

ESSAYS

ON

LIBERTY

AND

NECESSITY;

IN WHICH

THE TRUE NATURE OF LIBERTY IS STATED AND DEFENDED,

AND

The principal Arguments used by Mr. EDWARDS, and others, for *NECESSITY*,

ARE CONSIDERED.

IN TWO PARTS.

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By SAMUEL WEST, D. D.

Pastor of the FIRST CHURCH of CHRIST in NEWBEDFORD.

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PART FIRST.

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## *Advertisement.*

**T**HE substance of the FIRST PART of the following Essays was penned about twenty years ago. In reading Mr. Edwards on the Freedom of the Will, several observations occurred to the author, which he communicated, in conversation, to some of his friends. They were pleased to say, that they thought them pertinent and just : and they requested the author to pay more attention to the subject, with the idea of his publishing strictures upon the whole book. Remarks were made upon different parts of it ; but nothing was prepared for publication : The author supposed the public were too much interested in disputes of a political nature to attend to the subject. A young Gentleman, who lived with the author a few years since, copied several letters and detached pieces, which had been written many years before. Several gentlemen perused the manuscript. At their desire, some alteration being made in the arrangement of the observations, and some new remarks being added, it was submitted to the public eye.---An edition was struck off in Boston, and in a few months was out of print.---A Second impression is now offered the public : which, with the Second Part, it is hoped will meet as welcome a reception.



## INTRODUCTION.

**W**HEN we consider the many ingenious and useful discoveries, which have been made in Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Astronomy, we are led into an admiration of the sagacity and penetration of the human mind. But when we turn our thoughts upon Metaphysical Subjects, we shall be astonished at that barrenness and poverty of human genius so frequently discovered in such kind of compositions; many of them being little more than a mere play upon words, abounding with unintelligible terms, and distinctions without a difference. The study of Metaphysics has, by these means, fallen into disrespect among many men of sense and learning.

But I apprehend, that Metaphysics may be made a very useful and profitable study, if we do but keep ourselves within the bounds, and confine ourselves to those limits, which are ordained and established by the Deity. All our knowledge is founded originally on certain first principles and self-evident truths. Whenever we leave these first principles, we wander entirely in the dark, having no clue to guide us. Whoever denies any thing, which we take to be a first principle, puts it out of our power to confute him; because we have no common standard, by which to try his sentiments; and consequently have no means left, by which we can reduce him to an absurdity.

No simple idea can be defined; nor is a self-evident proposition capable of proof: therefore, all first principles must be taken for granted. Every proposition, the truth or falsehood of which we are examining, must be tried by these first principles of common sense. If it be agreeable to these first principles, it is to be received: If it be contrary to them, it is to be rejected.

One great occasion of the confusion and obscurity of metaphysical writers has been the using of terms in a vague and indeterminate manner; frequently with little or no meaning; and sometimes, using the same word in very different senses. Thus the term *cause* has been used, sometimes to signify the efficient, or that which produces an effect; sometimes for the instrument by which a thing is effected, or brought to pass; sometimes for the mere occasion, upon the account of which an event does take place; and sometimes it signifies the end for which a thing is brought to pass or effected.--- The using of a term in such a variety of senses tends eminently to render a discourse perplexed and obscure.

Treating abstract terms as though they signified real beings, that had distinct natures and essences of their own, is another cause of great obscurity in metaphysical writings. Whereas abstract terms, when used by themselves, mark no particular being, and are like cyphers in Arithmetic, which by themselves signify nothing; and only acquire a meaning when annexed to an integer. The case is much the same with respect to abstract terms, especially those which are names of the modes, attributes, or properties of beings. For as no mode or attribute can be conceived to exist separate from the substance, of which it is the mode or attribute; so the names of modes or attributes by themselves signify nothing; and only acquire a meaning, when, in our own minds, we connect them with the substances, of which they are the modes or attributes. Thus, Virtue, Vice, and Volition are the names of certain modes or attributes of moral agents, which acquire a real meaning, when, in our own minds, we connect them with their proper agents. But when we treat of them as real beings, distinct from their proper agents, we then talk in the dark, and use terms without a meaning.

This reminds me of a laboured section in Mr. Edwards' Book on the freedom of the will, to prove that "the essence of Virtue and Vice consists, not in their cause, but in their nature." Plain, common sense will inform us, that the essence of every real being consists in

in its nature, and not in its cause. Now, if Virtue and Vice be real beings, and not mere modes or attributes of rational beings, then doubtless their essence consists in their nature, not in their cause; and consequently they may be rewarded or punished, without at all affecting the rational agents, in whom these creatures happen accidentally to reside. But if he really meant, that Virtue and Vice were not creatures, or proper substances of themselves, but only mere modes or attributes of a rational agent, then the proposition amounts to this, that the essence of a moral agent, acting virtuously or viciously, consists, not in its cause, but in its nature. If this is all that he meant, he had no occasion to prove it; for no person will dispute it. But if he meant, that Virtue and Vice were neither attributes of a rational agent, nor yet distinct substances from it; but something distinct from both, I must be entirely at a loss for his meaning, and therefore can determine nothing about it.

My design, in the following Essays, is to take notice of the principal arguments brought in support of the doctrine of the necessity of human Volition. But before I enter upon the consideration of those arguments, it will be proper to consider Mr. Edwards' distinction of necessity into moral and natural.

Natural necessity, according to him, has reference to some supposable voluntary opposition, or endeavor, that is insufficient; and that a thing will take place, notwithstanding our endeavor against it, or opposition to it. This necessity, he says, excuses us from all blame; because our endeavors are resisted and overcome by a superior force. But he tells us, that no such opposition or contrary will and endeavor is supposable in the case of a moral necessity. For this reason, a moral necessity does not excuse from blame; but the stronger the moral necessity is for doing wrong, the greater is the crime. Mr. Edwards farther observes, that moral necessity may be as absolute as natural necessity; i. e. the effect may be as perfectly connected with its moral cause, as a naturally necessary effect is with its natural cause:

cause: And further, he lets us know, that he would not be understood to mean, that the nature of things is not as much concerned in a moral, as in a natural necessity. So that the principal, if not the only difference between a natural necessity and inability, and a moral necessity and inability, is, that, in the former case, the opposition and endeavor against what does take place is overcome and borne down by a superior force; but, in the latter kind of necessity and inability; there is no opposition and endeavor, that is overcome and conquered by any superior force.

But if we attend to the matter, we shall find, that here is a distinction without a difference; and that Mr. Edwards's moral necessity and inability are attended with as much insufficient opposition and endeavor, as his natural necessity and inability are: For he tells us, that the mind is always determined by the strongest motive; consequently the opposition or endeavor of a weaker motive is always insufficient, being borne down and overcome by the superior force of a stronger motive. And, if I mistake not, by the strongest motive, he means an act of will: For he thinks it more accurate to say, that the will always is, as the greatest apparent good is, than to say, that the will is always determined by the greatest apparent good: and the reason he gives, is this, that the greatest apparent good, or what appears most agreeable, seems hardly to be properly and perfectly distinct from the mind's preferring and choosing. Now, the greatest apparent good, or that which appears most agreeable and pleasing, is, undoubtedly, the same thing as the strongest motive: But the greatest apparent good, according to Mr. Edwards, seems not to be properly distinct from the mind's preferring and choosing. Hence it follows, that the greatest apparent good, an act of will, choice, and the strongest motive, are all one and the same thing: Consequently, a weaker motive, being a weaker good, is a weaker volition; therefore, the stronger volitions overcome the opposition from the weaker volitions: So that there may be will and endeavor against, or diverse from,

from, present acts of will; though Mr. Edwards asserts, that this is not a supposable case. Yet, I think I have proved, from his own words, that this must be a case, which, according to his account of the matter, must frequently happen.

But he grants, that there may be will and endeavor against future acts of the will---the acts of the will, at one time, may be against the acts of the will, at another time; and there may be desires and endeavors to prevent or excite future acts of the will:---but that such desires and endeavors be, in many cases, rendered insufficient and vain, through fixedness of habit. Again, he says, that the will may remotely and indirectly resist itself, and do it in vain, in case of strong habits. He also asserts, that reason may resist present acts of the will, and its resistance be insufficient. So that there are no less than four different kinds of insufficient opposition and endeavor, which are involved in his idea of moral necessity and moral inability, viz. 1. Weaker motives may oppose stronger motives. 2. There may be present acts and desires against future acts of the Will. 3. The will may remotely and indirectly resist itself. And, 4. Reason may resist present acts of the will. Now, if an insufficient opposition and endeavor render a man free from blame in what he calls natural necessity and natural inability, they must equally excuse a man from blame in the case of moral necessity and moral inability.

