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**The Works Of the late Right Honorable Henry St. John,
Lord Viscount Bolingbroke**

In Five Volumes, complete.

Bolingbroke, Henry St. John

London, 1754

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FRAGMENTS or MINUTES

OF

E S S A Y S.

I.

I Have read again Dr. CUDWORTH'S posthumous treatise concerning eternal and immutable morality, which you sent me long ago: and, since you ask my opinion of it now, I shall take some notice of those, which this very learned author defends on two subjects, the nature of human knowledge, and the principles of natural religion. On the first I have writ to you already, and on the last you know that I intend to write to you. On both of these I differ widely from the doctor, and am very far from finding any thing in this treatise, which can induce me, in the least degree, to change my way of thinking. On the contrary, the great principle on which he proceeds seems to me of the utmost absurdity, and the consequences deducible from it at least as dangerous, perhaps

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more so, to the foundation of all religion, than the consequences that flow from the doctrines he opposes.

CUDWORTH enters into the dispute between DES CARTES and his opposers, who have triumphed exceedingly over him for saying, "I do not think that the essences of things, and those mathematical truths which can be known of them, are independent on God; but I think, however, that they are immutable and eternal, because God willed and ordered that they should be so." It is more probable, and it is more candid to believe, that this philosopher was in earnest, than that he was in jest, when he advanced this proposition. He might think that he took the best, if not the strongest side in dispute, and approve his own intention in the choice he made; as it deserves to be approved by every sincere theist, and modest enquirer into matters of the first philosophy, even by those who are not of his mind.

IF DES CARTES was to arise, and to answer for himself, might he not distinguish between immutable and independent? Might he not say, that these truths are immutable, because they affirm what is conformable to that universal nature whereof God is the author, as he is of that intelligence by which they are perceived; and that they are therefore, in a proper sense, both immutable and dependent? immutable, as much as the nature is to which they belong; dependent, on that Being by whose energy this nature began to exist, and is preserved. He might own himself afraid to assert, notwithstanding the decisions of schoolmen, or the decrees of councils, that there can be any entity whatever, or any thing in any being whatever, which is independent on God. He might lament his own fate, to be accused of atheism, because he employed, in physical hypotheses, matter and motion alone; tho he always supposed a
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first mover, and had proved, by a demonstration he thought good, the existence of an all-perfect Being: and to be thus accused by men, who presume to maintain that they have other objects of knowledge, besides the existence of an all-perfect Being, which exist by the necessity of their own natures, and independently on him. He would reject most certainly, with some of that fierceness which he had in his temper as well as in his countenance, the imputation of betaking himself to a pitiful evasion. He would shew, with great force, that his apprehension of admitting any thing independent on God into the corporeal or intellectual system, is a most reasonable apprehension, and no bugbear, as the doctor calls it. He might shew, perhaps, the prophane consequences of such metaphysics as the doctor's, by citing, among others, this assertion from the treatise we speak of here; "the eternal and immutable wisdom in the mind of God is thence participated by created beings independent upon the will of God." He might insist, that, since "the wisdom of God is as much God as the will of God," and the will, by consequence, as the wisdom, it is absurd to distinguish them; and that it is something worse than absurd to reason about the divine, as we reason about the human intellect, to divide and parcel out the former on the plan of the latter. If the will of man is blind, dark, plumbear, flexible, and liable to be seduced, is the will of God to be conceived in the like manner? And if it is not, why are we led to conclude that a superior faculty is necessary to determine it, as the judgment of reason does, or should determine that of man? The antients thought matter eternal, and assumed that the Demiurgus, or divine architect, composed the frame of the world with materials which were ready prepared, and independently on him in a confused chaos. Much in the same manner, such metaphysicians as the learned CUDWORTH have imagined a sort of intellectual chaos, a chaos of eternal ideas, of incorporeal essences,

essences, independent on God, self-existent, and therefore co-aeval with the Supreme Being, and therefore anterior to all other natures. In this intellectual chaos, God sees, and man must endeavour to see, the natures, the real essences of things: and thus the foundations of morality are laid higher than the existence of any moral agents, before there was any system of being, from which the obligations to it could result, or to which they could be applied: just as the same philosophers suppose the incorporeal essences of white and black, for instance, to have existed when there was no such thing as color, and those of a square and circle, when there was neither form nor figure.

DES CARTES would have broke off the dispute by acknowledging, what he had acknowledged before, that "all these things are unintelligible to us," and that by consequence all dispute about them is impertinent. I should have gone away confirmed in my opinion that there is nothing, in any kind of being, which does not depend on the supreme, immense, all-perfect Being, nor any nature which does not depend on the Author of all nature; tho I felt, at the same time, the difficulty of maintaining this opinion by argument. Mr. LOCKE observes how impossible it is for us to conceive certain relations, habitudes, and connections, visibly included in some of our ideas, to be separable from them even by infinite power. Let us observe, on this occasion, how impossible, or at least how extremely difficult it is for us to separate the idea of eternity from certain mathematical and moral truths, as well as from such as are called necessary, and are self-evident, on one hand: and, on the other, how impossible it is to conceive that truths should exist before the things to which they are relative; or particular natures and essences, before the system of universal nature, and when there was no being but the super-essential Being.

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God knew, from all eternity, every system corporeal and intellectual that he created, in time. He knew by consequence, for he ordered, the various manners in which all the parts of these systems, and the systems themselves should operate on one another, the relations they should have, the proportions they should bear, the ideas they should communicate to creatures fitted to receive them, and capable of knowing only by them. All this he foreknew; but all this did not therefore exist: such an existence was at most eventual, and depended on the will, not the knowledge of God; if we may distinguish them, to be a little more intelligible. These immaterial forms and essences, if any such there were, and these immutable truths, for such there are most certainly, could not begin to exist in any proper sense till those systems of nature, to which the former are said to belong, and from which the latter do manifestly result, were called into actuality: and, in short, I cannot persuade myself that DES CARTES asserted without good reason, tho he has been much censured for asserting it, that God is the author of the essence, as well as of the existence of all that he created*.

