

Divine Benevolence:

Or, An ATTEMPT to prove that the

PRINCIPAL END

Of the Divine

Providence *and* Government

IS THE

Happiness of his Creatures;

BEING

An Answer to a Pamphlet, entitled,

Divine Rectitude; or, An Inquiry concerning the Moral Perfections of the Deity.

WITH

A Refutation of the Notions therein
advanced concerning Beauty and Order, the
Reason of Punishment, and the Necessity of a
State of Trial antecedent to perfect Happiness.

LONDON;

Printed for John Noon, at the White-Hart in
Cheapside, near Mercer's-Chapel MDCCXXXI

[Price One Shilling.]

INTRODUCTION.

THERE cannot be a controversy of greater importance, than that which relates to the divine perfections. On our right apprehensions of these religion entirely depends: on these all our hopes of happiness are entirely built. For unless we know what God is, and entertain clear conceptions of his perfections, and particularly of his moral attributes, we shall neither know how to behave towards him, nor what we are to expect from him according as we do behave: We shall be apt to attribute to him those things that are real imperfections, and shall very probably be sadly perplexed in accounting for his various dispensations towards mankind. It is a work therefore of great service and use to mankind, to put them in a way of thinking more clearly concerning the perfections of God, and avoiding the mistakes we are apt to fall into relating to this point.

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The author of a pamphlet entitled *Divine Rectitude, &c.* has made a laudable attempt of this kind, which I have observed to have been greatly commended by persons whose judgments I value; but to me, though there be many things in it which I could join in applauding, yet the general method of his reasonings appears rather to increase than to abate the perplexities of this subject, and (which seems to me a point of the greatest consequence) to render our expectations from the divine being very precarious and uncertain. This, I hope, will be esteemed a sufficient vindication of my attempting to reconsider this subject, and to make my remarks on the abovementioned dissertation; in which remarks, I hope, the author of that work will have no reason to complain of any designed misrepresentations of what he says, or of any treatment unfuitable to that excellent temper and good sense that discovers itself in his performances.

Divine

Divine Benevolence

SECTION I.

It been the common method of those who have treated of the moral perfection of God, to consider this as distinguished into several attributes; the principal of which are *goodness*, *justice* and *veracity*. And this has been done, I think, upon the justest ground, because the greater number of true propositions we know concerning God: provided each of these be clear in themselves, and really distinct from each other; the clearer notion we have of God himself, the better we are furnished for arguing concerning him, and may more easily judge what conduct to expect from him. This is certainly true, though all the moral perfections of God were allowed to be founded in one uniform principle of action. Suppose for instance, that this principle is moral rectitude, and that God is

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good, and just, and true; because otherwise there would be a defect in this his moral rectitude. Yet it is certain, that I know more of God by knowing that he will ever act according to goodness, justice, and truth or veracity, than if I only knew that he would always act agreeable to the moral fitness of things, or as it is fit he should. And from the former I should at least more *readily* and *easily* know what to expect from him. It is told me in the word of God, *that Christ judge the world*; now, shall not I more readily discern the certain truth of this proposition, if I assured that this is the declaration of him that cannot lie, than if I were only told, that this is said by him that always acts according to moral rectitude? For I can perhaps perceive no moral fitness in this, that Christ should be the judge of the world. 'Tis sure, it may be said, but it is morally fit that God should not deceive and impose on his creatures; and therefore it follows from the moral rectitude of the divine being, that since he has said it, Christ will be the judge. I don't deny it. But yet it's plain, that before you can come to the conclusion, you are obliged to make the divine veracity a medium of your Proof. And the like examples might be easily given with respect to the other moral perfections of God. Wherefore the least inconvenience that can arise from abstracting from these, and resolving into moral

