting theological issues to one side, there are cases in which it is absolutely impossible for anyone to either will to F or $\neg F$.

Having a mastery of a concept seems to imply grasping certain truths: Arguably, no one can have a mastery of the mathematical concept *even*, and understand what it is to be even, without grasping the truth that (seeing that) even numbers are divisible by two without remainder. Arguably, no one can have a mastery of the logical concept of self-distinctness, and understand what it is to be distinct from oneself, without grasping the truth that (seeing that) no one could never be self-distinct.

Now I take it that it is impossible to will to F , even though one does not have a concept of F -ing, and so does not know what it is to F . If a two-year-old child does not have a concept of error, and accordingly does not have a concept of doing everything one can to avoid error, that child cannot will to do everything she can to avoid error.

I also take it that it is impossible to will to F whilst seeing that one cannot F . (Try willing to count all the way to the largest integer.)

So, suppose that (a) necessarily, no one wills to become self-distinct, unless she both understands what it is to become self-distinct, and does not see that she cannot become self-distinct, and (b) no one understands what it is to become self-distinct, unless she sees that she cannot become self-distinct. It follows that it is just as impossible for anyone to will to become self-distinct as it is for anyone to become self-distinct. In which case, willing to become self-distinct is absolutely necessary and absolutely sufficient for becoming self-distinct, and becoming self-distinct is absolutely impossible; in which case (i**) is false (whether necessity and sufficiency are understood absolutely, or subjunctively, or, for that matter, materially).

The moral of these arguable counterexamples to (i**) is the following: according to (i**), as long as an agent's willing to F is (in a suitably strong sense) necessary and sufficient for that agent's F -ing, it is in that agent's power to F . This seems plausible enough, in cases in which the agent has the possibility of willing to F . But only in such cases: if God does not have the possibility of willing to do evil (or I do not have the possibility of willing to become self-distinct), we may not infer that doing evil is in God's power (or becoming self-distinct is in my power) from the fact that God's willing to do evil (or my willing to become self-distinct) is (in a suitably strong sense) necessary and sufficient for His doing evil (or for my becoming self-distinct).

Notice that this point is a general one, which applies even when willing is not at issue, and even when absolute impossibilities are not involved. Suppose that I have snapped my fingers ninety-nine times before now. If snapping my fingers now is in my power, then, since my snapping my fingers now is (in a suitably strong more-than-material sense) necessary and sufficient for snapping my

fingers for the hundredth time, snapping my fingers for the hundredth time is in my power. If, however, snapping my fingers now is not in my power (say, because my hand has become paralysed), then snapping my fingers for the hundredth time is not in my power, despite the necessity and sufficiency of my snapping my fingers now for my snapping my fingers for the hundredth time.

So, *pace* Augustine, there seems to be no way to get from the ‘self-necessity’ and ‘self-sufficiency’ of my willing, to my willing’s being in my power or up to me. If my snapping my fingers now might be self-necessary and self-sufficient, without being in my power, it seems that the same might be true of my willing a certain way – even if willing that certain way isn’t anything as impossible as willing to become self-distinct. Why might it be that my willing, say, to turn away from greater goods towards lesser goods was not in my power? There might be lots of reasons. Given the kind of body I have, it’s not in my power to hold up heavy objects indefinitely; sooner or later, I have to put them down or drop them. It might analogously be that, given the kind of mind (and heart) I have, it’s not in my power to keep my will turned towards greater goods indefinitely; sooner or later, I reach a point where my will turns towards lesser goods.⁴ Alternatively, it might be that God has willed that I am not going will a certain way. Assuming that it’s in my power to will that certain way only if it’s in my power to bring it about that God’s will is inefficacious, and it’s not in my power to bring it about that God’s will is inefficacious, then it’s not in my power to will that certain way. Alternatively again, it might be that willing a certain way is in my power only if it’s in my power to do something such that, if I did it, the past would be different or the laws of nature would be different, and it is not in my power to do anything such that, if I did it, the past would be different or the laws of nature would be different.

To recap: Augustine seems to hold and defend the view that the will, just in so far as it is a will, is free. But his defence of that view (in *DLA*, III, 3) is neither fully explicit nor compelling, and it’s not clear (to me, at least) how to complete it in such a way as to make it compelling.

Another route to the essential freedom of the will?

Still, someone might say:

Augustine’s defence of the view that the will is essentially free is admittedly neither especially clear, nor especially convincing. The view itself is nevertheless entirely defensible.

