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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

LII.

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

state are ordered by an Almighty and Allwise Creator; and that they are equally foolish, and presumptuous, who make imaginary excursions into futurity, and who complain of the present.

THESE reflections, on the general and usual state of mankind, may be carried much further, and more may be added. But these are sufficient, and I proceed to plead the cause of God, on another head, against the same confederates.

LII.

IF you improve in your own thoughts the hints dispersed in the precedent reflections, you, whose good understanding is undebauched by metaphysics, will see very evidently the truth of these two propositions. First, that, supposing the world we inhabit to be a scene of as many evils as it is represented to be, the arguments, drawn from thence against the wisdom, or power, or goodness of God, are inconclusive. God is the Creator and Governor of the universe, not of this world alone, a small and, probably, a very inconsiderable part of it: so that, if there was really more evil than good in this part, it would conclude nothing against the whole, wherein there might be still much more good than evil, nor, consequently, against the divine attributes. Secondly, that there is even in this world so much more good than evil, and the general state of mankind is so happy in it, that the exaggerated descriptions of a supposed contrary state would make no impression against these attributes, if men had not been induced to think most absurdly, that God could have no good reason for creating them, but that of communicating happiness to them, and happiness such as they would have, happiness without alloy.

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The accusation, brought against the goodness of God, is founded, therefore, on a false representation, and an arbitrary supposition. Modern philosophers are more to be blamed on this account, than the antients. They have a nobler view of the immense universe. They know, that this planet is a part of it. How then can they assume, that this part was made for one species of the animals it produces, rather than for the whole system? Divines are still more to be blamed than mere philosophers. A confederacy with atheists becomes ill the professors of theism, and less than any, those who pretend to teach it. No matter: they persist, and having done their best, in concert with their allies, to destroy the belief of the goodness of God, they endeavor to destroy that of his justice, which is a further article of their alliance. I have said already, that lest the bare existence of physical and moral evil should not afford the atheists color enough to deny the being of God, nor the divines a sufficient foundation to erect an heaven and an hell, they proceed to consider these evils relatively to the distribution of them, and they pronounce this distribution unjust. Their declamations are heard on this subject with a double advantage, the partiality of love, and the prejudice of aversion. Men are apt to pass easily, and silently, over the good, and complain loudly of the evil by which they are affected in their own persons, or in the persons of those whom they approve. As easily, and silently, do they pass over the evil, which they never think sufficient, and complain loudly of the good, which they always think too much, that falls to the share of those whom they disapprove, or who stand on any account in opposition to them. On such motives they are induced to charge the providence of God with injustice. But here the confederacy breaks. The atheist concludes once more, that there is no God. The divine still maintains, that there is one. How well they both support

the charge, how effectually the latter re-asserts the justice of the Supreme Being, we are now to enquire: and I persuade myself, that you will be under some surprize to find a charge so groundless, that has been so long and so clamorously brought, and an hypothesis so weak, that has prevailed so long and so generally among theists. I know not, whether the natural temper and disposition of mankind, by which we must account for one, or the political and private interests, by which we must account for the other, will take off this surprize till you have considered them thoroughly, in their rise and progress, and found them to be permanent causes of permanent effects. Then, indeed, your surprize will cease, because you will find nothing in this case, which you will not find in many others; that is, error established and perpetuated by affections, passions, interest, and authority among men, in opposition to the plainest dictates of their reason.

THAT good men are often unhappy, and bad men happy, has been a subject of invective, rather than of argument, to EPICURUS, to COTTA, and to others among the antients. It has been too nearly so in the writings of some of the moderns, and little less in those of some eminent divines. I have quoted CLARKE on several occasions. I must quote him on this. In his Evidences of natural and revealed religion*, as well as in his Demonstration of the being and attributes of God †, he presumes to say: "It is certain and necessary, even as certain "as the moral attributes of God," (and he had before affirmed the moral to be as essential to the divine nature as the natural, and, therefore, as certain as God's existence) "that "there must be, at some time or other, such a revolution, and "renovation, of things, such a future state of existence of the

* p. 130.

† p. 131.

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“same persons as that, by an exact distribution of rewards and
“punishments therein, all the present disorders, and inequali-
“ties, may be set right, and that the whole scheme of provi-
“dence may appear at it’s consummation to be a design wor-
“thy of infinite wisdom, justice, and goodness.” At it’s
consummation; for it appears actually unworthy of them, as
these men not only imply, but say. The hypothetical cer-
tainty and necessity on which the doctor is willing to risque our
acknowledgment of a Supreme Being, or our denial of him,
is founded on this assertion; “that rewards and punish-
“ments, in general, are necessary to support the honor of God,
“and of his law and government;” and on this assumed pro-
position “that the condition of mankind, in this present state,
“is such that the natural order of things is perverted, and
“virtue and goodness prevented from obtaining their proper,
“and due effects.” Audacious and vain sophist! His whole
chain of reasoning from the moral attributes of God down-
wards is nothing more than one continued application of
moral human ideas to the designs and conduct of God: and,
in this case, he assumes, most presumptuously, that the scheme
and order of things which God has established in this system
of ours are such as cannot be reconciled, even to the notions
of human justice. His terms have a very solemn air that may
impose on the unwary, and confirm the habitual prejudices
of others. But he who analyses them, and attends to the sense
of them, will perceive that more absurdity cannot be stuffed
into so few words.

