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A

# Confutation of Atheism

FROM THE  
*Origin and Frame of the WORLD.*

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PART I.

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A

# SERMON

Preached at  
**S<sup>t</sup> Mary-le-Bow,**  
OCTOBER the 3<sup>d</sup>. 1692.

Being the *Sixth* of the Lecture Founded by  
the Honourable **ROBERT BOYLE**, Esquire.

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By **RICHARD BENTLEY**, M.A.  
Chaplain to the Right Reverend Father in God,  
**EDWARD**, Lord Bishop of *Worcester*.

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L O N D O N,  
Printed for *Henry Mortlock*, at the *Phœnix* in  
*St. Paul's Church-yard*, 1692.

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FRONT THE

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# Imprimatur.

*Ra. Barker, R<sup>mo</sup> in Christo Patri  
ac D<sup>no</sup> D<sup>no</sup> Johanni Archiep. Can-  
tuar. à Sacris Domest.*

LAMBETH,

Nov. 10. --92.

OCTOBER 10 1892

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the Honorable RICHARD BARKER Esq. M.P.  
By RICHARD BARKER Esq. M.P.  
Clerk of the House of Commons  
R.D.W. A.R.D. Esq. Clerk of the House of Commons



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ACTS XIV. 15, &c.

*That ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, who made Heaven and Earth and the Sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffer'd all Nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that he did Good, and gave us Rain from Heaven, and fruitfull Seasons, filling our hearts with Food and Gladness.*

**A**LL the Arguments, that can be brought, or can be demanded, for the Existence of God, may, perhaps not absurdly, be reduced to three General Heads: The *First* of which will include all the Proofs from the Vital and Intelligent portions of the Universe, the Organical Bodies of the various Animals, and the Immaterial Souls of Men. Which Living and Understanding Substances, as they make incomparably the most considerable and noble Part of the naturally known and visible Creation; so they do the most clearly and cogently demonstrate to Philosophical Enquirers

A 2 ers

Chap. 17. v. 2.

Pfal. 19. 1.

Jer. 51. 15.

Pfal. 148. 5.

147. 8.

65. 2.

rers the necessary Self-existence, and omnipotent Power, and unsearchable Wisdom, and boundless Beneficence of their Maker. This first Topick therefore was very fitly and divinely made use of by our Apostle in his Conference with Philosophers and that inquisitive People of *Athens*: the latter spending their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some New thing; and the other to call in question the most evident Truths, that were deliver'd and received of Old. And these Arguments we have hitherto pursued in their utmost latitude and extent. So that now we shall proceed to the *Second* Head, or the Proofs of a Deity from the Inanimate part of the World; seeing that even Natural Reason, as well as the Holy Scripture, assures us, That *the Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his Handywork*; That *He made the Earth by his power, He hath established the World by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the Heaven by his understanding*; That *He commanded and they were created*; He hath also established them for ever and ever; He covereth the Heaven with Clouds, He prepareth Rain for the Earth, He crowneth the Year with his Goodness.

These

These Reasons for God's Existence, from the Frame and System of the World, as they are equally true with the Former, so they have always been more popular and plausible to the illiterate part of Mankind; in so much as the *Epicureans*, and some others, have observed, that mens contemplating the most ample Arch of the Firmament, the innumerable multitude of the Stars, the regular Rising and Setting of the Sun, the periodical and constant Vicissitudes of Day and Night and Seasons of the Year, and the other Affections of Meteors and Heavenly Bodies, was the principal and almost only ground and occasion, that the Notion of a God came first into the World: making no mention of the former Proof from the Frame of Human Nature, *That in God we Live and Move and have our Being*: Which Argument being so natural and intrinsecal to Mankind, doth nevertheless (I know not how) seem more remote and obscure to the Generality of Men; who are readier to fetch a Reason from the immense distance of the starry Heavens and the outmost Walls of the World, than seek

Lucret. 5. *Præterea cæli rationes ordine certo, Et varia annorum cernebant tempora verti: &c.* lib. 6. *Nam bene qui didicere Deos securum agere ævum, Si tamen interea mirantur, &c.* Cic. de Nat. Deor. lib. 2. *Quis hunc hominem dixerit, qui cum tam certos cæli motus, tam ratos astrorum ordines, &c.* Plutarch. de plac. phil. 1, 6. *Θεῶν γὰρ ἔννοιαν ἔχον ἀπὸ τῶν φαινομένων ἀστέρων, ὁρῶντες τέρας μεγάλης συμφωνίας ὄντως αἰτίας, καὶ τεταγμένας ἡμέραν τε καὶ νύκτα, χειμῶνά τε καὶ θέρος, ἀναπλάσ τε καὶ δυσμῶν.*

one at home, within themselves, in their own Faculties and Constitutions. So that hence we may perceive, how prudently That was waved, and the Second here insisted on by *St. Paul* to the rude and simple Semi-barbarians of *Lycaonia* : *He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us Rain from Heaven, and fruitfull Seasons, filling our Hearts with Food and Gladness.* Which words we shall now interpret in a large and free Acceptation ; so that this *Second* Theme may comprehend all the Brute Inanimate Matter of the Universe, as the *Former* comprised all visible Creatures in the World, that have Understanding or Sense or Vegetable Life. These two Arguments are the Voices of Nature, the unanimous Suffrages of all real Beings and Substances created, that are naturally knowable without Revelation. And if, Lastly, in the *Third* place, we can evince the Divine Existence from the Adjuncts and Circumstances of Human Life ; if we find in all Ages, in all civilized Nations, an Universal Belief and Worship of a Divinity ; if we find many unquestionable Records of Supernatural and Miraculous Effects ; if we find many faithfull Relations of Prophecies punctually accomplished, of Prophecies so well attested,