It appears to me very strange, that Mr. Edwards should assert, that will and endeavor against, or diverse from, present acts of the will, are, in no case, supposable, when he has before asserted, that the greatest apparent good, or that which appears most agreeable and pleasing to the mind, and the mind's preferring and choosing, seem hardly to be properly and perfectly distinct. For, if this be true,---that the greatest apparent good, or that which appears most agreeable and pleasing to the mind, is the same as an act of will, or choice; then the goodness, agreeableness, or pleasingness of the object, as it appears to the mind, must be



be the only thing intended by the terms *willing* and *choosing*. Hence it follows, that the weakest apparent good is the weakest choice, which is resisted and overcome by the greatest apparent good; that is, by the greatest or strongest choice.

It will not help the matter, at all, to appropriate the terms *willing* and *choosing* to signify only the greatest apparent good: For names, being only arbitrary sounds, cannot alter the nature of things: For if the goodness, agreeableness, or pleasantness of the object as it appears to the mind, be the only thing intended by willing and choosing; then both the weakest or smallest apparent good, and the strongest or greatest apparent good, having the nature and essence of Volition, and differing from each other only in degree, the one may be called the greatest or strongest volition; and the other the weakest or smallest volition, with the greatest propriety. According to this definition, it most certainly follows, that the weakest or smallest choice---that is, will and endeavor against, or diverse from, present acts of the will, do frequently take place; and consequently, that Mr. Edwards's distinction between a moral necessity and inability, and a natural necessity and inability, is a distinction without a difference.

According to Mr. Edwards, motives are the cause of volition;---and the existence of the acts of the will is properly the effect of their motives. Now, by *cause* I understand that which produces an effect; i. e. an efficient: and, by an *efficient*, I understand an agent; and, by an *agent*, I understand a mind: For I have no idea, that any thing can properly deserve the name of an agent, i. e. of an active being, but only a mind. When other things are called agents, it must be in a popular, improper and figurative sense. If this be true, it will follow, that if motives be causes, which produce effects, they are properly minds, which have a real existence: which is to me, a thing quite incomprehensible.

He observes, that *Chubb* frequently calls motives and excitements to the action of the will, the passive ground

ground or reason of that action; "which," he says, "is a remarkable phrase; than which, I presume, there is none more unintelligible, and void of distinct and consistent meaning, in all the writings of Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas." Now, I must confess, that Mr. Edwards, by making motives the cause of the acts of the will, and by declaring, that the existence of the acts of the will is the effect of their motives, appears full as unintelligible to me as *Chubb* could possibly appear to him. For if by motives he means certain energies or operations of Deity raising ideas in the mind, through the intervention of the senses, this will only prove, that the Deity, by means of our senses, is the cause of all our perceptions; which is nothing at all to the purpose; unless he means to assert, that volitions are nothing more than mere perceptions: And this, we have already observed, seems to be his sentiment, when he says, that the greatest apparent good, or the most pleasing appearance and choice, seem hardly to be properly distinct. But Doct. Wells, in his Essay on Moral Agency, has boldly spoken it out; for he says, p. 65, the perception of the beauty of an object is not the cause or ground of choice, nor any thing distinct from it. Now, it is certain, that we are passive in our perceptions; which will appear from this single consideration, that if one be confined to a room, it depends not on his will, whether he shall hear the music performed in that room or not. With what propriety then can these gentlemen tell us of the acts of the will? For if the acts of the will be nothing but mere perceptions, in which we are wholly passive, to tell of acts of will, signifies the same as active passiveness, or passive activeness, which is a contradiction. But if volition and agreeable perception be one and the same thing, then motive and volition are one and the same thing: For nothing can be a motive but an agreeable perception; or, which is the same thing, motive is the perceiving of the fitness of an object to answer a particular purpose: Therefore, if motive be agreeable perception, and agreeable perception be

be volition, it follows, that if motive be the cause of an act of will, then an act of will is the cause of an act of will---if choice be determined by motive, then choice is determined by choice; and the first act of choice must be determined by a preceeding act of choice; which will run him into the same gross absurdity, which he charges upon the gentlemen whom he opposes.

In order to avoid confusion upon the subjects of Liberty and Necessity, I shall observe, that there are three essential faculties or properties of the mind, which ought always to be considered distinctly, and should never be confounded nor blended together; and these are Perception, Propension, and Will. The last only is properly the active faculty of the mind. In Perception I include apprehension, judgment, and memory; for memory is only the reviving of past perceptions, with a consciousness, that we have had those perceptions before. Judgment is the perceiving of the agreement or disagreement of two or more things compared together. Apprehension is the steady and quick perception of the reality of things presented to our view.

The active faculty is exerted in acquiring many of our perceptions: But still perceptions are no acts of the will. Thus, a man is active in opening his eyes, and turning them to the light: But when he has done so, it depends not upon his will, whether he shall see or not. Thus, also, in demonstrating the truth of a proposition, a man is active in orderly arranging the several steps of the demonstration: But when he has done that, the perception of the truths demonstrated depends not upon an act of his will. By propension I mean to include inclination, affection, passion. These are all entirely distinct from the Will. That bodily appetites, such as hunger, thirst, drowsiness, &c. are involuntary, I suppose will be allowed: And we may say the same of mental propensions, such as fear, love, anger, &c. Thus, a man, who, in his childhood, had contracted a superstitious fear of being alone in the dark, may, at adult age, be convinced of the absurdity of such a fear; and may choose to be rid of it; and yet he

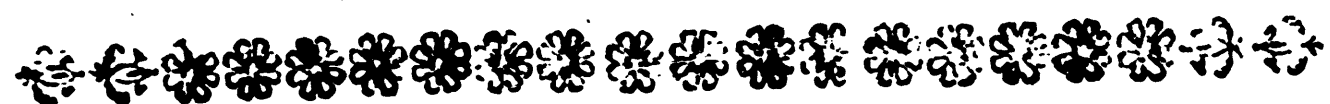
he may find that irrational passion to be very strong in his mind, even at the very moment when he wills to oppose it. In like manner, a man may love a person, whom he knows to be utterly unworthy of his affections, and may really choose to eradicate this propension from his mind; and yet he may find this passion rising in his breast, in direct opposition to his will and choice. And the same observations may be made with respect to every other propension in the human mind. They may all be in direct opposition to present acts of will and choice. Were not this the case, there could be no struggle in the mind to overcome wrong propensions and vicious habits: but common experience will teach us, that there is frequently a very great struggle in the mind to gain the victory over vile affections.

We know, that all voluntary exertions do assist the mind in the perception of truth: So persevering in voluntary exertions may enable us to increase or diminish the strength of particular propensions; and to eradicate habits, and to acquire contrary ones. But this we know is a very arduous task; which could not be the case, if volition and propension were the same thing; unless we should suppose, that the will did directly oppose its own present acts, which is absurd.

I would observe, that Mr. Edwards' necessity of volitions is a necessity of connexion, viz. that volition is an effect, which is inseparably and infallibly connected with its cause: So that whenever the cause operates, the effect will follow; and that the effect, under those rigid circumstances, cannot be otherwise than it is; that is, when all the antecedent or previous circumstances to action take place, the action must inevitably follow; consequently the necessity of volitions taking place must be in the previous circumstances, or cause: For this cause is considered as a necessitating cause; and these previous circumstances are supposed to make the action or volition necessary. I shall therefore call this kind of necessity, an antecedent or previous necessity of action or volition. This I do to distinguish it from what I call a logical necessity; by which I mean,

that it is impossible for a thing to be, and not to be, at the same time : That is, when it is a truth, that a thing does exist at any time, it cannot be a truth, that it does not exist at the same time. If it be a truth, that A was born in America, it cannot be a truth, that he was born in France. Here we see, that, in a logical necessity, the truth of the real existence of the thing in question is premised, or taken for granted ; and then it is inferred, that its non-existence cannot be true.--- This shews, that a logical necessity is subsequent to the existence of the thing in question ; and therefore can have nothing to do with the question about volition, whether it take place necessarily or not.

It is surprising, that both Mr. Edwards and his followers seem to have confounded this logical or subsequent necessity with their notion of an antecedent or previous necessity of volition. But of this matter, I shall have occasion to speak more fully in my Essay on foreknowledge. But to conclude my introduction, I would observe, that when there is a real difference about first principles---that is, when one denies what the other takes to be the plain principles of common sense, there is no foundation left for a dispute ; but each must look upon the other as insane, or wrong-headed. Modesty, indeed, ought to make us suspect ourselves ; but let the wrong-headedness be on which side it will, so long as it remains, we have no common standard, to which we can make our appeal ; and, consequently, have no means, by which to terminate our dispute.



