9

Is Free Will Compatible with Determinism?

The Free Choice of the Will[*]

Augustine

St. Augustine (354-430) was a 5th-century Christian theologian and philosopher hailed as the greatest of the Church fathers. In philosophy, he is best known for his fusion of Christianity with Platonic philosophical ideas. He wrote many influential works, but his best known are his autobiographical *Confessions* (A.D. 400) and the *City of God* (413-26), a massive defense of the Christian worldview.

Study Questions

1. What question does Evodius want Augustine to answer? Why is this question important?
2. Why is it impossible, according to Augustine, to impute our sins to God?
3. What does Augustine say is the cause of all evil? What worry does he express regarding the search for a deeper cause of the will?
4. How does Augustine explain why human beings do not presently enjoy free will? How does he answer the person who questions the justice of this?

[*] Reprinted from *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 59, *Saint Augustine: The Teacher, The Free Choice of the Will, Grace and Free Will*, trans. R. P. Russell (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1968; reprint, 1990). Used by permission of Catholic University of America Press.

5. How does Augustine explain how the first man was able to fall into sin without God being to blame?
6. How does Augustine explain the devil's fall into sin?

BOOK THREE

Chapter 1

[*Evodius*] Since it is clear enough to me now that free will must be reckoned among things good, and not among the least of them, to be sure, we are therefore forced to admit that it was given by God and that it should have been given. If you deem the question opportune, I would like to find out from you the cause of that movement by which the will itself turns from the unchangeable good, common to all, and turns towards individual goods, either those of others or the lowest goods, and why, for that matter, it turns to all kinds of transitory goods.

[*Augustine*] Why do we have to know this?

Ev. Because if the free will given to us is such that this movement comes from its nature, then it turns to these goods of necessity, and where nature and necessity rule, there is no culpability. . . .

Aug. See just what that very obvious truth is which made you forget what you said a short while ago. If that movement of the soul arises from nature or necessity, it can in no way be blameworthy. But now you are maintaining that it is blameworthy so tenaciously that you think any doubt about so obvious a matter deserves to be ridiculed. Why, then, have you seen fit to assert, or at least to propose as somewhat doubtful, something which you yourself now show to be manifestly untrue? You said: "If the free will given to us is such that this movement comes from its nature, then it turns to these goods of necessity, and where nature and necessity rule,

there is no culpability." Since you have no doubt that this movement is blameworthy, you should have had no doubt at all that this was not the kind of will given to us.

Ev. I termed this movement blameworthy, and therefore stated that I disapproved of it and could not doubt that it is blameworthy. But I do deny that the soul is culpable when it is drawn by this movement from the unchangeable good to changeable goods, if its nature is such that it is drawn there by necessity.

Aug. Whose movement is it that you admit is really blameworthy?

Ev. I see now it is in the soul, but I do not know whose it is.

Aug. Do you deny that the soul moves by this movement?

Ev. I do not.

Aug. Then do you deny that a movement which moves a stone belongs to the stone? I am not speaking of that motion by which we move a stone, or where it is moved by some external force, as when it is thrown up in the air, but of the movement by which a stone tends downward of its own force and falls to the ground.

Ev. I do not deny, of course, that the movement by which a stone, as you say, changes its direction to return to the earth belongs to the stone, but I do say that this movement comes from its nature. Now if the soul also has this kind of movement, then it too is determined by nature and cannot be blamed since its movement is fixed by nature. Even if this movement should bring the soul to ruin, it is driven there by a necessity of its nature. Since, on the contrary, we are certain that this movement is voluntary, we must simply deny that it is determined by nature. Consequently, it is unlike the movement which moves the stone by a natural necessity.

Aug. Have we accomplished anything in our two previous discussions?

Ev. We have, indeed.

Aug. I believe you recall that in our first discussion it was shown to our satisfaction that the mind becomes a slave of sinful desire only by its own will. For it cannot be forced into such a shameful condition by anything superior or equal to it, which would be unjust, or by anything beneath it, which is impossible. We must conclude that the movement by which the soul turns for its delight away from God towards the creature is its own movement. If this movement is looked upon as culpable—and you thought it was ridiculous for anyone to doubt it—then it is not determined by nature, but is voluntary. It resembles in this respect the movement of the stone in its downward course, since one movement belongs to the soul just as the other belongs to the stone. But it is unlike it in another respect, namely, that it is not within the power of the stone to check its downward movement, whereas, while the soul is unwilling, its movement does not make it love lesser goods by forsaking those that are higher. Hence, the movement for the stone is fixed by nature, while that of the soul is voluntary. So if anyone says that the stone sins because it tends downward by its own weight, I will not say he has less sense than the stone, but he is certainly thought to be out of his mind. But we charge the soul with sin when we find it guilty of having forsaken what is higher to find its enjoyment in what is lower.

What need, then, is there to look for a cause of that movement by which the soul turns from the unchangeable to a changeable good? We agree that it belongs to the soul alone and is voluntary, and, consequently, culpable. Furthermore, all practical instruction in this matter has this for its aim, that, renouncing and restraining this kind of movement, we turn our will from the instability of temporal things to the enjoyment of the everlasting good.

Ev. I see and can almost touch and grasp the truth of what you say. There is nothing I perceive so surely and intimately as the fact that I have a will which moves me to find delight in anything. But if this power which enables me to will or not to will is not mine, then I cannot

readily find anything to call my own. So if I do wrong by my will, to what can I impute the act, if not to myself? Since it is the good God who made me, and I can do good only by my will, it is clear enough that the good God gave it to me for this purpose.

But if the movement by which the will can turn in different directions were not voluntary and subject to our control, a man ought not to be praised or blamed when, so to speak, he turns the hinge of his will in the opposite directions of higher and lower goods. And there would be no need at all to admonish him to neglect things temporal and to strive for the possessions of the eternal, or to try to lead a good rather than a bad life. But anyone who would think that man should not be so admonished, should be banished from the company of men. . . .

Chapter 16

[*Aug*.] When anyone does not act as he ought, this, far from being a fault on the part of the Creator, even redounds to His praise, because such a one suffers due punishment. The very fact that one is blamed for not doing what he ought to do, is simply to give praise to God to whom he owes a debt. If you receive praise for seeing what you are obliged to do, though you can only see this in Him who is the changeless Truth, how much more should He be praised who has both laid a command upon your will and has given you the power to fulfill it, and has not allowed your refusal to go unpunished?

If everyone must render what he has received, and if man has been so made that he sins of necessity, then it is his duty to sin. Therefore, whenever he sins, he is doing what he ought to do. If it is wicked to make such an assertion, then no one is forced by his nature to sin. Neither is he forced to sin by another's nature, for no one sins so long as what happens to him is against his will. If he suffers justly, his sin is not in suffering against his will, but in his having sinned by

such willful action that he now suffers a just punishment against his will. If he suffers unjustly, how does he sin? For there is no sin in suffering something unjustly, but rather in perpetrating some unjust action. But if no one is forced to sin, either by his own nature or by someone else's, it follows that he sins by his own will.