attested, above the suspicion of Falshood, so remote and particular and unlikely to come to pass, beyond the possibility of good Guessing or the mere Foresight of Human Wisdom ; if we find a most warrantable tradition, that *at sundry times and in divers manners God spake unto mankind by his Prophets and by his Son and his Apostles*, who have deliver'd to us in Sacred Writings a clearer Revelation of his Divine Nature and Will : if, I say, this *Third Topick* from Human Testimony be found agreeable to the standing Vote and Attestation of Nature, What further proofs can be demanded or desired ? what fuller evidence can our Adversaries require, seeing all the Classes of known Beings are summoned to appear ? Would they have us bring more Witnesses, than the All of the World ? and will they not stand to the grand Verdict and Determination of the Universe ? They are incurable Infidels, that persist to deny a Deity ; when all Creatures in the World, as well spiritual as corporeal, all from Human Race to the lowest of Insects, from the Cedar of *Libanus* to the Moss upon the Wall, from the vast Globes of the Sun and Planets to the smallest Particles of Dust, do declare their absolute dependence upon the first Author and Fountain of  
all



all Being and Motion and Life, the only Eternal and Self-existent God ; with whom inhabit all Majesty and Wisdom and Goodness for ever and ever.

But before I enter upon this Argument from the Origin and Frame of the World ; it will not be amiss to premise some Particulars, that may serve for an illustration of the Text, and be a proper Introduction to our Discourse thereupon.

Ver. 8. As the Apostles, *Barnabas* and *Paul*, were preaching the Gospel at *Lystra* a City of *Lycaonia* in *Asia* the Less, among the rest of their Auditors, there was a lame Cripple from his Birth, whom *Paul* commanded with a loud voice, To stand upright on his feet ; and immediately by a miraculous Energy he leaped and walked. Let us compare the present Circumstances with those of my former Text, and observe the remarkable difference in the Apostle's proceedings. No question but there were several Cripples at *Athens*, so very large and populous a City ; and if that could be dubious, I might add, that the very Climate disposed the Inhabitants to impotency in the Feet. *Atthide tentantur gressus, oculique in Achæis Finibus*--- are the words of *Lucretius* ; which 'tis probable he transcribed from  
from

from *Epicurus* a *Gargettian* and Native of *Athens*, and therefore an unquestionable Evidence in a matter of this nature. Neither is it likely, that all the *Athenian* Cripples should escape the sight of *St. Paul*; seeing he disputed there in the Market daily with them Ver. 17. that met him. How comes it to pass then, that we do not hear of a like Miracle in that City; which one would think might have greatly conduced to the Apostles design, and have converted, or at least confuted and put to silence the *Epicureans* and *Stoicks*? But it is not difficult to give an account of this seeming Disparity; if we attend to the Qualifications of the Lame person at *Lystra*: whom *Paul* stedfastly beholding, and perceiving that Ver. 9. he had Faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. This is the necessary Condition, that was always required by our Saviour and his Apostles. And *Jesus* said Luke 18. 42. unto the blind man, Receive thy sight, thy Faith hath saved thee; and to the Woman, that had the Issue of blood, 8. 48. Daughter, be of good comfort, thy Faith hath made thee whole, go in peace. 'Twas want of Faith in our Saviour's Countrymen, which hinder'd him from shedding among them the salutary Emanations of his Divine Vertue: And he did not many mighty Matt. 13. 58.

Mark 6. 5.

*Works there, because of their Unbelief.* There were many diseased persons in his own Country, but very few that were rightly disposed for a supernatural Cure. St. Mark hath a very observable Expression upon the same occasion: *And he could do no mighty Work there, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.* Καὶ ἐκ ἰδύνατο ἐκεῖ ἐδραμίζεν δύναμιν ποιῆσαι. We read in St. Luke 5. 17. *And the Power (δύναμις) of the Lord was present to heal them.* And, chap. 6. ver. 19. *And the whole Multitude sought to touch him: for there went Vertue (δύναμις) out of him, and healed them all.* Seeing then that ἰδύνατο and δύναμις are words of the same Root and Signification; shall we so interpret the *Evangelist*, as if our Saviour had not *Power* to work Miracles among his unbelieving Countrymen? This is the passage, which that impious and impure Atheist *Lucilio Vanino* singled out for his Text in his pretended and mock Apology for the Christian Religion; wickedly insinuating, as if the Prodiges of Christ were mere Impostures and acted by Confederacy: and therefore where the Spectators were incredulous, and consequently watchfull and suspicious, and not easily imposed on, he *could* do no mighty Work there; there his Arm was shortned,  
and

*Vanini Dial.*  
P. 439.

