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Lord Viscount Bolingbroke**

In Five Volumes, complete.

Bolingbroke, Henry St. John

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XLII.

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XLII.

THE dispensations of providence, in the distribution of good and evil, stand in no need of any hypothesis to justify them: and if they did, that of a future state of rewards and punishments would be insufficient. These two propositions may be made, I think, very evident: and I shall endeavour to make them so, before I quit the subject. Reason will neither deny, nor affirm, that there is to be a future state: and the doctrine of rewards and punishments in it has so great a tendency to enforce civil laws, and to restrain the vices of men, that reason, who cannot decide for it on principles of natural theology, will not decide against it, on principles of good policy. Let this doctrine rest on the authority of revelation. A theist, who does not believe the revelation, can have no objection to the doctrine in general. But even a theist, who does believe the revelation, may refuse to admit the doctrine on principles on which it is established by divines, and may disapprove the use they make of it in several respects.

THE hypotheses, that have been crayoned out, are the chief pillars of artificial theology. Some of them were assumed in compliance with the overweening notions of their own worth and importance, which men are prone to entertain, and by which they raise themselves up to the imaginary heights that have been mentioned: tho the distance between our friend GAY'S FLY, in his fables, and the infinite self-existent Being, is not a whit greater than that between this Being and SOCRATES or St. PAUL, the two apostles of the gentiles. Other hypotheses were invented to maintain these; and by tagging one hypothesis to another, men deviated at last so far from
natural

natural theology, and raised so much confusion in their notions about it, that they had no means left of returning to the first principle of this theology, nor of clearing to common apprehension a little of this confusion, but those of another hypothesis. Strange effect of theological skill! It makes a demonstrated truth depend on a precarious supposition. If there is not a future state, God is neither good nor just, according to our ideas of goodness and justice in his dispensations. If he is not good and just, according to our ideas of these moral attributes, neither can the physical attributes, such as infinite wisdom and power, belong to him: and a being, who has none of these, is not God. But there is a future state. Thus divines have dared to argue; and I am justified in saying, that they betray the cause of God to the atheist, when they joyn with him in so many points, that nothing remains to be opposed to him, in defence of God's existence, but the problematical and futile reasonings they employ to prove a future state.

We are apt to carry the judgments we make into extremes, and the characters we give into panegyrics or satyrs. The examples of this kind are without number, but none are so remarkable as those which we find in writers antient and modern, concerning the human nature. No creature is so miserable, in some descriptions, nor so necessitous as man. He comes into the world bemoaning his state. He grows up, and passes through the human state, exposed to many wants and bodily infirmities, unknown to the brute creation. You remember, no doubt, those fine verses in *LUCRETIVUS**:

Tum porro puer, ut faevis projectus ab undis

* Lib. 5.

T t 2

Navita,

Navita, nudus humi jacet infans, indigus omni
 Vitali auxilio.
 Vagituque locum lugubri complet, ut aequum est
 Cui tantum in vitâ restat transire malorum.
 At variae crescunt pecudes &c. . .

No creature is to be compared with man in other descriptions, and in a contrary sense. He was made of earth; but this earth was impregnated with celestial seeds, if you will take OVID's * word for it.

. . . . Recens tellus, feductaque nuper ab alto
 Aethere, cognati retinebat femina coeli.

He was made in the image of the gods, and his very form denoted his divine original.

Os homini sublime dedit, coelumque tueri
 Jussit &c.

Some of these writers degrade even the human mind, and that intelligence and reason wherein we triumph. PLATO, who in one mood, raises man up to the contemplation of the abstract forms of all things, sends him in another for instruction to the beasts of the field: and the HOSPES in the POLITICUS reckons their conversation among the means of improvement in philosophy and the knowledge of nature which men enjoyed under the reign of SATURN. MONTAGNE, another prose-poet, deals with man as divines deal with God, and having drawn down human nature as low as he could, he raises that of some other animals so high, that he ascribes a sense of religion to elephants, and represents them deep in meditation and contemplation before the rising sun, and atten-

* Metam. L. 1.