# ESSAY I.

*Concerning the NATURE of that LIBERTY or FREEDOM,  
which is maintained in these ESSAYS.*

**B**Y Liberty, or Freedom, we mean a power of acting, willing or choosing : And by a power of acting, we mean, that when all circumstances necessary for action have taken place, that then the mind can act, or not act. By action here, we mean internal action, or volition, in contradistinction to external action, or that which is consequent upon volition.

Now, when we say, the mind acts, it implies, that there is some object in the view of the mind, about which it exercises itself. If there were no objects in the view of the mind, there could be no action ; for there would be nothing for the mind to act upon.

To act, to determine, to will, or to choose, is to be free : For, in these Essays, I shall use these words as synonymous terms. But, that the reader may not be misled, I would observe, that choice, as it is commonly used, signifies preference ; and yet it is certain, that between two objects equally eligible, the mind is not restrained from acting : For example---Of two eggs equally good, we can determine to take one, and leave the other : But it cannot be said, that we prefer that, which we have taken, to that, which we have left ; because, according to the question, they are both considered as equally eligible. Therefore, the word choice, when used about the determination of the mind respecting the things that appear to us equally eligible, does not include in it, the idea of preference.

Determining is often used to signify judging, and belongs to the perceptive faculty. But when we apply



it to the active faculty, it is the same with volition: And this is the sense, in which we shall use it in these Essays. Hence, according to our definition and use of the word determine, there is a manifest impropriety in the question, "*What determines the Will?*" For it is the same as to ask, What determines Determination? What wills the Will? Or what chooses choice? And this will shew in what sense we use the term self-determination; not to signify, that self acts on self, and produces volition; or, that the mind, somehow, determines to will; i. e. wills to will, or chooses to choose. But the sense, in which we use self-determination, is simply this, that we ourselves determine; i. e. that we ourselves will, or choose; that we ourselves act; i. e. that we are agents, and not mere passive beings; or, in other words, that we are the determiners, in the active voice; and not the determined, in the passive voice.

By our definition of self-determination, we have set aside the notion, that the will determines all the present acts of the will: For we entirely join with Mr. Edwards in exploding that idea. This will greatly reduce our dispute, and confine it to much narrower limits than it was before.

But we cannot agree with Mr. Edwards in his assertion, "*that motive is the cause of volition.*" By motive, we understand the occasion, reason, end, or design, which an agent has in view, when he acts; therefore, we say, that the mind acts upon motives; i. e. when the mind acts or chooses, it always has some end, design, or reason, which is the occasion of its acting, or choosing; therefore, motives, in our sense of the term, are the previous circumstances, which are necessary for action. But we say, that when these previous circumstances have taken place, i. e. in Mr. Edwards' style, "*when motives have done all they can do,*" the mind may act, or not act; i. e. that there is no infallible connexion between motive and action: that though it be true, that the mind never acts without some reason, or design in acting, yet there is no need of assigning a reason for not acting.

Our

Our experience will inform us, that there are many things, which appear fit and agreeable, which are never chosen; nor yet properly refused; i. e. the mind feels no abhorrence of them; nor does it will the absence of them. They pass through the mind as agreeable things; and that is all that can be said of them.--- We may observe further, that when two different things appear equally eligible to the mind, we find no difficulty in taking one, and leaving the other. Mr. Edwards allows, that two things may appear equally eligible to the mind: but, in this case, he supposes, that we are determined by accident---one is nigher to us than the other, or is last in the eye or mind. Let us suppose, that I am at a Gentleman's table---he asks me which I choose, tea, coffee, or chocolate: They are neither of them present to affect my eye; and I am told, that either of them can be had, with equal ease; and they all of them appear equally eligible to my mind. I determine to take coffee. Was the reason of determining to take coffee, because coffee was last in my mind. Chocolate was mentioned last. Surely, then, it was not the sound that caused the coffee to be last in my mind. What, then, was the reason, or accident, which caused the coffee to be last in my mind? I believe, that it will be impossible, in this, and a multitude of similar instances, to assign any accident or circumstance, which determines the mind to its choice among things which appear equally fit and eligible. Consequently, here is an undeniable proof of the liberty for which we contend: And this instance will explain my idea, that there always is a reason for acting or choosing: But, that there is not always a reason for not acting; and that things may appear eligible to us, and yet not be chosen; e. g. I accepted the coffee, because I wanted some refreshment: Coffee appeared to me properly suited to answer my desire. This was a sufficient reason for my receiving the coffee. The other two appeared equally eligible: About them I exerted no act: but this, being a mere negation, could require no positive reason.

All

All who believe that there is a Deity, must grant that he has a self-determining power: For, he being the first cause, his volitions cannot be determined by any cause antecedent or extrinsic to himself. But if this be denied, then let us suppose two modes of conduct, or two very different plans of conduct, should appear equally fit and eligible to the Divine Mind: and suppose, that it should be absolutely necessary for the preservation of the universe that one of them should take place: If he must be determined by the strongest motive, it is impossible that he should adopt either of them, according to the sentiment of these gentlemen; even though the whole universe should rush into ruin for want of one of them. This makes the Deity the minister of blind fate or chance, and not able to do that which is wisest and best: For it is certainly wisest and best, that one of these plans should take place; because it is certainly wisest and best to preserve the universe from ruin. But the two plans for its preservation being equally fit, there can be no particular reason why one should be adopted rather than the other. Again, if every volition, both in God and the creature, must be determined by the greatest apparent good, or by the strongest motive; and if any event should take place, that was not thus determined, it must be the effect of mere fate or chance; then it will follow, that we can have no evidence of the existence of the Deity: For, though we see innumerable tokens of wisdom and design in the works of creation, yet we cannot say, of any one thing, but that something else might have taken place, that would have been equally wise and fit as that which has taken place; and therefore, possibly, all that we see may be owing to fate and chance.

We certainly feel ourselves agents---feel ourselves free, and accountable for our conduct---we feel ourselves capable of praise and blame. How all these things can be reconciled to the doctrine of necessity, I cannot conceive.

I have nothing to do with the notion of liberty of indifference, if it mean any thing different from the definition

definition of liberty which we have given above. There remains, therefore, only two arguments more for me to take notice of---The first is, that volition is an effect, and has a cause---The second is, that foreknowledge proves the necessity of volition.



## ESSAY II.

*That VOLITION is not properly an EFFECT, which has  
a CAUSE.*

**I**N order to determine whether volition be properly an effect, and have a cause, we must define the terms volition, cause, and effect. Now, volition is an abstract term, and is the name of a certain property, which belongs to all intelligent beings, from the Deity, down to man. From observing, that all rational beings are agents, we, in our own minds, separate that which is peculiar to each individual, and fix upon that exertion of the active principle which is common to them all, and call it by the name of volition. Now, we observed, in the introduction, that abstract terms are like cyphers in arithmetic: for as cyphers by themselves signify nothing, but acquire a meaning when annexed to an integer; so abstract terms, when used by themselves, have no meaning: But whenever, in our own minds, we join them to a subject, they then acquire a meaning, and may be used with very great propriety. This point is so plain, that it hardly needs any illustration. For certainly a property without a subject is absurd, and cannot be conceived to exist. Thus volition, or an act of will, is the exercise of a property of a mind; and when it is referred to a proper subject, implies the agent acting or willing or operating. Used in this sense, it is intelligible: But if, in our own minds, we attempt to consider it as something that has a real existence of itself, we shall be confused, and talk wholly without ideas.

Cause and effect are relative terms. Nothing is a cause which does not produce an effect: And nothing

is an effect, which is not produced by a cause. Now, no being can become a cause; that is, an efficient, or that which produces an effect, but by first operating, acting, or energising: Consequently, operativeness or activeness is that which constitutes a being a cause. A being, that is inoperative and inactive, is no cause; for he produces no effect; operativeness or activeness being essential to the idea of an efficient cause, can never, with any propriety, be considered as an effect. Now, volition, when used with a proper meaning, i. e. when reduced to the being of which it is the property in exercise, can signify nothing but the being operating or acting; consequently, volition, when used intelligibly, is so far from being an effect, that it is really an efficient cause. It will doubtless be allowed, that an efficient is a being operating or acting, and that the mind, willing or choosing, is only the mind operating or acting; i. e. it is the mind causing. But if the operativeness or activeness, which is essential to the idea of a cause, is itself an effect, then its cause must operate to produce said effect; and consequently, that operativeness, being an effect, must have another cause to produce it; and so on *in infinitum*.

If, then, volition be only the mind, considered as operating or acting, it can, with no propriety, be considered as an effect: For it will unavoidably lead us into the absurd conclusion of an infinite series of causes and effects, which is entirely excluding the idea of a first cause.