and his Power and Vertue too feeble for such supernatural Effects. But the gross Absurdity is no less conspicuous, than the villainous Blasphemy of this suggestion. For can it be credible to any rational person, that St. Mark could have that meaning? that he should tax his Lord and Saviour, whom he knew to be God Almighty, with Deficiency of Power? He *could* do no mighty Works; that is, he *would* do none, because of their Unbelief. There's a frequent change of those words in all Languages of the World. And we may appeal with St. Chrysostom to the common Custom of Speech, whatever Country we live in. This therefore is the genuine Sense of that expression; Christ *would* not heal their infirmities, because of the hardness and slowness of their Hearts, in that they believed him not. And I think there is not one instance in all the History of the New Testament of a Miracle done for any ones sake, that did not believe Jesus to be a good person, and sent from God; and had not a disposition of Heart fit to receive his Doctrine. (For to believe he was the Messias and Son of God, was not then absolutely necessary, nor rigidly exacted; the most Signal of the Prophecies being not yet fulfilled by him, till his

Τὸ το δὲ ἐν κοινῇ συνθεῖσθαι φυλαττόμενον ἰδοὺ πῶς εἶναι. So δύναμαι is volo, Acts 4. 20. John 7. 7. and θέλω is possum. Vid. Bude Comm. L. Gr.

See John ch. 9. and Matt. 16. 14.

Passion and Resurrection.) So *Herod* hoped in vain to have seen some Miracle done by him :  
 Luke 23. 8. And when the Pharisees sought of him a sign from Heaven, tempting him ; they received this disappointing Answer, *Verily I say unto you, There shall no Sign be given to this generation.*  
 Mark 8. 12. And we may observe in the Gospels, That where the Persons themselves were incapable of actual Faith ; yet the Friends and Relations of those Dead that were raised again to life, of those Lunaticks and Demoniacks that were restored to their right minds, were such as sought after him and believed on him.  
 Matt. 17. 15.  
 15. 22. Luke 8. 4. And as to the healing of *Malchus's* Ear, it was a peculiar and extraordinary Case : For though the person was wholly unworthy of so gracious a Cure ; yet in the account of the meek Lamb of God it was a kind of Injury done to him by the fervidness of *St. Peter*, who knew not yet what Spirit he was of, and that his Master's Kingdom was not of this World. But besides this obvious meaning of the Words of the Evangelist, there may perhaps be a sublimer Sense couched under the Expression. For in the Divine Nature *Will* and *Can* are frequently the self-same thing ; and Freedom and Necessity, that are opposites here below, do in Heaven above most.

most amicably agree and joyn hands together. And this is not a Restraint, or Impotency; but the Royal Prerogative of the most absolute King of Kings; that he *wills* to do nothing but what he *can*; and that he *can* do nothing which is repugnant to his divine Wisdom and essential Goodness. God *cannot* do what is unjust, nor say what is untrue, nor promise with a mind to deceive. Our Saviour therefore *could* do no mighty Work in a Country of Unbelievers; because it was not fit and reasonable. And so we may say of our Apostle, who was acted by the Spirit of God; that he could do no Miracle at *Athens*, and that because of their *Unbelief*. There is a very sad and melancholy Account of the success of his stay there. *Howbeit certain Men clave unto him and believed*; A more diminutive expression, than if they had been called *a few*. And we do not find, that he ever visited this City again, as he did several others, where there were a competent number of Disciples. And indeed, if we consider the Genius and Condition of the *Athenians* at that time, How vitious and corrupt they were; how conceited of their own Wit and Science and Politeness, that They had invented Corn and Oil and distributed them

Tivès de av-  
d'ess, C. 17. v. 34.

to

Cicero pro  
Flacco. Ad-  
sunt Atheni-  
enses, unde hu-  
manitas, do-  
ctrina, religio,  
fruges, jura, le-  
ges ortæ atque  
in omnes ter-  
ras distributæ  
putantur. Isoc.  
Paneg. Diod.  
Sic. 13.

to the World; that They first taught Civility, and Learning, and Religion, and Laws to the rest of Mankind; how swollen and puffed up with the fulsome Flatteries of Philosophers and Sophists and Poets of the Stage: we cannot much wonder, that they should so little regard an unknown Stranger, that preached unto them an unknown God.

See John 21.  
25. and 2 Cor.  
12. 12.

I am aware of an Objection, That for ought we can now affirm, *St. Paul* might have done several Miracles at *Athens*, though they be not related by *St. Luke*. I confess I am far from asserting, That all the Miracles of our Saviour are recorded in the Gospels, or of his Apostles in the Acts. But nevertheless, in the present Circumstances, I think we may conjecture, That if any Prodigy and Wonder had been performed by our Apostle among those curious and pragmatical *Athenians*; it would have had such a Consequence, as might have deserved some place in Sacred History, as well as this before us at *Lystra*:

Ver. 11. where when the people saw what Paul had done, they lift up their voices, saying in the speech of *Lycaonia*, The Gods are come down to us in the likeness of Men: and the Priest came with Oxen and Garlands, and would have sacrificed to them, as to *Jupiter* and *Mercurius*.  
That