tive

tive at certain hours of the day to perform certain acts of devotion. He took this from *PLINY* *, and he might have added, on the same authority, among other excellencies, that they understood the language of their country, loved glory and were great moralists; a commendation seldom due to men, “*quae etiam in homine rara.*” But *COTTA*, in the third book of the nature of the gods, goes so far as to assert that human reason, far from being an advantage, is a disadvantage to man, the worst present that heaven could make him, and one of the plagues of human life. “*Pestifera multis, admodum paucis salutaris.*” The academician complains that it is bountifully and largely bestowed, “*tam munificè et tam largè dari.*” But the whole chorus of theistical philosophers and of divines boast it to be the distinguishing gift of God to man, that which gives him a preeminence and a right of command over his fellow creatures. *OVID* † calls him for this reason, sanctius his animal: and the stoic, whom *COTTA* answered, had not only distinguished him from other animals, but coupled him with the gods. The sole beings who have reason are gods and men “*dii et homines quibus profectò nihil est melius.*” In a word, metaphysicians have refined and subtilized their discourses on this favorite theme into a jargon which has no meaning at all, or a blasphemous meaning: and they would stand justly exposed to the ridicule of common sense, if common sense could resolve to laugh at blasphemy. There have been those who taught that the human is a portion of the divine soul. Others § have been more modest, and have allowed that the former is a created being, “*creatura quae mens dicitur rationalis,*” but a being of so high an order that there is none

* L. 8. C. 1. † Ib.

§ PORPH. PLOTIN. ST. AUSTIN. MALB. &c.

supe

superior, except the Supreme Being, and that these two are more closely and intimately united than the human soul is to the body it informs.

THERE is a middle point between these extremes, where the truth lies: and he who seeks it may find it. He will not find what the principle of divine or even of human intelligence is. But he will soon find that the distance between them, whatever they are, is so immense as to admit in reality no degree of comparison. He will find on the other hand many such degrees between the human intelligence and that of various animals. He may be induced perhaps to think, that intellectual faculties and corporeal senses, of the same and of different kinds, are communicated in some proportion or other to the whole race of animals; but he will be still conscious of his superiority, as they themselves are, most apparently, such of them at least as know mankind; not the sagacious elephant alone, who submits to his service, but the lion and the tyger, who make him occasionally their prey.

MAN is then the principal inhabitant of this planet, a being superior to all the rest. But will it follow from hence, that the system wherein this planet rolls, or even this planet alone, was made for the sake of man? Will it follow that infinite wisdom had no other end in making man, than that of making an happy creature? Surely not. The suppositions are arbitrary, and the consequences absurd. There is no pretence to say that we have any more right to complain of the evils which affect our state, than our fellow creatures of the evils which affect theirs, or which are common to both. Many of them have plainly some foresight of the future, and of physical effects more than we have. But all of them feel the present. Because God has given us intellectual powers supe-

superior to theirs, to them more instinct perhaps, to us more reason certainly, is he cruel and unjust, because he has not given us invulnerable and impeccable natures? By reason we learn to avoid, or to soften, or to remedy, many evils to which we are exposed. By reason we ought to learn to bear such as can be neither avoided, nor softened, nor cured. If we employ our reason only to aggravate these evils in our imaginations, and to complain more loudly, far from having a better right to do so, we are on this very account just so much the more impertinent and absurd.

THE whole tribe of divines assert, that the goodness of God required, he should make the world for the sake of man, and man purposely to make an happy creature. Those among them, who rise higher in metaphysics, assert, "that God can act for himself alone, and can create rational beings for no reason but that of being known and loved by them*." Now I, who know just as much of this matter as all or any of these dogmatical persons, deny, on my own authority, what they affirm, on theirs; and, whilst they pretend arrogantly to demonstrate, will presume modestly and diffidently to guess. What they say, hangs ill together. I leave it to them to reconcile, among a multitude of other inconsistencies, and shall only observe, on the latter part, since we reason on human ideas, for we have no others whereon to reason, that they who advance it, entertain a very false notion of beneficence. An heathen moralist would have thought them better. No one confers a benefit, who has himself and his own interest and satisfaction alone in view, "si una dandi causa est se intueri ac commodum suum, illud non beneficium sed Foenus est." From hence SENECA† concludes, that all the benefits we re-

* Vid. MALB. Preface to the Recherche &c.

† L. 4.

ceive

ceive from God, are truly benefits; since God can reap no advantage to himself in bestowing them, and would, therefore, bestow none, if utility to himself could be his motive. "Nam
" si una beneficii dandi causa sit dantis utilitas, nulla autem
" ex nobis utilitas Deo speranda est, nulla dandi Deo be-
" neficii causa est."

BUT the former part of what is asserted on this occasion by divines requires much more discourse. They who assert, that man and the happiness of man were the final causes of the creation, seem to have ideas no better determined of goodness, than the others of beneficence; for if there be not a certain proportion kept in the exercise of it, the seeming goodness of the heart is really the weakness of the mind. You see at once, what numberless instances might be produced to exemplify this truth. Let me ask now the greatest flatterers of human nature, what proportion there is between the excellencies of it, and the goodness of God, that should determine his infinite wisdom to judge it essential to his goodness, when he resolved to make man, to make a planet the more for the habitation of this ideal creature? The habitation is fit for him, and he is fitted to live in it. He could not exist in any other. But will it follow, that the planet was made for him, not he for the planet? The ass would be scorched in Venus or Mercury, and be frozen in Jupiter or Saturn. Will it follow, that this temperate planet was made for him, to bray and to eat thistles in it?