To begin this analyse; let us consider the terms good and
bad, happy and unhappy, as they stand here applied. Men will
be never agreed about the former; the latter can never be ascer-
tained: and, consequently, the proposition that good men are
unhappy, and bad men happy, should not be advanced in the

fense in which it is advanced, and as if the natural order of things was perverted; for what is the natural order of things? It is that which the author of nature has established, and according to which evil may happen sometimes to the good, and good to the bad: but according to which, likewise, virtue can never lead to unhappiness, nor vice to happiness. It is false, therefore, to say that the natural order is actually perverted, as if unhappiness was really become the consequence of virtue, and happiness of vice, in the course of human affairs. But now, who are the good? who are the bad? If by the good are intended such as conform themselves to the law of nature, and by the bad such as violate this law; the words are very equivocal, and must appear so in their applications. Men differ in nothing more than in the characters they impute to one another, even in their private thoughts: and when they agree the most, it is very possible they may not judge as God judges, tho they pretend to judge by the same rule, which they call the eternal reason of things. Those whom they admire for great achievements, they call great; those who have done them good, they call good, and often confound the two. So that the justice of divine providence is condemned, or acquitted, on the fallible and interested judgments of men.

SUCH indeed they are. Go back to the early ages of the world. Consider their heroes and their demi-gods, observe by what goodness they acquired the honors of deification. They destroyed sometimes robbers or wild beasts. Others of them sowed corn, planted the vine, and invented useful arts. Did these alone constitute good men according to the law of nature? By no means. Not even the last. Of all the cardinal virtues, fortitude seems chiefly to have been cultivated by the heroes of antiquity: and, notwithstanding some good that they did, their rapes, their duels, their battles, the injuries

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ries they offered, and the vengeance they took, made them at once objects of admiration, and plagues to mankind. When we descend to later ages, more enlightned by philosophy, and more renowned for wisdom of government, we find the characters of good and bad men rather more equivocal, and much honor done to great vices, as well as to great virtues, according to the modes and prevalent passions of the time, which sanctified, by the help of prepossession and flattery, such actions as right reason can never approve. If we judge by this, and by this alone we should judge; what shall we think of those Roman and Greek worthies, for instance, whose names and actions have been delivered down by their historians so pompously to posterity? * I might call in question the chastity of SCIPIO, and the fidelity of REGULUS to his parole. I might doubt on the face of their history, and without any more particular anecdotes, whether DRUSUS was a less factious citizen than SATURNINUS. I might bring reasons to excuse, perhaps to justify, the GRACCHI. I might prove, by some letters of CICERO to ATTICUS, that the second BRUTUS was the vilest of usurers. But I wave such particulars as we have not, for the most part, sufficient means of examining, and I ask whether the best of these men, in the best days of the Roman or Grecian commonwealths, were not the instruments of ambition, of avarice, of injustice, and cruelty? They were great men most certainly, but their goodness was often problematical, in Greece as well as at Rome. When revealed religions arose, a true one like the christian, a false one like the MAHOMETAN, the same uncertainty remained, and the same fallacious judgments were made about morality. But there arose too a new sort of goodness at the same time, for we need attempt to go no further back: and, about this, men can

* Vid. AV. GELLIUM.

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never be agreed. The christians pass for ill men among the mahometans, the mahometans among the christians; the sects of OMAR and ALI censure each other; we tax your church with superstition and idolatry; she taxes ours with heresy and schism: and thus contrary judgments are passed on one another, not only by particular men, but by whole communities. It may be said, that these judgments are not passed as generally, and as rashly, as I pretend; and that the christian, who condemns the mahometan, or the mahometan, who condemns the christian religion, may distinguish very truly at the same time between the good and the bad men of the contrary party. But if it be said, it will not hold; for the new sort of goodness which has been mentioned is that, not only as much but more than moral goodness, by a regard or disregard to which the justice of God, in the dispensations of providence, is tried in every religion that claims the prerogative of a revealed system, and according to which it is assumed that men will be rewarded or punished hereafter. Such has been, and such is, the state of this matter.

LET us consider next the terms happy and unhappy. They are more vague, and less easy to be ascertained in their application than the others. Agreeable sensations, the series whereof constitutes happiness, must arise from health of body, tranquillity of mind, and a competency of wealth. An absolute privation of all these we are not to suppose. The case cannot happen; or if it could, an immediate end would be put to the miserable being. But, how shall we judge for other men of the several degrees, in which they enjoy all or any of these? How shall we make up their several accounts of agreeable and disagreeable sensations, and pronounce their state to be, according to the ballance, tolerable, or happy, or very happy? To pretend to it is, at least, as absurd as to pretend to measure the degrees

degrees of goodness; since neither of them consists so much in outward shew as it does in the inward sentiment: and yet, without being able to measure both, what faucy, what pragmatical presumption is it to pretend, in any sort, to judge of providential dispensations, even supposing them to be those of particular providences?

LIII.

WE will enter, if you please, first into some reflections on the general tendency of virtue and vice to promote happiness, and after that into a more particular detail. I think then, that health of body is pretty equally distributed to good men and bad, whether jews, christians, turk, or infidels. In this respect too the good are likely to have in themselves, and in their posterity, much the advantage. But, besides, if health and vigor of body were to be found more commonly among the wicked than the good, it might appear to be, like other instances of prosperity, the cause, it will never appear to be the effect, of vice.

TRANQUILITY of mind is the inseparable companion of virtue, that adds relish and favor to all the comforts, and takes off their bitter taste from all the misfortunes, of life. It is the health of the mind. Without this, no intellectual joy can be tasted, as without the other no corporeal pleasure. The virtuous man looks back with complacency, and feels the truth of that saying of TULLY: "a good conscience is the great theatre of virtue". The present satisfies him, and the future gives him no alarm. The second BRUTUS exclaimed, that virtue was an empty name. Stoical virtue was little better; nor his, in particular, any more than a mask that hid, under an appearance