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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**

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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.

“ that is, because as we are born, so we die. Children, we  
“ trifle away our time at play; or we are sent to school, and  
“ submitted to discipline. Men, we are exposed to difficulties,  
“ and surrounded with cares. There are inhuman or vicious  
“ husbands, false or peevish wives, refractory or unhappy  
“ children. Many can never obtain a comfortable livelihood;  
“ many of those that do, break; and even when their affairs  
“ go on prosperously, their families encrease, and new occa-  
“ sions of solicitude are introduced by this increase. Under  
“ such grievances we lie during the best part of life, and  
“ when we grow old we grow infirm. In short, physical  
“ and moral evil intermixed with a few transitory and uncer-  
“ tain enjoyments, not worth enjoying, make up the whole  
“ system of our lives, at the last stage of which, if we are not  
“ taken away sooner by death, fainting, tottering, and  
“ bending to the earth, we fall into the grave of ourselves.”

Such, and far more miserable, (for I omit among others those who labor under incurable distempers, and who subsist by begging, borrowing, or shifts as bad as these) is the state of mankind represented to be; after which the pathetic writer concludes, and must man end here? Is this the period of his being? Is this all? The author I quote is so transported by the torrent of his eloquence, and by such reflections as these, that he raises in his own mind what I think he will raise in that of no sober reader, a sort of indignation against the state wherein Almighty God has placed us, and against the order of his providence. On this he grounds an expectation of life and immortality in a better state, and, on this expectation, an argument that there will be such a state.

IN this rapture he retires to some solitary walk, and there far from noise, perhaps, but certainly not free from prejudice, he

he meditates for our instruction. "He thinks himself sure  
"that he is above lifeless matter, above the vegetative  
"tribe, and above the sensitive animals that he sees. He  
"has not only immediate sensations, but ideas of an higher  
"order. He can make excursions into futurity; he had al-  
"most said that he could, by strict thinking, get into  
"another world beforehand. Can he be made capable of  
"such great expectations only to be disappointed at last?  
"Can he have such overtures of immortality, if, after all,  
"there is no such thing? He makes great improvements in  
"knowledge which he has often no opportunity of shewing  
"here. Must they not be preparations for another world,  
"wherein he may shew them? Can the author of his reason-  
"ing faculties be himself so unreasonable as to give them to  
"no purpose? By the exaltation of his reason, and by the  
"practice of virtue he approaches to an higher manner of  
"being, and tastes already something spiritual, and above  
"this world. Must his private acts of religion be all lost?  
"Can God have so little regard for him who has so much for  
"God?"

IN this specimen, which is very faithfully extracted, we have an example of the second sort of madness mentioned above. The man who writ all this nonsense was a man of parts, of learning, a philosopher, and a geometrician. But he made one mistake in the delirium of metaphysics. Instead of reasoning about a creature of God's, he reasoned about one of his own creation. When these learned lunatics conceive men to be nearly what they are, they pull down the divinity nearly to the same level, and frame their notions of God's proceedings with them on those of their proceedings with one another. When they think more worthily of the Supreme Being, and raise their ideas of an all-perfect nature

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as high as they are able, they raise their ideas of the human nature in a certain proportion to these; so that God and man are, in all their reasonings, within degrees of comparison. Thus Mr. WOLLASTON has done in his truths relating to the deity, and in those relating to a private man. He raises our conceptions in the first, as high as they can be raised, and then loses himself, and leaves his reader to be lost, in the incomprehensibility of the divine nature, as they must needs be. He does not, indeed, flatter the human in the second as grossly as some writers, who endeavor to impose on us against the intuitive knowledge which every one may have of himself; but he insists so much on the spirituality and immortality of the soul, and on the unsuitableness of the condition to the importance of mankind, that he gives ground sufficient to stand upon to those fulsome panegyrist of humanity, who consider man as the image of God, the final cause of the creation, and the principal object among created beings, even above angels, of the divine care and sollicitude.

