



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

LXIX.

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

cusations themselves to be made up of exaggeration, and false representation. As to the second, neither their case, nor their conduct, is the same. In the character of philosophers they are under no necessity of maintaining this hypothesis, nor obliged to excuse that providence they never accused. But in the character of divines they are under this necessity, and their profession obliges them to defend every part of the system it was instituted to defend. They defend it, therefore, and they find the task of doing so in concert with their brethren much harder, than that of defending the cause of God against their brethren and the atheists in alliance, by shewing that there is more good than evil in this world, and that the happiness of mankind is provided for sufficiently in it.

LXIX.

IF the immortality of the soul could be proved by physical arguments, the eternity of rewards and punishments would be no necessary corollary deducible from it. But this immortality is a consequence necessarily deducible from this eternity. This immortality, therefore, seems to rest on a moral proof, and an inverted order of reasoning, since if the justice of God requires that there should be a state of eternal rewards and punishments, the soul of man is immortal, certainly, and the same persons, who were virtuous or vicious here, must receive their retribution there. To conceive this personal identity, which is ascertained by our consciousness, and which is known as intuitively as our existence in the present, and must be so in the future state, unless we drink of the water of Lethe by the way, is not difficult surely; and it may be matter of surprise to observe how many scruples have been raised concerning it by men who seem to embrace the rest of this doctrine without

without any. The rest of this doctrine is, however, as inconceivable as this part of it is plain; and whether we suppose that it was derived from an opinion of the immortality of the soul, or that this opinion was derived from it, neither way will it stand the test of reason; for in one case it is founded originally on mere imagination, or on physical and metaphysical proofs that are insufficient; and in the other, the opinion of the soul's immortality is founded originally on moral proofs that are precarious, to say no worse of them yet.

It is said that this opinion was brought into Greece first by PHERECYDES of Syros. But the doctrine of future rewards and punishments had been brought thither long before. It is indeed far more probable that this opinion and this doctrine were imported together by ORPHEUS, and other ancient poets, tho' the master of PYTHAGORAS might be the first who writ in prose on these, or on any philosophical subject. But, however this was, it is obvious enough that they, who believed the immortality of the soul, and future rewards and punishments in another life, did not believe an eternity of torments to be the common fate of the wicked. The priests had reasons of private as well as of public interest to encrease these terrors; and yet in days of the blindest superstition they tried to reconcile them, by several softenings, to the justice of God, and to the belief of men. The whole mythology of the other world was so absurd, and so confused in itself, and it is come down to us in so many dark and inconsistent reports, that the learned attempt in vain to make out any coherent system of it. Thus much however we know, that whilst the pagans installed in the choir of the gods some men, whose sepulchers were to be seen on earth, for the good or great actions they had done in their generations, " viros
" claros:

“claros et fortes*,” and bestowed on these a sort of secondary immortality, they held that there was a middle state, wherein they who were neither good enough for heaven, nor bad enough for hell, the “animae sanabiles” of PLATO, should be purged, and their state of probation, as it were, lengthened. This purgatory your church has borrowed: but the heathen divines applied the belief of it to a very theistical purpose, to justify the providence of God in his dealings with men; and your church has made use of this belief to a very mercenary purpose, to bubble the laity, and to enrich the priesthood. We know further that the system of a metempsychosis, according to which the persons, who existed in the human state, had pre-existed, and would exist again, after they went out of this, in others; and that the several ranks and orders of beings in heaven, as well as the several degrees and kinds of punishment in hell, were invented to answer the objections that were made to the government of God in this world, and that might be made to the oeconomy of the same government in the next; if it was assumed that all those, who did not deserve to be damned at their going out of this life for what they had done in it, were saved alike, and that all those, who did not deserve to be saved, were damned at the same time in a lump. These hypotheses, and others of the same sort, were very extravagant no doubt; but still they were well intended. They afforded answers at least as good as the objections made to the dispensations of providence in this life, and they rendered those of the same providence in another life less repugnant to the notions of justice.