If you wish to impute the sin to the Creator, you will exonerate the sinner who has done nothing that falls outside the designs of the Creator. But if it is just to defend the sinner, he has not sinned, and there is nothing to impute to the Creator. Let us, therefore, praise the Creator, whether the sinner can be defended or not. If he is justly defended, he is not a sinner; praise God, then. But if he cannot be defended, he is a sinner insofar as he turns away from the Creator. So give praise to the Creator. Accordingly, I do not see how we can impute our sins to God, our Creator, and I declare that there is no way possible, and that none in fact exists. I do find that He is deserving of praise even in these very sins, not merely because He punishes them, but also because they are committed at the very moment that one departs from His truth.

Ev. I am perfectly willing to accept these points and I give them my approval. And I agree it is perfectly true that it is altogether impossible to impute our sins rightly to our Creator.

Chapter 17

But I would still like to know, if this is possible, why one nature does not sin, which God foreknew would not sin, and why another does sin, which He foresaw was going to sin. I am no longer of the opinion that, because of God's foreknowledge, the one is forced to sin while the other is not forced to sin. But unless there were some cause for it, rational creatures would not be divided into some that never sin, others that continuously sin, and others, in between, as it were, that sometimes sin and at other times turn to doing what is right. What is the cause for the

separation into these three groups? Now I do not want you to reply that it is the will, for I am looking for the cause of the will itself. Since they all have the same nature, there must be some cause why one never wills to sin, why another always wills to sin, and why another wills to sin at one time but not at another. This much alone seems clear to me, namely, that there has to be a cause for this threefold division of the human will, but what it is, I do not know.

Aug. Since the will is the cause of sin, and you are looking for the cause of the will itself, supposing I were to find this, will you not be looking for the cause of this cause which I have found? What limit will there be to our inquiry, and where will our investigation and discussion end, since there is no need to carry your inquiry beyond the root of the matter? Beware of supposing that anything could possibly be truer than the saying that "avarice is the root of all evil," namely, the desire for more than is sufficient. Sufficiency is measured by what each nature requires for its preservation according to its class. The word avarice, in Greek, *philarguría,* is not to be understood merely in terms of silver and coins, from which the Greek term is more properly derived, since, among the ancients, coins were made from silver or, as was more commonly the case, from a silver alloy, but must be understood in regard to everything that is desired immoderately whenever anyone simply wants more than is sufficient. Such avarice is cupidity, and cupidity is a perverse will. A perverse will, therefore, is the cause of all evil. If this were natural, it would certainly preserve the nature and not be destructive of it, and consequently it would not be a perverse will. Hence the conclusion that the root of all evil is not in accord with nature, which is a sufficient rejoinder against those who want to reproach nature. But if you are looking for the cause of this root, how will it be the root of all evil? For there will be a cause of this cause and, as I said, when you find it, you will look for what caused it and there will be no end to our inquiry.

But what could possibly come before the will to be its cause? Either the will is itself the cause, and there will be no regress from this root of the will, or it is not the will, and the will is without sin. Consequently, either the will itself is ultimately the cause of sin, or the ultimate cause of sin is without sin. Sin can be justly imputed to no one but a sinner, and can therefore only be justly imputed to one who wills it. But I fail to see why you wish to look for something else. Finally, whatever is the cause of the will is certainly either just or unjust. If just, whoever obeys it will not be sinning; if unjust, it must not be obeyed and one will not commit sin.

Chapter 18

Or is there perhaps some violent cause that compels one against his will? Now, must we go on repeating the same things over and over again? Recall the previous points which we mentioned at length concerning sin and free will. If it is difficult to commit them all to memory, keep this brief point in mind. Whatever the cause of the will, if a man is unable to resist, there is no sin in his yielding to it; if he can resist, he must not yield to it and there will be no sin. Or does it perhaps deceive a man caught off his guard? Then let him take care not to be deceived. Or is the deception so powerful that it is simply impossible to be on one's guard against it? If this is the case, there is no sin, for how can anyone sin where he cannot possibly be on his guard? But sins are committed, and therefore it is possible to be on one's guard.

And yet there are things done even from ignorance which are condemned and judged as deserving of correction, as we read on the authority of the Sacred Writers. For example, the Apostle says: "I obtained mercy, because I acted in ignorance." And the Prophet says: "Remember not the deeds of my youth and of my ignorance." Actions performed of necessity are blameworthy when a man has the will to do right and cannot do so. Hence the words of the

Apostle: “For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, I do”; and, “To will is present with me, but to accomplish that which is good, I find not”; and, “The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. For these things are contrary one to another, so that you do not what things you will.” But these things are all the lot of men who spring from the time of man’s condemnation to death; for if this is not a punishment for man, but is something natural, then there is no sin. If man does not depart from the natural condition in which he was made, which cannot be improved upon, then, in doing these things, he is only acting as he should. But if man were good, he would be in a different condition. But because he exists the way he does, he is not good now and does not have it in his power to become good, either because he does not see what kind of man he ought to be, or, though seeing this, he is unable to become what he sees he ought to be. Can there be any doubt that this is a punishment?

Now every punishment, if just, is a punishment for sin, and is called a penalty. But if the punishment is unjust, and there is no doubt that it is a punishment, then it has been inflicted on man by some ruler who is unjust. Besides, since only a fool would doubt the omnipotence and justice of God, this is a just penalty and is inflicted as punishment for some kind of sin. For no unjust ruler could ever steal man from God, unknown to Him, or wrest him from God against his will, as if God were too weak and were so subject to threats or violence that this ruler might afflict man with unjust punishment. It remains, then, that this is a just punishment springing from man’s condemnation.

We must not be surprised that man in his ignorance does not enjoy the free choice of will to choose the right thing to do or, though aware of what is right and with a will to do it, that he is unable to accomplish it against the opposition of carnal habits which have somehow become ingrown in nature by the vehemence present in the act of human generation. It is a perfectly just

penalty for sin that man should forfeit what he would not put to good use when he could easily do so, if he were willing. That is to say, a man who fails to do what he knows is right, and a man who was unwilling to do what was right when he could, forfeits the power to do so when he wants to have it.

These two punishments, ignorance and difficulty, are truly present in every soul that sins. Through ignorance, the soul is tainted with error; through difficulty, it suffers anguish. But to accept falsity for truth, so as to err unwillingly, and to be unable to refrain from lustful acts through the resistance of carnal habits, these are not of man's nature as he originally existed, but are a punishment of man inflicted after his condemnation. When we speak of the will's freedom to do what is right, we are speaking, of course, of that freedom with which man was created.

