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A refutation of the objections against moral good and evil

John Harris



J E R E M. ix. 24.

Let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, who exercise loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth: for in these things do I delight, saith the Lord.

IN these Words, as I have already shewed, there are these two Things considerable:

- I. A Supposition that God is capable of being known to us by his Attributes.
- II. An Account of some of those Attributes which he exerciseth in the Earth, and in which he delights.

On the former of these, I did, in my last Discourse endeavour to remove the Objections against the Attributes of God in general, and to shew that they are plainly discoverable by Reason, and agreeable to Philosophical Truth. As to the Second,

The Attributes of God mentioned here by the Prophet, and which he is said to delight to exercise in the Earth.

I think it not necessary to discourse particularly of them, having in my last Sermon shewn how They, as well as all other Excellencies and Perfections which we can discover in the Creatures, must of necessity be in the Divine Nature in the greatest Perfection;

because they are all derived from Him. But that which I judge will be more proper to be done now, as being agreeable to my Design of Answering the Atheistical Objections in their Natural Order, will be from hence to Remove two Great Barrs to the true Knowledge of God and of his Attributes, which Sceptical and Unbelieving Men have here placed in the Way. For indeed, till this be done, no true Notion of God or of his Perfections can be established in Mens Minds; nor any Ground fixt whereon to build a Rational Belief of Natural or Revealed Religion, or any kind of Worship of the Supream and Almighty Being. And these Two great Objections of our Adversaries are,

1. That there is in reality no such thing as Moral Good and Evil; but that all Actions are in their own Nature indifferent.

2. That all things are determined by Absolute Fatality: And that God himself, and all Creatures whatsoever, are Necessary Agents, without having any Power of Choice, or any real Liberty in their Nature at all.

These are two of the strongest Holds of Atheism and Infidelity, which 'tis therefore absolutely necessary to batter down and demolish: And these do in some sense communicate with and run into one another; and indeed the former plainly follows from the latter. But however, they being very frequently made use of distinctly by the Opposers of Religion, and the former being maintained by some Persons whom I cannot find do hold the latter; I shall endeavour to Refute them severally. Beginning with that which I have first proposed; viz.

That

That there is in reality no such things as Moral Good and Evil, but that all Actions are in their own Nature purely Indifferent.

And this Position our Adversaries are very express in maintaining, as will sufficiently appear by their own Words.

*The Virtues that Men extoll so highly, saith Mr. Blount (a), are not of equal weight and value in the Balance of Nature; but that it may fare with them, as with Coin made of Copper or Leather: which tho' it may go at a high Rate in one Country by Proclamation; yet will it not do so in another, for want of Intrinsic Value. 'Tis plain enough what he means by this; but how this Assertion will agree with his allowing some things to be *ἄνευ δίκαια* (b), Good and Just in their own Nature, as he doth in his Account of the Deists Religion, let the Admirers of those Contradictory Oracles of Reason, consider. But, indeed, 'tis no new or uncommon thing with these kind of Men to make Contradictory Propositions subservient to their Purposes: as they often do in this very Case. For when you upbraid them with a Disbelief of Revelation, they will say, that 'tis enough for any Man to live up to the Principles of Natural Religion, and to adhere inviolably to all things, *ἄνευ δίκαια*; for those are things that are Obligatory on all Mankind, and not like Revealed Truths, mere Political and Topical Institutions. Whereas at another time, if you tell them of some gross Immoralities that they are Guilty of, and which are plainly contrary to Reason, and to the clearest Light of Nature; Then they will answer you, That Good and Evil are only *Thetical things*; which receive their very Essence from Human Laws or Customs*

(a) *Anima Mund. in Or. of Reason, p. 117.*

(b) *Oracles of Reason, p. 89.*

- stoms only, but that by Nature nothing is either Good or Bad; and that all Actions are alike and Indifferent; so hard is it, as an Excellent Person observes (a), *to contradict Truth and Nature, without contradicting ones self.* But to go on, Spinoza takes care to deliver himself very plainly, as to this Matter. *Bonum & Malum nihil Positivum in Rebus sc. in se consideratis indicant (b).* And in another Place, he tells us, *Postquam homines sibi persuaserunt, omnia quæ sunt, propter ipsos fieri, id in unaquâq; re præcipuum judicare debuerunt, quod ipsis, utilissimum; & illa omnia præstantissima æstimare, à quibus optimè afficiebantur. Unde has formare debuerunt Notiones, quibus Rerum naturas explicarunt, sc. Bonum & Malum, Ordinem & Confusionem, &c. (c).* And the same thing also he asserts in many other places. Mr. Hobbs also expressly maintains, *That there is nothing simply nor absolutely Good or Evil, nor any common Rule about them to be taken from the Objects themselves, but only from the Person; who calleth that Good which he likes or desires, and that Evil which he hates, &c. (d)* Nothing, saith he, *is in its own Nature Just or Unjust, because naturally there is no Property, but every one hath a Right to every thing (e);* And therefore he defines *Justice to be only keeping of a Covenant (f).* And in another place he tells us, *That Good and Evil are only Names that signifie our Appetites and Aversions; which in different Tempers, Customs and Doctrines of Men are different (g).* The same thing he asserteth also in many other places of his Writings (h). And this Doctrine the Translator of *Philostratus* is so fond of, that, tho' he be sometimes very desirous of being thought an Original, yet
- (a) A. Bish. Tillotf. Serm. Vol. 4. p. 315.
- (b) Op Posthum, p. 164.
- (c) Ibid p. 37. Vid. etiam, p. 171, 185, 360, &c.
- (d) Leviath. p. 24.
- (e) Ibid. p. 63, 64.
- (f) P. 73.
- (g) Ibid p. 79.
- (h) Vid. Hum. Nature, p. 38. Element. de Cive c. 1. §. 2.

