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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

LXV.

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

LXV.

I AM not unacquainted with the various refinements of ingenious men, about the freedom of the human will. Some of them have assumed it to be a freedom from external compulsion only, and not from internal necessity. Others have assumed it to be a freedom from both; and there are those who assign not only freedom to the will, but a natural indifference, which is not excited to chuse, because an object is agreeable antecedently to the choice, but chuses for the pleasure it finds in chusing, and makes the object agreeable by this choice*. The first seem to me to leave neither contingency, nor virtue, nor vice in the world. They establish an universal necessity, of one sort at least. The last seem to me to transfer in some sort to man, what belongs to God. There is an agent, no doubt, who makes things good and agreeable by chusing them, and who is not determined to his choice ab extra, by any pre-existent goodness in objects. But this agent is not that passive creature man, who acts, when he does act, according to the contingent impressions of outward objects on him, or according to those remote objects which his imagination represents to him; for in this scene alone, and a large one it is, free-will does, and I suppose can, exercise itself. The second opinion is so evidently true, that I cannot conceive it would have been liable to any contradiction; if philosophers had not done in this case, what they do in many, if they had not rendered what is clear, obscure by explanations, and what is certain, problematical by engravements.

INTO these subtil and perplexed disquisitions I have no design to enter with them. I write to you, and for you; and

* Vid. KING de Orig. Mali.

you

you would think yourself little obliged to me, if I took the pains of explaining in prose, what you would not think it necessary to explain in verse, and in the character of a poetical philosopher, who may dwell in generalities. But besides this, I have another reason, which would weigh with me on every other as well as on this occasion. I fear to go out of my depth, in founding imaginary fords that are real gulphs, and wherein many of the tallest philosophers have been drowned, whilst none of them ever got over to the science they had in view. Here even LOCKE, that cautious philosopher, was lost; and here they who have followed and refuted him, like those who went before them all, have succeeded no better: so true is that saying of MONTAGNE, when men attempt to carry knowledge far, "tout finit dans l'éblouissement," the sight is dazzled, and nothing is seen clearly.

INSTEAD of consulting these writers, therefore, let us consult ourselves. Let us at least attend to them no further, than our inward reflection and our intuitive knowledge confirm their opinions. The material world is an immense scene. Numbers of men, and numbers of ages have been employed to acquire knowledge; and, where this has fallen short, to make hypotheses, sometimes useful, concerning the constitution of it, and the laws according to which bodies act on bodies, in order to apply them to the service of mankind. No man's experience can instruct him sufficiently in this science, even for the most ordinary uses of life. Every one must lean on that of others, the illiterate universally, and the most learned in many parts; since no one of them is able to embrace and cultivate alike the whole. But knowledge of the intellectual world is more confined as to the principles of it, and, therefore, less confined as to the persons equally capable of acquiring all the real knowledge that is to be acquired about it. I
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say, real knowledge; because hypotheses, which are often admitted very reasonably and very usefully in one case, have no pretence to be admitted in the other. Physical hypotheses, which go beyond knowledge, but are founded on it, may be admitted, not only because we must accept probability for certainty on many occasions always, but because when we accept it in these cases, we accept it, as it were, *pro interim*. None of the phaenomena stand in opposition to the present probability, and they all lye open to future discoveries; so that by the same means, by which we attain to this probability, we may attain hereafter to certainty, and, in the mean time, the former can be convicted of no error. The hypotheses of metaphysicians are very different from these. They are often framed in direct contradiction to the phaenomena: and if they are so once, they must be so always; for the phaenomena are, in this case, always the same, no new ones arise, and there are no means of further discoveries. The phaenomena of our intellectual system lye in a narrow compass, for the whole system is within us, and we have but to turn our eyes inward to have intuitive knowledge of it. Moral philosophers may draw different corollaries from the known operations of the mind, determinations of the will, and motives of human actions: but nothing can be more futile than the attempts of metaphysicians, to shew, by tedious abstract reasoning, what the internal phaenomena in themselves are, instead of appealing to our intuitive conscious knowledge of them. They would not be a jot more ridiculous, if they attempted to demonstrate, most philosophically, to a man whose eyes are open, what those objects are which he sees, or may see, at a due distance, and through a proper medium.

