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## ARTICLE VII.

ROTHE ON THE LIMITATIONS OF DIVINE FORE-  
KNOWLEDGE.

BY PROF. J. P. LACROIX, OF THE WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY, OHIO.

THE omniscience of God is a doctrine which has always been held not only by all branches of the Christian church, but also by all mere theists. And it has generally been taken for granted that omniscience must include a knowledge of *all* that is future. The relation, however, in which this attribute of God stands to the future actions of imperfect moral creatures, has been a matter of controversy from the very beginning, and is far from being settled even yet. The two great currents of theology, the determinists and the libertarians, have taken a precisely opposite view of this relation. The former say, these actions take place because God foreknows them; the latter say, God foreknows them because they are going to take place. Both parties, with few exceptions, hold as unquestionable both that God does foreknow such actions, and that he knows them infallibly. The reasons respectively adduced by the two parties as to the possibility of such foreknowledge, are not, however, equally good. The determinist is strictly logical in saying: God can foreknow the future actions of imperfect mortal creatures, because these actions form a constituent part of his eternal world-plan. For there is here a clearly rational nexus between the subject and the object. But it is far from clear that the libertarian is logical in saying: God can foreknow such actions without thereby precluding their freedom, seeing that he foreknows them not as pre-determined but as free. Here the nexus between the subject and the object is not only not clear, but it is absolutely inconceivable,— at least for the human mind. Free-willists do not even attempt to discover this nexus, but admit it to be one of the points which will forever

baffle finite reason. But why do they persist in believing in the possibility of such foreknowledge? Manifestly because they are driven thereto by their unhesitating clinging to the doctrine of omniscience in its tacitly-assumed, traditionally-orthodox form.

So far, then, the determinists have the advantage of rational consistency over the free-willists. Unless some other interest calls for a change of base, they can rest in the confidence that their view enables them intelligibly to follow the whole sweep of cosmical development from creation to the final consummation of things.

But is not such an interest found in the doctrine of human freedom? If this doctrine is taken in full earnest, then the notion must be given up, that all the actions of human beings can form an organic part of the eternal world-plan of God. For such a foreknowledge precludes the conception of the freedom of such actions. Such, at least, is the position of respectable authorities. We will here cite but two. Weisse says: "God knows the future in so far as it follows with organic necessity out of the past and present, but he does not know it in so far as, while resting upon the general ground of this necessity, it is yet subject to the spontaneity of the intra-divine and extra-divine nature, that is, to the freedom of the intra-divine and the extra-divine will."<sup>1</sup> Also Lotze, in his "Mikrokosmos," takes the same position. Martensen says: "An unconditional foreknowledge is unquestionably inconsistent with the freedom of creatures in so far as freedom admits of discretionary choice; it unquestionably precludes the undetermined, which is in fact inseparable from the notion of a free development in time. Only that reality which is *per se* rational and necessary can be the object of an unconditional foreknowledge, but not that reality which might have been otherwise than as it is; for this latter can be fore-known only as a possibility, as an eventuality."<sup>2</sup> The position here taken by Weisse and Martensen is, that the sincere admission of freedom, not only excludes a nexus between the

<sup>1</sup> Philos. Dogmat., i. p. 609.

<sup>2</sup> Christl. Dogmat. (2d edition), p. 249.

future actions of free creatures and a foreknowledge of them on the part of God, but, in fact, renders such a nexus inconceivable and absurd. There does not exist any condition of things, any train of causes, any complex of fruitful germs, out of which such future actions spring, from any form of physical, rational, or moral necessity or certainty. For freedom necessarily involves the possibility and the liability of alternate choice. Hence a free action can be foreknown in no other manner than as an indetermined one among the indefinite many choices to which the will may incline. So that to hold that God can infallibly foreknow the free actions of free creatures, is to hold that he can do that which is, in the nature of the case, impossible, and hence absurd.

The alternative with which we are confronted is, therefore, either to abandon the notion of real creatural freedom (in the sense of the possibility of alternate choice), or to abandon such a conception of divine omniscience as implies that God infallibly foreknows all the free actions of his creatures. And it is equally evident that it is the second alternative that is to be preferred. At least the matter has presented itself thus to a number of recent theologians, whose ability, impartiality, and evangelical character entitle their views to a candid hearing.

No one, so far as we know, has presented the view of the divine non-foreknowledge of the actions of free creatures with more cogency and earnestness than the late lamented Richard Rothe. And it is the main purpose of this Article to enable this eminent divine to present this subject for himself, and in his own peculiar manner (so far as translatable) to the English-reading public. Some little patience will be required for the first few pages, while he is dealing with general principles and laying his foundation, but in the end these generalities will be seen to form the necessary basis or back-ground for the views insisted upon. The following is a careful but condensed translation from the revised edition of Rothe's master-work, *Theological Ethics*.<sup>3</sup> Rothe says:

<sup>1</sup> *Theologische Ethik*, 2. Auf., i. pp. 212-234. Wittenberg. 1867.