Chapter 19

Here there arises a question which is often mulled over by men who grumble and are ready to blame anything at all for sin, except themselves. They say, for example: "If Adam and Eve sinned, what have we poor creatures done that we should be born with the blindness of ignorance and with the anguish of difficulty? First, in ignorance of what we ought to do, we fall into error; then, when the precepts of justice begin to be made known to us, we have the will to fulfill them and cannot do so because some kind of compulsion from carnal concupiscence resists our efforts." In reply to such men, I will answer briefly that they should be quiet and should stop murmuring against God. They might have grounds to complain if no man had ever triumphed over error and lust. But there is everywhere present One who makes manifold use of creatures, at the service of Him their Lord, to recall the man who has turned away from Him, to teach him when he believes, to console him when he has hope, to encourage him when he loves, to assist

his efforts, to hear him when he prays. You are not charged with a fault because you are in ignorance against your will, but because you fail to seek knowledge that you do not have. Nor are you at fault because you do not bind up your wounded members, but because you neglect Him who wants to heal them. These are personal sins of your own. No man has been denied a knowledge of the benefit of inquiring after something where ignorance is of no benefit, or of how he should make humble avowal of his weakness so that, while searching after knowledge and confessing his weakness, he may be assisted by Him who experiences neither error nor difficulty in coming to our aid.

Wrong actions done by anyone from ignorance and the inability to perform good acts that he wants to, are called sins for the very reason that they have their origin in the first sin, which was voluntary, and it is this previous sin which has merited these consequences. We use the term "tongue" not only for the bodily member which moves about in our mouth when we speak, but also for the effect produced by this movement of the tongue, namely, the arrangement and sequence of words. It is in this sense that we say that Greek is one tongue, and Latin another. Similarly, we use the term "sin" not only in the strict sense of a fault which one commits knowingly and willingly, but also to indicate the effects which follow necessarily as punishment for such sin.

So, too, we use the term "nature" in different senses. In the strict sense, we speak of man as having a specific nature in which he was originally created in the state of innocence as one of a class. We use it in another sense to indicate the nature into which we are now born as mortal creatures, ignorant and slaves to the flesh, following the sentence of condemnation which was passed upon the first man. It is in this sense that the Apostle says: "For we were also by nature children of wrath, just as the others."

Chapter 20

As we are born from the first union, subject to ignorance and difficulty and death, because through sin our first parents were cast headlong into error, misery, and death, so too has it pleased the justice of the Supreme God and Ruler of the universe, first to reveal His justice by punishment at the time of man's origin, and then, as man advanced in time, to manifest His mercy as a Liberator. Though under a sentence of condemnation, the first man was not deprived of the happiness of having children. It was possible that even from his offspring, however carnal and mortal, something should appear and, in its own way, be a thing of beauty and an adornment for the earth. Yet, equity would not allow Adam to beget offspring better than himself. But it was only right that, from the moment of turning to God, each one should not only be unhampered in his desire but should even be aided in overcoming the punishment which man had merited at the beginning by turning away from God. In this way, too, the Creator of the universe showed how easy it would have been for man, had he so willed, to preserve the condition in which he was created since even his offspring were able to overcome the condition that was theirs by birth.

Again, if only a single soul was created from which are derived the souls of all men that are born, who can say that he did not sin when the first man sinned? But if souls are created one by one in each man that is born, it is not incongruous, but rather altogether fitting and in accord with order, that the evil merits of a former soul should be the natural inheritance of one that follows, and that the good merits of the succeeding soul should be the natural possession of the former. How is it unworthy of the Creator that He should have chosen even this way to show how the soul's dignity so far excels bodily creatures that one soul can begin to rise up from that condition which another had come to by its fall? When the sinful soul has reached the condition of ignorance and difficulty, this is properly called a punishment because the soul was better before

this punishment. If, not only before sinning, but before beginning upon life, one soul begins to exist in the same condition to which another had come after a sinful life, it still possesses no small good for which to give thanks to its Creator, since even at the time of its creation and beginning, it is more excellent than the best of bodies. That the soul should not only enjoy a natural superiority over all bodies, but should also have power, with its Creator's help, to perfect itself and be able to acquire and possess by its pious efforts all the virtues by which it is freed from the anguish of difficulty and the blindness of ignorance —all these are no ordinary blessings.

If this is so, ignorance and difficulty will not be a punishment for sin to souls at birth, but a stimulus to make progress and the first step on the way to perfection. It is no small advantage that the soul, previous to any merit for good works, should have received a natural power of discernment to enable it to rank wisdom above error, and rest above difficulty, so it can attain these, not through birth, but by its own effort. But if a soul is unwilling to do so, it will be justly held as guilty of sin for not having made good use of the power it received. Though born in a state of ignorance and difficulty, it is not compelled by any necessity to remain in that state in which it was born. No one but God Almighty could be the Creator of such souls, who creates them before they love Him and perfects them once they have loved Him. He gives them being when they do not exist, and confers happiness upon those that love Him as the Source of their existence. . . .

Chapter 24

We should ask what the first man himself was like when he was created, rather than how his descendants have been propagated. Some think they are displaying great acumen when they

propose the question as follows. If the first man was created wise, why, they ask, was he misled, and if he was created foolish, how can God not be the cause of vice, since folly is the greatest of the vices? They speak as if it were impossible for human nature to be endowed with some intermediate state, besides folly and wisdom, which could be called neither folly nor wisdom. Actually, a man begins to be either foolish or wise, and must be called one or the other, only from the time he is able to possess wisdom and when, by neglecting to do so, his will is guilty of the vice of folly. No one is foolish enough to call an infant foolish, though it would be more absurd of him to want to call it wise. Though already a human being, the infant cannot be called either wise or foolish.

Hence it is clear that human nature is endowed with an intermediate state which you may not properly call either folly or wisdom. Consequently, if anyone were born with a soul in the same state as those who lack wisdom through negligence, no one could properly call him foolish, since he could tell that his conditions arose, not from vice, but from nature.

Folly is not any kind of ignorance at all about what we should seek and avoid, but an ignorance born of vice. This is why we do not say that irrational animals are foolish, since they have not been endowed with the power to become wise. But we often use terms in a way that is similar, but not the same. Though blindness is the most serious of all defects in the eye, it is not a defect in newborn puppies, and cannot, properly speaking, be termed blindness.

Accordingly, if a man was created in a state where, though yet unwise, he could receive a command that he ought certainly to obey, it is neither surprising that he could be seduced, nor an injustice that he should suffer punishment for failing to obey. Neither is the Creator the cause of his vice, since it was not yet a vice for man to be without wisdom when he had not yet received the power to have it. Yet he did have something that would enable him to advance towards what

he did not yet have, provided he was willing to make good use of it. It is one thing for a man to be rational, it is something else to be wise. Through reason, man became a fit subject for commands, and he must show himself faithful to these and so fulfill all that is commanded of him. Just as it is natural for reason to grasp a command, so too, it is the observance of such a command that gains for us the possession of wisdom. What nature does in the way of grasping the command is accomplished by the will in carrying it out. And as rational nature merits, in a way, to receive a command, so too, it is the observance of it that merits the bestowal of wisdom.