Mr. Edwards, and his followers, grant, that the Deity is a first cause---a self-existing being---being not an effect produced by an extrinsic cause; consequently, none of his essential attributes can be effects, either of himself, or of any other being; for that would imply a cause of the first cause. Motives, then, cannot be the cause of the Divine volitions: For this would be to assert, that motives were the cause of the first cause. Therefore, by Divine volition, we must understand the Deity, considered as operating, willing, or causing. If, then, we must grant, that volition in Deity



is no effect, but is only the Deity considered as willing or causing, it will follow, that to assert, that volition is no effect, is not in itself an absurdity; for, if it were, it could not be predicated of Deity. Why may we not affirm, that volition in the creature is no effect; but is only the agent acting.

We grant, that the human mind has no power nor faculty, but what it has received from the Creator. But is there any absurdity in saying, that the Deity has made man an agent? But how can he be an agent, if volition be the effect of an extrinsic cause? Every effect is wholly passive with regard to the cause which produces it: For no effect contributes any thing toward its own existence. Consequently, if human volition be an effect, man must be passive in willing. But if man be passive in willing, he can be active in nothing else; i. e. he is no agent, but a mere passive machine. But if man be active in willing, then volition cannot be the effect of any extrinsic cause, and will be nothing but the mind acting or operating.

But it will be said, that whatever has a beginning in time must be an effect: but human volition has a beginning in time; therefore, human volition must be an effect. Answer—It is very true, that every substance, which has a beginning in time, must be an effect. But how does this prove, that a substance, which has a beginning in time, may not be an agent. And if there be a created substance, that is an agent, how does it appear, that the willing or acting of such a being must be an effect produced by an extrinsic cause? Is there any thing in the idea of time, which implies, that a man cannot act without being determined to act by an extrinsic cause? The Deity has not only acted from all eternity, but is continually acting upon the whole creation, for the preservation and government of it. Shall we call these operations of Deity upon the creation, effects, because they take place in time? These operations or energies of Deity are only Deity considered as acting. But if these energies or operations of Deity, by which he produces effects in the universe, are themselves

selves effects, then the Deity, who is an unchangeable Being, is constantly producing changes in himself, which is a palpable contradiction. If then the energies of Deity, which take place in time, are not to be considered as effects, why should the energies or volitions of the human mind be considered as effects, because they take place in time?

I have been asked the question, whether volition be not an accidental modification of the human mind? If the term volition be used by the querist to signify the mind choosing, or the agent acting, then all the question will amount to, is, whether the mind, in choosing or acting, do not modify itself? If this be the sense of the question, and it be answered in the affirmative, then it will follow, that the modification in question is the consequence or effect of the mind willing or choosing. But the effect of the mind choosing, i. e. the effect of volition, will not prove, that volition is an effect; but the contrary, viz. that it is a cause. But if by the question be meant something distinct from the agent acting, or mind willing, the question must remain unanswered by me; because it is perfectly unintelligible.

It appears to me very surprising how men ever happened to conceive, that volition was an effect, seeing that activeness is so essentially involved in the idea of a cause; and that it is certain, that volition can mean nothing, but only the mind acting. And beside, if volition were an effect, we could not be causes of effects, as I have already observed. At the most, a man could only be a mere passive instrument, or medium, made use of by a cause to produce effects, like an ax in the hand of the woodman; and, consequently, we could have no more ideas of cause and effect, than a blind man has of colours, or a deaf man of sounds. For we, being passive in our ideas of sensations, they could never suggest to us the ideas of cause and effect; and if volition, or internal action, be the effect of an extrinsic cause, our reflections could never afford us an example of an efficient cause. Now, as all our ideas arise



arise either from sensation or reflection, if neither of them afford us an instance of an efficient cause, we must remain forever ignorant, and destitute of the ideas of cause and effect. Again, if our volitions, or internal actions, were the effects of an extrinsic cause, we could never have the ideas of dependence and independence. Now, if we had not the ideas of cause and effect, of dependence and independence, we could never connect our ideas together; i. e. we could not be rational beings: We could have no more claim to the character of rationality, than the very lowest of the animal creation. We might have a greater number of sensations, but no more reason than an oyster. But as we are rational beings, it follows, that our volitions are not the effects of an extrinsic cause; but, that we are self-determined. Our consciousness, that we are self-active, suggests to us the ideas of cause and effect, of dependence and independence. Conscious, that we ourselves are the determiners, and not the determined; i. e. that we are agents, and not patients, we have the idea of our independence, in willing or choosing. Conscious, that many things take place in consequence of our acting or determining, we attain the ideas of cause and effect; in consequence of which, we become capable of connecting our ideas, and of being rational creatures. If any one dislike this account of the matter, let him inform me how we came by the ideas of independence, efficiency, &c. If these ideas be not in consequence of experiencing in ourselves, that, in willing and choosing, we act independently of any extrinsic cause, from what quarter do they arise?

If volition mean nothing, but only the mind willing, or the agent acting, then it cannot be considered as being an effect of any cause whatever, or as having any proper existence of its own; it must be considered only as a term expressive of the operativeness or activeness of an agent upon some particular subject; being the relation of the energy exerted by a cause, in producing an effect. And to justify this assertion, I have the authority of Mr. Edwards himself. "*The word passion,*"  
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he says, "*when set in opposition to action, or rather activeness, is merely a relative term. It signifies no effect nor cause, nor any proper existence; but is the same with passiveness, or a being passive, or a being acted upon by something, which is a mere relation of a thing to some power or force, exerted by some cause producing effect in it, or upon it. And action, when set properly in opposition to passion or passiveness, is no real existence. It is not the same with an action; but is a mere relation. It is the activeness of something on another thing, being the opposite relation to the other, viz. a relation of power or force exerted by some cause toward another thing, which is the subject of the effect of that power. Indeed the word action is frequently used to signify something not merely relative, but more absolute, and a real existence; as when we say, an action, when the word is not used transitively, but absolutely, for some motion or exercise of body or mind; without any relation to any object or effect. And as used thus, it is not properly the opposite of passion, which ordinarily signifies nothing absolute, but merely the relation of being acted upon. And therefore, if the word action be used in the like relative sense, then action and passion are only two contrary relations.*"\* Hence it is very clear, that according to Mr. Edwards himself, we cannot be charged with holding, that events take place without a cause. But, if I am not very much mistaken, according to Mr. Edwards' principles, there can be no such thing as an efficient cause existing in the universe: For if volition signify the operativeness of the mind, or the mind acting; and yet, at the same time, is properly the effect of an extrinsic cause, it will follow, that the mind is only the passive subject of that cause, which produces in it the effect, viz. volition. But nothing can be an effect, which is not produced by the operativeness of an agent. But this operativeness, by which volition is produced, must be the effect of some other being, producing in the agent, as a passive subject, that operativeness, which  
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\* See Inquiry, page 203.

produces volition ; and, consequently, that operativeness can be no efficient ; but only a mere instrument in the production of volition ; and this operativeness, being the effect of some other being, must take place in consequence of the operativeness of another being, which operativeness, being also an effect of the operativeness of another being, will lead us to the effect of an effect *in infinitum* : So that there will be an infinite series of effects, without any efficient cause ; which will prove, that all things are produced by an efficient nothing, or an effectual no-cause.

We learn from what has been said, that no agent can bring any effects to pass, but what are consequent upon his acting ; i. e. that all effects are in consequence of the activeness or operativeness of some being ; therefore it is very absurd to call the acting or activeness of a being, an effect ; because it introduces the utmost obscurity into language, by confounding and blending things together, which are very different.

If the followers of Mr. Edwards grant, as I think they must, that the Divine volitions are no effects, either produced by the Deity, or by any extrinsic cause, then they must grant, that the Deity has the power of self-determination in our sense of the term. Consequently, our idea of liberty, as it respects the Deity, is just. It lies with them to prove, that this kind of liberty is an incommunicable attribute ; otherwise we shall take it for granted, that we are in possession of it.



## E S S A Y III.

*The* DIVINE PRESCIENCE *does not imply the*  
NECESSITY of FUTURE EVENTS.

**W**E shall endeavor to shew, in this Essay, that *infallible foreknowledge* in the Deity does not prove, that *events* take place in consequence of an *antecedent* or *previous necessity* ; that it only proves a *logical necessity*, or a *necessity of consequence* ; that is, it being certain that a thing *will* take place, it follows, that to assert that it will *not* take place, must be false, and cannot be true : For it is impossible, that a thing should exist and not exist at the same time. But as the existence of the thing in question must certainly be known before we can draw the conclusion, that its non-existence must be false ; it follows, that this kind of necessity can never be urged, with any kind of propriety, to prove that the *existence* of the thing in question does or will take place in consequence of any previous necessity, with which the thing in question was infallibly, or inseparably, connected. We may, with as much good sense, say, that the child begot the parent, and not the parent the child ; or that conclusions infer their premises, and not premises their conclusions ; as to say, that a *logical necessity*, or *consequence*, can prove that there was a *previous necessity* of the existence of the thing in question.