How great this repugnancy is, and how much reason there is to apprehend that it should destroy little by little, among men

* TULLY.

who

who reason for themselves, and are not stupidly implicate, all those impressions which the belief of a future state is so usefully designed to give; rather than to hope that the received hypothesis should fortify these impressions, or even preserve them on the minds of such men; two observations will help to shew: one of which cannot be contradicted, and the other of which is so easily proved, that, like self-evident propositions which admit of no proof, it scarce requires any. That which cannot be contradicted is this. As much as christian divines are hampered by some expressions in holy writ, there are those among them who appear very evidently to have disbelieved the eternity of the torments of hell; for it is too little to say that they doubted about them, or seemed to oppose them: and these are men who bow to none in superiority of parts and learning. Such too there were in the church of old. That which scarce requires any proof is this. They who maintain this eternity are reduced to employ such arbitrary assumptions, such inconsistency in what they advance, and such futility of argument, as they would reproach severely to others, and be ashamed to employ themselves on any subject that was not theological. The writings of these men are in every hand, and I dare appeal to you, whether you can force your inward sense to admit that eternal torments in another life are consistent with any notions of justice you are able to frame, either because every sin is an offence against an infinite Being, and therefore deserves infinite punishment, as if every offence was to be punished, not according to the degree of it, but in proportion to the dignity of the lawgiver; or because these torments may be a warning to the heathen, whose state of probation may be extended, beyond this life, and must be extended to make this argument good, beyond the consummation of all things; or finally, for it would be tedious and useless to mention any more, because the damned
may

may grow mad, and not feel their misery, or grow fond of it, in which case if it was not cruel, it would be absurd, to continue their punishments?

COMPARE the greatest human virtue you can imagine, exposed to all the calamities of life during a term of fifty or threescore years, and recompensed with happiness which exceeds vastly in every instance of it, as much as in it's duration, the sum total of all these calamities, that is, with happiness infinite and eternal. Compare the greatest human wickedness you can imagine, accompanied with an uninterrupted unmingled affluence of every thing which can go to the constitution of human felicity during the same number of years, and after that punished in a state of excessive and never ending torments. What proportion, in the name of God, will you find between the virtue and the recompence, between the wickedness and the punishment? One of these persons has amends made to him beyond all conceivable degrees of a just reparation. The other has punishment inflicted on him beyond all conceivable degrees of a necessary terror. Again. Suppose two men of equal virtue, but of very opposite fortunes in this life. The one extremely happy, the other as unhappy during the whole course of it. Are these men recompensed alike in the next? If they are, there arises such a disproportion of happiness in favor of one of these virtuous men, as must appear inconsistent with justice, and can be imputed to nothing but partiality, which theism will never impute to the Supreme Being, whatever artificial theology may do and does in many instances. Are these two men not recompensed alike? Has one of them a greater, and the other a less share of happiness in that heaven, to which they both go? If this be said and allowed, the same disproportion, nay, a disproportion infinitely greater will remain. The difference must be made by

by the degree, it cannot be made by the duration of this happiness, which both of them are to enjoy eternally. Now any degree of happiness the more, tho never so small, enjoyed eternally, will exceed infinitely not only all the happiness of earth, but all that of heaven which can be enjoyed in any determined number of years. If you suppose two persons of equal guilt, one of whom has been as happy as a wicked man can be, and the other of whom has suffered as much misery in this life as a wicked man can be thought to deserve; the same reasoning will hold good: the disproportion of punishments in one case will be like the disproportion of rewards in the other, and that justice, which is said to be the same in God as in our ideas, will be acquitted in neither. A divine, pressed by such arguments, might have recourse, for aught I know, to something like that balance, wherein it was said that WOLLASTON affected to weigh happiness and misery even to grains and scruples, in order to assume that the additional degrees of happiness in heaven, and of misery in hell, cease as soon as the account between the two worlds is made even, and the disproportion taken away; after which the two good men and the two wicked men remain in the different states allotted to them, on an equal foot. This might be said by one accustomed to make hypotheses at random and without any other rule than his want of them, but I cannot think it would deserve a serious answer.

LXX.

SOMETHING else may be said, that will appear more reasonable at first, and that will be found, on examination, only to set the injustice of the assumed future dispensations