Suppose that, as Augustine would put it, I *F* by will. In that case, I *F* by choice. This in turn implies that I choose to *F*. Now if I choose to *F*, I make a choice about *F*-ing. And if I make a choice about *F*-ing, then I have a choice about *F*-ing. (Think how strange it would sound to say: ‘I have no choice about *F*-ing, but I’m making one anyway: I’m choosing to *F*).

Moreover, if I have a choice about *F*-ing, then it is in my power to *F*, and I am free to *F*. (If it’s not in fact in my power to *F*, and I am not in fact free to *F*, I (at most) think I have a choice about *F*-ing.) So whenever I *F* by will, I freely *F*.

Now suppose that I freely *F*. Then, before I *F*-ed, I was free to *F*, or not to *F*. But equally, I was free to choose to *F*, and free to choose not to *F*.

(Before I freely *F*-ed, it was in my power whether (or not) I'd *F*, and likewise in my power whether (or not) I would choose to *F*; if it hadn't been in my power whether I chose to *F*, it wouldn't have been in my power whether I *F*-ed.)

So when I *F* by will (by choice), just as my *F*-ing is in my power and free, so is my choosing (my willing) to *F*. In other words, whenever I use my will to *F*, both the *F*-ing and the willing are free (both the act that I will, and the willing of that act are free). In this sense, the will, as well as what we do by will, is essentially free: in the absence of freedom, nothing is either done by will, or willed.

What should we make of this defence of the essential freedom of the will? I think that, in a very natural sense of 'choosing' and 'choice', *choosing to F* implies *having a choice about F-ing* implies *being free to F and free not to F*.

I am not inclined to think that willing is just choosing, so that unfree willing is no more possible than unfree choosing. To my mind, just as hope that is seen is not hope (Romans, 8:24), choice that is not free is not choice, but willing that is not free is still willing. If choice that is not free is not choice, but willing that is not free is still willing, then *F*-ing by choice is not the same as (or implied by) *F*-ing by will, even if it is the same as (or implied by) *F*-ing of one's own *free* will.

Still, a defender of Augustine might say, the fact that Augustine conceives of willing in a different way from the way I do doesn't imply that Augustine is making some kind of mistake (or for that matter that I am). Perhaps we can irenically allow that, however we conceive of willing, as Augustine conceives it, the will does not admit of unfreedom. To put it another way, perhaps we can say that the Augustinian view that our 'will' (*voluntas*) and what we do 'by will' (*voluntate*) are *ex vi terminorum* free is simply the unobjectionable view that choice and what we do by choice are *ex vi terminorum* free.

From the essential freedom of the will to the compatibility of human freedom and divine foreknowledge

But suppose that the will is essentially free. How does that help address the worry Evodius raised in *DLA*, III, 2 concerning the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom? Towards the end of *DLA*, III, 3, Augustine moves rather quickly from the essential freedom of the will (and additional premises) to the compatibility of divine foreknowledge with the freedom of our will. But the crucial point seems to be the following:

When God has foreknowledge of our will, it is going to be the will that He has foreknown. . . . Nor can it be a will, if it is not in our power. Therefore God also has knowledge of our power over it. So the power is not taken from me by His foreknowledge . . . (Augustine (1961), 93)

Assuming, as it seems clear from *DLA* III we may, that for Augustine, my will's being in my power and my will's being free come to the same thing,⁵ Augustine may be reasoning here along something like the following lines:

- (1) God has foreknowledge of my will. (That is, God has complete foreknowledge of how I am going to will.)
- (2) So God foreknows that I am going to will a certain way (even if I don't know what that certain way is).
- (3) *I am going to will a certain way implies I am going to freely will that way* (since the will, in so far as it is a will, is free).
- (4) Since God foreknows whatever is implied by what He foreknows God foreknows that I am going to freely will that way.
- (5) If God foreknows that I am going to freely will that way, then (A) God foreknows that I am going to will that way, and (B) I am freely going to will that way. In other words, if God foreknows that I am going to freely will that way, my willing that way in the future is both divinely foreknown and free.
- (6) So my willing that way is both divinely foreknown and free (since we can move from (1) to (4) via (2) and (3), and from (3) to (5) via (4)).
- (7) So divine foreknowledge is compatible with the freedom of my will (and, more generally with the freedom of our will).

This argument is sound only if there is a God (since (1) implies that there is a God). Notice, though, that – assuming the truth of (3) – the argument will still go through if we replace (1) with the weaker

- (1') It is possible that there is a God who has foreknowledge of my will.
and (2) with the weaker
- (2') It is possible that there is a God who foreknows that I am going to will a certain way.

