

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

A Display of Arminianism: Of Free-Will, the Nature and Power Thereof

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Our next task is to take a view of the idol himself, of this great deity of free-will, whose original being not well known, he is pretended, like the Ephesian image of Diana, to have fallen down from heaven, and to have his endowments from above. But yet, considering what a nothing he was at his first discovery in comparison of that vast giant-like hugeness to which now he is grown, we may say of him as the painter said of his monstrous picture, which he had mended or rather marred according to every one's fancy, "*Hunc populus fecit*," — it is the issue of the people's brain. Origen¹ is supposed to have brought him first into the church; but among those many sincere worshippers of divine grace, this setter forth of new demons found but little entertainment. It was looked upon but like the stump of Dagon, with his head and hands laid down before the ark of God, without whose help he could neither know nor do that which is good in any kind, still accounted but "*truncus ficulnus, inutile lignum*," — "a fig-tree log, an unprofitable piece of wood." "*Incerti patres scamnum facerentne?*" The fathers of the succeeding ages had much debate to what use they should put it, and though some exalted it a degree or two above its merits, yet the most concluded to keep it a block still; until at length there arose a stout champion,² challenging on his behalf the whole church of God, and, like a knight-errant, wandered from the west to the east to grapple with any that should oppose his idol; who, though he met with divers adversaries,³ one especially,⁴ who in the behalf of the grace of God continually foiled him and cast him to the ground, and that in the judgment of all the lawful judges assembled in councils,⁵ and in the opinion of most of the Christian

¹ Hieron. ad Ruf.

² "Pelagius: *Dogma quod — Pestifero vomuit coluber sermone Britannus.*" — Prosper. de Ingrat., cap. i.

³ "*Adfuit, exhortante Deo provisa per orbem, Sanctorum pia cura patrum: — 1. Pestem subeuntem Prima recidit, Sedes Roma Petri. 2. Non segnior inde, orientis Rectorum cura emicuit. Synod. Palest. 3. Hieronymus libris valde excellentibus hostem Dissecuit. 4. Atticus Constantinop. 5. Duæ Synodi Africanæ.*" — Prosper, de Ingrat.

⁴ "*Concilium cui dux Aurelius ingeniumque Augustinus erat. Quem Christi gratia cornu Uberiore rigans, nostro lumen dedit ævo.*" — Prosp., *ibid.*

⁵ "*Dixit Pelagius, quis est mihi Augustinus? Universi acclamabant blasphemantem in episcopum, ex cujus ore, dominus universæ Africæ, unitatis indulserit felicitatem, non solum a conventu illo, sed ab omni ecclesia pellendum.*" — Oros. *Apologet.*, p. 621, de Synod. Palest. "*Præ omnibus studium gerite libros. S. Aug. quos ad Prosp. et Hilar. scripsit, memoratis fratribus legendos ingerere,*" etc. — *Epist. Synod. Byzac.*

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bystanders,⁶ yet, by his cunning insinuation, he planted such an opinion of his idol's deity and self-sufficiency in the hearts of divers, that to this day it could never be rooted out.

Now, after the decease of his Pelagian worshippers, some of the corrupter schoolmen, seeing him thus from his birth exposed without shelter to wind and weather, to all assaults, out of mere charity and self-love built him a temple, and adorned it with natural lights, merits, uncontrolled independent operations, with many other gay attendances. But in the beginning of the Reformation,—that fatal time for idolatry and superstition, together with abbeys and monasteries,—the zeal and learning of our forefathers, with the help of God's word, demolished this temple, and brake this building down to the ground; in the rubbish whereof we well hoped the idol himself had been so deeply buried as that his head should never more have been exalted, to the trouble of the church of God, until not long since some curious wits, whose weak stomachs were clogged with manna and loathed the sincere milk of the word, raking all dunghills for novelties, lighted unhappily upon this idol, and presently, with no less joy than did the mathematician at the discovery of a new geometrical proportion, exclaim, "We have found it! we have found it!" And without more ado, up they erected a shrine, and until this day continue offering of praise and thanks for all the good they do to this work of their own hands.