Now, from the time a man begins to be capable of receiving a command, from that moment he begins to have the power to sin. Before a man becomes wise, he can sin in two ways, either by failing to make himself fit to receive the command, or by not observing the command once he has received it. But if a man already wise turns from wisdom, then he sins. Just as the command does not issue from the person commanded, so too, wisdom does not come from the person who is enlightened but from Him who is the Source of enlightenment.

Is there any reason then why man's Creator should not be praised? Man is something good, and because he is capable of receiving a command, he is something better than the beast. He is better yet when he has already received a command, better yet when he has obeyed it, and still better when he is made happy by the eternal light of wisdom.

The malice of sin consists in a man's failure either to accept the command, or to observe it, or to be steadfast in the contemplation of wisdom. This enables us to see how the first man could be seduced by sin, even though he was created wise. Since this sin was within his free choice, it entailed a just penalty by reason of God's law. It is in this sense too that the Apostle says: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became foolish." For pride turns a man from wisdom and folly follows in its wake. Surely, folly is a kind of blindness, as the same Apostle indicates,

where he says: ". . .and their foolish heart was darkened." Now what is the cause of this darkness, but the turning away from the light of wisdom? And what causes this turning away, if not the fact that man, whose good is God, wills to be his own good, just as God is His own good? Whence the words of Scripture: "My soul is troubled in my own regard," and, "Taste, and you shall be as gods."

In examining this matter, some are disturbed by the question as to whether the first man fell from God through folly, or whether he became foolish by falling from God. If you answer that he fell from wisdom through folly, it will appear that he was foolish before he fell from wisdom, so that folly was the cause of it. Likewise, if you reply that he became foolish by falling, they will ask whether, in doing so, he acted foolishly or wisely. If he acted wisely, he did what was right and committed no sin; if he acted foolishly, then, they say, it was the folly already found in him that made him fall since, without folly, he could not do anything foolish. This makes it clear that there is some middle state through which a man passes from wisdom to folly. We cannot say that this state resulted either from folly or wisdom, and it is one that men in this life can only understand in terms of its contraries. Thus, no mortal can become wise unless he passes from folly to wisdom. If the transition itself is made foolishly, it is certainly not done well, which would be a very foolish thing to say; if the transition is made wisely, then wisdom was already present in man before he passed over to wisdom, which is something equally absurd. This makes it clear that there is a middle state which cannot go by either name. So, too, when the first man passed from the heights of wisdom to folly, the transition was neither foolish nor wise. It is something like sleep and wakefulness, where falling asleep is not the same as sleeping and where awakening is not the same as being awake, but where there is a passing from one state to another.

There is, however, this difference, that the latter generally happen involuntarily, while the former are always voluntary, which is why the punishments that follow are perfectly just.

Chapter 25

But the will is not drawn to any action unless something is perceived. It is within anyone's power to accept or reject something, but it is not in his power to be unaffected by what he sees. We must acknowledge that the soul is affected by the things it perceives, both of a higher and lower order, so that a rational being may take what it chooses from each, and, on the merit of what it takes, there follows unhappiness or happiness. In the garden of paradise, for example, God's command belonged to the perception of higher things, the suggestion of the devil, to things below. Neither the command enjoined upon him by God nor the suggestion made by the devil was in the power of man. Just how free man was from having to yield to the lower attraction of what he perceived, when he was free from the constraints of difficulty and living a sound life of wisdom, can be seen from the fact that even foolish men overcome this attraction as they approach wisdom, even though they find it hard to forego the deadly delights of their pernicious habits.

A question may arise at this point. If man was confronted by both classes of objects that he perceived, God's precept on the one hand, and the serpent's suggestion on the other, how was it suggested to the devil himself to pursue wickedness and so fall from his place on high? If he had not been affected by something he perceived, he would not have chosen to do what he did, for, unless something had entered his mind, he would not have turned his thoughts at all to wickedness. How, then, did it enter his mind to embark upon something which would make a devil out of a good angel?

One who wills, certainly has to will something, and unless this something is either suggested externally by the bodily senses, or arises in the mind in some hidden way, he cannot will it. We must distinguish, then, two classes of things that are perceived. The first comes from the will of one who makes use of persuasion, as the devil did, when man sinned by yielding to him. The second class comprises things which come to the attention of the mind or to the bodily senses. Apart from the Changeless Trinity, which does not fall under the soul's comprehension but rather transcends it, the things that it perceives are these: first, the soul itself, by which we perceive that we are alive; secondly, the body, which is governed by the soul, enabling the soul to move whatever member is needed to perform an act at the time. Bodily things, on the other hand, are all subject to the perception of the bodily senses.

In contemplating supreme wisdom—which, being unchangeable, is not the soul—the mutable soul also gets a view of itself and somehow comes into its own mind. This is only possible because of the difference that separates the soul from God, though even the soul is something which, after God, can be a source of delight. But it is better for the soul when it forgets itself in its love of the unchangeable God, or utterly despises itself by comparison with Him. If, on the other hand, it gets in its own way, so to speak, and takes delight in itself, by a perverse imitation of God in its desire to enjoy its own power, then the more it wants to be greater, so much does it become less. Thus, "pride is the beginning of all sin, and the beginning of pride is man's apostasy from God."

In addition to his pride, there was the devil's insidious ill-will to urge upon man that very pride which he realized had brought damnation upon himself. Hence the provision that man should receive a corrective punishment rather than one which would entail his destruction. Thus, while the devil made himself an example of pride for man, the Lord, through whom we have the

promise of life eternal, offered himself to man as an example of humility. Consequently, since Christ has purchased us by His blood, after having endured indescribable trials and suffering, let us cling steadfastly to our Liberator with such great love and be so transported by the light of His countenance that the sight of things below may not turn us from the higher vision. And even though some suggestion inspired by a desire for things below should enter our mind, the thought of eternal punishment and the torments suffered by the devil should bring us back to our senses.

Such is the beauty of justice and the delight of that eternal light, namely, changeless truth and wisdom, that, even were one permitted to abide in it only for the space of a single day, yet, for this alone, he would rightly and justly regard as nought the countless years of the present life, though they were filled with delights and an affluence of temporal goods. These words of the Psalmist: “For better is one day in thy courts over thousands,” were expressed with no small degree of genuine fervor. They can also be understood, however, in another sense, where a thousand days may stand for the changing character of time, while one day stands for the changelessness of eternity.

I do not know that I have passed over any point needed to answer your questions, so far as the Lord has seen fit to allow me. And even if some question does come to your mind, the limits of this book compel me to bring it to an end and to rest at last from our discussion.

