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## Foreknowledge and Free Will in Chaucer

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**FOREKNOWLEDGE AND FREE WILL  
IN CHAUCER**

**Paul Aloysius Huber, S.J.**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Mas-  
ter of Arts in Loyola University**

**Chicago, June, 1939.**

## Vita Auctoris

Paul Aloysius Huber was born in Dayton, Kentucky, June 11, 1911. He received his elementary education at Sacred Heart School, Bellevue, Kentucky. He attended Saint Xavier's High School, Cincinnati, Ohio, from which he was graduated in June, 1930. In September of the same year he began his college studies at Xavier University, Cincinnati, where he completed but one semester. He continued them at the same institution when, in August, 1931, he entered the Jesuit Novitiate of the Sacred Heart, Milford, Ohio. He transferred to West Baden College, Indiana, in 1935, and received the Bachelor of Arts degree from Loyola University, Chicago, in June, 1936.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter:	Page:
I. Introduction. . . . .	1.
II. The Solution of Boethius . . . . .	3.
III. The Lamentation of Troilus. . . . .	30.
IV. Chanticleer and Destiny. . . . .	50.
V. The Patristic and Scholastic Answer . . . . .	57
VI. Conclusion. . . . .	72
Bibliography . . . . .	74

## CHAPTER I

## Introduction

Chaucerian scholars invariably note and comment upon the poet's interest in the problem of divine foreknowledge and human free will. Some of their number, namely, H.R. Patch, W.C. Curry, and especially B.L. Jefferson, in his Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius, have studied with a degree of thoroughness the passages in Chaucer's poetry in which interest is displayed. The present writer, however, believes that a more detailed and more accurate treatment of the matter can be made by examining the views expressed by the poet not only in the light of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae, but also with reference to the patristic and scholastic teaching which influenced directly or indirectly the minds of Chaucer and his contemporaries. To make such an examination is the purpose of this thesis.

Since Chaucer's principal source for his observations on foreknowledge and free will is Boethius, the thesis will begin with a summary and an elucidation of the latter's views as contained in the fifth book of the De Consolatione. Then will follow successively an explanation of the two chief passages in which Chaucer deals with the subject, namely, that of Troilus and Criseyde (Book IV, ll. 953-1078), and that of the Nun's Priest's Tale (ll. 3234-3250). Subsequently

there will be given a résumé of the patristic and scholastic teaching touching the problem together with an exposition of Chaucer's attitude toward that teaching. This method of procedure should result in making more intelligible the passages in Chaucer's writings of which there is question. In the following chapter, therefore, the solution of Boethius will be presented. In the third chapter the Troilus passage will be discussed, and in the fourth the pertinent lines of the Nun's Priest's Tale. The fifth chapter will give the patristic and scholastic answer, and the sixth will put forward certain conclusions which the writer has formed in the course of his study.

## CHAPTER II

## The Solution of Boethius

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, a Roman statesman and philosopher, was born at Rome in the year 480, and died at Pavia in 524 or 525. He was descended from a consular family. As early as 507 he was known as a learned man, and as such was entrusted by King Theodoric with several important missions. When, however, his enemies accused him of disloyalty to the Ostrogothic king, alleging that he plotted to restore "Roman liberty," and adding the accusation of sacrilege (the practice of astrology), he was cast into prison, condemned, and executed by order of Theodoric. During his imprisonment he reflected on the instability of the favors of princes and the inconstancy of the devotion of his friends. These reflections suggested to him the theme of his best known philosophical work, the De Consolatione Philosophiae.

By the eighth century a tradition, which became constant, that one reason for his condemnation was his Catholic Faith, had assumed definite shape. In recent times critical scholarship has gone to the opposite extreme; and it has been held that Boethius was not a Christian at all, or that, if he was, he abjured the Faith before death. A saner view, which seems at the present time to be prevalent among scholars, is that Boethius was a Christian and remained a Christian to the end. It is not

easy, however, to show from documentary sources that he died a martyr for the Catholic Faith; nevertheless value should be given to the constant tradition that he did.

He produced works on mathematics, music, philosophy, and theology. His philosophical works exercised very great influence on the development of medieval terminology, method, and doctrine, especially in logic. In fact, the schoolmen, down to the beginning of the twelfth century, depended entirely on Boethius for their knowledge of the doctrines of Aristotle. They adopted his definitions and made them current in the schools.

The best known work of Boethius is the De Consolatione Philosophiae, which was written during his imprisonment. It is a dialogue between "Philosophy" and Boethius, in which the Queen of Sciences strives to console the fallen statesman. The main argument of the discourse is the transitoriness and unreality of all earthly greatness and the superior desirability of the things of the mind. There are evident traces of the influence of Neo-Platonists, especially Proclus, and little, if anything, that can be said to reflect Christian influences. The recourse to Stoicism, especially to the doctrines of Seneca, was inevitable, considering the nature of the theme. It astonishes us that he should have failed in his moment of trial and stress to refer to obvious Christian sources of consolation. Perhaps he felt that a strictly formal dialogue such as the De Consolatione should adhere rigorously to the realm of "natural truth," and leave out of con-



consideration the lesson to be derived from the moral maxims of Christianity, "supernatural truth."

The work takes up many problems of metaphysics as well as of ethics. It treats of the being and nature of God, of providence and fate, of the origin of the universe, and of the freedom of the will. In medieval times it became one of the most popular and influential philosophical books, a favorite study of statesmen, poets, historians, philosophers, and theologians. Its influence may be traced in much of the literature of the Middle Ages. That the De Consolatione was a favorite study of the theologians as well as of the literary men is evidenced by the numerous imitations under the title "De Consolatione Theologiae" which were read widely during the later Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup>

Now that we have considered these few facts about the life and works of Boethius, we are ready for the main labor of the present chapter, a summary and an elucidation of the Fifth Book of the De Consolatione Philosophiae. However, before this matter is taken up specifically, a somewhat general summary of the whole Fifth Book would seem to be helpful. Therefore, after some necessary introductory details, this general summary will be given. But first let us consider the introductory details.

The disciple lies sick in his prison bed, and a noble and beautiful woman, the Lady Philosophy, is at his bedside instructing and consoling him. In their conversation she shows that what men think to be chance is nothing more than the action

of hidden causes, and that this action does not proceed from the wills of men but from God, Who wills it and guides its course. This explanation prompts the disciple to ask whether or not Providence in His prearrangement of the action of all causes holds the world in the grip of necessity, so that there can be no free will. The lady answers by proving that man has a free will. She goes on to say that there are degrees of free will, and that men destroy it when they sin. While speaking of sin, she mentions the divine foreknowledge of men's sinful voluntary acts, and by so doing raises a great difficulty in the mind of the disciple. He states his difficulty. He cannot understand how free will in man can be reconciled with the foreknowledge in God. Thus he opens up the subject of the Fifth Book, the reconciliation of man's free will with the divine foreknowledge. With this exposition of the introductory matter, the general summary of the Fifth Book can now be given.

Believing his difficulty to be unsoluble, the disciple now proceeds to give his reasons for thinking so. It should be noted well that in the whole of his argument he is ever anxious to defend the foreknowledge of God. To him the question is not, "Can the divine foreknowledge be reconciled with free will in man?" but rather, can human free will be reconciled with the foreknowledge of God?" The divine foreknowledge must be defended at all cost, even if it require the denial of free will. In the course of his reasoning he also considers a certain

solution of the problem offered by other philosophers according to which free will is reconciled with divine foreknowledge. This solution he holds to be unsound. He concludes by commenting on the sad state in which mankind is if there be no free will.

It is now Lady Philosophy's turn to speak. She first refutes thoroughly the arguments of the disciple. This done, she proves to be sound the solution to the problem which he had rejected, and finally enters into a long explanation of it. Her explanation concludes the Fifth Book. The foregoing, then, is a brief, general summary of that part of the De Consolatione in which we are presently interested. We are now ready to take up the various arguments of the Fifth Book in more detail.<sup>2</sup>

The disciple begins by putting forth his proposition: human free will is incompatible with the foreknowledge of God. Proceeding to his proof, he says that his proposition is true if two principles are true, first, that God foreknows all things, and, secondly, by that God cannot be deceived in what He knows, i.e. cannot have false knowledge. Assuming that these principles are self-evident, the disciple continues. He points out that according to the first principle all the acts of man's free will must be known by God, and that according to the second He cannot have false foreknowledge about these acts. Next the disciple states that if a man did have free will, God could not have certain knowledge of his future free will acts, but only "uncertain expectations."<sup>3</sup> The disciple gives no proof for this

assertion here, but puts it off until much later in his speech. For the present he merely makes the assertion, and draws a conclusion from it as if it were true. This conclusion is that it would be "impious" of us to attribute to God the possibility of having "uncertain expectations" (as men have concerning the future). It would be so because it would violate the principles already put forward. It would violate the first, because it would not know all things; for if I am uncertain about the outcome of some event, I cannot be said to know its outcome. It would violate the second in that it would admit the possibility of God having false knowledge of future free will acts; for if I have only "uncertain expectations" about something, it is possible that my judgement about its outcome be false.

The disciple's next step is to consider an adversary's attempt to reconcile free will with the divine foreknowledge, in order to refute the latter's arguments. Before expatiating on this matter, let us return to the disciple's unproved assertion that "if man had free will, God could not have certain foreknowledge of his free will acts, but only "uncertain expectations." As we have already stated, the disciple puts off the attempt to prove this assertion until later in his speech. However, the present stage is <sup>the</sup> more logical place for this "proof", and as it is basic to the whole position of the disciple, it will be given here.<sup>4</sup>

Put briefly, the proof is this: God would have certain foreknowledge of a thing which of its very nature uncertain, and this would be false knowledge. ( By "certain" is meant absolute certainty, not a high degree of probability.)

On the one hand, God must have certain foreknowledge of future free will acts-- the two principles laid down at the beginning, namely, that God must know all things, and that this knowledge must not be false knowledge, require divine certitude concerning free will acts-- and on the other He must have certitude about a thing which of its very nature is uncertain, a free will act. This apparent contradiction is what the disciple offers as the bed-rock foundation for his whole position. It is the very heart of his line of argument. If man had free will, his free will acts as future things would be uncertain in their outcome. The essence of free will is the power to choose between two or more possibilities. It is uncertain how a man will choose until the time comes when he actually makes his choice. Hence, if God foreknew with certitude that He would eventually make a choice, such foreknowledge would be false. My choice of A instead of B does not become a certain truth until half-past nine o'clock of the morning of the second day of March, 1938, at which time I actually choose A. All along through the thousands of past years until now, it is just as possible that I shall choose B as A. If you wish to be certain how I shall act in a given circumstance, you must wait until I actually act. Thus does the

disciple give reasons for his basic assertion.<sup>5</sup> Let us now take the disciple's speech where we left off, namely, where he begins to consider an adversary's attempt to reconcile free will with God's foreknowledge.