“ In the sense of a teleological guidance of the world’s development, the divine world-government necessarily presupposes a world-plan, ideally sketched out by the divine mind, implying that God from the beginning thought and thinks the world as that which it definitively is to be, as well as also the way upon which it is to reach this goal. The forming of this world-plan is a purely *a-prioristic* or speculative thought-process. The divine world-positing (the divine *πρόθεσις*) is simply the world-idea as genetically constructed by God in virtue of absolute speculation. It is nothing more nor less than God’s eternal speculative thought or conception of the progression of the (as yet only chaotically existing) world toward its goal in its successive passage through all its essential stadia and stations; that is, it is the conception of the world’s development, as absolutely carried out through all its factors, in the divine thought. As such, however, it is the divine intuition, not of the concrete reality of the development of the world in full detail, but only of the idea or essential truth of the same, or of its sum and substance; that is, it is an entirely abstract formula, expressed in unknown quantities, receiving its concrete fulfillment solely through the divine world-administration in time. The material or elements wherein and whereout God concretely fulfills (realizes) this, his world-plan, are presented to him by the creature (*κτίσις*) in its process of self-development out of its own God-given capabilities. This material he works upon through his world-administration in order to the carrying out of his world-plan, that is, in order to the realization of the purpose impressed upon the world in his creating of it. His world-governing is simply his absolutely all-wise and almighty activity, whereby, in the development of the world out of itself, he so guides the play of the relatively-independent created potencies, especially of the personal ones, that his world-plan is carried out by the very means of this play; that is, that his eternal world-idea is infallibly realized in a constantly nearer approximation. As the divine world-plan rests upon immanent speculative necessity, it is absolutely unchangeable, and consequently

the course of the world's development is divinely predetermined. This predetermination, however, contains nothing more than what lies in the notion of the world-plan, which is an entirely abstract formula. This world-plan settles immutably the world-goal, as well as also the organic series of logically necessary stages and development crises through which the world can be brought to this goal. More than this is not predetermined.<sup>1</sup> Most emphatically the individual self-determination of personal creatures is not infringed upon by the divine world-plan. For in as far as the realization of the world-goal is mediated by the activity of the self-determining<sup>2</sup> personal creature, in other words, by the moral process, and consequently is expressly conceived and ordered by God himself as so mediated,—in so far it is left subject to the free play of personal creatures. Thus creatural self-development (freedom) finds all necessary scope for self-virtualization, and nevertheless the realization of the divine world-plan is infallibly assured, and that too in and by means of this freedom. This assurance lies in the divine world-government, that is, in the absolute activity of the all-wise and almighty God upon the world. However fortuitous and capricious may be the play of self-determining creatural causes in the world, nevertheless God (to whom nothing unprovided for or surprising can happen) constantly embraces with his all-comprehending vision, the whole complex web of individual volitions, beholds its bearing upon the plan of his world-

<sup>1</sup> Im. H. Fichte (Spekul. Theol., p. 641) asks: "When would the idea of a divine world-government entirely preclude the notion of freedom in the finite spirit?" And answers: "Only when the notion of absolute predetermination were a necessary one, that is, when the divine world-plan were predetermined in the minutest details, when the world-government should be a mere unfolding of this plan, and when the finite creature should be nothing more than the ready-made product of divine omnipotence."

All the notes to this Article are from Rothe. — J. P. L.

<sup>2</sup> Ulrici (Gott und die Natur, p. 746) says: "The working of man appears in its greatest inferiority to the creative power of God, in the fact that it can produce absolutely nothing which bears in itself even the least degree of self-subsistency. Hence it is evident that the omnipotence of God, instead of being diminished or nullified by the relative self-subsistency, of creatures, evinces in fact, in this self-subsistency its greatest triumph."

government, and has it, at every moment and at every point, in the unlimited power of his omnipotence; so that he can irresistably turn and direct it, as a whole, as is, at any time, required by its teleological relation to his unchangable world-plan. While he concedes to personal creatures the free unfolding of the capacity of self-development as implanted in them by himself, he nevertheless retains them in the hand of his all-seeing omnipotence, wherefrom, notwithstanding their freedom, they cannot escape. The *definitive* total-product, the result-proper of the collective movement of all single creatures, self-determining ones included, is always the very result willed and predetermined by him,— is his work.

But more in detail. The relation of God to the already existing world, is usually expressed by the two notions of world-preservation (including the so-called co-operation) and of world-government or administration. But the notion of world-preservation, in the sense usually given it, must, we are fully persuaded, be abandoned. The relation of this world-preservation to creation and to the world-government involves insuperable difficulties. For so soon as creation is conceived of as beginningless [which Rothe has previously attempted to demonstrate], the preservation of the world is no longer distinguishable from its creation, inasmuch as this conception of preservation rests expressly on the distinguishing of the beginning of the creature (*κτίσις*) from its continuance. This would require the notion of world-preservation to be taken in its narrowest sense, (which, however, its supporters do not mean), so that it should be distinguished from the preservation of the creature (*κτίσις*) in general; for in this narrow sense the world has of course had a beginning.

