THE

SYSTEM OF NATURE:

OR,

LAWS OF THE MORAL AND PHYSICAL WORLD.

BY BARON D'HOLBACH,

AUTHOR OF "GOOD SENSE," ETC.

A NEW AND IMPROVED EDITION, WITH NOTES BY DIDEROT.

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that are real and useful to his permanent felicity; let him study nature’s laws; let him study himself; let him consult the bonds which unite him to his fellow mortals; let him tear a-under the fictitious bonds that enchain him to a mere phantom. If his imagination must always feed itself with illusions, if he remains steadfast in his own opinions, if his prejudices are dear to him, let him at least permit others to ramble in their own manner or seek after truth as best suits their inclination; but let him always recollect, that all the opinions, all the ideas, all the systems, all the wills, all the actions of man, are the necessary consequence of his nature, of his temperament, of his organization, and of those causes, either transitory or constant, which modify him: in short, that man is not more a free agent to think than to act; a truth that will be again proved in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XI.

Of the System of Man’s Free Agency.

Those who have pretended that the soul is distinguished from the body, is immaterial, draws its ideas from its own peculiar source, acts by its own energies, without the aid of any exterior object, have, by a consequence of their own system, enfranchised it from those physical laws according to which all beings of which we have a knowledge are obliged to act. They have believed that the soul is mistress of its own conduct, is able to regulate its own peculiar operations, has the faculty to determine its will by its own natural energy; in a word, they have pretended that man is a free agent.

It has been already sufficiently proved that the soul is nothing more than the body considered relatively to some of its functions more concealed than others; it has been shown that this soul, even when it shall be supposed immaterial, is continually modified conjointly with the body, is submitted to all its motion, and that without this it would remain inert and dead: that, consequently, it is subjected to the influence of those material and physical causes which give impulse to the body; of which the mode of existence, whether habitual or transitory, depends upon the material elements by which it is surrounded, that form its texture, constitute its temperament, enter into it by means of the aliments, and penetrate it by their subtility. The faculties which are called intellectual, and those qualities which are styled moral, have been explained in a manner purely physical and natural. In the last place it has been demonstrated that all the ideas, all the systems, all the affections, all the opinions, whether true or false, which man forms to himself, are to be attributed to his physical and material senses. Thus man is a being purely physical; in whatever manner he is considered, he is connected to universal nature, and submitted to the necessary and immutable laws that she imposes on all the beings she contains, according to their peculiar essences or to the respective properties with which, without consulting them, she endows each particular species. Man’s life is a line that nature commands him to describe upon the surface of the earth, without his ever being able to swerve from it, even for an instant. He is born without his own consent; his organization does in nowise depend upon himself; his ideas come to him involuntarily; his habits are in the power of those who cause him to contract them; he is unceasingly modified by causes, whether visible or concealed, over which he has no control, which necessarily regulate his mode of existence, give the hue to his way of thinking, and determine his manner of acting. He is good or bad, happy or miserable, wise or foolish, reasonable or irrational, without his will being for any thing in these various states. Nevertheless, in despite of the shackles by which he is bound, it is pretended he is a free agent, or that independent of the causes by which he is moved, he determines his own will, and regulates his own condition.

However slender the foundation of this opinion, of which every thing ought to point out to him the error, it is current at this day and passes for an incontestable truth with a great number of people, otherwise extremely enlightened; it is the basis of religion, which, supposing relations between man and the unknown being she has placed above nature, has been incapable of imagining,

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how man could either merit reward or deserve punishment from this being, if he was not a free agent. Society has been believed interested in this system; because an idea has gone abroad, that if all the actions of man were to be contemplated as necessary, the right of punishing those who injure their associates would no longer exist. At length human vanity accommodated itself to a hypothesis which, unquestionably, appears to distinguish man from all other physical beings, by assigning to him the special privilege of a total independence of all other causes, but of which a very little reflection would have shown him the impossibility.

As a part subordinate to the great whole, man is obliged to experience its influence. To be a free agent, it were needful that each individual was of greater strength than the entire of nature; or that he was out of this nature, who, always in action her-self, obliges all the beings she embraces to act, and to concur to her general motion; or, as it has been said elsewhere, to conserve her active existence by the motion that all beings produce in consequence of their particular energies, submitted to fixed, eternal, and immutable laws. In order that man might be a free agent, it were needful that all beings should lose their essences; it would be equally necessary that he himself should no longer enjoy physical sensibility; that he should neither know good nor evil, pleasure nor pain; but if this were the case, from that moment he would no longer be in a state to conserve himself, or render his existence happy; all beings would become indifferent to him; he would no longer have any choice; he would cease to know what he ought to love, what it was right he should fear; he would not have any acquaintance with that which he should seek after, or with that which it is requisite he should avoid. In short, man would be an unnatural being, totally incapable of acting in the manner we behold. It is the actual essence of man to tend to his well being, or to be desirous to conserve his existence; if all the motion of his machine spring as a necessary consequence from this primitive impulse; if pain warn him of that which

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act according to this impulse is, because there comes some new cause, some new motive, some new idea, which modifies his brain in a different manner, gives him a new impulse, determines his will in another way, by which the action of the former impulse is suspended: that is, the sight of an agreeable object, or its idea, determines his will to set him in action to procure it: but if a new object or a new idea more powerfully attracts him, it gives a new direction to his will, annihilates the effect of the former, and prevents the action by which it was to be procured. This is the mode in which reflection, experience, reason, necessarily arrests or suspends the action of man's will: without this he would of necessity have followed the anterior impulse which carried him towards a then desirable object. In all this he always acts according to necessary laws, from which he has no means of emancipating himself.

