

their own imaginations and reasonings to conclusions which neutralize the effect of their sublimer conceptions, and often contradict them. The eternity of matter, for instance, was held by the Greek and Roman philosophers, and by their preceptors, the Oriental schools, who thought it absolutely impossible that anything should be produced from nothing,—thus destroyed the notion of creation in its proper sense, and of a Supreme Creator.

In like manner, though occasionally we find many excellent things said of the providence of God, all these were weakened or destroyed by other opinions. The Epicurean sect denied the doctrine, and laid it down as a maxim, "That what was blessed and immortal gave neither any trouble to itself nor others;" a notion which exactly agrees with the system of the modern Hindoos. The Stoics contended for a Providence; but in their creed it was counteracted by the doctrine of an absolute necessity, or fate, to which God and matter, or the universe, which consists, as they thought, of both, was immutably subject; and where they allow it, they confine the care of the gods to great affairs only.

Another great principle of religion is the doctrine of a future state of reward and punishment; and though in some form it is recognised in Pagan systems, and the traditions of the primitive ages may be traced in their extravagant perversions and fables, its evidence was either greatly diminished, or it was mixed up with notions entirely subversive of the moral effect which it was originally intended to produce.

The doctrine of Aristotle and the Peripatetics gives no countenance to the opinion of the soul's immortality, or even of its existence after death. Democritus and his followers taught, that the soul is material and mortal;—Heraclitus, that when the soul is purified from moist vapours, it returns into

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