I shall now shew, that the *knowledge* of any event, *present*, *past*, or *future*, does not imply in it any *necessity*, except the *logical* one above mentioned.

To begin with the knowledge of things *present* :---I know that the Sun shines at this instant ; consequently,

ly, he who asserts that the Sun does not shine at this instant, asserts, what I know cannot possibly be true at this instant; because the Sun cannot both shine, and not shine at the same time. I saw the Sun shine yesterday. It could not both shine and not shine at that time: Consequently, to assert, that it did not shine at that time, cannot be true. The Sun will shine tomorrow; therefore, it cannot be true, that it will not shine on the morrow. We see, that in the instances now mentioned, a *logical necessity*, is the only necessity, that is really implied in the knowledge of what has, does, or will take place; and we can easily conceive, notwithstanding this logical necessity, that what does, or has taken place, might have been prevented, or avoided in the time of it. Hence we frequently say, it is a pity such a person did so; there was no occasion for it; he might easily have omitted the doing of the thing, in the time of it, if he would. Why may we not as well say, such a man will certainly do a particular thing, though he will have power to forbear doing it. There could not be the least appearance of absurdity, or contradiction, in speaking in this manner about a future action, any more than about a past action, were it not for the great difficulty, or supposed impossibility of conceiving, how a thing can be foreknown, unless it be connected with something, that now exists; that is, that a thing cannot be foreknown, unless there is some *medium*, which has a present existence; and which is so connected with an event in futurity, that its future existence may be as necessarily inferred from *this medium*, as any conclusion, that is rightly drawn from its premises. It will be readily granted, that such finite, imperfect beings, as we are, cannot possibly know, that any future event will certainly take place, unless it is necessarily connected with some thing, that has a present existence; and that, for this plain reason, that whatever we can possibly know, must either be self-evident, or else evident by proof. Things that are self-evident, are known by immediate *intuition*, and are supposed to have a present existence in the mind; but

but things that are future, cannot be thus known. They must be evident to us by proof, i. e. they must be connected with some *cause*, or *medium*, known to us at present, from which we can with certainty infer their future existence. The obvious reason why we cannot know things, but only by intuition, or proof, is, because our knowledge is entirely *ab extra*. We have no innate stock of knowledge; for even our intuitive knowledge is discerned through a certain medium, viz. the senses; we having no ideas in our minds, but what are derived, either mediately, or immediately from the five senses; and all the ideas we derive from the senses, are first excited by external objects; which, striking the organs of the senses, do, by their means, convey ideas to the soul. Now, seeing that all our knowledge is derived from external objects, by means of the senses, it seems easy to conceive the reason, why we cannot know the certainty of a future event, which is not necessarily connected with something which has a present existence: For simple ideas, and self-evident truths, being the materials of all our knowledge, we are under a necessity of laying together a number of self-evident propositions, and comparing our ideas one with another, in order to our forming any judgment concerning things, which we do not discern by intuition. When, therefore, we compare self-evident truths together, if we cannot see a necessary connection of the premises with the conclusion, which we would infer, it is impossible that we should ever be certain of the truth of it. We must always doubt and hesitate about it, till we can find some self-evident proposition, the connection of which, with the truths of the thing we would prove, we can clearly discern to be certain and necessary. Hence it follows, that the true reason why we cannot be certain of *futurities*, unless they are necessarily connected with some present things, from which we can infer that they will certainly take place, is because all our knowledge is *ab extra*, i. e. derived from external objects, by means of the senses; for by them we discover both self-evident truths, and truths that are evident by proof.

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Now, if the true reason why we cannot be certain of the *being* of a thing future, unless it be infallibly connected with something that we discern to have a present existence, is, because we have no *innate* ideas, but derive all our knowledge from *extrinsic* causes; it will follow, that the Deity, being himself *uncaused*, must be possessed of an *underived, self-existing* knowledge, which is independent of any cause or medium whatever; and therefore his knowledge can extend to all futurities, independent of the imperfect mode of inferring conclusions from their premises: And consequently, infallible prescience in the Deity cannot imply any antecedent or previous necessity of the event foreknown. And hence no necessity is implied in divine prescience, except merely a *logical* one; but this being a *necessity of consequence*, is, in the nature of things, subsequent to the infallible foreknowledge of the existence of the thing foreknown; that is, it being infallibly certain that a particular event will take place, it follows, that to assert that it will not take place, cannot be true, but must be false. This same necessity of consequence is equally implied in the knowledge of things present; e. g. I know that at this instant I am writing; therefore, to say, that I am not writing at this instant, cannot be true, but must be false. For it is impossible that I should be writing, and not writing, at the same time. We see that in each of these instances, both of *present* and *future* knowledge, nothing more is implied, than only asserting that both parts of a contradiction cannot be true; and that nothing more can be proved from the infallible foreknowledge of the Deity, appears to me as plain, and as easy to be demonstrated, as any proposition in Euclid; provided we entertain just ideas of the Divine knowledge. The knowledge of the Deity is uncreated, underived; it is essential to the very existence of Deity, and necessarily implied in the very idea of God; and consequently, as his immensity extends to every part of the universe, so that there can be no place where the Deity is not really present, so there can be no part of duration either

either past, present, or future, which is not contained and comprehended within the essential knowledge of the Deity. If this definition of the Divine knowledge is just, then it will follow, that there is no previous or antecedent certainty in the things themselves, upon which Divine prescience is founded. For by certainty in the things themselves, previous to the Divine knowledge, must be meant, some medium distinct from the things themselves, by which they render themselves evident to the Divine knowledge. This will imply that the things themselves act upon the Deity, and excite ideas in him; but there can be no greater absurdity than to assert that any thing can act upon a self-existing being, and produce ideas in him: For this would be making a cause of the first cause. But if this previous certainty in things themselves means nothing distinct from the things themselves, then all that can be meant by this previous certainty in things themselves, upon which the Divine knowledge is founded, is only this, that the Deity cannot know that things will exist, which he knows never will exist. And therefore to say, that there is a previous certainty in things themselves, upon which the Divine knowledge is founded, is only saying, in other words, that the Divine knowledge is founded on the Divine knowledge. For I apprehend, that knowledge in the Deity must mean the same thing with certainty; for if knowledge be of the essence of Deity, he can have no organs of perception, nor any other medium, by which he arrives at the knowledge of whatever does, or will take place. It seems very plain, that Mr. Edwards supposed it to be impossible for the Deity to know that an event would take place hereafter, without his first being able to infer its future existence from some medium of proof; just as we infer a conclusion from its premises. For after having asserted, that “*there must be a certainty in things themselves, before they are certainly known; that there must be a certainty in things to be a ground of certainty of knowledge, and to render things capable of being known to be certain; that all certainty of knowledge* consists



*consists in the view of the firm and infallible connection between the subject and predicate of the proposition, which contains the truth to be known ;”* he adds, “*so God’s certain foreknowledge of the future existence of any event, is his view of the firm and indissoluble connection of the subject and predicate of the proposition, which affirms its future existence. The subject is that possible event : The predicate is its future existence : But if future existence be firmly and indissolubly connected with that event, then the future existence of that event is necessary. If God certainly knows the future existence of an event, which is wholly contingent, and may possibly never be, then he sees a firm connection between a subject and a predicate, which are not firmly connected ; which is a contradiction.*” Here, if I rightly understand Mr. Edwards, his meaning is this ; the Deity sees that a certain event is possible ; he then inquires, whether this possible event shall ever really exist : By some means he discovers that its future existence is infallibly connected with its present possibility, or with its now being only a mere possible event : But if he can discover no infallible connection between the present possible event, and its future existence, then he cannot possibly know that it ever will exist. If this does not imply, that foreknowledge is not an essential attribute, I am under a great mistake : For it plainly implies, that the Deity acquires his knowledge of future events, by certain acts of his own ; i. e. he infers the future existence of events from certain premises, which have a present existence. This is absolutely denying that foreknowledge is an essential attribute of Deity. For that which is of the essence of Deity, can depend on no act of his, to bring it into existence. But it seems, according to Mr. Edwards, that the Deity arrives at his foreknowledge by actually inferring conclusions from premises. That the Deity does perfectly discern all connections between subjects and predicates in propositions, and all conclusions that are rightly inferred from their premises, is readily granted : But that he cannot know futurities without first infer-