The chief difficulty, however, is, that the notion of world-preservation is also not distinguishable from that of world-governing. For there is no such thing as a mere (unchanged) continued-existing of the world, but it persists in existing only in that it incessantly develops itself; but this, its self-developing, is essentially also a being-developed by God, that

is, a being-governed by God. Hence, *in concreto*, preserving is governing. Moreover the usual notion of preservation implies a relation between God and the world, in virtue of which the latter has *per se* no positive basis, but can be regarded only as a transient phase of the absolute essence of God. With such a view, there is strictly no significancy in the proposition, that God actually produced a world in the universe. This appears more evidently still in the notion of preservation as a *creatio continua*, which, when consequentially carried out, entirely denies the reality of creatural existence. The presupposition upon which this notion rests, is, that the positing of creatural being is in turn directly also an annihilating,—that it is the positing of a mere phantasm, a something that is *per se* absolutely null. According to such a mode of thinking, no single moment of the existence of the world is really connected with its earlier or later moments, and the world, with all its actual features, is at every present moment brought forth anew by God. And thereby the reality of the causal nexus between creatural things is as good as destroyed (and hence natural science is compelled earnestly to protest against such a view).

It is not to be overlooked, however, that the notion of world-preservation as a *creatio continua* rests obscurely on the correct consciousness, that, in fact, the already posited world incessantly continues (until its full completion) to be the object of a divine activity, which is indeed essentially of a creative character. But this continuous creative activity of God as bearing upon the existing world is not preservation, but governing. The interest of religion by no means requires us to reduce the being of the already created creature in its relation to God to a mere nullity. It does, however, imperatively demand the unconditional dependence of the world upon God, and that too in its continued existence. This, however, by no means precludes a real substantiality, a relative self-subsistence of the world; all that is required is simply that God should have this self-subsistent world absolutely within his power in all its points and moments, — which is in

fact unconditionally safeguarded by his [properly defined] omniscience and omnipotence.

Our conception of creation does not at all admit of the notion of a world-preserving, in the usual sense of the term. The creature, the world, is, in our view, a really posited entity, — has a real existence. Its perishableness we maintain also, but only as relative; that is to say, it is as material, and as not yet become spiritual, that the world is a *per se* relatively null, and hence perishable existence. It is not *per se*, and as such, — and especially not as essentially finite, — that the creature is perishable; but it is perishable as yet at that point of its development at which we have empirical cognizance of it, that is, as being as yet material, and hence not yet perfected. In its completion, that is, when it has really become spirit, it is imperishable, notwithstanding its ever-enduring finiteness, and ‘has life within itself.’ So soon as it has really become spirit, it has, thereby, attained to a real immanence of God in itself; and then manifestly there can be no longer any thought of its being in need of preservation.

But the creature, even while as yet material, is only relatively null and perishable. Each single material object in the world is evidently perishable; for the continued existence of the material world is a constant alternation of the birth and death of single existences. This birth and death, however, is the very life-process of the material world as a whole. The material world preserves itself in this continuous birth and death of its single parts out of itself, and indeed by virtue of this very process. All the single parts are preserved in the whole, and the whole in the parts, as is the case with every form of organism. The material world is in fact posited, by creation itself, essentially as nature (from *nascor*), that is, as continuously begetting itself out of itself, — as a nature-organism, as an organic and (in virtue of its organization) *per se* vital totality of materially-creatural existence. Thus conceived of, it does not need, in order to its continued existence, the preserving causality of God. It is true the creature (*κτίσις*) is, also as a whole, only relatively imperish-

able, and it develops itself out of itself only its definitely determined time; but the perishableness inherent in it in this respect is not counteracted by any preserving activity of God. The material world, in fact, does away with itself of necessity by its own life process, in that it eventually absolutely destroys its materiality, and potentiates itself into a spiritual world, which is then by its very nature absolutely imperishable, and no longer in need of preservation *ab extra*, — potentiates itself into spirituality in virtue of the moral process which takes place within itself. This self-destruction is, however, the express purpose whereunto God made it. This is, therefore, a perishableness against which the material world needs no preservation on the part of God. Did it not, however, hold together long enough actually to accomplish upon itself (under the general direction of the divine world-government) this God-designed self-development, it would be a faulty work, such as could not have come from the hand of God. Now, though the world, taken as a whole, offers no place for a preserving-activity of God, still this does not by any means imply that God retired from his world after creating it, and left it to run its own course. On the contrary, he tarries within its sphere with his active causality, — not, however, as a preserving, but as a governing causality. And that for the simple reason that the continued existence of the world is not of a merely inert, unchanging character, but is a progressive self-development out of itself. This development of the world is *in concreto* its continued existence; and its guidance is the purpose of the progressively-creative activity of God, as still continuing with the sphere of the already created world. As the world develops itself strictly under God's determining influence, so that its self-development is absolutely under his control, hence there results its absolute dependence on him, even in its continued existence.

