Bramhall's discourse of liberty and necessity

§ 3 Either I am free to write this discourse for liberty against necessity, or I am not free. If I be free, then I have obtained the cause, and ought not to suffer for the truth. If I be not free, yet I ought not to be blamed, since I do it not out of any voluntary election, but out of an inevitable necessity.

§ 4 And so to fall in hand with the question without any further proems or prefaces, by liberty I do understand neither a liberty from sin, nor a liberty from misery, nor a liberty from servitude, nor a liberty from violence. But I understand a liberty from necessity, or rather from necessitation, that is, a universal immunity from all inevitability and determination to one, whether it be of exercise only, which the Schools call a liberty of contradiction and is found in God and in the good and bad angels, that is, not a liberty to do both good and evil, but a liberty to do or not to do this or that good, this or that evil, respectively; or whether it be a liberty of specification and exercise also, which the Schools call liberty of contrariety and is found in men endowed with reason and understanding, that is, a liberty to do and not to do good and evil, this or that.[1]

§ 5 Thus the coast being cleared, the next thing to be done is to draw out our forces against the enemy. And because they are divided into two squadrons, the one of Christians, the other of heathen philosophers, it will be best to dispose ours also into two bodies, the former drawn from Scripture, the latter from reason.

[1] Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I–II.ix.1, I–II.x.2; Bellarmino, *De gratia et libero arbitrio* III.iii.

Proofs of liberty out of Scripture

§ 6 First, whosoever have power of election have true liberty, for the proper act of liberty is election. A spontaneity may consist with determination to one, as we see in children, fools, madmen, brute beasts, whose fancies are determined to those things which they act spontaneously, as the bees make honey, the spiders webs. But none of these have a liberty of election, which is an act of judgment and understanding, and cannot possibly consist with a determination to one. He that is determined by something before himself or without himself cannot be said to choose or elect, unless it be as the junior of the mess chooses in Cambridge, whether he will have the least part or nothing. And scarcely so much.

But men have liberty of election. This is plain: if a wife make a vow it is left to her husband's choice either to establish it or to make it void.[2] And: 'Choose you this day whom you will serve, . . . But I and my house will serve the Lord.'[3] He makes his own choice and leaves them to the liberty of their election. And: 'I offer thee three things: choose thee which of them I shall do.'[4] If one of these three things was necessarily determined, and the other two impossible, how was it left to him to choose what should be done? Therefore we have true liberty.

§ 9 Secondly, they who might have done, and may do, many things which they leave undone; and they who leave undone many things which they might do, are neither compelled nor necessitated to do what they do, but have true liberty. But we might do many things which we do not, and we do many things which we might leave undone, as is plain: 'Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies.'[5] God gave Solomon his choice. He might have asked riches, but then he had not asked wisdom, which he did ask. He did ask wisdom, but he might have asked riches, which yet he did not ask. And: 'After it was sold, was it not in thine own power?'[6] It was in his own power to give it, and it was in his own power to retain it. Yet if he did give it, he could not retain it; and if he did retain

[2] Numbers 30:13. The AV reads: 'Every vow, and every binding oath to afflict the soul, her [sc. a wife's] husband may establish it, or her husband may make it void.'
[3] Joshua 24:15. The AV reads: 'choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord'.
[4] 2 Samuel 24:12. The AV reads: 'I offer thee three things: choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee.'
[5] 1 Kings 3:11. [6] Acts 5:4.

it, he could not give it. Therefore we may do what we do not, and we do not what we might do. That is, we have true liberty from necessity.

§ **10** Thirdly, if there be no true liberty, but all things come to pass by inevitable necessity, then what are all those interrogations and objurgations and reprehensions and expostulations which we find so frequently in holy Scriptures (be it spoken with all due respect) but feigned and hypocritical exaggerations? 'Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded that thou shouldst not eat?'[7] And he said to Eve, 'Why hast thou done this?'[8] And to Cain, 'Why art thou wroth, and why is thy countenance cast down?'[9] And: 'Why will ye die, O house of Israel?'[10] Does God command him[11] openly not to eat, and yet secretly by himself or by the second causes necessitate him to eat? Does he reprehend him for doing that which he has antecedently determined that he must do? Does he propose things under impossible conditions? Or were not this plain mockery and derision? Does a loving master chide his servant because he does not come at his call, and yet knows that the poor servant is chained and fettered so as he cannot move, by the master's own order, without the servant's default or consent? They who talk here of a twofold will of God, secret and revealed, and the one opposite to the other, understand not what they say. These two wills concern several persons. The secret will of God is what he will do himself; the revealed will of God is what he would have us to do. It may be the secret will of God to take away the life of the father, yet it is God's revealed will that his son should wish his life and pray for his life. Here is no contradiction, where the agents are distinct. But for the same person to command one thing, and yet to necessitate him that is commanded to do another thing; to chide a man for doing that, which he has determined inevitably and irresistibly that he must do; this were (I am afraid to utter what they are not afraid to assert) the highest dissimulation. God's chiding proves man's liberty.