yet he Transcribes this entirely from Mr. *Hobbs* (a); as indeed Mr. *Hobbs*, according to his usual way, had before, in a great measure done from *Sextus Empiricus*; who in very many places declares that it was the Opinion of the Scepticks, *that there was nothing Good or Evil in it self* (b). And he endeavours to prove this Point, by the very same Arguments which the Modern Assertors of this Opinion, do make use of (c).

And tho' Mr. *Hobbs* boast much of his Notions about these things to be new, and originally his own; yet 'tis plain, that it was the Old Atheistick Doctrine long before *Plato's* Time. For he tells us, *Lib. 2. De Rep.* p. 358. That there were a sort of Men who maintained, That by Nature Men have a boundless Liberty to act as they please, and that in such a state, to do that to another which is now called an *Injury*, or a piece of *Injustice*, would be *Good*; tho' to receive it from another would be *Evil*: And that Men did live a good while at this rate, but in Time finding the Inconveniencies of it, they did agree upon Laws, in order to live peaceably and quietly with one another. And then that which was enacted by these Laws, was called Just, and Lawful. Ὀνομάσται τὸ πρὸ τῆ νόμου ἐπιτάγμα νόμιμον τε καὶ δίκαιον.

This is the Principle we see of those Atheistical Men: which tho' some of them do now and then take Care to conceal, or to express a little cautiously, yet they understand one another well enough: and so indeed may any one do them, that thinks it worth his while to consider seriously of, and to search into the Bottom of the Matter. And this is truly one of the Great Depths of Atheism and Infidelity: 'Tis a Principle that when once thoroughly understood and imbibed,

(a) Blount's Life of *Apollo-nius*, p. 151.

(b) ἡμῶν ἀγαθὸν πῆ ἢ κακὸν εἶναι λεγόντων ἔστιν — Pyrrh. Hypot. p. 46.

And again, p. 147. ἐκ ἀσφαλεῖ φύσει ἀγαθόν.

(c) Vid. *Sext. Emp. Adv. Math.* p. 450, 451, &c. 462, 463, &c.

imbibed, confirms a Man in the Disbelief of all manner of Religious Obligation. For he that hath once swallowed down this abominable Tenet, will, as some of the lately mentioned Writers discover themselves to do, believe nothing of the Deity, but that he is *Almighty and Arbitrary Power, or a Blind fatal and Necessary Agent*: Either a Being that makes his Will his Law, and who is not guided in his Actions or Dispensations, by the Dictates of Reason nor by any Rules of Justice and Goodness: or else one that properly speaking, hath *no Ends nor Designs at all* (a); but is *without any Understanding* (b), *Freedom of Will, Choice or Wisdom*; one who cannot possibly help doing as he doth, but is impelled in every thing by absolute Necessity. So that there being (as according to these Principles there cannot be) no Goodness in the Deity, there can be none any where: But all Actions, antecedent to Human Laws, will be Indifferent. And the Obligation that Men are under to Human Laws being only, as *Hobbs* saith, from Fear of Punishment; no doubt a Man of this wicked Perswasion will stick at the Perpetration of no Villany nor Immorality, that will any way advantage himself, and which he can commit secretly and securely; but will pursue his own Private Benefit and Interest (the only Good he understands, and thinks himself obliged to mind) by all possible Means and Endeavours.

This therefore being the Case before us, it will very much concern us to Return a fair Answer to, and fully to Refute this Dangerous Objection against all Religion, and indeed against the Good and Welfare of all Governments, and all Civil Societies: and which I wish we had not so much reason to believe, is fixt in the Minds of too many amongst us. And

(a) *Spinoz. Op. Posthum. p. 36.*

(b) *Ostendam-- ad Dei naturam neq; Intellectum neq; Voluntatem pertinere. Ibid.*

p. 18.

Vid. Etiam,

p. 29.