Of Liberty and Necessity[*]

David Hume

(For a brief biographical note on Hume, see chapter 5)

Study Questions

1. What does Hume think is the source of the dispute over liberty and necessity? How does he propose to resolve the dispute?
2. How do we come to have the idea that matter acts by necessity?
3. Why does Hume think that human actions occur by necessity?
4. How does Hume explain apparent irregular and non-uniform actions?
5. Why, according to Hume, are people reluctant to acknowledge the necessity of human actions? How does Hume argue against this reluctance?
6. How does Hume define "liberty"? How does he define "chance"? What does he mean when he says that "liberty, when opposed to necessity, not to constraint, is the same thing with chance; which is universally allowed to have no existence"?
7. What does Hume say would be the consequence for morality if the necessity of the will is denied?
8. What objections to his view of liberty and necessity does Hume consider? How does he answer them?

[*] From *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1777 edition). Reprinted from *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 2nd ed., ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902).

Part I

It might reasonably be expected in questions which have been canvassed and disputed with great eagerness, since the first origin of science and philosophy, that the meaning of all the terms, at least, should have been agreed upon among the disputants; and our enquiries, in the course of two thousand years, been able to pass from words to the true and real subject of the controversy. For how easy may it seem to give exact definitions of the terms employed in reasoning, and make these definitions, not the mere sound of words, the object of future scrutiny and examination? But if we consider the matter more narrowly, we shall be apt to draw a quite opposite conclusion. From this circumstance alone, that a controversy has been long kept on foot, and remains still undecided, we may presume that there is some ambiguity in the expression, and that the disputants affix different ideas to the terms employed in the controversy. . . .

This has been the case in the long disputed question concerning liberty and necessity; and to so remarkable a degree that, if I be not much mistaken, we shall find, that all mankind, both learned and ignorant, have always been of the same opinion with regard to this subject, and that a few intelligible definitions would immediately have put an end to the whole controversy. I own that this dispute has been so much canvassed on all hands, and has led philosophers into such a labyrinth of obscure sophistry, that it is no wonder, if a sensible reader indulge his ease so far as to turn a deaf ear to the proposal of such a question, from which he can expect neither instruction or entertainment. But the state of the argument here proposed may, perhaps, serve to renew his attention; as it has more novelty, promises at least some decision of the controversy, and will not much disturb his ease by any intricate or obscure reasoning.

I hope, therefore, to make it appear that all men have ever agreed in the doctrine both of necessity and of liberty, according to any reasonable sense, which can be put on these terms; and that the whole controversy has hitherto turned merely upon words. We shall begin with examining the doctrine of necessity.

It is universally allowed that matter, in all its operations, is actuated by a necessary force, and that every natural effect is so precisely determined by the energy of its cause that no other effect, in such particular circumstances, could possibly have resulted from it. The degree and direction of every motion is, by the laws of nature, prescribed with such exactness that a living creature may as soon arise from the shock of two bodies as motion in any other degree or direction than what is actually produced by it. Would we, therefore, form a just and precise idea of *necessity,* we must consider whence that idea arises when we apply it to the operation of bodies.

It seems evident that, if all the scenes of nature were continually shifted in such a manner that no two events bore any resemblance to each other, but every object was entirely new, without any similitude to whatever had been seen before, we should never, in that case, have attained the least idea of necessity, or of a connexion among these objects. We might say, upon such a supposition, that one object or event has followed another; not that one was produced by the other. The relation of cause and effect must be utterly unknown to mankind. Inference and reasoning concerning the operations of nature would, from that moment, be at an end; and the memory and senses remain the only canals, by which the knowledge of any real existence could possibly have access to the mind. Our idea, therefore, of necessity and causation arises entirely from the uniformity observable in the operations of nature, where similar objects are constantly conjoined together, and the mind is determined by custom to infer the one from the appearance

of the other. These two circumstances form the whole of that necessity, which we ascribe to matter. Beyond the constant *conjunction* of similar objects, and the consequent *inference* from one to the other, we have no notion of any necessity or connexion.

If it appear, therefore, that all mankind have ever allowed, without any doubt or hesitation, that these two circumstances take place in the voluntary actions of men, and in the operations of mind; it must follow, that all mankind have ever agreed in the doctrine of necessity, and that they have hitherto disputed, merely for not understanding each other.

As to the first circumstance, the constant and regular conjunction of similar events, we may possibly satisfy ourselves by the following considerations. It is universally acknowledged that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations. The same motives always produce the same actions: The same events follow from the same causes. Ambition, avarice, self-love, vanity, friendship, generosity, public spirit: these passions, mixed in various degrees, and distributed through society, have been, from the beginning of the world, and still are, the source of all the actions and enterprises, which have ever been observed among mankind. . . .

Hence likewise the benefit of that experience, acquired by long life and a variety of business and company, in order to instruct us in the principles of human nature, and regulate our future conduct, as well as speculation. By means of this guide, we mount up to the knowledge of men's inclinations and motives, from their actions, expressions, and even gestures; and again descend to the interpretation of their actions from our knowledge of their motives and inclinations. The general observations treasured up by a course of experience, give us the clue of human nature, and teach us to unravel all its intricacies. Pretexts and appearances no longer deceive us. Public declarations pass for the specious colouring of a cause. And though virtue and honour be allowed

their proper weight and authority, that perfect disinterestedness, so often pretended to, is never expected in multitudes and parties; seldom in their leaders; and scarcely even in individuals of any rank or station. But were there no uniformity in human actions, and were every experiment which we could form of this kind irregular and anomalous, it were impossible to collect any general observations concerning mankind; and no experience, however accurately digested by reflection, would ever serve to any purpose. Why is the aged husbandman more skillful in his calling than the young beginner but because there is a certain uniformity in the operation of the sun, rain, and earth towards the production of vegetables; and experience teaches the old practitioner the rules by which this operation is governed and directed.

We must not, however, expect that this uniformity of human actions should be carried to such a length as that all men, in the same circumstances, will always act precisely in the same manner, without making any allowance for the diversity of characters, prejudices, and opinions. Such a uniformity in every particular, is found in no part of nature. On the contrary, from observing the variety of conduct in different men, we are enabled to form a greater variety of maxims, which still suppose a degree of uniformity and regularity.

Are the manners of men different in different ages and countries? We learn thence the great force of custom and education, which mould the human mind from its infancy and form it into a fixed and established character. Is the behaviour and conduct of the one sex very unlike that of the other? Is it thence we become acquainted with the different characters which nature has impressed upon the sexes, and which she preserves with constancy and regularity? Are the actions of the same person much diversified in the different periods of his life, from infancy to old age? This affords room for many general observations concerning the gradual change of our sentiments and inclinations, and the different maxims which prevail in the different ages of

human creatures. Even the characters, which are peculiar to each individual, have a uniformity in their influence; otherwise our acquaintance with the persons and our observation of their conduct could never teach us their dispositions, or serve to direct our behaviour with regard to them.

