



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

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

In Five Volumes, complete.

Bolingbroke, Henry St. John

London, 1754

II.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-60777](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-60777)

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

affumes that goodness and justice in God are the same as in our ideas, and that the relations, proportions, and rationes of things are absolutely and necessarily what they appear to be to the understandings of all intelligent beings; among whom he must needs comprehend the Supreme Being, since he makes these relations, proportions and rationes of things to be the rule or law by which God proceeds, and for his observation of which he appeals to man. Thus he affirms, at least, that God knows by the help of ideas. But MALEBRANCHE outshoots him, and confines the Supreme all perfect Being to this human manner of knowing. He allows him no other. He denies that he can have any other. The ideas of bodies and of all other objects "que nous n'appercevons point par eux mêmes," because they are exterior to the soul, are perceived by us for no other reason but this, they are in God, in him we see them. All the ideas of created beings must be in God, it was absolutely necessary that they should be so; because if they had not been so, he could not have created such beings. "Puisqu'autrement il n'auroit pas pu les produire." He could no more have made ADAM, if he had not had the idea of ADAM in his mind, than KNELLER could have painted your Picture, if he had not had the idea of you in his mind.

HEATHEN divines builded their theology, not only on physical, but on moral philosophy. They made gods, not only of the elements and the parts of this material system, but of the faculties of the human intellect, as of memory; of the passions of the mind, as of hope, fear, love; of our affections and habits, as of piety, of justice, of virtue, and so on. Now it seems that if this antient polytheism and idolatry was to be renewed, the doctrine I have combated would contribute extremely to the introduction of it. These abstract ideas, every one of which is an eternal essence, an intelligible nature, an incorporeal

corporeal substance, might pass for proper objects of adoration; since they are represented as eternal patterns according to which all things are made or done, as eternal principles by a participation of which every thing is what it is. Why should they not be adored? They are independent on God: nay God is so far dependent on them, that his will is determined, and his conduct and operations are directed, by them.

OUR proneness to measure all other beings by ourselves grows up into strange extravagance, when we presume to measure in some sort even God by this rule. God has given us a manner of knowing fitted to our system, and sufficient for all our real business in it. We can conceive no other. But is there then no other? Is the positive nature of God, is the extent of his power, confined to the limits of our conceptions? There is an eye which never winks, a sun which never sets; but, with Dr. CUDWORTH'S leave, the absurdity lies on the side of the philosopher who pretends to see with this eye, and to walk in the brightness or lucidity, to use his word, of this sun: not on the side of a modest and humble thief, who is far from all metaphysical presumption and theological arrogance, and therefore dares not assume so much in his own favor, nor in favor of any created being. Such a man will think that he makes a much more apposite simile, when he says that we are shut up in one of those dark caverns of the universe, mentioned in the Phædo; that there we grope about after knowledge, not by the light of the sun, but by that of a small and dim taper. This light, whatever it is, was bestowed on us by God. He gave us our light. He did not give us his own. They who think in this manner cannot be suspected of being too near a kin to those antient theologues ARISTOTLE speaks of, who fetched the original of God and all things out of night. They who think in the other, would do well

to consider whether they are not too near a kin to those, who have promoted, in all ages, of heathenism and of christianity, superstition in religion, paradox in philosophy, and enthusiasm in both.

It may be said, you know it has been said by one I love and honor, * “ that the immediate object of knowledge being “ called an idea, there is no inconvenience in saying that God “ knows objects, that he knows ideas in the proper sense of the “ word, which is LOCKE’s sense; altho our conception of God’s “ knowledge, or any other of his attributes, be infinitely inadequate, yet he saw no absurdity in supposing that human “ knowledge hath some similitude to the divine, as a thing finite “ and imperfect, and weak and small, can have to that which is “ infinite and all perfect; nor in supposing, with the scripture, “ that we are made in the likeness of God; nor in supposing, “ with the greek poet, that we are his offspring; and with the “ latin, that we contain *divinæ particulam auræ*.” It seems evident to him, “ that intellect is above the powers of motion “ and figure, and that it is of kind altogether incorporeal.” I respect the authority which made this objection to what I have said, and shall therefore go as far as I can in submission to it. I see no inconveniency in speaking of the divine ideas, when we speak of the divine knowledge. On the contrary, I see much conveniency in it; because I apprehend that we can neither conceive any thing, nor explain our conceptions on many occasions, concerning God’s knowledge, without ascribing to him hypothetically the sole manner of knowing that is known to us. But I think it, however, both absurd and prophane to pronounce dogmatically, that this is God’s manner of knowing, that he has no other, and that without the help of ideas he