And in order to do this the more clearly and effectually, it will be necessary first truly to state the Point, and to dis-engage it from some Difficulties and Perplexities which our Adversaries have designedly clouded it withall. Say they whatever is the Object of any Man's Desires that he calls Good; as also whatsoever is in any respect Beneficial and Advantageous to him. And on the other hand, that which is hurtful and prejudicial to him, and is the Object of his Hatred and Aversion, that he calls Evil, and so doubtless it is to him. Now, say they further, Since that which may be *Good* to one Man, or *desired* by him *now*, may be *Evil* to another, or may by the very same Person, be hated and shunned at *another Time*; it plainly follows, that the Nature of *Good and Evil*, is perfectly precarious, and will be as various and changeable as the different Humours and Inclinations of Mankind can make it. And thus Mens Actions will be denominated accordingly. Every one accounting that a *Good one* which he likes, which promotes his Interest, and is conducible to his Advantage: And calling that an *Evil one*, which he disapproves of, and which is contrary to his Interest and Inclination.

To all which, I say, that these Men run their Argument a great way too far, and conclude much more from it than the Nature of the thing will bear. For allowing as a first Principle *that all Men desire Good*, and that they cannot do otherwise; Allowing also that Apparent or seeming Good hath the same Effect as real Good, while it is the Object of any particular Man's Desires: Nay, allowing also this *Apparent Good* to be a very precarious Thing, and to depend very much on the different Humours, Tempers and Inclinations

nations of Mankind; which is the whole Basis on which these Writers found their Argument. I say, Granting all this, it doth not come up to the Question between us, nor form any Real Objection against the natural difference between Good and Evil, and the Eternal Obligation of Morality; for the Point in dispute is not whether such an Essential and Immutable Difference as this now spoken of, be discernible in *all* the Actions of Mankind; for 'tis readily allowed that there are a great many *Indifferent*, and which are neither *good* nor *bad* in their own Natures, but may be *either*, as Circumstances determine. This, I say, is not the Case; but whether there be not *some* such Actions, as do plainly discover themselves to the Unprejudiced Judgment of any Rational Man, to be *Good and Evil* in their own Natures, antecedent to the Obligation of any Human Laws. Or in other Words, whether there be not some Actions which do carry along with them such a clear and unalterable Reasonableness and Excellency, as that they do approve themselves to be Good and Lovely to any Unprejudiced Mind, and consequently Mankind must be under an Universal and Eternal Obligation to perform them, and to avoid and shun their Contraries. As also, whether we have not all the reason in the World to believe that those Actions, which the Mind of Man can thus discover to be Morally and Essentially Good, are agreeable to the Will of God, and directed by it: And to conclude, that the Deity also acts and proceeds in all Respects according to the same Universal and Eternal Dictates of Reason, and is Just and Good, Equitable and Righteous in all his Dealings with his Creatures; and *that he exerciseth*

ciseth these things in the Earth. This I take to be the true state of the Case; and this is what we Assert, and our Adversaries Deny; and what I shall now endeavour to prove.

In order to which, it must be allowed in the
1. Place, That Man is a thinking Being, and hath the Power of Reasoning and Inference. It must be allowed also, that we are capable of Knowing this, and do most evidently discover such a Power in our selves. And since all Intelligent Creatures do naturally desire to be happy, we must do so too, and consequently endeavour to obtain that Kind of Happiness which is agreeable to our Natures and Faculties; *i. e.* a Happiness that shall relate to our *whole Natures*, and not to the Body only: Now the Happiness of any Being consisting in the free and vigorous Exercise of its Powers and Faculties, or in the Perfection of its Nature; and the Nature of Man being Reason, the Happiness of Mankind must consist chiefly in the free and vigorous Exercise of his Reasoning Faculty; or being in such a Condition as that we can do all things that are agreeable to, and avoid all such things as are disagreeable to it. Now all this supposed and granted, as I think none of it can be denied, it will plainly follow, that all such Actions as do Universally approve themselves to the Reason of Mankind, and such as when duly examined and considered, do constantly and uniformly tend towards, and promote the Happiness of Man, considered as to his whole Nature, and chiefly as to that part of him in which his Nature doth more properly consist, which is his Rational and Understanding Faculty: Such Actions, I say, must necessarily be said to be in their own Na-

ture *Good*; and their Contraries must be denominated *Evil*, after the same manner; for whatsoever is universally *Approved*, is universally *Good*: to call a thing *Good* being nothing else but to declare its conducibility to that end it was designed for. Now according to our Adversary's Assertion, Men call that *Good* which promotes their own Advantage and Happiness, and so no doubt it ought to be esteemed; all that they mistake in, being, that they don't understand wherein their true Happiness consists. And therefore if a Thing doth in its own Nature approve it self to the impartial Reason of Mankind, and can on due Examination manifestly appear to conduce to the Interest, Advantage and Happiness of Human Nature; such a thing must by all Rational and thinking Men be pronounced *naturally and morally Good*; and its Reverse, *Evil* in the same manner. And that this is the case in Reference to that which is commonly called *Moral Good and Evil*, will appear plain and evident when we shew,

