



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

**The Works Of the late Right Honorable Henry St. John,
Lord Viscount Bolingbroke**

In Five Volumes, complete.

Bolingbroke, Henry St. John

London, 1754

LXIV.

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

who maintain that the world was made for the sake of man, and man merely to have happiness communicated to him, represent it to be. But yet I am persuaded, and so must every man be who is capable of reflection, that his condition would have been very different from what it is, if the hypothesis of these men had been true. In short, without regard to the exaggerations of the elder *PLINY*, who makes the human state as despicable as he can, we shall find sufficient reason to say on our own observation of the progress of human life, and not of the beginnings of it only, how mad are men when they entertain such high opinions of their own elevation, and think themselves born to be proud! “*Heu dementiam ab his
“ initiis existimantium ad superbiam se genitos**!

LXIV.

THO God does not govern the world by particular providences, and tho it seems to be contrary to what infinite wisdom has established that he should, yet are we not, nor has mankind ever been without God, and the evident marks of his providence in the world. Look back, as far as history and tradition give you any light. Consider the present course of things in the physical and moral systems. Which way soever you turn yourself, you will meet with God, “*Deum
“ videbis occurrentem tibi †,*” and may say to the divine what the good man, whom *SOCRATES* mentions in his ecclesiastical history, said to the philosopher ‡, my book is the nature of things, which is always at hand when I am desirous to read the words of God: “*meus liber, o philosophe, est
“ natura rerum, quae quidem praesto est quoties Dei verba le-*

* *PLIN.* L. 7.† *SEN.* de Benef.

‡ L. 4.

“ gere

“gere liberit.” What we read in that book is undoubtedly the word of God, and in that we shall find no foundation for a scheme, like this, of particular providences. We shall find that the course of things has been always the same; that national virtue and national vice have always produced national happiness and national misery in a due proportion, and are, by consequence, the great sanctions, as it is said above, of the law of nature. We shall find that these sanctions are sufficient, in terrorem, to the collective bodies of men, and that the punishment of individuals is left to the discipline of those laws which every society makes for its own sake, and which are suggested by the law of nature, to prevent, by private punishments, the growth of public misfortunes. We shall find that he, who made, preserves the world, and governs it on the same principles, and according to the same invariable laws which he imposed at first. Invariable they are, no doubt: and that difference of events, which gives occasion to the distinction of ordinary and extraordinary, is nothing more than the natural effect of them. Comets, nay eclipses, were thought to be extraordinary apparitions that portended extraordinary events, till experience and observation made them familiar, and astronomers began to calculate their returns.

THE laws we speak of are so truly invariable, that the same face of nature and the same course of things have been preserved from the first, in heaven and on earth, under the direction of the same general providence. The celestial bodies moved in the same order five or ten thousand years ago that they move now. The inanimate parts of our globe, the vegetable and the animal world have been constituted, maintained, and propagated in the same manner; and whatever difference the most antient patriarchs, or the first of men, if they were to come into life again, might find in the works of art, they

they would find none in those of nature: so that, when a great philosopher says that ADAM would find a new world, he must be understood to mean that the first of men would find a great deal more of the old one discovered, as we say that COLUMBUS found a new world when he discovered America. These laws, tho they are invariable, are general too, and as such they admit of much contingency. Matter, as we conceive it, is purely passive, can act no otherwise than it is acted upon according to the first impressions of motion that were given by the first mover, and is, therefore, less liable to contingency, because more immediately, and more absolutely under the influence of those laws by which the motion of it, the first of second causes, is continued. The first gleams of thought appear in our animal system, and with them the powers of willing, and of beginning motion. Thought improves, and the exercise of these powers grows more frequent, and more considerable, as the system rises. As it rises, therefore, there is more room for contingency of events under the general and invariable laws imposed on the whole kind, or on the particular species. But in no species is there so much room of this sort as in the human. Other animals seem to act more agreeably to the laws, each of his own nature, and more uniformly than man, by that secret determination of the will which is knowable only by its effects, like every other kind of force, which we call instinct, and which may answer in natural influences, to what the divines call grace in those that they suppose to be supernatural. This influence, whatever it be, is, I think, more extensive and more durable in other animals than in us. It serves them in more particulars, and seems to have the sole direction of their conduct through life. It has, at least, the principal direction, even in those of them in whom we perceive some glimmerings of rationality, and some partial indications of a moral nature.

BUT now in man, instinct does no more than point out the first rudiments of the law of his nature. Reason does, or should do the rest. Reason, instructed by experience, shews the law, and the functions of it, which are as invariable and as uniform as the law; for in all the ages of the world, and among all the societies of men, the well-being or the ill-being of these societies, and, therefore, of all mankind has borne a constant proportion to the observation or neglect of it. God has given to his human creatures the materials of physical and moral happiness, if I may say so, in the physical and moral constitution of things. He has given them faculties, and powers necessary to collect and apply these materials, and to carry on the work, of which reason is the architect, as far as these materials, these faculties, these powers, and the skill of this architect admit. This the Creator has done for us. What we shall do for ourselves he has left to the freedom of our elections; for free-will seems so essential to rational beings, that I presume we cannot conceive any such to be without it, tho we easily conceive them restrained in the execution of what they will. This plan is that of divine wisdom; and whatever our imaginations may suggest, we know nothing more particular, and, indeed, nothing at all more of the constitution and order of the human system, nor of the dispensations of providence, than this.

AGREEABLY to this plan, men have been every where intent to procure to themselves all the physical comforts of life, and solicitous to defend themselves against all the physical evils. In the first, they have succeeded every where so well that they enjoy, not only the necessaries and comforts, but the luxuries of life; for there is the luxury of Scythians as well as of Sybarites, of Americans as well as of Europeans, and of the
2 cottage

cottage as well as of the palace. In the second, as in the first, and in every human invention and institution, there is something that is imperfect, something that falls short of the end that we propose, by defect of knowledge, or by defect of power. But even in this, the success of mankind has been great; since they have found means universally, even the most savage have found them, to prevent or to cure many of those physical evils to which they stand exposed, and to alleviate those which they can neither prevent nor cure. This has been done variously and by slow degrees, but it has been always doing, and distempers were cured and many physical evils averted before the great improvements of experimental philosophy were made. They are so, even now, in countries where these improvements were never heard of.

AGREEABLY to the same plan, moral good has been promoted, moral evil has been restrained, and the general state of mankind has been greatly improved in this respect, as well as in the other; tho in this respect many more and more frequent contingencies are to be guarded against than in the other, because they arise in the moral system from the most uncertain principle imaginable, the free will of man: and in the other they are such alone as certain laws and an established order of things admit. Physical contingencies are rather apparent than real. But moral contingencies are very real, and yet they are guarded against so well, and the principles and practice of morality are so well maintained in the several societies of men that they produce no great disorders in these, and there are on the whole vastly more innocent than guilty persons.