I grant it possible to find some actions, which seem to have no regular connexion with any known motives, and are exceptions to all the measures of conduct which have ever been established for the government of men. But if we would willingly know what judgement should be formed of such irregular and extraordinary actions, we may consider the sentiments commonly entertained with regard to those irregular events which appear in the course of nature, and the operations of external objects. All causes are not conjoined to their usual effects with like uniformity. An artificer, who handles only dead matter, may be disappointed of his aim, as well as the politician, who directs the conduct of sensible and intelligent agents.

The vulgar, who take things according to their first appearance, attribute the uncertainty of events to such an uncertainty in the causes as makes the latter often fail of their usual influence; though they meet with no impediment in their operation. But philosophers, observing that, almost in every part of nature, there is contained a vast variety of springs and principles, which are hid, by reason of their minuteness or remoteness, find, that it is at least possible the contrariety of events may not proceed from any contingency in the cause, but from the secret operation of contrary causes. This possibility is converted into certainty by farther observation, when they remark that, upon an exact scrutiny, a contrariety of effects always betrays a contrariety of causes, and proceeds from their mutual opposition. . . .

Thus, for instance, in the human body, when the usual symptoms of health or sickness disappoint our expectation; when medicines operate not with their wonted powers; when irregular events follow from any particular cause; the philosopher and physician are not surprised

at the matter, nor are ever tempted to deny, in general, the necessity and uniformity of those principles by which the animal economy is conducted. They know that a human body is a mighty complicated machine: That many secret powers lurk in it, which are altogether beyond our comprehension: That to us it must often appear very uncertain in its operations: And that therefore the irregular events, which outwardly discover themselves, can be no proof that the laws of nature are not observed with the greatest regularity in its internal operations and government.

The philosopher, if he be consistent, must apply the same reasoning to the actions and volitions of intelligent agents. The most irregular and unexpected resolutions of men may frequently be accounted for by those who know every particular circumstance of their character and situation. A person of an obliging disposition gives a peevish answer: But he has the toothache, or has not dined. A stupid fellow discovers an uncommon alacrity in his carriage: But he has met with a sudden piece of good fortune. Or even when an action, as sometimes happens, cannot be particularly accounted for, either by the person himself or by others; we know, in general, that the characters of men are, to a certain degree, inconstant and irregular. This is, in a manner, the constant character of human nature; though it be applicable, in a more particular manner, to some persons who have no fixed rule for their conduct, but proceed in a continued course of caprice and inconstancy. The internal principles and motives may operate in a uniform manner, notwithstanding these seeming irregularities; in the same manner as the winds, rain, clouds, and other variations of the weather are supposed to be governed by steady principles; though not easily discoverable by human sagacity and enquiry.

Thus it appears, not only that the conjunction between motives and voluntary actions is as regular and uniform as that between the cause and effect in any part of nature; but also that this

regular conjunction has been universally acknowledged among mankind, and has never been the subject of dispute, either in philosophy or common life. Now, as it is from past experience that we draw all inferences concerning the future, and as we conclude that objects will always be conjoined together which we find to have always been conjoined; it may seem superfluous to prove that this experienced uniformity in human actions is a source whence we draw *inferences* concerning them. But in order to throw the argument into a greater variety of lights we shall also insist, though briefly, on this latter topic.

The mutual dependence of men is so great in all societies that scarce any human action is entirely complete in itself, or is performed without some reference to the actions of others, which are requisite to make it answer fully the intention of the agent. The poorest artificer, who labours alone, expects at least the protection of the magistrate, to ensure him the enjoyment of the fruits of his labour. He also expects that, when he carries his goods to market, and offers them at a reasonable price, he shall find purchasers, and shall be able, by the money he acquires, to engage others to supply him with those commodities which are requisite for his subsistence. In proportion as men extend their dealings, and render their intercourse with others more complicated, they always comprehend, in their schemes of life, a greater variety of voluntary actions, which they expect, from the proper motives, to co-operate with their own. In all these conclusions they take their measures from past experience, in the same manner as in their reasonings concerning external objects; and firmly believe that men, as well as all the elements, are to continue, in their operations, the same that they have ever found them. A manufacturer reckons upon the labour of his servants for the execution of any work as much as upon the tools which he employs, and would be equally surprised were his expectations disappointed. In short, this experimental inference and reasoning concerning the actions of others enters so much into

human life that no man, while awake, is ever a moment without employing it. Have we not reason, therefore, to affirm that all mankind have always agreed in the doctrine of necessity according to the foregoing definition and explication of it?

Nor have philosophers ever entertained a different opinion from the people in this particular. For, not to mention that almost every action of their life supposes that opinion, there are even few of the speculative parts of learning to which it is not essential. What would become of *history,* had we not a dependence on the veracity of the historian according to the experience which we have had of mankind? How could *politics* be a science, if laws and forms of goverment had not a uniform influence upon society? Where would be the foundation of *morals,* if particular characters had no certain or determinate power to produce particular sentiments, and if these sentiments had no constant operation on actions? And with what pretence could we employ our *criticism* upon any poet or polite author, if we could not pronounce the conduct and sentiments of his actors either natural or unnatural to such characters, and in such circumstances? It seems almost impossible, therefore, to engage either in science or action of any kind without acknowledging the doctrine of necessity, and this *inference* from motive to voluntary actions, from characters to conduct. . . .

I have frequently considered, what could possibly be the reason why all mankind, though they have ever, without hesitation, acknowledged the doctrine of necessity in their whole practice and reasoning, have yet discovered such a reluctance to acknowledge it in words, and have rather shown a propensity, in all ages, to profess the contrary opinion. The matter, I think, may be accounted for after the following manner. If we examine the operations of body, and the production of effects from their causes, we shall find that all our faculties can never carry us farther in our knowledge of this relation than barely to observe that particular objects are

constantly conjoined together, and that the mind is carried, by a *customary transition,* from the appearance of one to the belief of the other. But though this conclusion concerning human ignorance be the result of the strictest scrutiny of this subject, men still entertain a strong propensity to believe that they penetrate farther into the powers of nature, and perceive something like a necessary connexion between the cause and the effect. When again they turn their reflections towards the operations of their own minds, and *feel* no such connexion of the motive and the action; they are thence apt to suppose, that there is a difference between the effects which result from material force, and those which arise from thought and intelligence. But being once convinced that we know nothing farther of causation of any kind than merely the *constant conjunction* of objects, and the consequent *inference* of the mind from one to another, and finding that these two circumstances are universally allowed to have place in voluntary actions; we may be more easily led to own the same necessity common to all causes. And though this reasoning may contradict the systems of many philosophers, in ascribing necessity to the determinations of the will, we shall find, upon reflection, that they dissent from it in words only, not in their real sentiment.

Necessity, according to the sense in which it is here taken, has never yet been rejected, nor can ever, I think, be rejected by any philosopher. It may only, perhaps, be pretended that the mind can perceive, in the operations of matter, some farther connexion between the cause and effect; and connexion that has not place in voluntary actions of intelligent beings. Now whether it be so or not, can only appear upon examination; and it is incumbent on these philosophers to make good their assertion, by defining or describing that necessity, and pointing it out to us in the operations of material causes.