The adversary's argument is this, that things do not come to pass because God foreknows them, but God foreknows them because they will come to pass. The disciple's position, according to the assumption of the adversary, is that an act of the will which God foreknows must come to pass because He foreknows it. God's very foreknowledge of the act creates the necessity of the act's coming to pass. The adversary argues that this view is incorrect, since the act does not at all come to pass because God foreknows it, but on the contrary, God foreknows it because it will come to pass.

The adversary is concerned with finding out where the causality of the necessity is. He knows that the cause can only be in two places: either it is the foreknowledge of God, so that this foreknowledge causes the necessity of future things happening; or on the contrary, it is the future events themselves, so that they cause a kind of necessity in the foreknowledge of God, the necessity of God having foreknowledge of them. By coming into existence they make it necessary that God foreknow them. With this reasoning in mind the adversary lays down his proposition: It is not necessary that those things happen which are foreseen by God, but necessary that God foresees those things

which are to come; or to put it another way, things do not come to pass because Providence foresees them, but Providence foresees them because they will come to pass. With this proposition the adversary believes that he can save free will.

The disciple replies to this argumentation by alleging that it is not to the point. Admittedly, the necessity is caused by the foreknowledge of God, or it is caused (in a sense) by the future event. But, so the disciple says, the question at issue is not where the necessity is; that is beside the point. Further, it makes no difference where the cause is; for wherever it is proved to be, foreknown things must happen of necessity. He can fully admit his adversary's proposition, and still prove his own thesis. This he labors to do by means of the example of a man sitting. In this example one knows an event that is taking place in the present time before one's very eyes. The disciple offers this example, although dealing with the present, as a perfect parallel to God's foreknowledge of a future event.

A man is sitting there before me. Since he is sitting there, it is necessary that my judgment that he sits be true, so far as my example is in perfect accord with the proposition of the adversary. An event exists. That event causes necessity in my knowledge of it: first, the necessity of me having knowledge of it (it is before me, I am attentive to it, I cannot help but know it); and secondly, the necessity of my knowledge of it being true. Therefore, the causality is all on

the side of the event. Just as the adversary can say it is necessary that God foreknow a thing because it will exist, so I can say in this case it is necessary that I know this event because it exists now.

But I can also reverse the process. If my knowledge is true, and true necessarily, it is also necessary that the man sit there. Therefore, I know the man sits there of necessity. I am certain of it. But does my knowledge cause that necessity? Not at all! And so I fulfill the other part of the adversary's proposition. As the event of the future does not of necessity exist because God foreknows it, so this event of the present does not exist of necessity because I know it now. Thus I have in this example agreed perfectly with the adversary, and yet from it I can prove that foreknown things must happen of necessity. When all is said and done, my knowledge of the man sitting there, which is necessarily true knowledge, tells me that the man must be sitting there. I am positive it is necessary that he be sitting there.

A few lines further on the disciple applies the example to the foreknowledge of future events. "As when I know anything to be, it must be; so when I know anything shall be, it must needs become."<sup>6</sup> As when I know a man sits, sit he must of necessity, so if I know he will sit in the future, he must of necessity sit in the future. He has not the free will to avoid sitting in the future, necessity forcing him to sit, My fore-



knowledge of the event is true, and true of necessity; therefore I can argue that the event itself must happen of necessity. If it does not, my foreknowledge of it is false. But God must know all things, past, present, and future, and His knowledge of these must be true. To conclude what must be said on the application of the example, - what is true of my knowledge of a present or future event is equally true of God's knowledge of a present or future event. The adversary has attempted to reconcile the free will of man with the foreknowledge of God by the proposition, "It is not necessary that things come to pass because God foreknows them, but it is necessary that God foreknow them because they will come to pass. The disciple has shown that even if this proposition be true, the fact remains that foreknown things must come to pass.

Thus far the disciple has been merely defending his position against the adversary. Now he takes the offensive. The adversary clearly wishes to say that future events cause the foreknowledge of God, in the true sense of the word "cause."

The disciple claims it is "absurd" to say that temporal events should be said to cause God's everlasting foreknowledge. The disciple does not tell us why it is "absurd," but from what Lady Philosophy says about this later on, his reason probably is that if the foreknowledge were caused by future events, it would depend on them, because causality implies dependence. But the very idea "God" implies absolute independence from all other beings; hence it is "absurd," that is, it is a contradiction in terms, to say

that the foreknowledge of such an absolutely independent being should depend on temporal events. 7,8

With this the disciple leaves the adversary as entirely refuted, and offers the argument for his own position, which has already been given and explained in this paper much earlier as fitting logically there rather than here where the disciple actually puts it. This argument is the basis of his whole position, and it is very important for the understanding of that position. It is the argument that if man had free will, God, in order to foreknow his free will acts, would have to have certain foreknowledge of a thing which of its very nature must be uncertain; in this hypothesis God's foreknowledge would be false. After giving this argument the disciple considers that he has proved sufficiently that free will cannot be reconciled with God's foreknowledge. He concludes his speech by enumerating the woeful consequences which must follow if man has no free will. There can be no reward for virtuous conduct, or punishment for evil conduct. There cannot even be a difference between virtue and vice. Furthermore, if there could be sin, God would have to be the author of it, since all things happen of necessity by the will of Him Who prearranged man's every will action. Lastly, men could not hope in God, and it would be useless to pray to Him. From this it would follow that all mankind would be separated from Him, since it is hope and grace alone that bind men to God.

It is only after she has listened to the long dis-

course of the disciple that Lady Philosophy begins to express her views.<sup>9</sup> The whole difficulty in this matter, according to her, is that we do not understand the way in which God knows things. If we did have this understanding, we would have no trouble in comprehending how God foreknows future things, and how consequently free will can be reconciled with the divine foreknowledge. Later she will explain God's intellect insofar as it is humanly possible. In the meantime she will clear up the special difficulties proposed by the disciple.

Lady Philosophy first asserts that the position of the adversary, which the disciple rejected, is indeed the correct one. Be it recalled that the adversary's solution to the problem was that things do not come to pass of necessity because God foreknows them, but He necessarily knows them because they will come to pass. She goes on to consider the difficulty, proposed by the disciple, of the man sitting. In putting forth this example the disciple admitted that foreknowledge did not at all cause the necessity of future acts, but held that it indicated as a sort of sign the presence of the necessity. The Lady meets this difficulty with two answers. The first is that one must prove the existence of the necessity before proclaiming anything as a sign of its existence. (One might justly question the probative force of this reason.) The second answer is that we should argue rather from intrinsic causes from signs. (The Lady designates arguments from signs as "far-fetched" arguments.)<sup>10</sup> Thus she

responds to the disciple's argument from the example of the man sitting.

Now the Lady goes a step further. She says that the disciple has only one difficulty against the adversary's principle (later she will show there are two important errors, one depending upon the other, buried beneath this difficulty). The disciple's difficulty consists in his thinking that free will is repugnant to foreknowledge of its own acts. If Lady Philosophy can show there is no repugnance, the disciple must accept the principle. Her method of proof is to argue from a parallel example. She will first demonstrate there is no repugnance in the existence of free will acts and a simultaneous knowledge of them. She will then make the proper application to foreknowledge of future free will acts.

Lady Philosophy regards as self-evident the existence of free will acts which we can know while they come into being before our very eyes. One might indeed ask her how she can take such free will acts for granted, when the whole question under debate is whether or not human free will exists. Let it be said in her defense that the existence of God's foreknowledge is never doubted. The point at issue is whether or not this foreknowledge negatives the possibility of human free will. Now the disciple has no desire to deny the existence of free will. His difficulty lies in the reconciliation of it with a known truth. This truth, the fact of God's foreknowledge, has been established earlier in

the De Consolatione. The disciple is quite willing to admit the existence of human free will, if demonstrably it is not repugnant to the divine foreknowledge. The Lady is perfectly justified, therefore, in considering free will a self-evident truth, if she can remove the apparent contradiction of its coexisting with God's foreknowledge.

Lady Philosophy argues from the example of a coachman driving his horses. His actions are free, and I know them to be such. I cannot argue from the knowledge I have of them, as from a sign, to necessity in them, (as the disciple has done in the case of the sitting man), because the Lady has already rejected that line of argument as invalid. Consequently, here is a case in which free will can stand with a knowledge of its acts. Now as free will acts are not repugnant to this present knowledge of them, so future free will acts are not repugnant to foreknowledge of them. The parallel, so the Lady alleges, is perfect.

Naturally enough, the disciple objects strongly. He denies the parallel, and he denies it on account of that basic reason behind his whole position which the writer made so much of in treating the disciple's own speech. His reason, it will be remembered, was that if God foreknew the event of some free will act, that foreknowledge would be false, since a free will is of its very nature uncertain, and uncertain things cannot be known with certitude. There is no uncertainty concerning the acts of the coachman, for I behold them coming into being before my eyes.

From a great number of possible free acts the driver has now selected particular ones. Before he made his selection, it was uncertain which he would choose, but now that he has made his choice all uncertainty has vanished. Real things, i.e., free will acts, come into existence, and I can know them with all certainty. But the case is quite different with future free will acts and foreknowledge of them. A man has not yet made his actual choice. It is uncertain what he will choose until the intervening time goes by and the moment comes when he actually makes his choice. Then only can his act be the object of certain knowledge. If before that time I have foreknowledge of it, my foreknowledge is false, since the object of it is a thing whose very nature it is to be uncertain in its issue. Hence there is no parallel between knowledge of present free will acts and foreknowledge of future free will acts.

Nothing daunted, the Lady replies that though free will acts are admittedly uncertain in themselves, nevertheless they can be foreknown with certitude. The disciple's error, she points out, lies in his believing that things are known in accordance with their natures. In actual truth they are known according to the faculty knowing them. Of this assertion she gives the following proof. Consider, she says, some knowable object. In itself, according to its own nature, it is individual, concrete, and present to us. In the scale of being, ranging from the lowest type of animal all the way up to the highest intel-

lectual being (God), there are four kinds of knowing faculties. First there is mere sense faculty, capable only of sense knowledge of our object, and that only when the object is present. Secondly, there is imagination, which also has but sense knowledge of the object, but which has the added power of knowing the object when it is absent. So far we have two faculties which are limited to the sensible, the singular, and the concrete. The third faculty, man's intellect, can know our object in the abstract, i.e., it can have universal knowledge of it. The fourth and highest faculty, that of God, has powers of knowing the object far above those peculiar to the human intellect. Thus each of the four faculties knows one and the same object, but differently from the other three, and in a manner peculiar to its own nature. All this goes to show that a given object is not known according to its nature, but according to the nature of the faculty knowing it.<sup>11</sup> Therefore the disciple cannot reject the parallel on the ground that a future free will act is by its very nature uncertain in its issue, and so precludes all certain foreknowledge of itself.