And that the idol may be free from ruin, to which in himself they have found by experience that he is subject, they have matched him to contingency, a new goddess of their own creation, who, having proved very fruitful in monstrous births upon their conjunctions, they nothing doubt they shall never want one to set on the throne and make president of all human actions: so that after he hath, with various success, at least twelve hundred years, contended with the providence and grace of God, he boasteth now as if he had obtained a total victory. But yet all his prevailing is to be attributed to the diligence and varnish of his new abettors, with (to our shame be it spoken!) the negligence of his adversaries. In him and his cause there is no more real worth than was when by the ancient fathers he was exploded and cursed out of the church: so that they who can attain, through the many winding labyrinths of curious distinctions, to look upon the thing itself, shall find that they have been, like Egyptian novices, brought through many stately frontispieces and goodly fabrics, with much show of zeal and devotion, to the image of an ugly ape.

⁶ *"Imo noverunt, non solum Romanam Africanamque ecclesiam, sed per omnes mundi partes, universæ promissionis filios, cum doctrina hujus viri, sicut in tota fide ita in gratiæ confessione congruere."*—Prosp. ad Rufin. *"Augustinum sanctæ recordationis virum pro vita sua, et meritis, in nostra communione semper habuimus, nec unquam hunc sinistræ suspicionis saltem rumor suspexit."*—Cœlest., Epist. ad Gal. Episcop. These I have cited to show what a heavy prejudice the Arminian cause lies under, being professedly opposite to the doctrine of St Austin, and they continually slighting of his authority.

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Yet here observe, that we do not absolutely oppose free-will, as if it were “nomen inane,” a mere figment, when there is no such thing in the world, but only in that sense the Pelagians and Arminians do assert it. About words we will not contend. We grant man, in the substance of all his actions, as much power, liberty, and freedom as a mere created nature is capable of. We grant him to be free in his choice from all outward coaction, or inward natural necessity, to work according to election and deliberation, spontaneously embracing what seemeth good unto him. Now, call this power free-will, or what you please, so you make it not supreme, independent, and boundless, we are not at all troubled. The imposition of names depends upon the discretion of their inventers. Again; even in spiritual things, we deny that our wills are at all debarred, or deprived of their proper liberty: but here we say, indeed, that we are not properly free until the Son makes us free;—no great use of freedom in that wherein we can do nothing at all. We do not claim such a liberty as should make us despise the grace of God,⁷ whereby we may attain true liberty indeed; which addeth to, but taketh nothing from, our original freedom. But of this after I have showed what an idol the Arminians make of free-will. Only take notice in the entrance that we speak of it now, not as it was at first by God created, but as it is now by sin corrupted; yet, being considered in that estate also, they ascribe more unto it than it was ever capable of. As it now standeth, according to my formerly-proposed method, I shall show,—first, what inbred native virtue they ascribe unto it, and with how absolute a dominion and sovereignty over all our actions they endow it; secondly, what power they say it hath in preparing us for the grace of God; thirdly, how effectually operative it is in receiving the said grace, and with how little help thereof it accomplisheth the great work of our conversion;—all briefly, with so many observations as shall suffice to discover their proud errors in each particular.

“Herein,”⁸ saith Arminius, “consisteth the liberty of the will, that all things required to enable it to will any thing being accomplished, it still remains indifferent to will or not.” And all of them at the synod:⁹ “There is,” say they, “accompanying the will of man an inseparable property, which we call liberty, from whence the will is termed a power, which, when all things pre-required as necessary to operation are fulfilled, may will any thing, or not will it;” that is, our free-wills have such an absolute and uncontrollable power in the territory of all human actions, that no influence of God’s providence, no certainty of his decree, no unchangeableness of his purpose, can sway it at all in its free determinations, or have any power with his highness to cause him to will or resolve on

⁷ *“Homo non libertate gratiam, sed gratia libertatem, assequitur.”* — Aug.