If we replace (1) and (2) with (1') and (2'), we can no longer derive that my willing a certain way (in the future) is both divinely foreknown and free, but we can still derive that my willing a certain way in the future could be both divinely foreknown and free. (If there is a possible world in which my willing a certain way is divinely foreknown, and if (in virtue of the essential freedom of the will) my willing a certain way's being divinely foreknown implies my willing that way's being both free and divinely foreknown, then there is a possible world in which my willing that way is both free and divinely foreknown.)

So whoever accepts the thesis that the will is essentially free must, on pain of inconsistency, accept that God's foreknowledge is compatible with the freedom of our will, as long as she grants that *God foreknows our will* is true, or at any rate possibly true. Does this mean that the thesis that the will is essentially free is of significant help in arguing for the compatibility of God's foreknowledge with the freedom of our will? For reasons I shall endeavour to bring out, I think not.

Suppose that (like Arthur Prior *et vari alii*) you think both that truth implies inevitability (because there are no truths about the open future), and that *I will inevitably F* implies *I will F unfreely*. In that case (if you have your wits about you)

you'll think that *God foreknows I am going to freely will a certain way (at a certain future time)* could not be true.

Why? Well, suppose that *God foreknows I am going to freely will a certain way (at a certain future time)* is true. Then (since *nihil potest sciri nisi verum*) *I am going to freely will that way (at that time)* is true. Also, if *God foreknows that I am going to freely will a certain way (at a certain future time)* is true, so too is *God foreknows that I am going to will that way (at that time)* (given that *I am going to freely will a certain way (at a certain time)* implies *I am going to will that way at that time*, and God foreknows anything implied by anything he foreknows). In which case (again, by the factivity of (fore)knowledge), *I am going to will that way (at that time)* is true. In which case, assuming that truth implies inevitability, *I am inevitably going to will that way (at that time)* is true. In which case, assuming that inevitability implies unfreedom, *I am unfreely going to will that way (at that time)* is true. So (assuming that truth implies inevitability and inevitability implies unfreedom) if *God foreknows that I am going to freely will a certain way (at a certain future time)* is true, both *I am going to freely will that way (at that time)* and *I am going to unfreely will that way (at that time)* are true. But it could not be true both that I am going to freely will a certain way at a certain time, and that I am going to unfreely will that way at that time. So it could not be true that God foreknows that I am going to freely will a certain way (at a certain time).

Suppose now that, as well as agreeing with Prior that truth implies inevitability and inevitability implies unfreedom, you agree with Augustine that the will is essentially free. Then (as long as you have your wits about you) you'll say that it is not even possible that God foreknows that I am going to will a certain way. For you will say:

Suppose it were possible that God foreknows that I am going to will a certain way. Then, in light of the fact that the will is essentially free, it would also be possible that God foreknows that I am going to freely will a certain way; but it isn't possible that God foreknows that I am going to freely will a certain way.

The moral is that someone who agrees with Augustine that the will is essentially free, can still reject Augustine's argument, and the tweaked version thereof in which (1) and (2) are replaced by (1') and (2'), on the grounds that neither (1) and (2) nor (1') and (2') are true – as long as she holds that there are no truths about the open future, and that inevitability implies unfreedom.

Suppose now that, unlike Prior, you don't believe in an open future. Suppose that, like Jonathan Edwards, you think that an open future isn't so much as metaphysically possible, because in every possible world, there is just one way the future could go – the way that a necessarily existing and necessarily omniscient God has always foreknown it is going to go. Suppose also that, like Prior (and Evodius) you think inevitability implies unfreedom.

In that case (if you do a bit of reasoning), just like Prior, you'll think that *God foreknows that I am freely going to will a certain way (at a certain future time)* could not be true. For you will reason as follows:

Suppose that *God foreknows that I am freely going to will a certain way (at a certain time)* is true. Then (since *nihil potest sciri nisi verum*) *I am freely going to will that way (at that time)* is true. Equally, if *God foreknows that I am freely going to will a certain way (at a certain time)* is true, so is *God foreknows I am going to will that way (at that time)*. In which case (by the factivity of (fore)knowledge) *I am going to will that way (at that time)* is true. In which case, *I am going to will that way (at that time)* is inevitable (since whatever is actually true is inevitably true, given that necessarily the actual future is the only possible future). In which case *I am unfreely going to will that way (at that time)* is true (since inevitability implies unfreedom). Since *God foreknows that I am freely going to will a certain way (at a certain time)* implies both *I am going to freely will that way (at that time)* and *I am going to unfreely will that way (at that time)*, *God foreknows that I am freely going to will a certain way (at a certain time)* could not possibly be true.

