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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**

XXXI.

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more than twenty olympiads after him, and many more avowed or concealed atheists, might draw the same conclusions, and be mad enough not to discern that a few local observations were not sufficient to invalidate a proposition that might be true independently of them, and that there might be a God, and a true worship of him, tho all the gods of Greece were fictitious, and the adoration of them was mere superstition.

THESE men were plunged at once, and by indignation, as it were, into atheism; whilst others went into it by dint of philosophical refinements more leisurely, less directly, and some of them against the primitive doctrines of their own schools.

## XXXI.

LET us consider what happened in the academy, and what the consequence was of all that metaphysical theology which the founder was supposed, by his immediate successors, and by other philosophers, to have taught dogmatically. If SPEUSIPPUS, XENOCRATES, CRATES, CRANTOR, and POLEMO, did not teach exactly the same dogmas, they taught on the same principles of chimerical knowledge that their founder had done; and, in this sense, it might be said, "quae acceperant tuebantur." Other sects of dogmatists arose at the same time, and among the rest one which gave a principal occasion to that revolution in the academy which ARCESILAUS began, and CARNEADES improved. The sect, I mean, was that of the stoics, concerning whom it is true to say, that their theology and their moral philosophy were alike absurd. By one they drew the divinity down to be a  
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fort of plastic, intelligent, fiery nature. By the other, they strained their notions of human wisdom and virtue so high, that man was obliged to God for neither: he gave them to himself, and God and man were in these respects nearly on a level.

ZENO, who founded the portic, had been an auditor in the academy, and was accused of pirating his philosophy from the lessons of XENOCRATES and POLEMO, when he set up his school as a rival to the other. POLEMO had taught, that the world was God, for instance: and ZENO had adopted this among other extravagancies. When the contest ran high between him and ARCESILAUS, the latter saw by this instance, and by many, that he lay under a double disadvantage. He had the doctrines of his own school to defend, and it was no easy task to defend, by reason, a system of imagination. His adversaries had often the authority of his own school, and of the founder of it, to urge against him, when he attacked them even in their weakest parts. He changed, therefore, his method of philosophising. No matter whether he did it, as LUCULLUS says, by introducing a new one, or, as CICERO affirms\*, by reviving and avowing the old one. When the maxim was established, that nothing could be known, "nihil cognosci, nihil percipi, nihil sciri posse," the academicians could always attack, and never be attacked. This I take to have been the political secret of ARCESILAUS. But whatever his secret was, he established scepticism: and SOCRATES and PLATO had given him but too much reason, to make it the academical principle. As there was little difference, except in name, between the second and third academy, so there was little that it is easy or worth our while to ascertain, between

\* in Academ.

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this sect, and another founded, about the same time, by that melancholy mad man PYRRHO. One acknowledged probability: both denied certainty.

The Pyrrhonian is against all sides: and all sides are against him. He is a common enemy, "hostis philosophici generis." The academian would pass, if he could, for a neuter, who is for no side, nor against any; or else for a trimmer, who changes sides often, and finds the probable sometimes on one, sometimes on the other. TULLY, most of whose works are come down to us, is a standing portrait in our sight of the true academian. In his academical questions he opposes, to LUCULLUS, the variety, and the repugnancy, of all the philosophical systems. In his books, about the nature of gods, he makes COTTA oppose the epicureans and the stoicians both in their turns. The conclusion is always against embracing any of these systems, and so far doubtless he concluded well. But here lay the error. When he assented to the probability of some, and to the certainty of no proposition whatever, he confounded truth with falsehood, as LUCULLUS objects to him that he did; just as much as the sect of LUCULLUS, or any other dogmatists, who put every thing they advanced into the same class of certainty. The stoicians would have assented to this proposition, "it is now light in a full sunshine" with the same assurance, and with no more than they would have assented at any other time to this, "the world is a wisebeing." Such has been the dogmatical impertinence, for it deserves this name, of all those in every age, and in every sect of philosophy or religion, who have imagined they could impose by authority, or who have had the affectation of framing complete systems, concerning the universal order and state of things, divine and human. It is this practice which had laid the men who submitted to it under a sort of intellectual tyranny, and

which has driven those, who have not submitted to it, into a sort of intellectual anarchy. The fault of all lies at the door of the dogmatist; for there is in science, as there is in government, a middle between tyranny and anarchy, far better than either of them. I will explain myself by two examples: and they shall be very modern, that the antients may not blush alone.