* WHAT I have been led to say on this occasion makes it necessary to explain myself a little more fully; for tho I dare not assert, like metaphysical divines of your and my communion, that the essences of things are in a strict and proper sense independent on God, any more than their existence; nor am able to conceive a dependency of existences or beings, and an independency of essences or manners of being; yet am I far from assenting to DES CARTES in all he has advanced on this subject and on matters relative to it. He has pushed hypothesis and even truth itself into chimera. There is a sort of knight-errantry in philosophy as well as in arms. The end proposed by both is laudable; for nothing can be so more than to redress wrongs and to correct errors. But when imagination is let loose, and the brain is overheated, wrongs may be redressed by new wrongs, errors may be corrected by new errors. The cause of innocence may be ill defended by heroes of one sort, and that of truth by heroes of another. Such was DON QUIXOTE, such was DES CARTES; and the imaginary character of one, and the real character of the other, gave occasion to the two most ingenious satirical romances that were ever writ.

IF what has been said should be called hypothetical, it must be allowed to be less so, and, at the same time, to convey to

IN one of these, a Chinese Mandarin meets some disciples of this philosopher as they travelled through the moon to those imaginary spaces, to that third heaven, where his thinking substance was employed in building a new world, or the model of a world, on his own principles of matter and motion, whilst his extended substance lay buried at Stockholm, or at Paris. The Mandarin had contracted acquaintance with father MERSENNE in a former journey, had read the metaphysical meditations, was instructed in this part at least of the Cartesian philosophy, and the judgment he made of it I own to be mine. It contains opinions that seem to my apprehension most evidently false, and paralogisms so much oftener than demonstrations, that, when I am of the same mind, I am so, frequently, for reasons different from his, and even contrary to them. Thus, for instance, I take it to be evidently false that we have certainty of knowledge whenever we have clear and distinct ideas of any thing. Our ideas are often clear and distinct, and at the same time fantastical. Examples may be brought of such as we receive immediately and passively from outward objects, and of such as the mind frames by its own activity; for that which GASSENDI acknowledges of himself, in his objections to the third meditation of DES CARTES, must have been alike true of others. Many things had seemed to him so clear and distinct that he held them for undoubted geometrical truths, which he was obliged afterwards, and on a further examination, to reject. To what purpose now is it said that an attribute which we perceive to be contained in the idea of any thing, may be affirmed of that thing with truth? Such an attribute may be affirmed with metaphysical truth of the most fantastical idea. But the difference between metaphysical and real truth is great, and tho we have the former on our side in affirming the attribute, yet the whole must be chimerical if the idea be so, and such a process of reasoning may confirm us in fantastical, it cannot lead us to real knowledge.

THIS happened to the author of these maxims, the first of which is false, and the second precarious and uncertain, when he attempted to demonstrate the existence of God. I do not believe that he meant to weaken this great truth by employing a sophism to prove it; but I believe that the affectation of novelty led him into a paralogism, or an undesigned sophism. He assumed that he had in his mind a clear and distinct idea of an infinite all-perfect being; that this idea has an objective reality, or, in plainer terms, a real object, which may be known by the idea alone, and without any further proofs; and that necessary existence is contained, as indeed it is, in this idea. From all this he concluded that an infinite all-perfect being exists, and is the cause of this idea which represents himself.

Now that such a being exists, and that he can want no perfection conceivable or inconceivable by us, may be, and has been demonstrated invincibly. But to say
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the mind ideas and notions much more intelligible, than all that metaphysical jargon which Dr. CUDWORTH employs,

that he can become the object of a clear and distinct idea, is to advance a groundless paradox. We may know very certainly that there is a figure which has a thousand sides, but no man will say, I think, that his mind represents these thousand sides to him in one clear and distinct idea, nor that he has any other than a general and confused notion of this figure. Much less will any man, who is not a sworn Cartesian, pretend that he perceives in his mind a clear and distinct idea of the infinite all-perfect being. He knows in general that there is such a being, and that to suppose there is not, implies contradiction, or rather many contradictions. He has particular ideas and notions of some of the divine perfections, well determined as far as they extend, and yet inadequate. There are others which he cannot so determine, and he knows that there are many of which he can have no conception at all: for I do not agree with the Chinese philosopher, nor with the Jesuit who makes him speak, that there are any which seem incompatible to him, unless it be when he determines all the ideas he has, or when he pretends to have ideas he cannot have; and that we are apt to do so often, the very examples which are brought to shew an incompatibility in the divine perfections, are sufficient to shew.

To believe that there is a God, we must be taught this great principle of all religion, and receive it on authority. To know that there is one, we must go through a process of reasoning that connects certain evident truths intuitively together, and so arrives at demonstration. Tho' the atheist does not connect them into a demonstration of God's existence, yet he knows them all to be truths as well as the theist. He knows that they result from the nature of things. He pronounces them therefore immutable and eternal, as he conceives that nature to be; and can take no side in the question, whether they are dependent or independent on God, since he acknowledges no God. The theist makes a better use of these truths; for he connects them into a demonstration of God's existence, and instead of acknowledging the truth of no proposition, like DES CARTES, till he discovers the truth of this, he finds by experience that he could not have discovered the truth of this, if he had not antecedently known and acknowledged the truth of many others. He owns several necessary truths not written nor imprinted on his mind, but such as he has framed by observing the agreement and disagreement of his ideas, and such as he concludes every other man who has the same faculties, and the same perceptions in his mind, must necessarily frame. He calls these truths eternal and immutable relatively to that system of nature from which they result. But he cannot call them independent as properly and as consistently as the atheist may, since he acknowledges a first cause, an author of this and every other system of nature.

