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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**

XL.

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explained and enforced by it; but from a false reasoning, in which philosophers have indulged their pride, and their curiosity, ever since their was such a thing as philosophy in the world. Let us descend into a particular consideration of this matter, and speak of it a little at large.

## XL.

**A**FTER pleading the cause of natural and revealed religion, I am now to plead that of God himself, if I may use the expression of *SENECA*, in his treatise *De Providentia*, against divines and atheists in confederacy.

THAT chain of reasoning by which we arrive, from a knowledge of the Phaenomena, at a knowledge of the author of nature, of a first intelligent cause of all things, self-existent and the fountain of all existence, all-perfect, and the inimitable original of all perfections, has never been, and can never be broken. How should reason dissolve a demonstration reason has made, by leading us from things perceived by sense and by intuition to that existence which cannot be so perceived\*? The atheist cannot be said properly to argue against the most evident, and in my apprehension, the most comfortable truth, which human reason demonstrates. All he can do is to cavil at it: and thus far the association, between him and the theist, has been carried too generally in all ages.

IGNORANCE that was real, and knowledge that was fantastical, superstition and philosophy combined to create gods,

\* Ratio quae ex rebus perceptis ad id quod non percipiebatur aducit. Acad. Quaest. L. 2.

whose existence could not be demonstrated. But these gods, these hypothetical deities, did not interfere with the one Supreme Being, even in the minds of those who worshipped them. "à rebus physicis tracta ratio ad commentitios et fictos deos." These were the most antient, and like the sun, the first and principal objects of adoration. They were the *dii majorum gentium*. But they were visible and generated gods, as they are called by PLATO: and however confusedly this appellation was employed in common use, the *Θεοὶ* were always distinguished from *ὁ Θεός* and *τὸ Θεῖον*. The TIMAEUS distinguishes them sufficiently; and PROCLUS, in his comment upon it, where he mentions the doubts and disputes that arose about the many, affirms that the belief of one God was uniform. Even they who believed some, of the many, eternal, believed them so by an eternal creation or procession from the one, and if equal in time, yet not so in the order of nature and causality, nor self-existent. CELSUS was a strenuous polytheist, and yet when he pleaded for the worship of daemons, he asserted, "that the one true God is never to be neglected, neither by day nor night, neither in public nor private, neither in words nor actions; but that our minds ought to be directed constantly to him." In short, when the pagan theists were called upon to explain themselves, they made a profession of their faith easily reconciled to true theism: and the fathers of the church, who rejected, like EUSEBIUS, these professions as those of men who only denied what they were shamed from owning by christianity, had a very ill grace; since they themselves were every day employed to explain and alter old doctrines by new, and were nursing up a sort of polytheism, which became little different from that of the pagans, and which needs, at this hour, as much indulgence to make it pass for any thing else.

THAT

THAT there were some men, who knew not God in all ages, may be true; but the scandalous task of combating his existence, under the mask of theism, was reserved for metaphysicians and theologians. It was undertaken probably as soon as philosophers, who professed such sciences, arose. It was undertaken certainly in an unknown antiquity; for as early as the most antient, and especially the most learned nations appear to us, we see such doctrines and institutions established as owe plainly their original to objections raised against the proceedings of divine providence. What were the OSIRIS and TYPHO of the Aegyptians, the OROMAZES and ARIMANIUS of the magi, the good and bad planets of the Chaldaeans, the Zeus and Hades of the Greeks, the Monas and Dyas of PYTHAGORAS, the concord and discord or two principles of other philosophers; what were all these but so many inventions, piously designed to account for the mixture of good and evil, that there is in the world? To account for the supposed unjust distribution of them, other expedients had been found. Besides a metempsychosis or transmigration of souls, from the body of men into those of birds, beasts, fishes, and after a revolution of many ages into the bodies of men again, the Aegyptians held an heaven and an hell, into one of which the good were to be received and to live with the gods, whilst the wicked were tormented in the other. PYTHAGORAS and PLATO had learned this doctrine from them\*. But the former thought to give it more weight by pretending to have gone in person to the infernal shades: and the latter quoted, for the same purpose, Heres of PAMPHILIA, who had been sent from thence to relate what he had seen and heard there. It is worth while to mention the particulars related by him, in order to shew how much