BUT, after all their endeavors to make of man a being superior to the whole animal kind, rather than a superior species of the same kind, man will appear what he really is to every unprejudiced mind. In vain will they endeavor to persuade any such that the natural state of mankind is unnatural, if I may say so; that is, a state neither agreeable to the nature of God himself, nor to that nature wherewith he has dignified man. In vain will they endeavor to persuade any such that the conditions of humanity are imperfections in the system; and that, in the works of God, as in those of men, whatever falls short of the idea of the workman, or is not proportionate to the value of the materials he prepares in one essay, may be rectified in another instance. It is not only true but obvious, that man is connected by his nature, and, therefore, by the  
design

design of the Author of all nature with the whole tribe of animals, and so closely with some of them that the distance between his intellectual faculties and theirs, which constitutes as really, tho not so sensibly as figure, the difference of species, appears, in many instances, small, and would, probably, appear still less, if we had the means of knowing their motives, as we have of observing their actions. The connection of all animal, and, by consequence, of human with vegetable life is more remote. But there is such a connection; and it will be manifest to him who considers how vegetables are produced, how they grow up, how they ripen, flourish for a time, wither and die, how many wants they have, such as nourishment, culture and shelter, for instance, as well as to how many distempers and injuries they are exposed, in all which circumstances their connection with the animal kind is too apparent to be denied. Tho man is an animated material, being capable of beginning motion, and of many other modifications of thought, both single, and in series; yet, however these mental powers were communicated to him, and in degrees still more imperfect to other animals, his system and theirs are founded alike in mere matter, and when we look at one another, the first ideas we receive are those of extension and figure, the parts of which, like those of any other clod of earth are liable to separation, and to a dissolution of the form. Nay, there is a further analogy between animated and inanimated bodies. The former have, by instinct, a sort of moral gravitation to one another, by which they adhere together in society. I will not apply instinct to the latter; but this I may say, that a force as unknown as instinct, produces a gravitation of the several parts of matter to each other, and keeps them together in a kind of physical society.

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THE whole world, nay the whole universe is filled with beings which are all connected in one immense design. The sensitive inhabitants of our globe, like the *dramatis personae*, have different characters, and are applied to different purposes of action in every scene. The several parts of the material world, like the machines of a theatre, were contrived not for the actors, but for the action: and the whole order and system of the drama would be disordered and spoiled, if any alteration was made in either. The nature of every creature, his manner of being, is adapted to his state here, to the place he is to inhabit, and, as we may say to the part he is to act. If man was a creature inferior or superior to what he is, he would be a very preposterous creature in this system. GULLIVER'S horses made a very absurd figure in the place of men, and men would make one as absurd in the place of horses. I do not think that philosophers have shewn in every instance why every thing is what it is, and as it is, or that nothing could be in any one case otherwise than it is without producing a greater inconveniency to the whole than the particular inconveniency that would be removed. But I am sure this has been proved in so many instances, that it is trifling, as well as prophane, to deny it in any. We complain often of our senses, and sometimes of our reasoning faculties. Both are defective, weak, fallible: and yet, if the former were more extensive, more acute, and more nice, they would not answer the purposes of human life, they would be absolutely inconsistent with them. Just so, if our reasoning faculties were more perfect than they are, the order of intellectual beings would be broken unnecessarily, and man would be raised above his proper form without any real advantage to himself, since the reason he has is sufficient for him in the state allotted to him; and since higher faculties, and greater degrees

of knowledge would on one hand encrease his presumption, and yet on the other would rather excite than sate his curiosity, by shewing him more clearly the extent of his ignorance.