§ **11** Fourthly, if either the decree of God or the foreknowledge of God or the influence of the stars or the concatenation of causes or the physical or moral efficacy of objects or the last dictate of the understanding do take away true liberty, then Adam before his fall had no true liberty. For he was

[7] Genesis 3:11. The AV reads: 'Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?'
[8] Genesis 3:13. The AV reads: 'What is this that thou hast done?'
[9] Genesis 3:6. The AV reads: 'Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?'
[10] Ezekiel 18:31. [11] command him: ed.; command: *Def.*, *Ques.*, *W1*, *W3*.

subjected to the same decrees, the same prescience, the same constellations, the same causes, the same objects, the same dictates of the understanding. But *quicquid ostendes mihi sic, incredulus odi* [Whatever you show me so, I disbelieve and I hate].[12] The greatest opposers of our liberty are as earnest maintainers of the liberty of Adam. Therefore none of these supposed impediments take away true liberty.

§ **12** Fifthly, if there be no liberty, there shall be no day of doom, no last judgment, no rewards nor punishments after death. A man can never make himself a criminal if he be not left at liberty to commit a crime. No man can be justly punished for doing that which was not in his power to shun. To take away liberty hazards heaven, but undoubtedly it leaves no hell.

Proofs of liberty drawn from reason

§ **13** The first argument is *Herculeum* or *Baculinum* [the stick], drawn from that pleasant passage between Zeno and his man.[13] The servant had committed some petty larceny, and the master was cudgelling him well for it. The servant thinks to creep under his master's blind side, and pleads for himself that the necessity of destiny did compel him to steal. The master answers, 'The same necessity of destiny compels me to beat you.' He that denies liberty is fitter to be refuted with rods than with arguments, until he confess that it is free for him that beats him either to continue striking or to give over, that is, to have true liberty.

§ **14** Secondly, this very persuasion that there is no true liberty is able to overthrow all societies and commonwealths in the world. The laws are unjust which prohibit that which a man cannot possibly shun. All consultations are vain if everything be either necessary or impossible. Who ever deliberated whether the sun should rise tomorrow, or whether he should sail over mountains? It is to no more purpose to admonish men of understanding than fools, children, or madmen if all things be necessary. Praises and dispraises, rewards and punishments, are as vain as they are undeserved if there be no liberty. All counsels, arts, arms, books, instruments are superfluous and foolish if there be no liberty. In vain we labour, in vain we study, in vain we take physic, in vain we have tutors to instruct us, if all things

[12] Horace, *Ars poetica* 188. Bramhall misquotes; the original reads: *quodcumque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi*.
[13] Reported by Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* VII.23.

come to pass alike, whether we sleep or wake, whether we be idle or industrious, by unalterable necessity. But it is said, that though future events be certain, yet they are unknown to us; and therefore we prohibit, deliberate, admonish, praise, dispraise, reward, punish, study, labour, and use means. Alas! How should our not knowing of the event be a sufficient motive to us to use the means, so long as we believe the event is already certainly determined and can no more be changed by all our endeavours than we can stay the course of heaven with our finger or add a cubit to our stature? Suppose it be unknown, yet it is certain. We cannot hope to alter the course of things by our labours. Let the necessary causes do their work, we have no remedy but patience, and shrug up the shoulders. Either allow liberty or destroy all societies.

§ **15** Thirdly, let this opinion be once radicated in the minds of men, that there is no true liberty and that all things come to pass inevitably, and it will utterly destroy the study of piety. Who will bewail his sins with tears? What will become of that grief, that zeal, that indignation, that holy revenge, which the Apostle speaks of, if men be once thoroughly persuaded that they could not shun what they did? A man may grieve for that which he could not help; but he will never be brought to bewail that as his own fault which flowed not from his own error but from an antecedent necessity. Who will be careful or solicitous to perform obedience, that believes there are inevitable bounds and limits set to all his devotions, which he can neither go beyond nor come short of? To what end shall he pray God to avert those evils which are inevitable, or to confer those favours which are impossible? We indeed know not what good or evil shall happen to us; but this we know, that if all things be necessary, our devotions and endeavours cannot alter that which must be. In a word, the only reason why those persons who tread in this path of fatal destiny do sometimes pray, or repent, or serve God, is because the light of nature and the strength of reason and the evidence of Scripture do for that present transport them from their ill-chosen grounds, and expel those stoical fancies out of their heads. A complete Stoic can neither pray, nor repent, nor serve God to any purpose. Either allow liberty or destroy Church as well as commonwealth, religion as well as policy.