These views do not in the least conflict with the thought of world-preservation as a principle, but only with a specific form of this doctrine, namely, the ecclesiastically-traditional one. The Christian consciousness calls for the doctrine, un-

der some form. It requires, however, simply and only that the continuance of our own existence be referred directly to the divine causality. To the Christian consciousness it is absolutely certain that our earthly life is every moment received from, and preserved only by God. But it is also equally certain to the consciousness of the Christian individual that this does not hold good of his existence on the whole, but only of this his material or sensuous (inclusive of the psychical as such) existence, and that the destruction of his existence *per se*, in so far as it is not perishable by its very constitution, that is, in so far as it is "immortal," is in fact not even in God's power. This suggests the religious contents proper of the notion of the divine world-preservation. This conception relates exclusively to the existence of individual world-creatures, but not to that of the world-whole; and it relates only to such world-creatures as are as yet material, and to their existence only in so far as it is as yet not really spiritual. The continued existence of individual world-creatures, without exception, is, in so far as they are material, constantly within the scope of the free determination of God. Any moment he can annihilate or disorganize them, and thus resolve them into the general organism of the universe. Their existence is, indeed, within certain limits, guaranteed by the activity of the laws of nature; but the operation of these laws is dominated by God, and they stand so elastically under his power that he can at any moment by their means destroy the existence of any and every world-creature, in so far as it is merely material. This possibility is, moreover, plainly implied by the fact that no one of all the material world-creatures is an indispensable factor in the divine world-plan. Also the continued existence of every single material world-creature stands in unconditional dependence on God, and its continued existence is absolutely caused by God. Its continued existence as material arises from the fact that God does not negate, but affirms it. When, now, in the consciousness of our sinfulness and guilt, we deeply feel how unworthy we have made ourselves of the gift of life, then we have a

proper conception of the goodness of God toward us, in that he does not cast off our material life, but still affirms it for us. Now, it is just so much, and no more, that the pious consciousness calls for in the preservation of the world by God,—it simply requires that it be conceived of as a manifestation of the divine goodness. In this sense we also hold to a divine world-preservation; so viewed, however, it is only a special phase of God's world-governing, and it is not a peculiar divine activity co-ordinate to the governing and even also to the creating of the world.

The idea of a world-government we firmly hold fast to, but we cannot admit of its co-ordination to the notion of creation; for, in our view, creation embraces the collective and concurrent activity of God in general, (also his redeeming activity). The governing of the world by God, we regard as only a special phase of the creative activity, though of course an essential one. Without this doctrine we could not hold to the unconditional dependence of the world upon God,—namely, in view of our position, that the creature really has existence in itself, and that consequently, in its development, it really develops itself out of itself,<sup>1</sup> and does not simply mechanically uncoil a series of movements which were, in its original position, predisposed or predetermined by God as necessary. Along-side of this vital activity of the creature *per se* stands the thought of the divine world-government. The constantly-flowing movement of the world in the unfolding of the vital potency inherent in it as a living organism, is absolutely dominated, that is, teleologically guided by God,—it is, in virtue of his active guidance, a sure movement toward the definite goal set before it by him,—is a development of the world out of itself, such as constantly approximates it toward the goal implied by the very

<sup>1</sup> Dorner (*Jahrb. für deutsche Theol.*, iii. p. 594) says: "In positing the living, God posits a self-positing object, a product which is itself productive, an act which is active; and instead of being true that God limits his omnipotence by imparting a causality to objects which he is not, he becomes, in fact, a productive causality only by this pretended self-limitation, which is however, really a virtualization of his power, and an enlarging of his scope of power.

constitution of its nature. Without the divine activity of God upon the natural development of the world it would not be capable of attaining to its God-set goal. Such is the idea of the divine world-government.

A difficulty presents itself, however, so soon as we apply the idea of the divine world-government to the actions of personal world-creatures (i.e. within the sphere of our earthly-world, to human beings),—in view of the fact that the actions of personal beings, in the very nature of the case, proceed from personal self-determination. For as the divine world-government presupposes a world-plan, and as such a plan implies a divine predetermination of the world's development, it would seem, at first view, that thereby the personal free self-determination of personal world-creatures were inevitably precluded. Such a predetermination, in the sense usually implied, manifestly precludes the possibility of effectual personal will-determinations in such creatures; and the impossibility of such will-determinations involves the psychological impossibility of personal will-determinations on the whole, at least, for all such as know of such divine predetermination. For, indeed, who would, with a clear consciousness, be willing to make efforts which he knows to be utterly superfluous and ineffectual! Now, the traditional but obsolete make-shift at this point is this, that God's eternal foreseeing of the future free actions of personal creatures is called in to the rescue. God is represented as basing his own eternal world-plan upon his certain eternal foreknowledge<sup>1</sup> of all the future workings and activities of his (yet to be created) creatures, and more especially of the future free actions of such of them as are personal. By this course, however, the knot is not disentangled, but only rendered the more perplexing. For it not only does not enable us to safeguard creatural freedom, but it forces us, at the same time, to sacrifice also the freedom of God himself, reducing him to a dependence on his personal

<sup>1</sup> The expression "foreknowledge of God," is not at all a happy one, as it is very liable to misapprehension and misapplication. There is a foreknowledge of God in no other sense than in that of a forethinking (*a priori* thinking), and relatively, of a foredetermining.