WOLLASTON pretends to reduce every one who does not adopt the hypothesis of rewards and punishments in a future state, to this dilemma: "no rational creature is unavoidably miserable, or God is an unreasonable and cruel being." But, in the first place, who told this writer, or how does he know that there are any rational creatures unavoidably miserable? The whole story of mankind tells him so, and his own senses shew him that it is so, and on these supposed authorities he makes such a state of misery to be that of almost all mankind. I might have said of all mankind absolutely: for tho he allows that some are more and some are less miserable than others; yet in the enumeration he makes of unavoidable human miseries he includes many that are unavoidable indeed, but that do not constitute misery, either when they come separately, or when several of them come together. They are inconveniencies at most, to which every man is liable. Every man is liable to catch cold, and like other animals, to be afflicted with various bodily distempers. Every man, and he most, who is deemed commonly to be the furthest removed from misery, is exposed to cares, to troubles, to disappointments, &c. Our author is fond on this occasion of the word misery, it carries a stronger idea along with it, and serves the purpose of exaggeration better. But what is misery? Let us, who have no other purpose to serve than that of truth, determine our ideas with greater precision. As I take happiness to be a continued permanent series of agreeable sensations or of pleasure, so I take misery to be a continued permanent series of the contrary: and such misery has never been brought, I believe, on any man necessarily, and una-



unavoidably, as a consequence of the general state wherein God has placed mankind.

PARTICULAR occasional evils, physical and moral, are consequences of this state, no doubt, and such as we are able to shew that they could not be prevented in the best of all material systems. The course of things rolls on through a vast variety of contingent events, for such they are to our apprehensions, according to the first impression of motion given to it, and under the direction of an universal providence. This perpetual flux, and the vicissitudes it creates, in what we call the fortune of men, bring along with them both good and evil. Human life is chequered variously with both; and as the good has often some alloy, so the evil is softened by many circumstances, even by habit, and above all, by hope, that cordial drop which sweetens every bitter potion, even the last.

THE saying of the epicureans is true of all sorts of evil. If it is violent, it spends itself, or it puts an end soon to him who suffers it. If it is moderate, it is tolerable, it may be compensated, or the sense of it may wear out. Thus a dancing, drunken, smoaking revel makes ample amends to the savage for all the wants he has suffered, and for all the pains and perils to which he has been exposed. Thus the galley-slave sings whilst he is chained to an oar, and thus might they sing who worked in the golden mines of the upper Aegypt, and for whom as well as their relations and poor children Mr. WOLLASTON is moved to so much compassion. I should wonder, when he was in Aegypt, that he did not quote a tradition from the Bible as well as from DIODORUS, if I did not consider that he gave probably more credit to the prophane than to the sacred history, and lament the fate of the Israelites who were obliged to make bricks without straw, and whose

backs were scourged by their task masters. The real evils, that men suffer, are not in truth so great as they appear in these exaggerated representations of them, and very often, perhaps, to the eye of a spectator: nay, the greatest of them are not greater than those which men impose voluntarily on themselves, whilst they complain loudly of evils far less, which the conditions of humanity impose on them. I might bring examples from those who row in galleys, or dig in mines, for hire; from those who condemn themselves to pass their whole lives in austerities like the fathers of LA TRAPPE, or in torments like the Faquirs of the east, on motives of superstition; from those in whom a turn of imagination can take off the fear of death, and make them court it before it's time, like the followers of ODIN, who sung the praise of it in their hymns, witness the ode of good king LODBROG, and had no better a reason for it than the hope of drinking beer in the skulls of their enemies at the palace of ODIN.

THUS do men frequently embrace, by choice, the very evils they complain of, when they happen to them in the usual course of things, and sometimes even death itself, for which they have, by nature, the strongest aversion. Thus too they devote their whole lives to real and constant misery, which is no part of the general natural state of mankind. In short, their greatest evils are from themselves, not from God, which might be shewn in innumerable instances. True it is, that they are sometimes involved, in general calamities, which they can neither foresee nor prevent, such as inundations, earthquakes, pestilences, and the entire devastations of kingdoms or provinces by savage and barbarous people, like the Huns of old, or the Spaniards in later ages. But these calamities are rare. They may be considered as chastisements; for chastisements are reasonable, when there are any to be amended  
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by partaking in them, or by being, at least, spectators of them. They may be considered as the mere effects, natural tho contingent, of matter and motion in a material system, put into motion under certain general laws. If they are seen in the first light, they should teach mankind to adore, and to fear that providence which governs the world by particular as well as general dispensations. If they are seen in the second, they should suggest some other reflections, which are not without their utility neither.

