

## OF FATE.\*

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I WILL endeavor, my dearest Piso, to send you my opinion concerning Fate, written with all the clearness and compendiousness I am capable of; since you, who are not ignorant how cautious I am of writing, have thought fit to make it the subject of your request.

1. You are first then to know that this word Fate is spoken and understood two manner of ways; the one as it is an energy, the other as it is a substance. First therefore, as it is an action, Plato † has under a type described it, saying thus in his dialogue entitled Phaedrus: “And this is a sanction of Adrastea (or an inevitable ordinance), that whatever soul being an attendant on God,” &c. And in his treatise called Timaeus: “The laws which God in the nature of the universe has established for immortal souls.” And in his book of a Commonweal he calls Fate “the speech of the virgin Lachesis, who is the daughter of Necessity.” By which sentences he not tragically but theologically shows us what his sentiments are in this matter. Now if any one, translating the fore-cited passages, would have them expressed in more familiar terms, the description in Phaedrus may be thus explained: That Fate is a divine sentence, intransgressible because its cause

\* “This little Treatise is so pitiously torne, maimed, and dismembred thorowout, that a man may sooner divine and guess thereat (as I have done) than translate it. I beseech the readers therefore, to hold me excused, in case I neither please my selfe, nor content them, in that which I have written.” — HOLLAND.

† See Plato, Phaedrus, p. 248 C; Timaeus, p. 41 E; Republic, X. p. 617 D.

cannot be divested or hindered. And according to what he has said in his *Timæus*, it is a law ensuing on the nature of the universe, according to which all things that are done are transacted. For this does *Lachesis* effect, who is indeed the daughter of *Necessity*, — as we have both already related, and shall yet better understand by that which will be said in the progress of our discourse. Thus you see what *Fate* is, when it is taken for an action.

2. But as it is a substance, it seems to be the universal soul of the world, and admits of a threefold distribution; the first destiny being that which errs not; the second, that which is thought to err; and the third that which, being under the heaven, is conversant about the earth. Of these, the highest is called *Clotho*, the next *Atropos*, and the lowest, *Lachesis*; who, receiving the celestial influences and efficacies of her sisters, transmits and fastens them to the terrestrial things which are under her government. Thus have we declared briefly what is to be said of *Fate*, taken as a substance; what it is, what are its parts, after what manner it is, how it is ordained, and how it stands, both in respect to itself and to us. But as to the particularities of these things, there is another fable in his *Commonweal*, by which they are in some measure covertly insinuated, and we ourselves have, in the best manner we can, endeavored to explain them to you.

3. But we now once again turn our discourse to *Fate*, as it is an energy. For concerning this it is that there are so many natural, moral, and logical questions. Having therefore already in some sort sufficiently defined what it is, we are now in the next place to say something of its quality, although it may to many seem absurd. I say then that *Fate*, though comprehending as it were in a circle the infinity of all those things which are and have been from infinite times and shall be to infinite ages, is not in itself infinite, but determinate and finite; for neither law, reason.

nor any other divine thing can be infinite. And this you will the better understand, if you consider the total revolution and the whole time in which the revolutions of the eight circles (that is, of the eight spheres of the fixed stars, sun, moon, and five planets), having (as Timaeus\* says) finished their course, return to one and the same point, being measured by the circle of the Same, which goes always after one manner. For in this order, which is finite and determinate, shall all things (which, as well in heaven as in earth, consist by necessity from above) be reduced to the same situation, and restored again to their first beginning. Wherefore the habitude of heaven alone, being thus ordained in all things, as well in regard of itself as of the earth and all terrestrial matters, shall again (after long revolutions) one day return; and those things that in order follow after, and being linked together in a continuity are maintained in their course, shall be present, every one of them by necessity bringing what is its own. But for the better clearing of this matter, let us understand that whatever is in us or about us is not wrought by the course of the heavens and heavenly influences, as being entirely the efficient cause both of my writing what I now write, and of your doing also what you at present do, and in the same manner as you do it. Hereafter then, when the same cause shall return, we shall do the same things we now do, and in the same manner, and shall again become the same men; and so it will be with all others. And that which follows after shall also happen by the following cause; and in brief, all things that shall happen in the whole and in every one of these universal revolutions shall again become the same. By this it appears (as we have said before) that Fate, being in some sort infinite, is nevertheless determinate and finite; and it may be also in some sort seen and comprehended, as we have farther said, that it is as it were a

\* Plato, Tim. p. 89 D.

circle. For as a motion of a circle is a circle, and the time that measures it is also a circle ; so the order of things which are done and happen in a circle may be justly esteemed and called a circle.

