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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

LXX.

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

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

tions of providence in a still stronger light. It may be said, that altho such proportions, as I have mentioned, are included in our notions of justice, strictly taken; yet rewards and punishments do often exceed these strict bounds, without being deemed repugnant to justice, and marks of weakness, or of cruelty, in him who bestows them, or inflicts them. This now is true in certain degrees, and in certain circumstances, according to which these degrees are to be regulated. Excessive mercy may be vicious, as well as excessive severity, in the judgments of men; and they must be excessive when the particular proportions in which they are measured out, exceed by far what is necessary to encourage the good, and to terrify the wicked, the two general objects of justice. The bounds of human justice are straiter, or larger, but still it has bounds; and whenever the former are transgressed, the circumstance which justifies this transgression must be some public good. Such is the nature of human justice, according to which we are to judge of divine justice in our disputes with these men who say that they are the same.

For my part, who do not think that they are the same in such a sense, as to make us adequate judges of one as well as of the other, I could easily persuade myself, if I admitted this hypothesis, that the mercy and goodness of God stand as it were on one side of his justice, that his mercy pardons the offenders who amend consistently with his justice; for else, as all men offend, all men would be punished; and that his goodness may carry on the work his mercy has begun, and place such as are the objects of both in a state where they will be exempt perhaps eternally from all natural, and, as much as finite creatures can be, from moral evil. I could persuade myself, that they who are objects of neither, and are not therefore pardoned, remain, if they do remain, secluded from the
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happinels of the others, and reduced to a forlorn state. Some such hypothesiſ, where no certainty is to be had, I could admit as probable, becauſe it contradicts none of the divine attributes, ſets none of them at variance, nor breaks their harmony: for tho I fear to pronounce what God will do, and am always aſtoniſhed at the boldneſs of thoſe who pronounce not only what he will do, but what he ought to do; yet I think myſelf obliged, among theſe various opinions that are, or may be entertained of the divine proceedings, to embrace as probable, if I embrace any, that and that alone which comes neareſt to the beſt notions I can frame of moral perfection. It is not poſſible for me, therefore, to conceive any attributes ſtanding on the other ſide of God's juſtice. No attribute can hold that place, unleſs cruelty be a divine attribute; which it would be blaſphemous to ſuppoſe, tho the Jews, and ſome other barbarous people have ſuppoſed it to be ſo.

To reform offenders is neither the ſole, nor the principal end of puniſhments. Thoſe of an inferior kind may have this intention. Thoſe that are capital muſt have ſome other, and it would be too ridiculous to make the hangman, who executes a criminal, paſs for the reformer of his manners. The criminal is executed for the ſake of others, and that he, who did much hurt in his life, may not only be deprived of the power of doing any more, but may do ſome good too by the terror of his death. If a prince, or a magiſtrate, tortured and put to death clandestinely, without regard to reparation or terror, even ſuch as deſerved capital puniſhment, he would be deemed a tyrant; becauſe the principal end of puniſhment is not obtained by this proceeding; and ſuch a prince, or magiſtrate, could have no motive to puniſh, but the pleaſure of puniſhing, which no ſpirit but that of anger, vengeance, and cruelty can inſpire. A ſpirit of juſtice puniſhes; but the judge

who has no other spirit, punishes with regret. If these notions are true, and surely they are true, how can any one, who believes that God is an all-perfect Being, believe at the same time that he does what would deserve the highest censure among his imperfect creatures? None but those who accuse him of injustice in this life, can believe him so unjust in the next. They make him more unjust, than the prince or magistrate would be in the case that has been supposed. If the torments of hell take place before the consummation of all things, he is as unjust as this prince, or magistrate. But if sentence is not pronounced, nor judgment executed, till then, he is infinitely more so. Clandestine punishments may have some of the effects of justice, and may contribute in some degree to the reformation of men, or at least to the good of society, by putting out of it such as are hurtful to it. But what effect of this kind can further punishments have, when the system of human government is at an end, and the state of probation over; when there is no further room for reformation of the wicked, nor reparation to the injured by those who injured them; in fine, when the eternal lots of all mankind are cast, and terror is of no further use?

You will say perhaps, for it is commonly said, that altho it be too late, after the consummation of all things, or of the system of this world at least, to obtain the ends of human justice, yet the divine justice remains to be satisfied; and that this cannot be satisfied unless every human creature, who has sinned beyond all measure of pardon here, be punished eternally hereafter. Can this now be urged by any one, who has assumed that divine and human justice are the same, and that God appeals to man for the equity of his proceedings; or, indeed, by any one else? Sure I am, it cannot be so, consistently, by the former, nor reasonably by the latter; for
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tho it may be said, to soften this bold assumption, that justice is truly the same in God as it is in our ideas, but that, God being infinitely superior to man, an extreme difference must needs arise, in the exercise and particular applications of it, between divine and human justice; yet this will appear to be an evasion in the present case and not an answer. A prince, or a magistrate, may do no doubt very justly, nay it is essential to justice that he should do, what would be unjust and criminal in a private man. The rank he holds, and the power with which he is invested, give him this right: but neither superior rank, nor superior power, can give him a right to pervert justice, nor to act in opposition to those laws of the society which ought to be the rules of his conduct. Thus the Supreme Being, whose majesty, wisdom, and power are elevated far above all our conceptions, may do justly, in a multitude of instances, what princes, and magistrates, have no more the right, than the power of doing. But then we may presume to say, that there is this similitude between the two cases. Tho the right and power of the Supreme Being, are not delegated, they may be limited like theirs. This I mean. They are limited, if we believe certain divines, by eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses of things independent on him, according to which he regulates his conduct, and all rational beings are obliged to regulate theirs, because all rational beings are capable of knowing them. But if we reject this doctrine, as, I think, we ought to do, and not without horror, we must be convinced, however, that the Author of all nature, in constituting our system, constituted certain specific physical and moral natures, according to which he governs the world: from whence it will follow, that the reasons, on which his providence acts in the present system of things, may be known to us in some instances, and must be unknown to us in others; whilst the whole oeconomy of any future system must
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be absolutely impenetrable. We are able to account, in great measure, for the general distribution of good and evil here, tho not perhaps for every particular instance. But we are wholly unable to say what will happen hereafter. This only we know, that neither here, nor hereafter, God will deal with his creatures in direct violation of those natures and essences of things which he himself has constituted, and has given them the means of knowing. He will not deal with them according to one rule here, and according to another hereafter.

As we must believe, if we think worthily of the Supreme Being, that he will not proceed with his human creatures, in any state, in violation of that justice which he has constituted in the nature of things, and whereof he has made them able to acquire ideas and notions; so we must be on our guard lest we should be induced to believe that he will proceed, at any time, agreeably to those affections and passions which have so great a share in directing our conduct, and so much influence over our thoughts. Sovereign reason is exempt from affection and passion; and the great cause of error in theism is this, we judge of it with all our affections and passions about us. What the effects of this cause were in the heathen world we all know. But few of us consider that the same cause has worked ever since, works still, and if it does not produce a crop of errors as foul and as abominable as those, it produces a crop not less abundant.

LXXI.

WHATEVER the vulgar religion of the heathen taught, their philosophers, even those of them who assumed providence to be the most active in directing the affairs