If when tormented with violent thirst, he figures to himself in idea, or really perceives a fountain, whose limpid streams might cool his feverish want, is he sufficient master of himself to desire or not to desire the object competent to satisfy so lively a want? It will no doubt be conceded, that it is impossible he should not be desirous to satisfy it; but it will be said—if at this moment it is announced to him that the water he so ardently desires is poisoned, he will, notwithstanding his vehement thirst, abstain from drinking it: and it has, therefore, been falsely concluded that he is a free agent. The fact, however, is, that the motive in either case is exactly the same: his own conservation. The same necessity that determined him to drink before he knew the water was deleterious, upon this new discovery equally determines him not to drink; the desire of conserving himself either annihilates or suspends the former impulse; the second motive becomes stronger than the preceding, that is, the fear of death, or the desire of preserving himself, necessarily prevails over the painful sensation caused by his eagerness to drink: but, it will be said, if the thirst is very parching, an inconsiderate man without regarding the danger will risk swallowing the water. Nothing is

This example will serve to explain the whole phenomena of the human will. This will, or rather the brain, finds itself in the same situation as a bowl, which, although it has received an impulse that drives it forward in a straight line, is deranged in its course whenever a force superior to the first obliges it to change its direction. The man who drinks the poisoned water appears a madman; but the actions of fools are as necessary as those of the most prudent individuals. The motives that determine the voluptuary and the debaucher to risk their health, are as powerful, and their actions are as necessary, as those which decide the wise man to manage his. But, it will be insisted, the debaucher may be prevailed on to change his conduct: this does not imply that he is a free agent; but that motives may be found sufficiently powerful to annihilate the effect of those that previously acted upon him; then these new motives determine his will to the new mode of conduct he may adopt as necessarily as the former did to the old mode.

Man is said to deliberate, when the action of the will is suspended; this happens when two opposite motives act alternately upon him. To deliberate, is to hate and to love in succession; it is to be alternately attracted and repelled; it is to be moved, sometimes by one motive, sometimes by another. Man only deliberates when he does not distinctly understand the quality of the objects from which he receives impulse, or when experience has not sufficiently apprised him of the effects,
more or less remote, which his actions will produce. He would take the air, but the weather is uncertain; he deliberates in consequence: he weighs the various motives that urge his will to go out or to stay at home; he is at length determined by that motive which is most probable; this removes his indecision, which necessarily settles his will, either to remain within or to go abroad: this motive is always either the immediate or ultimate advantage he finds, or thinks he finds, in the action to which he is persuaded.

Man's will frequently fluctuates between two objects, of which either the presence or the idea move him alternately: he waits until he has contemplated the objects, or the ideas they have left in his brain which solicit him to different actions; he then compares these objects or ideas; but even in the time of deliberation, during the comparison, pendent these alternatives of love and hatred which succeed each other, sometimes with the utmost rapidity, he is not a free agent for a single instant; the good or the evil which he believes he finds successively in the objects, are the necessary motives of these momentary wills; of the rapid motion of desire or fear, that he experiences as long as his uncertainty continues. From this it will be obvious that deliberation is necessary; that uncertainty is necessary; that whatever part he takes, in consequence of this deliberation, it will always necessarily be that which he has judged, whether well or ill, is most probable to turn to his advantage.

When the soul is assailed by two motives that act alternately upon it, or modify it successively, it deliberates; the brain is in a sort of equilibrium, accompanied with perpetual oscillations, sometimes towards one object, sometimes towards the other, until the most forcible carries the point, and thereby extricates it from this state of suspense, in which consists the indecision of his will. But when the brain is simultaneously assailed by causes equally strong that move it in opposite directions, agreeable to the general law of all bodies when they are struck equally by contrary powers, it stops, it is in nesc; it is neither capable to will nor to act; it waits until one of the two causes has obtained sufficient force to overpower the other; to determine its will; to attract it in such a manner that it may prevail over the efforts of the other cause.

This mechanism, so simple, so natural, suffices to demonstrate why uncertainty is painful, and why suspense is always a violent state for man. The brain, an organ so delicate and so mobile, experiences such rapid modifications that it is fatigued; or when it is urged in contrary directions, by causes equally powerful, it suffers a kind of compression, that prevents the activity which is suitable to the preservation of the whole, and which is necessary to procure what is advantageous to its existence. This mechanism will also explain the irregularity, the indecision, the inconsistency of man, and account for that conduct which frequently appears an inexplicable mystery, and which is, indeed, the effect of the received systems. In consulting experience, it will be found that the soul is submitted to precisely the same physical laws as the material body. If the will of each individual, during a given time, was only moved by a single cause or passion, nothing would be more easy than to foresee his actions; but his heart is frequently assailed by contrary powers, by adverse motives, which either act on him simultaneously or in succession; then his brain, attracted in opposite directions, is either fatigued, or else tormented by a state of compression, which deprives it of activity. Sometimes it is in a state of incommotions inaction; sometimes it is the sport of the alternate shocks it undergoes. Such, no doubt, is the state in which man finds himself when a lively passion solicits him to the commission of crime, whilst fear points out to him the danger by which it is attended; such also, is the condition of him whom remorse, by the continued labour of his distracted soul, prevents from enjoying the objects he has criminally obtained.