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rectitude, will be to make our arguments relating to this subject more tedious and laborious. If moral rectitude be indeed the foundation of all the moral perfections of God, the most proper method of procedure would be, from hence to deduce goodness, justice, and veracity, and the like, and then to go on in our enquiries concerning the divine dispensations; for till we have clear notions of these, and know whether they do, or do not belong to God, I am sure every one must acknowledge that nothing but mistakes and blunders can be expected in such enquiries; and therefore nothing can be more unreasonable than designedly to abstract from them, when we are employed in these disquisitions. But to come to the Author of the above-mentioned dissertation, whom, for the future, to avoid multiplicity of words, I shall call our Author. He tells us, *P. 4.* that “however we may divide and distinguish the moral perfections of God, according to the different effects, dealings, and dispensations resulting from them; yet in themselves they seem to be but one and the same perfection variously exercised on different objects and occasions, and in different cases and circumstances and cannot therefore, without error and inconvenience, be considered as distinct attributes.”

This Perfection is that of God's determining himself by moral fitness, or acting perpetually according

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to the truth, nature, and reason of things;" which is what, in other places, he calls Moral Rectitude. And, in *P. 30.* he tells us, that

"his chief aim is to endeavour to shew the convenience and advantage of considering the moral perfections of the Deity, under the idea of rectitude, rather than in the mixed light of many distinct attributes."

My design, on the other hand, is to show that there is no convenience in this method ; but especially to take notice of those errors which he has fallen into, perhaps by adhering to it. As to the former part of this design, I have already, in some measure, prevented myself; but the consideration of what our author has advanced, in support of his opinion, will give occasion for some farther illustration of this point. He says the moral attributes of God are really one, and therefore they cannot without error and inconvenience be considered as distinct. If by their being but one he means only that they may be all comprehended under one general notion, as so many distinct species, I don't deny it; but that they are as such, really different, none, I think, can deny; and therefore it does not follow from the general notion in which they may agree, that they cannot, without error and inconvenience, be considered as distinct. Is it not plain that the ideas of goodness and veracity are distinct? May not a person be veracious, and yet wicked ?

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Where then can be the error of conceiving of these two attributes as distinct, when they really are so? If these two attributes really belong to God, then two distinct moral attributes belong to him; or else we must mean precisely the same thing, when we say of God that he cannot lie, as when we say that he is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. And as there is no error in conceiving of the moral attributes of God as distinct, so neither is there any inconvenience in it, nor any occasion to have recourse to our Author's method to escape the perplexities to which the other exposes us; as he asserts, *Pag. 6.*

To support which, he represents it as common for men to bewilder themselves in searching for the boundaries between divine justice and goodness: By the one of which; he says, is generally understood a *communication of blessings*; by the other, an *infliction of judgments and calamities*; and then adds, with a note of admiration, as if God were not equally righteous in both dispensations.

I can hardly think that any one did ever really entertain this notion of justice and goodness. To communicate blessings may in many cases arise from foolish fondness and partiality, and have nothing of real goodness in it; and to be sure the infliction of calamities, the causing of distress and misery may as well be supposed to arise

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from malice and ill-nature, as from justice.

I can't therefore well understand what our author means by persons puzzling themselves in searching for the boundaries between goodness and justice, *i.e.* according to the definition he here gives of these words, between a communication of blessings, and infliction of judgments and calamities.

If any having entertained such an imperfect notion of justice and goodness have been perplexed in searching for the boundaries between them, this does not discover any inconvenience in considering justice and goodness as distinct, according to the proper signification of the words.