4. This therefore, though there should be nothing else, almost shows us what sort of thing Fate is ; but not particularly or in every respect. What kind of thing then is it in its own form ? It is, as far as one can compare it, like to the civil or politic law. For first it commands the most part of things at least, if not all, conditionally ; and then it comprises (as far as is possible for it) all things that belong to the public in general ; and the better to make you understand both the one and the other, we must specify them by an example. The civil law speaks and ordains in general of a valiant man, and also of a deserter and a coward ; and in the same manner of others. Now this is not to make the law speak of this or that man in particular, but principally to propose such things as are universal or general, and consequently such as fall under them. For we may very well say, that it is legal to reward this man for having demeaned himself valiantly, and to punish that man for flying from his colors ; because the law has virtually — though not in express terms and particularly yet in such general ones as they are comprehended under, — so determined of them. As the law (if I may so speak) of physicians and masters of corporal exercises potentially comprehends particular and special things within the general ; so the law of Nature, determining first and principally general matters, secondarily and consequently determines such as are particular. Thus, general things being decreed by Fate, particular and individual things may also in some sort be said to be so, because they are so by consequence with the general. But perhaps some one of those who more accurately examine and more subtly search into these things may say, on the

contrary, that particular and individual things precede the composition of general things, and that the general exist only for the particular, since that for which another thing is always goes before that which is for it. Nevertheless, this is not the proper place to treat of this difficulty, but it is to be remitted to another. However, that Fate comprehends not all things clearly and expressly, but only such as are universal and general, let it pass for resolved on at present, as well for what we have already said a little before, as for what we shall say hereafter. For that which is finite and determinate, agreeing properly with divine Providence, is seen more in universal and general things than in particular; such therefore is the divine law, and also the civil; but infinity consists in particulars and individuals.

After this we are to declare what this term "conditionally" means; for it is to be thought that Fate is also some such thing. That then is said to be conditionally, which is supposed to exist not of itself or absolutely, but as really dependent upon and joined to another; which signifies a suit and consequence. "And this is the sanction of Adrastea (or an inevitable ordinance), that whatever soul, being an attendant on God, shall see any thing of truth, shall till another revolution be exempt from punishment; and if it is always able to do the same, it shall never suffer any damage."\* This is said both conditionally and also universally. Now that Fate is some such thing is clearly manifest, as well from its substance as from its name. For it is called *εἰμακμένη* as being *εἰρομένη*, that is, dependent and linked; and it is a sanction or law, because things are therein ordained and disposed consequentially, as is usual in civil government.

5. We ought in the next place to consider and treat of

\* This is the whole passage from Plato's Phaedrus, p. 248 C, of which part is quoted in § 1. (G.)

mutual relation and affection ; that is, what reference and respect Fate has to divine Providence, what to Fortune, what also to " that which is in our power," what to contingent and other such like things ; and furthermore we are to determine, how far and in what it is true or false that all things happen and are done by and according to Fate. For if the meaning is, that all things are comprehended and contained in Fate, it must be granted that this proposition is true ; and if any would farther have it so understood, that all things which are done amongst men, on earth, and in heaven are placed in Fate, let this also pass as granted for the present. But if (as the expression seems rather to imply) the " being done according to Fate " signifies not all things, but only that which is an immediate consequent of Fate, then it must not be said that all things happen and are done by and according to Fate, though all things are so according to Fate as to be comprised in it. For all things that the law comprehends and of which it speaks are not legal or according to law ; for it comprehends treason, it treats of the cowardly running away from one's colors in time of battle, of adultery, and many other such like things, of which it cannot be said that any one of them is lawful. Neither indeed can I affirm of the performing a valorous act in war, the killing of a tyrant, or the doing any other virtuous deed, that it is legal ; because that only is proper to be called legal, which is commanded by the law. Now if the law commands these things, how can they avoid being rebels against the law and transgressors of it, who neither perform valiant feats of arms, kill tyrants, nor do any other such remarkable acts of virtue ? And if they are transgressors of the law, why is it not just they should be punished ? But if this is not reasonable, it must then be also confessed that these things are not legal or according to law ; but that legal and according to law is only that which is particularly pre-

scribed and expressly commanded by the law, in any action whatsoever. In like manner, those things only are fatal and according to Fate, which are the consequences of causes preceding in the divine disposition. So that Fate indeed comprehends all things which are done ; yet many of those things that are comprehended in it, and almost all that precede, should not (to speak properly) be pronounced to be fatal or according to Fate.

6. These things being so, we are next in order to show, how “ that which is in our power ” (or free will), Fortune, possible, contingent, and other like things which are placed among the antecedent causes, can consist with Fate, and Fate with them ; for Fate, as it seems, comprehends all things, and yet all these things will not happen by necessity, but every one of them according to the principle of its nature. Now the nature of the possible is to presubsist, as the genus, and to go before the contingent ; and the contingent, as the matter and subject, is to be presupposed to free will : and our free will ought as a master to make use of the contingent ; and Fortune comes in by the side of free will, through the property of the contingent of inclining to either part. Now you will more easily apprehend what has been said, if you shall consider that every thing which is generated, and the generation itself, is not done without a generative faculty or power, and the power is not without a substance. As for example, neither the generation of man, nor that which is generated, is without a power ; but this power is about man, and man himself is the substance. Now the power or faculty is between the substance, which is the powerful, and the generation and the thing generated, which are both possibles. There being then these three things, the power, the powerful, and the possible ; before the power can exist, the powerful must of necessity be presupposed as its subject, and the power must also necessarily subsist before the possible. By this

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