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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

XXXVI.

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

SOCIABILITY is the great instinct, and benevolence the great law, of human nature, which no other law can repeal, or alter: and yet when men have accustomed themselves to think of the Supreme Being, as of an human legislator and governor, and to ascribe to the all-perfect Being the same ideas, the same sentiments, affections, and passions, that they perceive in themselves; they may easily come to imagine, or to make others imagine him as intent to preserve the outward forms of his court, as the most essential laws of his government; and themselves as much bound at least to be good courtiers as good subjects. They may think themselves surest to please in the first of these characters. On a confidence in the merit of it, they may not only neglect the duties of the other, but they may sacrifice, to a false notion of honoring the prince, the fundamental laws, and the constitution of his government. They may think, or they may represent themselves to be his favorites, and they may treat even his best subjects as rebels, by virtue of laws which his ministers make, and which he is supposed to authorize.

THIS allusion to the abuses of civil government, in the kingdoms of earthly monarchs, gives a true image of those which have always prevailed in the spiritual kingdom of CHRIST, to the subversion of its original constitution: and with this allusion I shall finish this head.

XXXVI.

BUT I have undertaken to shew further, that artificial theology, which has shaken the foundations of natural religion, has laid revealed religion much more open to the attacks
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of unbelievers, by explanations and defences, than it would have been, if it had been left to stand without them on the proper proofs of this fact singly, it is a divine revelation. Now to illustrate this point, let us suppose a theist objecting to some modest reasoner *à posteriori*, who is firmly persuaded of the authenticity of the scriptures, that they contain many things repugnant to the justice and goodness of God, and unworthy of his majesty, his wisdom and power. The believer might reply, that he knows the difference between knowledge produced by the certainty of demonstration, and that assurance which the highest degree of probability may produce; that an assurance founded on any less degree of probability would not be sufficient in this case; but that assurance founded on probability is the utmost which can be had in all cases of this kind, and, therefore, that he thinks himself obliged to receive these books for the word of God, tho he cannot reconcile every thing that they contain to his ideas of the attributes of an infinite all-perfect Being. He might add, that he sees and feels many things in the constitution of the physical and moral world, and in the conduct of providence, which it is not easy to reconcile to the same attributes; and yet that he knows, with all the certainty of demonstration, that the former are the works, and the latter the act of God. He might add, that revelation may be necessary to illuminate reason in matters of religion, because there is a more immediate correspondence in matters of religion between God and man, but that reason cannot explain revelation, nor much less enforce it; that nothing less than another revelation can do either, and that in the mean time it is the duty of man to submit to believe what he does, and to adore what he does not, understand. This the reasoner *à posteriori* might reply with great plausibility at least. But the reasoner *à priori* could have no right to use the same language. A
theist

theist would retort his own doctrine against him in this manner. "You argue, and you pretend to demonstrate, on your ideas of justice and goodness as well as of wisdom and power, and by the reason of things, even when your arguments and your supposed demonstrations conclude against the constitution and government of the world, which you and I both acknowledge to be from God. With what face then can you object to me, that I reason upon the same ideas, and by the same rule, concerning this book which you acknowledge, and I do not, to be the word of God? Must I respect probability more than you respect certainty, and a probability which is either not established, or is established by halves? It is not established, if the book contains any thing which implies an absolute contradiction with any conceivable perfection even of the human nature. It is established by halves, whatever external proofs you may bring, unless you can shew that the things contained in it, which seem repugnant to all our ideas of a perfect nature, are really consistent with them; which must be shewn not by a precarious begging of the question, but by direct and evident proofs." What now must the reasoner *à priori* do? He must give up the cause to the theist, or he must submit to the task which the reasoner *à posteriori* evaded, by crying out from the first "o altitudo!" and by declining to examine any objections to matters contained in the scriptures: in short, he puts himself under a necessity of shewing*, that all these matters are exactly consonant to the dictates of sound reason, or the unprejudiced light of nature, and most wisely perfective of it†; and that all the doctrines . . . necessary to salvation, or closely connected with such as are so, are apparently most agreeable to reason, tho not discoverable by it.

* Evid. p. 239.

† Ib. p. 244.

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THIS task has been undertaken accordingly by every divine, sanguinely and dogmatically by most, weakly by all of them. One of your acquaintance and mine* has distinguished himself, in all these respects, by writing on the subject, as he would have preached to an Irish congregation. But that such a man as CLARKE should write upon it at all, and have nothing better to say than what he has said, may serve to shew how these men are led, by their manner of reasoning, and by their artificial theology, to disarm christianity of her best defence, by taking her out of the strong-hold of revelation, and by trusting to those feeble entrenchments, which they are able to cast up; for even those, which CLARKE cast up, are feeble beyond belief. I am not answering his book, and shall, therefore, do no more than make a transient mention of some particulars: but I am willing to rest the truth of what I have advanced, even on this transient mention.