* B. of C.

could

could neither govern the world as he governs it, nor have made it as he made it. To say, in allegorical or poetical style, that we are made in the image of God, that we are his offspring, or that we contain *divinæ particulam auræ*, may pass for some of those images by which we endeavour, and often improperly enough, to help our own thoughts, and the communication of them; but surely they are not to be employed in the didactic style, and so as to pass, not for distant images of truths that we cannot contemplate nearly and directly, but for real truths which we do so contemplate. I do not believe that matter can draw intellect, to use an expression of L'ABBADIE, out of its own bosom; neither do I believe that the incorporeity of the soul can be proved from the non-existence of matter, which my right reverend friend takes to be a demonstrable point. Intellect is certainly above the mere powers of motion and figure, according to all the ideas we have of them; and therefore I embrace very readily the opinion of those who assume that God, who has, without any color of doubt, notwithstanding some logical and trifling cavils, the power of doing it, has been pleased to superadd to several systems of matter, in such manner and in such proportions as his infinite wisdom has thought fit, the power of thinking. Every other hypothesis seems to me unconceivable, and this, of which so much has been said here, particularly dangerous. It might serve to introduce polytheism, or it is not very far from spinozism. I could be an anthropomorphite and believe the human figure to be God's figure, as soon as I could believe the human intellect to be God's intellect, and the modifications of the former to be the modifications of the latter. If I was absurd enough to be persuaded of this, I should be absurd enough easily to believe, with the help of intelligible natures and incorporeal substances, or substances "quasi incorporeal," as many Gods as men, and to erect a larger pantheon than the gods of the heathen

or your faints require. If I avoided this extreme, the same hypothesis might draw me into another, and I might persuade myself, that since there is an universal mind, in which all ideas are contained, and of which every particular mind is a participation, every intelligence, down to the lowest, is a modification of the same mind, as every material system is a modification of the same matter; which would bid fair for a composition with SPINOZA: and two substances might render a Supreme Being as unnecessary as one substance, to which the modifications of both kinds are ascribed in a manner less conformable to our ideas, and much more repugnant to theology.

I HAVE as good a right to deny, as the most dogmatical writer can possibly have to affirm, that the Supreme Being knows by the intervention of ideas. Nay the negative is more probable than the affirmative on many accounts, and particularly on this, that our manner of knowing seems neither immediate, absolute, nor perfect enough to be ascribed to him. To talk positively of the divine nature and attributes, and to determine, on our supposed knowledge of them, any thing more than we are able to collect from his works, and the proceedings of his providence, is very great presumption, tho' the common practice of divines. But to deny concerning them whatever implies the least defect or imperfection, is highly reasonable, and essential to true theism. Of the excellencies of God's nature we can have no adequate ideas: they are infinite. But this we can know most certainly, that those things, which are short even of the excellencies we are able to comprehend, ought not to be ascribed to him. That the first cause of all things is an intelligent cause, may be proved invincibly *à posteriori*, and can be proved no other way; after which it will not require much logic to demonstrate *à priori*, that the all-perfect Being must be omniscient, as well as self-existent. But how he knows, or what knowledge is in him, we are unable to say.