\* PLATO de Rep. L. 10.

the antient theists were persuaded, that nothing less than the existence of all mankind in a future state, and a more exact distribution of rewards and punishments, could excuse the assumed irregular and unjust proceedings of providence in this life, on which atheists founded an objection that the others admitted too easily. AEACUS then, and MINOS and RHADAMANTHUS sat in judgment in the field of truth, "in campo veritatis." All the souls of the dead were brought before this tribunal. There they were tried, and the separation of the righteous from the wicked was made. The former were placed on the right hand, the latter on the left: the former went upwards to live with the gods in heaven, the latter downwards to live with the furies in hell. Of these, however, a distinction was made. Such souls as were judged curable, and required only a little more purification, the animae sanabiles, were delivered from hell after a year of suffering; and for this purpose a review of souls was made annually. Let me observe, by the way, that the doctrine of purgatory is plainly proved by this doctrine, according to CLARKE'S way of proving, and better than by a passage in one of the books of the Macchabees, to be agreeable to sound reason and the unprejudiced light of nature, in general: and that the particular circumstance of an annual review of souls favors extremely a fact which the Franciscan monks asserted, and the council of Basle censured, the annual descent of their founder into purgatory; from whence he delivered, by a special privilege, and carried with him to heaven, the souls of all those of his own order\*. What use may be made of these observations, I leave it to you to determine. But I think, you will agree with me on the whole, that the cavils raised, on account

\* Beatus Franciscus ex divino privilegio quotannis ad purgatorium descendit, suosque omnes ad coelum deducit. SPOND. an. 1443.

of

of physical and moral evil, are as old as metaphysics and theology.

THEY who arrived by proofs, à posteriori, at a demonstration of God's existence, might think, very rationally, that whatever discoveries they made further concerning his nature, his attributes and his will, must be made by the same means, and that what could not be so discovered, could not be discovered at all. Thus men of common sense might think, and by proceeding in this method, they might be sure of acquiring as much knowledge as they wanted, and be safe against falling into error; since to proceed in this method is to follow natural revelation, and instead of employing our reason about the suggestions of imagination, to employ her about those of nature, which are the suggestions of God himself. But we may be assured, that there were, in those days, as there are in ours, men of uncommon sense, who setting themselves far above the vulgar proceeded on a very vulgar principle, and made themselves the measure of all Being, of the Supreme Being among the rest. When modern divines tell us, that we are made after the image of God, they mean it with a regard to our intellectual system, and they proceed in the very same manner with those ancient divines who made God after their own image. To say the first is more decent, but the last is always done; for there can be no application from God, whom we do not know, to man. The application must be made, and it always is so, from man, whom we do know, to God.

WHEN we contemplate the works of God " . . . cum suspicimus magni coelestia mundi templa super stellisque micantibus aethera fixum, et venit in mentem lunae folisque viarum"; they give us very clear and determined ideas  
of

of wisdom and power, which we call infinite, because they pass, in the exercise of them, all the bounds of our conceptions. Thus far the reasoner à posteriori went formerly, and goes now; because the phaenomena conduct him thus far, and give him these ideas with an invariable uniformity. But the reasoners à priori have been never thus confined. As soon as they had proved to themselves the existence of a first intelligent cause of all things, which can be proved by the other method alone, they abandoned it, and having assumed that divine and human intelligence are the same, in kind at least, they proceeded in all their reasonings about the nature, moral attributes, and will of God, not only without regard to the phaenomena, but often in direct contradiction to them. In short, no true theist ever asserted, with greater assurance, this undeniable truth, that every thing which God has done is for that very reason right, than these false theists have asserted the repugnancy of many things, in the constitution and government of the world, to the moral attributes, and even to the wisdom of God. God is, in their notion of him, nothing more than an infinite man. He knows as we know, is wise as we are wise, and moral as we are moral: but his knowledge, his wisdom, and his morality are in their nature infinite, tho they are not exercised alike in the production of all the phaenomena, nor with a constant harmony, nor consistency.

## XLI.

**N**O man has been more dogmatical on this head than CLARKE\*. He is much scandalized at those theists, among others, who being so absurd as to imagine that good-

\* Evid. p. 26.

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