I have said something here and there in these minutes, already, concerning the principles of our moral system, in order
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to shew how it may be and how it has been improved, and to justify the providence of God on this head, as well as on that of our physical system. In this place, let it be observed to the same purpose again, that, altho the human will be free from external compulsion and internal necessity, yet it is liable to be determined often by sensible and intellectual affections; for I shall not make the distinction *SENECA* makes, between affections and the *principia praeludentia affectibus*. I am conscious that this is so, for I am conscious that I have determined too often, in compliance with my appetite, and in favor of pleasure, regardless of happiness, not only against my reason in general, but against the immediate, the instantaneous act of my understanding: as I am likewise conscious that I have determined sometimes, and I wish I had done so much oftener, in compliance with my reason, and in favor of happiness, not only against my appetite, but against my appetite excited by an immediate object. I am not more certain that I exist, than I am that all this is true: and since it is true of me, I conclude that it is so, in some degree or other, of all mankind. Now, amidst the contingencies that must arise from this constitution of every individual in the complicated affairs of his life, and in that diversity of relations in which he stands, I need not go about to prove, that the odds will be always on the side of appetite, from which affections arise, as affections grow up afterwards into passions, which reason cannot quite subdue in the strongest minds, and by which she is perpetually subdued in the weakest. Had the allwise Creator implanted in every man a moral sense, which may be acquired in some sort by long habits of virtue, and the warmth of true philosophical devotion, but which it is whimsical to assume to be natural; had he done more, had he determined men to the practice of virtue, as he has to the preservation of their beings, by irresistible instinct; or had he appointed particular providences

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ces for particular men, to make them good and to reward them for being so; there would have been in the freedom of human will no chance for immorality, or rather this freedom would have been taken from us in all occurrences of a moral nature, by the internal necessity of such an instinct, or the external compulsion of such providences. But no one of these methods, which self-sufficient philosophers have thought it necessary that God should take to secure the moral happiness of mankind, by securing in all events the morality of individuals, has appeared necessary to the purposes of divine wisdom. It is plain by the whole course of God's providence, that he regards his human creatures collectively, not individually, how worthy soever every one of them deems himself to be a particular object of the divine care. He has given them indifferently, and in common, the means of arriving at happiness in their moral, as in their physical state; and has left it to them to improve these means, that they may obtain this end.

IN this respect he has dealt with them alike in both. But the progress of these improvements is very different. It goes from individuals to collective bodies in one case, and from collective bodies to individuals in the other. Particular men have made discoveries, and invented arts beneficial to the whole species. The generality has adopted them. Their immediate utility has maintained them in practice, and appetite and reason have conspired to set the undivided force of self-love on their side. But our improvements in morality have always had, and must always have a very different progress. Some few particular men may discover, explain, and press upon others, by advice and example, the moral obligations that are incumbent on all. This alone will have little effect, and our moral state will be little improved by it. This improvement, therefore, in themselves and in others is not
trusted

trusted to the reason of particular men. It is a principal object of the universal reason of mankind. For this purpose governments have been instituted, laws have been made, customs have been established, children have been trained up to morality by education, and men have been deterred from immorality by various punishments, which human justice inflicts. When these means are employed effectually in any society of men, the moral state of that society is happy. When they are employed ineffectually, which must be always the fault of those to whom government is committed, the state of that society is miserable. Individuals are the objects of human justice: societies of men, of divine justice. When the former is not exercised effectually, the latter is; and no physical causes produce their effects more naturally, nor more surely, than general depravity produces general misery.

LXVI.

SUCH is the constitution of things, and such the divine oeconomy in the government of mankind. God has given us the desire of happiness and the means of attaining to it. He has given us faculties sufficient to discover, and to improve, these means. What could we ask more of a beneficent Creator? Let us adore his goodness, and his justice (if we will ascribe our ideas of moral attributes to him) as well as his wisdom, and his power. Let us give him thanks for bestowing existence upon us, in the system to which we belong; whilst prophane antitheistical writers refuse to own, that he himself exists, unless there be another. Our state, in this world, is a state not of pure, but of mixed, happiness. As we are material beings, we are subject to generation and corruption, and to many physical evils that arise necessarily from this constitution.