We may frame dark and confused notions of knowledge vastly superior to our own in kind as well as degree, and we should do much better to rest in these, dark and confused as they are, than to frame others, which, being deduced from our own, are seemingly too adequate to be really true. The past, the present, and the future, as we conceive them, are known alike to the Supreme Being, not by the perception, the retention, or the anticipation of ideas, but in a manner inconceivable by us; for there is, I think, a plain fallacy in this expression, that the immediate object of knowledge being called an idea, we may say that God knows an object, that he knows an idea. When we speak of objects of human knowledge, we allude to the sense of seeing, and we apply, very properly, the allusion to the inward perceptions of the mind. But surely no man, who tries to elevate his notions of the all perfect Being as much as he can above the low level of humanity, for so I will call what we know of the human nature, can think the same allusion applicable to the divinity. Outward and inward sense have a great connexion in the human system. The former gives occasion to the latter, they help one another, and both have their objects. But it will no more follow that God thinks like man, than that he sees like man. He may have conscious knowledge of all things possible, as we have conscious knowledge of our own existence, a knowledge which prevents even thought, so far from being originally, whatever we make it afterwards, an object of thought. But further. When God is said to know objects, he is said to know ideas. The words are taken synonymously on this occasion. But we must distinguish them. A knowledge of things as they are, and a knowledge of the ideas of them, are extremely different, as different as immediate and reflected light, as absolute and relative knowledge. Every thing we know is known to us in the second manner; nothing in the first. Every thing is
known

known to God in the first: and he has no need of knowing any thing in the second. As it would be absurd to say, that God receives ideas from external objects, so it is no less absurd to say either that the divine mind combines and abstracts ideas, or that complex and abstract ideas exist in it, or coexist with it, like so many incorporeal independent substances, by the contemplation of which God has, and PLATO and his scholars assures us that man may have, real knowledge.

THESE hypothetical reflections, on which I lay no more weight than they deserve, will serve at least to shew, how little ought to be laid on those dogmas to which they are opposed.

IF the Supreme Being does not know by the help of ideas, the chain of Dr. CUDWORTH'S reasoning is broke in the first link of it; for there are then no such eternal abstract ideas, either in or out of the supreme mind, as have been supposed; and all the incorporeal substances, with the verities clinging like ivy about them, that have been said to exist eternally and independently, neither exist, nor ever did exist, out of the imaginations of metaphysicians, those fruitful nurseries of phantastic science.

SHOULD any one ask, like CUDWORTH, and the sixth objector to the metaphysical meditations of DES CARTES, at what time it was not yet actually true that a triangle has three angles equal to two right angles, or when it began to be true that twice four are eight? It would be a full and sufficient answer to say, that the time when neither these truths, nor the ideas from a comparison of which they result, did exist, was that wherein God had not yet created any intelligence whose manner of knowing was by the intervention of ideas,

and that these ideas began to exist when such intelligent beings were actually created. There never was a time when two and two were unequal to four. But there was, we may conceive, a time when their equality did not exist, because no numeral things existed, nor any mind to compare them except the supreme mind; which, being assumed not to know by the help of ideas, can no more be said to compare than to perceive them, or to perform any operations about them. If he who made this answer was pressed by arguments drawn from the consequences of it, he would have at least the advantage of retorting arguments drawn from the consequences of the other hypothesis, and of shewing that he, and those learned divines he opposed, were in a case very common to theists and atheists in their disputes. He had difficulties in his way: they had absurdities in theirs. He would own the difficulty of accounting for knowledge independently of ideas: but he would demonstrate the absurdity of maintaining, that knowledge in God is dependent on ideas, and these ideas independent on him. He would have the further advantage of stopping his inquiries where the means of knowledge stop; of confessing his ignorance, and of preserving that awful respect for the Supreme Being which divines are apt, above all other men, to lose, by reasoning about his nature and his attributes, as well as his providence, in a style and manner that no other theist presumes to use, and to which they have no better pretence than that which the taylor gives them by making gowns for them, and coats for every one else.

WERE men, even they who affect to examine like philosophers, and to investigate truth in all the recesses of it, less ignorant of that which is nearest to them, of themselves, and less liable to be blinded by their affections and passions, by the force of habit and the determining influence of self interest, it
would

