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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

LX.

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they can be trained up from hence, they bear the genuine fruit of knowledge. But when fantastical gardeners bend the tops of the highest sprigs, like the *ficus indica*, down to earth; if they take root, they bear it of a bastard kind, and serve only to plant a labyrinth wherein the gardeners themselves are lost. Such fantastical gardeners our metaphysicians are. When they have acquired ideas from the actual system of things, and have carried their knowledge up from the creation to that self-existent, intelligent Being, the Creator, they disdain to reason any longer à posteriori. They frame an hypothesis, with much agitation of their minds, out of the ideas and notions they have acquired in this manner, and reason from it without any further regard to the phaenomena. This method of philosophising has produced often nothing more than impudent assertions. Such was the theology of the epicureans, if that may be called so: and that of the stoics too, as much as they opposed the former, and as good theists as they were esteemed on this account, was little better.

LX.

WHILST the folly lasted among the antient philosophers of making universal systems, and of explaining the whole scheme, order and state of things, he who had not given a great part of his system to theology, would have gained little reputation. This PLATO saw, and he put theology into every thing he taught. I can easily imagine, that the same progress was made in composing these spiritual romances, that we see has been made in composing those of a different kind. AMADIS OF GAUL, and many more, which the niece, the curate and the barber threw out of DON QUIXOTE'S windows, and burned in his yard, were writ without any regard
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to probability, and no man could read them with any attention, nor suffer his imagination, to wander long so extravagantly, who was not as mad as the knight of LA MANCHA. After these writers, LA CALPRENADE arose, like another PLATO, and by mixing fiction ingeniously with the truth of history, he composed romances capable of amusing, and even almost of deceiving. But however this may have been, all our metaphysical writers have rather copied, than improved the platonic systems, so that if the founder of the academy meant to distinguish himself by his theology, he has succeeded beyond any hopes he could conceive. It prevailed in the heathen world, and it has prevailed much more in the christian church. Particular men among the heathen embraced it for the same reason that he had to teach it, to distinguish themselves, and to acquire a name in philosophy. Or else they were determined to it, like PLOTINUS and PORPHYRY, by an enthusiastic turn of mind, which all the religions of those ages and countries were very proper to give, and this theology to confirm. But as soon as an entire order of men was set a part in the christian church, to instruct the world in all matters of a divine or moral nature, and to teach a revelation little different in many instances from platonism, this philosophy acquired a new strength, and more motives concurred to maintain it than there had been to establish it. The opinions of PLATO were employed to illustrate the mysteries of the gospel, and even to recommend them to the belief of such apologists as JUSTIN, and of such doctors as AUSTIN. No wonder, therefore, that being consecrated in this manner, they have been propagated with christianity in every instance where they are not directly repugnant to it. No wonder, that theology becoming one of the sciences in *lucrum exeuntes*, that is a trade, the professors of it have kept up that marvellous which is the mystery of the trade, and to which nothing could contribute

tribute more than the metaphysics of PLATO. No wonder, that the doctrine, which we speak of here, should still subsist, tho it does not seem agreeable to the simplicity of true theism, nor of service to morality, which would not be the duty of every man, if the principles of it could be understood by none but metaphysicians, nor the obligations of it be well explained, without an intricate deduction of arguments à priori.

THIS the trade, and nothing but the trade, makes necessary: and tho we are told, that proofs à posteriori are no more than secondary considerations, I must confess what I have often felt, that if I had not been convinced of all the great articles of natural religion by my own reflections on the infinite wisdom and power displayed in the universe (no part whereof, and therefore not the whole, could be conceived to be self-existent, even if it were conceived to be eternal) on the constitution of my own nature, and on that of the system to which I belong, I should not have been so by all the fine spun argumentations à priori. The proofs that result immediately from such reflections as these are founded in my sensitive and intuitive knowledge, and to resist them I must renounce my clearest and most distinct ideas. I must do little less, I must accept a flow of mere words, thrown into the form of a demonstration, for demonstration, or I must take inadequate, incomplete, and obscure ideas and notions for such as are adequate, complete and clear, if I admit many of the proofs brought by some of our most famous writers. They present us with dim spectacles to see, what we see clearly without any, and by the natural strength of our eyes; or else to see what is not by nature, nor can be made by art visible to our internal sight. They prove as much as needs to be proved, and, therefore, as much as we are able to prove, in order to refute atheism, and to establish theism. But then they mingle this
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real, and connect it with so much fantastical knowledge, that they disgrace and weaken, as much as it is in their power, the former by the latter. It was this very practice which hindered the stoics from beating the epicureans out of the field of controversy, and from imposing silence on those babblers, the academicians. I apprehend, that our divines have brought the same disadvantage on themselves in their disputes with atheists, to whom they would be much more formidable, if they neither pursued the practice, spoken of here, nor made that occasional alliance with them against the dispensations of providence, which is spoken of above.

To make this conduct appear the less strange, and to take off our wonder at it, we must not only consider that the religious society is composed of as arrant men as the civil, seduced by the same affections, transported by the same passions, and that our divines have at least as much the ostentation of knowledge, superior to that of other men, as those ancient philosophers had, who pretended that philosophy was the science of all things divine and human, or the schoolmen who were ready to dispute *de omni scibili*; but we must consider further, that they assume a right which the ancient philosophers did not claim, tho' *PYTHAGORAS* seems to have intended it, a right to instruct mankind in natural as well as in revealed religion, and have made, of the exercise of this right, a very lucrative trade. To keep this trade in repute, therefore, and themselves with it, two things have been thought necessary, and are really so. It has been thought necessary to preserve the mystery which they found established in one part by the first professors of it, and to introduce mystery into the other. The method they take serves both these purposes. They slide into the proofs of natural, what they judge necessary to impose their artificial theology. From these principles, laid

out of vulgar fight, and, in truth, out of their own, they deduce even moral obligations: and thus the whole sum of religion falls under the direction of the religious society. How this society directs it, and to what purposes principally, appears plainly enough in the instance before us.

LXI.

WHATSOEVER may be determined about the moral fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, and the suitability and unsuitability of circumstances to persons, all of which are conceived to be eternal because we cannot conceive them to have been ever otherwise than they are, certain it is that they become discernible to us in our system alone; and that altho they are immutable natures in it, from whence all our obligations arise, and may be assumed to be absolutely and in themselves eternal as well as immutable, and, therefore, independent, if philosophers please to call them so; yet we neither know, nor can know any more about them than what the actual constitution of this system shews us. In some other system we might not have had the same ideas, or having them we might not have had the same occasions of collecting them into the same complex modes. This we see happen in different countries, and what happens in different countries might surely happen in different systems. It is sufficient, therefore, to establish our moral obligations, that we consider them relatively to our own system. From thence they arise: and since they arise from thence it must be the will of that Being who made the system, that we should observe and practice them. The assumed eternity of morality cannot make it more obligatory. Why then are such pains taken to prove it eternal? The reason is obvious. If we went no higher than our own system, the principles of it would be easily