Nevertheless, rejoins the disciple, it is selfevident that men cannot have certain knowledge of uncertain future events such as free will acts are. This would be against the nature of the human faculty. Thus reasoning, he still denies the parallel. Lady Philosophy admits that men cannot have certain foreknowledge of future events uncertain in their issue, since this is beyond the natural powers of the human intellect. But it is otherwise

with God. His intellect is of such perfection that it can have certain foreknowledge of events uncertain in their issue, i.e., of free will acts. This peculiar power she calls the "simplicity" of the divine knowledge. If we could understand this "simplicity", we could also understand how God is able to have certain foreknowledge of events uncertain in their issue. She will now attempt to explain this simplicity, and by so doing will solve the disciple's last difficulty against her "parallel." This done, she will have removed the last prop of the disciple's contention that human free will cannot co-exist with divine foreknowledge. She will also have refuted entirely his objections against his adversary's manner of solving the apparent contradiction in free will and foreknowledge, - against the use of the principle, "things do not of necessity come to pass because God foreknows them, but God of necessity must foreknow them because they will come to pass."

After some remarks on other matters, Lady Philosophy proceeds to treat of the simplicity of God. In order, however, to understand the divine simplicity, one must have some notion of the "eternity" of God. This eternity of God she defines as "a perfect possession altogether of an endless life."<sup>12</sup> The meaning of the definition becomes clearer if we consider temporal things. A temporal thing cannot embrace all the space of its life at once, as can the eternal being. The life of temporal beings can be divided into three sections, present, past, and



future. The present section is that life alone which it really possesses; its past life has gone forever, its future life has not yet come. The eternal being, on the contrary, does possess its past and future life, and that together with its present life. The fact of the matter is that it does not have a past or future life, but only life in the present, and this present is everlasting. What is present to men is a short fleeting moment, what is present to God is everlasting. Thus does the Lady explain her definition of eternity, i.e., "the perfect possession altogether of an endless life."

She now connects the idea of eternity with the Divine intellect. If God's nature is eternal, it follows that His intellect must be eternal. As God's life has no past or future, but only an everlasting present state, so also His intellect. He does not know things as past, present, and future, but as present. God's intellect knows two bodies of truth, His own everlasting life, and the life of temporal things. As the divine is known as something which is entirely in a present state, so temporal things are known as something entirely in a present state, although temporal things actually have a present and future state as well as a present state. For example, a man will live eighty years. He will have performed in that time a great number of actions. At present he is only forty years of age. At the present he is performing certain actions. God knows these present actions.

They are, as the Lady would put it, "now in doing," and God knows them as such.<sup>13</sup> But in the forty years past he has also performed actions, and in the forty years to come he will perform more. God knows these past and future actions. But how? As of the past and as of the future? No. He knows them as if they were present. He knows them, to repeat the words of Lady Philosophy, "as if they were now in doing."

In this whole matter we are not greatly concerned with man's past and present actions. We wish to find out about his future actions. How does God foreknow these future actions? He knows them "as if they were now in doing." Really it is incorrect to talk of the foreknowledge of God. He does not have foreknowledge, but rather the knowledge of a never fading present. All the foregoing has been for the purpose of explaining the "simplicity" of God's knowledge. We can now define this "simplicity" as the power to know the past and future as if it were the same as the present, as if the past and the future were now in doing. It is this simplicity which enables God to know our future free will acts with certitude, although these in themselves be events uncertain in their issue. Since God's intellect has such a power, the disciple's last reason for denying the parallel between our knowledge of a coachman's free will acts and God's foreknowledge of future free will acts falls flat. Further, the Lady's explanation of the simplicity of God's intellect has brought out how striking that parallel is. God's

foreknowledge is just as much a knowledge of something going on in the present as is our knowledge of the present itself. Lady philosophy has completed her argument from the example of the coachman, wherefrom she has proved that there is no contradiction between free will and God's foreknowledge. There remains, however, some obscurity which must be removed, some objections which must be answered.

The disciple can argue in this manner: God foreknows free will acts which some day will actually come to pass. Since such is the case, why cannot I still argue that what God foreknows will happen, and what actually will happen, must happen, and is therefore necessary? The Lady grants the existence of a necessity, but denies that this necessity destroys free will. The will act referred to the divine knowledge is necessary, but in itself is entirely free. She explains this statement by her distinction between conditional and simple necessity. (As we shall see, Chaucer mentions both types of necessity in the Nun's Priest's Tale.)

When the act is referred to the divine knowledge, it is necessary with conditional necessity.<sup>14</sup> What does this conditional necessity mean? We can understand it better by taking the example of a man who is walking before us, supposedly of his free will. If I know that he is walking, he must of necessity be walking; for, as Lady Philosophy observes, "what a man knoweth cannot be otherwise than it is known." The man is known to walk.

Therefore, walk he must, but his walking is necessary only conditionally - by the condition of my knowledge. Consequently, my knowledge is the condition. And so it is with the foreknowledge of God and our free will acts. God by virtue of the simplicity of his foreknowledge knows the act as if it were happening in the present before him; therefore it must needs take place.

The next step is to inform the disciple how this conditional necessity is compatible with free will. If I know a man is walking, that man must be walking, because knowledge does nothing more than mirror reality. But before the man set out he might not have walked. While the man walks, it is necessary that he walk; but before he set out it was not necessary that he should walk. By the power of his own free will the man brought the act of his walking into existence, and by giving it existence made it necessary; for all existing things have a necessity. Thus it was by his own free will that he conferred necessity on this act. Once the act came into existence it was necessary that it exist. But it depended on man's volition whether or not it should acquire the quality of necessity, i.e., come into existence. As a matter of fact, the man actually has determined to bring it into existence and God foreknew that He would. In this sense only it is necessary that what God foreknows happen. Thus does Lady Philosophy explain conditional necessity. <sup>15</sup>

Besides this conditional necessity there is another kind with which free will is not compatible, and this is

"simple" necessity. A good example of simple necessity is the sun rising. Of its rising we cannot say, "it might not have happened," and "there was no necessity that it rise." Before it rose, the sun had to rise; there was no free choice in the matter. Such is the nature of simple necessity. It is really simple necessity that the disciple has been defending all along.

Now the Lady is fully prepared to meet the difficulty. God foreknows men's free will acts; therefore they must happen of necessity. She makes a distinction. These free will acts must happen with conditional necessity, yes. They must happen with simple necessity, no. God foreknows both that the sun will rise on a given morning in the year 1940, and that on the same morning a man will go out walking. The man will walk with conditional necessity, therefore, freely; the sun will rise with simple necessity, therefore, without freedom.

The second objection is that if I have free will I can change my purpose, and thus can frustrate the foreknowledge of God. I should make it false, since what God thought I would do I will not do. The solution is that since the foreknowledge of God is a knowledge of the present, He knows whether or not we will change our purpose, and, if we do change it, what the new purpose will be.

Another question arises. When we change our purpose, does God's knowledge change with it, so that He has a new knowledge for my new purpose? The answer is "no." There is just one

knowledge of the present in which both purposes are contained, since in God's knowledge our second purpose does not follow the first. Both exist simultaneously, and hence there is no change. Free will cannot change God's foreknowledge of it.

According to Lady Philosophy this last solution also answers that difficulty which the disciple urged in his discourse against the adversary's principle that things do not happen of necessity because God foreknows them, but that God foreknows them of necessity because they will happen. The reader will recall the disciple's holding it to be unworthy of God to have free will acts as the cause of His foreknowledge. Applying again the answer just given, Lady Philosophy would aver that such is not unworthy of God, since those acts do not change his foreknowledge and are as present events to Him. Since this is so, His foreknowledge does not depend on our acts. Such reasoning would seem to make it clear that the Lady does not accept the word "cause" here in its ordinary meaning, i. e., as implying dependence. Consequently, when she defends the dictum, "our acts cause the foreknowledge of God," she uses the word in a new sense.

Thus once more does Lady Philosophy defend the adversary's principle. Thus also does she meet the last difficulty standing in the way of the reconciliation of free will with God's foreknowledge. She ends her speech by affirming that, since we truly have free will, and since He foreknows all our free will acts, God can justly reward virtue and punish sin. Further, man

can truly hope in God and pray to Him. She concludes by advising the disciple to live a good life and to pray and hope, offering as a motive the fact that he lives in the sight of his Judge, "who beholdeth all things." So ends the dialogue between Lady Philosophy and her disciple as set down in Book V of the De Consolatione Philosophiae.

## Notes to Chapter II

1. Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. II, p. 610.
2. In this chapter an attempt has been made to render faithfully the line of argument proposed by Boethius in Book V, without reading into it scholastic philosophy for which there is no warrant in the text. At times the writer has expanded what seems evidently the thought of Boethius more fully than it is presented in the text.  
In the disciple's speech, for the most part, the specific order and the form have been preserved; however in Lady Philosophy's discourse only the general order has been followed. Often the form has been changed a little, but the substance of the matter has always been carefully retained.
3. Whenever the word "certitude" is mentioned in this thesis, absolute certitude is meant, never a high degree of probability.
4. The Lady's long proof later on that things are not known according to their natures but according to the nature of the knowing faculty, and her careful explanation of the simplicity of God's knowledge are both mostly intended to meet this particular difficulty.
5. Boethius, The Theological Tractates. The Consolation of Philosophy, H.F. Stewart and E.K. Rand. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons Co.), p. 376, 55-81.
6. This application in Boethius comes eight lines further on, a new objection having intervened. Stewart & Rand, p. 372, 52-54.
7. The writers using this principle never meant that our free will acts cause the foreknowledge of God in the true sense of the word cause. To them the free will act was the essential condition of God's foreknowledge. A condition does not imply dependence, whereas a cause does. Here as in other places, Boethius uses terms loosely. The exact terminology of scholastic philosophy did not yet exist.
8. Now comes the application (cf. Note 60), and immediately follows the section on the impossibility of an uncertain event becoming the object of certain knowledge.
9. Lady Philosophy says that the disciple's difficulty in reconciling free will with the foreknowledge of God was vehemently



pursued by Cicero in his Distribution of Divination.  
Stewart & Rand, p. 382, 1-4.