2. That there are some Things and Actions which the Free and Unprejudiced Reason of all Mankind, cannot but acknowledge to be *Comely, Lovely, and Good* in their own Natures as soon as ever it considers them, and makes any Judgment about them. And this is what is apparent to the Observation of all Men to have been *ipso facto* done; and the Truth of it cannot be denied: For have not all Nations in the World agreed in paying some kind of Worship and Veneration to the Deity? Was there ever any Place where, or Time when, *Obedience to Parents, Gratitude for Benefits received, Acts of Justice, Mercy, Kindness, and Good Nature*, were not accounted reasonable, good.

good and decent things? I know some Persons have boldly told the World that 'tis quite otherwise, and that there are some whole Nations so Savage and Barbarous as to have no Notion of any Deity, who have no manner of Religious Worship at all, and who have no Notion or Idea of *Moral Good and Evil*: But when we consider that these Accounts come originally only from a few Navigators, who probably did not stay long enough at those Places to acquaint themselves with the Language of the Natives, and who consequently could not have much Knowledge of their Notions, Opinions, and Customs; it will be too hardy a Conclusion to infer positively that Men pay no Worship to, nor have any Idea of a God, only because they did not see them at their Devotions. And moreover, when we have had later and more accurate Accounts of some of those Places, which do plainly disprove the former Assertions, we have good reason, I think, to suspend our assent to them. And then as to their Notions of Good and Evil, it will not follow that they account Stealth and Murder as good and comely things as Justice and Mercy, only because these Relators had some of those Acts committed on them. For commonly they themselves shew them the way, by wickedly Robbing, Imprisoning and Murdering them; and therefore why the Poor *Indians* may not return some such Actions upon their Enemies and Invaders, without being supposed to be quite Ignorant of the Difference between Good and Evil, I confess, I do not see. And by what too often appears from their own Relations and Books of Travels, the *Indians* have not more reason to be thought Savage and Barbarous, than those that
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give us such an Account of them; for by their Actions they discover as poor Notions of Morality, as 'tis possible for any Men to have.

But after all, suppose the Fact true, as I do really believe it is not, That there is any Nation of Men so Stupid as to be quite devoid of any Notion of a God, or of the Difference between Good and Evil: All that can be concluded from hence is, that some Men may for want of Commerce with other Parts of the World, and for want of Thinking, and cultivating and exercising their Rational Faculties, degenerate into meer brute Beasts; and indeed, as such the Relators describe them; according to whose Account of them, many Species of the Brute Creation discover more Understanding, and Act, if I may so speak, more rationally; but it cannot be fairly argued from hence, that they *never have had* any Notion or Belief of these things; or that their Reasons will not assent to the Truth of them *hereafter*, when their unhappy Prejudices may be removed, and they may become civilized by Commerce. Much less sure will this Prove, that there is no Notion of a Deity, nor of Moral Good and Evil in all the other Parts of the World, and amongst Men that can think, and do exercise their Reason and Understanding. Will not a General Rule stand its Ground tho' there be a few Exceptions against it? Will Men take their Measures to judge of Human Nature only from the Monstrosities of it, from the worst and most stupid Parts of Mankind? Men may as well argue that all Mankind are devoid of Arms or Hands, or are Universally Defective in any other Part of the Body, because some few are daily born so, or rather have them cut off. We see there are often
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Natural Defects in Mens Minds as well as their Bodies, and that some are born Fools and Idiots, as well as others Blind and Lame ; and a great many we see make themselves so by their own Fault ; But sure no one will conclude from hence, that all Mankind are Fools and Idiots, unless he be a degree worse than one himself. And yet Men may even as justly make any of these absurd Inferences, as to say, there is in the Minds of Men no Power to distinguish a Natural Difference between Good and Evil, only because there are some Stupid and Barbarous People, among whom no such thing can be discovered. For my part, I do most heartily believe, that 'tis impossible for a Rational and Thinking Mind, acting as such, to be insensible of the Difference between Moral Good and Evil : I cannot Imagine that such a Person can think it a thing indifferent in its own Nature, whether he should Venerate, Love and Worship the God that made him, and from whom he derives all the Good he can possibly enjoy ; or whether he should Slight, Despise, Blaspheme or Affront him. It seems utterly impossible to me, that any thinking and considerate Man, should judge it an indifferent thing in its own Nature, whether he should honour and reverence his Father, or abuse him and cut his Throat : or that he can esteem it to be as good and decent a thing to be Ungrateful or Unjust, as it is to acknowledge and to return a Kindness, to render every one their Due, and to behave ourselves towards others, as we would have them do towards us.