If the powers or causes, whether exterior or interior, act on the mind of man, tend towards opposite points, his soul, as well as all other bodies, will take a mean direction between the two; and in consequence of the violence with which his soul is urged, his condition becomes sometimes so painful
that his existence is troublesome; he has no longer a tendency to his own peculiar conservation; he seeks after death as a sanctuary against himself, and as the only remedy to his despair: it is thus we behold men, miserable and discontented, voluntarily destroy themselves whenever life becomes insupportable. Man cannot cherish his existence any longer than life holds out charms to him; when he is wrought upon by painful sensations, or drawn by contrary impulsions, his natural tendency is deranged; he is under the necessity to follow a new route; this conducts him to his end, which it even displays to him as the most desirable good. In this manner may be explained the conduct of those melancholy beings, whose tortured consciences, whose chagrin, whose ennui sometimes determine them to renounce life.*

The various powers, frequently very complicated, that act either successively or simultaneously upon the brain of man, which modify him so diversely in the different periods of his existence, are the true causes of that obscurity in morals, of that difficulty which is found, when it is desired to unravel the concealed springs of his enigmatical conduct. The heart of man is a labyrinth, only because it very rarely happens that we possess the necessary gift of judging it; from whence it will appear, that his circumstances, his indecision, his conduct, whether ridiculous or unexpected, are the necessary consequences of the changes operated in him; are nothing but the effect of motives that successively determine his will; which are dependant on the frequent variations experienced by his machine. According to these variations the same motives have not always the same influence over his will; the same objects no longer enjoy the faculty of pleasing him; his temperament has changed, either for the moment, or for ever; it follows as a consequence, that his taste, his desires, his passions, will change:

* See Chapter xiv.—Man is often induced to destroy himself by mental than by bodily pains. A thousand things may cause him to forget his bodily sufferings, whilst in those of the mind his brain is wholly absorbed; and this is the reason why intellectual pleasures are superior to all others.

there can be no kind of uniformity in his conduct; nor any certitude in the effects to be expected.

Choice by no means proves the free agency of man: he only deliberates when he does not yet know which to choose of the many objects that move him, he is then in an embarrassment, which does not terminate until his will is decided by the greater advantage he believes he shall find in the object he chooses, or the action he undertakes. From whence it may be seen, that choice is necessary, because he would not determine for an object, or for an action, if he did not believe that he should find in it some direct advantage. That man should have free agency it were needful that he should be able to will or choose without motive, or that he could prevent motives coercing his will. Action always being the effect of his will once determined, and as his will cannot be determined but by a motive which is not in his own power, it follows that he is never the master of the determination of his own peculiar will; that consequently he never acts as a free agent. It has been believed that man was a free agent because he had a will with the power of choosing; but attention has not been paid to the fact that even his will is moved by causes independent of himself; is owing to that which is inherent in his own organization, or which belongs to the nature of the beings acting on him.† Is he the master of willing not to withdraw his hand from the fire when he fears it will be burnt? Or has he the power to take away from fire the property which makes him fear it? Is he the master of not choosing a dish of meat, which he knows to be agreeable, or analogous to his palate;

† Man passes a great portion of his life without even willing. His will depends on the motive by which he is determined. If he were to render an exact account of every thing he does in the course of each day—from rising in the morning to lying down at night—he would find that not one of his actions have been in the least voluntary; that they have been mechanical, habitual, determined by causes he was not able to foresee; to which he was either obliged to yield, or with which he was allured to acquiesce; he would discover, that all the motives of his labours, of his amusements, of his discourses, of his thoughts, have been necessary; that they have evidently either seduced him or drawn him along.
of not preferring it to that which he knows to be disagreeable or dangerous? It is always according to his sensations, to his own peculiar experience, or to his suppositions, that he judges of things, either well or ill; but whatever may be his judgment, it depends necessarily on his mode of feeling, whether habitual or accidental, and the qualities he finds in the causes that move him, which exist in despite of himself.

All the causes by which his will is actuated, must act upon him in a manner sufficiently marked to give him some sensation, some perception, some idea; whether complete or incomplete, true or false: as soon as his will is determined, he must have felt either strongly or feebly; if this was not the case he would have determined without motive: thus, to speak correctly, there are no causes which are truly indifferent to the will: however faint the impulse he receives, whether on the part of the objects themselves, or on the part of their images or ideas, as soon as his will acts, the impulse has been competent to determine him. In consequence of a slight or feeble impulse, the will is weak; it is this weakness in his will, that is called indifference. His brain with difficulty perceives the sensation it has received; it consequent acts with less vigour, either to obtain or to remove the object or the idea that has modified it. If the impulse is powerful, the will is strong, it makes him act vigorously to obtain or to remove the object which appears to him either very agreeable or very inconvenient.