ARISTOTLE, who acts a part as well as the Chinese Mandarin in the scenes of the romance I quote, when he comes to examine those assertions of DES CARTES, "That the essences of things, and the truths called necessary, are dependent on God, and that they are immutable and eternal in no other sense than this, that God willed they should be so", supposes that the French

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after his Grecian masters. Is it any thing better than jargon, to tell us, that our ideas of white, or black, which we receive

philosopher could mean to speak of no essences except those of created beings, nor of any propositions except such as are advanced concerning them. That this was his meaning no doubt can be made, and he explained it sufficiently, when he said, "God is the author of the essence, as well as of the existence of his creatures." But even with this meaning, the Stagyrice, or rather the Jesuit, is not contented. DES CARTES should have reflected, he says, that truths which regard the essence of created beings, have a necessary connection with those which regard the essence of God. He brings an example. "That the creature is essentially dependent on God," is, he says, a proposition which belongs to the essence of the creature. "That God is the absolute master and the free cause of all beings," is a proposition which belongs to the essence of the Creator; and yet, that if one of these could be false, the other might be so too. Now surely the want of reflection was, in this case, on the side of ARISTOTLE himself. "If one of these propositions could be false, the other might be so too." Agreed, but not for the reason he gives, a supposed necessary and general connection between truths that regard the essences of created beings, and truths that regard the essence of the divine uncreated being. The reason is, that these propositions are in truth identical, that the first belongs to the essence of God as really as the last, and that to say the creature is dependent on the Creator, or the Creator is absolute master of the creature, is to affirm the same thing. Their essences are infinitely distant, but they are connected by this relation, and all other connection of them is purely imaginary.

WE know the relation of the Creator to his creatures, and of the creatures to their Creator. But to talk of a necessary connection between truths that belong to the essence of one and the essences of the other, seems to be little else than metaphysical nonsense, and the language of men who seek to evade what they cannot explain. When God made the animal world, he made substances whose essences are unknown to us. Even our own is so. What now is the necessary connection between the incomprehensible essence of the supreme, self-existent, all-perfect being, and those of created substances which he has not given us the means of knowing, or between truths that belong to either? When God created finite extension he created all the possible modes of it, and among the rest, that of a space included within three lines, which we have observed, and have called a triangle. By contemplating this figure, we discover the various properties of it, and are able to demonstrate several truths concerning them, as the equality, for instance, of these three angles to two right angles. What now is the necessary connection between finite extension in the several essential modes of it, and an infinite but simple unextended spiritual substance, such as we conceive that of God to be in his ineffable manner of being? What is the necessary connection between true and false propositions relative to one, or the other?

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from outward objects; our ideas of a square, or a circle, which we acquire by the help of our senses likewise; or our ideas of

ON the whole, we may conclude in favor of DES CARTES, that he imagined no such absurd connection, and thought himself therefore at liberty to assume what he did assume, concerning the dependency of created essences, as well as existences on God, who is, according to him, the efficient cause of the truth of all true propositions about them. Truths relating to God always have been, and always must be the same. They are absolutely from all eternity, and to all eternity independent on his will, for he is what he is, by the necessity of his nature, and self-existence is part of his essence. But nothing of this kind is applicable to the creatures. They might have been, or not have been, and the supposition of their non-existence implies no contradiction. It is true, indeed, that whilst they exist, they are what God made them to be, and omnipotence that can destroy them, cannot alter their essences. These essences, however, and the truths concerning them, are not so absolutely independent on God, as the adversaries of DES CARTES pronounce them to be; for even in the hypothesis, that God had no other share, nor exerted any other power in the great work of the creation, than that of calling essences he could not create into existence, by creating the things to which they belong; these essences are still indirectly, if not directly dependent on him, and he is doubly the cause of those truths which we affirm concerning them, as he called the essences into existence, and as he created beings capable of perceiving them.

THIS distinction between existences and essences, the former of which, that are dependent on the will of God, drew the latter, that are independent on his will, along with them, into the system of things that are, is not very clear. Might not the obscurity be taken away by taking away this distinction, and by understanding essences to be nothing more than manners of being determined by the power that gives the being, and manners of conceiving determined by the power that forms the conceptions? When God made limited extension, he made it capable of receiving various modifications, and of producing various appearances. These we distinguish by names for our own use. We call them circles for instance, or squares, or triangles, (I speak not here of substances, for with their real essences, it is not pretended that we have any thing to do) and when we have given them these names, philosophers assume that they are real essences, independent on God, tho he is the author of all extension, and gave us faculties to perceive these forms of it.

It would be tedious, and needless to speak of the doctrine of the schools concerning essences. I shall content myself to make one observation more on this head. The combinations of ideas which are distinguished by the term of mixed modes, and are principally of the moral kind, have no bad title to be esteemed essences. We compound them, we can therefore decompound them, and the real constitution of every species of them, cannot be unknown to us. They are

just and unjust, which we frame on experience, are incorporeal substances, eternal essences, and independent natures, things ingenerable and unperishable, according to PLATO and ARISTOTLE, and which the former, as TULLY expresses his sense, “negat gigni, sed semper esse, et ratione et intelligentiâ contineri?” Is it any thing better than jargon, to tell us, that “these substances, essences, natures, are the primary objects of science, and the same too with the intellect that knows them; that they are uniform modifications of the human, and of the divine mind, and that altho the former be created, yet the