would not be so easy as it is, to impose such high opinions of the human, and such low opinions of the divine nature. In attempting the first, metaphysicians and divines run the risk of having the conscious knowledge of every man opposed to them; for every man knows, or may know, that the faculties of his mind, and his means of knowledge, are not such as they would persuade him that they are. Every man has reason to suspect, from the natural imperfections, from the accidental infirmities, from the sensible growth, maturity, and decay of that which thinks in him, and from its apparent dependance on the body, that his soul, whatever it be, has no affinity with the all-perfect Being. To maintain therefore an opinion of this affinity, the same persons have recourse to another method, from man, whom we can see, to God, whom we cannot see; from man, of whom we have intuitive, to God, of whom we have demonstrative knowledge alone, and which goes little further than a certainty of his existence, and of his infinite power and wisdom, but not so far as to reach his manner of existing, or his manner of knowing. The knowledge of men is confined to ideas. They cannot raise it higher in imagination, in their own, nor in that of other men. They try therefore to reduce the divine knowledge to their own low level, and, as strange as it is, it is true that they succeed.

LET them not succeed with you and me. This world, which is the scene of our action, is the scene of our knowledge: we can derive none that is real from any other, whatever intellectual worlds we may imagine. Let us consider then how it is constituted, in what relations we stand, to what ends we are directed. Let us trust to pure intellect a little less than we are advised to do, and to our senses a little more. When we have examined and compared the informations we receive from these, and have reasoned à posteriori from the
works

works to the will of God, from the constitution of the system wherein we are placed by him to our interest and duty in it, we shall have laid the foundations of morality on a rock, instead of laying them on the moving sands, or the hollow ground, that metaphysics point out to us. Thus we shall know, as God designed we should know, and pursue, as far as our part extends, the plan of infinite wisdom. Instead of amusing ourselves vainly with a false sublime, let us keep soberly within the bounds of our nature; let us reason cautiously, pronounce modestly, practise sincerely, and hope humbly. To do this, is to be wise and good: and to be wise and good, is better far than to be a philosopher, a metaphysician, or even a divine.

THE law of their nature, is the concern of all men alike. All men are, therefore, able alike to discover this law, and the constitution of things from which it is derived. All men do not discover it indeed alike, tho all men, even the most savage and ignorant, have, as I believe, some imperfect notions of it, which observation and experience force into their minds. If there are any creatures of human figure, to whom even thus much cannot be ascribed, which I do not believe, they are ranked as improperly under the human species, as they would be if they had a different figure. Ignorance about the law of nature, like ignorance about many other truths, to which no man can refuse his assent when they are proposed to his understanding, is due to some or more of those many reasons, by which men are diverted from the pursuit of attainable knowledge, or stopped in it: and their errors, in this case, may be imputed, in some degree, to the same causes, as well as to affections, passions, and the force of custom. But philosophers, divines, and lawyers, who divest, or should divest themselves of affections and passions, and pay no regard to custom,

Vol. V. G run,

run, by a contrary method, into a variety of contrary opinions, concerning one of the plainest and most important objects of our thoughts. The former stop short of that knowledge, which lies within the bounds of human comprehension. The latter overlook it, whilst they aim at knowledge that is unattainable; because it lies beyond the bounds of human nature, and therefore of human comprehension.

THE notions on which CUDWORTH endeavours to ground eternal and immutable morality have prevailed much, with some difference in the representation of them, among antient and modern theists. Let us mention two of the latter only, besides himself, GROTIUS and CLARKE.

ONE would be tempted to think that when these men assert the eternity, independency, and immutability of the great principles of the law of our nature, they mean all this comparatively only; comparatively with civil laws, which are novel, dependent on the will of man, and mutable at his pleasure. One might think it strange too, that they should not distinguish between the divine prescience, and the divine institution; or imagine a law, made for man, co-eternal with God. But their theological purpose in maintaining an opinion liable to so many objections, and quite unnecessary to the establishment of our moral obligations on the firmest foundation, will appear in the course of these reflections. Divines, among whom the great lawyer we have mentioned has a just right to be reckoned, see far before them, and are determined in laying of principles by the consequences they intend to draw.

PUFFENDORF* is of a contrary opinion to GROTIUS. He censures very justly those who, like him, endeavour to join

* Law of nature and nations. l. i. c. 2.

with

with God any coeval, extrinsecal principle, which they assume that he was obliged to follow in assigning the forms and essences of things. He maintains, that the actions of men are perfectly indifferent, if you set aside the consideration of all law divine and human; that the morality of actions in a social creature, is derived from that social nature which God has been pleased to give him, and not from any immutable necessity; and he shews how ill those passages of Scripture, which GROTIUS quotes, are applied to prove an original law so truly common to God and man, that God permits himself to be judged according to it.