creatures, utterly inconsistent with his absolutism. In the case of a being such as the personal creature, and especially in the case of man, before having attained to his moral perfection, the divine foreknowledge of his actions necessarily<sup>1</sup> precludes his freedom, so soon as we take this term in its full sense (that is, as the capability of choosing between contradictory forms of self-determination). For in such personal creatures freedom has not as yet become absolutely identical with (moral) necessity (which it of course can become, and which it in fact is, in its true perfection, or as true freedom); in other words its character has not ripened to its definitive perfection, and consequently there must inevitably as yet cling to its freedom some degree of capriciousness. Any pretended freewill-act of such a creature, which can be foreseen with unconditional (and it is such alone that we here mean) certainty—even though the foreseeing one be God himself—becomes, by this very condition, an unfree, necessary one. So long as my freedom is not as yet ripened beyond all caprice or subjective discretion, I am really free only when I can say, I could, just as I am, and as precisely this same person, have chosen and acted, in this particular case, also otherwise than as I have done, though of course not with the same ease or, as the case may be, difficulty. If God infallibly foreknows with apodictic certainty, all the actions of men, then these actions must be absolutely certain beforehand; but (seeing that, as being partially discretionary, they cannot rest absolutely on inner necessity) they could be absolutely certain beforehand only through a divine predetermination; but this would not only preclude the free self-determination of man, but also make God the author of sin. That which in God's knowledge stands objec-

<sup>1</sup> Weisse (Philos. Dogmat., i. p. 609) says: "The affirmation of an unconditional foreknowledge of everything yet to come, notwithstanding that it is made with as much assurance as by Augustine himself (*qui non est præscius omnium futurorum, non est utique Dens. — Civ. Dei. v. p. 9*), is, say what one will, nothing else than positive and glaring determinism, — a determinism which precludes the freedom of God, when the affirmation is applied to the future acts of God, and which annuls creatureal freedom, when applied to all the acts of creatures."

tively fixed, cannot be for man, in his present unperfected state, a matter of free determination; the absolute foreknowing on the part of God of the actions of as yet not perfected personal creatures is unavoidably a predetermining of the same.<sup>1</sup> It is in vain to seek to evade this consequence by resorting to the formula, that God foreknows the free actions of creatures expressly as free.<sup>2</sup> This formula contains a self-contradictory assertion; for the free, in so far as it is as yet discretionarily (capriciously) free, can, as such, not possibly be foreknown in an absolute and infallible manner. It cannot at all be an object of a proper, that is, an unconditionally reliable foreknowledge, and consequently also not of the divine foreknowledge. Of course we do not mean that the free does not admit of any precalculation whatever. On the contrary, any intelligent judge can conjecture beforehand, of any given moral subject, the manner in which he will act under given circumstances, and that, too, with all the greater certainty the more accurately, on the one hand, he knows both the subject and his environment, and the more fully, on the other, the said subject has already approached the completion of his character-development. But so long as the subject has not attained to perfect completion, that is, to a perfectly ripened moral character, this calculation can never lead to anything but probabilities, greater or less; but not to an infallibly correct result, and consequently not to one that is apodictically certain. And of this latter alone we are here speaking. Such an approximate precalculation of the free actions of personal creatures lies, of course, in the capacity of God, and indeed to the highest degree, so that for him all possibility of deception as to the degree of the probability of such precalculation is precluded. And he undoubtedly puts

<sup>1</sup> Martensen (*Dogmat.*, p. 413): "Whatever can be an object of an eternal foreknowledge, must be based in a law of eternal necessity."

<sup>2</sup> Müller (*Sünde*, 3. Auf., p. 289) says: "If, in using this formula, the idea of freedom is taken in real earnest, . . . then it does not solve the problem, but simply proposes it. For the real question is, in fact, this: Whether God can infallibly foresee the future actions of free creatures, or eternally foreknow them, without by that very circumstance making them necessary?"

this capacity into full application, both in the forming of his world-plan and in his world-governing; this, however, does not amount to a properly so-called, that is, to an apodictic, foreknowledge.

To the question, how indeed such a foreknowledge as to the future actions of creatures could be possible to God, no other answer has been found than a resort to the statement that the divine foreknowledge of the future is not of a calculating character, as with man, but is intuitive, and that it can be such for the reason that it is of an eternal, trans-temporal character. This answer, however, is entirely unsatisfactory; for the divine foreknowledge is of an intuitive beholding character only as being speculative. To say that it is not a calculated foreknowledge can only mean that the thinking whereby it is reached is not limited by a lapse of time. The difficulty remains, therefore, wholly unremoved; for, unquestionably, thought can foreknow with absolute certainty only the absolutely necessary. And it is equally inconclusive to say, that because the knowledge of God is eternal and trans-temporal, therefore an intuitive knowledge of the future is possible. For, if a trans-temporal knowledge is conceivable at all, it is so only as a knowing through pure, or speculative thinking. But if intuitive thinking is taken in such a sense as not to be a knowing through pure thinking, then any trans-temporal beholding or knowing is, to us, at least, a meaningless word.