not, however, essences like those which several philosophers have imagined, from PLATO down to CUDWORTH, and others infected by the same metaphysics. They are not ingenerable, nor immutable, nor unperishable in a proper sense, for if they were so, these effects would be more perfect than their cause, since the human mind is their cause, and in some sort their creator, and since the human mind is none of these. They are not independent neither on the will of God. They are abstract complex notions. Such Mr. LOCKE gives us leave to call them, “as by a peculiar right appertaining to the understanding*.” The mind makes them arbitrarily and occasionally, by virtue of a power to conceive things in this manner, which God has bestowed, and directed to the improvement of general knowledge. There they fluctuate: they are not the same essences in every mind, nor always in the same mind; and if they answer their purpose in any degree, that degree is proportionable to the mental power of conceiving things in this manner which God has given us. Thus even the truths we call necessary, the eternæ veritates of which we boast, are one way or other dependent on the Supreme Being. Their necessity is not antecedent, but consequential to the existence of material and intellectual created natures. Their necessity arises from a conformity to these natures, which we are made able to discern intuitively in certain cases.

BUT it is time to conclude a note too long perhaps already, tho I have hurried through it, and touched the matter of it more lightly than I could have done. I do not pretend to decide the question between DES CARTES and his adversaries. All I would inculcate is this, that since his opinion may receive a reasonable interpretation, it should not be condemned as absolutely, and as dogmatically as it has been, and that it becomes a theft to incline always to the side which ascribes the greatest possible power to God, from that which has even the appearance of limiting it by assuming an independency, when a dependency on him implies no contradiction.

* Lib. iii. c. 5.

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“ knowledge it has is a participation of that one eternal, immutable, and uncreated wisdom ? ” In short, is it any thing better than jargon, to talk of “ ectypal prints, and derivative signatures from one architypal intellect or seal, like so many multiplied reflexions of one and the same face made in several glasses ? ”

ACCORDING to such philosophy as this, we may, and we must pierce into the mystery of God's nature, and into the depths of his wisdom, to arrive at a knowledge of his will relatively to man. We must found the principles of morality, not on our knowledge of what our Creator has done, but on our knowledge of what he knows. We must not consult his will as it is signified by the constitution of the system wherein he has placed us, but we must abstract ourselves from this, and deduce our moral obligations from an eternal reason, from the immutable and independent natures of things. We must contemplate the same archetypes according to which our system of being was made, to know how we are to conduct ourselves in it: and thus the same rule becomes common to God and man. Our knowledge is no longer human, it is divine. It is no longer derived from outward impressions, and inward operations; our ideas have no longer their distinct archetypes existing out of the mind, or formed in it; they are all the impressions of an architypal seal, that is, of the divine intellect. A strange method, surely, of proving our ideas, if not the knowledge we acquire by them, to be independent on God.

I CANNOT soar so high as PLATO and CUDWORTH. I will not sink so low as PROTGORAS, and other antients; as HOBBS, and other moderns. The former amaze, instead of instructing me; and if I understand the latter, I only understand them, to know that they impose on themselves, and would im-

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pose on me, the grossest absurdities. Strange extremes! When CUDWORTH holds up the metaphysical glass to my eye, I see something, I know not what; something that glitters at an immeasurable distance from me. When HOBBS holds it up, he changes the position: and I see something monstrous at the very end of the glass.

As whimsical, and as little intelligible as the doctrines of the former are, they may lead men to think, that the will of God, signified by his works, not being the sole true criterion of moral good and evil; and since there is another criterion antecedent to this, nay, even the criterion of it, that is, the eternal reason of immutable independent natures; they ought to have an entire regard to these, and none to the will of God signified by his works: because in them he has done little else than clothe these eternal uncreated essences with a garment of existence, "factoris instar rerum essentias vestire existentia." CUDWORTH declares against this absurd conceit, which ARISTOTLE too chastises. But then what did the good man, and all those who have held the same opinions, mean? To answer truly, they thought, as men deep in imaginary science are apt to do, that they had much meaning when they had really none.

AFTER founding loudly in our ears, and repeating dogmatically, that things are what they are by their natures, eternal, immutable, and independent on the will of God, they are driven to distinguish, that they may avoid all mistakes, as they pretend, and to assert, not what their words import, but something which their words do not import, nor can be said to import any where out of the schools. When they talk of natures by which things are what they are, they do not mean, it seems, as any vulgar man would have thought, the constituent essences
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of things, the real natures by which alone things can be what they are. They mean something which is not a nature nor effence, but something which schoolmen and philosophers have been pleased to call so. When they say, that things are white by whiteness, triangular by triangularity, or just by justice, and that omnipotence itself cannot make them white, triangular, nor just, without such certain natures; a man who is no metaphysician, nor logician, must be induced to think their meaning to be, that God makes things, dependent on him, to exist conformably to natures independent on him. If they were not thought to have some such meaning, they could be understood to mean nothing more than this, that things are white, triangular, and just, because God has made them white, triangular, and just; and that omnipotence itself cannot make black, square, nor unjust, what omnipotence makes white, triangular, and just. These are most immutable truths, no doubt, and deserve to have their place at the fountain-head of science; but these philosophers do not mean by their eternal, independent natures, any natures at all. They mean such intelligible essences, and rationes of things, as are objects of the mind. Now, the objects of our minds being nothing but our ideas, it follows, that these natures, so much talked of, are not natures, but simple or complex ideas of natures; and all the incorporeal substances vanish into air, that is, they are confessedly phantastic, not real. They are merely certain abstract ideas which philosophers have taken it into their heads to affirm that they frame, and in which affirmation I may have leave to be of opinion, that they deserve no more credit than a man who is in any other delirium. They who are as subtile as ARISTOTLE or CUDWORTH, who can discover, with the first, that sense is the same with sensible things, and with both, that understanding is the same with the things understood, may find out, likewise, that the nature of a thing, and the idea of that nature are one
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and the same. But I suppose, that they who preserve their common sense free from the taint of metaphysics, will not easily conceive, that their ideas, however general or abstracted, can be called, with the least propriety, immaterial essences, incorporeal substances, eternal, immutable, and so on.