⁸ *“Libertas Arbitrii consistit in eo, quod homo, positis omnibus requisitis ad volendum, indifferens tamen sit, ad volendum vel nolendum, hoc vel illud.”* — Armin. Art. Perpend., p. 11.

⁹ *“Voluntatem comitatur proprietatis quædam inseparabilis, quam libertatem vocamus; a qua voluntas dicitur potentia, quæ positis omnibus prærequisitis ad agendum necessariis, potest velle et nolle, aut velle et non velle.”* — Remon. in Act. Synod, p. 16.

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any such act as God by him intendeth to produce. Take an instance in the great work of our conversion.¹⁰ “All unregenerate men,” saith Arminius, “have, by virtue of their free-will, a power of resisting the Holy Spirit, of rejecting the offered grace of God, of contemning the counsel of God concerning themselves, of refusing the gospel of grace, of not opening the heart to him that knocketh.” What a stout idol is this, whom neither the Holy Spirit, the grace and counsel of God, the calling of the gospel, the knocking at the door of the heart, can move at all, or in the least measure prevail against him! Woe be unto us, then, if when God calls us our free-will be not in good temper, and well disposed to hearken unto him! for it seems there is no dealing with it by any other ways, though powerful and almighty.¹¹ “For grant,” saith Corvinus, “all the operations of grace which God can use in our conversion, yet conversion remaineth so in our own free power that we can be not converted; that is, we can either turn or not turn ourselves;” —where the idol plainly challengeth the Lord to work his utmost, and tells him that after he hath so done he will do what he please. His infallible prescience, his powerful predetermination, the moral efficacy of the gospel, the infusion of grace, the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit, all are nothing, not at all available in helping or furthering our independent wills in their proceedings. Well, then, in what estate will you have the idol placed?¹² “In such a one wherein he may be suffered to sin, or to do well, at his pleasure,” as the same author intimates. It seems, then, as to sin, so nothing is required for him to be able to do good but God’s permission? No! For the Remonstrants¹³ (as they speak of themselves) “do always suppose a free power of obeying or not obeying, as well in those who do obey as in those who do not obey;” —that he that is obedient may therefore be counted obedient, because he obeyeth when he could not obey, and so on the contrary:” where all the praise of our obedience, whereby we are made to differ from others, is ascribed to ourselves alone, and that free power that is in us. Now, this they mean not of any one act of obedience, but of faith itself, and the whole consummation thereof.¹⁴ “For if a man should say, that every man in the world hath a power of believing if he will, and of attaining salvation, and that this power is settled in his nature, what argument have you to confute

¹⁰ “*Omnes irrogeniti habent Lib. Arbit. et potentiam Spiritui Sancto resistendi, gratiam Dei oblatam repudiandi, consilium Dei adversus se contemnendi, evangelium gratiæ repudiandi, ei qui cor pulsat non aperiendi.*” —Armin. Artic. Perpend.

¹¹ “*Positis omnibus operationibus gratiæ, quibus Deus in conversione nostri uti possit, manet tamen conversio ita in nostra potestate libera, ut possimus non converti; hoc est, nosmet ipsos convertere vel non convertere.*” —Corv. ad Bog., p. 263.

¹² “*Non potest Deus Lib. Arbit. integrum servare, nisi tam peccare hominem sineret, quam bene agere.*” —Corv. ad Molin., cap. vi.

¹³ “*Semper Remonstrantes supponunt liberam obediendi potentiam et non obediendi; ut qui obediens est idcirco obediens censeatur, quia cum possit non obedire obedit tamen, et e contra.*” —Rem. Apol., p. 70.