I do not think that the Instances produced by a late Ingenious Writer, of some wild People's exposing their Sick and Aged Parents to die by the Severities of
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of Wind and Weather, nor of others who eat their own Children, are of force to prove that there is really and naturally no difference between Good and Evil, any more than I will believe that he cited those Passages with a design to make the World think so; for I think, allowing the truth of all these Relations, no such Inference can be thence deduced. A Practical Principle, of the Truth and Power of which a Man may be demonstratively assured, may yet be over-born in some Respects by other Opinions which Ignorance and Superstition may have set up in a Man's Mind. This Gentleman saith, *p. 25. Of Human Understanding, That a Doctrine having no better Original than the Superstition of a Nurse, or the Authority of an Old Woman, may by length of time grow up to the dignity of a Principle in Religion or Morality.* Now should a precarious and wicked Opinion over-rule a Man in one or two particular Cases, and carry him against the Rules of Morality, will it follow from thence that a Man doth believe those Rules of no Natural Force, and that it is an Indifferent thing whether he observe them or not? Ought I to conclude, that because I have read of a King that Sacrificed his Son to *Moloch*, that therefore he believed it as good and reasonable a thing to burn his Children alive, as to preserve, take care of them, and give them a good Education? Certainly, 'twould be a fairer and more reasonable Inference, to conclude that his Reason and Natural Affection was over-power'd by his Idolatrous and Superstitious Opinion; and that the reason why he did such a Wicked and unnatural Action was because he expected some very great Benefit for it from the Idol, or that he would inflict some very great Judgment upon him, if

if he did not do it. And so in the Cases above-mentioned, one may well enough believe that those Barbarous and Inhumane Wretches that Starved their Parents and Eat their Children; did not nor could not believe it was as good and reasonable so to do, as it would be to preserve them; but only that they were under the Power of some Wicked Superstition, or Abominable Custom that had unhappily crept in among them; which they thought it a greater Evil to break (if they thought at all) than they did to Act against their Judgment, Natural Reason, and Affection. For *this way (as he observes) 'tis easie to imagine how Men, may come to worship the Idols of their own Minds, grow fond of Notions they have been long acquainted with there, and stamp the Characters of Divinity upon Absurdities and Errors, &c. p. 26.* So that I cannot see any Consequence at all, in asserting the Non-existence of Moral Good and Evil, from a few Barbarous and Ignorant Wretches doing some Actions that bear hard on the Rules of Morality: For notwithstanding that they may be lost in a great measure in some places; yet these things, and many others that might be instanced in, do certainly carry such Self-evidence along with them; that a free and unprejudiced Mind must needs perceive which way to determine, as soon as ever they can be proposed to it, and considered of by it. For any one in the World that doth but understand the meaning of the Terms in any of the lately mentioned Moral Propositions, will be demonstratively assured of the Truth of them: And he will see as
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clearly that God is to be worshipped, that Parents are to be honoured, and in a word, that we ought to do to others as we would be done unto, as he assents to the Truth of such Axioms as these: That a Thing cannot be and not be, at the same Time; That Nothing hath no Properties; And that the whole is greater than any one, and equal to all its Parts taken together: For the Reason why all Mankind allow these as *first Principles*, is because their Truth is so very Apparent and Evident, that they approve themselves to our Reason at first sight. And so, I think, do all these Great Principles in Morality; they certainly affect impartial and considerate Minds, with as full a Conviction as any of the former can possibly do. And would no more have been denied or disputed than the others are, had they not been *Rules of Practice*, and did they not require something to be *done*, as well as to be *believed*. For he that rightly understands what is meant by the words *God*, and *Worship*; will see the Necessary connexion between those Terms, or the Truth of this Proposition, *God is to be worshipped*, as evidently as he that knows what a *Whole* and a *Part* is, will see that the *Whole must be greater than a Part*. And no Proposition in Geometry can be more demonstratively clear, than these Moral ones are, to Men that are not wilfully Blind and wickedly Prejudiced against such Practical Truths. For as one hath well observed (a), *Morality may be reckoned among those Sciences that are capable of Demonstration*. And that these Moral Truths have a stronger connexion one with another,

(a) Essay of Human Understanding. p. 274. 375.

ther, and a more necessary Consequence from our Idea's, and come nearer to a perfect Demonstration than is commonly imagined; infomuch, that as he saith in another place, *They are capable of real Certainty as well as Mathematicks* (b). Now if the case be so, as most certainly it is; it will plainly follow, that Those things that do thus demonstratively approve themselves to the unprejudiced Reason of all Mankind, must be *good and lovely* in their own Natures, or Morally so, antecedent to the Obligation of Human Laws, Customs or Fashions of particular Countries.

And in this plain Distinction between Good and Evil, which our Reason, when duly used, Impowers us thus at first sight to make, is founded that which we call Conscience: which is a kind of an Internal Sensation of *Moral Good and Evil*. And *this Candle of the Lord, set up by himself in mens Minds, and which 'tis impossible for the Breath or Power of man wholly to extinguish* (a); is as Natural to a Rational Mind, as the Sense of Pain and Pleasure is to the Body; for as that is given us by the Author of our Natures to preserve us from bodily Evils, and to capacitate us to enjoy such a Kind of Happiness; so Conscience is our Guard against the Invasions of Moral or Spiritual Evils; and will, if rightly followed, give us always so much Peace, Joy, and Satisfaction of Soul, as cannot possibly be had any other way. But again;

2. It is most plain also, That there are some things which do Universally and Naturally tend to promote the Happiness and Welfare of Mankind, and

(b) Pag. 284.