IT is an observation of Mr. LOCKE, that “we have very few abstract names for our ideas of substances, and that the few which the schools have forged, could never get into common use, nor obtain public approbation; whereas all our simple ideas have abstract as well as concrete names, and so have our ideas of modes and relations.” From hence that great author infers a confession of all mankind, that they have no ideas of the real essences of substances, and a declaration, that their simple ideas, and those of modes and relations are real essences, or the ideas of real essences. Now, the truth of the supposed confession I admit entirely; but the truth of the supposed declaration is not so evident, and requires some explanation as it is expressed. It is, if I mistake not, in part false, and in part true, and serves neither Mr. LOCKE’s purpose, nor Dr. CUDWORTH’s, even where it is true. To argue from the use of words to the reality of things, is no very sure method. Languages are framed by the vulgar, not by philosophers: and when names are improperly given, and words come to be improperly applied, custom establishes them soon, and they easily mislead even the minds of philosophers. The subject before us affords an example of this sort, and if we examine it a little attentively, we shall find a corner of Mr. LOCKE’s system about ideas, rent and torn, but the whole fabric of Dr. CUDWORTH’s demolished to the foundations.

WORDS have been invented and applied, and names have been assigned, as men wanted them, or fancied, by mistake,
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that they wanted them, to communicate their ideas with more precision, or even to conceive them more distinctly. Whatever advantage has been procured to the improvement of knowledge by the first manner of proceeding, much confusion and error have arisen from the second: innumerable instances of which there are. One of the greatest, and of the most pernicious in its consequences, we find in the use and application of the word abstraction. There is a very practicable operation of the mind, by which we are said to abstract ideas, and by which we do, in effect, generalize them in a certain manner, and to a certain degree, by substituting one as representative of many. There is another supposed, but impracticable operation of the mind, by which some philosophers have made themselves and others believe, that they abstract, from a multitude of particular ideas, the idea of one general nature or essence, which is all of them, and none of them: whereas, in truth, tho' they can define general natures or essences in very clear propositions, they cannot frame an idea of any general nature, which is not a particular idea of that nature.

SINCE men do not commonly employ abstract names for their ideas of substances, it is a shrewd sign, indeed, that they are not conscious of any ideas of substances made by the second kind of abstraction, as Mr. LOCKE observes, but content themselves, in this case, with general ideas made by the first. To talk of nominal essences, and the abstraction of such, comes too near the gibberish of the schools about genera and species: and if it does not coincide with the doctrine of certain essential forms, or moulds, wherein different things are cast, as it were, to constitute different natures, it perplexes the understanding, and darkens the plainest objects of it but little less. If we lay aside these refinements, and think for ourselves, we shall soon discover, unless I am extremely mistaken, that the former method

thod of abstracting or generalizing our ideas, is the universal practice of mankind; and that the latter is purely imaginary, not only in the case of substances, and of simple ideas, whereof the real essences are, in my opinion, equally unknown to us, but in the case of modes and relations, whose real essences must of necessity be known to us, since our understanding frames them.

NOTHING can be more true than what Mr. LOCKE himself confesses, that "general and universal belong not to the real existence of things, but are the inventions and creatures of the understanding, made by it for its own use, and concern only signs, whether words or ideas*." On this principle I proceed; but it will not carry me to all the consequences my master, for such I am proud to own him, deduced from it. Let us consider substances in the first place. We have innumerable ideas of particular substances, and I need not stand to shew how little improvement we should make in knowledge, and how impossible it would be to reason, or to communicate any reasonings about them, by the help of such ideas alone. How then does the mind proceed? As these complex ideas are innumerable, so are they beyond measure various. Out of this variety the mind selects such as have a more remote, and such as have a more immediate resemblance, and classes them accordingly. From this operation of the mind has arisen the school distinction of genus and species. Now, to speak according to it, which we may do intelligibly on this occasion, as the mind is unable, by abstraction, or any imaginable way, to comprehend any one species, and much more any one genus, under one general idea, it comprehends each under one general name, and we say, for instance, man, or animal. The mind does still more in the former case; for, all the ideas that com-

* Essay, lib. iii. c. 3.

pose a sort or species having a close resemblance to one another, the mind substitutes one, as I said above, to represent them all. This ideal man is neither PETER nor PAUL; it is not the idea of any particular man; it is a particular idea of man made general by the application. The archetypes of this phantasm are without, and it is abstracted, if you please to use the word, from them. But it is so far from being an abstract universal idea of man, abstracted from those particular forms, or complex phantasms, which the mind represents to itself (as CUDWORTH affirms against intuitive knowledge) that it is one of these very phantasms. It is not, in short, an idea of humanity. The mind creates it to supply the want of an idea we cannot have. A general universal idea is inconsistent with the real existence of things: but such a particular idea of that which may exist becomes itself an archetype, according to which we include, in the same ideal class, or exclude out of it, the objects that strike our senses. Thus it becomes general, by the use the mind makes of it, tho it be particular, and be signified by a particular word.

THE mind proceeds in the same manner with respect to all the other sorts or species, into which it has classed its ideas of substances. But with respect to kinds, or genera, this cannot be. They may be, and they are comprehended under distinct general names; but none of them can be represented to the mind by any particular phantasm or idea, as in the other case. How should there be one common archetype for things that have not a close, but a very remote resemblance? Such are the various sorts which every kind contains: and therefore when the mind would advert to the idea, as well as to the name of animal, it finds itself disappointed. Far from having any abstract universal idea, it has not so much as a particular idea that may be generalized, and stand in the place of the other.