CLARKE has, in our time, distinguished himself in defence of the doctrine we oppose. He has made it the first proposition, in his Evidences of natural and revealed religion, with a magisterial air, and all the confidence of those men who talk on every occasion of nothing less than demonstration. "Fidenter sanè, ut solent isti, nihil tam verens, quam ne dubitare aliqua de re videretur*." This proposition, however, on which he presumes to rest so important a cause, as on the angular stone of all religion, will appear to be absurd and inconsistent, when it is once analysed; and his proofs of it will appear to prove nothing, or to prove what is out of dispute. Thus I think: and if I think rightly, there is the more reason to demolish this false foundation; because it is as easy, as necessary, to lay one that is undeniably true.

THE general absurdity and inconsistency of this proposition lies here. The demonstrator confounds in it two contrary propositions; and sliding, insensibly to many readers, from that which no reasonable man can admit, into that which every

* TULLY de Nat. Deor. Lib. 1. speaking of VELLEIUS the Epicurean.

reasonable man must admit, he means nothing by a pomp of words, or he means to make the proofs of the latter pass for proofs of the former. He asserts, that necessary and eternal relations of different things to one another, and the consequent fitness and unfitness of application of these things and of their relations, determine the will of God always and necessarily to chuse to act only what is agreeable to justice, equity, goodness, and truth, that is, to those abstract ideas, in order to the welfare of the whole universe. These expressions lead me, they cannot but lead me, to understand that the same doctrine is intended, as we have said no reasonable man, no good theist most certainly, can admit, the doctrine of eternal independent essences, as it has been taught. But the state of the question is changed at once; for, after asserting that all subordinate rational beings ought to determine their wills, and conduct their actions, by the same eternal rules by which God proceeds in governing, and therefore proceeded in creating, the world; the instances brought to prove it are all relative to our human state, and the rules are such as could be no rules antecedently to the existence of subordinate rational beings, and moral agents. Let us mention two or three of these instances. That God is infinitely superior to man, is as clear no doubt, as that infinity is larger than a point, or eternity longer than a moment. That men should worship and obey God, for I dare not use theological familiarity and talk of imitating God, is as fit, as it is true that they depend on him. In short, general benevolence, fidelity in particular compacts, and all the duties of natural religion, arise most evidently from a fitness of application of different things, and their different relations arising from the nature which God, according to his good pleasure, has bestowed upon us, and from that of the system which he has constituted, and wherein he has placed us. That God is superior to man, and that man ought
to

to worship and obey God, are truths that have existed ever since there was such a rational creature as man to perceive them, and to stand in such a relation to God. That benevolence, fidelity, and every other moral obligation has existed likewise, ever since there was such a moral agent as man to be obliged by them, and to stand in such relations as we stand to one another. Is it not enough that we go as high as our nature, to discover the laws of it? To what purpose do we make that intricate, by metaphysical abstractions, which God has made so extremely plain?

I MIGHT ask, to what purpose this kind of legerdemain is employed in reasoning? After Dr. CUDWORTH has talked dogmatically of eternal, immutable, independent natures, it comes out that he does not mean real natures, but the ideas that we frame of natures that we assume. Much in the same manner, after Dr. CLARKE has talked, at least as dogmatically, of an eternal rule by which God has always acted necessarily, and of justice, equity, goodness, and truth, as of intelligible natures which have always existed, and agreeably to which God has always directed his conduct, he proceeds to talk of this very rule not as a rule eternally resulting from the eternal and independent differences of things and of their relations, but as a rule resulting from a system of beings whom God created in time, and from the relation in which he constituted them to himself and to one another. No man will deny, that a square is double to a triangle of equal base and height, from all eternity, if the doctor pleases, and rather than engage in such useless disquisitions: but every man of common sense will deny, that there could be a law of human nature before any such nature was in being. CLARKE raises man first to act by the same rule, by which God made and governs the universe: and after that, he restrains infinite knowledge and wisdom to act by the same rule