10. Neither of the answers seem at all to meet the difficulty. However, the Lady's explanation of conditional and simple necessity, which comes later, does meet it quite well. Another point to be noted is the fact that even though she does not give a satisfactory answer, the reasoning is valid because the necessity distinction, somewhat adapted, could be introduced here.
11. This explanation is more lengthily developed in Boethius.
12. Stewart & Rand, p. 400, 9-10.
13. Stewart & Rand, p. 402, 65, "Quasi jam gerantur."
14. The Lady puts these ideas in a different form, but substantially her reasoning is the same as the explanation given
15. Boethius' explanation in this whole matter seems quite accurate, save that he makes God's foreknowledge the condition of the necessity. The type of necessity he has explained would appear present even if God did not foreknow the act. In a word, God's foreknowledge does not seem responsible for the necessity in any way, even by way of condition.

## CHAPTER III

## The Lamentation of Troilus

In Chapter II was given a summary and an elucidation of Book V of the De Consolatione Philosophiae, the solution offered by Boethius to the problem of the reconciliation of human free will and divine foreknowledge. We are now ready to take up the principal passages in the writings of Chaucer wherein the poet treats this age-old problem, and to explain what he has written in the light of the teaching of Boethius. We shall first consider what we have entitled "The Lamentation of Troilus," an excerpt from Book IV of Troilus and Criseyde, lines 953 to 1078.

Mr. B.L. Jefferson, in his Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius, remarks that this long passage was taken over bodily by Chaucer from Boethius, that it is virtually a poetical translation. In order to show how close the translation is, Mr. Jefferson compares it with Chaucer's own prose translation of the same section in Boethius, pointing out a close similarity in phrasing, and an almost indetical arrangement of ideas. According to Mr. Jefferson, Skeat's observation (Oxford Chaucer II:490), "that a considerable portion of this passage is copied, more or less closely from Boethius," is understated and misleading. Indeed the entire passage, with the exception of two lines, is copied directly from Boethius, Mr.

Jefferson goes on to say that the few changes made by Chaucer were slight, that they do not effect the subject matter, and that they were necessary to meet the requirements of rhythm and meter. We shall have more to say later about these contentions of Mr. Jefferson. For the present it will suffice to remark that they are accurate, except that they ignore one important omission made by Chaucer.

In the following commentary on "The Lamentation of Troilus" we shall refer to successive groups of lines as "sections." This procedure, we hope, will make our commentary more intelligible, and provide for greater facility in cross-reference.<sup>1</sup>

#### Section 1

Goth Pandarus, and Troilus he soughte,  
 Til in a temple he fond hym al allone,  
 As he that of his lif no lenger roughte;  
 But to the pitouse goddes everichone  
 950 Ful tenarely he preyed, and made his mone,  
 To doon hym sone out of this world to pace;  
 For wel he thoughte ther was non other grace.

And shortly, al the sothe for to seye,  
 He was so fallen in despeir that day,  
 955 That outrely he shop hym for to deye.  
 For right thus was his argument alway:  
 He seyde, he nas but lorn, so weylaway!  
 "For al that comth, comth by necessitee:  
 Thus to ben lorn, it is my destinee."

Pandarus finds Troilus in a temple, alone and in complete despair. He is praying to the gods to make him soon pass out of this world. So fallen is he into despair, that he is utterly resolved to die, for this is ever his argument: He is

lost because all that comes, comes by necessity, and it is his destiny to be lost. Troilus has here stated his position. All the actions of a man's life are ordered beforehand into a certain iron-bound plan. When his life-time comes, he must of necessity act according to this plan. According to his own life plan he must now be lost. There is nothing to do about it, and so logically he despairs, praying to the gods for release from life.

### Section 2

960 "For certeynly, this wot I wel," he seyde,  
 "That foresight of divine purveyaunce  
 Hath seyn alwey me to forgon Criseyde,  
 Syn God seeth every thyng, out of doutaunce,  
 And hem disponyth, thorough his ordinaunce,  
 965 In hire merites sothly for to be,  
 As they shul comen by predestyne."

He knows well that God has foreseen that he will lose Criseyde. ("Being lost" to Troilus means, of course, his impending separation from Criseyde.) God foresees all future events and ordains and disposes them.

### Section 3

"But natheles, allas! whom shal I leeve?  
 For ther ben grete clerkes many oon,  
 That destyne thorough argumentes preve;  
 970 And som men seyn that, nedely, ther is noon,  
 But that fre chois is yeven us everychon.  
 O, welaway! so sleighe arn clerkes olde,  
 That I not whos opynyoun I may holde.

We now find out something more about the extent to which Troilus believes the arguments he has been giving. He says that many great clerks have proved predestination;<sup>2</sup> but, on

the other hand, some men deny predestination entirely. Both sides have argued so well that he does not know which side has the better of it. "But natheles, allas! whom shal I leeve?"

#### Section 4

975 "For som men seyn, if God seth al biforn,  
 Ne God may nat deceyved ben, parde,  
 Than moot it fallen, theigh men hadde it sworn,  
 That purveiance hath seyn before to be.  
 Wherefore I sey, that from eterne if he  
 Hath wist byforn oure thought ek as oure dede,  
 We han no fre choia, as this clerkes rede.

He tells what "som men seyn" i.e., tells how they defend predestination. Before (cf. Section 3) he stated that there were many "grete clerkes" who proved predestination with arguments. Now he is going to give one of the arguments used by some. Whether or not those using this argument are of the number of "grete clerkes" he does not say. If, first, God foresees all things, and, secondly, may not be deceived, i.e., may not have false knowledge, then a future event which God foresees must happen of necessity, even though men had sworn it would not. With this brief statement of the argument, Troilus also gives his attitude toward it. If the two principles put forward by these men be true (Troilus states but one, but from the context, it can be seen that the other is implied), then, as these clerks declare, there is no free will. To him it appears that this argument proves predestination, although he has already admitted that the opponents of predestination can put up so strong a defense that he is utterly unable to decide whether they or the

defenders of predestination have the stronger arguments. It is difficult to analyze his state of mind. He expresses evident doubt, and yet seems inclined more to predestination, since he is acting on this hypothesis. Until practically the end of his soliloquy he argues to prove predestination.

In this section begins the virtual translation of Boethius.<sup>3</sup> The addition of the phrases "for som men seyn," "theigh men hadde it sworn," and "as this clerkes rede," do not change the thought of the author of the De Consolacione. Up to this section Troilus is more or less introducing his subject. His introduction to the subject differs greatly from that which we have seen in Boethius.<sup>4</sup>

### Section 5

- 981 "For other thought, nor other dede also,  
Myghte nevere ben, but swich as purveyaunce,  
Which may nat ben deceyved nevere mo,  
Hath feled byforn, withouten ignoraunce.  
985 For yf ther myghte ben a variaunce  
To writen out fro Goddis purveyinge,  
Ther nere no prescience of thyng compynge.

"But it were rather an opynyoun  
Uncerteyn, and no stedfast forseynge."

Men cannot have a thought or deed which God does not foreknow, because God knows all things and cannot be deceived. These words merely restate the two principles given in the previous section, and apply them to man's thoughts and deeds. Now Troilus goes a step further. If men could escape this foreknowledge by any means, the only kind of knowledge left for God

to have their future actions would be uncertain opinion.

In all this reasoning Chaucer is giving a virtual translation of Boethius. At this point, however, he makes an important omission. Let us recall how Boethius handled the argument here. Just as Troilus does, the disciple asserts that there can be no free will acts, because if there were, God could not have certain foreknowledge of them, but only uncertain opinion. The disciple gives no immediate proof for this assertion, but puts it off until much later in his discourse. For the present he merely makes the statement and builds his next step upon it as if it were true. It will be remembered that the postponed proof consisted in this that God would have foreknowledge of a free will act, a thing which of its nature is uncertain and this would be false knowledge. As was explained in Chapter II, this argument was the foundation of the disciple's whole position. Lady Philosophy spends a long time refuting what she thinks is the error at the root of it, namely, the belief that things are known according to their natures, when in reality they are known according to the nature of the faculty knowing them. Further, she spent much time explaining how God's intellect has the power of knowing uncertain future events with certitude, this because He knows the future as if it were present. Thus we see that this proof is of considerable importance in the speech of the disciple. The disciple introduces it towards the end of his discourse.<sup>5</sup> Just as Troilus, he, in the beginning, merely makes a statement,

and then builds on this statement as if it were true. But Troilus does not bring in the proof later on as does the disciple. So Troilus' speech, despite Mr. Jefferson's assertions, is not quite a virtual translation of Boethius.

### Section 6

990 And certes, that were an abusion,  
That God sholde han no parfit cler wytynge  
More than we men that han doutous wenynges.  
But swich an errour upon God to gesse  
Were fals and foul, and wikked corsesnesse.

Troilus in this section advances to the next step of his argument. It "were an abusion" if God had no more clear and perfect knowledge than we have about future free will acts, i.e. if He had nothing more than doubtful conjectures concerning them. To deny God's having perfect knowledge would be untrue, vile, a wicked abomination. Chaucer is quite close to his original in this section.

### Section 7

995 "Wk this is an opynyoun of some  
That han hire top ful heighe and smothe yshore:  
They seyn right thus, that thyng is nat to come  
For that the prescience hath seyn byfore  
That it shall come, therefore the purveyaunce  
Woot it byforn, withouten ignoraunce;

"And in this manere this necessite  
Retorneth in his part contrarie agayn.  
For nedfully byhoveth it nat to bee

1005 That thilke thynges fallen in certayn  
That ben purveyed; but nedly, as they sayn,  
Byhoveth it that thynges whiche that falle,  
That they in certayn ben purveyed alle.



In this section Troilus is going to give very briefly a principle with which the defenders of the other side attempt to reconcile free will with the foreknowledge of God. According to this principle an event does not come to pass because God knows beforehand that it will happen; but because it will happen, therefore God knows it beforehand. They assume that according to the position of those defending predestination an act of the will which God foreknows must come to pass because He foreknows it. God's very foreknowledge of the act creates the necessity of that act's coming to pass. In a word, the foreknowledge causes the necessity of things happening. They on their side argue that the act does not at all come to pass because God foreknows it (therefore that the foreknowledge does not cause the necessity of things happening), but on the contrary, God foreknows it because it will come to pass. We have now completed the matter of lines 995-1001. Let us examine then lines 1002-1008: "And in this manere this necessite retorneth in his part contrarie agayn, etc."