That this was a common Opinion among the *Gentiles*, that the Gods sometimes assumed Human shape, and conversed upon Earth as Strangers and Travellers, must needs be well known to any one, that ever looks into the ancient Poets. Even the Vagabond Life of *Apollonius Tyanensis* shall be called by a bigotted Sophist, ἑπιδημιὰ ἐς ἀνθρώπους Θεῶν, a Pe- Eunapius, cap. 2. regrination of a God among Men. And when they say, ὁμοιωθέντες ἀνθρώποις, in the shape of Men, we must not so understand it, as if they believed, that the Gods had other Figure than Human even in Heaven it self (for that was the received Doctrine of most of the *Vulgar Heathen*, and of some Sects of Philosophers too,) but that They, who in their own Nature were of a more august Stature and glorious Visage had now contracted and debased themselves into the narrower Dimensions and meaner Aspects of mortal Men. Now when the Apostles heard of this intended Sacrifice, they rent their cloaths and ran in among Ver. 14. the people, crying out, &c. *St. Chrystom* upon this place hath a very odd Exposition. He enquires why *Paul* and *Barnabas* do now at last reprove the People, when the Priest and Victims were even at the Gates; and not presently, when they lift up their Voice and called them



Ἄλλ' ἐκ ἧν  
 ἔγωγε ἐλάλω  
 λον, τῆ γὰρ οἰ-  
 κεία φωνῇ ἐφ-  
 ἔγγοντο· δια-  
 ἔγωγε ἐστὲν αὐ-  
 τοῖς ἔλεγον, ἐ-  
 πεισθὲν δὲ εἶδον  
 τὰ σέμματα,  
 τότε ἔξελαθόν-  
 τες διῆρρηξαν  
 τὰ ἱμάτια αὐ-  
 τῶν. Chryl. ad  
 loc.

Ephorus apud  
 Strab. lib. 14.

Steph. voce  
 Δέξβη.

1 Cor. 14. 18.

Acts 2.

Ver. 7.

Ver. 15.

them Gods : for which he assigns this reason, That because they spoke *Λυκαονιστῶν*, in the *Lycaonian Tongue*, the Apostles did not then understand them : but now they perceived their meaning by the Oxen and the Garlands. Indeed it is very probable, that the *Lycaonian Language* was very different from the *Greek* : as we may conclude from *Ephorus* and *Strabo* that cites him, who make almost all the Nations of *Asia Minor* to be *Barbarians* ; and from *Stephanus Byzantius*, who acquaints us, that *ἀξκωθῶ*, a Juniper-tree, was called *δέλβεια* in the Speech of the *Lycaonians*, ἐν τῇ τῆς *λυκαονικῆς φωνῆς*. But notwithstanding we can by no means allow, that the great Apostle of the *Gentiles* should be ignorant of that Language ; he that so solemnly affirms of himself, *I thank my God, I speak with Tongues more than you all.* And yet at the first Effusion of this heavenly Gift, the *Dwellers in Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia* (some of them near Neighbours to the *Lycaonians*) heard the Apostles speak in their several Tongues the wonderfull Works of God. And again, How could they have preached the Gospel to the *Lystrians*, if they did not use the common Language of the Country ? And to what purpose did they cry out and speak to them,

if

if the Hearers could not apprehend? or how could they by those Sayings restrain the people from sacrificing; if what they said was not intelligible? But it will be asked, Why then were the Apostles so slow and backward in reclaiming them? and what can be answer'd to the Query of St. Chrysostom? When I consider the circumstances and nature of this affair, I am persuaded they did not hear that discourse of the people. For I can hardly conceive, that Men under such apprehensions as the *Lystrians* then were, in the dread Presence and under the very Nod of the almighty *Jupiter*, not an Idol of Wood or Stone, but the the real and very God (as the *Athenians* made their Complement to *Demetrius Poliorcetes*) should exclaim in his sight and hearing: this, I say, seems not probable nor natural; nor is it affirm'd in the Text: but they might buzz and whisper it one to another, and tacitly withdrawing from the presence of the Apostles, they then lift up their voices and noise it about the City. So that *Paul* and *Barnabas* are but just then informed of their idolatrous design, when they rent their Cloaths, & run in among them, and expostulate with them; *Sirs, why do ye these things? we also are Men of like passions with you* (ὁμοιοπαθεῖς ὑμῶν, *Mortal men like your selves,*

Ver. 15.

Οὐ ξύλινον,  
ἢ λίθινον,  
ἀλλ' ἀληθινόν.  
Atheniensis.  
6, 15.

Ὡς δὲ δὲ τις εἶ-  
πεν ἰδὼν ἐς  
πλησίον ἀλ-  
λον.

Ver. 15.

Mortales su-  
mus similes  
as vobis homines.

<sup>S</sup> Ἔτι καὶ  
 ἴδιον  
 ἢ common  
 Expression in  
 Gr. Writers.

Αἱ δὲ ἰδωὶ αὐτῶν  
 εἰλω ἀδυνα-  
 τῶν καὶ ἀγνῶ-  
 σταν ἠμαρταν  
 πᾶσαν. Hom.