Suppose that, as well as agreeing with Edwards that the open future is a metaphysical impossibility, and agreeing with Prior and Evodius that inevitability implies unfreedom, you agree with Augustine that the will is essentially free. Then (as long as you have your wits about you), you will (just like Prior) say that it is not so much as possible that God foreknows that I am going to will a certain way. For (just like Prior) you will say:

Suppose it were possible that God foreknows that I am going to will a certain way. Then, in light of the fact that the will is essentially free, it would also be possible that God foreknows that I am going to freely will a certain way; but it isn't possible that God foreknows that I am going to freely will a certain way.

The moral is that someone who agrees with Augustine that the will is essentially free can still reject Augustine's argument, and the tweaked version thereof in which (1) and (2) are replaced by (1') and (2'), on the grounds that neither (1) and (2) nor (1') and (2') are true – as long as she holds that the open future is a metaphysical impossibility, and that inevitability implies unfreedom. Notice, though, that someone who takes this line is going to have to say that just as God's knowing that I am going to will a certain way at a certain future time is impossible, so too is my willing that way at that time. (After all, if it were possible, so too would my freely willing that way at that time, and it isn't.)

Now I think that Augustine would say that the view that there is no way of willing and future time such that my willing that way at that time is so much as possible is daft. At least, so I surmise from the way that at *DLA*, I, 12 Augustine comes down on Evodius like a ton of bricks when the latter expresses doubt about whether he has a will:

Augustine: [D]o you have a will?
 Evodius: I don't know.
 Augustine: Do you want [or will] to know?
 Evodius: I don't know that either.
 Augustine: Then ask me nothing more.
 Evodius: Why?

- Augustine: Because I ought not answer your questions, unless you have a will to know what you ask. And also, unless it is your will to arrive at wisdom, there is no point to discussing things of this kind with you. Finally, you cannot be my friend if you do not will things to go well for me. And surely, with regard to yourself: do you think you have no will to be happy?
- Evodius: I yield; it cannot be denied that we have a will. (Augustine (1961), 23–24)

So, I think Augustine would say, one cannot after all (defensibly) reject his argument (and the tweaked version thereof), if one accepts that will is essentially free, and has an Edwardian view of the future, and holds that inevitability implies unfreedom. Augustine would say that those we might call *super-hard theological determinists* (that is, those who hold that (for theological reasons) the open future is a metaphysical impossibility, and that openness is a precondition of freedom) will have to deny the essential freedom of the will, on pain of embracing the absurd consequence that there are no possible futures in which I will anything.

But is this fair to super-hard determinists? True, on the face of it, (i) whatever assumptions we might make about the existence and knowledge of God, it is entirely unproblematic that I am going to, or at least could, will a certain way tomorrow. (Even Priorians will grant that I *could* will a certain way tomorrow.) And true, we might think that, (i) whatever assumptions we make about the existence and knowledge of God, it is entirely unproblematic that I am going to, or at least could, will a certain way tomorrow, even though (ii) it's *not* the case that, whatever assumptions we make about the existence and knowledge of God, it is entirely unproblematic that I am going to, or at least could, freely will a certain way tomorrow. But we cannot (coherently) think both (i) and (ii) *on the (Augustinian) assumption that the will is essentially free*.

After Augustine convinces Evodius that he has a will, and before Augustine convinces him that the will is essentially free, Evodius accepts both (i) and (ii). After Augustine convinces him of the essential freedom of the will, Evodius holds onto (i), and abandons (ii): he comes to think that since God's knowing what I am going to freely will is no more problematic than His knowing what I am going to will, the former and the latter are both unproblematic. Suppose that a super-hard theological determinist initially accepts both (i) and (ii). If Augustine convinces her that the will is essentially free, she might go Evodius' way, holding onto (i) and abandoning (ii). She might come to think that since God knows that she'll will a certain way in the future, and that implies that God knows she'll freely will that certain way in the future, God knows that she'll freely will that certain way in the future. (If she goes this way, of course, she'll have to renounce super-hard theological determinism, and (presumably) give up her belief that inevitability implies unfreedom.) But equally, she might hold on to (ii), and abandon (i) – in which case she can hold on to her super-hard theological determinism, and deny the soundness of the Augustinian argument.