In the future I shall perform some free will action. Since God knows all things, He must foreknow this action; hence the action, so to speak, causes the necessity of God's foreknowing it, and on this account the adversaries can say that the necessity passes over to the other side. It is not necessary that those things happen which are foreseen, but it is necessary that those things be foreseen which will happen.

In this whole section Chaucer, so far as the line of argument is concerned is quite close to his original.

naturally enough, we do not look in Boethius for an equivalent of Chaucer's "some that han hire top ful heighe and smothe yshore." Such a phrase is typically Chaucerian.

### Section 8

1010 "I mene as though I laboured me in this,  
 To enqueren which thyng cause of which thyng be:  
 As whether that the prescience of God is  
 The certeyn cause of the necessite  
 Of thynges that to comen ben, parde;  
 Or if necessite of thyng compynge  
 1015 Be cause certeyn of the purveyinge.

"But now n'enforce I me nat in shewynge  
 How the ordre of causes stant; but wel woot I  
 That it byhoveth that the byfallynge  
 Of thynges wiste byforen certeynly  
 1020 Be necessarie, al seme it nat therby  
 That prescience put fallynge necessaire  
 To thyng to come, al falle it foule or faire.

For the sake of clarity, let us consider how Boethius (whom Chaucer is following quite closely in this section) puts the matter. According to the disciple, his adversary is missing the point at issue. The question the adversary is trying to settle is whether the foreknowledge of God causes the necessity of the future act, or whether the future event, by the fact that it will some day exist, causes the necessity of God's foreknowing it. What the disciple himself is trying to prove is that whichever of the two possible answers is given, the fact remains that a thing foreknown by God must happen of necessity. Even granting the contention of the adversary that foreknowledge does not cause the necessity of the occurrence of future events,

nevertheless, foreknown things must necessarily come to pass. The disciple then goes on to prove from the example of the man sitting that a thing foreknown must happen of necessity, admitting for the sake of argument that the foreknowledge does not cause that necessity.

### Section 9

- "For if ther sitte a man yond on a see,  
 Than by necessite bihoveth it  
 1025 That, certes, thyn opynyoun sooth be,  
 That wenest or coniectest that he sit.  
 And further over now ayeynward yit,  
 Lo, right so is it of the part contrairie,  
 As thus, - nowe herkne, for I wol nat tarie:
- 1030 " sey, that if the opynyoun of the  
 Be soth, for that he sitte, than sey I this,  
 That he mot siten by necessite;  
 And thus necessite in eyther is.  
 For in hym nede of sittyng is, ywys,  
 1035 And in the nede of soth; and thus, forsothe  
 There mot necessite ben in yow bothe.

Troilus gives an example of one's knowing a fact which is present before him; this example he offers as a parallel to God's foreknowledge of the future. A man is sitting there before you. It is necessary that your judgement "the man sits" be true. (Neither Troilus nor the disciple tell us the reason for this necessity; probably it would be the following: it is perfectly evident that the man sits, and in the face of such strong evidence one must of necessity have true knowledge.) Further, you can reverse the process. If your judgement of the sitting be true, then the man of necessity must sit. There must of

necessity exist a fact to which your judgement conforms. Thus there is necessity on either side, of your judgement's being true, and of the man sitting. Chaucer adheres closely to Boethius in this section.

### Section 10

1040 "But thow mayst seyn, the nam sit nat therefore,  
 That thyopynyoun of his sittynge soth is;  
 But rather, for the man sit ther byfore,  
 Therefore is thyn opynyoun soth, ywis.  
 And I seye, though the cause of soth of this  
 comth of his sittynge, yet necessite  
 Is entrechaunged both in hym and the.

But you may say the cause of the sitting is not the truth of your judgement; but on the contrary, the truth of your judgement is caused by the sitting. The answer is that, although the cause of the necessity comes only from one side, from the man sitting, there is a common necessity on both sides. In the previous section Troilus explained what he meant by that common necessity. There is the necessity that your opinion be true, and the necessity of the man sitting.

Chaucer again is very close to Boethius. Concerning the common necessity, the words Boethius uses to express it are "Communis in utraque necessitas."<sup>7</sup> Chaucer renders these words "yet necessite is entrechaunged both in hym and the (lines 1042-1043)." About this common necessity Mr. Jefferson says:

Boethius is forced to admit that A does not sit down because B's opinion was true, but that the opinion was true because A sat down. Yet he re-asserts lamely, that there was a common necessity in

opinion caused the sitting. What he is attempting to prove from his example is that an existing fact which is known must be necessary, even though the knowledge did not cause its existence. Be it recalled that Lady Philosophy stated explicitly that the disciple argued as from a sign to the necessity of the man sitting. He believed that the sign indicated the necessity; he does not say that it caused the necessity.

For a better understanding of the whole soliloquy of Troilus, let it be said that it contains three fallacies: first, in the case of the man sitting, Troilus does not distinguish conditional necessity from simple necessity; secondly, he believes that uncertain things cannot be known with certitude; thirdly, he thinks that things are known in accordance with their natures, when as a matter of fact they are known according to the nature of the knowing faculty.

#### Section 11

1045 "Thus in this same wise, out of doutaunce,  
I may wel maken, as it semeth me,  
My resonyng of Goddes purveyaunce  
And of the thynges that to comen be;  
By which rescoun men may wel yse  
That thilke thynges that in erthe falle,  
That by necessite they comen alle.

Now Troilus applies his example to the foreknowledge of God. In the same way that he argued concerning one's knowledge of a man sitting, he reasons relative to God's foreknowledge and the things to come, holding consequently that every-

thing on earth happens by necessity.

### Section 12

1055 "For although that, for thyng shal come, ywys,  
Therefore is it purveyed, certeynly,  
Nat that it comth for it purveyed is;  
Yet natheles, bihoveth it nedfully,  
That thing to come be purveyed, trewely;  
Or elles, thynges that purveyed be,  
That they bitiden by necessite.

"And this suffiseth right ynough, certeyn,  
For to destroyeoure fre choise every del.

Although Chaucer is making a virtual translation in this section, his matter is somewhat confusing. This is the fault of Boethius, who himself is none too clear.<sup>10</sup> At this stage of the discussion, the disciple, and Troilus also, has finished with his example and has made his application. Now he gives something of a summary of all that he has said since he proposed the principle of the adversary. Says the disciple: "It is necessary either that the future events be foreseen by God, or that things foreseen happen." Troilus puts his idea in the words of the present section: "Yet natheles, bihoveth it nedfully, that thing to come be purveyed, trewely; or elles, thynges that purveyed be, that they bitiden by necessite." As the reader recalls, this is the question which Boethius held that the adversaries were trying to solve when they put forward their principle. From his reasoning he has seemingly proved that whichever way you solve this question, the fact remains that things foreknown must happen of necessity. As Troilus puts it: "And this suffiseth ynough,

certeyn, for to destruye cure fre chois every del."

In the words which begin this section, "For although that, for thyng shal come, ywys, therefore is it purveyed, certeynly, nat that it comth for it purveyed is," Troilus, like the disciple, is merely recalling the fact that in his reasoning from the example he has granted for the sake of argument that the event does not happen of necessity because God foresees it.

### Section 13

1060 "But now is this abusoun, to seyn  
That fallyng of thynges temporel  
In cause of Goddes prescience eternal.  
Now trewely, that is a fals sentence,  
That thyng to come sholde cause his prescience.

1065 "What myght I wene, and I hadde swich a thought,  
But that God purveyeth thyng that is to come  
For that it is to come, and ellis nought?  
So myghte I wene that thynges alle and some,  
That whilom ben byfalle and overcome,

1070 Ben cause of thilke sovereyne purveyaunce,  
That forwoot al withouten ignoraunce.

Thus far Troilus has been defending his position against the principle of the adversaries; now he takes the offense against it. It is absurd, he says, to say that the happening of temporal things is the cause of God's eternal knowledge. The adversaries, with their principle that God foreknows things because they will come to pass, equivalently say that future events cause His foreknowledge, and further that all the things which have happened in the past have exercised this causality.

## Section 14

"And over al this, yet sey I more herto,  
 That right as whan I wot ther is a thyng,  
 Iwys, that thyng moot nedfully be so;  
 1075 Ek right so, whan I woot a thyng comyng,  
 So mot it come; and thus the bifallyng  
 Of thynges that ben wist bifore the tyde,  
 They mowe nat ben eschued on no syde."

Furthermore, says Troilus, even as when I know there is a thing, that thing must exist of necessity, so also when I know a thing is coming, that thing must come of necessity. And thus the coming about of things foreknown cannot be prevented in anywise. In this section he is harking back to the sitting example and applying it to foreknowledge of the future, which application he has already made, though implicitly. (Cf. lines 1044-1047.) This application seems logically out of place here, because the section immediately previous begins a new line of thought. However, it is to be noted that in this section, where Chaucer follows his original in all respects, the application is clearer and more explicit than in the former one.

Thus does Troilus end his argument by which he tries to demonstrate that free will cannot be reconciled with God's foreknowledge. As we will recall, the disciple does not leave off at this point. The latter next gives us that important proof for his assertion that God cannot have foreknowledge of free will acts, but only uncertain expectations. The proof was that free will acts, which are of their very nature uncertain, cannot be foreknown with certitude.<sup>11</sup> Troilus omits this proof entirely from his



speech, which otherwise is a fairly close translation of Boethius. After this proof, as was pointed out in Chapter II, the disciple considers his position well enough defended, and concludes by enumerating the woeful things that must be true of man if he has no free will.<sup>12</sup>

### Section 15

Thanne seyde he thus, "Almyghty Jove in trone,  
That woost of al this thyng the sothfastnesse,  
Rewe on my sorwe, and do me deyen sone,  
Or bryng Criseyde and me from this destresse!"  
And whil he was in al this hevynesse,  
Disputyng with hymself in this matere,  
Com Pandare in, and seyde as ye may here.

Troilus concludes with a prayer to Jove. "Jove, he says, "you who know the truth of this matter, pity my sorrow and let me die soon, or else bring Criseyde and me out of this distress. Chaucer then adds that, while Troilus was in the midst of this sadness and self-disputing, he was interrupted by Pandarus.

It would be well now to sum up the attitude of mind which Troilus manifests in his soliloquy regarding the foreknowledge-free will problem. In lines 944-967, sections 1 and 2, Chaucer tells us that Troilus is all alone in the temple, caring no longer for life, and praying to each of the gods to let him soon pass out of this world. He thinks there is no other favor for him but death. He has so completely fallen into despair that he is utterly resolved to die. Chaucer immediately assigns the reason for this attitude ("for right thus was his argument always"). All things happen by necessity. It is

necessary that he be lost, i. e. be separated from Criseyde. He knows well that God has foreseen that he will lose her, and there is no doubt but that God foresees and ordains and disposes them as they have deserved to be.