It has been believed that man was a free agent, because it has been imagined that his soul could at will recall ideas which sometimes suffice to check his most unruly desires.* Thus, the idea of a remote evil, frequently prevents him from enjoying a present and actual good; thus remembrance, which is an almost in- sensible or slight modification of his brain, annihilates, at each instant, the real objects that act upon his will. But he is not master of recalling to himself his ideas at pleasure; their association is independent of him; they are arranged in his brain in despite of him and without his own knowledge, where they have made an impression more or less profound; his memory itself depends upon his organization; its fidelity depends upon the habitual or momentary state in which he finds himself; when his will is vigorous it determined to some object or idea that excites a very lively passion in him, those objects or ideas that would be able to arrest his action, no longer present themselves to his mind; in those moments his eyes are shut to the dangers that menace him; of which the idea ought to make him forbear; he marches forwards headlong towards the object by whose image he is hurried on; reflection cannot operate upon him in any way; he sees nothing but the object of his desires; the salutary ideas which might be able to arrest his progress disappear, or else display themselves either too faintly or too late to prevent his acting. Such is the case with all those who, blinded by some strong passion, are not in a condition to recall to themselves those motives, of which the idea alone, in cooler moments, would be sufficient to deter them from proceeding; the disorder in which they are, prevents their judging soundly; renders them incapable of foreseeing the consequence of their actions; precludes them from applying to their experience; from making use of their reason; natural operations which suppose a justness in the manner of associating their ideas, but to which their brain is then not more competent, in consequence of the momentary delirium it suffers, than their hand is to write whilst they are taking violent exercise.

Man's mode of thinking is necessarily determined by his manner of being; it must therefore depend on his natural organization, and the modification his system receives independently of his will. From this, we are obliged to conclude, that his thoughts, his reflections, his manner of viewing things, of feeling, of judging, of combining ideas, is neither voluntary nor free. In a word, that his soul is neither mistress of the motion excited in it, nor of representing to itself, when wanted, those images or ideas that are capable of counterbalancing the impulse it re-

* St. Augustine says: "Non enim enquam in potestate est quid veniat in mentem."
receives. This is the reason, why man, when in a passion, ceases to reason; at that moment reason is as impossible to be heard, as it is during an ecstasy, or in a fit of drunkenness. The wicked are never more than men who are either drunk or mad; if they reason, it is not until tranquillity is re-established in their machine; then, and not till then, the tardy ideas that present themselves to their mind enable them to see the consequence of their actions, and give birth to ideas that bring on them that trouble, which is designated shame, regret, remorse.

The errors of philosophers on the free agency of man, have arisen from their regarding his will as the *primum mobile*, the original motive of his actions; for want of recurring back, they have not perceived the multiplied, the complicated causes which, independently of him, give motion to the will itself; or which dispose and modify his brain, whilst he himself is purely passive in the motion he receives. Is he the master of desiring or not desiring an object that appears desirable to him? Without doubt it will be answered, no: but he is the master of resisting his desire, if he reflects on the consequences. But, I ask, is he capable of reflecting on these consequences, when his soul is hurried along by a very lively passion, which entirely depends upon his natural organization, and the causes by which he is modified? Is it in his power to add to these consequences all the weight necessary to counterbalance his desire? Is he the master of preventing the qualities which render an object desirable from residing in it? I shall be told: he ought to have learned to resist his passions; to contract a habit of putting a curb on his desires. I agree to it without any difficulty. But in reply, I again ask, is his nature susceptible of this modification? Does his boiling blood, his unruly imagination, the igneous fluid that circulates in his veins, permit him to make, enable him to apply true experience in the moment when it is wanted? And even when his temperament has capacitated him, has his education, the examples set before him, the ideas with which he has been inspired in early life, been suitable to make him contract this habit of pressing his desires? Have not all these things rather contributed to induce him to seek with avidity, to make him actually desire those objects which you say he ought to resist.

The *ambitious man* cries out: you will have me resist my passion; but have they not unceasingly repeated to me that rank, honours, power, are the most desirable advantages in life? Have I not seen my fellow citizens envy them, the nobles of my country sacrifice every thing to obtain them? In the society in which I live, am I not obliged to feel, that if I am deprived of these advantages, I must expect to languish in contempt; to cringe under the rod of oppression?

The *miser* says: you forbid me to love money, to seek after the means of acquiring it: alas! does not every thing tell me that, in this world, money is the greatest blessing; that it is amply sufficient to render me happy? In the country I inhabit, do I not see all my fellow citizens covetous of riches? but do I not also witness that they are little scrupulous in the means of obtaining wealth? As soon as they are enriched by the means which you censure, are they not cherished, considered and respected? By what authority, then, do you defend me from amassing treasure? what right have you to prevent my using means, which, although you call them sordid and criminal, I see approved by the sovereign? Will you have me renounce my happiness?

The *roluptuary* argues: you pretend that I should resist my desires; but was I the maker of my own temperament, which unceasingly invites me to pleasure! You call my pleasures disgraceful; but in the country in which I live, do I not witness the most dissipated men enjoying the most distinguished rank? Do I not behold that no one is ashamed of adultery but the husband it has outraged? do not I see men making trophies of their debaucheries, boasting of their libertinism, rewarded with applause?

