



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**

XLI.

---

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

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.

ness

ness and justice are not the same in God, which they are in our ideas, but something transcendent, think it is impossible we should argue with any certainty about them. This opinion, he says, does not stand on any consistent principles, and must finally recur to absolute atheism. Now I own very freely, that the opinion is mine, and that it is one of those which I think it impious to alter, "*quae deferi á me, dum quidem spirare potero, nefas judico.*" Far from apprehending, that I shall be reduced to atheism by holding it, the doctor seems to me in some danger of being reduced to manifest absurdity by holding the contrary opinion.

After repeating, over and over, of all the moral attributes, that they are the same in God as they are in our ideas, and that he who denies them to be so may as well deny the divine physical attributes, the doctor insists only on two of the former, on those of justice and goodness. He was much in the right to contract the generality of his assertion. The absurdity of ascribing temperance for instance, or fortitude to God would have been too gross, and too visible even to eyes that prejudice had blinded the most. But that of ascribing justice and goodness to him, according to our notions of them, might be better covered, and was enough for his purpose, tho not less really absurd.

If justice and goodness be not the same in God as in our ideas\*, then we mean nothing when we say, that God is necessarily just and good, and, for the same reason, it may as well be said, that we know not what we mean, when we affirm, that he is an intelligent and wise Being. These are the doctor's own words, and surely they shew, that great men, in com-

\* Evid. ib.

mon estimation, are sometimes great triflers. When they, who are of his opinion, affirm, that God is necessarily just and good, according to their precise notions of justice and goodness, they know, indeed, what they mean, and they mean very presumptuously. When they, who are not of his opinion, say, that God is just and good, they too have a meaning which is not less reasonable for being more modest. They ascribe all conceivable perfections to God, moral and physical, which can belong to a divine nature and to a Supreme Being; but they do not presume to limit them to their conceptions, which is their crime with doctor CLARKE. Every thing shews the wisdom and power of God, conformably to our ideas of wisdom and power in the physical world and in the moral. But every thing does not shew, in like manner, the justice and goodness of God, conformably to our ideas of these attributes in either. The physical attributes are in their nature more glaring, and less equivocal. The divine and the atheist, therefore, deny that to be just or good, which is not one or the other according to their ideas. The theist acknowledges whatever God has done to be just and good in itself, tho it does not appear such in every instance, conformably to his ideas of justice and goodness. He imputes the difference to the defect of his ideas, and not to any defect of the divine attributes. Where he sees them, he owns them explicitly: where he does not see them, he pronounces nothing about them. He is as far from denying them, as he is from denying the wisdom and power of God. In every case he knows what he means, and his meaning is in every case rational, pious, and modest.

WILL the divine say, that he does not deny the justice and goodness of God, because he proves them, in general, à priori; and that when he denies them in particular instances, he  
only

only denies the complete exercise of them in this world, because that is reserved for another? When he proves then the justice and goodness of God, he proves them as he could not prove even his intelligence, that is à priori: and when he denies them, his denial is absolute; unless an hypothesis, which may be denied on much better grounds, for we speak here of reason, not of revelation, be true. But what is this proof à priori? Does it prove that justice and goodness, tho they are so connected with the physical attributes, that when we ascribe one we are obliged, by necessary consequence, to ascribe the other to the Supreme Being, are yet so distinct that they may be separated in the exercise of them, and that either of them may act as independently of his wisdom, as of one another? If this be said, they who say it may assume, in consequence, that the Supreme Being is sometimes partial, instead of being always just, and sometimes evil, instead of being always good; which hypothesis might have saved the antients the trouble of inventing that of the two principles, and sets the reasoning of such a divine, as CLARKE, on principles as little consistent as that of an atheist. Does the argument à priori prove that the justice, and goodness, and wisdom, and power of God are so intimately connected, and are so much the same by nature, that they cannot be separated in the exercise of them? In this case, his natural attributes absorb the moral. The will of God is not determined, sometimes by one moral attribute, and sometimes by another, like that of man, but by a concurrence of them all with his wisdom in every act of it. God is then infinitely wise: he does always that which is fittest to be done. That, which is fittest to be done, is always just and good, and the dispute is over.