THE doctor is to prove it agreeable to found unprejudiced reason to believe, that the Supreme Being did generate a divine person or emanation from himself, and he proves it by asserting, that this doctrine contains no manner of absurdity nor contradiction in it. This was more easily asserted than proved, some persons would say. But besides, is it agreeable to reason to believe a proposition true, merely because it does not manifestly imply contradiction? Is every thing, that is possible, probable: or it is reasonable to believe, on the probability that a revelation is a true revelation, any thing that may be possibly not inconsistent with the perfections of the divine nature, but that seems to be so in probable opinion? It is said, that the wisest and most learned of the antient

* DR. DELANY.

philosophers received and taught some doctrines. . . . as difficult to comprehend, as any thing in this article of the christian faith, and that these men would not have made any objection to it on this account. Agreed. How then does the argument stand? Reduce it to its just value, and it stands thus. The heathen philosophers taught many doctrines as incomprehensible as this, without any pretence of a divine authority; and their own wild hypotheses would have conducted them readily to receive this, on the authority of a revelation: it is, therefore, agreeable to found unprejudiced reason that we, who know how fantastical their whole theology was, should follow the example which it is assumed they would have set us, and believe, without any of their prejudices, what they might have been induced, by these very prejudices, to believe. This doctrine of the logos or nous was taught in some of the egyptian, and other schools of eastern divinity; and we are not to wonder if PLATO, who had it from them, spoke obscurely, or understood little concerning it, since it is not discoverable by bare reason. But, I think that PLATO would not have been more willing than ARIUS, or CLARKE himself to subscribe to the athanasian creed. He would have assented perhaps, as much as he assented in other cases, to a coequality of the son with the father, as the eternal effect of an eternal cause. But he would not have assented to their coequality. He assumed that the son and the spirit are distinct subordinate beings, and no more coequal with the one Supreme Being, in the order of nature, than the world was thought to be by ARISTOTLE, and the philosophers, who maintained the eternity of it.

ARCHBISHOP TILLOTSON's challenge to the socinians it is not to my purpose to examine; and I need say nothing of the holy spirit, since all that CLARKE says is, that the same
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which is said of the second may be understood very agreeably to right reason and with little variation, of the third.

THAT the account the Bible gives of a paradisiacal state, of the loss of it by sin, and of the consequences of this loss, are exactly consonant to the dictates of sound reason *, or the unprejudiced light of nature, and most wisely perfective of it (for thus far his undertaking goes) it behoved him to make out very clearly; because if the redemption be, as he owns it is †, the main and fundamental article of the christian faith, sure I am, that the account of the fall of man is the foundation of this fundamental article. He should have labored this point the rather, since it is, in all it's circumstances, absolutely irreconcilable to every idea we can frame of wisdom, justice and goodness, to say nothing of the dignity of the Supreme Being, who is introduced so familiarly, and employed so indecently, in taking the cool air, in making coats of skins, to serve instead of aprons of fig leaves which ADAM and EVE had sewed together, and not only in cursing the serpent, and them, and their whole posterity, and the world itself for their sakes, but in joking most cruelly on them; for the twenty-second verse of the third chapter of Genesis is allowed to be an holy irony or sarcasm by that learned divine, MATHEW POOLE. Instead of proving any part of this to be agreeable to sound reason, and the unprejudiced light of nature, CLARKE passes over the whole, as very reasonable and credible in itself, which it appears to be, he says, not only from the abstract consideration of the nature of the thing ‖, but also from the general opinion of the heathens, that the original state of man was innocent and simple, till God, for the sins of men, changed this happy constitution of things.

* Evid. p. 239.

† Ib. p. 262.

‖ Ib. p. 255.

In the name of God, is this to prove? Do men, who prove no better, deserve an answer, how much reputation soever they may have acquired? Their adversaries deny, and have attempted to shew, that this account of the fall of man is unreasonable, and incredible, in every consideration, abstract, or particular. This champion in demonstration says, it is very reasonable and credible from the abstract consideration of the thing. He says no more. He begs the question, therefore, shamefully, on the very point in dispute, and which he undertook to maintain. The heathen, the most antient and learned of them, are again brought in to no purpose whatever; since if they had all agreed, in some general and obscure tradition of this sort, it would avail little, as to the reasonableness and credibility of this change in the constitution of things, and nothing as to the particular circumstances, which are made the angular stones of the whole fabric of christianity. One cannot consider the use which CLARKE makes, so frequently, and to so little purpose, of the heathen philosophers without laughing, as CALANUS, the doctor's voucher on this occasion, laughed at the dress of ONESICRITUS, when he bid him strip and lye down naked on the stones by him*. The mad gymnosophist had begun, whilst he laughed, to tell the messenger of ALEXANDER, as a sample of his wisdom, how fertile the world was in antient times, how the fountains ran with milk, with water, with honey, with wine and with oyl; how JUPITER had destroyed this constitution of things†, for the iniquity of men, who abused his goodness; and had obliged them to live by their labor; how it had been restored again on their reformation, and what danger there was, now they had re-

* Strabo l. 15.

†ob fatietatem et luxuriam ad contumeliam se transfiderunt.

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lapsed into almost the same iniquity, that the end of all things should be at hand. He would have proceeded, no doubt, in much the same style, if MANDANIS, the head of the order, had not imposed silence on him, and, calling ONESICRITUS to himself from CALANUS, had not talked with great decency and good sense, in a manner, and on subjects proper for the greek to report to his prince. Thus the history of the fall, and all the circumstances of it are proved reasonable and probable.

XXXVII.

OUR author takes a little more pains to shew, that the doctrine of the redemption of mankind is agreeable to reason. Having assumed, which he calls proving, that the moral attributes of God, and the notions and expectations of some wise men among the heathens, make it reasonable to believe God did make, seventeen hundred years ago, a revelation of his will to mankind, as if mankind stood in more need of a revelation four thousand years after their race began, than at any other period; as if the moral attributes of God were not the same, four thousand years before, when he made the first revelation of his will, in the constitution of nature, and finally, as if the notions and expectations of SOCRATES and PLATO, supposing these philosophers to have had them really, proved any thing more than their desire of more knowledge than God thought proper to give them the means of acquiring; having assumed all this, I say, he proceeds to argue in this manner*. Some sacrifice or expiation for sin was necessary to be appointed, “ to shew God’s irreconcilable

* Evid. p. 263 et sequ.

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