**Free will**

**Religious free will - Arminius**

**Background:**

* Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) was a student of Theodore Beza. Beza was the son-in-law and successor of predestination supporter John Calvin. In his early life Arminius identified as a Calvinist.
* (I’ve broken Arminius’ free will theory into 4 parts – to make it easier to understand):

**Part 1: denial of predestination**

* Arminius eventually denied Calvinism and its views on predestination. This is because he came to believe that God needed to be defended against Calvinist predestination claims.
* This is because Arminius believed Calvinist predestination ideas reduced humanity to God’s pre-programmed minions. That God just used humanity as a ‘play thing’ doing only as He willed.
* One particular element, of this, that Arminius highlighted was that if predestination was correct then God must be responsible for all evil carried out by humanity. If humans only do as God will’s then it must be God’s will that causes all evil.
* Therefore, Arminius stated he needed to defend God against predestination theories, so that: **“God might not be considered the author of sin, nor man an automation in the hands of God.”**
* Arminius developed an alternative view of predestination called 'conditional predestination' – that God can foresee who will gain salvation through their own faith in Christ.

**Part 2: the effect of original sin on free will**

* Unlike the earlier free will theology by Pelagius (see above notes), Arminius believed that original sin (when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit) was bad for humankind.
* This is because, Arminius argued, all of humanity do inherit original sin from Adam. Therefore, Arminius argues that humanities free will is compromised. As Arminius states: **"In this [fallen] state, the free will of man towards the true good is wounded, infirm, bent, and weakened.”**
* Therefore, like Calvin’s predestination argument (see earlier notes), Arminius believed that if left in this state a person’s natural impulse would be to sin.

**Part 3: God's 'prevenient' grace (the Holy Spirit) allows humans to exercise freewill**

* However, unlike Calvin’s predestination doctrine, Arminius believed that ‘the fall’ did not completely fill humanity with the predestination to sin. Therefore, humanity was not necessarily predestined to continually sin.
* This is because of God’s grace. God’s grace, according to Arminius, is associated with the Holy Spirit. This link between God’s grace and the Holy Spirit is called ‘prevenient grace’. This is because it is God’s grace precedes each moral decision.
* Arminius believes that within all humanity God has placed his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is seen by some Christians as the third divine person of ‘The Trinity’ i.e. the triune nature of God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
* Arminius believed that the Holy Spirit is the part of God that encourages all people to do good works. As Arminius stated the Holy Spirit will: **"fight against Satan, sin, the world and their own flesh.”**
* Arminius believed that the Holy Spirit is ever present to aid and assist all people through the variety of temptations they may face.

**Part 4: the Elect and the possibility of rejecting God's grace**

* However, the guidance provided by the Holy Spirit is based on a person’s own will to follow through on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As Arminius stated: **“provided they (believers) stand prepared for the battle, implore his help, and be not wanting to themselves, the Spirit preserves them from falling."**
* Therefore, a person’s impulse to sin, because of their inherited ‘original sin’, is balanced by the guidance of the God’s Holy Spirit.
* Arminius makes it clear that the Holy Spirit only balances humanities impulse to sin, it does not override it. This is because the Holy Spirit does not force itself on to a person; it acts only as a God given moral guide. As Arminius states: **“God has limited his control in correspondence with man's freedom.”**
* Therefore, all humanity has the freewill to decide whether to follow the will of the God’s Holy Spirit or give in to their natural inclination to sin. Thus, all moral agents have the ability to be saved from sin, but only if they freely follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
* Therefore, God has provided the possibility of salvation for all of humanity, but His provision only becomes effective for those who, of their own free will, choose to cooperate with His holy spirit and thus accept God’s offer of grace.
* People can also freely choose to resist God’s grace and therefore thwart God’s attempt at salvation.