§ **16** Fourthly, the order, beauty, and perfection of the world does require that in the universe should be agents of all sorts, some necessary, some free, some contingent. He that shall make either all things necessary, guided by destiny, or all things free, governed by election, or all things contingent,

happening by chance, does overthrow the beauty and the perfection of the world.

§ **17** Fifthly, take away liberty and you take away the very nature of evil and the formal reason of sin. If the hand of the painter were the law of painting, or the hand of the writer the law of writing, whatsoever the one did write, or the other paint, must infallibly be good. Seeing therefore that the first cause is the rule and law of goodness, if it do necessitate the will or the person to evil, either by itself immediately or mediately by necessary flux of second causes, it will no longer be evil. The essence of sin consists in this, that one commit that which he might avoid. If there be no liberty to produce sin, there is no such thing as sin in the world. Therefore it appears, both from Scripture and reason, that there is true liberty.

§ **18** But the patrons of necessity, being driven out of the plain field with reason, have certain retreats of distinctions which they fly unto for refuge. First, they distinguish between Stoical necessity and Christian necessity, between which they make a threefold difference.[14]

First, say they, the Stoics did subject Jupiter to destiny, but we subject destiny to God. I answer that the Stoical and Christian destiny are one and the same: *Fatum quasi effatum Jovis* [Fate is as it were the decree of God].[15] Hear Seneca: 'Destiny is the necessity of all things and actions, depending upon the disposition of Jupiter'.[16] I add that the Stoics left a greater liberty to Jupiter over destiny than these stoical Christians do to God over his decrees, either for the beginnings of things, as Euripides,[17] or for the progress of them, as Chrysippus,[18] or at least of the circumstances of time and place, as all of them generally. So Virgil: *Sed trahere et moras ducere, etc.* [But to stretch out and bring delay, etc.].[19] So Osiris in Apuleius promises him to prolong his life, *ultra fato constituta tempora*, beyond the times set down by the destinies.[20]

[14] Cf. Lipsius, *De constantia* I.xx; Calvin, *Institutio religionis christianae* I.xvi.8.
[15] Lipsius, *De constantia* I.xix.
[16] Bramhall may have drawn these words from *Naturales quaestiones* II.xxxvi.1. Only the first clause, however, is an actual quotation from this text, which reads: *Existimo* [*fatum*] *necessitatem rerum omnium actionumque, quam nulla vis rumpat* [I consider [fate] to be the necessity of all things and actions, which no force may break]. Cf. *De beneficiis* IV.vii.2.
[17] Euripides, *Suppliants* 734–6. [18] As reported by Aulus Gellius, *Noctes atticae* VII.ii.
[19] Virgil, *Aeneid* VII: 315. Bramhall misquotes; the original reads: *at trahere atque moras tantis licet addere rebus* [But to stretch out and bring delay to such great issues – that I may do].
[20] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* XI.vi. Here Bramhall paraphrases rather than quotes; the text actually reads: *scies ultra statuta fato tuo spatia vitam quoque tibi prorogare mihi tantum licere* [you shall know that I alone can prolong your life beyond the limits determined by your fate]. Also, Bramhall's 'Osiris' is a mistake; it is Isis who speaks these words.

Next, they say that the Stoics did hold an eternal flux and necessary connection of causes; but they believed that God does act *praeter et contra naturam*, besides and against nature.[21] I answer that it is not much material whether they attribute necessity to God or to the stars or to a connection of causes, so as they establish necessity. The former reasons do not only condemn the ground or foundation of necessity, but much more necessity itself upon what ground soever. Either they must run into this absurdity, that the effect is determined, the cause remaining undetermined; or else hold such a necessary connection of causes as the Stoics did.

Lastly, they say, the Stoics did take away liberty and contingence, but they admit it. I answer, what liberty or contingence is it they admit but a titular liberty and an empty shadow of contingence, who do profess stiffly that all actions and events which either are or shall be cannot but be, nor can be otherwise, after any other manner, in any other place, time, number, order, measure, nor to any other end, than they are, and that in respect of God determining them to one? What a poor ridiculous liberty or contingence is this!

