



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

In Five Volumes, complete.

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LXXV.

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LXXV.

BUT we are taught a very different lesson in the schools of artificial theology. In them all the notions of those obligations, under which men lye to one another by the constitution of their nature, are transferred to God; and an imaginary connection between his physical and moral attributes is framed by very precarious reasonings *à priori*; all of which are founded on that impertinent supposition, that moral fitnesses and unfitnesses are known, by the eternal reason of things, to all rational beings as well as to God. They go further. As God is perfect, and man very imperfect, they talk of his infinite goodness and justice as of his infinite wisdom and power, tho the latter may preserve their nature without any conceivable bounds, and the former must cease to be what they are, unless we conceive them bounded. Their nature implies necessarily a limitation in the exercise of them. Thus then the moral attributes, according to this theology, require infinitely more of God to man, than men are able, or would be obliged, if they were able, to exercise to one another; greater profusion in bestowing benefits and rewards, greater rigor in punishing offences. This whole system of God's moral obligations, or of divine ethics, being raised *à priori*, and not *à posteriori*, is a system of the duty of God to man: let the blasphemy of this expression be charged to the account of those who make it proper and necessary to be used, in order to expose their doctrine. It is a system of what he ought, or is obliged by his attributes to do; and not a scheme of what he has done. It prescribes to God, and the dispensations of his providence are acquitted or censured as they are conformable or not conformable to it.

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THE makers of this system have gone still further, and have attributed to the Divinity not only the perfections, but the imperfections of humanity. Superstition improved by philosophy succeeded that which was rude and unsystematised; and learning and knowledge finished what ignorance had begun. When they saw that the constitution of things, and the order of providence did not answer the notions of goodness and justice in all the extent, in which they thought it was fit to ascribe these notions to a Supreme Being, contrary notions stood ready to take the place of these; and, since they could not ascribe them all to one, they ascribed them to several divinities. From hence a good and an evil god, the ditheism of philosophers. From hence that universal polytheism, a principal use of which was to account for the phaenomena of nature, and for the government of the moral world. The moral characters of pagan divinities differed, like the moral characters of men; and, to make these characters complete, the same passions were ascribed to both: one nation, nay one man was favored by one god, another by another; and as there were parties on earth, there were parties in heaven. But here we must distinguish between the theology of the jews and that of other nations. The jews, with more inconsistency and not less profanation, dressed up the one Supreme Being in all the rags of humanity; which composed a kind of motley character, such as foolish superstition, and mad enthusiasm alone could ascribe to him, and such as no man, who believes him to be an all-perfect Being, can hear without horror.

THE most barbarous nations had the most barbarous deities generally, and the gods seem to have been civilised no faster, than their adorers were, and even not so fast, nor in the same proportion: for we know by experience, that superstition can

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maintain barbarity in religious policy, among those who are the furthest from it in civil. The antient Chinese, it is said, represented the Supreme Being, the lord of heaven and earth, for so they called him, as the giver of all good*, as an object of adoration and of gratitude, to whom their emperors offered up the first fruits of the corn they had sowed with their own hands. But the antient nations, of whom the histories and traditions with which we are better acquainted speak, represented the divine nature like that of their own tyrants. The divine favor was to be obtained by importunate supplications, by magnificent presents, and by all the external shew of service, and pomp of adulation. Their gods too, like their tyrants, were prone to anger, and hard to be appeased. Nothing less than bloody sacrifices of beasts, of men, of children, could appease them; and the notion of rendering them propitious by putting other creatures to death being established, we are not to wonder, if the greatest offenders grew the most devout. In this respect they had better quarter from gods than men, tho SENECA says, that it cost more to assuage the wrath of their gods, than the rage of their tyrants, “ut sic dii placentur quemadmodum ne homines quidem saeviunt.”

IF we would own the truth, we should be obliged to own that this kind of propitiation is much more repugnant to all our notions of justice, than any of those instances of supposed injustice which divines and atheists charge on God; and yet it continued to be the constant practice of the jews at the same time as they boast that God was their king, and relate the terrible judgments that he executed, and that they executed by his command, or with his approbation, personally on one another, and personally for their own sakes on other

* Scien. Sin.