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ring them from premises, that now exist, is denied. But the friends of Mr. Edwards generally follow him in this sentiment. Hence we find them asserting, that the foreknowledge of God is founded on his decree ; that he is the cause of his own foreknowledge ; and that foreknowledge is the effect of the decree. But if this be true, it will follow, that either foreknowledge is not an essential attribute of Deity, but is a creature of his own forming ; or, if it be an essential attribute of Deity, that then the Deity acted before he existed, and brought himself into being ; i. e. that he is self-created. In answer to this, it has been said, “*that to assert, that the foreknowledge of God is founded upon his decree, no more implies, that it is a creature of his forming, than the supposition of his having some special determinations, respecting some particular events, implies, that such determinations are creatures of his own forming.*” But it appears to me, that the cases are widely different, for this plain reason, that the Divine determinations, respecting particular events, are only to be considered as the Deity decreeing and willing, and enter into the very definition of the Deity’s being a cause. Wherefore, not the decrees of God, but the consequences of his decree, or the effects of his decree, are to be considered as his creatures. But if foreknowledge is grounded upon the Divine decree, then it is the effect of the Divine decree, and consequently must be one of his creatures. But it has been said, “*that God rejoices in his own works ; therefore, the happiness which he has in contemplating them, may, with as much propriety, be termed a creature of his own, as his foreknowledge may, upon supposition of its being founded on his decree.*” I know that the Scripture informs us, that God rejoices in his own works ; I know also, that the Scripture speaks of the Deity as repenting, and being angry ; it also ascribes to him hands, eyes, and ears : But all these expressions I have been wont to consider as popular and figurative expressions. So as to his rejoicing in his works ; the phrase, I apprehend, must mean, that whatever the Deity does,

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is agreeable to the eternal fitness of things, being absolutely perfect, and the effect of infinite wisdom, and agreeable to the perfect moral rectitude of his nature. But if I must understand this phrase literally, viz. that the Deity has, by his works, greatly added to his own happiness, I can never reconcile it to the idea, that God was originally and necessarily possessed of perfect felicity. The very idea, that Deity is a self-existing being, implies, that no addition can be made to any of his perfections, viz. to his happiness, holiness, power, or wisdom, either by his own acts or by any thing else. I would ask the friends of Mr Edwards, if the Deity cannot foreknow futurities, unless he first decree them, how came he by the knowledge of the objects of his decrees? The Deity must know, that the events which he decreed should come into existence, were possible. He could not decree to make a world, without having a perfect idea of the world he determined to make. He could not determine to create any thing, without having an idea of the thing which he was going to create, i. e. he must know every event that was possible, in the nature of things, before he could determine to create the universe. How came the Deity by the knowledge of possible existence? that is, how came he by the idea of the object of his decrees? For us to know what is possible, implies, that we have an idea of something that has had a real existence in nature, which we use as a standard, by which we form an idea of what may exist again. But without some such standard, or archetype, we can form no idea of what may take place. We can as easily create a world, as form one new, simple idea, which we have not already received from our senses. Now, if the Deity cannot know things, but only in the imperfect way of us finite creatures, by having ideas first excited in his mind, I would ask what there was, from all eternity, to excite in the Deity the ideas of what might take place? i. e. what was the standard by which the Deity formed the idea of possible existence? Were there any beings or agents who could exhibit to him any patterns or archetypes

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of what was possible to come into existence? Surely there were not. Here, then, we have an infallible proof, that the knowledge of all possible existence, i. e. of whatever could take place, or was possible, in the nature of things, upon any supposition whatever, must, in the Deity, be an underived, self-existing knowledge, entirely independent of his decree, not founded on any archetype, or any other medium whatever. Should it be said, that the standard, or archetype, by which the Deity arrived at the knowledge of what was possible to exist, was his own essence, powers, and perfections; that is, that the knowledge of his own perfections exhibited to him the knowledge of whatever was possible in the nature of things: Should any one say thus, it will by no means solve the difficulty: For there are many things in the creation that bear no resemblance to the perfections of the Deity. Thus, he being a pure spirit, body cannot bear any resemblance to him. As he is perfectly happy, how could he, from a survey of his own perfections, have the idea of pain and misery? Or, how could a perfectly holy being, from barely contemplating his own perfections, have the idea of sin? Is there any thing in the pure nature of the Deity, that can bear the least resemblance to moral evil? What is there in the Divine nature, of which sin is the true image, copy, or representative? And if sin resembles nothing in the Deity, how is it possible, upon these gentlemen's principles, that it should ever become the object of his decree? We may carry our inquiries still further, and ask, could immutability and absolute independence suggest to Deity their contraries, viz. mutability and dependence? Could self-existence suggest to Deity the idea of created or derived existence? If not, then, according to the hypothesis I am now considering, it was impossible that the Deity should have the idea of the possibility of creation. And if this be true, then it will follow, that nothing has been created; but that all things existed from eternity, which will land us in gross Atheism and irreligion. We ask again, How came the Divine Being by the knowledge

knowledge of his own powers, properties, and perfections? What was the medium, or cause, by which the Divine Being arrived at this knowledge? Was it by taking a survey of himself, and examining the properties of his own nature? But could this survey suggest to him, that he had a power to create, before he had created any thing? But even this supposition, that the Deity took a survey of his own perfections, in order to arrive at the knowledge of possible existence, implies a certain degree of knowledge, without which it would have been impossible that he should have taken this survey of himself, or have examined his own perfections. Now, I would ask, on what medium or cause did this first knowledge in the Deity depend, by which he took a survey of his own perfections? No one, I presume, will say, that this first or original knowledge was excited by an extrinsic cause; neither can it be said to be grounded on the Divine decree, nor any act of Deity whatever, because it is supposed to be prior to his acts & determinations, being that upon which they are grounded. Here, then, I apprehend, we have a plain proof of an underived, essential knowledge in Deity, according to my sense of the phrase, i. e. a knowledge independent of any cause or medium whatever. Now, if the knowledge in Deity of his own powers and perfections, and of whatever is possible to exist, is an underived, essential knowledge, that does not depend on any archetype, nor on any act of his will, it must be because his underived and essential knowledge extends to all things; and that the ideas of all things existed in the Divine mind from all eternity; i. e. the Deity, from all eternity, perfectly discerned the essence, nature and properties of all things, independently of any archetype, medium, or act of his own. But if the ideas of all things, existing in Deity, were essential and underived, then it follows, that the knowledge of futurities could not be founded on the Divine decree.

If what has been said, be true, we may very easily answer the following argument of Mr. Edwards, viz.  
*"That no future event can be certainly foreknown,*  
*whose*

*whose existence is contingent, and without all necessity, may be proved thus. 'Tis impossible for a thing to be certainly known to any intellect without evidence. To suppose otherwise, implies a contradiction. Because, for a thing to be certainly known to an understanding, is for it to be evident to that understanding: And for a thing to be evident to any understanding, is the same thing as for that understanding to see evidence of it: But no understanding, created or uncreated, can see evidence where there is none; for that is the same as to see that to be which is not. And therefore, if there be any truth which is absolutely without evidence, that truth is absolutely unknowable, inasmuch that it implies a contradiction to suppose that it is known."* Now, there cannot be the least appearance of force in this argument, when applied to the Deity, if it be true, that the knowledge of the Deity is an essential attribute: For then his knowledge of futurities cannot depend upon his decree, or any other acts of his own. And it must be very absurd to suppose, that any finite or created being can act upon the Deity, and produce ideas in a self-existing being. For I take it for granted, that the Deity acts upon all things, and is himself acted upon by nothing. Nor can I conceive, that the knowledge of futurities, in the Deity, can be different from the knowledge of things present; for whatever that difference should be supposed to consist in, whenever the future things come to have a present existence, that difference must cease, and foreknowledge must be changed into the knowledge of things present; which will imply, that there is some variation, succession, or change in the mind of that being, with whom is no variableness, succession of ideas, or the least shadow of mutability. Now, if foreknowledge is the same in the Deity as his knowledge of things present, then the evidence of his knowledge, in both cases, must be the same. But if his knowledge is not founded on his decree, nor on any extrinsic cause, then evidence and knowledge in the Deity must mean the same thing. As we derive all our knowledge from extrinsic causes, evidence,



with regard to us, is that upon which the certainty of our knowledge is founded; but this cannot be the case with a being whose knowledge is essential and undervied. Mr. Edwards asserts, that "*if there be a full, certain, and infallible foreknowledge of the future existence of the volitions of moral agents, then there is a certain, infallible, and indissoluble connection between those events and that foreknowledge; and that therefore those events are necessary events, being infallibly and indissolubly connected with that, whose existence already is, and so is now necessary, and can't but have been;*" i. e. as I understand him, foreknowledge has had existence, and so now is necessary, and can't but have been; and the *future volitions* being infallibly and indissolubly connected with that, which already has had existence, their existence must be necessary.