No, says the divine. However you distinguish, or however you blend the divine attributes, there is a rule, according to

VOL. V.

S s

which

which the exercise of these attributes is determined, and must be characterised. This rule is the reason of things, resulting from their eternal relations, which are such as they appear to be to the understandings of all intelligent beings. God appeals to this rule; we have a right to judge him by it: and therefore, when he appears neither just nor good à posteriori, tho we know him to be so à priori, we must have recourse to some hypothesis or other, in order to reconcile the exercise of his attributes to this rule. "Quo teneam protea nodo?" It is hard to follow men, from supposition to supposition, through all the mazes of metaphysical theology. There is no end of it neither: and if I shewed CLARKE, that the understandings of all mankind, his own among the rest, are extremely apt to understand things to be what they are not, that they are imperfect and depraved\*, and that his rule of judging God by man is, therefore, to the last degree impertinent, on this account, as well as on many others; if all this was shewn, I say, it would not serve to silence men, who seek nothing more than to maintain the honor of the gown by having the last word in every dispute. We shall do better, therefore, to go as far back as we can to the origin of this dispute, where we shall find, if I mistake not, that as it is carried on, so it was founded on a previous question or two, miserably begged on one side, and as foolishly granted on the other.

THE argument, by which EPICURUS endeavored to prove that there could be no God, since there was such a thing as evil in the world, is stated more strongly than it is refuted by LACTANTIUS, in his book *De irâ Dei*. AU. GELLIUS quotes a passage of Q. CLAUDIUS the annalist, wherein the gods are

\* Dem. p. 125.

condemned

condemned for their iniquitous distribution of good and evil †: and PLUTARCH introduces his dialogue, concerning the delay of divine justice in punishing the crimes of men, by supposing that EPICURUS, who was just gone out of the company, had poured forth a whole torrent of blasphemy against the providence of God, for this delay. In the third book of the Nature of the gods, all the powers of eloquence are called forth, in a sprightly declamation to exaggerate physical and moral evil, and to conclude as directly, as an academician could conclude, from their existence and from the assumed unjust dispensations of providence, that there is no God. These instances, to which I refer you, are sufficient. They are antient themselves, and they are the copies of others much more antient. But as bold as the charge is, and as high as it was founded, the belief of God's existence could not have been shaken by it in the minds of men, nor could they have been reduced, as they have been from the most early ages, to defend a demonstrated truth by evasions, by sophisms, by hypotheses, and by all the low expedients that are employed to palliate error, if theists had not been seduced many ways into a confederacy with atheists.

THE case before us affords a signal example, the most signal that it is possible to imagine, of the danger we run, whenever we soar, in the vague of abstract reasoning, too far from the phaenomena of our system. To be real, our knowledge must rise in it. To be useful, it must be applicable to it. But philosophers appear often, like comets, that rise out of our system, just cross it, disorder it, and go out of it again. The general observation has been inculcated throughout all I have

† Haec maxime versatur deorum iniquitas, quod deteriores sint incolu-  
miores, neque optimum quempiam internos finunt diurnare. L. 17. C. 2.

written, and it has been just now applied, particularly to the proceeding of those reasoners à priori, who either became atheists themselves, or who supported the cavils of those who were such, till these cavils became arguments founded on theistical principles, and therefore difficult, I might say impossible, for those who had established these principles, to answer. A self-existent Being, the first cause of all things, infinitely powerful, and infinitely wise, is the God of natural theology: and we may advance, without any fear of being disproved, that as the whole system of the universe bears testimony to this great truth, so the whole system of natural religion rests on it, and requires no broader foundation. These systems are God's systems. That of our knowledge is given and limited, that of our duty is prescribed and revealed by him. Both are adequate to one another; both are commensurate: we have no knowledge beyond our duty, nor any duty beyond our knowledge.