Secondly, they distinguish between the first cause and the second causes. They say that in respect of the second causes many things are free, but in respect of the first cause all things are necessary.[22] This answer may be taken away two ways.

First, so contraries shall be true together: the same thing at the same time shall be determined to one and not determined to one; the same thing at the same time must necessarily be and yet may not be. Perhaps they will say, not in the same respect. But that which strikes at the root of this question is this, if all the causes were only collateral, this exception might have some colour. But where all the causes, being joined together and subordinate one to another, do make but one total cause, if any one cause (much more the first) in the whole series or subordination of causes be necessary, it determines the rest, and without doubt makes the effect necessary. Necessity or liberty is not to be esteemed from one cause, but from all the causes joined together. If one link in a chain be fast, it fastens all the rest.

Secondly, I would have them tell me whether the second causes be predetermined by the first cause or not. If they be determined, then the effect is necessary, even in respect of the second causes. If the second cause be not determined, how is the effect determined, the second cause remaining undetermined? Nothing can give that to another which it has not itself.

[21] Lipsius, *De constantia* I.xx. [22] Cf. Lipsius, *De constantia* I.xix.

But, say they, nevertheless the power or faculty remains free. True, but not in order to the act, if it be once determined. It is free *in sensu diviso* [in the divided sense], but not *in sensu composito* [in the composite sense].[23] When a man holds a bird fast in his hand, is she therefore free to fly where she will because she has wings? Or a man imprisoned or fettered, is he therefore free to walk where he will because he has feet and a locomotive faculty? Judge without prejudice; what a miserable subterfuge is this, which many men confide so much in.

§ **19** Thirdly, they distinguish between liberty from compulsion and liberty from necessitation.[24] The will, say they, is free from compulsion but not free from necessitation. And this they fortify with two reasons. First, because it is granted by all divines that hypothetical necessity, or necessity upon a supposition, may consist with liberty.[25] Secondly, because God and the good angels do good necessarily, and yet are more free than we. To the first reason, I confess that necessity upon a supposition may sometimes consist with true liberty, as when it signifies only an infallible certitude of the understanding in that which it knows to be, or that it shall be. But if the

[23] In their standard use by medieval logicians, the terms *in sensu diviso* and *in sensu composito* refer to two ways of construing conditional sentences containing modal operators, i.e. such sentences as 'If God knows that Adam sinned then necessarily Adam sinned.' Understood in the composite sense, this means, 'It is a necessary truth that if God knows that Adam sinned then Adam sinned', which most such logicians, as well as Bramhall (and Hobbes), would have taken to be true. Understood in the divided sense, however, the sentence means 'If God knows that Adam sinned, then it is a necessary truth that Adam sinned', and most of these same logicians would have taken this to be false, as would Bramhall (though not Hobbes). Bramhall's use of the distinction in this passage, however, is not the standard one. He seems to be considering, not a conditional sentence which is ambiguous as a whole, but a conjunction whose ambiguity lies in its second clause alone. The sentence is this: 'The cause is necessitated and the effect is free.' The second clause, 'the effect is free', is ambiguous because it may mean either, 'the effect, considered apart from its cause, is capable of not occurring', or, 'the effect, given that its cause occurs, is necessitated to occur'. Bramhall then says that, not the compound sentence as a whole, but the second clause by itself, is understood in the divided sense when it is given the former meaning, in which case it is true; and in the composite sense when it is given the latter meaning, in which case it is false. For further explanation and examples, see Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I.xiv.13 ad 3; *Summa contra gentiles* II.xxv.23–4.; and *De veritate* ii.2 ad 4.

[24] Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I.lxxxii.1.

