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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**

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LXI.

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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

easily discovered, the criterion of moral good and evil, of just and unjust would be fixed, and at least there would be no need of consulting divines about it. They lead the minds of men, therefore, to contemplate objects that are out of their system, and renew the platonic doctrine of eternal ideas, forms, essences, natures, according to which they assume that the Supreme Being regulates his own conduct, and all his rational creatures are obliged to regulate theirs by the eternal reason of things.

THEY prove the existence of an all-perfect Being, the Creator and Governor of the universe, and to demonstrate his infinite wisdom and power they appeal to his works. But when they have done this, which includes the whole of natural theology, and serves abundantly all the ends of natural religion, they parcel out a divine moral nature into various attributes like the human, and determine precisely what these attributes require that God should do, to make his will conformable to the eternal ideas of fitness which are so many independent natures. Thus they assume that God knows after the manner of men by ideas, that his moral attributes are not barely names that we give to various manifestations of the infinite wisdom of one simple uncompounded Being, but that they are in him, what they are in us, distinct affections, dispositions, habitudes; that they are in him the very same that they are in our ideas, being derived from the same eternal natures, and known by the same eternal reason; in fine, that we have no need to judge of his moral attributes as we judge of his physical, but are able to determine what they require that he should do, without any regard to what he has done. This is in plain and unexaggerated terms the very doctrine which CLARKE and other divines teach, presumptuous and prophane as it is, under the disguise of modest and pious expressions.

By

By these they frequently impose on readers who attend more to their theological cant than to their meaning, and the necessary consequences of what they advance; whilst they give other readers a just occasion to say of them what CLARKE \* says of some theists, it matters not at all how honorably they may seem to speak . . . of God, but what . . . . . must needs in all reason be supposed to be their true opinion.

WHEN we reason humbly and cautiously from the phaenomena, we have a sure criterion to guide our judgments, and the undoubted word of God declared in his works, wherein he speaks most intelligibly to us, to authorize them. When we reason otherwise, not from the phaenomena but to them, we have no such criterion to guide, nor any word but the precarious word of man to authorize, our judgments. In the place of real, we substitute fantastic natures, and in the place of common sense an imaginary reason of things. This sublime metaphysical reason, which deals so much in abstract ideas, is so imaginary, and by consequence so vague, that it serves the purpose of every divine alike in all their discordant opinions. Metaphysician, I think, never convinced metaphysician; neither is there any thing so absurd which may not be made in this method problematical: and when it is once made so, the absurdity is called a demonstration. The system of SPINOZA, derived at least from that of DES CARTES, is very absurd, and so are many propositions in that of HOBBS. But there are spinozists and hobbits still in the world, as well as cartesianes, and there might be possibly still more if metaphysical arms alone were employed against them. Let it not be said that they are men of depraved understandings, and depraved morals. This is to rail, not to argue. Their parts

\* Quasi ego id curem quid ille aiat aut neget. Illud quaero, quid ei consentaneum sit dicere. Cic. de fin. Lib. 2.

and

and their morals are, no doubt, in general as good as those of the men who oppose them; and if they conclude absurdly it is because they reason absurdly, as they reason absurdly because they pursue an absurd method: for, to bring this discourse home to the present purpose, the fault is so truly in the method, that this assumed eternal reason has misled theists as well as atheists, to such a degree that the last are not always the most impious of the two. The opinions, mentioned in the last paragraph, might stand for sufficient proofs. But there are many more. He who asserts, for instance, on his notions of the eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses and of the eternal reason of things, that the providence of God in the present state of mankind would be convicted of injustice, if there were only one innocent man unhappy, when it is notorious that there are several, or that God is unjust, because particular providences do not enough distinguish the virtuous from the wicked, is as grossly absurd, and much more impious than HOBBS, when he asserts that there is no such thing as innocence, nor guilt, till they are distinguished by civil laws, and the authority of the magistrate. He who asserts that predestination of millions to damnation, before they are capable of being either innocent or guilty, is agreeable to the divine attributes, and an exertion of jurisdiction and power not at all repugnant to the eternal fitness and reason of things, in a Being who is not the Governor alone but the Creator of all beings, and has an absolute right to dispose of them as he shall think fit, is as impious as SPINOZA, who asserts one sole substance, and who denies, as in effect he did deny, any Creator and Governor of the universe.