It would seem, indeed, that men begin at the wrong end of this question concerning liberty and necessity, when they enter upon it by examining the faculties of the soul, the influence of the understanding, and the operations of the will. Let them first discuss a more simple question, namely, the operations of body and of brute unintelligent matter; and try whether they can there form any idea of causation and necessity, except that of a constant conjunction of objects, and subsequent inference of the mind from one to another. If these circumstances form, in reality, the whole of that necessity, which we conceive in matter, and if these circumstances be also universally acknowledged to take place in the operations of the mind, the dispute is at an end; at least, must be owned to be thenceforth merely verbal. But as long as we will rashly suppose, that we have some farther idea of necessity and causation in the operations of external objects; at the same time, that we can find nothing farther in the voluntary actions of the mind; there is no possibility of bringing the question to any determinate issue, while we proceed upon so erroneous a supposition. The only method of undeceiving us is to mount up higher; to examine the narrow extent of science when applied to material causes; and to convince ourselves that all we know of them is the constant conjunction and inference above mentioned. We may, perhaps, find that it is with difficulty we are induced to fix such narrow limits to human understanding: But we can afterwards find no difficulty when we come to apply this doctrine to the actions of the will. For as it is evident that these have a regular conjunction with motives and circumstances and characters, and as we always draw inferences from one to the other, we must be obliged to acknowledge in words that necessity, which we have already avowed, in every deliberation of our lives, and in every step of our conduct and behaviour.

But to proceed in this reconciling project with regard to the question of liberty and necessity; the most contentious question of metaphysics, the most contentious science; it will not require

many words to prove, that all mankind have ever agreed in the doctrine of liberty as well as in that of necessity, and that the whole dispute, in this respect also, has been hitherto merely verbal. For what is meant by liberty, when applied to voluntary actions? We cannot surely mean that actions have so little connexion with motives, inclinations, and circumstances, that one does not follow with a certain degree of uniformity from the other, and that one affords no inference by which we can conclude the existence of the other. For these are plain and acknowledged matters of fact. By liberty, then, we can only mean *a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will;* that is, if we choose to remain at rest, we may; if we choose to move, we also may. Now this hypothetical liberty is universally allowed to belong to every one who is not a prisoner and in chains. Here, then, is no subject of dispute.

Whatever definition we may give of liberty, we should be careful to observe two requisite circumstances; *first,* that it be consistent with plain matter of fact; *secondly,* that it be consistent with itself. If we observe these circumstances, and render our definition intelligible, I am persuaded that all mankind will be found of one opinion with regard to it.

It is universally allowed that nothing exists without a cause of its existence, and that chance, when strictly examined, is a mere negative word, and means not any real power which has anywhere a being in nature. But it is pretended that some causes are necessary, some not necessary. Here then is the advantage of definitions. Let any one *define* a cause, without comprehending, as a part of the definition, a *necessary connexion* with its effect; and let him show distinctly the origin of the idea, expressed by the definition; and I shall readily give up the whole controversy. But if the foregoing explication of the matter be received, this must be absolutely impracticable. Had not objects a regular conjunction with each other, we should never have entertained any notion of cause and effect; and this regular conjunction produces that

inference of the understanding, which is the only connexion, that we can have any comprehension of. Whoever attempts a definition of cause, exclusive of these circumstances, will be obliged either to employ unintelligible terms or such as are synonymous to the term which he endeavours to define. And if the definition above mentioned be admitted; liberty, when opposed to necessity, not to constraint, is the same thing with chance; which is universally allowed to have no existence.

Part II

There is no method of reasoning more common, and yet none more blameable, than, in philosophical disputes, to endeavour the refutation of any hypothesis, by a pretence of its dangerous consequences to religion and morality. When any opinion leads to absurdities, it is certainly false; but it is not certain that an opinion is false, because it is of dangerous consequence. Such topics, therefore, ought entirely to be forborne; as serving nothing to the discovery of truth, but only to make the person of an antagonist odious. This I observe in general, without pretending to draw any advantage from it. I frankly submit to an examination of this kind, and shall venture to affirm that the doctrines, both of necessity and of liberty, as above explained, are not only consistent with morality, but are absolutely essential to its support.

Necessity may be defined two ways, conformably to the two definitions of *cause*, of which it makes an essential part. It consists either in the constant conjunction of like objects, or in the inference of the understanding from one object to another. Now necessity, in both these senses, (which, indeed, are at bottom the same) has universally, though tacitly, in the schools, in the pulpit, and in common life, been allowed to belong to the will of man; and no one has ever pretended to deny that we can draw inferences concerning human actions, and that those

inferences are founded on the experienced union of like actions, with like motives, inclinations, and circumstances. The only particular in which any one can differ, is, that either, perhaps, he will refuse to give the name of necessity to this property of human actions: But as long as the meaning is understood, I hope the word can do no harm: Or that he will maintain it possible to discover something farther in the operations of matter. But this, it must be acknowledged, can be of no consequence to morality or religion, whatever it may be to natural philosophy or metaphysics. We may here be mistaken in asserting that there is no idea of any other necessity or connexion in the actions of body: But surely we ascribe nothing to the actions of the mind, but what everyone does, and must readily allow of. We change no circumstance in the received orthodox system with regard to the will, but only in that with regard to material objects and causes. Nothing, therefore, can be more innocent, at least, than this doctrine.

All laws being founded on rewards and punishments, it is supposed as a fundamental principle, that these motives have a regular and uniform influence on the mind, and both produce the good and prevent the evil actions. We may give to this influence what name we please; but, as it is usually conjoined with the action, it must be esteemed a *cause,* and be looked upon as an instance of that necessity, which we would here establish.

The only proper object of hatred or vengeance is a person or creature, endowed with thought and consciousness; and when any criminal or injurious actions excite that passion, it is only by their relation to the person, or connexion with him. Actions are, by their very nature, temporary and perishing; and where they proceed not from some *cause* in the character and disposition of the person who performed them, they can neither redound to his honour, if good; nor infamy, if evil. The actions themselves may be blameable; they may be contrary to all the rules of morality and religion: But the person is not answerable for them; and as they proceeded from nothing in

him that is durable and constant, and leave nothing of that nature behind them, it is impossible he can, upon their account, become the object of punishment or vengeance. According to the principle, therefore, which denies necessity, and consequently causes, a man is as pure and untainted, after having committed the most horrid crime, as at the first moment of his birth, nor is his character anywise concerned in his actions, since they are not derived from it, and the wickedness of the one can never be used as a proof of the depravity of the other.

Men are not blamed for such actions as they perform ignorantly and casually, whatever may be the consequences. Why? but because the principles of these actions are only momentary, and terminate in them alone. Men are less blamed for such actions as they perform hastily and unpremeditately than for such as proceed from deliberation. For what reason? but because a hasty temper, though a constant cause or principle in the mind, operates only by intervals, and infects not the whole character. . . .