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THERE are two other operations which the mind performs not constantly, but occasionally. The first may serve to facilitate the communication of knowledge: the second has served to nothing but to facilitate the introduction of error. From the names that signify particular sorts, we deduce sometimes, and as the mind has need of them, adjectives, or concrete terms, that fix and appropriate to each sort whatever belongs to it, or is meant to be ascribed to it. Thus from man we derive human, and we speak of human figure when we would signify the figure peculiar to him, and of human passions when we would apply those to him which belong to him, tho they are, at the same time, common to him, and to other animals. But the schoolmen have not stopped here. They have invented words to signify, very confusedly and falsely, what was signified very distinctly and truly before. Thus, for example, they have coined the terms, humanity and animality. If they meant to signify, by these terms, nothing more than what we know to be comprehended under the names of man and animal, I should have no objection to the use of them, nor to those of tableity, cuppeity, and gobleity, when custom had established them, as much as DIOGENES scoffed at PLATO for introducing them into philosophy. But PLATO did mean something else, and so has many a deep metaphysician and logician, since his time, and after his example. They have not meant only those appearances, according to which the minds of men have sorted things, which MR. LOCKE calls nominal essences, and which, he says, are the abstract ideas their names stand for; but they have meant real essences, intelligible natures, the patterns and archetypes, according to which every thing is what it is. The first is, to me, unintelligible; for I neither comprehend how essences can be purely nominal, nor how words can be abstract ideas: and the second is, I suppose,
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at this time, an exploded opinion among rational men. In short, he must know his own mind very ill, or, knowing it well in other instances, must be strangely deceived in this by the prejudices of imagination, who can persuade himself, that the words humanity and animality have any other ideas annexed to them than the words man and animal. When the first raises any idea in the mind, it is one of those complex phantasms that have been mentioned, and that draws after it, successively, but rapidly, the ideas of all those qualities, corporeal and intellectual, which are signified when we join to them the term, human. When the second raises any idea at all there, a confused huddle of ideas rush into the mind at once; an assemblage of several species of animals that throng together, like those which throng about ADAM, in the famous design of Mr. JOHN OVERTON, to receive their names from the first of men, who became thus the institutor of nominal essences.

BUT now, if it should be confessed, that we know nothing of the real essences of substances, and therefore can abstract no such ideas of them as some have pretended; if it should be confessed further, that nominal essences are nothing more than general names of particular things, not made by abstraction, but by imposition; yet still it would be asserted, perhaps, that our simple ideas are real essences; that the mind is able to abstract their general from their particular natures; and that we give them, for that reason, both abstract and concrete names; the truth of which latter propositions I should take the liberty to deny, as well as that of the former. Our simple ideas, not one of which it is in our power to make, or to unmake, may be called, properly enough, intellectual atoms, the principles or materials of our whole intellectual system. Matter, and the atoms that compose it, have been thought eternal, and if we
assume,

assume, that they were created in time, we must assume too, that they were created at once. The same atoms, specific in number, as well as of specific natures, pass thro all the changes, and take all the various forms, which we observe in the material world. There is no new, no continued creation of them. But we know, consciously, that there is a continued creation of these intellectual atoms, that is, of simple ideas, in the intellectual world, in different minds, and even in the same mind, neither specific in number, nor, perhaps, always exactly so in nature; and thus they are not only combined, as the former are always, with one another, that is, with the same, but new ideas, that arise from new perceptions, enter very often into these combinations. There is another difference to be observed, much more to our purpose. We can analyse more easily, and with greater success, our complex into simple ideas, than we can decompose substances. In one of these operations, we go up to the intellectual atoms. In the other, we stop far short of the corporeal. To what now is this difference owing? Is it owing to our strength, or to our weakness? Is it a difference, as it may appear at first sight, in favor of the human mind? Much otherwise. It serves only to shew the deficiency and imperfection of our simple ideas, of the first principles of all our knowledge. If these were not so confined, and so superficial as they are most evidently, if they were extended to more objects, and made their impressions on us from a spring that lay deeper in the nature of things, we should know much more than we do concerning the composition and decomposition of substances. If they were real essences, or the ideas of real essences, we should be acquainted with the real essences of substances, at least to a certain degree: for, what do we mean, when we say, that we have no knowledge of the real essences of substances, except these two things? We mean certainly, that we have not a number of

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ideas

ideas sufficient for the acquisition of such knowledge; and thus the deficiency of simple ideas causes one half of our ignorance about the complex ideas of substances. We mean, likewise, that the simple ideas, which we perceive by the impressions of outward objects, are often false, and always inadequate to the nature of these objects; and thus the imperfection of simple ideas causes another half, at least, of our ignorance about the complex ideas of substances.

SIMPLE ideas are real essences. Of what? Of simple ideas? Of themselves? Just so certain metaphysical ideas are real ideas. They are really in the mind; but they have no other reality. Such essences and such ideas are chimerical alike. All our simple ideas arise from sensation and reflection, from the impressions of outward objects, and from the operations of our minds. What the powers are that make these impressions on the mind in a passive state, we know as little as we do, what those are to which the operations of the mind, in an active state, are due. But this we know, the powers that cause are more properly essences, than the simple ideas that are caused by them. An essence is that by which a thing is what it is. We have an idea of white, we know what it is in our minds: but do we know by virtue of what, it is what it is there? Certainly we do not. It is not so much as the idea of any knowable essence: how can it be itself a known essence? Or, what seek we further than to know that it is a sensation?

SUCH concrete names were necessary to be invented, not to signify things that exist by themselves like substances, but to signify qualities, so we usually call them, that cannot exist independently of some substance in which they appear to exist, and are conveyed to the mind in the complex idea of it.