(a) Essay of Hum. Understand. p. 276.

others that do equally contribute to its Misery : And consequently on this Account we must esteem the former to be really and naturally *Good* things, and the latter, *Evil*. Now one would think, that one need not spend Time to prove that the Practice of Moral Virtue, doth Uniformly and Naturally promote the Happiness of Mankind, and that Vice and Immorality do as naturally and necessarily tend to its Misery. For doth not any one plainly perceive, that there is no Virtue, or Part of Morality, but what hath some particular Good and Advantage to Human Nature, connected with it, as all Vice and Wickedness hath the contrary? Doth not a sincere Veneration for that Supreme and Almighty Being, from whom all our Powers and Faculties are derived, and a consciousness to our selves that we are obedient to his Will, and consequently under his Protection; doth not this, I say, bring constant Peace, Comfort and Satisfaction along with it? and prove our greatest Support under any Troubles and Afflictions? And on the other hand, hath not generally speaking he that is guilty of Impiety, Profaneness and Irreligion, dismal Doubts and dire Suspicions in his Mind of impending Punishments, and Misery? Is not such a Mans whole course of Action, a continual state of War in his own Breast, and a constant Contradiction of his Reason and his Conscience? What hath such a Person to support him, or to give him any comfort on a Sick or a Death-Bed, when the hurry and amusements of sensual Pleasure are over; and when all the treacherous Enjoyments of this World begin to fail him, and discover themselves
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to be counterfeit and fictitious? But again, is it not plain to every one, that Truth, Justice and Benevolence, do Naturally and Essentially conduce to the well being and Happiness of Mankind, to the mutual support of Society and Commerce, and to the Ease, Peace and Quiet of all Governments and Communities? and doth it not as clearly appear on the contrary that breach of Trusts and Compacts, lying and falsifying of Mens Words, Injustice, Oppression, and Cruelty, do inevitably render that Place or Society miserable where they abound? What an unexpressible wretchedness would Mankind be in, if *Hobbs* his *State of Nature* were in Being amongst us? *i. e.* a State wherein no Man would have any Notion of Moral Virtue, but where every one should think himself to have a *right to all things*, and consequently be still endeavouring to obtain them; and making it his daily business to vex, rob, ruin and destroy all who opposed his Will, and they also be doing continually the same things against Him, and against one another. A Man must be stupidly and wilfully blind before he can assert such a *State* as this, to be as happy and advantageous to Mankind, as where all Moral Virtues are observed and exercised: And therefore Mr. *Hobbs* himself is forced to allow that rational Agents would have recourse to the Enacting of Laws for the due Government and Regulation of Society. But how these Laws should ever come into Peoples Heads, that are supposed to have no manner of Notion of any distinction between *Good* or *Evil*, *Just* or *Unjust*; and when there is in reality no such thing, is what I cannot
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not possibly conceive. On the contrary, I think that the Constant and Universal Support, that these Moral Virtues have always had from Human Laws, is a most demonstrative Argument that Men have always thought them Substantially and Morally Good and Excellent in themselves; and that they do Naturally and Eternally conduce to the good of all Societies. Indeed, some things may be, and often are Enacted or Prohibited by Human Laws, that have no real nor Intrinsick Goodness, nor Natural Evil in them; but are only *Good* and *Evil*, according to some particular Circumstances and Exigencies of Affairs. And thus God himself was pleased to appoint the *Jews* many Rites and Observances that had not any real or Intrinsick goodness in them, but only were necessary for the present Circumstances and Condition of that Nation. But then these are every where in Holy Writ, Post-poned to Moral Virtue (*a*), declared by God himself to be of much lesser Value; and whenever there was a Competition between them, *these* were to give place to *those*; which were properly speaking good in their own Natures, and of Universal and Eternal Obligation; whereas the others were only good *pro hic & nunc*. Therefore they are said by the Apostle, *to be not Good*, i. e. in themselves or in their own Natures; but only by Institution. But this is not the Case as to such Actions as we have been mentioning, which are called Morally *Good* or *Evil*; for these have been constantly and universally distinguished by Humane Laws, and have never been confounded or changed. For can any
Man

(*a*) Mich. 6. 8.
Deut. 10. 12.
1 Sam. 15. 22.
Psal. 50. 8.

Man produce a Law that ever obtained universally against paying Adoration and Worship to the Deity? against Mens honouring their Parents, or against their being Just, Good, Merciful, and Righteous in their Dealings with one another? *Against such things*, as St. Paul tells us, *there is no Law.* Nor is it possible for our Adversaries to shew us, that the contrary Immoralities were ever universally thought good and lawful; or allowed and established by any General Authority whatsoever; and should the Reverses to Moral Virtue be enjoined as Laws, and every one commanded to be Unjust, Oppressive, and Cruel, as now he is enjoined the contrary, any one may imagine what would be the dismal Consequences of it.