The *choleric man* vociferates: you advise me to put a curb on my passions, and to resist the desire of avenging myself: but can I conquer my nature? Can I alter the received opinions of the world? Shall I not be for ever disgraced, infallibly dishonoured in so-
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Of the power of your fellow creature the injuries I have received?

The zealous enthusiast exclaims; you recommend me mildness; you advise me to be tolerant; to be indulgent to the opinions of my fellow men; but is not my temperament violent? Do I not ardently love my God? Do they not assure me, that zeal is pleasing to him; that sanguinary inhuman persecutors have been his friends? As I wish to render myself acceptable in his sight, I therefore adopt the same means.

In short, the actions of man are never free; they are always the necessary consequence of his temperament, of the received ideas, and of the notions, either true or false, which he has formed to himself of happiness; of his opinions, strengthened by example, by education, and by daily experience. So many crimes are witnessed on the earth only because every thing conspires to render man vicious and criminal; the religion he has adopted, his government, his education, the examples set before him, irresistibly drive him on to evil; under these circumstances, morality preaches virtue to him in vain. In those societies where vice is esteemed, where crime is crowned, where venality is constantly recompensed, where the most dreadful disorders are punished only in those who are too weak to enjoy the privilege of committing them with impunity, the practice of virtue is considered nothing more than a painful sacrifice of happiness. Such societies arise, in the lower orders, those excesses which they respect in the higher ranks; and frequently have the injustice to condemn those in the penalty of death, whom public prejudices, maintained by constant example, have rendered criminal.

Man, then, is not a free agent in any one instant of his life; he is necessarily guided in each step by those advantages, whether real or fictitious, that he attaches to the objects by which his passions are roused: these passions themselves are necessary in a being who unceasingly tends towards his own happiness; their energy is necessary, since that depends on his temperament; his temperament is necessary, because it depends on the physical elements which enter into his composition; the modification of this temperament is necessary, as it is the infallible and inevitable consequence of the impulse he receives from the necessary action of moral and physical beings.

In despite of these proofs of the want of free agency in man, so clear to unprejudiced minds, it will, perhaps, be insisted upon with no small feeling of triumph, that if it be proposed to any one, to move or not to move his hand, an action in the number of those called indifferent, he evidently appears to be the master of choosing; from which it is concluded that evidence has been offered of his free agency. The reply is, this example is perfectly simple; man in performing some action which he is resolved on doing, does not by any means prove his free agency: the very desire of displaying this quality, excited by the dispute, becomes a necessary motive, which decides his will either for the one or the other of these actions; what decides him in this instance, or that which persuades him he is a free agent at this moment, is, that he does not discern the true motive which sets him in action, namely, the desire of convincing his opponent: if in the heat of the dispute he insists and asks, "Am I not the master of throwing myself out of the window?" I shall answer him, no; that whilst he preserves his reason there is no probability that the desire of proving his free agency, will become a motive sufficiently powerful to make him sacrifice his life to the attempt; if, notwithstanding this, to prove he is a free agent, he should actually precipitate himself from the window, it would not be a sufficient warranty to conclude he acted freely, but rather that it was the violence of his temperament which spurred him on to this folly. Madness is a state, that depends upon the heat of the blood, not upon the will. A fanatic or a hero, savages death as necessarily as a more phlegmatic man or a coward flies from it. *

* There is, in point of fact, no difference between the man that is cast out of the window by another, and the man who throws himself out of it, except that the impulse in the first instance comes immediately from without, whilst that which determines the fall in the second case, springs from within his own peculiar machine, having its more re-
It is said that free agency is the absence of those obstacles competent to oppose themselves to the actions of man, or to the exercise of his faculties: it is pretended that he is a free agent whenever, making use of these faculties, he produces the effect he has proposed to himself. In reply to this reasoning, it is sufficient to consider that it in nowise depends upon himself to place or remove the obstacles that either determine or resist him; the motive that causes his action is no more in his own power than the obstacle that impedes him, whether this obstacle or motive be within his own machine or exterior of his person: he is not master of the thought presented to his mind, which determines his will; this thought is excited by some cause independent of himself.

To be undeceived on the system of his free agency, man has simply to recur to the motive by which his will is determined; he will always find this motive is out of his own control. It is said: that in consequence of an idea to which the mind gives birth, man acts freely if he encounters no obstacle. But the question is, what gives birth to this idea in his brain? was he the master either to prevent it from presenting itself, or from renewing itself in his brain? Does not this idea depend either upon objects that strike him exteriorly and in despite of himself, or upon causes, that without his knowledge, act within himself and modify his brain? Can he prevent his eyes, cast without design upon any object whatever, from giving him an idea of this object, and from moving his brain? He is not more master of the obstacles; they are the necessary effects of either interior or exterior causes, which alone cause also exterior. When Mutius Scerovala held his hand in the fire, he was as much acting under the influence of necessity (caused by interior motives) that urged him to this strange action, as if his arm had been held by strong men: pride, despair, the desire of bravishing his enemy, a wish to astonish him, an anxiety to intimidate him, &c., were the invisible chains that held his hand bound to the fire. The love of glory, enthusiasm for their country, in like manner caused Codrus and Decius to devote themselves for their fellow-citizens. The Indian Cunamus and the philosopher Peregrinus were equally obliged to burn themselves, by desire of exciting the astonishment of the Grecian assembly.
could find no peculiar, determinable, and invariable principle, capable of in
 continual succession, that persuaded him to depart, even for an instant, from
the several principles to which his mind was
accustomed.

