

passions torment them, and by yielding and giving in to them, they only aid the slavery they have brought upon themselves and become in a manner prisoners of their own freedom. Even so, this is visible to the eye of Providence as it looks out at all things from eternity and arranges predestined rewards according to each man's merit.

'Homer sings with honied tongue
How the brightly shining sun
All things views and all things hears.²
And yet with rays too weak to pierce
Far within he cannot see
The bowels of earth or depths of sea.
Not so the Founder of the world
To Whose high gaze is all unfurled,
Matter's dense solidity,
And cloudy night's obscurity.
What is, what was, what is to be,
In one swift glance His mind can see.
All things by Him alone are seen,
And Him the true sun we should deem.'

III

'Look,' I said, 'there is something even more difficult which I find perplexing and confusing.'

'Tell me,' she said, 'though I can guess what is troubling you.'

'Well, the two seem clean contrary and opposite, God's universal foreknowledge and freedom of the will. If God foresees all things and cannot be mistaken in any way, what Providence has foreseen as a future event must happen. So that if from eternity Providence foreknows not only men's actions but also their thoughts and desires, there will be no freedom of will. No action or desire will be able to exist

² *Iliad*, 3, 277, etc.

other than that which God's infallible Providence has foreseen. For if they can be changed and made different from how they were foreseen, there will be no sure foreknowledge of the future, only an uncertain opinion; and this I do not think can be believed of God.

'I do not agree with the argument by which some people believe they can cut this Gordian knot. They say that it is not because Providence has foreseen something as a future event that it must happen, but the other way round, that because something is to happen it cannot be concealed from divine Providence. In this way the necessity is passed to the other side. It is not necessary, they say, that what is foreseen must happen, but it is necessary that what is destined to happen **must be** foreseen, as though the point at issue was which is the cause; does foreknowledge of the future cause the necessity of events, or necessity cause the foreknowledge? But what I am trying to show is that, whatever the order of the causes, the coming to pass of things foreknown is necessary even if the foreknowledge of future events does not seem to impose the necessity on them.

'If a man is sitting, it is necessary that the opinion which concludes that he is sitting is true; and on the other hand, if the opinion about the man is true, because he is sitting, it is necessary that he is sitting. There is necessity, therefore, in both statements; in the one that the man is sitting, and in the other that the opinion is true. But it is not because the opinion is true, that the man sits; rather, the opinion is true because it is preceded by the man's act of sitting. So although the cause of the truth proceeds from the one side, there is, nevertheless, a common necessity in either side. Clearly the same reasoning applies to Providence and future events. For even if it is the case that they are foreseen because they are going to happen and not that they happen because they are foreseen, it is nonetheless necessary that either future events be foreseen by God or that things foreseen happen as fore-

seen, and this alone is enough to remove freedom of the will.

'But how absurd it is to say that the occurrence of temporal events is the cause of eternal prescience! Yet the opinion that God foresees the future because it is destined to happen is the same as believing that events of a single occurrence are the cause of that supreme Providence.

'Moreover, just as when I know something is, it is necessary that it be, so when I know that something is to be, it is necessary that it shall be. It comes about, therefore, that the occurrence of the event foreknown cannot be avoided.

'Finally, if anyone thinks something is different from what it is, not only is it not knowledge, but it is a false opinion very far from the truth of knowledge. So, if something is destined to happen in such a way that its occurrence is not certain and necessary, who could foreknow that it is to happen? For just as knowledge is unalloyed by falseness, so that which is comprehended by knowledge cannot be other than as it is comprehended. Indeed, the reason why there is no deception in knowledge is because it is necessary for things to be exactly as knowledge understands them to be.

'The question is, therefore, how can God foreknow that these things will happen, if they are uncertain? If He thinks that they will inevitably happen while the possibility of their non-occurrence exists, He is deceived, and this is something wicked both to think and to say. But if His knowledge that they will happen as they do is of such a kind that He knows they may as equally not happen as happen, what sort of knowledge is this, which comprehends nothing sure or stable? How does it differ from that ridiculous prophecy of Tiresias in Horace's *Satires*³

Whatever I say either will be or won't?

