



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**

LXXVII.

---

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-60777](#)

which latter character they may seem to lessen over modestly the dignity of their own order, and to raise that of the laity too high.--But I am ashamed to have said so much on this subject.

## LXXVII.

I MIGHT have concluded sooner, that an analogy arbitrarily assumed is not sufficient to excuse the literal attribution of those human passions to the divine nature, which are the disgrace of ours; that there is little or no difference in reality between one and the other of these attributions, whatever there may be in appearance, to an inattentive or prejudiced mind; and that anger and revenge were ascribed by the jews to the Supreme Being as literally as compassion and mercy, as literally as injustice in this life is ascribed to his providence by atheists and divines, or the justice of it in another is asserted by the latter. The false conceptions, and the licentious reasonings about the divine nature and providence, that have been mentioned, as well as many more, proceed chiefly from the doctrine which teaches that the moral attributes are the same in God as they are in our ideas, that the eternal reason of things, by which he acts, is open to all rational beings; and consequently that we are competent judges of his moral proceedings towards us, since we are competent to determine what his moral character requires. But these false conceptions and licentious reasonings may proceed likewise from the analogical doctrine, as contrary as it appears to the other; for by ascribing to God not human notions and passions, but something, whatever it be, equivalent to these, KING might, tho he does not, reason as dogmatically as CLARKE, a priori, from what the creator and governor of the world ought to do in

in those qualities, to what he has done which is condemned, and to what they assume he will do which is justified, and rendered his sole justification. On such conceptions, and such reasonings, the doctrine of future rewards and punishments has been established, as it is still taught. Had it been taught in terms more general, and less descriptive, had the punishments been represented, for instance, like the rewards, to be simply such as eye never saw, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man could conceive; it might have been maintained in credit, and have had an universal and real influence perhaps, to the great advantage of religion, even since the days of superstition and ignorance were over. But besides the absurdity of supposing that God inflicts eternal punishments on his creatures, which would render their non-existence infinitely preferable to their existence on the whole, as every one who has not the rage of paradoxes about him must admit; I apprehend that an air of ridicule has been cast on this doctrine by preserving all the idle tales, and burlesque images which were propagated in those days, and have been preserved in these by the united labors of nurses, pedagogues, painters, poets, and grave divines. I need not enumerate instances. They are enough known, and they have done so much to take off the solemnity, and to weaken the authority of this doctrine, that the man, who was induced to disbelieve a God by serious and pathetic discourses against his goodness and justice in the government of this world, would be hardly reclaimed to theism by an hypothesis which resembles so nearly that *mythologia de inferis* he had laughed at so often.

SINCE our divines have thought fit to risque the belief of an all-perfect Being, the creator and governor of all beings, on this hypothesis, they should have made it at least as plausible to the reason of mankind, as their objections are made  
in

in some degree to his reason, tho much more to his affections and passions; and on which they have appealed, in concert with the atheists, to this reason, and even to experience. They should not have shewn themselves so much more concerned for this hypothesis, than for the fundamental demonstrated principle of all religion, as to make, if they could, the hypothesis pass in some sort for the demonstration, and the demonstration for the hypothesis. They do little less when they attempt to prove that there is no God, if there is no future state; instead of insisting that since there is a God there may be a future state. The stoics asserted\*, that if there was a God, there was divination; and if there was divination, there was a God. "Reciprocantur ista: si divinatio sit "dii sunt; si dii sint, divinatio est." TULLY might have added in their name, "si divinatio non sit, nec dii sunt." But the heathen philosopher was on this occasion a better theist, than such a christian divine as CLARKE.

ANOTHER observation equally true, but not quite so obvious, requires to have it's place here, and to be a little more developed. Natural religion is that original revelation which God has made of himself, and of his will to all mankind, in the constitution of things, and in the order of his providence. Whatever is thus revealed is within the reach of our faculties; and the same reason which he has given us to improve the physical, he has given us to improve the moral system of our lives. Neither of them is improved equally; of which many apparent causes, and some that would be thought perhaps too refined and too hypothetical, may be assigned. But they who apply their reason the most to these improvements, provide the best for their own well being both here, and hereafter on the supposition of a future state. It would not be hard to shew

\* TULLY De divin.

one less instructed than you are, that human reason is able to discover, in this original revelation, every conceivable duty that we owe to God as our creator, and to man as our fellow-creature. It would be easy to shew that this system of duty is fully proportioned by infinite wisdom to the human state, and to the end of it, human happiness. Natural religion is therefore relatively perfect; and if it was so unrelatively, it would be very imperfect. It is therefore immutable as long as God and man continue to be what they are, as long as we stand in the same relations to him, and to one another. God cannot change; and to suppose that the relations of mankind to him, or to one another, may, or have changed, is to assume arbitrarily, and without any proof, that can be urged in a disputation of this kind. If it does not follow necessarily from hence, sure I am it follows probably, that God has made no other revelation of himself, and of his will to mankind. I do not assert that he has made no such particular revelations, as I did not presume to assert that there are never any particular interpositions of his providence: but this I will assert, that if he has made any such, the original and universal revelation must be the foundation, and the criterion of them all. Let it be, for argument's sake, that God, who knew from all eternity what the state of mankind and of every society of man would be at every point of time, determined to deal out his revelations by parcels, as legislators are forced to make new laws, and new rules of government that are adapted to circumstances unforeseen by them; instead of making a system of moral law, when he created moral agents, that might answer his whole purpose in all circumstances of time, place, and persons; just as he made a physical system of laws for the other part, the inanimate part of his creation. Let this be assumed, for argument's sake, tho it be not in any degree so agreeable to the notions of infinite knowledge and wisdom as the con-

I

trary

trary opinion: it must be assumed at the same time, that there is nothing in any of these posterior revelations inconsistent with the first, even in appearance and to our apprehensions; or it must be assumed that God himself, the supreme wisdom, is inconsistent, or gives occasion to his rational creatures to think that he is so.

