



The Philosophy of the Reformation

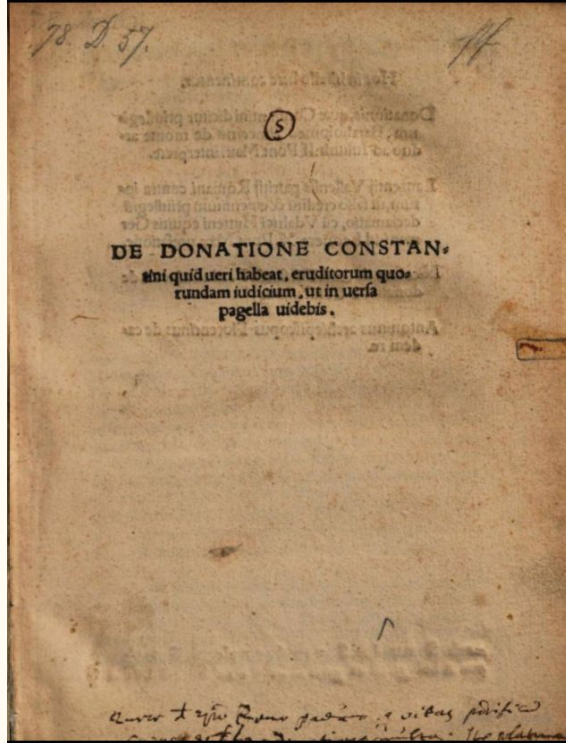
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Precursor: Italian Humanism

- Italian Humanist movement saw challenges to church authority and a focus on personal improvement
- *Ad fontes!*
- Rise of Ottoman Empire saw mass migration of scholars to Western Europe → brought their Greek manuscripts with philosophical works unknown to western scholarship, such as works by Plato and the *Corpus Hermeticum*
- Platonic Forms challenged Aristotelian scholasticism
- Many of the texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum* attempted to bring together Platonism and Christianity



Questioning Papal Authority



- New trends in textual criticism challenged the authenticity of several fundamental texts of Catholic doctrine
- 4th century *Donation of Constantine*, important document of papal authority was proved to be a medieval forgery by Humanist scholars Nicholas of Cusa, and others.
 - Document allegedly written by Constantine and transfers power over Rome and Western Roman Empire to the pope.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) as philosopher

- Luther normally seen as theologian → ideas had long lasting influence on philosophy
- But Luther was dismissive of philosophy, but stance requires recontextualization
- Primarily concerned with the uses of reason for certain theological ends
- His own thought deeply connected to the philosophical tradition
- Luther would go on to influence philosophers that we're going to discuss later, such as Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Feuerbach, and Heidegger



Luther vs. Erasmus

- *The Bondage of Will* (1525) → response to Humanist philosopher Erasmus on the subject of free will in his *De libero arbitrio* (1524)
 - Erasmus's work in part deals with Luther's earlier response to the papal condemnation of 1520 (*Assertio omnium articulorum*)
- In the *Assertio*, Luther claims that “Free will, after the Fall, exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin”
- In *The Bondage of Will*, Luther replies to Erasmus → challenges his use of scripture to support free will and then uses scripture to dispute free choice



Intellectual feud

- Luther uses his introduction to attack Erasmus's challenge to predestination
- Apologizes for the delay in responding to Erasmus but says that the reason was “neither pressure of work, nor the difficulty of the task, nor your great eloquence, nor any fear of you”, but rather “sheer disgust, anger, and contempt” at the quality of Erasmus's work, and its “evasive and equivocal nature”:

You fancy yourself steering more cautiously than Ulysses between Scylla and Charybdis as you assert nothing while appearing to assert something.

- Luther overcomes his aversion to respond so that the truth may win over the reader and maybe even Erasmus himself

Not the Church, but Scripture Alone

- Erasmus has claimed that he is cautious about making any claims that are outside of the church and scripture → would rather be like the Sceptics who suspend judgement on complex matters like free choice.
- Erasmus claims his own position is more modest and references church authority alongside scripture
- Luther responds:
 - Scepticism not appropriate for a Christian who is called to assert their trust in God
 - Scripture alone will tell us the essentials of Christian faith; the church is not necessary → scripture tells us enough of what we need to know
 - It actually IS very important for Christians to attempt to explore the subject of free choice

Foreknowledge and Free Will

The issue of Free Will should not be avoided:

as long as [Christians] are ignorant of what and how much they can do, they will not know what they should do; and being ignorant of what they should do, they cannot repent if they do wrong; and impenitence is an unforgivable sin...[so] if we do not know these things, we shall know nothing at all of things Christian, and shall be worse than any heathen.

[...]

For if you doubt or disdain to know that God foreknows all things, not contingently, but necessarily and immutably, how can you believe his promises and place a sure trust and reliance on them?... [T]his is the one supreme consolation of Christians in all adversities, to know that God does not lie, but does all things immutably, and that his will can neither be resisted nor changed nor hindered.