So far Troilus is quite certain about the whole matter. But now doubt enters his mind. He remarks (sections 3 and 4) that ancient clerks have so cunningly argued for and against predestination that he is not able to judge which side has had the better of it. His attitude of mind has changed from one of certitude to one of doubt.

In this state of mind he proceeds to give a long line of argument which seems to him to prove predestination (sections 5 to 14). He does not give the arguments on the other side. Yet presumably there are strong arguments for that side, strong enough to prevent Troilus from holding the necessitarian philosophy with certitude.

When he has concluded his reasoning, he offers a prayer to Jove which is perfectly in accord with his doubtful state of mind. Jove knows which side is true. If it is true, therefore, that free will cannot be reconciled with God's foreknowledge, and that all happens of necessity, then he must be separated from Criseyde. May Jove let him die then as soon as possible. If, on the other hand, there can be free will, and consequently the possibility of avoiding the separation, he prays that Jove might "bryng Criseyde and me fro this destresse." Thus his final state of mind remains one of complete doubt.

From this soliloquy of Troilus, what can we learn of Chaucer's own attitude toward the problem of reconciling free will with the divine foreknowledge? We can learn but little. It is always Troilus who speaks, never Chaucer himself, and since Troilus is merely a fictitious character, we cannot attribute the sentiments expressed by him to the author. Moreover, we must remember that Troilus had suffered bitter misfortune at the time of his gloomy soliloquy, and that it is in keeping with his present disposition to have a rather despairing view of the state of mankind.

Pertinent, perhaps, to the question of Chaucer's attitude towards the necessitarian philosophy put forward by Troilus, is the manner in which he concludes his "litel tragedye." After Troilus was slain by Achilles, his freed spirit ascended blissfully to the eighth sphere of heaven. There, beholding the wandering stars and listening to the heavenly melody, Troilus began utterly to despise this wretched world, and to hold all mundane pleasures to be vanity in comparison to the full felicity of heaven.

And down from thennes faste he gan avyse  
 This litel spot of erthe, that with the se  
 Embraced is, and fully gan despise  
 This wretched world, and held al vanite  
 To respect of pleyn felicite  
 That is in hevене above. (V, 1807-1819)

Chaucer thereupon points a moral. He advises young folk to forego their worldly vanity, and to cast their eyes upon

the God Who made them in His image. They should not seek "feynede loves" after the manner of Troilus and Criseyde, but rather center their whole affection upon their Creator and Redeemer, "syn he best to love is." From the tragedy of Troilus these young folks may see of what little worth were the "payens corsed olde rites," how little availed the worship of the gods, what little reward for toil was given by Jove, Apollo, Mars, and swich rascalle." Such reprobation of the whole pagan system under which the fictitious Troilus has his being argues strongly against the view that Chaucer is indicating his own opinion in the soliloquy of Troilus which we have been considering. We shall have more to say later regarding Chaucer's own attitude towards the problem of the reconciliation of divine foreknowledge and human free will.

## Notes to Chapter III

1. All Chaucerian quotations are from The Complete Works of Chaucer, Student's Cambridge Edition; edited by F.N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933).
2. Predestination is never used in this thesis in the technical sense it has in Catholic theology.
3. Stewart & Rand, p. 374, l. 6-10.
4. Ibid., p. 372, l. 1-6.
5. Ibid., p. 376, l. 55-81.
6. Ibid., p. 374, l. 18-31.
7. Ibid., p. 376, l. 40.
8. B.L. Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius, revised edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1917). p. 73.
9. Ibid., p. 76.
10. Stewart & Rand, p. 376, l. 42-46.
11. Ibid., p. 376, l. 55-81.
12. Ibid., p. 378, l. 81-112.

## Chapter IV

## Chanticleer and Destiny

This chapter will have to do with the second passage in which Chaucer dwells for some length on the problem of reconciling the free will of men with the foreknowledge of God. This second passage occurs in the Nun's Priest's Tale, lines 3230-3250. Again Chaucer is indebted to the De Consolatione. Of the three different answers to the problem which he proposes, as having been offered by the clerics, two are derived from Book V. As we will remember, Lady Philosophy in her solution distinguished between two kinds of necessity, conditional and simple. Moreover, the position defended by the disciple has been shown as equivalent to that of one upholding simple necessity. In the passage from the Nun's Priest's Tale, conditional necessity and simple necessity are given as representing two of the three answers to the problem.

The whole of the Nun's Priest's Tale is in a humorous, mock-heroic tone. The genial chaplain has just finished telling how Chanticleer, who had been warned by his dreams not to go out into the yard that day, is persuaded by his wife, Dame Partlet, to disregard them. Chanticleer is now in the yard with his hens, and a fox lies hidden, awaiting his chance to spring on him. Then follows the philosophical reflection which we have to consider, and the first part of which we have called:

## Section 1

O Chauntecleer, acoursed be that morwe  
 That thou into that yerd flaugh fro the bemes!  
 Thou were ful wel ywarned by thy dremes  
 That thilke day was perilous to thee;  
 But what that God forwoot moor nedes bee,  
 3235 After the opinion of certain clerkis.  
 Witnessse on hym that any parfit clerk is,  
 That in scole is gret altercacioun  
 In this mateere, and gret disputisoun,  
 And hath been of an hundred thousand men.

The morning on which Chanticleer flew from his rafters into the yard is accursed. He was fully warned by his dreams that the day was to be perilous to him; hence he should have remained at home and not ventured forth. Of his own free will, despite evident warnings, he was walking into the face of danger. But after all, was he really acting with free will? Was he not rather forced by necessity to act as he did? God foreknew that he would go into the yard that day, and "what God forwoot moot nedes bee, after the opinioun of certain clerkis."

But these clerks do not have everything their own way. The question has been hotly debated. Any clerk who knows his business can bear witness to the fact that there is now a great altercation and dispute about this matter, and has been in the past. A hundred thousand have fought over it. Something will be said in the next chapter concerning the historical aspect of this disputing.

## Section 2

But I ne kan nat bulite it to the bren,

As kan the hooly doctour Augustyn,  
 Or Boece, or the Bisshop Bradwardyn,  
 Wheither that Goddes worthy forwityng  
 Streyneth me nedely for to doon a thyng, -  
 "Nedely" clepe I symple necessitee;  
 Or elles, if free choys be graunted me  
 To do that same thyng, or do it nocht,  
 Though God forwoot it er that it was wrought,  
 Or if his wityng streyneth never a deel  
 But by necessitee condicioneel.

The Nun's Priest "kan nat bulte it to the aren," i.e., he cannot sift it to the chaff. He cannot decide which of the three answers is the correct one, as can the holy doctor Augustine, or Boethius, or Bishop Bradwardine. The first view, one which he has already proposed, is now put thus: "Weither that Goddes worthy forwityng streyneth me nedely for to doon a thing," i.e., whether God's foreknowledge compels me necessarily to do something. He explains in a parenthesis exactly what he means by "nedely." "Nedely" clepe I symple necessitee. The second answer is that free choice is granted man to do a thing or not to do it, even though God knows beforehand what choice will be made. In a word, there is no repugnance in free will and God's foreknowledge. The third answer is that God's foreknowledge imposes "conditional necessity."

About these three answers Mr. Jefferson remarks:

It may be by accident, but the three different views presented in this passage are in accordance with the different positions held by the three philosophers mentioned. Bishop Bradwardine ardently upheld foreordination and was opposed even bitterly to free will. He thought it presumptuous for man to assume for himself the responsibility of freedom of action. He



deemed all-sufficient for man the divine grace. The bishop Bradwardine, therefore, might be supposed to advocate "simple necessity," although he does not use this term himself; the Nun's Priest parenthetically assumes that responsibility....St. Augustine occupied the position presented in the second view. He believed that free will was a gift from God to man only in so far as God permitted; hence the following line: "Or elles if free choys be graunted me. Boethius.....entertained as his belief the doctrine of "conditional necessity," mentioned here as the third possibility.<sup>1</sup>

As Mr. Jefferson indicates in the words "It may be by accident," Chaucer does not say that the three answers belong respectively to the three dignitaries he mentions. He merely gives the names of those who can "bulte it to the bren," and then presents three solutions to the problem.

Mr. Jefferson attributes the first answer, that of simple necessity to Bishop Bradwardine. In the following chapter we shall have something more to say about the position of this prelate. For the present it will suffice to remark that, though his philosophic ideas are seemingly quite deterministic, he nevertheless maintained that man has free will. He could scarcely have remained a Bishop of the Catholic Church, if he did not maintain the free will of man.

The second answer, according to Mr. Jefferson, should be attributed to St. Augustine. Commenting on his own observation in a foot-note, he says:

St. Augustine considered the subject of free will in the City of God, Book V, Chap. VIII-XII. He is particularly concerned in disproving the view of Cicero, who in the De Divinatione has argued that it is impossible for both the foreordination of God and the free will of man to exist and that, since a choice between the two is necessary, he prefers to believe in the latter.<sup>2</sup>

If one consults the place mentioned by Mr. Jefferson, he does not find it difficult to see the similarity pointed out by him. St. Augustine's views will be more fully treated in the next chapter.

The remarks of the Nun's Priest concerning simple and conditional necessity undoubtedly come from Book V of the De Consolatione. The reader will recall that Lady Philosophy in her answer makes a distinction between the simple necessity of the sun rising, and the conditional necessity of the man walking. God foreknew both that the sun would rise on a certain morning, and that the man would walk, but nevertheless the former action is necessary and the latter free. Lady Philosophy does not say that the simple necessity position would characterize the disciple's views, but such is evidently the case.<sup>3</sup>

### Section 3

I wol nat han to do of swich mateere;  
 My tale is of a cok, as ye may heere,  
 That tok his conseil of his wyf, with sorwe,  
 To walken in the yerd upon that morwe  
 3255 That he hadde met that dreem that I yow tolde.

The simple chaplain will not venture further in high philosophical speculation. After all, he has a tale to tell,

that of a cock who to his sorrow took the counsel of his wife, of one who did not accept the advice given him in a dream. So ends the passage from the Nun's Priest's Tale on divine foreknowledge and human free will.