Man, it is said, frequently acts against
his inclination, from whence it is falsely concluded he is a free agent; but when
he appears to act contrary to his inclination, he is always determined to it by
some motive sufficiently efficacious to vanquish this inclination. A sick man,
with a view to his cure, arrives at
conquering his repugnance to the most
disgusting remedies: the fear of pain,
or the dread of death, then becomes
necessary motives; consequently this
sick man cannot be said to act freely.

When it is said, that man is not a
free agent, it is not pretended to com-
pare him to a body moved by a simple
impulsive cause: he contains within
himself causes inherent to his existence;
he is moved by an interior organ, which
has its own peculiar laws, and is itself
necessarily determined in consequence
of ideas formed from perceptions result-
ing from sensations which it receives
from exterior objects. As the mechanism
of these sensations, of these perceptions,
and the manner they engrave ideas on
the brain of man, are not known to him;
because he is unable to unravel all these
motions; because he cannot perceive
the chain of operations in his soul, or
the motive principle that acts within
him, he supposes himself a free agent;
which, literally translated, signifies,
that he moves himself by himself;
that he determines himself without
cause: when he rather ought to say,
that he is ignorant how or for why he
acts in the manner he does. It is true
the soul enjoys an activity peculiar to
itself: but it is equally certain that this
activity would never be displayed, if
some motive or some cause did not put
it in a condition to exercise itself; at
least it will not be pretended that the
soul is able either to love or to hate
without being moved, without knowing
the objects, without having some idea
of their qualities. Gunpowder has
unquestionably a particular activity,
but this activity will never dis-play
itself, unless fire be applied to it; this,
however, immediately sets it in motion.

It is the great complication of motion
in man, it is the variety of his action,
it is the multiplicity of causes that move
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of Man's Free Agency.

 Obliged to content himself with a known cause, constantly produce sensible effects, ever the same, when the circumstances are alike. After this he hesitates not to look upon physical effects as necessary; whilst he refuses to acknowledge necessity in the acts of the human will: these he has, without any just foundation, attributed to a motive-power that acts independently by its own peculiar energy, which is capable of modifying itself without the concurrence of exterior causes, and which is distinguished from all material or physical beings. Agriculture is founded upon the assurance, afforded by experience, that the earth, cultivated and sown in a certain manner, when it has otherwise the requisite qualities, will furnish grain, fruit and flowers, either necessary for subsistence or pleasing to the senses. If things were considered without prejudice, it would be perceived, that in morals, education is nothing more than the agriculture of the mind; that, like the earth, by reason of its natural disposition, of the culture bestowed upon it, of the seeds with which it is sown, of the seasons, more or less favourable that conduct it to maturity, we may be assured that the soul will produce either virtue or vice—moral fruit, that will be either salubrious for man or baneful to society. Morals is the science of the relations that subsist between the minds, the wills, and the actions of men, in the same manner that geometry is the science of the relations that are found between bodies. Morals would be a chimera and would have no certain principles, if it was not founded upon the knowledge of the motives which must necessarily have an influence upon the human will, and which must necessarily determine the actions of human beings.

If, in the moral as well as in the physical world, a cause, of which the action is not interrupted, be necessarily followed by a given effect, it flows consecutively that a reasonable education, grafted upon truth, and founded upon wise laws; that honest principles instilled during youth; virtuous examples continually held forth; esteem attached solely to merit and good actions; contempt and shame and chastisements regularly visiting vice and falsehood and crime, are causes
that would need to be done in the way of man, and would determine the greater number of his species to exhibit virtue. But if, on the contrary, religion, politics, example, public opinion, all labour to countenance wickedness and to train man viciously; if instead of fanning his virtues, they stifle good principles; if instead of directing his studies to his advantage, they render his education either use-less or unprofitable; if this education itself, instead of grounding him in virtue, only inoculates him with vice; if, instead of inculcating reason it imbues him with prejudice; if, instead of making him enamoured of truth, it furnishes him with false notions and with dangerous opinions; if, instead of fostering mildness and forbearance, it kindles in his breast only those passions which are incompatible to himself and hurtful to others; it must be of necessity that the will of the greater number shall determine them to evil.* Here, without doubt, is the real source from whence springs that universal corruption of which moralists, with great justice, so loudly complain, without, however, pointing out those causes of the evil, which are as true as they are necessary. Instead of this, they search for it in human nature; say it is corrupt; blame

* Many authors have acknowledged the importance of a good education, and that youth was the season to feed the human heart with wholesome diet; but they have not felt that a good education is incompatible, and impossible, with the superstition of man, since this commences with giving his mind a false bias; that it is equally inconsistent with arbitrary government, because this always dreads, lest he should become enlightened, and is ever sedulous to render him servile, mean, contemptible, and grovelling; that it is incongruous with laws that are too frequently bottomed on injustice; that it cannot obtain with those received customs that are opposed to good sense; that it cannot exist whilst public opinion is unfavourable to virtue; above all, that it is absurd to expect it from incapable instructors, from masters with weak minds, who have only the ability to infuse into their scholars those false ideas with which they themselves are infected.