We must, therefore, regard it as settled, that the as yet future actions of unperfected personal creatures cannot, in the very nature of the case, be the object of any infallible foreknowledge whatever. And for this reason it does not in the least detract from the absoluteness of God not to predicate of him an absolutely certain foreknowledge of such actions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Im. H. Fichte (*Spekul. Theol.* p. 644): "So certainly as a change in the world really takes place, it must be valid also for God, and for his consciousness, in so far as he is the highest intelligence; that is, he must know the past as past, and the future as to come." — Vatke (*Menschl. Freiheit*, p. 479): "Did not the antithesis of past and future exist for God, he would not be capable of knowing temporal things correctly; that is, he would not be omniscient."

Knowledge differs, necessarily, according to the degree the difference of its objects. God knows, in virtue of his omniscience, only that which is *per se* a possible object of knowledge; just as, also, by virtue of his omnipotence he cannot do everything, but only that which in the nature of things is possible. Even as it is *per se* impossible to cause that that which has been shall not have been, etc., so is *per se* impossible to know that which in the nature of things cannot be known. This non-knowledge or non-ability is in no sense a defect or imperfection on the part of God, seeing that the pretended objects thereof do not belong to the possible objects of the divine omniscience and omnipotence. Such a foreknowledge as we here deny, would, in fact, on the contrary, introduce an untruthfulness into the knowledge of God. For truth is the agreement of a conception with its object. Whoever, therefore, conceives the object yet necessarily undetermined and not absolutely about-to-be as definitely and absolutely about to be, his conception has no objective truth. In fact, the denial of the freedom of God is an unavoidable consequence of the hitherto prevailing attempt to solve the difficulty here in question by a resort to the doctrine of the divine omniscience. For, if God foreknows absolutely, definitely, from all eternity, absolutely everything, then this involves the necessary assumption that from all eternity absolutely everything stands fast in an absolutely objective manner, and is consequently absolutely necessary. And, notwithstanding that it may be said that it is through God himself that absolutely everything stands thus from all eternity absolutely fast, still this does not safeguard the freedom of God; it simply declares that God himself has from all eternity subjected himself to an unchangeable necessity,—that he has himself enthroned himself *fatum* above himself, and consequently has divested himself of that which is an essential attribute of his own nature. The fact is, free natural actions can be known in no other manner than as simply possible.

And it is as clear as the light of day that the attempt

reconcile the eternal world-plan of God and the will-freedom of personal creatures by appealing to God's eternal, absolute foreknowledge of the free actions of such creatures, inevitably (however unintentionally) destroys the absolute independence of God. If we conceive of the freedom of personal creatures as really the capability of choosing among contraries, and if we conceive of God as determined in his forming of his world-plan by his foreknowledge of the manner in which they will choose, then we make the thinking and willing of God in laying this world-plan dependent on the (by nothing determined) discretionary choice of free creatures. According as we conceive of the choice of even a single free creature as in any single case deciding in this or in some other way, such choosing will condition an entirely different series of consequences, and hence occasion an entirely different course of world-history; and inasmuch as we, according as the world-course is different, must also conceive differently of the plan of the divine world-government (which cannot differ from the world-course), hence we manifestly make the plan of the world-government to be modified, thus or so, from eternity, by the free actions of creatures. This position is, in fact, taken in express words by the notorious formula whereby the attempt is made to safeguard the freedom of moral creatures by a resort to the divine *πρόγνωσις* and *πρόθεσις*: 'It is not because God has foreseen it that thou hast done this or that; but because God foresaw that thy free choice would decide for it, he has taken this thy action into his eternal counsel, and made it a part of his world-plan.' Now, this assumption really involves a total reversal of the relation of dependence between God and the creature.

Thus the attempt at safeguarding the absoluteness of God against a merely imaginary danger actually results in sacrificing it altogether. And, in general, this attempt is based on a view of the relation of God to the world which would imply that God had reserved to himself, during the entire course of world-history, only the tedious *rôle* of an idle spectator.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Martensen (Dogmat., p. 193) remarks, that the view which excludes the con-  
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The only possible reconciliation of the contradiction between the assumption of a predetermined divine world-plan and the presupposition of the freedom of the actions of personal creatures, affords, as we shall see, a perfect safeguard to the character of God. Now the actual removal of this contradiction can, of course, be effected only by relaxing somewhat from the strictness of the usual conception, either of creatural freedom, or of the divine foreknowledge. From creatural freedom, however, nothing can be given up without sacrificing it entirely; whereas, from the very nature of the case, and in the very interest of the idea of God itself, we are imperatively driven to make such a limitation of the foreknowledge of God as we have above indicated.

