

A Brief Instruction
on the Eternal Approval & Disapproval of the Divine Mind,
& for Explaining the Nature of so Difficult a Thing

Robert Rollock

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Translated by

Charles Johnson

&

Travis Fentiman

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From:

*De Aeterna Mentis Divi Nae Approbatione et Improbatione, Doctrina Brevis, et Pro Natura Reitam
Arduae, Explicata. Per Robertum Rollocum*

([Edinburgh]: Robertus Waldegrave, typographus Regius, 1594)

Also compared with:

De Aeterna Mentis... (1593) in *Select Works of Robert Rollock, Principal of the University of
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About the Translators:

Charles F. Johnson

Earned a Bachelor's degree in linguistics from the University of Illinois and translates
from the reformed scholastics at [Reformed Theology Delatinized](#).

Travis Fentiman

Earned a Masters of Divinity degree from Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
and is the webmaster at [ReformedBooksOnline.com](#).

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A Brief Instruction

on the Eternal Approbation and Disapprobation of the Divine Mind, & for Explaining the Nature of Even a Hard Thing

God from eternity either approves or disapproves of something.

Approval in general is either bare and without the decree, or it is with the decree.

Approval without the decree is when God approves something simply, yet He does not decree that it be chosen or followed after.

Approval without the decree belongs to all good things with respect to themselves, though they are not at any time realized, of which sort are the conversion, faith, and salvation of reprobates; which God surely approves of simply, but does not decree to come about; thus He decrees them not to come about, as we shall see in the doctrine of disapproval. Concerning approval without the decree, see Dt. 5:29,¹ “O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!” 1 Tim. 2:4, “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Tim. 4:10, “...who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe.”²

The approval of God with the decree is when He indeed decrees and determines that something is to be chosen. The election of the divine will follows this.

The conjoined decree, moreover, is two-fold.

The first is that by which God decrees something to come about. Under this decree falls—so I may here be silent concerning the substances of all actions and qualities, good as much as evil—falls, I say, all things which are good in themselves, which in this world

¹ The original citation is Dt. 5:35, as numbered in the Junius-Tremellius Bible.

² The English translation of the Scriptures has been taken from the later King James Version by the translators. Rollock’s Latin either equates to it, or does nearly so; Rollock’s Latin differs at points with the Junius-Tremellius-Beza editions.

are brought about. One species of this decree is the predestination of particular creatures unto eternal life. For this decree, see Ex. 33:19, which says, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy." Acts 13:48, "...and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

The second decree is that by which God decrees something, indeed, not simply to happen, but truly to permit it to happen. Under this decree fall things evil in themselves, which are good rather by accident, that is, good in some respect: whatsoever happens in the world. One species of this decree is the predestination of particular creatures to eternal death. On this decree, see Ex. 4:21, "And the Lord said unto Moses, 'When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.'" Acts 14:16, "Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways."

Things though, that fall out from both sides of this decree of God are called *hecousiai*,³ or voluntary: for indeed those which fall out by the decree of divine permission are voluntary in a certain manner, insofar as they certainly do not happen without some decree. That which is done out of simple approval (that is, according to that approval which is without a decree) is not called voluntary, even for this reason alone: that surely there is nothing which is done out of that approval which is simple and without a decree; rather, let there be an adjoined voluntary aspect for something done. Indeed, it is clear that a *hecousion*, a voluntary thing, does not exist out of simple approval, or out of contraries, because nothing is called involuntary out of simple disapproval, as we will see further on.

With respect to God, no thing which happens or occurs is called *acousia*, or involuntary; for *acousion*, something involuntary, is, properly, not indeed that which infringes some express law, or the will which they call *revealed*, but rather, that which infringes the decree of God, or the will which they call *not revealed*, and which occurs contrary to the divine decree, either simply-so-called or permissive.

³ In Greek

However, that an involuntary thing is properly that which depends upon the decree, appears out of Acts 2:23, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain;" Acts 4:28, "For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." By such in these places the Spirit of God addresses the opinion of men concerning the crucifixion of Christ of it being a thing done unwillingly with respect to God, affirming that nothing was done by the Jews except what was already permitted of old by the divine decree. Nevertheless, while nothing can come about contrary to any decree of God (that is what we have in Isa. 14:27, "For the Lord," he says, "hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?), actually, with respect to God, nothing at all may be called involuntary. It is able to be called such, I grant, by God not approving or disapproving something to occur, namely, that which is done contrary to his express command; rather, that is straightaway not an involuntary thing with respect to God which is not approved by his mandate, when it can happen; so it is necessary that that very thing, which is otherwise committed contrary to his command, occur out of the permissive decree of God. So much for the eternal approbation of God; now we will speak of disapprobation.