WHAT now has artificial theology pretended to add to that knowledge of the deity, which natural theology communicates? It pretends to connect, by very problematical reasonings à priori, moral attributes, such as we conceive them, and such as they are relatively to us, with the physical attributes of God; tho there be no sufficient foundation for this proceeding in the phaenomena of nature: nay, tho the phaenomena are, as it has been said already, in several cases repugnant. God is just, and good, and righteous, and holy, as well as powerful and wise. Man is made in the image of God: he is little lower than the angels, or inferior gods in the platonic scheme. Nay, he is superior to them: there is no intermediate being between God and man in the stoical scheme. "Homini praestare quis possit nisi Deus?" was the question of CHRYSIPPUS: and SENECA assumes a friendship,  
a ne-



a necessary relation, a likeness between God and good men. The good man is the disciple of God; he emulates God; he is the true offspring of God\*.

SUCH were the notions of antient theists, and on such notions it was natural for them to assume, that this world was made for man; and that the Supreme Being could have no other motive to make so noble a creature, except that of communicating happiness to him. The atheists saw their advantage. They saw that artificial theology gave them the means of unravelling that thread, which natural theology had spun, and of playing the assumed, against the demonstrated attributes. They might ask, as they did, if God be good and holy, how comes it that there is any such thing as evil in the world? If he be just and righteous, how comes it that the best men have often the greatest share of this evil? The pagan theists were extremely puzzled how to answer these questions, so as to prevent the conclusion there is no God: and therefore they had recourse generally to the hypothesis of two coexisting principles, and thought like PLUTARCH † that it was better to abridge the power of JUPITER, than to impute to him that he caused or suffered evil. When they had not this recourse, they talked mere nonsense, figurative, sublime, metaphysical, but nonsense still. The stoics, those zealous assertors of the Supreme God, and defenders of his providence, had all a taint of enthusiasm, or they all affected it. DEMETRIUS was of the first sort, no doubt: and so might SENECA be, who quotes him, and who took much pains to work himself, and his friend LUCILIUS, up

\* .... Amicitia est .... imo etiam necessitudo et similitudo .... discipulus ejus, aemulatorque, et vera progenies. l. De provid.

† Adv. stoicos

to the same temper of mind. At least his treatise about providence is a rhapsody of paradox and enthusiasm, ingenious, affecting, and little to the purpose. I have quoted LACTANTIUS for the argument of EPICURUS\*. I might quote him for such an answer to it as deserves to have its place among the unexpected sayings, the inopinata of the stoics, and no where else. God can, but he will not, according to this father, take away the evil that is in the world; because if we did not know evil, we could not know good " . . . nisi prius malum " agnoverimus nec bonum poterimus agnoscere:" and because there is much more advantage and pleasure in the enjoyment of that wisdom by which alone we know the latter than there is trouble and pain in the evil we suffer. " Plus, " boni ac jucunditatis in sapientiâ quam in malis molestiæ." Thus the father proves, that all things were made for the sake of man, evil as well as good. " Constat igitur omnia propter " hominem proposita tam mala quam etiam bona."

THAT man is the final cause of the whole creation, and that God could have no other motive to make him, except that of communicating happiness to him, are propositions assumed by all the antient and modern theists, those of paganism and those of christianity. Love was the first or chief of the gods. Love was the first principle of things. Love of his creatures in idea determined God to draw them forth into existence. That God loves us even to fondness, " usque in " delicias amamur,†" would such a writer, as SENECA, say. That God loves us heartily is the language of such a writer as CLARKE. Such assumptions as have been mentioned, founded on such notions as these, were inculcated in all ages by artificial theology, and could not fail to be so with success; be-

\* De ira Dei C. 13.