See Acts 4.27.  
 14. 5. 26. 17.  
 Gal. 2. 14.

as it is judiciously render'd in the ancient Latin Version, otherwise the *Antithesis* is not so plain: For the Heathen Theology made even the Gods themselves subject to human passions and appetites, to Anger, Sorrow, Lust, Hunger, Wounds, Lameness, &c. and exempted them from nothing but Death and Old Age) and preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities (i. e. Idols) unto the Living God, which made Heaven and Earth and the Sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all Nations to walk in their own ways: Πᾶσαι τὰ ἔθνη, not all Nations, but all the Heathen (the word Heathen comes from ἔθνη) all the Gentiles, distinguished from the Jews; as the same words are translated Rom. 15. 11. and 2 Tim. 4. 17. and ought to have been so, Rom. 1. 5. and 16. 26. but much more in our Text, which according to the present Version seems to carry a very obscure, if not erroneous, meaning; but by a true interpretation is very easie and intelligible; That hitherto God had suffer'd all the Gentiles to walk in their own ways; and excepting the Jews only, whom he chose for his own people and prescribed them a Law, he permitted the rest of Mankind to walk by the mere light of Nature without the assistance of Revelation: but that now in the

the fulness of time he had even to the Gentiles also sent salvation and open'd the door of faith, and granted repentance unto life. So that these words of our Apostle are exactly coincident with that so much controverted passage in his discourse to the Athenians: And the (past) times of this ignorance (of the Gentile World) God winked at (or overlook'd:) but now commandeth all men every where to repent. And nevertheless even in that gloomy state of Heathenism, he left not himself without witness, in that he did good (*ἀγαθοποιῶν ἐξ ἑσέρῃ*, always doing good from Heaven, which seems to be the genuine punctuation, and is authorized by the Syriack Interpreters) and gave us Rain from Heaven and fruitfull Seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. Even the Gentiles might feel after him and find him; seeing that the admirable frame of Heaven and Earth and Sea, and the munificent provision of food and sustenance for his Creatures did competently set forth his Eternal Power and Godhead; so that (stupid Idolaters and) profane Atheists were then and always without excuse: which is the scope of these Discourses.

Acts 17. 30.

Interpretation.

כך עבד הוא  
להן מבתא  
מן שמים  
ומחור  
מטרה

So that they read ἀγαθ. ἐξ ἑσέρῃ, ἢ ὑσ-τιδ. Horat. Nec siquid mirificat natura, Deos id Tristes ex alto caeli demittere cesso.

Our Adversaries have used the same methods to elude the present Argument from the Frame of the World, as they have done to

evade the former from the Origin of Mankind. Some have maintain'd, That this World hath thus existed from all Eternity in its present form and condition: but *Others* do as stiffly affirm, That the Forms of particular Worlds are generable and corruptible; so that our present System cannot have sustain'd an infinite Duration already gone and expired: but however that Body in general, the common *Basis* and Matter of all Worlds and Beings, is self-existent and eternal; which being naturally divided into innumerable little particles or atoms, eternally endued with an ingenit and inseparable power of Motion, by their omnifarious concursions and combinations and coalitions, there emergeth successively (or at once, if Matter be infinite) an infinite number of Worlds; and among the rest arose this visible complex System of Heaven and Earth: and thus far they do agree, but then they differ about the cause and mode of the production of Worlds, some ascribing it to Fortune, and others to Mechanism or Nature. Indeed as for the Astrological Atheists, they will give us no trouble in the present dispute; because they cannot form a peculiar *Hypothesis* here, as they have done before about the Origination of Animals. For though some of them

are

are so vain and senseless, as to pretend to a *Thema Mundi*, a calculated Scheme of the Nativity of our World: yet it exceeds even their absurdity to suppose the Zodiack and Planets to be efficient of, and antecedent to themselves; or to exert any Influences, before they were in Being. So that to refute all possible Explications that the Atheists have or can propose, I shall proceed in this following method.

I. First, I will prove it impossible, that the primary Parts of our World, the Sun and the Planets with their regular Motions and Revolutions, should have subsisted eternally in the present or a *like* Frame and Condition.

II. Secondly, I will shew, That Matter abstractly and absolutely consider'd, cannot have born an Infinite Duration now past and expired; as also that Motion cannot have coexisted Eternally, as an inherent Property and essential Attribute of the Atheist's God, Matter.

III. Thirdly, That, though we allow them, that Universal Matter hath endured from everlasting, divided into infinite Particles in the *Epicurean* way, and that Motion hath been coeval and coeternal with it: yet these

Parti-

Particles or Atoms could never of themselves, by omnifarious kinds of Motion, whether Fortuitous or Mechanical, have fallen or been disposed into this or *a like* visible System; though a supposed infinite Duration of the Atoms and their Motions should already be expired and gone.