THE impious doctrine of predestination, such as it has been taught and is still taught among christians, is softened extremely at least, and the assumed proceedings of God towards

men are brought almost within the bounds of credibility, by LOCKE's forced exposition of the famous ninth chapter of the epistle to the Romans. He understands what is said of the potter, who has a power to make one vessel to honor, and another to dishonor, out of the same lump of clay, to refer to men nationally, not personally, nor with regard to an eternal state, but to the right which God has of exalting one nation and depressing another, according to his good pleasure and the merits or demerits of such political bodies. This sense may be admitted, whilst that of an universal and absolute predestination of every individual, such as it is taught, deserves to be rejected with horror. It may be admitted the better, perhaps, because it is conformable enough to the sanctions of the law of nature. According to these which regard mankind in general, as the law was given to mankind in general, virtue tends to the happiness, and vice to the misery of their several societies: and there seems, therefore, no great presumption in assuming that God does in any particular case, by a particular dispensation, that which is agreeable to the general tenor of his providence, and to the natural course of things. But it is impious to suppose that he acts, relatively to particular men, against the general tenor of his providence, and in a manner that shews partiality in his favors, cruelty in his judgments, and an arbitrary spirit in all his proceedings, directly opposite to that spirit of impartiality and benignity, which makes his sun to rise, and his rain to fall, on the just and unjust. Mr. LOCKE's exposition of St. PAUL's text is in the first of these cases. St. AUSTIN's, and that of many divines who had once the vogue of orthodoxy, is in the second. In what sense the apostle understood his own doctrine, I presume not to determine. Thus much is certain, if he understood it as LOCKE did, he reasoned very rabbinically, when he quoted the preference given to JACOB over a much better man,

man, over *ESAU*, and the deliverance of the *Israelites*, and the destruction of the *Aegyptians* by God for the glory of his name, in order to conclude à fortiori, that the same God might, by virtue of the same power, reject the *Jews*, who were literally the seed of *ABRAHAM*, for refusing to acknowledge the *Messiah*, and call the *gentiles*, who were figuratively this seed, for consenting to acknowledge him.

I have said already, how difficult it is to reconcile the scheme of particular providences to the general course of nature: and he who considers the many forced suppositions that ingenious men have made, to get over the difficulty, will be only the more convinced that it is insuperable. This scheme is, indeed, very unnecessary to those who hold an absolute predestination, and since they leave neither freedom of will in man, nor what is called contingency in the course of events, they seem to anticipate any want of particular providences by supposing somewhat still less conceivable. We comprehend as little God's manner of knowing, as we do his manner of being, and we should, therefore, presume to reason no more about one, than about the other. But these men, applying their ideas of human to the divine knowledge, maintain that God could not foreknow certainly what is to happen, if he did not make it necessary and certain by pre-ordaining that it should happen. So they argue on their notion of prescience. Now, it seems, and it has seemed to me ever since I turned my thoughts to subjects of this kind, that the whole system of predestination may be blown up by the change of an improper word. Let us talk no more of prescience, nor imagine things future relatively to God, as they are relatively to man. Let us acknowledge his omniscience, to which the future is like the present, and we may conceive, without any extraordinary effort of mind, that he knows, tho he does not pre-ordain, in the sense

of predestinating, the future. If we persuade ourselves of this great truth, that the whole series of things is, at all times, actually present to the divine mind, we may say as properly that God knows things because they are actual to him, and not that they are actual to him because he knows them, or much less pre-ordains them, as we say, that things are seen by us because they are visible, and not that they are visible because they are seen by us. They, who talk so much of pre-science and predestination, would do well to consider, whether it be not more reasonable to think in this manner, than to adopt all the absurd, as well as impious, consequences that flow from their hypothesis, according to which there must be not one general system of nature, but as many natural and moral systems, as there are rational creatures, and the providence of God must be employed to carry on this aggregate of systems so distinctly and so steadily, that the innocence and happiness of some, and the guilt and misery of others, may be effectually secured, agreeable to their several predestinations.

## LXII.

**T**HE fact, that there are such particular providences as have been assumed, which would be so many miracles, in the strict sense of the word, if they were real, cannot be proved; unless we accept for proofs, in an age when miracles are scarce pretended out of your church, and scarce believed in it, all the ridiculous stories that passed in times of ignorance and superstition. I said that particular providences would be miracles, if they were real, and such they would be strictly, whether they were contrary to the established course of nature or not; for the miracle consists in the extraordinary interposition as much as in the nature of the thing brought to pass.