It will be equally easy to prove, and from the same arguments, that *liberty*, according to that definition above mentioned, in which all men agree, is also essential to morality, and that no human actions, where it is wanting, are susceptible of any moral qualities, or can be the objects either of approbation or dislike. For as actions are objects of our moral sentiment, so far only as they are indications of the internal character, passions, and affections; it is impossible that they can give rise either to praise or blame, where they proceed not from these principles, but are derived altogether from external violence.

I pretend not to have obviated or removed all objections to this theory, with regard to necessity and liberty. I can foresee other objections, derived from topics which have not here been treated of. It may be said, for instance, that, if voluntary actions be subjected to the same laws of necessity with the operations of matter, there is a continued chain of necessary causes,

pre-ordained and pre-determined, reaching from the original cause of all to every single volition of every human creature. No contingency anywhere in the universe; no indifference; no liberty. While we act, we are, at the same time, acted upon. The ultimate Author of all our volitions is the Creator of the world, who first bestowed motion on this immense machine, and placed all beings in that particular position, whence every subsequent event, by an inevitable necessity, must result. Human actions, therefore, either can have no moral turpitude at all, as proceeding from so good a cause; or if they have any turpitude, they must involve our Creator in the same guilt, while he is acknowledged to be their ultimate cause and author. For as a man, who fired a mine, is answerable for all the consequences whether the train he employed be long or short; so wherever a continued chain of necessary causes is fixed, that Being, either finite or infinite, who produces the first, is likewise the author of all the rest, and must both bear the blame and acquire the praise which belong to them. Our clear and unalterable ideas of morality establish this rule, upon unquestionable reasons, when we examine the consequences of any human action; and these reasons must still have greater force when applied to the volitions and intentions of a Being infinitely wise and powerful. Ignorance or impotence may be pleaded for so limited a creature as man; but those imperfections have no place in our Creator. He foresaw, he ordained, he intended all those actions of men, which we so rashly pronounce criminal. And we must therefore conclude, either that they are not criminal, or that the Deity, not man, is accountable for them. But as either of these positions is absurd and impious, it follows, that the doctrine from which they are deduced cannot possibly be true, as being liable to all the same objections. An absurd consequence, if necessary, proves the original doctrine to be absurd; in the same manner as criminal actions render criminal the original cause, if the connexion between them be necessary and evitable.

This objection consists of two parts, which we shall examine separately; *First*, that, if human actions can be traced up, by a necessary chain, to the Deity, they can never be criminal; on account of the infinite perfection of that Being from whom they are derived, and who can intend nothing but what is altogether good and laudable. Or, *Secondly*, if they be criminal, we must retract the attribute of perfection, which we ascribe to the Deity, and must acknowledge him to be the ultimate author of guilt and moral turpitude in all his creatures.

The answer to the first objection seems obvious and convincing. There are many philosophers who, after an exact scrutiny of all the phenomena of nature, conclude, that the whole, considered as one system, is, in every period of its existence, ordered with perfect benevolence; and that the utmost possible happiness will, in the end, result to all created beings, without any mixture of positive or absolute ill or misery. Every physical ill, say they, makes an essential part of this benevolent system, and could not possibly be removed, even by the Deity himself, considered as a wise agent, without giving entrance to greater ill, or excluding greater good, which will result from it. From this theory, some philosophers, and the ancient *Stoics* among the rest, derived a topic of consolation under all afflictions, while they taught their pupils that those ills under which they laboured were, in reality, goods to the universe; and that to an enlarged view, which could comprehend the whole system of nature, every event became an object of joy and exultation. But though this topic be specious and sublime, it was soon found in practice weak and ineffectual. You would surely more irritate than appease a man lying under the racking pains of the gout by preaching up to him the rectitude of those general laws, which produced the malignant humours in his body, and led them through the proper canals, to the sinews and nerves, where they now excite such acute torments. These enlarged views may, for a moment, please the imagination of a speculative man, who is placed in ease and security; but

neither can they dwell with constancy on his mind, even though undisturbed by the emotions of pain or passion; much less can they maintain their ground when attacked by such powerful antagonists. The affections take a narrower and more natural survey of their object; and by an economy, more suitable to the infirmity of human minds, regard alone the beings around us, and are actuated by such events as appear good or ill to the private system.

The case is the same with *moral* as with *physical* ill. It cannot reasonably be supposed, that those remote considerations, which are found of so little efficacy with regard to one, will have a more powerful influence with regard to the other. The mind of man is so formed by nature that, upon the appearance of certain characters, dispositions, and actions, it immediately feels the sentiment of approbation or blame; nor are there any emotions more essential to its frame and constitution. The characters which engage our approbation are chiefly such as contribute to the peace and security of human society; as the characters which excite blame are chiefly such as tend to public detriment and disturbance: Whence it may reasonably be presumed, that the moral sentiments arise, either mediately or immediately, from a reflection of these opposite interests. What though philosophical meditations establish a different opinion or conjecture; that everything is right with regard to the whole, and that the qualities, which disturb society, are, in the main, as beneficial, and are as suitable to the primary intention of nature as those which more directly promote its happiness and welfare? Are such remote and uncertain speculations able to counterbalance the sentiments which arise from the natural and immediate view of the objects? A man who is robbed of a considerable sum; does he find his vexation for the loss anywise diminished by these sublime reflections? Why then should his moral resentment against the crime be supposed incompatible with them? Or why should not the acknowledgment of a real distinction between vice and virtue be reconcileable to all speculative systems of philosophy, as

well as that of a real distinction between personal beauty and deformity? Both these distinctions are founded in the natural sentiments of the human mind: And these sentiments are not to be controuled or altered by any philosophical theory or speculation whatsoever.

The *second* objection admits not of so easy and satisfactory an answer; nor is it possible to explain distinctly, how the Deity can be the mediate cause of all the actions of men, without being the author of sin and moral turpitude. These are mysteries, which mere natural and unassisted reason is very unfit to handle; and whatever system she embraces, she must find herself involved in inextricable difficulties, and even contradictions, at every step which she takes with regard to such subjects. To reconcile the indifference and contingency of human actions with prescience; or to defend absolute decrees, and yet free the Deity from being the author of sin, has been found hitherto to exceed all the power of philosophy. Happy, if she be thence sensible of her temerity, when she pries into these sublime mysteries; and leaving a scene so full of obscurities and perplexities, return, with suitable modesty, to her true and proper province, the examination of common life; where she will find difficulties enough to employ her enquiries, without launching into so boundless an ocean of doubt, uncertainty, and contradiction!

Questions for Reflection

1. Augustine holds that humans lack freedom after Adam's Fall but are still morally responsible. How plausible is his defense of this view? Why?
2. Do you agree with Hume that the dispute about liberty and necessity is simply a semantic issue? Why?
3. What do you think of Hume's explanation for the times human behavior is unpredictable? Is it convincing? Why?