¹⁴ “*Quod si quis dicat omnes in universum homines, habere potentiam credendi si velint, et salutem consequendi: et hanc potentiam esse naturæ hominum divinitus collatam, quo tuo argumento eum confutabis?*” —Armin. Antip., p. 272.

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him?" saith Arminius triumphantly to Perkins; where the sophistical innovator as plainly confounds grace and nature as ever did Pelagius. That, then, which the Arminians claim here in behalf of their free-will is, an absolute independence on God's providence in doing any thing, and of his grace in doing that which is good, — a self-sufficiency in all its operations, a plenary indifferency of doing what we will, this or that, as being neither determined to the one nor inclined to the other by any overruling influence from heaven. So that the good acts of our wills have no dependence on God's providence as they are acts, nor on his grace as they are good; but in both regards proceed from such a principle within us as is no way moved by any superior agent. Now, the first of these we deny unto our wills, because they are created; and the second, because they are corrupted. Their creation hinders them from doing any thing of themselves without the assistance of God's providence; and their corruption, from doing any thing that is good without his grace. A self-sufficiency for operation, without the effectual motion of Almighty God, the first cause of all things, we can allow neither to men nor angels, unless we intend to make them gods; and a power of doing good, equal unto that they have of doing evil, we must not grant to man by nature, unless we will deny the fall of Adam, and fancy ourselves still in paradise. But let us consider these things apart.

FIRST, I shall not stand to decipher the nature of human liberty, which perhaps would require a larger discourse than my proposed method will bear. It may suffice that, according to my former intimation, we grant as large a freedom and dominion to our wills over their own acts as a creature, subject to the supreme rule of God's providence, is capable of. Endued we are with such a liberty of will as is free from all outward compulsion and inward necessity, having an elective faculty of applying itself unto that which seems good unto it, in which it is a free choice; notwithstanding, it is subservient to the decree of God, as I showed before, chap. 4. Most free it is in all its acts, both in regard of the object it chooseth and in regard of that vital power and faculty whereby it worketh, infallibly complying with God's providence, and working by virtue of the motion thereof; but surely to assert such a supreme independency and every way unbounded indifferency as the Arminians claim, whereby, all other things requisite being presupposed, it should remain absolutely in our own power to will or not to will, to do any thing or not to do it, is plainly to deny that our wills are subject to the rule of the Most High. It is granted that in such a chimerical, fancied consideration of free-will, wherein it is looked upon as having no relation to any act of God's but only its creation, abstracting from his decree, it may be said to have such a liberty in regard of the object; but the truth is, this divided sense is plain nonsense, a mere fiction of such an estate as wherein it never was, nor ever can be, so long as men will confess any deity but themselves, to whose determinations they must be subject. Until, then, more significant terms may be invented for this free power in our nature, which the Scripture never once vouchsafed to name, I

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shall be content to call it with Prosper, a¹⁵ “spontaneous appetite of what seemeth good unto it,” free from all compulsion, but subservient to the providence of God. And against its exaltation to this height of independency, I oppose, —

First, Every thing that is independent of any else in operation is purely active, and so consequently a god; for nothing but a divine will can be a pure act, possessing such a liberty by virtue of its own essence. Every created will must have a liberty by participation, which includeth such an imperfect potentiality as cannot be brought into act without some premotion (as I may so say) of a superior agent. Neither doth this motion, being extrinsical, at all prejudice the true liberty of the will, which requireth, indeed, that the internal principle of operation be active and free, but not that that principle be not moved to that operation by an outward superior agent. Nothing in this sense can have an independent principle of operation which hath not an independent being. It is no more necessary to the nature of a free cause, from whence a free action must proceed, that it be the first beginning of it, than it is necessary to the nature of a cause that it be the first cause.

