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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**

LXXIV.

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has been prostituted to conceal the ignorance, and to palliate the errors of the most illiterate, superstitious, and absurd race of men who ever pretended to a system of things divine or human.

## LXXIV.

**A**NALOGY is employed in this case as it is in the other, and indeed in every case where theological paradoxes, which are not a few, are to be defended. If analogy itself, such as some divines assume and represent it, could be defended, there would be no case, wherein it ought to be employed with all its force more than in this; for, surely, to impute human passions, even the worst of them, to the Supreme Being, is not further off from blasphemy, than it is to ascribe to him a corporeal form, and the sensations, and the limbs, and the actions of a man. It is not true, tho it has been asserted, that this analogy is obvious to every one, and that no one can think on reflection that any of these passions can affect literally the divine nature\*. It is on the contrary as true, that a multitude of good christians, far the greatest number, believe at this hour that the divine nature is affected by them, as it is true that a multitude of good heathens represented to themselves their gods and goddeses, even the father of gods and men, under an human form, or conceived at least, which is much the same, that these divinities took the human nature upon them whenever either business or pleasure called them to converse and act with the children of men. Let us not imagine that any thing is too absurd for men to believe even on reflection. Heathen, jews, christians, have believed

\* Vid. Serm. supr. citat.

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the absurdities I have mentioned; and great metaphysicians and divines have believed this analogy\*. It would be tedious to take notice of all that has been said, stupidly enough by some, and not without a little air of plausible ingenuity by others, to establish this notion. I shall say no more about it, than my subject requires necessarily, and even that will be sufficient, I think, to explode a doctrine, that may be turned strongly against revealed religion, and that cuts up the very root of natural.

ALL the knowledge that God has given us the means to acquire, and therefore all that he designed we should have of his physical and moral nature and attributes, if they may be

\* The lord president of Scotland, who is no divine by profession, but something better, and more useful to society, deals however too much in divinity; and the contagion of HUTCHINSON'S writings and conversation makes him really mad quoad hoc, for there is such a madness, notwithstanding all his sagacity, good sense, and knowledge. In that strange book, which he has writ in this delirium against TINDAL, and which I have quoted somewhere, he says very rationally, "that we ought to be amazed at the impudence of those who pretend to decide what God is or is not, and what he can or can not do, from the notions they have framed to themselves of his attributes, his nature and perfection." But he himself affirms, in the same book, a multitude of facts relating to the Deity, and to the whole oeconomy of divine providence, on the faith of jewish and christian reveries, and his own or his master's whimsies; just as the others do on the faith of theirs. The censure, therefore, which he passes on them, may be justly passed on himself, unless it can be shewn, which it never can be, that what he advances is better proved to be true in fact, than what they advance is demonstrated conformable to right reason. Type, emblem, and analogy are the common means to disguise the absurdity both of the facts and reasonings they maintain; the consequence of which is abominable: for the vulgar may very well understand literally, what is pretended to be said analogically only, of the Supreme Being, of his nature, and of his proceedings, in the Bible; since this writer asserts it to be extremely plain, that the language of the scriptures, which describes the Deity's actions, affections, and inclinations in terms borrowed from the usage, the sentiments, and resolutions of men, is not so figurative as it is generally supposed to be, and that we ought to understand it something more literally, than reasoners are willing to allow.

considered separately, as we are apt to consider them, and if the latter and every thing we ascribe to these, are not to be resolved rather into the former, into his infinite intelligence, wisdom, and power; all this knowledge, I say, is derived from his works, and from the tenor of that providence, by which he governs them. We see him in a reflected, not in a direct light. But, because we cannot frame full and adequate ideas of this sort, nor answer every question impertinent curiosity may ask; will it follow that we have, properly speaking, no knowledge at all of his attributes, nor of the manner in which they are exercised? Every part of the immense universe, and the order and harmony of the whole, as far as we are able to carry our observations and discoveries, are not only conformable to our ideas or notions of wisdom and power, but these ideas or notions were impressed originally and principally by them on every attentive mind; and men were led to conclude with the utmost certainty, that a being of infinite wisdom and power made, preserved, and governed the system. As far as we can discern, we discern these in all his works; and where we cannot discern them it is manifestly due to our imperfection, not to his. God cannot be in any instance unwise nor impotent. This now is real knowledge, or there is no such thing as knowledge. We acquire it immediately in the objects themselves, in God, and in nature, the work of God. We know what wisdom and power are: we know, both intuitively and by the help of our senses, that such as we conceive them to be such they appear in the work; and therefore we know demonstratively that such they are in the worker.