IV. And Fourthly, *à posteriori*, That the Order and Beauty of the Inanimate Parts of the World, the discernible Ends and Final Causes of them, the τὸ Βελτίον, or a Meliority above what was necessary to be, do evince by a reflex Argument, That it is the Product and Workmanship, not of blind Mechanism or blinder Chance; but of an Intelligent and Benign Agent, *who by his excellent Wisdom made the Heavens and Earth: and gives Rains and fruitfull Seasons for the service of Man.*

I. And First, That the present or *a like* Frame of the World hath not subsisted from Everlasting. We will readily concede, that a thing may be truly Eternal, though its Duration be terminated at one End. For so we affirm Human Souls to be Immortal and Eternal, though ἦν ἔτι ἐκ τῆσαν, there was a time when they were Nothing; and therefore  
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their Infinite Duration will always be bounded at one Extreme by that first beginning of Existence. So that, for ought appears as yet; the Revolutions of the Earth and other Planets about the Sun, though they be limited at one end by the present Revolution, may nevertheless have been Infinite and Eternal without any Beginning. But then we must consider, that this Duration of Human Souls is only *potentially* Infinite: for Their Eternity consists only in an endless capacity of Continuance without ever ceasing to be, in a boundless Futurity that can never be exhausted, or all of it be past and present: But their Duration can never be *positively* and *actually* Eternal; because it is most manifest, that no Moment can ever be assigned, wherein it shall be true, that such a Soul hath then actually sustain'd an Infinite Duration. For that supposed Infinite Duration will by the very Supposition be limited at two Extremes, though never so remote asunder; and consequently must needs be Finite. Wherefore the true Nature and Notion of a Soul's Eternity is this: That the future moments of its Duration can never be all *past and present*; but still there will be a Futurity and



and Potentiality of more for ever and ever. So that we evidently perceive, from this instance of a Soul, That what-ever successive Duration, shall be bounded at one end, and be all *past and present*, must come infinitely short of Infinity. Which necessarily evinceth, That the present or *a like* World can never have been Eternal; or that there cannot have been Infinite past Revolutions of a Planet about a Sun. For this supposed Infinity is terminated at one extreme by the present Revolution, and all the other Revolutions are confessedly past; so that the whole Duration is bounded at one end, and all *past and present*; and therefore cannot have been Infinite, by what was proved before. And this will shew us the vast difference between the false successive Eternity backwards, and the real one to come. For, consider the present Revolution of the Earth, as the Bound and Confine of them both. God Almighty, if he so pleaseth, may continue this Motion to perpetuity in Infinite Revolutions to come: because Futurity is inexhaustible, and can never be all spent and run out by *past and present* moments. But then, if we look backwards from this present  
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sent Revolution, we do apprehend the impossibility of infinite revolutions on that side: because all are already *past*, and so were once actually *present*, and consequently are finite, by the argument before. For surely we cannot conceive a Præteritness (if I may say so) still backwards *in infinitum*, that never was present: as we can an endless Futurity, that never will be present. So that though one is potentially infinite; yet nevertheless the other is positively finite. And though this Reasoning doth necessarily conclude against the past infinite duration of all successive Motion and mutable Beings; yet it doth not all affect the eternal Existence of the adorable Divinity, in whose invariable nature there is no Past nor Future; who is Omnipresent not only as to Space, but as to Duration; and with respect to such Omnipresence it is certain and manifest, that Succession and Motion are mere impossibilities and repugnant in the very terms.

And *Secondly*, though what hath been now said, hath given us so clear a view of the nature of successive Duration, as to make more Arguments needless: yet I shall here briefly shew, how our Adversaries *Hypothesis* doth without any outward opposition destroy and confute it self. For let us suppose infinite

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Revolutions of the Earth about the Sun to be already gone and expired: I take it to be self-evident; that, if None of those past Revolutions has been infinite ages ago, All the Revolutions put together cannot make up the duration of infinite ages. It follows therefore from this supposition, that there may be some one assignable Revolution among them, that is at an infinite distance from the present. But it is self-evident likewise, that no one past Revolution can be infinitely distant from the present: for then an infinite or unbounded Duration may be bounded at two extremes by two annual Revolutions; which is absurd and a contradiction. And *again*, upon the same supposition of an eternal past Duration of the World, and of infinite annual Revolutions of the Earth about the Sun; I would ask concerning the monthly Revolutions of the Moon about the Earth, or the diurnal ones of the Earth upon its own Axis, both which by the very *Hypothesis* are coæval with the former; whether these also have been finite or infinite? Not finite to be sure; because then a finite number would be greater than an infinite, as 12 or 365 are more than an Unit. Nor infinite neither; for then two or three Infinities would exceed one another; as

as a Year exceeds a Month, or both exceed a Day. So that both ways the Supposition is repugnant and impossible.

And *thirdly*, the Arguments already used, from the gradual Increase of Mankind, from the known Plantations of most Countries, from the recent Invention of Letters and Arts, &c. do conclude as forcibly against the Eternity of the World, as against infinite Generations of Humane Race. For if the present Frame of the Earth be supposed eternal; by the same notion they make Mankind to have been coeternal with it. For otherwise, this eternal Earth, after she had been eternally barren and desolate, must at last have spontaneously produced Mankind, without new cause from without, or any alteration in her own texture: which is so gross an absurdity, that even no Atheist hath yet affirmed it. So that it evidently follows, that if Mankind had a beginning; the present Form of the Earth, and therefore the whole System of the World had a beginning also.

Which being proved and established; we are now enabled to give answers to some bold Queries and Objections of Atheists; That seeing God is described as a Being infinitely powerfull and perfectly good; and that these

Serm. III.