† We can scarcely conceive a more baneful doctrine than that which implicates the natural corruption of man, and the absolute need of the grace of God to make him good. Such a doctrine tends necessarily to discourage him; it either makes him sluggish or drives him to despair whilst waiting for this grace. What strange system of morals is that of theologians, who attribute all moral evil to an

man who is incapable of commiserating him for seeking after his own happiness; insist that he must have supernatural assistance to enable him to become good; yet, notwithstanding the supposed free agency of man, it is insisted that nothing less than the author of nature himself is necessary to destroy the wicked desires of his heart; but, alas! this powerful agent himself is found inefficient to control those unhappy propensities, which, under the fatal constitution of things, the most vigorous motives, as has been before observed, are continually infusing into the will of man. He is indeed incessantly exhorted to resist these passions; to stifle and root them out of his heart: but is it not evident they are necessary to his welfare, and inherent in his nature? Does not experience prove them to be useful to his conservation, since they have for object, only to avoid that which may be injurious and to procure that which may be advantageous? In short, is it not easy to be seen, that these passions well directed, that is to say, carried towards objects that are truly useful, that are really interesting to himself, which embrace the happiness of others, would necessarily contribute to the substantial and permanent well-being of society? The passions of man are like fire, at once necessary to the wants of life, and equally capable of producing the most terrible ravages.†

Every thing becomes an impulse to the will: a single word frequently suffices to modify a man for the whole course of his life; to decide for ever his propensities; an infant, who has burned his finger by having approached it too near to the flame of a lighted taper, is warned that he ought to abstain from indulging a similar temptation; a man once punished and despised for having committed a dishonourable action, is not often tempted to continue so
unfavourable a course. Under whatever point of view man is considered, he never acts but after the impulse given to his will, whether it be by the will of others, or by more perceptible physical causes. The particular organization decides the nature of the impulse; souls act upon souls that are analogous; fiery imaginations act with facility upon strong passions; and upon imaginations easy to be inflamed: the surprising progress of enthusiasm, the hereditary propagation of superstition, the transmission of religious errors from race to race, the excessive ardour with which man seizes on the marvellous, are effects as necessary as those which result from the action and reaction of bodies.

In despite of the gratuitous ideas which man has formed to himself on his pretended free agency; in defiance of the illusions of this supposed intimate sense, which, mauge his experience, persuades him that he is master of his will; all his institutions are really founded upon necessity: on this, as on a variety of other occasions, practice throws aside speculation. Indeed, if it was not believed that certain motives embraced the power requisite to determine the will of man, to arrest the progress of his passions; to direct them towards an end, to modify him, of what use would be the faculty of speech? What benefit could arise from education, from legislation, from morals, even from religion itself? What does education achieve, save give the first impulse to the human will; make man contract habits; oblige him to persist in them; furnish him with motives, whether true or false, to act after a given manner? When the father either menaces his son with punishment, or promises him a reward, is he not convinced these things will act upon his will? What does legislation attempt except it be to present to the citizens of a state those motives which are supposed necessary to determine them to perform some actions that are considered worthy; to abstain from committing others that are looked upon as unworthy? What is the object of morals, if it be not to show man that his interest exacts he should suppress the momentary ebullition of his passions, with a view to promote a more certain happiness, a more lasting well-

*Every religion is evidently founded upon fatalism. Among the Greeks they supposed men were punished for their necessary faults—as may be seen in Oracles, in Godsignus, etc., who only committed crimes predicted by the oracles. Christians have made vain efforts to justify God Almighty in throwing the faults of men on their free will, which is opposed to Predestination, another name for fatalism. However, their system of Grace will by no means obviate the difficulty, for God gives grace only to those whom he pleases. In all countries religion has no other foundation than the fatal decrees of an irresistible being who arbitrarily decides the fate of his creatures. All theological hypotheses turn upon this point; and yet those theologians who regard the system of fatalism as false or dangerous, do not see that the Fall of Angels, Original Sin, Predestination, the System of Grace, the small number of the Elect, etc. incontestably prove that religion is a true system of fatalism.