BUT I hear the divine reply, that man is a rational being, far superior to the brute creation, and alone more worthy than all of them, to be the final cause of the world he and they inhabit. That he alone has reason may be too much to grant, since several of the faculties, in the exercise of which
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it consists, are exercised by other animals, as every man, who is not *CARTESIAN* enough to believe more than *DES CARTES* believed himself, must allow. But whether the difference of that, which is called reason in man, and the intelligence of other animals, be in kind or in degree only, one way or other certain it is, that his superiority over them is very real and very great, according to all our ideas of order. It was this consideration, and this partial comparison of him with the creatures of his own system, that made the human pass for the first of all rational natures, after the divine, among those who had no suspicion of any others. Such were the narrow and confined ideas which it appears, by sacred as well as prophane philosophy, that all the antients entertained of the works of God. Modern discoveries in astronomy have presented them to us in a more noble scene. We cannot doubt, that numberless worlds and systems of worlds compose this amazing whole, the universe, and as little I think, that the planets, which roll about our sun, or those which roll about a multitude of others, are inhabited by living creatures fit to be the inhabitants of them. When we have this view before our eyes, can we be stupid or impertinent and vain enough to imagine, that we stand alone or foremost among rational created beings? We who must be conscious, unless we are mad and have lost the use of our reason, of the imperfection of our reason? Shall we not be persuaded rather, that as there is a gradation of sense and intelligence here from animal beings imperceptible to us for their minuteness, without the help of microscopes and even with them, up to man in whom this be their highest stage, sense and intelligence stop short and remain very imperfect; so there is a gradation from man, through various forms of sense, intelligence and reason, up to beings who cannot be known by us, because of their distance from us, and whose rank in the intellectual system is even

above our conceptions? This system as well as the corporeal, that is the whole physical or natural system, for such the two properly are, must have been alike present to the divine mind before he made them to exist. If we assume, therefore, that he made this world for the sake of man, we must assume à fortiori that he made every other world for the sake of the rational inhabitants he designed to place in it.

Now it seems to me to follow from this hypothesis very absurdly, that one of these systems was made in mere subserviency to the other: whereas it is certainly agreeable to the clearest and most distinct ideas we are able to frame, of the proceedings of infinite wisdom, to believe that each of them was made in some degree of subserviency, and the animal system perhaps in the greatest, to the other, and that both of them were made on some greater motive and for some greater purpose, whatever these were, than either. It might be observed, as another absurdity, that according to this hypothesis the whole universe was made for some minute parts of it, and that the divine architect of nature proceeded in an unnatural method, making the whole relatively to these, instead of making these and all the other parts relatively to the whole. But I chuse rather to pass it over, and to observe that the hypothesis I oppose is not only unreasonable in speculation, but evidently contradicted by the phaenomena. Nothing in truth can be so preposterous as the conduct of the divine and atheist appears to be, whilst they deplore the miserable state of mankind, and the evils that abound in a world wick they assume was made for the sake of mankind.

BOTH of them reason à priori from assumed moral attributes of the divinity. So they call their method of reasoning;

ing; and such it is in a false sense. It cannot be such in a true one; since their ideas of these attributes are very human ideas, applied arbitrarily to the divine nature, not founded in any knowledge of it that they have really. No matter. They have accustomed men to this absurd imposition, and they proceed. Both of them pretend to be led from proposition to proposition down to their different conclusions. But the truth is, that they have their different conclusions from the first in view. The promises, wherein they concur so amicably, are plainly contrived to establish such notions of the moral attributes of God as shall appear repugnant to what we see and feel and know, when they are applied to the constitution of the world and to the state of mankind in it: whereas it is from this constitution and this state alone, that we can acquire any ideas of the divine attributes, or a right to affirm any thing about them. When they have done this, a COLLINS concludes, that there is no God; and a CLARKE, that there is a future state of rewards and punishments.

LET us proceed in another method, argue from knowledge not from imagination, and advance nothing more than the former will justify. The former will justify enough to refute abundantly the two allies.

XLIII.

THE demonstration of God's existence is founded in knowledge, and pursued with intuitive certainty through every step of it. This the divine will admit; and this the atheist is so little able to deny, that he has recourse to cavil, as it has been said already, and endeavors vainly to unravel the thread he cannot break. I assume, therefore, nothing more than what is proved, when I assert, that the Su-

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