rule by which the creatures of God determine, or ought to determine, their wills, and according to the ideas that they derive from the contemplation of their own system of being, that is, of a small, and doubtless an inconsiderable part of the universe, not, by immense degrees, of the whole. "Quo te-
 "neam Protea nodo?" By the first we are bewildered in metaphysical abstractions, that have no tendency to promote morality; and by the last, divines obtain a latitude of making what hypotheses they please, and a pretence of reasoning with the same licence about the designs and conduct of the living God, as they would take in reasoning about those of a dead, but not of a living monarch. This is the true theological secret: and I believe you will think it is so, when we come to consider CLARKE'S doctrine concerning the moral attributes of the Supreme Being, and the use he makes of it.

BUT to carry on the analyse of this first proposition. We are told in it, that these eternal and necessary differences of things, for such they are still called, cause it to be the duty of men, or lay an obligation upon them, to act according to this rule, separate from the consideration of the will of God, and from any expectation of reward, or fear of punishment, annexed either by natural consequence or by positive appointment. Now surely this must be thought a very odd method of promoting natural religion, and giving evidences of it, since it puts the atheist and the theist into the same case; and as rules were inconsistently jumbled together before, so characters are now. The atheist may have regard to natural differences alone, and to the consequences of acting or not acting according to them. He may see, that altho human actions, considered merely as natural, and abstractedly from all relations, circumstances, and consequences, might be deemed absolutely indifferent, yet no human action can be so considered. The atheist, therefore, may
 I think

think himself very truly under an obligation of interest, arising from the different consequences of his actions, tho he acknowledges no divine legislature; and he would laugh very justly at the man who should tell him, that he was not obliged to pass over the bridge, tho he might be drowned in the torrent, because there was no act of parliament for it. The thief indeed must think himself, in this respect, under an obligation of duty as well as interest. Whatever actions are naturally good or evil, must appear to him to be so morally. They derive their particular natures from the constitution of our system. They might not have been what they are, if this system had not been what it is, and this system could not have been what it is, if God, who made it, had not willed that it should be so. Nay, even on the supposition of eternal necessary differences, and independent natures, it would be still true that the will of God constitutes the obligation of duty. It would be false to assert, in the terms of this proposition, that the supposed eternal necessary differences of things constitute it alone. How independent soever we suppose the different natures of things to be, it depended most certainly on the will of God, who made the system, to introduce them into it as he thought fit. If he did not make, he assembled, he ordered them; and whatever obligation results from them, in this system, results from them therefore by his will, and is imposed by it. Once more, and to conclude this analyse. It is plainly false to assert, that men are obliged to observe the laws of nature on abstract considerations, and for reasons alone, of the same kind as those which determine them to agree about proportions or disproportions, in geometry and arithmetic. The advantages or disadvantages, annexed by natural consequence to the observation or breach of the law of nature, do certainly determine the atheist who observes it without believing a law in the strict sense of the word, but believing an obligation in the strictest: and it is manifest, that

that no other consideration can, nor, on his principles, ought to determine him. The theft is determined by the same advantages or disadvantages, still more strongly; because he looks on them as annexed, not only by natural consequence, but by positive and divine appointment. I speak of the thief as a philosopher only. If we considered him as a christian, we should consider him under the influence of further and greater advantages or disadvantages, annexed by the same divine appointment. Thus the matter stands very clearly: and tho men may puzzle it by playing with the words inducement, obligation, will of a superior, law, and others, they cannot alter the state of it.

RIGHT reason consists in a conformity with truth, and truth in a conformity with nature. Nature, or the aggregate of things which are, is the great source from whence all the rivulets of real knowledge must be derived. When we cannot go up, and as far as we cannot go up thither, we must remain in ignorance, and we may be the more contented to remain so in several cases, because we go up in several to the spring head, or at least as far towards it, as the Author of all nature thought it necessary that creatures in our rank of being should go. It is a strong instance of the perversity of the human will, but it is true in fact, that men attempt often to go beyond nature, for no better a reason than this, because they cannot go up to it; or than this, because they do not find that to be, which imagination had told them might be. These men are metaphysicians, and by this method they have fallen at all times into error, or into something worse perhaps than error, but worse surely than ignorance, into doubt, perplexity, needless disquisitions, and endless disputation. Thus it has fared with the greatest scholars, and with men of the nicest discernment and acuteness, with CUDWORTH, for instance, and with

CLARKE.