[25] Strictly speaking, hypothetical necessity is a property of propositions, so what Bramhall means here is something like the following: the hypothetical necessity of something's occurring (i.e. its being hypothetically necessary that it occurs) is consistent with its occurring freely (i.e. its being true that it occurs freely). To say that a proposition is hypothetically necessary is to say that it is the consequent of a conditional proposition that is necessary non-hypothetically or absolutely. Such a conditional is necessary *in sensu composito* (see n. 23 above), but if its consequent alone is not necessary absolutely or in its own right, then the conditional is not necessary *in sensu divisu*. The same point is sometimes made by saying that the conditional is necessary by the necessity of the consequence, but not necessary by the necessity of the consequent. The whole matter is nicely explained by Aquinas in *Summa contra gentiles* I.lxvii.10. In his treatise (§ 19), Hobbes gives his own explanation of hypothetical necessity.

supposition be not in the agent's power, nor depend upon anything that is in his power; if there be an exterior antecedent cause which does necessitate the effect, to call this free is to be mad with reason.[26]

To the second reason, I confess that God and the good angels are more free than we are, that is, intensively in the degree of freedom but not extensively in the latitude of the object; according to a liberty of exercise but not of specification. A liberty of exercise, that is, to do or not to do, may consist well with a necessity of specification, or a determination to the doing of good. But a liberty of exercise and a necessity of exercise, a liberty of specification and a necessity of specification, are not compatible, nor can consist together. He that is antecedently necessitated to do evil is not free to do good. So this instance is nothing at all to the purpose.

§ **20** Now to the distinction itself, I say, first, that the proper act of liberty is election, and election is opposed not only to coaction but also to coarctation, or determination to one. Necessitation or determination to one may consist with spontaneity but not with election or liberty, as has been showed.[27] The very Stoics did acknowledge a spontaneity. So our adversaries are not yet gone out of the confines of the Stoics.

Secondly, to rip up the bottom of this business, this I take to be the clear resolution of the Schools. There is a double act of the will, the one more remote, called *imperatus*, that is, in truth the act of some inferior faculty subject to the command of the will, as to open or shut one's eyes; without doubt these actions may be compelled. The other act is nearer, called *actus elicitus*, an act drawn out of the will, as to will, to choose, to elect.[28] This may be stopped or hindered by the intervening impediment of the understanding, as a stone lying on a table is kept from its natural motion; otherwise the will should have a kind of omnipotence. But the will cannot be compelled to an act repugnant to its inclination, as when a stone is thrown upwards into the air; for that is both to incline and not to incline to the same object at the same time, which implies a contradiction. Therefore to say the will is necessitated is to say the will is compelled so far as the will is capable of compulsion. If a strong man, holding the hand of a weaker, should therewith kill a third person, *haec quidem vis est*, this is violence; the weaker did not willingly perpetrate the fact because he was compelled. But now suppose this strong man had the will of the weaker in his power as well as the hand,

[26] Cf. Terence, *Eunuchus* I: 63: *ut cum ratione insanias*.
[27] See § 6 above. [28] Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I–II.vi.4.

and should not only incline but determine it secretly and insensibly to commit this act: is not the case the same? Whether one ravish Lucretia by force, as Tarquin,[29] or by amatory potions and magical incantations not only allure her but necessitate her to satisfy his lust and incline her effectually and draw her inevitably and irresistibly to follow him spontaneously, Lucretia in both these conditions is to be pitied. But the latter person is more guilty and deserves greater punishment, who endeavours also, so much as in him lies, to make Lucretia irresistibly partake of his crime. I dare not apply it but thus only: take heed how we defend those secret and invincible necessitations to evil, though spontaneous and free from coaction.

These are their fastnesses.

§ **21** The rest are umbrages quickly dispelled. First, the astrologer steps up and subjects liberty to the motions of heaven, to the aspects and ascensions of the stars:

> *plus etenim fati valet hora benigni*
> *quam si nos Veneris commendet epistula Marti.*
>
> [for an hour of favourable fate is worth more
> than a letter from Venus commending us to Mars.][30]

I stand not much upon them who cannot see the fishes swimming beside them in the rivers, yet believe they see those which are in heaven; who promise great treasures to others, and beg a groat for themselves. The stars at the most do but incline, they cannot necessitate.

Secondly, the physician subjects liberty to the complexion and temperature of the body. But yet this comes not home to a necessity. Socrates and many others, by assiduous care, have corrected the pernicious propensions which flowed from their temperatures.

§ **22** Thirdly, the moral philosopher tells us how we are haled hither and thither with outward objects. To this I answer, first, that the power which outward objects have over us is for the most part by our own default, because of those vicious habits which we have contracted. Therefore though the actions seem to have a kind of violence in them, yet they were

[29] According to legend, Lucretia was the wife of Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, grand-nephew of one of the traditional nine kings of Rome, in the sixth century B.C.E. She was raped by Sextus Tarquinius, son of a later king, and in consequence committed suicide, stabbing herself in the breast with a dagger. The story is recounted by Livy in his history of Rome, *Ab urbe condita* I.lviii.

[30] Juvenal, *Satires* XVI: 4–5.