What do these lines tell us about Chaucer's own attitude towards the problem we have been studying? We know, first of all, that he was interested in the problem. We know, that he was cognizant of the continued disputations concerning it in the schools. We know that he was acquainted with the principal solutions put forward to solve the problem. We are a little inclined to suspect that he found none of the solutions absolutely convincing. However, it is one thing to believe in a tenet of a creed, and another to be able to explain it. From Chaucer's works we know that he believed in sin, in human responsibility, in merit, in reward, and punishment. In other words, he believed in human free will. Just how free will could be reconciled with God's undoubted foreknowledge, he apparently did not see clearly. Perhaps the solution was apparent to great minds; it was not so to his. In regard to such profound questions, like his nun's priest, very probably, he decided that he would "nat han to do of swich matere." It was for him to believe in foreknowledge and free will and not to explain their reconciliation.

## Notes to Chapter IV

1. Jefferson, loco citato, p. 79
2. Ibid.
3. Stewart & Rand, p. 406, l. 104-108.

## Chapter V

## The Patristic and Scholastic Answer

It will help greatly to understand Chaucer's attitude toward the problem, and also the place the problem itself has in scholastic philosophy, if a short historical sketch of it be given.<sup>1</sup> The reader will recall the former chapter in which a summary of Boethius's treatment was given. It will be well if he keep in mind some of the general points of that chapter while reading the following sketch, and especially the fact that the De Consolatione Philosophiae was written in the early part of the sixth century, whereas the Nun's Priest's Tale and Troilus and Criseyde were composed in the late decades of the fourteenth century.

The question regarding the reconciliation of foreknowledge and free will is a very old one. It has been meditated upon by many of the wisest men in history. Some thinking there was no possible means of reconciliation, denied either the foreknowledge of God or the free will of men. Cicero, Marcus, Celsus, Stephanus Parisiensis denied that God can have foreknowledge of free will acts. The Fathers of the Church defended the principle that God has a perfect and certain foreknowledge of free will acts. Among them are Tertullian, St. Justin Martyr, Cyril of Alexandria, Justin, Gregory the Great, Origen and St. Jerome. Even non-Christian philosophers, such as Ammonius, Plotinus, and Philo

adaeus defended this principle.<sup>2</sup>

We have noticed in Boethius the importance which the principle that God knows the past and the future as an eternal present plays in the reconciliation of free will and foreknowledge. He is by no means the only one who used this principle, nor indeed the first one. This principle is important because on the one hand it saves the foreknowledge of God, since it permits God to have certain knowledge of what is in itself uncertain; and on the other hand, it prepares the way for saving free will, because once we show that future free will acts are present to God, it is not difficult to explain how that knowledge does not necessitate them. Those who used this principle before Boethius are Gregory the Great and Cyril of Alexandria, and the non-Christian writers, Ammonius, Plotinus, and Philo. Besides these can be enumerated Athanasius, Ambrose, and Origen.<sup>3</sup> Origen, when arguing against necessity, one of the first to propose the difficulty of reconciling foreknowledge and free will, used the example of one man beholding another falling into a hole. As the fact, he pointed out, that one sees the other falling does not make the falling necessary, so the fact that God has foreknowledge of our future free will acts does not make them necessary; for God knows them not as future events but as present ones. As we shall see, Augustine too uses this method of argumentation. It should be mentioned that not all the writers listed were trying to prove that foreknowledge does not impose necessity on future free will

acts, as Origen was in the example given. Some were merely endeavoring to show that God has foreknowledge of all things, free will acts included. Their names have been given to show that they were acquainted with the principle.

Another principle which, as was shown in Chapter II, was made much of by Boethius was that things do not happen because God foreknows them, but He foreknows them because they will happen. Once you admit that God knows future things as present, this principle is the next logical step. If God's foreknowledge of future things is the same as our knowledge of present things, we can conclude logically that a future event does not happen because He foreknows it, but on the contrary, He knows it because it will happen, just as the event taking place before me does not happen because I know it, but I know it because it is happening. But if this is so, I cannot say that His foreknowledge makes the event necessarily happen, any more than I can say that my knowledge makes the action before me happen necessarily, since in both cases the knowledge presupposes the existence of the object. Very much used this second principle, among them the following: Origen, Jerome, Chrysostom, Epiphanius, Cyril of Alexandria, St. Anselm, St. Augustine, Alexander of Hales, and Albertus Magnus. In general the explicit interpretation of the principle was that the act is the essential condition of the foreknowledge of God, not the cause of it.

We are now prepared to consider the individual men

who contributed to the development of the scholastic answer to the problem. The first will be St. Augustine. He considers the question in the De Civitate Dei, cap. ix and x. Here he is chiefly concerned with refutation of Cicero, who in De Divinatione denied that both free will and the foreknowledge of God can stand, and who consequently denied the foreknowledge of God.<sup>4</sup>

First of all Augustine differentiates types of necessity. The necessity of death is contrary to free will. The necessity of God's living does not destroy His free will. Man has the necessity of willing or not willing, which does not destroy the freedom of the action of willing itself. But concerning this action, does it not have a necessity which is incompatible with free will? It must be foreseen by God, and what is foreseen must happen. The Stoics thought that what has a certain, fixed order of causes is necessary, and in such a way as to preclude free will. Cicero had a similar belief. He argued that if God foreknew all things, such a certain order of causes would exist. If all things are foreknown by God, so says Cicero, they will come in the order in which they are foreknown to come, and so will have a fixed and certain order. Consequently what is foreknown by God must happen by necessity. To this Augustine answers that it does not follow that because the order of the causes is certain to God, consequently there is no free will. Our wills also are causes, and as such are a part of that order of causes which is certain to God and is contained in His foreknowledge. But if He



can know these causes, i. e. our wills, He can also know that it is their nature to act freely, and can know how that free action will take place; just as, although we must be aware of an action we are performing, our knowledge does not make it necessary that we perform that action. St. Augustine explains more clearly what he means in his "De Libro Arbitrio."<sup>5</sup> Suppose it is true, he argues, that the foreknowledge of God imposes necessity on future things, so that on this account some one would sin of necessity. If that were true, he would sin of necessity solely because of God's foreknowledge. But this is absurd, for God's foreknowledge no more imparts such a necessity of sinning than your foreknowledge would, if you were to foreknow that someone would sin. Again, as your memory of some action of the past does not impose necessity on that action, so neither does God's foreknowledge of the future.

In another place<sup>6</sup> Augustine says that it is not necessary that a man sin, although it be necessary that God foresee he will sin. But if God foresees that he will sin, he most certainly will sin, because God's foreknowledge cannot be deceived. God foresees the fact that the man deliberately will choose to sin. If he did not wish to sin, he would not have to do so. And if the man chose not to sin, God would also foresee that. In the second book of the Questiones ad Simplicium, Augustine, while speaking of the nature of God's foreknowledge, lays down the principle that God knows the future as if it were

present. We cannot help noticing how similar in many points is the treatment of Augustine to that of Boethius. The latter must have drawn heavily on Augustine for his Book V.

We will now examine briefly the contribution of Boethius. He first lays down the principle that God knows the future and past as an eternal present. Then he takes up the objection that what God foreknows must come to pass. There are two kinds of necessity, conditional and simple, only one of which is repugnant to free will. The sun's rising would be an example of simple necessity. Conditional necessity arises in the case of a man whom you see walking, for what is known cannot be otherwise than it is known. This necessity does not come from the nature of the will act, but from the addition of a condition, i.e., the knowledge of the beholder. Thus in itself the act is perfectly free. Referred, however, to the knowledge of the beholder, it is necessary. So free will acts derive a kind of necessity from the knowledge of God. This necessity is commonly called among the scholastics conditional, or consequens, or composite; the other is termed simple, or antecedent, or divided, or absolute. Manifestly Boethius<sup>im</sup> proved on the treatment of Augustine.

The next important name for our consideration is that of Anselm. In his "De Concordia Praescientiae Dei cum Libertate" he treats the question skillfully. The necessity implied by the foreknowledge of God signifies nothing more than that because a thing will exist, it cannot at the same time not exist. Anselm

calls this necessity consequent, and opposes it to the other necessity, termed antecedent. The antecedent necessity comes before the existence of the thing and is within its cause; the consequent necessity is simultaneous with the existence of the thing, and follows from its existence. He explains well the principle that the past and future is an eternal present to God, showing that the free will act, although changeable in time, is changeless in eternity, because things are not in eternity according to time. Since it is changeless in eternity, God can have eternal and immutable knowledge of it.

Omitting William of Paris<sup>7</sup> who wrote excellently on the question, we pass on to the prince of philosophers and theologians, St. Thomas Aquinas. He explains the problem lucidly and completely. In his treatment we find much to remind us of Book V of Boethius. In De Veritate<sup>8</sup> St. Thomas tells us that there are two ways in which men have gone wrong in trying to decide how God knows contingent beings. Some, reducing His knowledge to the level of ours, denied that He knows them at all. This will not do because there could be no divine providence of human affairs which are contingent. On the other hand, some have said that God foreknows all, and that all things happen with necessity. But this makes free will impossible. It would render unjust, punishment for sin and reward for virtue. Therefore, we must say that God knows all future things, and does so without hindering the event of any contingent being. This line of

thought reminds us of Book V of De Consolatione.

Error comes from the fact that the object is not known as it is. Now nothing can prevent a necessary thing from happening, since its causes are immutably ordered to its production. Consequently, necessary things can be known with certitude, even when they are future, as, for example, the rising of the sun. However, it is possible to hinder the production of a contingent being, because one can interfere with the action of its causes. But once it is actually produced, its production cannot be hindered, and on this account it is possible to have certain knowledge about it. For example, one has a certain judgment that Socrates sits when he beholds Socrates sitting. From this it is clear that one cannot have certain knowledge about contingent things in so far as they are events of the future, but if they are present to him, he can. Thus God can have certain knowledge of future contingent things because He knows them as if they were present. This will be clearer, perhaps, from the following example. I see many people passing successively through a gate, and this for some time. Now the passage of each of these people in some particular moment of the time I stood there was present to me. However, the passage of all of them cannot be present to me. If my knowledge was tota simul, i.e., if my knowledge could behold all the past, present, and future in one everlasting present act, I could behold the present passage of all of them in the same moment of time, and this despite the fact that they do not all pass through the gate at the same time but successively. The

divine knowledge is tota simul, since it is eternal, and eternity is tota simul; yet God's knowledge embraces all time. Since this is so, it beholds whatever will take place in time not as future but as present. We behold the future as future, because we are bound by time, and in time events are future to us. As we are not deceived when we behold contingent events happening in the present, and nevertheless do not by our knowledge hinder them from happening contingently, so God can know future events with certitude, and without interfering with their happening contingently.