Attributes were essential to him from all Eternity; why did not he by his Power for the more ample communication of his Goodness create the World eternally, if he created it at all? or at least, many Millions of Ages ago before this short span of duration of five or six thousand Years? To the first we reply, That, seeing we have discover'd an intrinsecal and natural impossibility, that a successive Duration should be actually eternal; it is no less than a contradiction to it self, that the World should be created from everlasting: and therefore it is no affront to the divine Omnipotence, if by reason of the formal incapacity and repugnancy of the thing, we averr that the World could not possibly have been made from all Eternity, even by God himself. Which gives an answer to the Second Question, why created so lately? For if it be impossible to have been created eternally; there can no instant be assigned for its Creation in Time, though never so many Myriads and Millions of years since, but the same Query might be put, Why but now, and why so late? For even before that remoter period God was eternally existent, and might have made the World as many Myriads of Ages still backwards before That: and consequently

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ly this Objection is absurd and unreasonable. For else if it was good and allowable, it would eternally hinder God from exerting his Creative Power: because he could never make a World so early, at any given Moment; but it might truly be said, He cou'd have created it sooner. Or if they think that there may be a Soonest Instant of possible Creation: yet seeing that all Instants have an equal pretence to it in humane apprehension, why may not this recent production of the World, according to Sacred Authority, be supposed to be that Soonest? at least it may make that Claim to it, that cannot be baffled by such Arguments, as equally conclude against all Claims, against any conceivable Beginning of the World.

And so when they profanely ask, Why did not this supposed Deity, if he really made the Heavens, make them boundless and immense, a fit and honourable Mansion for an infinite and incomprehensible Being? or at least vastly more ample and magnificent, than this narrow Cottage of a World? we may make them this answer; First, that it is impossible and a contradiction, that a created World should be immense; because  
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it is the nature of Space and Motion; that they can never be actually and positively infinite: they have a power only and a capacity of being increased without end; so that no Space can be assigned so vast, but still a larger may be imagin'd; no Motion so swift or languid, but a greater Velocity or Slowness may still be conceived; no positive Duration of it so long, than which a more lasting may not be supposed. From whence secondly it follows; that, though the World was a million of times more spacious and ample, than even Astronomy supposes it; or yet another million bigger than that, and so on in infinite progression; yet still they might make the same Exception world without end. For seeing that God Almighty can do all that is possible; and Space hath always a possibility of being enlarged indefinitely: he could never create so ample a World, but still it would be true, that he could have made a bigger; the fecundity of his Creative Power never growing barren nor being exhausted. Now what might always be an exception against all possible Worlds, can never be a just one against any whatsoever.

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And when they scoffingly demand, Why would this imaginary Omnipotence make such mean pieces of workmanship? what an indigent and impotent thing is his principal Creature Man? would not boundless Beneficence have communicated his divine Perfections in the most eminent degrees? they may receive this reply, That we are far from such arrogance, as to pretend to the highest dignity, and be the chief of the whole Creation; we believe an invisible World and a Scale of Spiritual Beings all nobler than our selves: nor yet are we so low and base as their Atheism would depress us; not walking Statues of Clay, not the Sons of brute Earth, whose final Inheritance is Death and Corruption; we carry the Image of God in us, a rational and immortal Soul; and though we be now miserable and feeble, yet we aspire after eternal happiness, and firmly expect a great exaltation of all our natural powers. But farther we affirm, That whatsoever was or can be made, whether *Angels or Archangels, Cherubims or Seraphims*, whether *Thrones or Dominions or Principalities or Powers*, all the glorious Host of Heaven, must needs be finite and imperfect and dependent Creatures: and God out  
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of the *exceeding greatness of his power* is still able, without end, to create higher Classes of Beings. For where can we put a stop to the Efficacy of the Almighty? or what can we assign for the Highest of all possible finite perfections? There can be no such thing or notion, as an *almost Infinite*: there can be nothing Next or Second to an omnipotent God: *Nec viget quicquam simile aut secundum*; as the Heathen Poet said excellently well of the supposed Father of Gods and Men. The infinite Distance between the Creator and the noblest of all Creatures can never be measured nor exhausted by endless addition of finite degrees. So that no actual Creature can ever be the most perfect of all possible Creation. Which shews the folly of this Query, that might always be demanded, let things be as they will; that would impiously and absurdly attempt to tie the Arm of Omnipotence from doing any thing at all, because it can never do its Utmost.

II. I proceed now to the Second Proposition, that neither Matter universally and abstractly consider'd nor Motion can have endured a past Eternity. And to this I shall speak the more briefly; not only because it is <sup>an</sup> ~~an~~ <sup>an</sup> abstruse

abstruse and metaphysical Speculation ; but also of far less moment and consequence to us than the others : seeing that without this we can evince the Existence of God from the Origin and Frame of the Universe. For if the present or a like System of the World cannot possibly have been eternal, by the first Proposition ; and if without God it could neither naturally nor fortuitously emerge out of a Chaos, by the third Proposition : We must necessarily have recourse to a Deity, as the Contriver and Maker of Heaven and Earth ; whether we suppose he created them out of Nothing, or had the Materials ready eternally to his hand. But nevertheless, because we are verily persuaded of the truth of this Article, we shall briefly assign some reasons of our Belief in these following Particulars.