I reason very unwillingly, and not without a certain awe on my mind, when I presume to speak of what God may, or may not do, as familiar as this practice is to many. But if it be free from presumption in any case, it is so when we endeavor to expose that of such men as these, and may be said rather to refute their doctrines, than to advance dogmatically any of our own. I speak in this manner when I say, agreeably to the most clear and distinct ideas I can frame, that as God, the supreme truth and reason, can neither pronounce nor imply any thing that is false, or absurd, in condescension to our capacities; so he will, in condescension to these capacities, make no revelation to us by his word, which shall be even in appearance, and to human apprehension, inconsistent with what he has revealed of himself, and of his will by his works. This revelation, and all that is contained clearly in it, is an object of knowledge. Other revelations, which we assume to be made by his word, and which we receive on the word of man, are objects of belief. Now it would be repugnant to the divine wisdom that he should perplex our knowledge in one case, or weaken our belief in the other, by suggesting inconsistent ideas of his nature, or his will. You will have learned, perhaps, to say that things, which appear in a posterior revelation inconsistent with the first, would not appear such, if we could comprehend them clearly and fully. But you will unlearn this lesson, if you consider that the common distinction, of things contrary to reason, and things above it, cannot be

VOL. V.

4 A

employed

employed, on this occasion, to any purpose that will avail. If things contained in any assumed revelation are inconsistent with the religion of nature, they are most certainly contrary to reason, since the religion of nature is collected by reason from the known constitution and relations of things, and from the known order of providence. They are therefore to be rejected. If the things contained in any such revelation be above reason, that is, incomprehensible, I do not say in their manner of being, for that alone would not make them liable to this objection, but in themselves, and according to the terms wherein they are communicated; there is no criterion left by which to judge whether they are agreeable, or repugnant to the religion of nature and of reason. They are not, therefore, to be received: and he who insists that they should be received independently of this criterion, falls into the absurdity already mentioned. He supposes them reconcileable to the original revelation God has made in his works, because they are contained in his word; whereas it is incumbent on him to shew that these very things are so many internal proofs of the authenticity of this revelation, by shewing that they are all reconcileable to the other. Divines themselves agree to this, or they mean nothing, when they take so much pains to reconcile them to it, in order to conclude, according to their usual method, that a thing is, whenever they imagine they have proved that it may be, or have said enough to make others believe so.

IT has been made a question, whether God can, consistently with his goodness, his justice, or even with his wisdom, give such secundary revelations as are assumed on particular occasions, or without any occasion and sufficient reason for them; and whether he can, consistently with the same attributes, after leaving his human creatures for a great number of

ages under the law of their nature, by which nothing but morality was prescribed, and nothing but immorality forbid, impose new and positive precepts, the precepts of mere will? The question has been agitated with equal presumption on both sides, perhaps; and certainly with much sophism, and more evasion than argument, on one side. I enter not into it. I stand on the ground I have already made, and insist, that the law of our nature is perfect, relatively to our system, and must be immutable as long as this system continues. I insist therefore, that it cannot be altered: but I may admit, for the point is not clear enough to oblige me to it necessarily, that things entirely and exactly consistent with it may be superadded to it by the same divine authority, tho' not in a manner equally authentic; and that positive precepts may be given about things which are indifferent by the law of our nature, partaking neither of morality nor immorality, and which become obligatory as soon as they are enjoined by such positive precepts. Notwithstanding these concessions it will remain true, that every instituted religion is dependent on natural religion, and should be made subservient to it.

THEY all boast that they are so, but experience shews that the very contrary is true. They consist chiefly of articles of faith that go far beyond all the knowledge we can acquire; and of external rites, ceremonies, and positive duties, that have no relation to those of the moral kind, which are all included in the precepts of natural religion. Now it is true in fact, that to believe these articles of faith, and to practise these external duties, are reputed in all these religions the most essential parts of them: so that a good man and a devout man may be always different, and are often opposite characters; so opposite, that I suspect no two characters would be found, if they could be nicely examined, in a great number of persons

to go together so seldom. This might be exemplified in many instances, but in none more strongly than in that of the jews. No nation so exact in observing fasts and feasts, and so superstitiously zealous in the practice of every ceremony of a law that abounded with ceremonies. But no nation so inhospitable at the same time, no people so uncharitable, nor so absolutely strangers to that fundamental principle of natural religion, universal benevolence.

## LXXVIII.

IT were much to be wished that the same reproach could not be made in any degree to the professors of christianity. But I apprehend that they too must pass condemnation on this head. The doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments was established, no doubt, in the christian, as in every other system of instituted religion, to enforce natural, that is, the first, the most authentic, and as we may say the mistress of all religions, since they should be all subservient to her. But this doctrine is applied, in every communion of christians, as much to enforce matters of metaphysical speculation, or positive duties, or forms of worship which are neither parts of natural religion, nor have any necessary connection with our moral obligations, as it is applied to enforce these. The mistress is set on a level with the servant, and the same regard is paid to one as to the other. But why do I say the same, when it is manifest that much more regard is paid in many instances, and in the application we speak of here particularly, to the latter than to the former? Metaphysical speculations, positive duties, and forms of worship can have no merit any further than they contribute to maintain, and improve in our minds an awful sense of the majesty of

the