† SEN. de Benef. L. 4.

cause

cause they flattered human nature, who is besides her own flatterer and seducer. "Blanda adulatrix et quasi lena fui." The productions of infinite power were confined long to the system of one planet alone, and the exercise of infinite wisdom to the affairs of one animal chiefly. When further discoveries opened by degrees a more noble view of the universe, and experience and reflection obliged men to think, on many occasions, a little more modestly of their own importance, if physics mortified them, metaphysics raised their spirits again. Fantastic knowledge became as indulgent to self-love, and to the pride of the human heart, as real ignorance had ever been: and altho some of the puerilities and superstitions, which had prevailed in the nonage of philosophy, were laid aside, yet some of these, and other opinions as extravagant and as inconsistent as these, were taught in the schools of theology. They who came theists, and they who came atheists out of these schools, triumphed equally: the former in those doctrines, that raised very nearly the human up to the divine nature; the latter in those, that debased the divine moral character of God as low as human ideas of moral perfections. Theology furnished arms on both sides. The theist confirmed men in the belief of a Supreme Being, and set their passions on his side, when he represented the predilection of this Being for them who were alone, or in common with the generated gods, the final cause of the whole creation, and who were made to exist, that there might be rational and proper objects of God's munificence in the world. The atheist proceeded, on the same theistical principles, to shake this belief of a Supreme Being. That they must be true, if there was such a Being, he asserted as loudly as the divine. But he worked himself up to doubt, and he set, in his turn, the passions of men on his side, by declaiming pathetically against the physical and moral evil, that abounds in the world; by censuring the

the dispensations of providence in it, and by shewing that many of the phaenomena are not reconcileable to our ideas of holiness, of goodness, of justice, and at the same time of wisdom and power. He came at last to deny, that there was any God; because he could not discover such a metaphysical and moral god as artificial theology had imagined.

THE arguments of the atheist were so strong ad hominem, for they are such in no other manner, that the atheist found himself obliged to seek the usual refuge of philosophers, who affect to dogmatize beyond their knowledge, and even beyond all their real, their clear and well determined ideas, the refuge I mean of hypotheses, by which they endeavor to evade what they cannot answer. That of two principles was the refuge of pagans from time immemorial, and of a famous sect of heretics in the christian church. That of the fall of man, and of the continued malice of the first tempter, the old serpent, who caused it, was the refuge of orthodox christians. By these they hoped to account for the introduction of physical and moral evil, consistently with the propositions assumed, "that the world was made for man, and man to be happy in it." By the hypothesis of a future state of rewards and punishments, both pagans and christians hoped to reconcile the dispensations of providence in this life, to the moral attributes of God, and to the rule of his conduct, which they assumed likewise to be the same in him, as they are in human ideas.

THE hypothesis of two principles, self-existing, infinite, opposite, is full of absurdities. But abstract it from these, and consider it only as it accounts for the introduction of evil, and it will appear much more plausible, tho it be not more reasonable, than that of the fall of ADAM, and the malice of the devil.

devil. The first saves, or seems to save, all the attributes of the good God. They all exist in him, as the thief conceives them. They are all exerted by him, as the thief assumes. But he is opposed by a coequal bad principle: and that mixture of good and evil, which appears in the frame and government of the world, arises from the perpetual struggle of these rival powers. The last is full of absurdities likewise; but abstract it from these, and still you will find, that it saves the divine attributes in no respect. It answers no purpose in opposition to atheism, and it could be so applied in good earnest, whatever other purpose it has been made to answer, by no thieves who understood their own hypothesis, and the objections of their adversaries. The goodness, and even the wisdom of God lye just as much exposed for suffering an inferior being, his creature and a creature in actual rebellion, to baffle the designs it is assumed that he had, as they would lye, if these designs were acknowledged to have been imperfectly executed by him. The severity with which he punished our first parents, for a fault, which he foreknew, that they would commit when he abandoned their freewill to the temptation of committing it, for there would be too much horror in supposing them predestinated to commit the fault; this severity, I say, and much more that which has been exercised on the whole race of mankind, who share the punishment, tho they had no share in the crime, cannot be reconciled to our ideas of justice. The introduction of physical and moral evil, therefore, could not be imputed more really to the Supreme Being independently of this hypothesis, than he is made the author of them by it, with the aggravating circumstance of punishing the innocent for what he permitted, in one sense of the word, the guilty to do.