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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**

XLIX.

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

seems to require. Whilst the CLARKES and WOLLASTONS of the age accuse the providence of God by arguments drawn from his nature, and from the eternal reason of things, both as imperfectly known to them as to you and me; let us defend this providence by arguments, drawn from the nature of man, and the actual constitutions of the world, both equally well known to them and to us. Instead of hearkening to them, let us hearken to God who speaks to us in his works; and instead of pronouncing what it was right for him to do, believe all he has done, for that very reason, right. Let us be prepared to meet with several appearances, which we cannot explain, nor therefore reconcile to the ideas we endeavor to form of the divine perfections. But let us remember too that as the pretended science of the men, against whom we dispute, exposes them to error, and as they render the great truths of theism doubtful, or at least perplexed by blending them up in an imaginary scheme of divine oeconomy; so we may be secure from error by a modest avowal of ignorance, where human knowledge ceases: and as the imperfections of created Beings prove them to be created, not self-existent, so the very deficiencies of the knowledge we have will be so many proofs of its truth. They must be necessarily such; for if it be true that infinite wisdom and infinite power created, and govern the universe, it cannot but follow that some of the phaenomena may be proportionable, and that others must be disproportionable to our, and to every other finite understanding.

## XLIX.

**H**AVING premised what I thought proper in this place, I observe that the representation, made of the general state of mankind, proves nothing, or proves too much.

much. It proves nothing if a gradation of animal beings appeared necessary or fit in the divine ideas, that is, to speak less platonically and more rationally, to the supreme or divine reason and intention; for in that case why should not we be the creatures we are? It proves or attempts to prove too much, if it be intended to prove that there is, or that there should have been no such chain of Being; for as we see that there is one almost from nonentity up to man, and have the most probable reasons to persuade us that it continues up to natures infinitely below the divine, but vastly superior to the human; so there is surely no metaphysical nor theological presumption mad enough to assert that we are capable of knowing what the constitution, order, and harmony of an universe require.

BUT now, whether such a gradation of being goes through the whole universe, or whether it be confined to our planet and stops at man, as the ignorance and pride of antient philosophers induced them to believe, why is not the general state of mankind consistent with the idea of a reasonable cause? This reasonable cause may have produced such creatures as we are either relatively to that chain, whereof we make a necessary link, or independently of it, and on other motives at which it is impossible we should even guess. When objections are made to such things as appear inconsistent with the perfections of an all-perfect Being in the Bible, the divine's answer is that of St. PAUL, "ô altitudo!" The same divine objects to the works of God, and will not be answered by the same exclamations. My ignorance is made a sufficient reason for submitting implicitly to whatever I find in this book, as agreeable to the perfections of the Deity; and yet my ignorance is not allowed to be a reason for submitting in the same manner to whatever I find in the book of nature that God  
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has actually done, as agreeable to these perfections. This may be called very justly theological effronterie in the divine; and it is at least as absurd in the theist to ask, whether the conditions of humanity, the various objects which men pursue, and the various scenes of their lives from the cradle to the grave, compose an end worthy a first cause perfectly reasonable? The learned author might have asked with far less impropriety, whether the lowest employments, to which legislators and magistrates subject some of the persons they govern in political societies, compose an end worthy of them? The answer would be, that considered by themselves, they do not, but that considered, as parts of a general system, wherein the most minute are necessary to make the whole complete, they do: and that even considered by themselves, they are worthy at least of the persons to whom they are assigned.

IN what I have written to you about human knowledge, I have insisted on one observation, which I will recall, and apply to the present case. The present case will justify the observation, and both together will discover very clearly the principal source from which all the perplexity, and all the tedious disputes concerning the origin of evil, and the supposed unjust dispensations of providence, as well as most other metaphysical and indeterminable questions, have arisen. The synthetical method of reasoning by arguments *à priori*, that is by arguments deduced from principles assumed to be evident, is very commodious for many philosophical and theological purposes. But it may lead us imperceptibly into error, and we can never be sure that it leads us to truth, unless these principles are self-evident, or unless their evidence be demonstrated by the analytical method, that is, by arguments *à posteriori*, that is, by tracing it up from the known phenomena. Now, it happens unfortunately for truth, that philosophers

phers and divines catch at certain principles through levity, through a too implicate confidence, or through design, and argue dogmatically from them in the synthetical method without a due regard to the analytical. Thus, for instance, the wisdom of God does not appear alike in all the phaenomena; but, as far, as we can discover, it appears in the greatest and the least to our astonishment, and the proofs of it multiply in an exact proportion to our discoveries, whilst no one of these can be strained into a repugnancy to it, for if any of them could, the case would be altered extremely. This wisdom, therefore, is established by the analytical method, and we may reason safely from our ideas of it in the synthetical. But the same cannot be said of the moral attributes, which we ascribe to the Supreme Being, according to our ideas of them. The superiority we have over the rest of the animals, that are our fellow inhabitants of this world, which is imaginary, perhaps, in some respects, and real, without doubt, on the whole, and several particular phaenomena, wherein virtue is rewarded and vice punished, give us these ideas. Now, whether the phaenomena that give them, even those wherein the final causes are the most apparent, and the most immediately relative to man, are to be deemed effects of the divine goodness and justice, in any other sense than some of the same and several others are to be deemed effects of the divine goodness to the several species of animals; or whether they are all effects of the divine wisdom exerting itself in every part relatively to the whole, may be disputed. But it cannot be disputed, and all sides agree, that many of the phaenomena are repugnant to these ideas of goodness and justice. They, therefore, who proceed on these principles, that goodness in God is just what we conceive it to be in our dealings with one another and in our abstract notions of it, and that his justice is the same, that he made the world for the sake of man, that  
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he made man only to communicate happiness to him, and that every one, who acts in contradiction to this happiness, must be rigorously punished by God himself, are so far from demonstrating, that they have not the merit of framing a good hypothesis; since no hypothesis, which is contradicted evidently by any one of the phaenomena, can be received as such; and since it is in vain that they endeavor to rectify one by another, and to maintain the second by the very proofs that destroy the first. If the first fails, the second cannot stand: and he who expects to be believed, when he asserts what the phaenomena can neither depose for, nor against, because he finds no other way to maintain what he had asserted in opposition to them, expects a great deal more than reason will grant him.