3. II, 5, 59.

And how is divine Providence superior to opinion if like men it considers those things uncertain whose occurrence is uncertain? If there can be no uncertainty at that most sure fount of all things, the coming to pass of those things which God firmly foreknows as future events is certain. Therefore, human thoughts and actions have no freedom, because the divine mind in foreseeing all things without being led astray by falseness binds human thoughts and actions to a single manner of occurrence.

'Once this has been admitted, the extent of the disruption of human affairs is obvious. In vain is reward offered to the good and punishment to the bad, because they have not been deserved by any free and willed movement of the mind. That which is now judged most equitable, the punishment of the wicked and the reward of the good, will be seen to be the most unjust of all; for men are driven to good or evil not by their own will but by the fixed necessity of what is to be. Neither vice nor virtue will have had any existence; but all merit will have been mixed up and undifferentiated. Nothing more wicked can be conceived than this, for as the whole order of things is derived from Providence and there is no room for human thoughts, it follows that our wickedness, too, is derived from the Author of all good.

'It is pointless, therefore, to hope for anything or pray to escape anything. What can a man hope for, or pray to escape, when an inflexible bond binds all that can be wished for?

'And so the one and only means of communication between man and God is removed, that is hope and prayer – if indeed we do obtain for the price of due humility the inestimable return of divine grace. And this is the only way by which it seems men can talk with God and join themselves to that inaccessible light before they obtain it, by means of supplication. And if admitting the necessity of future events means believing that hope and prayer have no power, what way will

there be left by which we can be joined and united to that supreme Lord of the world? Cut off and separated from its source, the human race, as you were singing just now, will be destined to grow weak and exhausted.

'What warring cause does thus disjoin
The bonds of things? What God has set
Such enmity between two truths,
That things established separately
Refuse a common yoke to bear?
Or is there no discord of truths
Which ever sure in union join?
Is mind, oppressed by members blind,
In lesser brightness powerless
To see the slender links of things?
Why burns it then with love so great
To learn the secret signs of truth?
Perhaps it knows already what it seeks
To learn? But who still seeks to learn things that
He knows? And if the mind knows not, what does
It then in blindness seek? For who could search
In ignorance for anything, or who
Could look for that which was unknown to him,
And where could he discover it? When found
Could ignorance discern the hidden form?
When once the mind beheld the mind of God
Did it both sum and separate truths perceive?
Now hidden in the body's density
It does not lose all memory of itself.
The many separate truths are lost, yet still
It holds the sum. Therefore who seeks the truth
In neither state will be: he does not know,
And yet he is not wholly ignorant.
So he reflects upon the sum retained
And kept in mind, and thinks of what on high
He saw, that he may add the parts forgot
To that which he retains.'

IV

Then Philosophy spoke. 'This is an old complaint about Providence. Cicero attacked it vigorously in his treatise *On Divination*,⁴ and you yourself have investigated it at great length. But up to now none of you has explained it with sufficient care and rigour. The reason for this blindness is that the operation of human reasoning cannot approach the immediacy of divine foreknowledge. If this immediacy could be understood by some means, all uncertainty would be removed. Later on I will try to explain it and make it clear, once I have first dealt with the matters that are disturbing you.

'Take the case of those who believe that foreknowledge does not impose necessity upon the future, and that freedom of the will is not infringed by foreknowledge. I would like to know why you consider their reasoning ineffective. For the only source of your proof of the predestination of the future is your belief that what is foreknown cannot but happen. Therefore, if – as you were only just now saying – if foreknowledge does not impose any predestination on the future, why is it that acts of the will are forced to be predestined?

'But for the sake of argument, so that you may see what follows, let us say that there is no foreknowledge. In this case, actions of the will are not forced to be predestined, are they?'

'No.'

'Again, let us say that there is foreknowledge, but that it does not impose any predestination on things; the same freedom of the will remains, I think, absolute and unfringed.

'But, you will say, even if it is not the same as predestination of the future, foreknowledge is a sign that the future will inevitably happen. In this case, even if there were no foreknowledge, everyone would agree that the occurrence of the

4. *De Div.*, II, 8 ff.