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to man: the philosopher writes, becaused he believes truth must sooner or later prevail over falsehood: theologians and tyrants necessarily hate truth and despise reason, because they believe them prejudicial to their interests; the sovereign, who strives to terrify crime by the severity of his laws, but who, nevertheless, often renders it useful and even necessary to his purposes, presumes the motives he employs will be sufficient to keep his subjects within bounds. All reckon equally upon the power or upon the necessity of the motives they make use of, and each individual flatters himself, either with or without reason, that these motives will have an influence on the conduct of mankind. The education of man is commonly thus defective or ineflicacious, only because it is regulated by prejudice: even when this education is good, it is but too often speedily counteracted and annihilated by every thing that takes place in society. Legislation and politics are very frequently iniquitous, and serve no better purpose than to kindle passions in the bosom of man, which, once set alight, they are no longer competent to restrain. The great art of the moralist should be to point out to man and to those who are intrusted with the office of regulating his will, that their interests are identified; that their reciprocal happiness depends upon the harmony of their passions; that the safety, the power, the duration of empires, necessarily depend on the good sense diffused among the individual members; on the truth of the notions inculcated in the mind of the citizens; on the moral goodness that is sown in their hearts; on the virtues that are cultivated in their breasts. Religion should not be admissible unless it truly fortified and strengthened these motives, and unless it were possible for falsehood to lend real assistance to truth. But in the miserable state into which error has plunged a considerable portion of the human species, man, for the most part, is obliged to be wicked or to injure his fellow creature; the strongest motives invite him to the commission of evil. Religion renders him a useless being; makes him an abject slave; causes him to tremble under its terrors; or else turns him into a furious fanatic, who arbitrary power crushes him and obliges him to become cringing and vicious; law visits crime with punishment only in those who are too feeble to oppose its course, or when it has become incapable of restraining the violent excesses to which a bad government gives birth. In short, education neglected and despised, depends either upon priests, who are impostors, or else upon parents without understanding and devoid of morals, who impress on the duteous mind of their scholars those vices with which they are themselves tormented, and who transmit to them the false opinions which they have an interest in making them adopt.

All this proves the necessity of recurring to the primitive source of man's wanderings, if it be seriously intended to furnish him with suitable remedies. It is useless to dream of correcting his mistakes, until the true causes that move his will are unravelled, or until more real, more beneficial, more certain motives, are substituted for those which are found so ineflicacious and so dangerous both to society and to himself. It is for those who guide the human will who regulate the condition of nations, to seek after these motives with which reason will readily furnish them; even a good book, by touching the heart of a great prince, may become a very powerful cause that shall necessarily have an influence over the conduct of a whole people; that shall decide upon the felicity of a portion of the human race.

From all that has been advanced in this chapter, it results, that in no one moment of his existence is man a free agent. He is not the architect of his own conformation, which he holds from nature; he has no control over his own ideas, or over the modification of his brain; these are due to causes that, in despite of him, and without his own knowledge, unceasingly act upon him; he is not the master of not loving or coveting that which he finds amiable or desirable; he is not capable of refusing to deliberate, when he is uncertain of the effects certain objects will produce upon him; he cannot avoid choosing that which he believes will be most advantageous to him; in the moment when his will is determined
by his choice he is not competent to act otherwise than he does. In what instance, then, is he the master of his own actions? In what moment is he a free agent?*

That which a man is about to do, is always a consequence of that which he has been—of that which he is—of that which he has done up to the moment of the action: his total and actual existence, considered under all its possible circumstances, contains the sum of all the motives to the action he is about to commit; this is a principle the truth of which no thinking being will be able to refuse accrediting: his life is a series of necessary moments; his conduct, whether good or bad, virtuous or vicious, useful or prejudicial, either to himself or to others, is a concatenation of action, as necessary as all the moments of his existence. To live, is to exist in a necessary mode during the points of that duration which succeed each other necessarily: to will, is to acquiesce or not in remaining such as he is: to be free, is to yield to the necessary motives he carries within himself.

If he understood the play of his organs, if he was able to recall to himself all the impulsions they have received, all the modifications they have undergone, all the effects they have produced, he would perceive that all his actions are submitted to that fatality, which regulates his own particular system, as it does the entire system of the universe; no one effect in him, any more than in nature, produces itself by chance; this, as has been before proved, is a word void of sense. All that passes in him, all that is done by him; as well as all that happens in nature, or that is attributed to her, is derived from necessary causes, which act according to necessary laws, and which produce necessary effects from whence necessarily flow others.

Fatality, is the eternal, the immutable, the necessary order, established in nature; or the indispensable connexion of causes that act, with the effects they operate. Conforming to this order, heavy bodies fall; light bodies rise; that which is analogous in matter reciprocally attracts; that which is heterogeneous mutually repels; man congregates himself in society, modifies each his fellow; becomes either virtuous or wicked; either contributes to his mutual happiness, or reciprocates his misery; either loves his neighbour, or hates his companion necessarily, according to the manner in which the one acts upon the other. From whence it may be seen, that the same necessity which regulates the physical, also regulates the moral world, in which every thing is in consequence submitted to fatality. Man, in running over, frequently without his own knowledge, often in despite of himself, the route which nature has marked out for him, resembles a swimmer who is obliged to follow the current that carries him along; he believes himself a free agent, because he sometimes consents, sometimes does not consent, to glide with the stream, which, notwithstanding, always hurries him forward; he believes himself the master of his condition, because he is obliged to use his arms under the fear of sinking.

Volentem ducunt fata, nolentem trahunt. Sene.

The false ideas he has formed to himself upon free agency, are in general thus founded: there are certain deliberation, in the choice, or in the action. Theologians must not, therefore, connect liberty with these operations of the soul, otherwise there will be a contradiction of ideas. If the soul is not free when it wills, deliberates, chooses, or acts, will theologians tell us when it can exercise its liberty?

It is evident that the system of liberty, or free will, has been invented to exonerate God from the evil that is done in this world. But is it not from God man received this liberty? Is it not from God he received the faculty of choosing evil and rejecting the good? If so, God created him with a determination to sin, else liberty is essential to man and independent of God.—See "Treatise of Systems," p. 124.