By the goodness of God we ought, I think, to understand a *disposition to communicate happiness to his creatures in general*; so that the end of goodness is answered by every action that produces more happiness than misery. By justice we are to understand a *disposition to take care of the support of the cause of virtue and righteousness, by the distribution of proper rewards and punishments*: And, taking the words in this sense, there is so far from being any real [fix], that there is not so much as the least seeming inconsistency between them; nor do these attributes, properly speaking, ever set bounds or limits to each other; for what justice requires, goodness cannot forbid, and what goodness demands, justice cannot oppose. 'Tis, indeed, usual enough (11)

to represent these as opposite. Justice, we say, requires the punishment of the sinner, and goodness pleads for his pardon. But this is only a popular way of speaking; for justice requires the punishment of the sinner only as a means of preserving the reverence due to the divine laws; and where it is necessary for this end, goodness cannot oppose the punishment, because the general happiness of the creatures of God cannot be supported, but by maintaining the authority of his laws: and, on the other hand, where this end can be secured without the punishment of the guilty, justice does not absolutely require it. Indeed, if we consider justice as implying in it hatred and revenge against the sinner, or suppose that it obliges to punish the guilty, where no better end is answered by it, than merely his misery, which seems not to be very different from the opinion of our author, it would then be very difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile this with goodness; and the belief of two attributes in the divine being, really opposite to one another, might easily lead us into endless perplexities.

But, allowing the afore-mentioned to be the true ideas of divine goodness and justice, there can no difficulty arise from supposing them both to belong to God, and therefore, from hence, no necessity appears of having recourse to our author's method. But that I may once for all show, that as his method (12)

may, very easily, lead us into mistakes; so it cannot possibly clear up any difficulty, or give a fair solution to any objection, unless where, by a round-about way, it at length coincides with the common method, consider the following instance.

Suppose a person were to object against what is said, *2 Kings, ch. xx. ver. 1.* and should say that it could not be the word of God, because it represents the prophet as telling *Hezekiah* that he should die of the sickness that was then upon him, whereas we find he recovered, and lived fifteen years afterwards: The difficulty of this objection lies plainly in this, that such an assertion being false, could not proceed from a being of perfect truth and veracity. Now is it any ways agreeable to the just rules of arguing in the solution of this difficulty to abstract: from the particular consideration of the divine veracity, and to appeal to the moral fitness of things? Or what could we possibly gain by such a conduct, unless it were to impose on ourselves or the objector? Suppose we could find an hundred reasons that should prove the fitness of the prophet's thus speaking to *Hezekiah*; yet nothing can really take off the force of the objection, but what shows that, in the place mentioned, there is nothing said inconsistent with the divine veracity; and the like may be said with respect to any other difficulties of this nature. If any phaenominon (13)

be asserted, or at first view appear contrary to any one of the perfections of God, it is plain, I think, to any person that has the least notion of reasoning, that there can be no way of reconciling

the proposed difficulty; but by showing either that the fact is falsely represented, that the perfection to which it is said to be contrary, is not really a perfection of God, or else that there is no inconsistency between them. But whilst we allow the perfection really to belong to God, and own the fact that seems contrary to it, to desire a person to abstract from that particular perfection, and to consider moral rectitude in general, looks more like a design to amuse than instruct; at least at first view it does not seem to be the conduct of a fair arguer.

I have all along hitherto gone upon the supposition that all the moral attributes of God might be comprehended under the idea of rectitude, or that the whole moral conduct of God is directed by a regard to the reason and fitness of things. But it seems plain to me, that in this description there is something wanting for the full and complete explication of this point; for did we only know that God will act according to moral rectitude, which in plainer words is only that he will act, *as it is fit he should*, we should hence in no one particular be able to guess what conduct to expect from him, unless we

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are also informed what it is in an action which renders it fit to be performed; nor without this can we possibly make any use of our author's general notion of rectitude. Now, as the desire of some end must be the motive to any action, so 'tis the nature of the end designed, and which the action is proper to effect that renders it good or bad, fit or unfit to be performed. When therefore we say, that God is in all his actions governed by the reasons and fitness of things, we must, I think, mean, if we would understand ourselves, that he is moved to every action by a regard to some good and valuable end, and always chooses that way of conduct which is most proper to bring about the end designed. This seems to be the only notion we have of a wise and reasonable action, and *this end* ought to be taken notice of in the description of divine rectitude.