It might be said here that in *DLA*, III, 2, Augustine is not aiming to demonstrate to all and sundry that God's foreknowledge and the freedom of our will are compatible. Instead, he is attempting to construct an argument for the compatibility of God's foreknowledge and the freedom of our will that will and should convince those who, like Evodius (and unlike Prior) take it as read that God has complete knowledge of what we are going to will. Fair enough. Still, even if Augustine's argument does convince Evodius, why should it? Unlike a Priorian (or a non-Priorian with a less than straightforward construal of omniscience, such as Richard Swinburne), Evodius is initially convinced that it would be blasphemous to deny that God knows what we are going to will. But the question remains: why should Evodius retain this conviction, once he has been persuaded by Augustine that the will is essentially free? Even if Evodius in fact holds onto (i) above and jettisons (ii) above, why couldn't he just as reasonably have held onto (ii) and jettisoned (i)? At the start of *DLA*, III, 3, Evodius is firmly convinced that (α) God is all-knowing, and (β) if God is all-knowing, there are things that God knows we are going to will. (Whence we may conclude that Evodius does not initially consider it a serious possibility that truth and openness are incompatible.) He is also uncertain that (γ) if God is all-knowing, then there are things God knows we are going to freely will. Once he is convinced by Augustine that to will is to freely will, Evodius is going to have to gain confidence in (γ), or lose confidence in (β). He goes the former way, but why should he? It is true that if we think of willing as wanting or intending, then (assuming that truth and openness are compatible) it's obvious enough that if God is all-knowing, there are some things He knows we are going to will. And in the passage in which Augustine browbeats Evodius into renouncing his doubts about whether he has a will, both Augustine and Evodius appear to be thinking of willing as something like wanting or intending. (My being your friend implies my wanting (rather than my choosing) that things will go well for you.) But if there is a sense of willing in which willing is free in so far as it willing, willing in that sense evidently cannot simply be wanting or intending.

Conclusion

I will conclude by trying to draw our threads together. In *DLA*, III, 2, Evodius sets out a certain worry about the compatibility of God's foreknowledge with the freedom of our will. In *DLA*, III, 3, Augustine attempts to deliver Evodius from his worry. That attempt turns crucially on the idea that our will, *qua* will, is free. Augustine argues for this idea. But, for reasons I have set out, I think that argument fails, inasmuch as the fact that our willing a certain way is (trivially) self-necessary and self-sufficient is entirely compatible with our willing that way's not being in our power, and not free. This leaves open that our will (or, at least, our will as Augustine is within his rights to conceive it) is as such free; and I suggested a way in which a defender of Augustine might try to motivate

the idea that it is. But, I argued, the supposition that our will as such is free does not, *pace* Augustine, help him meet Evodius' worry about the compatibility of God's foreknowledge with the freedom of our will. If we think of incompatibilism as the view that freedom and inevitability are incompatible, we can say that both Priorian and Edwardian incompatibilists could accept the essential freedom of the will, and still insist that *God knows I am going to will a certain way* and *I am going to freely will that way* are incompatible. So indeed could Evodius – even if (unlike both Prior and Edwards) he thinks there are truths about the open future. So far as I can see, in order to satisfactorily engage Evodius' worry, Augustine would have to address directly either the idea that divine foreknowledge implies inevitability, or the idea that inevitability implies unfreedom. This he does not do (in *DLA*, III, 3). I'm not sure why not. Augustine appears to share Evodius' view that inevitability precludes freedom (see *DLA*, III, 3: 'I pass over the . . . astounding assertion . . . that it is necessary that I will in this way' (Augustine (1961), 92–93)). If he is also inclined to share Evodius' (very plausible) view that *being foreknown by God* implies *being inevitable*, that would explain why he doesn't tackle either of the two assumptions driving Evodius' worry head on, and instead argues that, given what we know about God's foreknowledge and our will, that worry must be misplaced.⁶

References

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Notes

1. In (just) this case, the translation is not from Benjamin and Hackstaff but from Jasper Hopkins (1994), 111–126. (I used the Hopkins translation of this passage because it follows the contours of the Latin a bit more closely than the Benjamin and Hackstaff one.)
2. See Rowe (1964).
3. For more arguments to this effect, see Hopkins (1994).
4. As an anonymous referee has pointed out, it seems that Augustine would accept this last point – which raises a worry concerning the consistency of Augustine's account of the will, or the correctness of my interpretation of that account.
5. See Augustine (1961), 93: 'Since [our will] is indeed in our power, it is free in us . . . What we do not . . . have in our power is not free in us.'
6. Much thanks for encouragement and suggestions to Yang Guo, Robin Le Poidevin, John Marenbon, my students at King's, an audience at Trinity College, Cambridge, and an anonymous referee.