WHAT then could a very respectable writer\* mean, when he said, speaking of divine knowledge and wisdom, that God

\* Archbish. KING, ubi supr.

must either have these, or other faculties and powers equivalent to them, and adequate to the mighty effects which proceed from them? It is plain he meant by this supposition, in a case where nothing is ascribed but what ought to be ascribed to God, to prepare the way for the same supposition in a case where he was to excuse the jewish theology, and his own, for attributing in terms to God those affections and passions, which cannot be so attributed without impiety. The archbishop would have had no need to run into these absurdities, nor any temptation to advance some strange paradoxes, that he advanced on the foundation of an assumed analogical knowledge, if he had confined himself to refute one impiety, that of the predestinarians, without attempting to excuse another. Our ideas of divine intelligence and wisdom may be neither fantastic nor false, and yet God's manner of knowing may be so different from ours, that foreknowledge, as we call it improperly in him, may be consistent with the contingency of events, altho that which we call properly foreknowledge in ourselves be not so. But he reasons about the essential natural attributes of God as if he reasoned about those that we call moral, in which way of reasoning there is great and manifest error. The former are fixed, uniform, and specific natures, that want no equivalent; and that are certainly adequate, since the mighty effects that are produced proceed from them. They may be perceived more or less in different cases, but in no case will they vary, even in appearance and in human apprehension, from what they are. Like the sun, they may appear sometimes in the full effulgence of their brightness, and sometimes behind those clouds which the eye of human reason cannot pierce. But still, like the light and heat of the sun, tho differently perceived, they will appear the same. The latter are not such fixed, uniform, specific natures to human apprehension. They are rather assumed nominal natures,  
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not manifested by God in his government of the world as clearly and as determinately, as the physical attributes of wisdom and power are in the whole system of his works; but framed into abstract general notions by the human mind to help itself in the moral consideration of human actions, and applied to the Supreme Being that we may reason more distinctly, if not more truly, about his nature, and the dispensations of his providence. We ought to attribute all conceivable perfections, without doubt, to the supreme all-perfect Being. We can never raise our conceptions of this kind too high. They will remain, after all our efforts, vastly inadequate. Nay if we suppose them less so, or push absurdity to the utmost and suppose them adequate, yet still they will remain very insufficient criterions by which to judge in many cases, as men presume to do in all, of these perfections in the exercise of them. The reason is plain. God acts according to a multitude of relations unknown to us. He acts relatively to his system, we judge relatively to ours.

INTO such opposite paradoxes are divines transported by presumptuous reasoning and whimsical refinements, whilst they pretend to teach us the knowledge of God and of heavenly things, that some of them affirm dogmatically, and without any regard to truth, which they sacrifice readily to maintain an hypothesis, that the moral attributes are in God just what they are in our inadequate, fluctuating ideas, and that God himself appeals to man for his proceeding conformably to them: and some again are so far from falling into this, that they fall into a contrary extreme, and would persuade us that the attributes of God are all alike inconceivable to us as they are in themselves, and can be known no way except by analogy; which is not to know them at all: for knowledge, which rests in analogy, stops short, and is not knowledge.  
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The first of these opinions has done infinite hurt to all religion, and has turned it into superstition every where, and in every age. The last has not been of much service to christianity, as I apprehend; and sure I am that it will leave the objection, made to the jewish scriptures on account of the images under which they represent the Supreme Being, just where they find it.

HERE let us draw one line of separation, among others, between natural and artificial theology. By that we are taught to acknowledge and adore the infinite wisdom and power of God, which he has manifested to us, in some degree or other, in every part, even the most minute, of his creation. By that too we are taught to ascribe goodness and justice to him wherever he intended that we should so ascribe them, that is, wherever either his works, or the dispensations of his providence do as necessarily communicate these notions to our minds, as those of wisdom and power are communicated to us in the whole extent of both. Wherever they are not so communicated, we may assume very reasonably that it is on motives strictly conformable to all the divine attributes, and therefore to goodness and justice, tho unknown to us, from whom so many circumstances, with a relation to which the divine providence acts, must be often concealed; or we may resolve all such cases into the wisdom of God, and, resigning ourselves to that, not presume to account for them morally. Thus we follow God, and pretend to have knowledge of his moral character, no further than he gives it; no further than these abstract, or general notions, which we collect from the proceedings of his providence, are confirmed by the same.