One of the CROZATS, a family well known at Paris, went to take his leave of CLEMENT the eleventh, before he returned from Rome. The holy father asked, whether he had finished his purchase of a certain collection of paintings? CROZAT answered, that he had not; that there were several obscene pieces in the collection, and that the confessors, in his country, would not allow him to keep them. The Pope reflected on this occasion, with no small concern, on the number of Jansenists, who teach a more rigid morality, and who abound in the church of France. However, said the Pontiff, you might conclude your purchase, because it would be easy to sell such of those paintings, as your confessor would not suffer you to keep. CROZAT replied, that the same confessors, who would not suffer him to keep them, would as little permit him to sell them, and thereby contribute to the sin of another. CLEMENT smiled at the scruple, and proposed an expedient. Tho' your confessor, said his holiness, should object, if you sold these pictures to catholics, he could have no objection to make, if you sold them to heretics, to the English for instance. That is, the English neither believe in me, nor in any thing like me; they had, therefore, as good believe in nothing; they are, therefore, damned, and a sin the more will do none of them any great harm.

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THE other example shall be that of a better divine perhaps than the Pope but of as great a dogmatist. CLARKE undertook to demonstrate not only the being and attributes of God, and the obligations of natural religion by reason; but even the truth and certainty of christian revelation. Now the latter of these being his ultimate view, it was necessary that he should prove the two first in such a manner, and by such arguments, as were not always the best and the most persuasive, but were the fittest to demonstrate, on pretended grounds of reason, such a scheme, order and state of things as were agreeable to christian revelation, and to the received principles of the church. If he could not carry reason with him throughout, he resolved to carry some appearances of it, and for that purpose he argues in such a manner, and attempts to establish such notions from the first, as he flattered himself would secure these appearances to him on every part of his subject, assisted with all the skill, all the subtilty, and all the plausibility, he was able to employ. When he is to prove, that the first cause is an intelligent cause, without which he had proved in effect nothing, he has recourse to arguments "à postero-ri." There are, indeed, no others, and he owns as much; for which reason he might have been more favorable to them, than I have observed already that he was. But he could not have established by them some things, that he hoped to establish by the others, as I shall have occasion to shew more fully, when I come to vindicate providence against the joint accusations of atheists and divines. All that I mean, and that is to my purpose to observe here, is this. A necessary connection between the natural and moral attributes of God, no man, who believes in him, will deny; all the perfections of an all-perfect Being must be consistent and connected; to be otherwise would be imperfection. Divines,

therefore, will have nothing on this head with which to reproach any true thief: and they had best take care that the true thief has no just occasion to reproach them for setting these attributes at variance, as he might have, if he followed the rule CLARKE quotes from TULLY\*, and considered the consequences of their opinions without regarding what they affirm, nor how honorably they may seem to speak of some particular attributes of God †. But that which may be reproached to CLARKE, and for which I produce his example, is, that when he has asserted justice, and goodness, and the rest of the moral attributes to be in God, just what they are in our imperfect, unsteady, complex ideas; when he has asserted, that the rule, according to which God exercises these attributes, the nature and reason of things resulting from the fitness and unfitness of their relations, is obvious to the understandings of all intelligent beings, and when he has rather repeated these bold propositions over and over than proved them (for how should he prove them?) he triumphs in this foolish and wicked rhodomontade, that the man who denies the moral attributes, such as he makes them to be, for moral attributes, in general, are not concerned, may be reduced to a necessity of denying the natural likewise, and consequently into absolute atheism. Your Pope pretends to make universal and infallible decrees in matters of religion; our doctor infallible demonstrations: and both of them send every one to the devil, who does not believe in them, and in all cases like them.

\* Quasi ego id curem quid ille aiat aut neget: illud quaero quid ei consentaneum sit dicere. de Fin. L. 2.

† Evid. p. 22.