WHAT has been said seems to be extremely plain: and they would conclude in this manner on any other occasion, who are not ashamed to do the very contrary on this. By setting themselves free from the restraints of the analytical method, these reasoners à priori resemble very much one sort of madmen. Some of these are so very mad that they lose all use of their reason, and are as little able to deduce consequences as they are to establish principles. Others, again, deduce consequences, and argue very justly, but are still mad; because they reason from principles that have no appearance of reality out of their own over-heated and disordered imaginations. You will find instances of this kind without the trouble of going to Bedlam. You will find them in every form of life, even among those who are reputed sober and wise, and who really are so, except on some one particular subject. But you will find them principally in colleges and schools where different sects have rendered this sort of madness, which is occasional elsewhere, both epidemical and traditional. Few have

been mad like DON QUIXOTE, whilst multitudes have been, and are, as mad in different walks of science, as the Danish cabalift who instructed BORRI. The man had great parts, was learned, was devout. He reasoned extremely well; but he reasoned like the rest of his sect on the supposition of an elementary people and on other cabalistical principles. Atheists seem to me to deserve a place among the first sort of madmen, and I apprehend that many divines and theists ought to be ranked among the second.

THEY who approach the charm, are exposed to the enchantment. How should they escape who are bred up in it? I call it an enchantment, and I think, that men who have great strength of genius, and great warmth of imagination, are often the most liable to be affected by it. The analytical method is the surest road to truth, but it suits neither the purpose nor the temper of such philosophers. Where it may carry them they know not. It will carry them to truth, if it be well pursued, but it may carry them to truth that is inconsistent with the doctrines they are engaged by prejudice, or interest to maintain; and accordingly we see them fly off from it, like men who are afraid of their guide. It is troublesome and tedious; for it requires often a difficult and long induction of particulars: and they are in haste to arrive at science, or what they take for science. It stops, in many cases, short, and disappoints their curiosity. They scorn to stop where it stops; and, therefore, they take a bold leap, from certain ideas that seem to them clear and distinct, to the first principles of things, as FONTENELLE says of DES CARTES, foolishly to be sure, since he intended to make his panegyric, and to give him the preference to NEWTON.

ALL

ALL this may be applied to the persons we speak of here; and there is no subject, on which the enchantment has had so much force, nor has prevailed so long as on this of the origin of evil, of the moral attributes of God, and of the dispensations of providence. This was a chaos of metaphysical notions three thousand years ago, and it is so still. Some very able writers have endeavored to account for the origin of evil consistently with the received notions of the moral attributes of God, and of his design in creating man; but I doubt that the two famous questions are still unanswered by them. "If there is a God infinitely good as well as powerful, how comes it that there is any such thing as evil in the world? If he is infinitely just, how comes it that the virtuous have a share and sometimes the greatest of this evil?" The hypothesis of two principles, which had been invented by the most antient of the eastern philosophers, and was revived by MANES, and others, contained many absurdities, and did not solve the difficulty, since it might be asked, why did the good God create man at all, if he could not create and govern him independently of the evil god? The hypothesis of the fall of man, for such it is under a philosophical consideration, will serve the purpose as little; since it is impossible to render that assumed indulgence of God to the free-will of man, which defeated the original design of God, plunged man into a state of misery as soon as he was created, and obliged the divine goodness to have recourse to the expedient of a redemption by the blood of his own Son--- since it is impossible, I say, to render this agreeable to our ideas of goodness or even of wisdom.

THE first of these hypotheses has been exploded long ago. The second must be defended as well as it can, since it is made



the foundation of the christian system. But, however, the introduction of evil may be accounted for by this sacred tradition, and by much ingenious argumentation to the reason of mankind; every divine, and several theists, endeavor to account for the existence and distribution of it by another hypothesis, which is as antient as either of the former, and which must have been invented since it was not revealed to the Aegyptians, and other people any more than to the Israelites, not only for a political, but for a philosophical purpose, and to serve for an answer to the two atheistical questions. It is with this hypothesis, considered independently of revelation, that we have to do here. We are to examine whether it reconciles the phaenomena to the ideas we have of goodness and justice, by assuming that this world is nothing more than the porch or entry into another\*.

## L.

**A**S the men who maintain this hypothesis neglect the phaenomena when they pretend to determine the moral attributes of God, so they overstrain them with much affectation and unfairness when they pretend to demonstrate a future state. The author of the religion of nature delineated, that I may mention one particularly, does this in such a manner that his exaggerations become burlesque †. According to him, “ the general state of mankind is scarce consistent with  
 “ the idea of a reasonable cause, because we are born with the  
 “ labor of our mothers; because we are liable to hunger,  
 “ thirst, heat, cold, and indispositions of various kinds; and  
 “ because one generation drops off, and another springs up,

\* Rel. of nat. p. 207

† Ib. p. 206, 207, 209.