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As it is real or apparent want that determines the invention and use of names, so there have been some, and may be more invented, to signify, by one general word, and to appropriate to one substance, all the particular ideas that men conceive to belong to it, or desire to apply to it. This has been observed already, and here we observe further, that these terms are limited by the substance to which they are applied, human by man, golden by gold, and so in some, not in many, other instances of sorts or kinds, just as custom has decided. It is not much otherwise in the case of the concrete terms, which signify each one simple idea. The complex idea of man was in the mind, before the word human was invented to signify, without the trouble of enumerating them, all the particular ideas comprehended in that complex idea. The substantive gave occasion to the adjective. So the complex ideas of all those substances that communicate to us, among other simple ideas, those of white and black, for instance, were in the mind before the names of these simple ideas were invented. This was enough for use: and our ideas, when these names were invented, as well as the names of the several substances to which they belonged, were enough determined and distinguished. But the schools were not thus contented. They endeavoured to establish the doctrine of general natures abstracted from particular; and since they endeavoured it, without success, in the complex ideas of substances, they resolved to do it in the case of our simple ideas; and thus whiteness and blackness, and all the abstract names of simple ideas, were confirmed in general use.

THE same simple ideas being communicated to us from a multitude of different substances; and being observed to be the same in the child, and in the man, in the peasant, and in the
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the philosopher, they might easily pass for adequate ideas of real natures imparted to all the substances wherein they were perceived. Thus the vulgar might think very naturally; and, in fact, not only children, but much the greatest part of men, are firmly persuaded, that the idea of white, which they perceive in snow or milk, is whiteness in the snow or milk. Nay, this opinion, exploded as it is at present, has been that of the great oracles of philosophy, and many puerilities have been grounded on it, which are scarce yet a-while laughed out of the world. They who saw formerly, or who see now, the impropriety of these words, in a philosophical sense, as they denote real essences, or abstract ideas of such, may have thought, however, not only that the use of them is of some conveniency in language, but that it is a very harmless concession to the vulgar. They may have thought it too an indulgence of no great moment to the doctors of abstraction, who have refined themselves, on this occasion, as philosophers do sometimes, into vulgar error.

WHITENESS and blackness seem to stand in the same degree of a supposed abstraction with humanity, and color with animality. This would be admitted by some, whilst others would contend that it is practicable, with application, and a strong effort of the mind, to abstract general natures of sorts or species from many particular ideas that we perceive to be the same in substances of different sorts or species, as in the former instance, that of whiteness or blackness, they say they do; but that it is impracticable to abstract such a general nature from many particular ideas that we perceive not to be the same, tho co-existing in the same substance, as in the instance of humanity, they say they cannot. They would contend further, that tho it be practicable to abstract the general natures even of kinds, as well as the less general natures of

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sorts,

forts, where simple ideas are alone concerned; yet it is impracticable to do the same, where the various sorts that compose the kind are so many complex ideas, as in the instance of animality they say they cannot. But, I think, we may affirm all this to be whimsical and false alike, without entering into the dispute between these doctors of abstraction, and on this single principle, whereof we have an intuitive knowledge, That things cannot exist in our minds as it is impossible they should exist in nature. Now singulars do, but universals, about which so much noise has been made in the schools, and so many good heads have been broken formerly in the universities of London, and of Paris, do not exist in nature. It is therefore as impossible to abstract ideas of whiteness or blackness from all white or black things, as it is to abstract an idea of humanity from all human existence; or an idea of color from all things colored, as it is to abstract an idea of animality from all animal existence. In all these cases, having no real essence to abstract, we have nothing to abstract.

LET US consider, whether we are able to make such abstractions, when real essences are known to us, as they are in modes and relations. For my part, I know that I am not. I am utterly unable to elevate my mind from particulars to generals, as we must do in order to acquire Dr. CUDWORTH'S apodictical knowledge, of which therefore I must be content to remain deprived. I know the real essence of triangularity, and can define it in one short proposition. But to contemplate triangularity, abstracted from every triangular figure, is to my narrow and weak mind as impossible as to contemplate humanity, abstracted from every human figure, and every human quality. He who can frame the idea of a triangle, which is neither right, obtuse, nor acute-angled, nor, in short, of
any

any triangular species, but is all, and none of these, at once: he, I say, if in truth there is any such he, must be of a species different from mine, as surely as he would be so, if his sight could pierce to the center of the earth, or discern every frozen inhabitant of Saturn. Triangularity is so far from being no particular triangle, that it is every particular triangle: and no man, as I presume, can think of a space included by three lines that meet at three angles, without thinking of some one or more particular triangles. Triangularity can be no otherwise represented to the mind. The definition gives particular ideas, but is not itself an idea. I know the real essence of justice, and can define it several ways, as, for instance, by saying, after TULLY, "*Justitiæ primum munus est ut ne cui quis noceat, nisi laceffitus injuriâ; deinde ut communibus pro communibus utatur, privatis autem ut suis.*" But what then? Do these definitions, or their contraries, a conformity to one, or the other of which constitutes every action just, or unjust, form, in any mind, one abstract idea of justice? We can contemplate each of these apart, and compare any particular action with it, but we cannot abstract any general nature, with which we may compare every action that falls under some one of these definitions. Justice is a word that denotes particular natures, under a general term, but expresses no general nature.