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people. Thus they blended together at once, in the moral character of God, injustice, cruelty, and partiality. They made him an object of terror more, than of awe and reverence, and their religion was a system of the rankest superstition; for nothing can be more true, than what St. AUSTIN quotes some where from VARRO, that they who are religious revere, and the superstitious fear God*. The faint would have done well to have applied this true maxim to certain abominable doctrines of his own, and to have learned from an heathen to correct his own theology. But the truth is, that christianity preserved in many respects a strong tang of the spirit of judaism, as judaism had taken, and incorporated in the first institution of it, many of the rites and observances at least of Aegypt: for I will not say that the legislator, who was instructed in all the wisdom of the Aegyptians, took the belief of one God from the doctrine of the Theban dynasty, as different in that respect from the polytheism of the other Aegyptians, as that of the jews was; tho I might suspect that he did so much more reasonably, than a very able writer insinuates that the jews might instruct other nations in the most excellent philosophy, and that natural religion was originally built on the religion revealed to them†. The ceremonies of the law of MOSES in the worship of God were retrenched, and a more inward devotion, a more reasonable service were established: tho even this devotion and this service retained an air of that enthusiasm which prevailed among the prophets, or preachers of the jewish church, on whom the spirit of God was supposed to descend. The Supreme Being took a milder appearance several ways among christians. His favor was confined no longer to one people; all mankind were construed

* VARRO ait, Deum a religioso vereri, a superstitione timeri.

† Vid. Def. of revealed Rel. by CONYB. p. 406.

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by this new theology to be of the seed of ABRAHAM, and they were all included in the new covenant. The Messiah came, and God did for fallen man what he would not do for fallen angels, according to a remark of archbishop TILLOTSON. He sent his only son, who is one and the same God with himself, into the world to suffer an ignominious death, and by that sacrifice to redeem all the sons of ADAM from the consequences of his wrath, which the sin of ADAM had entailed on the whole race of mankind. Christian theology discovers in this mysterious proceeding, the love of God to man, his infinite justice and goodness. But reason will discover the fantastical, confused, and inconsistent notions of jewish theology latent in it, and applied to another system of religion. This love will appear partiality, as great as that which the jews assumed that he had shewn in preferring their nation to all the nations of the earth. This justice will appear injustice in all the circumstances of the fall, and in the redemption of man by the propitiatory sacrifice of an innocent person. This goodness will appear cruelty when it is considered that the propitiation was made by tormenting, and spilling the blood of the victim; and in short injustice and cruelty will appear inconsistently united in this circumstance, that mankind could not have been redeemed if the jews had received, instead of crucifying the Messiah; and yet that they were rejected then, and have been punished ever since, for not receiving, and for crucifying him.

ON the whole, the moral character imputed to the Supreme Being by christian theology differs little from that imputed to him by the jewish. The difference is rather apparent than real, and if the effects of sudden and violent anger are imputed to him in one system, those of slow and silent revenge are imputed to him in the other. The God of the Old Testament rewards and punishes visibly, and signally here:

he terrifies often by his anger, he reforms sometimes. The God of the New, makes little difference here between those whom he approves, and those whom he disapproves; so little that he is charged with injustice for it: but he lies in wait to punish the latter hereafter with unrelenting vengeance and eternal torments, when it is too late to terrify, because it is too late to reform. Divines would be therefore under a double obligation to reconcile these passions to the idea of an all-perfect Being, if that was possible. But because it is impossible, they take the part of denying, against the express terms of their scriptures, that he has any such passions. They quote contradictory passages, which were designed*, they say, to make us understand that these representations are imperfect, and to keep us from imagining that the things spoken of are in the same manner in God, in which any of these passages express them: as if inconsistency could preserve from error, or be an excuse for it. They say very truly, that it would be absurd to understand the representations literally: but they argue very precariously, when they conclude from thence that they were not intended to be so understood. Is it less repugnant to human reason to ascribe the human passions to the divine nature, than it is to impute to God many other things which our theology imputes to him? I recall them not in particular. This only I will say, and you must own, that it cannot be hard to conceive, how the jews and the first christians came to entertain such absurd notions, by any man, who considers that in the most enlightened ages, and at this hour, the greatest part of the christian church believes that the same propitiatory sacrifice, which CHRIST offered upon the cross, is daily offered up for the living and the dead on ten thousand altars at once, and that they eat and drink the very same body and blood. Well

* Archb. KING, ubi sup.