NECESSARY agents employ all their powers conformably to the laws of nature, in promoting the same end, that is, in carrying on the physical system. So rational agents should employ all their faculties in preserving the order of the moral system, which reason discovers to be their common duty, and reason and experience to be their common interest. There are great deviations in both, with a double difference relatively to the state of mankind. The former are wholly independent, the latter in great measure dependent on man, notwithstanding the strength of his passions, and the weakness of his reason. The former are not only rare, and the latter frequent; but the consequences of the latter become much more fatal to the happiness of mankind in general, than those of the former. From hence it results very evidently that the wisdom of God, which you may call his goodness, has given man by what is in his power very ample means to make himself amends for that which is out of his power. Atheists and divines find fault with the whole. They cannot, or they will not conceive, that the seeming imperfection of the parts is necessary to the real perfection of the whole. The entire scheme of the works of God must be altered to please them. Nothing, even inconvenient to these delicate persons, must be suffered in it. They must be physically invulnerable, and morally impeccable;

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or the divine providence must interpose continually to shield every particular man from evils of one sort, and to check him, like the daemon of SOCRATES, when he is about to commit those of another. This is all they modestly require; and of the want of this they complain perpetually, as they pretend, the divine at least does so, that they have a right to do, because God appeals to man for the equity of his proceedings.

LET us be convinced, however, in opposition to atheists and divines, that the general state of mankind in the present scheme of providence is a state not only tolerable, but happy. Without having WOLLASTON'S ballance, wherein he weighs happiness and misery even to grains and scruples, we may pronounce that there is much more good than evil in it; and prove what we pronounce even by his authority, and that of all those who deny it like him, if any such authority can be wanting. It is plain that every man has more good than evil in actual enjoyment, or in prospect, since every man prefers existing as he is to non-existence, and since none of them, not those who suffer the worst accidents in life, are willing to abandon it, and to go out of the state these declaimers represent to be so miserable. The proposition may be advanced thus generally, because there are very few examples to the contrary, and those are of men run mad by distemper, or made so by some prevailing enthusiasm. Neither will it avail to say that the desire of life and the fear of death are, one the greatest imperfection, and the other the greatest evil of our human state; since, whatever they are, and from whence soever they arise, they would lessen in all cases, and cease in many, if the condition of mankind were truly such as it is represented. What our author's circumstances were of any kind I am ignorant. But whatever they were, I am persuaded, you will be of my opinion, that any charitable person who had  
offered

offered to cut his throat, in order only to deliver him from the miseries he complained of in such lamentable terms, would have been very ill received. But I hasten to wind up and to conclude the hints, for they are no more, which occur to me, and which I think proper to give you concerning the general and usual state of mankind.

## LI.

I SAY then, that if men come helpless into the world like other animals; if they require even longer than other animals to be nursed and educated by the tender instinct of their parents, and if they are able much later to provide for themselves; it is because they have more to learn and more to do; it is because they are prepared for a more improved state and for greater happiness. Sense and instinct direct all animals to their several ends. Some of them profit more by experience, acquire more knowledge, and think and reason better than others both in different species and in the same. Man is at the head of these, he profits still more by experience, he acquires still more knowledge, he thinks and reasons better than all other animals; for he who is born too stupid to do so, is not a human creature: he sinks into an inferior species, tho he be made after the image of man. Man is able by his intellectual superiority to foresee, and to provide more effectually against the evils that threaten him, as well as to procure to himself the necessaries, the comforts, and the pleasures of life. All his natural wants are easily supplied, and God has proportioned them to the abilities of those who remain in the lowest form of rational creatures. The Tartar under his tent, and the Savage in his hut enjoys them. Such is the general state of mankind. Of what then do we complain? His happiness exceeds