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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

XXII.

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

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THE rough draughts, that have been thrown upon these papers, may help to shew that there is such a thing as the law of nature, antecedent to all other laws, and to the establishment of civil society; that this law is the law of reason collected "à posteriori" from the actual constitution of things, by experience and observation; that as instinct, affections, passions, and self-love that universal spring of the animal kind, were given to put us into action, so this law is given to guide and govern the human conduct; that if this law did universally and constantly guide and govern it, mankind would reach the perfection of their nature, and be as happy as they are by this made capable of being; but that the culture of their reason, the improvement of their knowledge, and every thing that tends to the perfection of their nature, and the completion of their happiness, being left to their industry, and subjected to the accidents and vicissitudes of human affairs, some few remain in ignorance, many more fall into error, and the irrational prevails over the rational nature, in different degrees, in all of them; that the state of mankind is imperfect, in proportion as the use that they make of their reason is so; that the will of God signified by the law of nature, and revealed in his works, a revelation that admits of no doubt, shews the road to human happiness to all mankind; that they are seduced out of it by false appearances, and that law, custom, and even religion, which should have kept them in it, confirm these appearances, and only serve to keep them out of it.

If it be difficult to shew the particular reasons that have contributed, in an immense variety of instances, to render the laws and customs of mankind so opposite to one another
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as they are, and so opposite, or so little conformable, to the law of nature and of right reason, which should have been the model, and must be made the criterion of them all, it is easy enough to discover what has rendered the religions, that have arisen in the world, from the first ages of it, so opposite in many particular modes, so similar in many general principles, and all of them together so little conformable to natural religion.

THESE religions instituted by human, under the mask of divine authority, tho they might be intended to restrain and reform mankind, to give stronger sanctions to the law of nature, and to be subservient to government, have served, in all ages, to very different purposes. They have promoted false conceptions of the deity, they have substituted superstition in the place of those real duties which we owe to God and man, they have added new occasions to those that subsisted before of enmity and strife; and insociability has increased as they have flourished. Nay, the first principles of them have been laid in it in direct opposition to the religion of nature and reason, the first principle of which is a sociability that flows from universal benevolence. We are obliged to except, out of the religions instituted by human authority, the jewish and the christian; but we cannot except even these as one of them was taught originally, as the other of them has been taught in the course of it, and as both of them have been practised, out of the religions that have served to the ill purposes here mentioned, to that principally of insociability. On the contrary, no religions have rendered the professors of them so insociable to other men, as those which have claimed truly or falsely to be immediate revelations of the Supreme Being, and have exacted an implicit faith as well as an implicit obedience. Insociability was from the first, and continues still, the great cha-

characteristic of judaism. So it was, and so it is of mahometism. So it was not of gospel-christianity, but so it is become of theological christianity; if I may be allowed to make a distinction which will justify itself abundantly in every instance of comparison.

THE wisdom, as well as the power, that appears in the whole construction, order, and harmony of the universe, must have carried at all times the same general conviction into the breast of every man who observed, and reflected on his own observations. BALBUS had therefore sufficient reason to say, in a good sense, what TULLY makes him say, that "he must want intelligence himself who can believe that this stupendous machine was made and is preserved without intelligence," that is without distinct and superior intelligence, not without intelligence of it's own; the intelligence of the maker, not that of the thing made, for this is such an absurdity as the refinements of philosophy alone could adopt, and as can be never reconciled to the judgment of common sense. "Cestem ergo admirabilem ordinem . . . qui vacare mente putat, is ipse mentis expertus habendus est," may be understood indeed to signify this very absurdity in the mouth of a stoic, and TULLY might mean to make BALBUS speak in character, for which reason the passage should never be quoted without any explanation as it is continually, for an exposition of true theism. But if the sphere of POSIDONIUS had been sent to the Britons, or to the Scythians, in the days of BALBUS and TULLY; if the machine called, I know not why, the Orrery was sent, in our days, to the Hottentots, or the Samojedes, these savages would smile at the stupidity of any of their brethren, if any so stupid should be found among savages, who could imagine such a machine to be the effect of chance, or to have contrived, and made itself. They would all conclude,

clude, that it was the work of intelligence, and of greater skill than that which they employed to build their huts, or to shape their canoes. The most reasonable among them could not fail to see, in the unity of the design, the unity of the artificer. But the vulgar, who make themselves, their own ideas, and their own manners, the measure of all things, might very easily conclude, that the several parts of this machine were made, and the several motions of it were directed, by different intelligences. This opinion too might grow up to be general amongst them, and the most rational savages might be obliged to yield to the least rational, in advancing of which no more is assumed than what has happened in every age and country, even the most civilised, and the least ignorant. But none of these savages would be absurd enough to suppose, tho philosophers such as the stoicians have done little less, that the intelligence which made every wheel of the machine to move was in the wheel.