3. But again, Another Argument for the Natural distinction between Good and Evil, may be drawn from the Consideration of our Passions and Affections: For these are so framed and contrived by our Wise Creator, as to guide and direct us to Good, and to guard and preserve us from Evil by a kind of Natural Instinct, which we find in our selves frequently previous to all Reasoning and Consideration. Thus, we perceive a strange Horror, and very ungrateful Sensations seize upon us immediately, on the sight of a Scene of Misery, or a Spectacle of Cruelty; and as soon as ever our Ears are entertained with the doleful Relation of such Actions; so also an Instance of great Injustice or very base Ingratitude, raises a just Indignation in us against the offending Person; and we cannot avoid being uneasily moved and affected in such Cases.

Cases. While on the contrary, a very pleasing Satisfaction of Soul arises in us, when we see, or hear of an Instance of great Kindness, Justice, Generosity, and Compassion. Now this Sympathizing of our Natural Affections with our Reason; and their approving and disapproving the very same things that it doth, is a very convincing Argument that there is an Essential difference between Actions as to their being *Good or Evil*, and that we have a plain Knowledge of such a distinction. For no doubt God implanted these Passions and Affections in our Natures, and gave them this *Turn* which we plainly perceive they have, in order to prepare the way for our Reasons more thoroughly assuring us of the Natural Goodness and Excellence of Moral Virtue, when it comes to be Ripe, and sufficient for that End; and in the mean time, to keep Children and Young Persons, in whom we perceive these Natural Efforts to be very strong, by a kind of Anticipation or Natural Instinct from doing such things as their Reason, freely exercised, will afterwards condemn them for.

And now upon the whole, there being thus plainly proved an Essential and Natural Difference between Moral Good and Evil; and that the Reason of all Mankind freely and impartially exercised doth agree in this Point, that Morality conduces to the Happiness, and Immorality to the Misery of Human Nature: We may very justly conclude from hence, that all other Rational Agents must judge of *Good and Evil* after the same manner,

manner, and plainly distinguish *one* from the *other*. And they also must Know and Understand that their Perfection and Happiness (though they may differ in some Circumstances from us) doth consist in Acting according to the Eternal Rules of Right Reason and Moral Virtue. For if the Case be not so, several Rational Natures all derived from the same Deity, may come to make contradictory Judgments, even when they Act according to the Great and Common Rule of their Nature. But the Principle of Right Reason, at this Rate, would be the most precarious thing imaginable, and Men could never possibly be assured that they were in the Right in any Point, or knew any thing at all. Assuredly therefore this Great Rule of Right Reason that God hath given his Creatures to govern and direct themselves by, is no such uncertain thing, is in no respect Contradictory to it self; but must be Uniformly and Constantly the same in all Beings, that are endowed with it, when it is rightly and perfectly followed.

And from hence also we cannot but conclude, that the same Eternal, Constant and Uniform Law of Right Reason and Morality that God hath given as an Universal Guide to all Rational Beings, must also be in Him in the greatest and most exquisite Perfection. And that, not only because all Perfections and Excellencies in the Creatures must necessarily be in that First Being from whom they are derived, as I have already proved; But also, that if it were not so, God must be sup-
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posed to have given us a Rule of Action that is contrary to his own Nature, or at least vastly different from it. And that he hath contrived our Powers and Faculties so, as to deceive us in the most Material and Essential Points, and indeed hath left us no possible way of knowing the Truth of any thing whatsoever.

For, If when, as I have shewn above, God hath not only fixed in our Natures, a Desire of Happiness; but also disposed them so, that every Power Faculty and Capacity of them convinces us that the Exercise of Moral Virtue is the Way, and indeed, the only Way to make us entirely happy. If I say after all this, there be no such things as Moral Virtue and Goodness, but that all Things and Actions, both in us and the Deity, are purely and in their own Natures Indifferent; 'tis plain, *Reason* is the most ridiculous thing in the World, a Guide that serves to no manner of Purpose but to bewilder us in the Infinite Mazes of Errour, and to expose us to Roam and Float about in the boundless Ocean of Scepticism, where we can never find our Way certainly to any Place, nor direct our Course to the Discovery of any Truth whatsoever. But this not being to be supposed of the Deity, who contains in himself all Possible Excellence and Perfection; it must needs be that our Reason will direct us to conclude the Deity also guided and directed in all his Proceedings by the Eternal Rules of Right Reason and Truth: and consequently that He will and doth always *exercise loving Kindness,*

ness, Judgment and Righteousness in the Earth ; as the Prophet here speaks.

And indeed, the *Hobbian* Notion of a Deity guided only by Arbitrary Will Omnipotent, without any regard to Reason, Goodness, Justice, and Wisdom, is so far from attributing any Perfection to God, or as they pretend, being the Liberty and Sovereignty of the Deity ; that it really introduces the greatest Weakness and Folly, and the most Brutish Madness that can be ! for what else can be supposed to be the Result of Irresistible and Extravagant Will, pursuing the most fortuitous Caprichio's of Humour, without any Wisdom, Ends, or Designs to Regulate its Motions by ?