Moreover, the position we have here taken as to the divine world-plan and the divine world-government, is imperious and directly called for by the very religious interest itself. For by the entertainment of any other view, the act of prayer becomes not only absurd but also a piece of thoughtlessness which would be, religiously, entirely inexcusable. The pious consciousness in its direct and absolute certainty of the effectualness of true and properly so-called prayer, will almost, despite any and all seemingly consequent theology, unhesitatingly reject as false any and every conception of the divine world-government which admits of no scope for prayer

ditional from the divine counsels, evinces itself thereby, "as unhistorical, in that it makes of history a merely passive reflex of the divine will." On p. 248 the same author writes: "As an unconditional foreknowledge annuls the conception of the freely-acting creature, so also it destroys the conception of God freely-acting in history. The God who foreknows everything becomes thereby a mere spectator of the already eternally-settled and predetermined events of history, and is not the all-tempering ruler in a drama of freedom which he carries out in co-operation (or in conflict) with the freedom of his creation. Hence, unless we wish to preclude the free mutual-relation between God and the creation, we cannot regard the entire actual world-course as the contents of the divine foreknowledge, but only the eternal contents of the world-course, or the eternal truth developed therein." On p. 224, he says: "The antagonism which some have found between a free world-course whose ways are not God's ways, and the absolute dependence of creation upon the divine omnipotence rests upon an ignoring of the truth that omnipotence is essentially an ethical and hence a self-limiting power."

that is, which precludes the possibility of a really determining influence on our part upon the will of God and upon his guidance of the world."

Such is Rothe's presentation of the subject. The principal positions assumed may be briefly summarized thus :

1. The traditional view of divine world-preservation proceeds upon an erroneous conception of the substance of created things. Posited matter is not delusory but real. It is endowed with a relative self-subsistency, and does not, like the falling apple, need constantly to be supported by the divine hand in order not to fall back into nonentity.

2. The commonly-held notion of world-preserving should give place to that of world-governing. The world, as endowed with self-subsistency, is actively guided by God through its prescribed course of self-development toward its normal goal. This guidance is of the nature of a continued creation.

3. The creature (*κτίσις*), is perishable only so long as it remains merely natural or material, and has not as yet developed itself into spirit. When once it has passed entirely through its development-process, it will have become spirit, will be participant in the divine nature, and hence no longer perishable, nor even destructible *ab extra*.

4. The pious consciousness calls not for such a conception of the divine world-government as to imply that God actively upholds us in being at every moment, but only that he mercifully bears with our unworthiness in not actively destroying us; in other words, that he affirms our being by not annulling the action of the organic laws in virtue of which he has endowed us with reality.

5. The notion of a divine predetermination of all things precludes effectual will-determinations on the part of the creature, and hence, renders earnest personal effort at such determinations a psychological impossibility.

6. The traditional make-shift to safeguard creatural freedom, namely, by saying that God foresees free actions *as free*, not only fails of its purpose, but also places God in an absurd relation of dependence on his supposed foreknowledge of the

manner in which creatures will act, in his constructing of his world-plan.

7. There are two essentially different phases of freedom first, in morally imperfect beings; second, in the morally perfected. The actions of the second class can be absolutely foreseen by the Infinite Mind, for such beings will always act according to absolute right. Given a specific moral environment, and their actions will correspond thereto with moral necessity. There will no longer be any scope for discretion. They will always follow the highest motive. But the actions of the first class, so long as they have not as yet attained to absolute perfection in kind, are subject to subjective discretion or caprice, and hence can only be pre-conjectured.

8. The formula, that God foreknows future free actions *absolutely free*, involves a self-contradiction. The free, in the sense of the discretionarily-free, cannot in the nature of the case be foreknown.

9. To predicate of God the non-knowing of future free creatural actions, is not to limit the divine omniscience. Even as omnipotence is not an ability to work the self-contradictory (e.g. that two units are as many as five), so omniscience is not an ability to know the *per se* unknowable. Omniscience knows all possible objects of knowledge; namely all the past, all the present, and all the future so far as it is logically contained in causes now in operation, and which will not be interfered with in the future, — but nothing farther.

10. To presuppose the divine foreknowledge of absolutely everything, sacrifices the freedom of God. It implies that all that is to be is already absolutely objectively fixed, and hence, that God has absolutely chained his own hands from all eternity, having once and for all set the universe upon the grooves of necessary sequence, and having sketched out in an immutable scheme all the exercises of his freedom in which he will dare indulge himself in the whole scope of eternity.

11. The presupposition of a divine foreknowledge from all eternity of absolutely everything, leaves to God, during the

lapse of the whole sweep of universal history, no other rôle than that of an idle spectator.

12. To make the divine world-plan dependent upon the foreseen actions of creatures, is to reverse the proper relation of dependence between God and the creature. This plan is, in this view, not a broad, solid road leading through the course of world-history, such as the Infinite Mind might have preferred it, but it is a narrow, tortuous, oft-interrupted outline, abounding in special provisions, trap-doors, ambuscades, checks, hedges, and other specifics, such as God foresaw would, from time to time, become necessary, in that he foresaw that here and there his creatures would choose this or that abnormal course of action.

13. The only possible method of solving the contradiction between the traditional form of the doctrine of omniscience and the real admission of creatural freedom is, to modify our conception of the doctrine of omniscience in such a manner as that it shall not include an absolute knowledge of so much of the future as depends on the choice of imperfect moral creatures.

