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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

XLV.

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XLV.

IT may be said that the thief argues hypothetically in defence of the divine attributes, like the atheist and divine who attack them. Now that he argues in some sort hypothetically, I agree. But that he argues in any sort like them, I deny. An hypothesis, which the phaenomena contradict, or which is inconsistent even with one of them, is not admissible. An hypothesis which they all concur to establish, is scarce an hypothesis. The goodness of God required that this world should be made for the sake of man, and he only to be happy, is an hypothesis of the first kind. That the goodness of God did not require this, and that his wisdom required something else, since it appears in his works that something else has been done, and since his works which must be always conformable to his attributes can alone enable us to judge concerning these, this, I say, is scarce an hypothesis. It is founded in fact, and is agreeable to our clearest and most distinct ideas. The atheist and the divine argue, from what they do not know, against what they do know; and in order to make the imposition pass, they trifle grossly between two methods of reasoning. One proves à posteriori that there is a first intelligent cause of all things. The other supposes it. After this, they attempt to prove à priori that there is a necessary connection between the wisdom and power of this being, and his goodness and justice, which are they say, in him, the very same that they are in our ideas. After this, they return again to the former method, and attempt to prove à posteriori that he is neither good nor just. The thief employs no such artifice. He reasons uniformly, from the works of God, to his existence and his attributes:

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and reasoning in this manner he raises no objection to either, and is able to defend both.

I have spoke often of the pride of man, as the cause of many errors in philosophy, and especially in the first philosophy. It has no doubt a share in determining the atheist to the opinions that have been mentioned. But the atheist has another motive. His great aim is to free his mind from the belief that there is any Supreme Being. He struggles hard against demonstration, and catches at every hypothesis that may give him a pretence to doubt. Such a pretence he finds in that which assumes notions of the moral attributes of God, and of his designs in favor of man, and then opposes the phaenomena to these notions. He has, on this occasion, the very singular advantage we have observed, that many of his adversaries agree with him in the premises, help him to establish them, and defend the cause of theism very ill against his conclusions afterwards. Divines, who do in effect no less than betray this cause to him, have likewise their private motive. They are unwilling to lower, on any account, their notions of human worth and importance, or of the designs of God in favor of man; and for that reason, since these notions cannot be maintained on the appearances of things that are, they have endeavored, in all ages, and in all religions, to maintain them on the supposition of things that may be: and the whole force of human imagination has been employed to soothe human pride. Much of what the pagans advanced hypothetically to keep up these notions, in opposition to universal experience, is indeed no longer hypothetical; since it has been admitted into christianity. It is not hypothetical, I mean, when it is considered as a matter of revelation; for it is as hypothetical as ever, when it is considered as an object of reason. Let us it leave then respectfully to revelation,

lation, which is sufficient, or nothing can be so, to support it. Let us not employ our reason about things which she must either disown, or prostitute herself to maintain. Let us not employ her to multiply, or to improve hypotheses. Let us employ her in a manner to want none: and that we shall do effectually, if we keep her within those bounds which God has prescribed, by revealing in his works so much and no more of natural theology, and of natural religion, as he thought it necessary for us to know.

THESE precautions are the more fit to be taken, because tho our religion forbids pride, and teaches humility, yet the whole system of it tends to inspire the former into all those who are not able to discern the consistency of particular precepts and of the system, which I presume that very few are. According to this system, man was not only made in the image of God, but the world and he were so made that his happiness seemed to be the final cause of the whole. He fell, indeed, from this state; but God, who suffered him to fall, rather than to restrain him in the exercise of his free will, determined instantly to raise him again, by the sacrifice of his own Son: whilst he abandoned myriads of fallen angels to the fatal consequences of their revolt, without any hopes of redemption. Is it possible to conceive higher notions of a created being, than these revealed truths must inspire? PLATO asserted, on his exalted notions of the Supreme Being, that immortality was communicated by a sort of physical necessity to every creature that this Being himself created. Christian philosophers might be led more easily from the exalted notions of human nature, which these revealed truths inspire, to imagine that happiness was to be communicated by a sort of moral necessity to such a creature as man. Allow me one instance more. The Israelites were one of the least, and least

worthy nations of the earth. Yet, God chose them, according to the same system, by a wonderful predilection for his favorite people, preferred them to all the people of the earth, and assigned them a country flowing with milk and honey. May not christian philosophers have been led, by this example, to believe that God preferred mankind to all other intellectual creatures, and made a particular world for them, as he assigned a particular country to the Israelites? The facts, tho received in theology, are not, indeed, applicable to philosophy. But when the mind is once tinctured by them, and an habit contracted of reasoning from them, any thing, that appears analogous to them, will be the more easily admitted.

XLVI.

THE confederacy between atheists and divines appears to have been carried very far, by what has been said already. I have chose in the reflections that have been made to account for the physical and moral evil that is in the world, and to defend the attributes of God, to go up to the source of all the false reasoning about them, rather than to insist on the topics that are commonly employed: and I hope, that the method I have taken is not the worse for being shorter, plainer, and less metaphysical. I must confess that I do not see, how the cause of God can be effectually pleaded on this head any other way. But there is another head, on which it must be pleaded likewise; for the antitheistical confederacy does not end here. Left the bare existence of evil should not afford the atheist color enough to deny the being of God, nor the divine a sufficient foundation whereon to erect, by the seeming authority of reason, that system of another world, which is, and always has been, of great advantage to him in this, they proceed