After this explanation St. Thomas refers directly to Boethius. Boethius, he says, considered it incorrect to speak of the "foreknowledge" of God, because there is really no knowledge in God of the future as future. St. Thomas next answers the objections he proposed before he entered into the long explanation just given. In these answers he says a few things which should be mentioned here. A future contingent being has no determined truth in itself, but it does have a cause, and God can know that cause. It is necessary, i.e., the future contingent being, in the sense that once it exists, it cannot at the same time not exist. God knows it as if it existed. (This idea was noted in treating of St. Anselm's teaching.) It is necessary, not in itself, but in that it is known by God; therefore in the order of an object to its cognition. What is attributed to a thing according to its own nature is a part of its being, but what is attributed to it in so far as it is known, is attributed to it according to the

nature of the knowledge of it. My intellect knows things immaterially, but this immateriality which the thing has is not of itself but of my intellect. To God a future contingent being is present and necessary, but this presence and necessity is not its own but is of God's intellect. Therefore, if I see Socrates running, he runs; and if God knows a future thing, that thing will be; both of these are necessary while they are existing, and they are existing in a sense because they are present.

St. Thomas adds more to his treatment of the problem in his commentary In Perihermeneias Aristotelis.<sup>9</sup> The valuable matter it contains warrants its translation in full:

God is altogether outside the order of time. He is standing, as it were, upon the high citadel of unalterable eternity. Before Him is spread out the whole course of time, which He takes in by one simple intuition. Consequently, by one act of vision, He sees everything that happens in the course of time; and each fact He sees as it is in itself, not as something that is to be present to His gaze in the future, and is for the present involved in the sequence of causes on which it depends; at the same time He also sees that sequence of causes. He sees every event in a manner altogether proper to an eternal being. Each fact, to whatever period of time it belongs, He sees even as the human eye sees Socrates seated. The sitting itself, not its cause, is seen by the eye. But from the fact of a man seeing Socrates seated, it must not be inferred that the sitting is an effect flowing from its cause necessarily. On the other hand, the human eye sees most truly and infallibly Socrates seated whilst he really is seated, because everything, as it is in itself, is a fixed and determined fact. Thus, then, we must admit that God knows with absolute certainty and infallibility whatever happens at any time. Nevertheless temporary events do not happen of necessity, but are the effects of causes that might have acted otherwise.

In the augmentation of St. Thomas just given the reader cannot help but see much similarity to the matter of the fifth book of the De Consolatione.

We have now given briefly the patristic and scholastic solution of the problem of the reconciliation of divine foreknowledge and human free will. Let us now revert to the lines in which Chaucer manifests his interest in this problem. As we saw, the lamenting Troilus is in a state of doubt. He tends to believe that all human actions are necessitated. Yet he cannot be sure, for there are strong arguments on the other side. Many a great clerk has taught foreordination, but many an other has claimed that nothing comes of necessity. It is all very confusing. "So sleighte arn clerkes olde, that I not whos opynyoun I may holde."<sup>10</sup> A certain similarity can be found in the Nun's Priest's attitude. True, he is not at all despairing as is Troilus. But the answers, and he is acquainted with them, of those who would solve the foreknowledge free will problem leave him at least seemingly unconvinced. Such answers are contradictory. The problem is apparently unsolvable. There has been great altercation in the schools, and great disputing about this question, and ever has been among a hundred thousand men. It is too much for him. He will not have to do with the matter. He will proceed with his tale of Chanticleer.

Certainly, the lines from Troilus and Criseyde and from the Nun's Priest's Tale manifest a certain scepticism. This

scepticism does not necessarily concern the Catholic dogmas of God's foreknowledge and man's free will. It has to do rather with the arguments, derived from human reason, which men have brought forward to show that there is no repugnance between such foreknowledge and free will. Whence comes this sceptical attitude of mind which Chaucer's characters display? It does not come from Boethius, whom, as we have seen, Chaucer followed closely. It does not come from the illustrious fathers and scholastics whose views we have briefly sketched. The historical resume has shown that they were well agreed on the whole matter. The work of one develops and completes that of the other. What shall we say then of the Nun's Priest's hundred thousand clerks and their wranglings?

Perhaps the history of those mediaeval philosophers, known as "Nominalists" will throw some light upon the matter of Chaucer's attitude. According to Petavius, leading Nominalists,<sup>11</sup> such as William Occam, Gabriel Biel, and Gregory Rimini, did not hesitate to declare unsoluble the problem of the reconciliation of God's foreknowledge and man's free will. Their views were sufficiently current in Chaucer's time, so that he could have been acquainted with them.

Monsignor Pohle reminds us<sup>12</sup> that the death of Duns Scotus marks the close of the golden era of the scholastic system, and that the period 1300-1500 represents its decline. What this period accomplished in constructive work consists in preserving and digesting the results of the former age.



Simultaneous with this good labor are elements of disintegration, due partly to the false ideas of mysticism of the Fraticelli, partly to the aberrations and superficialities of the Nominalists, and partly to the distressing conflict of church and state. The development and rapid spread of Nominalism, in England at least, must be ascribed mainly to William Occam, who died in 1347. The tenets of Nominalism were well known in England in the last decades of the fourteenth century, when Chaucer wrote Troilus and Criseyde and the Nun's Priest's Tale. As the Nominalists maintained that the foreknowledge-free will problem was insoluble, it may be that their teaching finds an echo in the sceptical remarks of Chaucer's characters.

Perhaps another source of light on Chaucer's attitude is to be found in the teaching of Bishop Bradwardine, referred to by the Nun's Priest, together with Augustine and Boethius, as an authority on the question of the reconciliation of foreknowledge and free will. Bradwardine was born about 1270 in London, and died in the same city about the year 1349. He attained great fame as a theologian. His theological lectures, delivered at Oxford, were expanded into his famous treatise on grace, entitled De cause Dei contra Pelagium et de virtute causarum ad suos Hertonsenses. After holding various prominent offices in the church and state, he was made Archbishop of Canterbury in 1349, the year of his death. His European reputation as a scholar was based not only on the theological treatise mentioned, but on his

mathematical works as well.<sup>13</sup>

As R. Seeberg gives it, the sum of Bradwardine's theological teaching is as follows:

God is complete perfection and goodness, is good action itself, free from the potentiality of imperfection. He is not limited by mentality. He is the first cause, the absolute principle of being and motion. Therefore, no one can act, nor can anything "happen"; God works or orders events. Divine foreknowledge is will exercised long before, or predestination of (man's) will. God's will, moreover, is unchanging. Everything takes place by virtue of the immutable antecedent necessity caused by the divine volition. Hence man can say nothing "more useful or efficacious . . . than 'thy will be done.'" The effects of predestination are the gift of grace in the present, justification from sin, award of merit, perseverance to the end, and unending bliss in the world to come. The result of this line of thought is, of course, determinism of a Thomistic type. In spite of this theory, Bradwardine, like Augustine, asserted the reality of free will.<sup>14</sup>

With such deterministic teaching current in England -- and Chaucer apparently knew something of Bradwardine and his teaching -- it is little wonder that the traditional doctrine of the fathers and scholastics should be obscured. Apparently too, there is some reason for the scepticism manifested by Troilus and the Nun's Priest.

## Notes to Chapter V

1. This matter of this historical sketch is taken largely from the following books:  
  
Dogmatic Theology, by Dionysius Petavius, S.J., new edition, Vol. I, Book IV, CC. VI-VIII, (Paris, Vives, 1885).  
  
God: His Knowability, Essence, and Attributes, by Msgr. Joseph Pehle, adapted by Arthur Preuss, (St. Louis, Harder, 1925), pp. 361-367.
2. Cf. works mentioned above.
3. Cf. Petavius, l.c., pp. 364 ff.
4. Cicero, De Divinatione, II, 7.
5. De libero arbitrio, CC. III and IV.
6. De Gratia Christi, Lib. I, Cap. III.
7. In I par. de Univer., par. III, cap. XV, XVI.
8. De Veritate, editio nova, Turin, Maretti, 1931, Q. II, Art. XII
9. The translation is taken from Natural Theology, by Bernard Boedder, S.J., (New York, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899), pp. 275-276.
10. Troilus and Criseyde, IV, 972-973.
11. Cf. Petavius, page 366.
12. Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XIV, p. 592.
13. Ibid., p. 693.
14. The New Schaff-Hersog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, (New York, Funk & Wagnalls, 1908), Vol. II, p. 246.

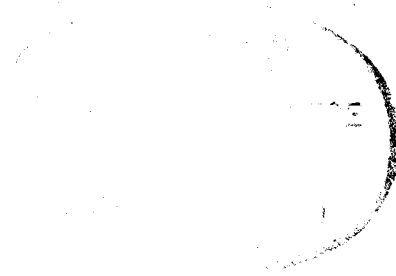
## Chapter VI

### Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the views expressed in the works of Chaucer on the subject of divine foreknowledge and human free will, with reference, especially, to the tenets of Boethius and to the teaching of the Fathers and the scholastic writers of the Catholic Church. This task has now been accomplished, and it is to be hoped that the Chaucerian passages in which such views are expressed have been made somewhat more intelligible.

It is necessary, finally, to sum up, and perhaps to amplify, what has already been said regarding Chaucer's own attitude to the problem of the reconciliation of God's foreknowledge and man's free will. First of all, it must be stated that undoubtedly Chaucer, as a Catholic believed in the existence both of divine foreknowledge and human free will. Many passages in the poet's works could be cited to illustrate his belief not only in an all-knowing God, but also in such matters as sin, human responsibility, merit, and reward, all of which imply the existence of free will in man. Moreover, even the Nominalists of Chaucer's time, and Bishop Bradwardine, though their philosophical speculations were rather awry, professed their belief in human free will.

But, as we have said, there is a certain scepticism displayed in the lines of Troilus and Criseyde and the Nun's Priest's Tale which we have examined. This scepticism does not concern, so it seems to us, the dogmas of foreknowledge and free will. It has to do rather with the arguments, drawn from human reason, which have been brought forward to show their non-repugnance. Even allowing for the fact that what Chaucer's characters say need not reflect the intellectual convictions of their creator, still it is hard to escape the impression that the poet himself regarded the foreknowledge-free will problem as a sort of mystery, something not to be solved to one's complete satisfaction, even by the greatest of clerks. It may well be that Chaucer was influenced in his views on this subject by the teaching of the Nominalists; or that the rather deterministic philosophy of men like Bishop Bradwardine (who nevertheless maintained their belief in free will) obscured for him the traditional patristic and scholastic solution.



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