First, It is no Contradiction, that Matter should be produced out of Nothing. It is urged as an Universal Maxim ; that nothing can proceed from Nothing. Now this we readily allow ; and yet it will prove nothing against the possibility of Creation. For when they say, Nothing from Nothing ; they must so understand it, as excluding all Causes, both material and efficient. In which sense it is most evidently and infallibly true : being equivalent to this proposition ; that nothing can make it self, or, Nothing cannot bring its no-self out of non-entity into Something. Which only proves thus much, That Matter did not produce it self, or that all Substances did not emerge out of an Universal Nothing. Now who ever talked at that rate ? We do not create the World from Nothing and by Nothing ; we assert an eternal God to have been the Efficient Cause of it. So that a Creation of the World out of Nothing by Something ; and by that Something, that includes in its Nature a necessary Existence and perfection of Power ; is certainly no Contradiction ; nor opposes that common

Maxim. Whence it manifestly follows, That seeing God may do any thing, that implies not a Contradiction; if there be such an Essence as God, he *may* have created Matter out of nothing, or given That an Existence, that had no Being before.

Serm. II. Secondly, Some Things have been *actually* created out of Nothing. In a former Discourse we have proved sufficiently, that Human Souls are not mere modification of Matter, but real and spiritual Substances, that have as true an Existence, as our very Bodies themselves. Now no man in his wits can seriously think, that his own Soul hath existed from all Eternity; not the Stuff or Matter of it, for it is no compound Being; not the *Personality* of it, as I appeal to Common Sense; and if a man could believe, that his personal Soul hath been from everlasting, such an Opinion would be as destructive to Atheism, as to concede the contrary now. So that the spiritual Souls of Men have confessedly been produced out of Nothing. But if God hath *actually* created those intelligent Substances, that have such Nobility and Excellency above brute senseless Matter; 'tis pervercioufness to deny, that he created Matter also: unless necessary Existence be included in the very Essence and Idea of Matter.

Thirdly, Matter doth not include in its Nature a necessity of Existence. Human Souls, as is proved before, have been actually created, and consequently have not necessary Existence included in their Essence. Now can I believe, that my spiritual Soul, that understands and judges and invents, &c. hath notwithstanding a dependent and precarious Being; while the Particles of this dead Ink and Paper have been necessarily eternal and uncreate? 'tis against natural reason; and no one while he contemplates an individual Body, can discern such a necessity. But men have been taught to believe, that Extension

sion or Space, and Body are the self-same thing : so that because they cannot imagin, how Space can either begin or cease to exist ; they presently conclude, that extended infinite Matter must needs eternally have a Being. But I shall fully prove hereafter, that Body and Space or Distance are quite different things, and that a Vacuity is interspersed among the Particles of Matter, and such a one as hath a vastly larger extension, than all the Matter of the Universe. Which now being supposed ; they must abstract their Imagination from that false infinite Extension, and conceive one Particle of Matter surrounded on all sides with vacuity, and contiguous to no other Body. So that all other Matter is divided and distinct from it, by the very supposition. And hence it appears, that whereas formerly they fancied an immense boundless Space, as an homogeneous One ; which great Individual they believed might deserve the Attribute of necessary Existence : Now the whole Question is about one solitary Atom, that hath no dependence on the rest of the World ; and is no more sustained in Being by other Matter, than it could be created by it ; whether this poor Atom, sluggish and unactive as it is, doth involve Necessity of Existence (the first and highest of all perfections) in its particular nature and notion ? I dare presume for the Negative in the judgments of all serious men. And I observe the *Epicureans* take much pains to convince us, that in natural corruptions and dissolutions Atoms are not reduced to Nothing ; which surely would be needless, if the very Idea of Atoms imported Self-existence. And yet if one Atom do not include so much in its Notion and Essence ; all Atoms put together, that is, all the Matter of the Universe does not include it. So that upon the whole matter, seeing that Creation is no contradiction, that God hath certainly created nobler Substances than Matter, and that Matter is not necessarily eternal ;

Serm. VII.

Lucret. lib. 1.

nal; it is most reasonable to believe, that the Eternal and Self-existent God created the Material World also, and produced it out of Nothing.

And Fourthly, it will be allowed as true, by all those that can reach these Speculations; That whatsoever hath not necessarily an eternal self-existence included in its very Nature and Definition, (which we have proved Matter hath not) cannot have been *actually* self-existent from Eternity: so that finally there is not only a great inducement from its probability and reasonableness, but a downright Necessity of admitting the Creation of the World.

And then Fifthly, as to Motion, that we may waive some Metaphysical Arguments, which demonstrate that Local Motion cannot be positively eternal; we shall only observe in two Words; That if Matter be not essentially eternal, as we have shewed before; much less can Motion be, that is but the adjunct and accident of it. Nay though we should concede an Eternity to Matter; yet why must Motion be coæval with it? which is not only not inherent and essential to Matter; but may be produced and destroyed at the pleasure of free Agents: both which are flatly repugnant to an eternal and necessary Duration. I am aware, how some have asserted that the same quantity of Motion is always kept up in the world; which may seem to favour the Opinion of its infinite Duration: but that Fancy doth solely depend upon an absolute *Plenum*; which being refuted in my next, it will then appear how absurd and false that concept is, how easily disproved from the Motive power of Souls embodied, and the gradual increase of Men and other Animals, and many Arguments besides. Therefore let this also be concluded, That Motion cannot have subsisted in an infinite past Duration: Which was the thing to be proved.

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