14. The religious interest calls for this modification. On the hypothesis that the future fate of all men stands already objectively fixed in the foreknowledge of God, real and earnest prayer on the part of man becomes psychologically impossible.

A word or so in conclusion :

These views of Rothe, and of a number of other eminent theologians, must stand or fall on their own merits. It is not to be denied, however, that, on the supposition of their correctness, they shed a very wholesome light upon some of the shadowy phases of the divine world-economy.

These views save us from the lame make-shift of saying, that God foreknows free actions *as free*, without our being able to conceive how this can be possible. It thus dispels one of the *mysteria* with which theology has gratuitously burdened itself.

These views afford the strongest possible motive to earnest

personal effort in making our calling and election "sure." This calling is not sure already, neither objectively nor subjectively, neither in God's mind, nor in any other sense. It is as yet absolutely undecided. It hangs simply upon our own will. If we actually do what we can do, we shall be saved. The more we advance in virtue, the less the probability of our ultimately failing. Hence our interest in daily increasing that virtue. The work of each day makes the morrow doubly sure.

These views enable the Christian to feel, in a true and real sense, that he is a co-worker with God in the salvation of humanity. He can now give full scope to the religious instinct of prayer, and to his impulses of love in laboring to save sinners. He need no longer have the oppressive feeling that the ultimate fate of each and every individual is already fixed, in the certain foreknowledge of God, so that, do what he will, he is only helping to bring about that which is to be anyhow. He may now have the inspiring thought that he can and may occasion souls to be saved which but for his discretionally-free activity would positively not have been saved. He now sees a new significancy in the representation that there is joy in heaven over a conversion upon earth. For this conversion is something new in the universe. It was conditioned — not *already*, and in the heavens above, — but *now*, and upon the earth, by the free action of the sinner himself in freely yielding to impressions which he might have resisted.

These views enable us to answer certain ugly questions which have puzzled and pained thoughtful Christians ever since the world began. Thus: If God foreknew that the race would fall, why did he create it? If he foreknew from eternity all the individuals who should persistently sin and be lost, why did he not prevent these from coming into being, or, at least, into sinful maturity? Why did he not let the frost of death nip all the innocent little human buds which he foreknew would, if let live, only make themselves wretched forever? The answer of Rothe is that this was not for

known, and that in the nature of the case it could not have been. Thus one of the darkest barriers to a rational theodicy is entirely dispelled at once.

These views help to explain the seeming changes of policy of God in the history of salvation. The Adamic covenant did not suffice to bring the race to God. When the free perverseness of man utterly baffled it in its general efficiency, God swept away the race, and made another trial in the Noachian covenant. And when this, also, had been defeated by man, he made a renewed attempt in the Abrahamic. In all these phases of history, the race is treated as a free factor. When it rejects one overture, divine mercy plans another.

Such are some of the many favorable phases of this seemingly new doctrine. It has a few apparently unfavorable ones, however, which will readily suggest themselves.

Julius Müller asked: "Will Rothe earnestly assume that the divine knowledge is subject to a constant increase, according to the will-determinations of man?" Rothe says: "I cheerfully and unhesitatingly answer, Yes!" God's knowledge is true knowledge. The sinner who has to-day yielded to grace has actually added an increment to the divine knowledge. God did not know him yesterday as a Christian; to-day, he does.

The most serious difficulty, however, is as to prophecy. How is prophecy possible, on the theory of Rothe? Several answers have been proposed. It has been urged that there is in all the prophecies of the Bible some degree of indefiniteness. Witness, to this, the circumstance that many of the Old Testament prophecies are still diversely interpreted by commentators. Prophetic writings abound in symbols and figures which are of elastic application. Witness to this, the infinitely varied interpretation of the Apocalypse, even of those parts of it which relate, confessedly, to events already past. But, while prophecies usually avoid literal numbers and local details, they yet contain general and essential truth. Now, the theory of Rothe admits of a very close calculating

of the essential outlines of the future, — especially of great masses of men, of cities, nations, etc. The influences of material environment, of philosophical systems, of the dominant passions of man in general, and of the peculiarities of particular races, of literature, of art and science, — all these afford data for the general mapping out of the future, even though the future volitions of individuals lie beyond the limits of possible apodictic knowledge. Is, or is not, this enough to explain the possibility and the actuality of prophecy and yet leave the view of Rothe intact?

But another hypothesis will be more satisfactory to many. It is this: God not only surveys through the pregnant actualities of the present the general scope of the future, but he also, as occasion requires, makes use of individuals — kings, military chieftains, etc. — as passive (and, in so far as not morally acting) instruments of his purposes. Compare the cases of Pharaoh, Balaam, Jonah, etc. That is, he providentially brings so many and such strong motives to bear upon them, that their actions fall, so to speak, for the time being, under the law of cause and effect; so that he can thus at any time, in the fulfilling of a specific purpose, bring about a specific event, or precipitate a general crisis. Thus the possibility of definite prophecies is fully given, and the field yet left entirely free for the doctrine of the non-foreknowledge of the future volitions of imperfect free creatures.