And of this the Ancient Heathens were so sensible, that they always connected *Goodness* with the Idea that they had of an *Omnipotent Mind's* being Supream Lord over all things in the Universe ; for *Mind* not guided and directed by *Goodness* was, according to them, not *νῆς* but *ἀνοια*, mere *Folly and Madness*, and consequently no true Deity. There is a Remarkable Passage of *Celsus's* to this purpose, which though introduced upon another Design, yet very clearly shews the Idea that the Heathens had of the Goodness and Wisdom of the Deity. *God*, saith he, *can't do evil things, nor will any thing contrary to Nature (or Reason) — for God is not the President or Governour of Irregular or Inordinate Desires ; nor of erroneous Disorder and Confusion, but of a Nature truly Just and Righteous. — ἀλλ' ἔτι γε τὰ ἀσχερά ὁ Θεὸς δύναται, ἐδὲ τὰ ἄδικα φύσιν βέβηλαι.*

---- εἰ γὰρ τὸ πλεονεμέλις ὀρέξεως, ἐδὲ τὸ πεπλανημένης ἀκροσμίης, ἀλλὰ τὸ ὀρθῆς ἢ δικαίας φύσεως Θεός ὅστις ἀρχηγέτης. *Orig. contr. Cels. lib. 5. p. 240. Cantabr.*

Excellently to the same Purpose, is that Saying of *Plotinus*, The Deity doth always act according to his Nature or Essence, and that Nature or Essence discovereth Goodness and Justice in all its Operations : for indeed, if these things should not be there (i. e. in God) where can they else be found? Ποιῖ τὸ Θεῖον ὡς πέρυκε, πέρυκε δὲ κατὰ τὴν αὐτῆς ἔσσαν, ἢ τὸ καλὸν ἐν τοῖς ἐνεργείαις αὐτῆς ἢ τὸ δίκαιον συνεκφέρει, εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἐκεῖ ταῦτα, πῶς ἂν εἴη; p. 265. *Ficin.*

And 'tis plain that the Heathens had a true Notion, that the Deity must be a Good, Just and Righteous Being; because several of the old Atheists, as *Protagoras*, &c. argued against the Existence of a Deity, from the Worlds being *so ill Made and Ordered as it is*, and from there being so much Evil and Misery among Mankind, as they pretended to find in the World; but now there had been no manner of force in this Argument, and it had been ridiculous to bring it, if, both the Atheistical Proposers of it, and their Antagonists, had not had a clear Notion that Goodness, Justice and Righteousness are naturally included in the Idea of a God. Accordingly *Vaninus* tells us, That *Protagoras* used to say, *Si Deus non est unde igitur Bona? si autem est, unde Mala*, *Amph. Ætern. Provid. p. 90.* And the same thing *Tully* tells us also (*Lib. De Nat. Deorum*) that *Diagoras* used to object against a Deity. All which sufficiently proves that they were all Agreed that there was some common

common Standard of Good and Evil; and that the Notion of a Deity had always these Attributes of Goodness and Justice connected with it.

And if this be so, as undoubtedly it is, we shall gain one more good Argument for this Natural and Eternal Distinction between Good and Evil, and a yet much Nobler Foundation for Morality. For we cannot but think, that a God who hath Perfect Goodness, Justice and Mercy, Essential to his Nature, and who hath Created several Orders of Being in the World, to make them Happy, and in order to display his own Glory, by his Just, Kind and Gracious Dealing with them: we cannot but think, I say, that God will give to those of his Creatures, whom he hath endowed with Reason, and a Power of Liberty and Choice, such a Method of knowing his Will, (the Way that leads to their own Happiness) as that they shall never be Mistaken about it, but by their own gross Fault and Neglect. And also that he will make the difference between Good and Evil, and between Virtue and Vice so plain and conspicuous, that no one can miss of the Knowledge of his Duty, but by a wilful Violation of those Powers and Faculties God hath graciously implanted in his Nature. And all this we see God hath Actually done: and indeed much more; having over and above connected very great Rewards with the Practice of Virtue and Morality. And hath either naturally planted in the Minds of Men a Notion of some future State, or else hath given our Nature such a Power, as that we may attain to
such

such a Notion : for we find a very plain Belief and Expectation of such a State, among many of the Ancient and Modern Heathens.

And over and above all this, he hath also given us a clear Revelation of his Will in the Holy Scripture, *that sure Word of Prophecy and Instruction*, whereby we may, if we will, gain a yet plainer Knowledge of our Duty, be more perfectly Instructed in the Method of Eternal Salvation, and find also much higher Encouragements, and much greater Helps and Assurances than we had before in the State of Nature. And all this is vouchsafed us to enforce the more effectually the Practice of Moral Virtue, and to enable us more perfectly to perform those Things, which the Universal Reason of Mankind approves as Good, Lovely and Advantageous to Human Nature.

F I N I S.

Books