Disapprobation in general is either bare and without the decree, or it is with the decree.

Disapprobation without the decree is when God disapproves of something simply, yet does not decree it to be repudiated or fled from.

Disapproval without the decree is of evil things in themselves, which for some reason are permitted to occur; nevertheless, as culpable evils, the hardening and perdition of reprobates are disapproved of simply, of which God simply disapproves; yet for some reason He permits them to occur; namely, because they serve for his glory. On disapproval without the decree, see Eze. 18:23, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" Rom. 9:22, "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?"

Disapproval with the decree is when He indeed decrees and determines something to be repudiated. The repudiation of the divine will follows this.

This decree is twofold, just as the decree which depends upon divine approval was twofold.

First is the decree by which He decrees something to not come about simply. Under this decree falls things good in themselves, though they be evil, however, for some reason: namely, because assuredly they do not serve for the glory of God, of which sort are the salvation, faith and conversion of reprobates. However, this negative decree coincides with an affirmative permission: for He decrees to permit one and the same works by the grace of the Word - the hardening of a reprobate person and their future non-conversion. On this simple, prohibitive decree, see 1 Kings 12:15, "Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the Lord, that he might perform his saying which the Lord spake by Ahijah;" and the same in 2 Chron. 10:15; Josh. 11:20, "For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the Lord commanded Moses;" John 12:39, "Therefore they could not believe, because... He hath blinded their eyes."

Second is that decree by which He decrees not to permit some evil to be done by an evil instrument. Under this decree falls evil things which are not approved or permitted in any way; that is, neither simply, nor in any respect, as are the hardening and perishing of the elect. Moreover, this negative decree coincides with the affirmative, by which He decrees something simply to come about by the grace of the Word, such as the conversion and salvation of the elect. For He decrees one and the same works - both the salvation and conversion of the elect to come about and not to permit evil to befall them by an evil instrument. See Gen. 20:6, "And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her;" Mt. 7:18, "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit;" Mt. 24:24, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

Both sides of this decree are prohibitive, and, on the other side, correspond to both sides of that affirmative decree that depends on divine approval; for the negative decree, by which God decrees good not to come about, on the contrary corresponds to the

affirmative decree, by which He decrees good to happen. And, on the contrary, the negative decree by which God decrees not to permit bad to happen corresponds on the other side to the affirmative decree by which God decrees to permit an evil to come about.

One must take notice, moreover, that in the decree prohibitive of the permission for sin, or the decree by which it is decreed not to let evil be done by an evil instrument, by the name of evil, is to be understood what is evil in any way whatsoever, either simply and as evil, or *secundum quid*, as it is such, and evil in some respect. For the hardening and perdition of the elect He in every way and every respect prohibits by his decree: by which the prohibitive decree of permission differs from the permissive, affirmative decree, since the permissive, affirmative decree is permissive of evil, not as it is evil, but as it respects some good end, and as, at any rate, it is good in some way.

From these things which we have said, we see that evil, as evil, is not good in any respect; but as it is only evil and considered in its own nature, it does not depend on the decree of permission. There assuredly is from the decree of permission, I grant, that which is otherwise evil; not, truly, as it is evil, but as it has some reason of good. For we have said that the decree of permission depends on the approval of God in some way, from which it should follow that if evil, as evil, depends upon the decree of permission, then it necessarily does indeed count on some approval of God, which is false. For God, by his inviolable sanctity, is not able to approve evil as it is evil, or that which is the same, evil considered simply.

Objection: Therefore evil, as evil, is done by an unwilling God, if he is not merely permitting. Response: It does not follow; for in order for some event to be unwilling, as we said, it is necessary that it happen contrary to some decree of God. But, while evil, as evil, is done, it is not done contrary to any decree; therefore, it is not done by an unwilling God, or, it is not involuntary with respect to God. That evil, as evil, whatsoever it is that happens, does not, moreover, come about contrary to the decree of God, appears even from this, that if there were any prohibitive decree of His, that is, decreeing it not to be permitted to happen, surely it would be entirely unable to happen: by the grace of the Word, if there would have been a decree prohibitive of the mischief of Judas, surely Judas would not have perished. For, for that evil for which a

prohibitive decree exists not to permit it to come about, that evil, by necessity, never comes about. For example: the prohibitive decree not to permit the perdition of the apostle Peter was from eternity; hence, it was made that it could not come about.

The End