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might the jews, and the first christians believe in contradiction to their reason, when an infinite number of learned men, and great philosophers believe in contradiction to their reason and their senses both.

We have observed above how this nostrum of analogy is applied to purge off the literal meaning of those passages which ascribe to God the form of man. Like a mountebank's panacea, it will have no better success when it is applied to purify those that ascribe the human passions to him. Archbishop KING*, for I think it worth my while to quote no other writer in favor of analogy, answers the objection made to this doctrine, " that if it be true all religion may be lost in mere figures," by saying " that there is great difference between this analogy and what we call figure. That the use of the last is to represent things, otherwise well known, so as to magnify, or lessen the ideas we have of them, to move our passions, and to engage our fancies; by which means they are often employed to deceive us. But that the use of divine analogy is to give us notions of things where we can have no direct knowledge." Now it seems to me that analogy is figure, or it is nothing; and that, if it is figure, it is of the kind of those which are employed to deceive us. The use of figure is not only to illustrate, and adorn things known, but to help our conceptions, and to introduce things knowable into the mind. When it is not employed to any of these purposes, to the first by orators and poets, or to the last by philosophers, figurative style is silly, unmeaning talk, or it is imposition, and fraud. We may be deceived by it, no doubt; but we cannot be deceived long, if the use of it be confined to things that are knowable by us. He

* Ubi sup.

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who is not able to tell us without any figure, what he means by the figure he employs, will neither deserve, nor have the attention of men of sense; and, besides, in matters that are knowable by us, we may discover the propriety, or impropriety of it by our own researches.

THE case of analogy is very different. It is a similitude, or resemblance of an object with some diversity, as the schoolmen say very intelligibly. But then the assertors of it say, that this object is not to be known otherwise by us, and that we must be content to know it this way, or not at all. If this assumed divine analogy differs from other figures, therefore, it differs in this, they cannot deceive long, this may deceive always. No, says theology: it never can deceive, because these analogical notions of the divine nature are communicated to us by God himself in his word. But who does not see, that this falls into the absurdity mentioned above? A theist doubts of the authenticity of this word, because such notions are contained in it. A divine justifies the notions, because they are contained in it. To want external proof sufficient to constitute this authenticity, and to have internal proof turned against it, would be too much. The weaker the former is, the more necessary it becomes to defend the latter. But then it is defended by so many arbitrary assumptions, and forced interpretations, that a bible, without a comment, can be reconciled neither to itself, nor to what we know of physical and moral nature; and that, with a comment, it is in a multitude of instances the word of man, rather than the word of God. There are not only things mysteriously, but things untruly expressed in it. In one case, God has so little regard to the weakness of our capacities, that his language is far above all human conception: in the other, it descends to that of the most illiterate ages, and of the most ignorant people among whom

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these scriptures were writ, compiled, or published. In the former, we are told that he designs to exercise our faith, which is the angular stone of every instituted religion: in the latter, that he was pleased to speak according to vulgar error, that he might be the better understood; as if the supreme intelligence, the God of truth, could stand in need of an expedient to which no philosopher would think himself reduced.

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IT is strange to observe that such a writer, as archbishop KING, should recommend his favorite analogy as the proper, and necessary, the usual and general method of teaching, and instructing mankind, and of leading them to knowledge, after he has assumed over and over, that all our knowledge of the divine nature and perfections rests on these notions solely, and can be carried no further. When we are instructed by analogy, by comparison, by figure in one word, on other occasions, it is in order to arrive at the knowledge of matters knowable. Knowledge that was to rest in these, would not be deemed knowledge, nor even that which we might think we acquired by reasoning from them; for demonstration cannot arise from real and much less from assumed similitude nor figure. It must be established on intuitive, or sensitive knowledge. The reason is obvious. Similitudes may be assumed, and figures employed falsely. We must go beyond them, and reason independently of them, to know whether they lead us to truth, or not; for the anger of God may be as improper an image, as that of his hands and feet, and there may be, as doubtless there is, in one representation no more proportion, nor resemblance, than in the other. Analogy consists of some similitude and some diversity. As fast as we perceive this similitude