If there were such general natures as are supposed, they would exist in the mind, and be perceived there. They do not exist in the mind; for they are not perceived by it. They exist then no where, whatever PLATO might dream, or might say hypothetically and poetically. The mind creates real essences for its own use; but that the mind abstracts, even from these creatures of its own, any general natures, is a mere poetical fiction, which has been adopted, like many other

fiction of the same author, for a philosophical truth. All the real essences we know are so far from being uncreated, that they are creatures of the human mind; they are so far from being independent, that they are dependent on the will of man, as far as concerns their existing or not existing; they are so far from being ingenerable, unperishable, and even immutable, that they begin to be and cease to be in the mind, and that whilst they actually exist there, if they were not maintained by distinct names, and by a constant attention of the mind to them and to their names, they would fluctuate and vary without any precision or steadiness.

WHEN the Stagyrite declared most dogmatically, that he would have HERACLITUS, CRATYLUS, and PROTAGORAS to know, that, besides sensible things, which they supposed always to flow, and he admitted to be always mutable, there were other beings or entities, neither subject to motion, corruption, nor generation, but immovable essences, the objects of theoretical knowledge, of the first philosophy, and of pure mathematics; when he spoke in such high terms, I say, the flowing philosophers might have told him that intellectual beings or entities were very much given to flow, as well as sensible things; and that immovable essences, how well soever fixed by definitions, were not always immovable even in his own mind, since they did not appear to be strictly so in his writings.

AFTER saying so much about these abstract ideas, I must freely confess that I scarce comprehend what they are intended to be. They are separate from matter, according to ARISTOTLE. They are free from all corporeal sympathy, according to CUDWORTH. Nay they are, even those of them whose real essences we know, such as triangularity and justice, imperfect ideas, ideas that cannot exist, ideas wherein some
parts

parts of several different and inconsistent ideas are put together, according to Mr. LOCKE. Thus abstraction becomes as great a mystery in philosophy, as any that religion holds out to us: and I am so little able to unfold mysteries, that I might sit forty years together in deep meditation over-against a white wall, as a Chinese philosopher is said to have done, and to as little purpose as he, if I pretended to unfold this inexplicable sort of abstraction. Who can help smiling, when he is told, that by the help of such ideas, and of certain self-evident maxims, knowledge is a comprehension of things proleptically, or by way of anticipation, or à priori; and that abstraction is that higher station from whence the mind comprehends things in this manner, from whence by it's subtle sharpness it penetrates into the essential profundity of body, of sphericalness, of triangularity, &c.

STRANGE effects of mysterious abstraction! Strange foundations of eternal and immutable morality! They might be rejected with contempt, if they were absurd only; but they are carried so far that they become prophane, a sort of metaphysical blasphemy, and deserve indignation. Could I suspect the least necessary connexion between such opinions and the proofs of GOD's existence, I should not treat them as familiarly as I have done, and intend to do. But there is nothing which shocks me so much, in the treatise I speak of, as the attempt to prove in a circle, that since universal notions, the supposed immediate objects of science, are eternal and necessarily existent, there is an eternal and necessarily existent mind; and that since there is such a mind, there must be such ideas and notions as the author assumes. But it may be worth while to set this reasoning down a little more at large.

“ SINCE

“ SINCE we cannot conceive that there was ever a time
“ when it was not yet actually true that the three angles of
“ a triangle are equal to two right angles, or that equals
“ added to equals produce equals, and the like in other in-
“ stances; these intelligible natures, these necessary verities,
“ had a being before the material world and all particular in-
“ tellects had any.” Again: “ Since these natures, these verities,
“ are, according to PLATO, nothing but noëmata, objective
“ notions or knowledges, that is, in good English, objects of
“ thought, they could not exist without some mind in which
“ they were comprehended. There is therefore an eternal
“ mind which comprehended them always, or rather a mind
“ which is itself these natures, these verities, these abstract
“ ideas.” Thus again, and to reason quite round the circle.
“ Since there is an eternal mind, that being must always com-
“ prehend himself, the extent of his own power, the ideas of
“ all possible things. Now these natures, these verities, are
“ included in these ideas. Our abstract ideas and universal
“ notions are therefore eternal and self-existent like GOD him-
“ self. If there were none such, there would be no GOD.
“ But there are such because there is a GOD, on whom how-
“ ever they are independent. They cannot be modifications of
“ matter, they must be therefore modifications of an eternal
“ mind. Every thing that is imperfect must needs depend
“ on something that is perfect in the same kind. There is
“ therefore a cognation, or connection, between our created
“ minds and the increated mind. Our imperfect intellect must
“ be therefore a derivative participation of the perfect in-
“ tellect.”

THIS rhapsody of jargon is faithfully extracted, and, for the most part, in CUDWORTH'S OWN WORDS.

A CLOSE

A CLOSE affinity between the divine and the human mind, and a certain sameness of ideas and notions, is the common boast of metaphysical theology : and father THOMASSIN, and many other learned and good men of all communions, have talked as prophanely on the subject as CUDWORTH. Their very great learning seduced them into error : they were too good scholars to be good philosophers, and whilst their minds were filled with the thoughts of PLATO and ARISTOTLE, of St. AUSTIN, and other refining as well as declaiming Christian fathers, there was no room for their own; or their own were grafted on these, and extended and improved from them. “ La passion même que nous avons pour la vérité nous trompe quelquefois, lorsqu’elle est trop ardente. Mais le desir de paroître savant est ce qui nous empêche le plus d’acquérir une science véritable.*” It is father MALEBRANCHE who speaks thus : and he was himself a great example of what is here said; for tho his sublime genius could not stoop to copy fervilely, as others have done, yet he took his hints and his manner from PLATO and St. AUSTIN principally, and added one beautiful whimfy to another, till he builded up a system that carries no conviction to the mind, and only serves to give great admiration of the author.

II.

OTHER divines, besides CUDWORTH, have assumed that GOD knows according to our manner of knowing, by the help of ideas. Thus CLARKE, in his book of Demonstrations, which has had much more reputation than it deserves,

* Recherche, &c. B. II. p. ii. c. 7.

assumes