**Section 4 (Part 1): Implications of Free will/Libertarianism on Moral Responsibility**

**4a - Background on Free will/libertarianism and Moral Responsibility**

* The implications of free will/libertarianism for moral responsibility are in many ways the opposite of hard determinism.
* This is because libertarians believe a person’s life is completely free from deterministic factors; such as God’s omnipotent predestination power, psychological behaviourism, biological determinism or universal causation etc.
* Therefore, if libertarianism is correct that the individual has free will, then each person must have complete control over their moral attitudes, moral actions, etc.

**4b -** **The value in blaming moral agents for immoral acts**

* The above theory that human free will leads to moral responsibility has several implications.
* One such implication is that there is moral value in blaming a person for any immoral acts they commit i.e. it would seem morally fair to punish people for committing immoral acts. This is because the choice of whether to act morally, or not, is within a person’s own free ‘willed’ moral control.
* This is why Sartre partly viewed free will as a curse for humanity - total free will comes with total moral responsibility. Sartre believed that even those people who wish not to take responsibility, for their actions, are still making a free choice to do so.
* Support for the above theory can be found in the UK legal system e.g. legal courts accept what is known as ‘rational choice theory’.
* Rational choice theory is the belief that people are ‘reasoning actors’ who freely weigh up the costs and benefits of their actions, and therefore make freely willed rational choices when committing an illegal act.
* Therefore, the UK legal system takes a free will view and thus believe it is right to punish people when found guilty of a crime.

**4c - The usefulness of normative ethics**

* A further implication of libertarianism is that they appear to uphold the usefulness of normative ethics.
* The aim of all normative ethics is to act as a moral guide, helping a person to do perceived good actions and avoiding wrongful ones.
* As libertarianism holds that people have the freedom to choose their actions, normative ethics can be seen as a useful guide to helping people freely choice the right course of action.
* Normative ethics maybe particularly useful when a person is ignorant of societies moral norms. This is because without a normative ethic to guide them, they may become amoral i.e. lacking any moral sense.
* Let’s consider the usefulness of Act Utilitarianism.

**Act Utilitarianism**

* Act Utilitarianism is an atheist normative ethic created by Jeremy Bentham, based on human pleasure (see earlier notes).
* Bentham’s Act Utilitarianism basically revolved around, what he called: ‘the principle of utility’ i.e. an action should only be carried out if the consequences of that action bring about the maximum happiness, for the maximum amount of people, affected by the action.
* However, Bentham is pre-supposing, with the principle of utility, that people have the free will to select the course of action which will bring about the greatest happiness e.g. if holding the door open for my teacher would bring about the greatest happiness; then the individual is morally guided by Act Utilitarianism to do this action.
* Therefore, if libertarianism is right, when stating that all human decisions are free willed, then normative ethics, like Act Utilitarianism, are of value.

**Section 4 (Part 2): Implications of Free will/Libertarianism on Religious Belief**

**4d - The implications for God’s omnipotence.**

* Monotheistic religions (such as Islam, Christianity, etc) generally attribute the quality of omnipotence to their deity.
* Definition of Omnipotence: having unlimited power.
* The theory of free will can question whether God is omnipotent. This is because humanities free will could be an illustration that God does not have the omnipotent power to carry out an eternal predestination plan for all of humanity.
* This point was potentially highlighted by Augustine: he reacted angrily to the free will teachings of Pelagius (see earlier notes) because his free will theology, according to Augustine, reduced the omnipotent nature of God.
* This is because Pelagius theories made it possible for a mere human being to decide freely whether to be morally good or sinful. The implication of this was that the individual would then be able to tell an omnipotent deity whether to give them salvation. Augustine, argued this would be a denial of God’s omnipotence.
* Therefore, Augustine is making it clear that concept of free will would deny God’s omnipotence.
* Moreover, psychologist Sartre believed that humanities free will not only illustrated there was no omnipotent God controlling human choice but was, indeed, a clear illustration there was no God at all. As Sartre states: **“There is no God, so man must rely upon his own fallible will and moral insight."**
* However, it can be argued that the above points do not illustrate that free will diminishes God’s omnipotence.
* This is because they instead show that God illustrates His omnipotent nature in different ways e.g. Arminius argued that within all humanity God has placed his guiding Holy Spirit (see earlier notes). Therefore, it could be argued that only an omnipotent God could have the power to do this.