THE Romans, the Greeks, and before them all the learned nations of the east, were in this case. The vulgar acknowledged a multitude of divinities, to whom they ascribed every excellency, and every defect of their own nature, so that in worshipping them they worshiped in some sort themselves. Their wise men, who acknowledged the unity of a Supreme Being, and held these inferior divinities to be his creatures and ministers, made even this being after their own image. The lovers of ease made him an indolent being, and wholly unconcerned about human affairs. The proud, who thought every thing that related to man equally important, and equally an object worthy of the divine care, made him a busy trifling being. "MYRMECIDES aliquis, minorum opusculorum fabricator". They who converted, with prophane timidity, a reverential awe into a superstitious fear of God, and made the

the existence of a Supreme Being, which ought to be the comfort, the terror of mankind, ran into one of these extremes. They either screened him from human sight by the interposition of mediating, interceding, attoning beings: or, fierce and cruel themselves, they represented him hating without reason, revenging without provocation, and punishing without measure. The gay, the wanton, the luxurious, made gods and goddesses of the same characters; and JUPITER himself, the father of gods and men, was liable to human passions, and partook of sensual pleasures. Thus the vulgar believed, and thus the priests encouraged; whilst the philosophers, over-borne by the torrent of polytheism, suffered them to believe, in ages when true theism was reputed atheism. There were others again who had, besides that vanity which is common to all men, the particular vanity of believing themselves chosen objects of the care of heaven, distinguished by singular privileges, and predestinated to some glorious purpose or other. The Egyptians were the first of all men admitted to the sight of the gods, and to a communication with them, according to JAMBlichus, and we may see what notions had been instilled into the Romans, of grandeur, and empire, to which they were designed by the gods, when we read the pompous answer that JUPITER makes to his daughter, in the first book of the Aeneid. I wave any further instances of the same kind: that of the Israelites, the most extraordinary of any, is too well known to be mentioned.

It is unnecessary too that I should enumerate, in this place, any of those metaphysical whimsies, concerning the divine and human nature, which philosophers broached, and brought into fashion; as the vulgar had brought, tho they had not been alone to invent, all the false conceptions that prevailed about the deity. Much has been said already, and more will
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be said on that subject. What is to my purpose to observe here is, that the systems of theology, which philosophers, priests, and the rabble of the world, conspired to frame, were systems of superstition, that they passed however for systems of religion revealed some how or other, to somebody or other, sometimes by the Supreme Being himself, sometimes by any other divine person, and, therefore, always of more authority than such as human reason could collect from the appearances of things. This persuasion too made it quite unnecessary to employ human reason about so superfluous a work, and thus an immense crop of superstitions grew up, choaked the feeds of natural religion, and corrupted, in a great degree, both public and private morality. In short, reason has been always controuled, natural religion and natural law have been almost entirely superseded in every society of men, and many instances might be produced to shew that this has happened most in those which have been esteemed the most civilised. This has been the effect of imagination and passion, necessary, but dangerous, parts of our composition, under the influence of particular prejudices, and the direction of private motives in matters of the most public concern. If the revelations had not been pretended only, if the same divine wisdom, that shews both the existence and the will of God in his works, had prescribed any particular form of worship to mankind, and had inspired the particular applications of his general laws, the system of religious and civil government would have been uniform in the whole world, as well as conformable to nature, and reason, and the state of mankind would have arrived at human perfection. But it was not in the councils of the most High, which it becomes us to adore and not to examine, that this should be so, and therefore all these systems of religions and laws being nothing more than human expedients, there is no room to wonder that they

have not been more effectual to good purposes, nor that the state of mankind is such as we feel, and as we are apt to complain that it is.

XXIII.

WE may assure, from fact, that this has been the divine oeconomy, and leave those men to assume from imagination what this oeconomy has, or should have been, who have so much theological presumption. But whilst we leave them to imagine without fact, we must not suffer them to imagine against it. Nothing can be, I think, more true than what has been advanced concerning the unnatural religions, laws, and customs established in the several societies of men, and yet it is not less true, that the tables of natural religion and law are hung up in the sight of all men. All may read them, and tho error has prevailed, and will ever prevail in the bulk of mankind against knowledge, more or less, and to some degree, because it is agreeable to the private interests of those who lead, and to the prejudices of those who are led, that it should, I do not believe that there ever was a time, when it could be said with truth that the law of nature was imperfectly known, or that it was an incomplete system of morality before the christian revelation, both of which propositions are roundly advanced by divines, tho manifestly false.

Dr. CLARKE says, in his evidences of natural and revealed religion, which are often dim, and often weak, that the heathen philosophers were never able to prove and explain clearly and distinctly enough to persons of all capacities those things which they were the most fully certain of, and did in good measure understand, such as the obligations of virtue,
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