All that I can understand by this paragraph is, that the future volitions of moral agents are so infallibly and indissolubly connected with the Divine foreknowledge, which has had existence from all eternity, that it is impossible that the Deity should be deceived; and, therefore, all these volitions will most certainly take place. For by *necessary*, here, he can, I think, mean nothing distinct from *infallible certainty*. But how does their being necessary in this sense, i. e. infallibly certain, prove that the volitions of moral agents are effects produced by an extrinsic cause? and if foreknowledge is not founded on the Divine decree, it is impossible that it should prove any kind of necessity distinct from what our knowledge of things present will prove. Now let me ask the friends of Mr. Edwards, whether the connection between my seeing a man walk, and his act of walking, is sufficient to prove, that the man was necessarily determined to that act, or that his act of walking was the effect of an extrinsic cause? If it does, then there is no need of attempting to prove that Divine foreknowledge implies in it the necessity of all events; for our knowledge of any thing that does, or has taken place, will, upon this supposition, as strongly infer the doctrine of necessity, as Divine prescience does.

docs. But this sentiment, strange as it may seem, appears plainly to be the sentiment of Mr. Edwards; for he says, "*All certain knowledge, whether it be foreknowledge, or after-knowledge, or concomitant knowledge, proves the thing known now to be necessary, by some means or other, or proves that 'tis impossible it should now be otherwise than true. I freely allow, that foreknowledge don't prove a thing to be necessary any more than after-knowledge.*"

Again, he says, "*that all certain knowledge proves the necessity of the truths known, whether it be before, after, or at the same time;*" i. e. that a mere *logical necessity* does prove, that *volition* is the effect of an *extrinsic cause*, and consequently the argument must stand thus: I know that A has chosen a certain particular thing; but he could not both choose, and not choose it, at the same time; therefore his choice was produced in him by an extrinsic cause. That this is a just representation of his sentiment, will appear manifest, if we recollect that he is endeavoring to shew, that *foreknowledge* in the Deity, proves that the idea of a *self-determining* power is absurd, and that the *volitions* of moral agents are the necessary effects of an extrinsic cause. But he has told us that "*foreknowledge don't prove a thing to be necessary any more than after-knowledge; and that all certain knowledge proves the necessity of the truth known, whether it be before, after, or at the same time.*" Now, if all certain knowledge, whether of past, present, or future existence, does equally prove that the volitions of moral agents are the necessary effects of an extrinsic cause, it must be because the very idea of existence does imply in it the idea of a necessary effect, produced by an extrinsic cause. But if this be true, that whatever we know certainly to exist, must be the necessary effect of an extrinsic cause; then it is impossible, that we should have the idea of a self-existing Deity or first cause; for it is a contradiction to assert, that there is a cause of the first cause. But if we grant that there is a self-existing being, who exists uncaused, and is the first cause of



of all things, and consequently cannot be the effect of any thing; then it will follow, that the certain knowledge, that something does exist, will not prove that it is the necessary effect of an extrinsic cause. But Mr. Edwards tells us, that "*certain knowledge proves that it is impossible that the thing known should now be otherwise than true; 'tis now become impossible, but that the proposition known should be true.*" This is readily granted. But this impossibility is only a logical impossibility, or a necessity of consequence, i. e. when we are certain that such a thing has existed, we then infer, that it is now become impossible that the existence of the said thing should be otherwise than true. But how does this prove, that it was impossible to have prevented that thing from taking place in the time of it? Or how does it prove, that the thing which has taken place, was the necessary effect of an extrinsic cause? If this consequence, that because a thing has taken place, it cannot now be true that it has not taken place, does prove that it was the necessary effect of an extrinsic cause, it must be either because the very idea of existence does necessarily imply, that it must be the effect of an extrinsic cause, the absurdity of which has already been shewn; or else it must be because that conclusions and consequences act backward, and produce their premises, and that all effects produce their causes. If neither of these things be his meaning, it is impossible for me to conceive how the certain knowledge that a thing has taken place, can prove, that that thing was the necessary effect of an extrinsic cause. For we may be very certain, that a thing has, or does exist, without knowing the manner how, the reason why, or even the real cause of its existence; e. g. I may be certain that a man is dead, and yet not know the reason of his death, nor the manner how he came by it, nor yet the true cause of his death: Yet, notwithstanding I reason thus, the man is certainly dead; but he cannot be dead and alive at the same time: But as he is certainly dead, it is impossible that at this instant he should be alive. Now, if this logical necessity, or necessity of consequence,

quence, cannot prove to me, either the reason why such a thing exists, or the manner how it came to exist, or the cause of its existence, I am sure it can never prove, that the volitions of moral agents are the necessary effects of an extrinsic cause.

I shall now inquire, whether its being impossible that a proposition should be false, when it is known to be true, is any way inconsistent with our idea of liberty, which is, that when all circumstances necessary for action have taken place, that then the mind can either act, or not act, or act differently, all previous circumstances remaining the same. The meaning is not, that the mind can both act, and not act, in the same instant, or act two different ways at once; for this would be a contradiction: But whether, when the mind has acted, it may not still be a truth, that it could have omitted that action in the time of it; or when it has omitted an action, whether it may not be true, that it could have done, or performed the action in the time of it; or when it has adopted one mode of action, it could not have omitted that mode of action, and have adopted another mode of action: That its being impossible that the same proposition should be both true and false, only proves, that it is impossible for the mind both to act, and not to act, in the same instant; but it by no means proves, that the mind has not a power either to act, or not to act; and, therefore, a bare certainty, that an agent will do such a thing, does not imply in it, that he had not in himself a power to refrain from doing it. I suppose it will be readily granted, on all sides, that even the Divine foreknowledge itself has no influence, nor causal force, with regard to the thing foreknown, either to bring it into existence, or to hinder its happening; but that all things would take place just in the same manner, if they were not foreknown, as they do now; so that the only question is, whether, supposing it to be foreknown that an agent will conduct in such a manner at such a time, it will be any contradiction to affirm, that the said agent will have power, at the same time, to act in a different manner.

manner. Now, by a contradiction, I understand that which hath reference to two assertions, or suppositions, the one of which destroys the other. Thus to affirm, that such a thing will be at such a time, and to affirm, that it will not be at the said time, is a contradiction; because the one assertion excludes the other. So, to affirm, that a man will have power to do such a thing, and to affirm, that he will not have a power to do it, is a contradiction: But to affirm, that a man will act in such a manner, though he will have in himself power to do otherwise, is no contradiction; for one assertion does not destroy the other. 'Tis affirmed, for truth, that the agent will act in this manner, rather than in another. This assertion is not denied in the other proposition; but another thing, of quite a different nature, is affirmed for truth, viz. that the agent will have a power, at the same time, of acting in a different manner. I suppose it will hardly be denied, that one may have a power of doing an action, which, at a particular instant, may lie dormant, and not be exerted. Thus, a man may have a power to walk, when he sits still. If this be allowed, where is the contradiction in supposing that a man will do such a thing, though he will have, at the same time, a power, of not doing it, i. e. that there may be a certainty on one side, that such a thing will take place, consistent with a power of acting differently, circumstances and things being as they are, i. e. that a future act of choice may be so certainly foreknown, as to imply a contradiction in supposing that it will not exist, and yet the agent may have, at the same time, a power of doing that which is directly the reverse of what will take place. To assert, that the Deity may infallibly foreknow, that an agent will act in a certain, particular manner, when, at the same time, he infallibly foreknows that the said agent will have a power of acting in a different manner, implies no contradiction: For there is nothing affirmed in one proposition, which is denied in the other: "Consequently, there cannot be the least appearance of a contradiction; for the first proposition

proposition speaks of what will certainly happen; the other proposition speaks of a certain power in the agent, which will not be exerted. As these propositions speak of different things, both of them may be infallible truths." If, then, it be allowed, that a man in perfect health, who has the free use of all his limbs, has the physical power of walking, when he sits still in a chair, i. e. that a power not exerted is properly a power, there will not be the least absurdity in asserting, that the Deity may infallibly foreknow, that an agent will have a power to refrain from doing that which it is infallibly certain he will do; or that he may infallibly know, that an agent will act in a certain, particular manner, when, at the same time, he infallibly knows that the said agent has a power of acting differently, or of forbearing to do the thing which it is infallibly certain he will do. This is not saying, that it is possible, in the nature of things, that contradictions may be, and exist; or that both parts of a contradiction may be true, as has been shewn already. But perhaps it will be objected, that when it is a certain truth, that a thing will be, it follows, that it must be; or when it is certain, that a person will perform such an action, that then it is impossible for him to do otherwise, or impossible that he should not do the thing, which it is certain he will do. How plausible soever such an objection may appear at first view, there is really nothing in it, but a mere play upon words, as will plainly appear upon a very small examination of the matter. Thus, when it is said, that if a thing will be, it must be; or it is certain, such a person will perform such an action, therefore it is impossible it should not happen; the words *must* and *impossible* don't at all relate to the power of the agent, or author of the fact, but to quite another thing, which is perfectly consistent with such power in the agent: For it relates wholly to the truth of the contrary supposition; so that to say such a thing will be, therefore it is impossible it should not be, is only saying, in other words, such a thing will be; therefore it cannot be true to say, that it will not be; i. e.