CLARKE. In all these cases, the safest side is that of ignorance: if he may be called ignorant, who keeps within the obvious bounds of nature and truth, and presumes to continue the pursuit of knowledge no further. Ignorance belongs more properly to him who is thought to know, whilst he transgresses these bounds, and calls every hypothesis a demonstration.

THAT the philosophers we have mentioned are guilty of this absurdity, has been shewn; and it would not be hard to shew, by many proofs, that whilst they pretend to establish morality, they do real injury to theism. They make the incomprehensible Being, in a certain sense, too comprehensible, and the knowledge of the all-perfect Being too nearly allied to the imperfection of the human.

THINGS are what they are by nature, not by will, says CUDWORTH. Would it not be more consistent with theism, to say, things are what they are by immutable natures, which the will of God has given them? Would it not be more within the bounds of human conception, and therefore more reasonable, to say, that God constituted these natures in constituting this system, than to assume that these natures, which are contained in our system, and to the knowledge of which we arrive no other way than by the gradual knowledge that we acquire of our system, are independent on it and on the God who made it?

THE reason of things, deduced from their differences, from their different relations, and from the different consequences of their applications, may be sufficient for the atheist. He may refer the whole to the powers and operations of something, he knows not what, but something self-existent and eternal, which he thinks fit to call the universe, or universal nature.

ture. The thief is not so content. The reason of things is to him that clue by which he conducts himself in discovering the existence of God, and the will of God, as far as man is an object of it. But the will of God is something less, and the reason of things is something more, in the esteem of such of these men as call themselves divines. An eternal reason of things, arising from their independent natures, and known to man as well as to God, is, according to these philosophers and divines, the true criterion of moral good and evil, the rule by which the Creator and the creature are obliged alike to act; with this difference, arising from the perfections of one and the imperfections of the other, God cannot act otherwise, man may. Is it not to be apprehended that men, tainted with such notions as these, will reason constantly *à priori*, and from them, down to their moral obligations: the consequence of which may be, that these obligations will become as unfixed and as fluctuating in their minds, as general and abstract ideas usually are? Is it not to be apprehended, that they will never condescend to reason *à posteriori*, and from the actual constitution of things, up to the will of God and the duty of man; the consequence of which would be to establish a rule of judgment concerning the great principles of moral obligations, as invariable as the obligations themselves?

THESE metaphysical divines are, for this reason, the more to be condemned, that, whilst they pretend to knowledge, that neither men nor angels, I presume, are capable of having, knowledge of divine ideas, and of the rule by which infinite wisdom governs, and whilst they would entice us by learned language, vague expressions, and false airs of demonstration, to seek the laws of our nature out of the scene of our nature, and beyond the reach of any clear conceptions we are

able to have; this very law is enacted in all the works of God, promulgated in terms the most proportionable to human conception, and writ in characters so plain that he who runs may read them.

THE great principles of moral truth are as much founded in the nature of things, as those of mathematical truth: and it is not a little less absurd to contradict the former by our words or actions, than to deny the latter. If the latter of these have an advantage in this respect, that the demonstrations of them are carried on with greater steadiness and precision, by the immediate and joint assistance of sense and intellect; the former have an advantage, for such it may be reckoned, of an other kind. We perceive the truth of both with equal evidence; but as the former are much more important to us than the latter, we may be ignorant of all mathematical, we cannot be so of all moral truth. We discover one, the other discovers itself; it obtrudes itself on the mind, and the mind perceives it with greater satisfaction. He who demonstrates that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, or that a square is double to a triangle of equal base and height, has a dry inward complacency. But he who contemplates the obvious advantages of benevolence and justice to society, and of society to mankind, will feel a pleasure much more sensible: and the same proportion will hold in all the progress the mind makes to discover mathematical, and moral truth.

III.

IF any man should advance, that we ought to proceed on the known principles of mathematics, not because there are such in nature, but because mathematicians have made an

H 2

agree-