**4e - The implications for God’s omnibenevolence.**

* Monotheistic religions also attribute the quality of omnibenevolence to their deity.
* Definition of Omnibenevolence: the quality of ‘all-loving’ or ‘all good’.
* The theory of free will can seem to support the idea of God’s omnibenevolence. This is because the concept of free will supports the idea that salvation can be potentially achieved by all humanity. As Pelagius and Arminius theorised (see earlier notes) all humanity can achieve salvation using their free will; therefore, God is being loving to all of his creation.
* This point was supported by Arminius’ supporters (called Remonstrants) at the ‘Synod of Dort’ in 1619. One of their ‘Five Articles of Remonstrance’ was that salvation (or condemnation) on the day of judgment is freely conditioned by the faith (or unbelief) of the individual.
* Therefore, God’s omnibenevolent nature is supported by free will theory because it opens the possibility that all people can achieve salvation by freely choosing to follow God’s eternal moral laws.
* This is in contrast with predestination theory, as stated by both Augustine and Calvin, which illustrated that God only appears to predestine some people – the elect. The rest, the reprobates, will not be saved by God and will inevitably descend to hell post-mortem. This clearly questions God’s omnibenevolent nature because God would appear to be punishing and rewarding people on behaviour only He had control over**.** Based on the above point **Bertrand Russell** (1872-1970) stated that God must be ‘**a monster’**. This is because, as Russell stated: **“A God that punishes or rewards on the basis of God’s own eternal decisions in unfair and immoral.”**
* (Optional Note: the above could be potentially countered because one of the other attributes of God, given by the monotheistic religions, is that God is omniscient (the quality of been all-knowing). It can, therefore, be argued that God knew that humanity would do great deeds of evil, such as the holocaust, with the free will He allowed humanity. However, despite this knowledge, God still went ahead and gave humanity freewill; which is not the actions of an omnibenevolent God.)

**4f - The use of prayer.**

* A further implication of free will theory is the value of prayer.
* Definition of prayer: from the Latin ‘precariis’ - which means to ask earnestly.
* If free will holds true, then it can be argued prayer is meaningfulness. This is because prayer can be used to seek God’s guidance on the correct moral path or to seek His forgiveness for sin. Both these uses of prayer are supported by the theory of free will.

**To seek God’s guidance on morality**

* Pelagius argues that humanity is not able to fulfil God’s moral law without divine aid (see earlier notes).
* Pelagius stated: **“God helps us by His teaching and revelation, whilst He opens the eyes of our heart. Whilst He points out to us the future, that we may not be absorbed in the present; whilst He discovers to us the snares of the devil** …”
* Therefore, Pelagius believed that people have the free will to choose to do good works, or be sinful. However, when their free will chooses to do good works, it is through the guiding grace of God. As Pelagius states: **“Free will is in all good works always assisted by divine help.”**
* This divine aid to guide people down the righteous path could be developed through prayer i.e. as the individual opens themselves up to God, so they are opening themselves up more to God’s guiding light.

**Seek His forgiveness for sin**

* Pelagius also believed that if people, with their free will, do choose not to follow God’s moral law, they can still seek forgiveness for their sins. Pelagius stated that God grants atonement, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, to all those who freely choose to seek forgiveness/repentance.
* Repentance can be gained, by all individuals, through prayer.

**4g - The existence of miracles**

* Definition of miracle: from the Latin ‘miraculum’ - meaning ‘wonder’.
* However, the term miracle tends to have a more specific religious meaning, perhaps best expressed by David Hume: **‘an event that appears to break the laws of nature and so is held as an act of God.’**
* The acceptance of free will theory has a negative effect on belief in miraculous events. This is because divine miracles, by their nature, are predetermining an outcome e.g. in Joshua 10:13 in the Judeo-Christian Bible, it states that God made the sun and moon stand still so that Joshua could defeat the enemies of Israel. Therefore, God was clearly predetermining the outcome of a major event, with a miracle.
* This directly conflicts with the theory of free will where all events are free of determinism. Therefore, illustrating the incompatible nature of free will and miracles.

**4h - The link between God and evil.**

* The last implication of free will theory, for religious belief, is the link between God and evil.
* The theory of free will theory could suggest that God is not responsible for evil.
* This can be illustrated with the theory of Arminius (see earlier notes). Arminius wrote his free will theory, as a response to the pre-destination ideas of John Calvin. This is because he felt the need to defend God’s nature against pre-destination so that: **“God might not be considered the author of all sin.”**
* The reason why free will theory can defend God against the above accusation is that free will gives the individual the freedom to choose to do good works or to sin. As Pelagius argued: **“this very capacity to do evil is also good – good, I say. Because it makes the good part better by making it voluntary and independent.”** Therefore, free will theory makes it clear that the responsibility for evil is humankinds and not God’s.
* This above idea is further supported by the theodicy of Irenaeus (130-202).
* Definition of a theodicy: a religious argument put forward to defend the existence of the God, but justifies why God allows both moral and natural evil.
* Irenaeus argued God created humanity imperfect. God did this because He made humankind's task in life to develop into God's perfection. To develop into God’s perfection, humanity must freely make moral decisions; every moral decision where the person chooses to do ‘good works’ develops that person closer God’s perfection.
* However, free will opens up the possibility that people will choose to be morally evil e.g. the holocaust. However, Irenaeus Theodicy illustrates this is not God’s responsibility. This is because, Irenaeus claims, moral evil is a necessary part of life because it enables humans to develop in to His perfection. Without evil moral decisions would have no real value i.e. humanity would not develop into God’s perfection such as developing the virtues of courage and perseverance (which Irenaeus called ‘second-order goods’)
* Therefore, God cannot stop moral evil occurring because this would compromise human freedom and, therefore, stop humanity having the potential to develop in His perfection.
* Therefore, Irenaeus, in his theodicy, is clearly supporting the idea that free will entails that humanity is responsible for the moral evil; God cannot intervene because this would stop the development of humanity.