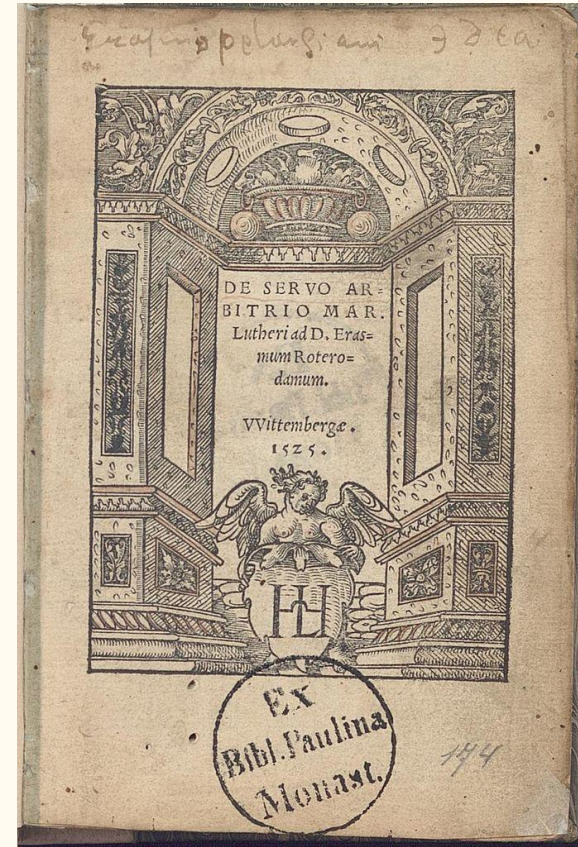
The Necessity of the Consequent/Consequence

- Luther turns to Paul's discussion of divine foreknowledge and human choice in Romans 9:15-18
- Erasmus had made use of the scholastic distinction between the necessity of the consequence and the necessity of the consequent:
 - God wills something and therefore it must happen (necessity of the consequence)
 - It does not follow that this happening is necessary (necessity of the consequent)
 - Leaves space for free will
- Luther claims that divine knowledge makes this distinction arguable and moot
- God has foreknowledge → therefore what God knows must happen otherwise he could not know it in advance
- If God does not have this knowledge “you take away faith and fear of God, make havoc of all the divine promises and threatenings, and thus deny his very divinity.”

Foreknowledge as Destiny

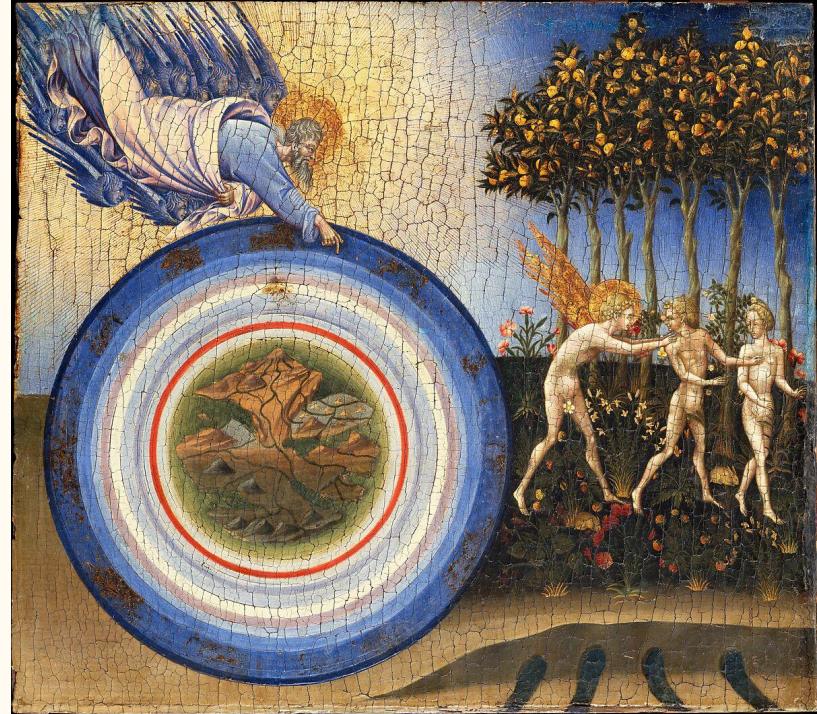
If God foreknows that Judas will turn traitor, or that he will change his will to betray, whichever God has foreknown will necessarily come about, or else God will be mistaken in his foreknowing and predicting, which is impossible.

- What are Erasmus's motivations for attempting to support the doctrine of free choice?
- Luther claims that Erasmus wants to confine God to the boundary of what is apprehendable to human reason



God should not be confined to human realities

- Are we trying to hold God to human norms?
- Human norms of Justice: we would then have to be critical of grace and forgiveness which violates these norms
- If it doesn't violate these norms, and only those deserving get God's rewards, then what is the role of grace when faced with free will?
- If human beings had the capacity to save themselves through their choices, Christ would have died in vain



Paradise Lost

They therefore as to right belongd,
So were created, nor can justly accuse
Thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate,
As if predestination over-rul'd
Thir will, dispos'd by absolute Decree [115]
Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Thir own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown.

So without least impulse or shadow of Fate, Or aught
by me immutable foreseen,
They trespass, Authors to themselves in all
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
I formd them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd
Thir freedom, they themselves ordain'd thir fall.