

**AN ENQUIRY INTO THE DOCTRINES OF
NECESSITY AND PREDESTINATION: IN FOUR
DISCOURSES PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD. WITH NOTES,
AND AN APPENDIX ON THE SEVENTEENTH
ARTICLE OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND**

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An Enquiry Into the Doctrines of Necessity and Predestination: In Four Discourses Preached before the University of Oxford. With Notes, and an Appendix on the Seventeenth Article of the Church of England by Edward Copleston

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BY
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OF ROCHESTER.

Hiacos intra muros peccatur et extra.

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P R E F A C E.

A SMALL treatise by the late Mr. Dawson of Sedbergh, published about twenty years ago, suggested to me the leading argument of the FIRST of these Discourses. It is entitled 'The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity briefly 'invalidated.' The author lays down three axioms, as the foundation of his reasoning.

I. 'If we make a false supposition, and 'reason justly from it, a contradiction or 'absurdity will be contained in the conclusion.'

II. 'Every action or exertion voluntarily made is with a design, or in 'hopes of obtaining some end.'

(RECAP)

III. 'All practical principles must either be founded in truth; or believed to be so for the moment that they operate.'

From these premises he infers that where the doctrine of necessity is firmly believed, and made use of as a practical principle, *motives cease to operate*. Assuming then that in a future state our faculties will be enlarged, our understandings enlightened, and our apprehensions quickened, he concludes that a continual progress in knowledge must at length terminate in absolute inactivity: and this conclusion, that *activity*, which throughout nature is observed to accompany *intelligence*, should be destroyed by the rational faculties being enlarged, he justly thinks is so paradoxical, as to throw much discredit on the principle from which it is by fair reasoning deduced.

It was perhaps not the most judicious

mode of applying the argument, to suppose the case of *another state* of intellectual progress, in order to exemplify it in its full force. For that is, to assume more conditions than are necessary—and those conditions all open to cavil or objection. It is quite enough for the conclusion aimed at, to apply the argument to human nature *as it actually is*; and the conclusion thus deduced is sufficiently absurd, to overthrow the hypothesis.

The developement of this principle so applied is attempted in the earlier part of the *FIRST Discourse*. But besides this, as an argument of equal authority, and as *one concurrent* in its application, it appeared to me that the *moral* consequences of the hypothesis in question might also be pursued: for the notion of a *moral* agent gifted with mental powers, the *improvement* of which naturally tends to the weakening or the extinction of moral principle, is an absurdity

similar to the former, and equally conclusive against the truth of the supposition from which it flows—a method of reasoning which I do not recollect to have seen adopted by any writer on a continued plan, although nothing is more common than an occasional reference to the topic, that the theory of necessity excludes the ideas of right and wrong. The establishment of these positions forms the main business of the FIRST DISCOURSE.

In the SECOND DISCOURSE the difficulties arising out of the belief in a superintending *Providence*, as compatible with the *Free-will* of man, are considered. This question is intimately connected with that concerning the *origin of evil*. *Why* evil exists, is undoubtedly mysterious. But we know it *does* exist. Any reasoning therefore which proceeds on the absence of evil from the universe we have nothing to do with. But assuming such

a mixed constitution of things as actually exists, the great principles of natural religion become intelligible. Without evil, actual or possible, without uncertainty, without the consciousness that *much* depends on ourselves, there could be no trial, no exercise of virtue, no trust in Providence. As on the one hand, if there were *no* settled order of things, we should be at a loss for any principles of action; so on the other, if *every thing* were understood to be settled and fixed beforehand, there would be no occasion for vigilance or foresight, or for prayer. Reason then teaches us that principles of *both kinds* must be admitted, viz. 1. That God foreknows all things; and yet that he deals with man as if future events were contingent in their nature. 2. That God's providence controls the order of events; and yet that man is free to choose and to act. Each proposition is separately demonstrable: they are not *contradictory*, and yet their *congruity* may be *inconceivable*.