Secondly, If the free acts of our wills are so subservient to the providence of God as that he useth them to what end he will, and by them effecteth many of his purposes, then they cannot of themselves be so absolutely independent as to have in their own power every necessary circumstance and condition, that they may use or not use at their pleasure. Now, the former is proved by all those reasons and texts of Scripture I before produced to show that the providence of God overruleth the actions and determineth the wills of men freely to do that which he hath appointed. And, truly, were it otherwise, God’s dominion over the most things that are in the world were quite excluded; he had not power to determine that any one thing should ever come to pass which hath any reference to the wills of men.

Thirdly, All the acts of the will being positive entities, were it not previously moved by God himself, “in whom we live, move, and have our being,” must needs have their essence and existence solely from the will itself; which is thereby made αὐτὸ ὄν, a first and supreme cause, endued with an underived being. And so much to that particular.

Let us now, in the **SECOND** place, look upon the power of our free-will in doing that which is morally good; where we shall find not only an essential imperfection, inasmuch as it is created, but also a contracted effect, inasmuch as it is corrupted. The ability which the Arminians ascribe unto it in this kind, of doing that which is morally and spiritually good, is as large as themselves will confess to be competent unto it in the state of

¹⁵ “*Lib. Arbit. est rei sibi placitæ spontaneus appetitus.*” —Prosper. ad Collat., cap. xviii. p. 379.

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innocency, even a power of believing and a power of resisting the gospel, of obeying and not obeying, of turning or of not being converted.

The Scripture, as I observed before, hath no such term at all, nor any thing equivalent unto it. But the expressions it useth concerning our nature and all the faculties thereof, in this state of sin and unregeneration, seem to imply the quite contrary; as, that we are in “bondage,” Heb. 2:15; “dead in sins,” Eph. 2:1, and so “free from righteousness,” Rom. 6:20; “servants of sin,” verse 17; under the “reign” and “dominion” thereof, verses 12, 14; all “our members being instruments of unrighteousness,” verse 13; not “free indeed,” until “the Son make us free.” So that this idol of free-will, in respect of spiritual things, is not one whit better than the other idols of the heathen. Though it look like “silver and gold,” it is the “work of men’s hands.”

“It hath a mouth, but it speaketh not; it hath eyes, but it seeth not; it hath ears, but it heareth not; anose, but it smelleth not; it hath hands, but it handleth not; feet, but it walketh not; neither speaketh it through its throat. They that made it are like unto it; and so is every one that trusteth in it. O Israel, trust thou in the Lord,” etc., Ps. 115:4–9.

That it is the work of men’s hands, or a human invention, I showed before. For the rest, it hath a mouth unacquainted with the “mystery of godliness,” “full only of cursing and bitterness,” Rom. 3:14; “speaking great swelling words,” Jude 16; “great things, and blasphemies,” Rev. 13:5; a “mouth causing the flesh to sin,” Eccles. 5:6;—his eyes are blind, not able to perceive those things that are of God, nor to know those things that are “spiritually discerned,” 1 Cor. 2:14; “eyes before which there is no fear of God,” Rom. 3:18;—his “understanding is darkened, because of the blindness of his heart,” Eph. 4:18; “wise to do evil, but to do good he hath no knowledge,” Jer. 4:22; so that without farther light, all the world is but a mere “darkness,” John 1:5;—he hath ears, but they are like the ears of the “deaf adder” to the word of God, “refusing to hear the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely,” Ps. 58:5; being “dead” when his voice first calls it, John 5:25; “ears stopped that they should not hear,” Zech. 7:11; “heavy ears” that cannot hear, Isa. 6:10;—a nose, to which the gospel is “the savour of death unto death,” 2 Cor. 2:16;—“hands full of blood,” Isa. 1:15; and “fingers defiled with iniquity,” chap. 59:3;—feet, indeed, but, like Mephibosheth, lame in both by a fall, so that he cannot at all walk in the path of goodness; but

“swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in his ways, and the way of peace hath he not known,” Rom. 3:15–17.