i. e. that the contrary supposition is false. Now, I desire to know what the truth or falsehood of a proposition has to do with the power of an agent? Are they not as different things as can be? To affirm, that a thing will be, and at the same time to assert, that it will not be, will imply two contrary propositions, which mutually destroy each other; and therefore the one being a certain truth, it is impossible but that the other should be a certain falsehood. This is what we call a logical kind of impossibility, "*which (as one observes) 'hath no more influence to the depriving an agent of the physical power of acting, or not acting, of which he is possessed in himself, than the impossibility of the non-existence of a man in the West Indies, when he doth actually exist there, can take away my power of acting, or not acting: and this, I think, will plainly appear, by putting, in the very terms of the person's having such a power, into two propositions, as thus: It is certain that Mr. F. will write again upon this subject, though he will have power to forbear writing. This being supposed, it must be a contradiction to suppose, that he will not write, though he have the power to forbear writing. From this contradiction arises the impossibility, of which we are speaking. But what is this impossibility? Is it the impossibility of his having in himself the power to forbear writing? No, surely. This was supposed in the proposition. But it is an impossibility of the contrary proposition's being true, viz. that he will not use the power of writing, which he hath: An impossibility of the latter proposition's being true; the other contrary proposition being before supposed to be true. It is granted, therefore, that when a thing is supposed to be certainly future, it is a contradiction to suppose, that it should be actually prevented; and, in this respect, we may say, it is impossible it should be prevented. But it is no contradiction to suppose, that a person should have in himself a power to prevent what it is infallibly certain he will not prevent.'*" Thus he. Now, one might be ready to ask, how comes it about, that the

the impossibility of two contrary propositions being both true, should ever be used as an argument to prove, that a man had not power to do a particular thing, only because it was certain he would not do it; i. e. that the being certain that a person will not exert a particular power, is a proof that he has not the said power to exert; but is destitute of it? It may be answered, that there is a fallacy, which the maintainers of the doctrine of necessity do not seem to be aware of: For their whole argument requires, in order to make it prove any thing to their purpose, that the necessity in question, or the impossibility that the event should be, or happen, otherwise than it is certain it will happen, be antecedent to the thing supposed to be future, and that the future event be connected with, and entirely dependent upon, the said antecedent necessity for its existence. Whereas the logical necessity, now under consideration, is a necessary consequent upon the supposition, that a thing does, or will exist. We always first suppose the existence of the thing in question to be a truth, and then infer, as a consequence of the proposition, that affirms its existence to be a truth, that the contrary proposition, which denies the existence of the thing in question, is false. Thus, when we say, it is certain that such a thing will be, the future existence of the said event is supposed to be a truth; the consequence of which is, that the proposition, which denies the future existence of the said event, must be false. Is it not then very absurd to urge a necessity, consequent to the existence of an event, as an argument to prove that the agent, who was the author of the event, had not in himself a power to prevent its taking place? What is this but to suppose, that a thing acts before it is, and produces effects before it has existence; and that a necessity, which is only the consequence drawn from the knowledge that a particular event will certainly take place, is supposed to act backwards, and to produce the event, as though it was antecedent to the event, and necessary to the existence of it; i. e. that the mere impossibility of a true proposition's



tion's being false, should prove that the agent is destitute of the power of acting. These things, it should seem, are incapable of being reconciled to the truth; for they appear to be shocking absurdities. Yet such absurdities will follow the supposing it impossible, that it should be certain that an event will take place, when, at the same time, the agent is supposed to have power to prevent its taking place.

From the observations which have been suggested, we may be enabled to answer this objection, that if the Deity infallibly knows that an agent will perform a certain action, when, at the same time, the agent has a power in himself to forbear doing the said action, it will then follow, that infallible knowledge may possibly, in the nature of things, be deceitful and fallible, because it will imply, that a created agent may have power to make that, which is certain in the Divine Mind, to be not certain. Now, for a thing to be certain, and not certain, is a contradiction. We need here only recollect, that the contradiction lies in stating the proposition. Thus, when it is affirmed, that such a thing will be, on the one hand, and on the other hand asserted that it will not be, these propositions must mutually destroy each other; and therefore, if one be true, the other cannot be true. But neither of these propositions relates to the power of the agent, nor proves any antecedent necessity infallibly connected with the action of the agent, so as to deprive him of a power of acting differently, or of forbearing to act, all requisites, necessary for the agent to act, remaining the same. The impossibility that a thing should not exist, when it is known that it certainly will exist, we have shewn, is consequent to the supposition, that it will exist, and therefore cannot at all relate to the manner in which the existence of the said thing becomes certain and evident to any mind whatever; and therefore, in the words of the author above quoted, I say, that "*The agent doth not do what he doth, because it was certain that he would do so, and therefore must do so; but, on the contrary, because he would use his power of acting this way, and not in another*;

*or; therefore the action was future; and being so, i. e. certainly future, it was impossible it should not be future; whereas if the person would have acted otherwise, which he might have done if he would, then that other action, instead of what is now certain, would have been certain, and it would have been in the same manner impossible, that that should not have been,"* i. e. it being certainly future, to assert that it was not future, would be false. We may set this matter in a very clear light, and obviate the objection we are now considering, by a very familiar example. There is sitting in the room, where I am present, a friend of mine. I see and know that he is sitting. I know that it is impossible that he should be sitting, and not sitting, at the same time. Therefore, he who affirms, that my friend is standing, affirms what I know to be an absolute falsehood, because it is contrary to a plain fact, which is now before mine eyes; and therefore impossible to be true. The word *impossible*, here, has no relation to any inherent power in the person; it does not imply that he has not a power to stand; it relates only to a fact, which being known to be a truth, the contrary fact cannot be a truth. My friend has just the same power to act, as though I did not know the position he was in. My seeing him sit, does not prove that he has not the power to stand; and had the position been standing, instead of sitting, it would not have proved that my eye sight was very deceitful and fallible, and so not at all to be relied upon: On the contrary, the certain truth, upon this supposition, would be, that he is standing, and not sitting; and to affirm that he is sitting, would be false, and could not be true. His being in any particular position, does in no wise depend upon my being present, or upon my will, or upon my being possessed of the faculty of seeing; but while I am present, in whatever position he places himself, I shall know it. Thus, all things, from eternity to eternity, being present to the Divine mind, he sees all things as they are. Now, though the volitions of moral agents do not depend necessarily upon the Divine will, or decree, for their existence; yet they are as much the objects of the Divine knowledge as though



though they were produced immediately by his positive efficiency ; and had an agent, at any time, acted differently from what he did act, this would not have made infallible knowledge to be very deceitful and fallible, any more than my friend's standing, instead of sitting, would have made my eye-sight to be so very deceitful and fallible as not at all to be relied upon, in any case whatever. Thus, the Divine Being knew, from all eternity, that Peter would deny, and that Judas would betray his Master : But had the reverse taken place, and Peter had betrayed, and Judas had only denied, his Master, this would not have made infallibility deceitful and fallible ; because then this latter proposition would have been an eternal truth, viz. that Peter would betray, and that Judas would only deny, his Master : And Deity would, from all eternity, have infallibly foreknown this proposition, as a certain and infallible truth. Hence, then, the supposing that an agent can act differently from what he does act, does not imply, that infallibility, in the nature of things, may possibly become fallible : It only implies, that if the agent had acted differently from what he has done, then, that other action, instead of what did take place, would have been infallibly certain, in the Divine mind, from all eternity. This, I think, must be an indubitable truth, if infallible prescience, in the Deity, only implies in it a logical necessity of the events foreknown, i. e. that it cannot be infallibly foreknown that an event will certainly take place, and at the same time be infallibly foreknown that it certainly will not take place ; for this necessity, being only a consequence founded upon the certainty of the thing foreknown, that it will take place, or that it is certainly future, it cannot have the least relation to the manner of its being foreknown by the Deity. i. e. this necessity of consequence can by no means prove, that there is an antecedent necessity of the volitions of created beings, or that the volitions of moral agents are the effects of an extrinsic cause. as has been already abundantly proved.

I have now finished my Essays upon Liberty and Necessity, and shall cheerfully submit my sentiments to the censure of the candid and impartial, and shall willingly stand corrected in any point, wherein it can be shewn, that I have laboured under any mistake of the matter in debate.

*F I N I S.*