These, and divers other such endowments and excellent qualifications, doth the Scripture attribute to this idol, which it calls “The old man,” as I shall more fully discover in the

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next chapter. And is not this a goodly reed whereon to rely in the paths of godliness? a powerful deity whereunto we may repair for a power to become the sons of God, and attain eternal happiness? The abilities of free-will in particular I shall consider hereafter; now only I will, by one or two reasons, show that it cannot be the sole and proper cause of any truly good and spiritual act, well-pleasing unto God.

First, All spiritual acts well-pleasing unto God, as faith, repentance, obedience, are supernatural; flesh and blood revealeth not these things:

“Not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man; but of God,” John 1:13;

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” chap. 3:6.

Now, to the performance of any supernatural act it is required that the productive power thereof be also supernatural; for nothing hath an activity in causing above its own sphere. “*Nec imbelles generant feroces aquilas columbæ.*” But our free-will is a merely natural faculty, betwixt which and those spiritual, supernatural acts there is no proportion, unless it be advanced above its own orb, by inherent, habitual grace. Divine, theological virtues, differing even in the substance of the act from those moral performances about the same things to which the strength of nature may reach (for the difference of acts ariseth from their formal objects, which to both these are diverse), must have another principle and cause above all the power of nature in civil things and actions morally good, inasmuch as they are subject to a natural perception, and do not exceed the strength of our own wills. This faculty of free-will may take place, but yet not without these following limitations:—

First, That it always requireth the general concurrence of God, whereby the whole *suppositum* in which free-will hath its subsistence may be sustained, Matt. 10:29, 30.

Secondly, That we do all these things imperfectly and with much infirmity; every degree, also, of excellency in these things must be counted a special gift of God, Isa. 26:12.

Thirdly, That our wills are determined by the will of God to all their acts and motions in particular; but to do that which is spiritually good we have no knowledge, no power.

Secondly, That concerning which I gave one special instance, in whose production the Arminians attribute much to free-will, is faith. This they affirm (as I showed before) to be

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inbred in nature, every one having in him from his birth a natural power to believe in Christ and his gospel; for Episcopius denies that¹⁶ “any action of the Holy Spirit upon the understanding or will is necessary, or promised in the Scripture, to make a man able to believe the word preached unto him.” So that it seems every man hath at all times a power to believe, to produce the act of faith upon the revelation of its object: which gross Pelagianism is contrary, —

First, To the doctrine of the church of England, affirming that a man cannot so much as prepare himself by his own strength to faith and calling upon God, until the grace of God by Christ prevent him, that he may have a good will. — Artic. x.

Secondly, To the Scripture, teaching that it is “the work of God that we do believe,” John 6:29. It is “not of ourselves; it is the gift of God,” Eph. 2:8. To some “it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” Matt. 13:11. And what is peculiarly given to some cannot be in the power of every one: “To you it is given in the behalf of Christ to believe on him,” Phil. 1:29. Faith is our access or coming unto Christ; which none can do “except the Father draw him,” John 6:44; and he so draweth, or “hath mercy, on whom he will have mercy,” Rom. 9:18. And although Episcopius rejects any immediate action of the Holy Spirit for the ingenerating of faith, yet St Paul affirmeth that there is no less effectual power required to it than that which raised Christ from the dead; which, sure, was an action of the almighty Godhead. “That ye may know,” saith he, “what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead,” Eph. 1:18–20. So that, let the Arminians say what they please, recalling that I write to Christians, I will spare my labour of farther proving that faith is the free gift of God; and their opposition to the truth of the Scripture in this particular is so evident to the meanest capacity that there needs no recapitulation to present the sum of it to their understandings.¹⁷

¹⁶ “An ulla actio S. S. immediata in mentem aut voluntatem necessaria sit, aut in Scriptura promittatur ad hoc, ut quis credere possit verbo extrinsecus proposito, negativam tuebimur.” — Episcop., Disput. Privat.

¹⁷ Owen, J. (n.d.). *The works of John Owen* (W. H. Goold, Ed.; Vol. 10, pp. 114–123). T&T Clark.