Thus, for instance, if you suppose with me, that the view by which the divine being is directed in all his actions¹, is a regard to the greatest good or happiness of the universe, then the moral rectitude of God may be thus described, *viz.* That it is a disposition in him to promote the general happiness of the universe: Which definition would in effect be the same with that given by our author, if we

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suppose that a tendency or fitness in things to produce happiness, or to prevent mischief, is that which constitutes the fitness of things; but whatever it be, whether a tendency to promote happiness, or order and beauty, or the like, that renders actions fit to be performed, this must be mentioned in the definition of divine rectitude, if we would have it of any use in our inquiries about the divine perfections or conduct for only to know that God will act according to the fitness of things, will make us no wiser in relation to this matter, than a person's knowing that he ought to act according to the fitness of things, or, as it is fit he should, will lead him into a right moral conduct. The first thing therefore that we have to do before we can determine anything concerning the moral perfections of God, or hope to solve the difficulties relating to the conduct of his providence, is to find out what it is that renders actions fit to be performed, or what is the end that a good and virtuous being, as such, is in pursuit of. And it is to be observed, that as we shall find this to be one and the same, or different and opposite, so it will appear that God is directed in his moral conduct by one uniform principle or not; for though we have got one word

¹When I speak of the divine actions throughout this difference I always mean his actions towards his creatures, though that should not be particularly mentioned.

[Rectitude] to express the moral perfections of God by, as we might easily find another that should express both his natural and moral ones together; yet that perfection cannot be really one (16)

and the same, that includes in it the desire of two opposite ends. If we suppose that God desires the happiness of his creatures, and at the same time the beauty and order of his works, if these two principles of action often clash and interfere, and set bounds to each other; this cannot be to represent him as governed by one uniform principle, tho' his love of order, and his love of his creatures, be both called moral rectitude: but if his moral rectitude be nothing else but a desire or inclination to preserve a constant regard to the general happiness of the universe in all his actions, then he is in this view represented as truly governed by one uniform principle; though we should afterwards find it very convenient to reckon justice, veracity, mercy, patience, &c. as particular species or branches of this rectitude. Our author therefore seems very far to have swerved from the main design he professes he had in view; which was to consider the moral perfection of God under one simple notion, rather than in the various and mixed light of many distinct attributes; when he supposes that the rectitude which he represents, as comprehending all moral perfections, really includes in it a regard to different and opposite ends; and consequently is only one word contrived to express several attributes, not only distinct from, but many times really opposite to one another. Had he instead of thus comprehending

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all the moral attributes of God under one word, shown how they are all derived from one uniform principle of action, or how they result from the supposition of the desire of one uniform end; he had acted much more agreeably to his own pretensions, and had explained a truth of very great importance in the consideration of the moral perfections of God; but he seems, on the contrary, to have studiously endeavored to find out as many distinct reasons or ends of the divine conduct as possible he could, and then supposes that there be many more, of which we have not the least notion or conception. Now, can any one think that he represents the moral perfections of God in a distinct and unmixed light by including them all under the term rectitude, when at the same time he tells us, that this rectitude implies in it a regard to different ends which do often interfere, but how far we know not; and a regard to various other reasons which we have no conception of? But lest this should be looked upon as misrepresentation, hear what he says himself. After having observed that it is commonly presumed that the communication of happiness was the sole end of God in creating the world, he says, *P.11.*

“I see no absurdity in supposing, that the creator might have various ends and designs of which we have not the least conception. But not to insist on this, it deserves to be considered, whether with in the compass of our own Ideas we may

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not find some other intention befitting the wisdom and rectitude of the supreme being. We seem to have grounds for such a supposition both from reason and revelation.”

And again, having represented order and beauty as an end aimed at in the works of God distinct from the happiness of his creatures, he says, *P.14.*

“ Where, and how far these ends do in fact interfere, is above the power of man to determine. But it does not appear to me, that the order, beauty, and harmony of the universe are merely intended to subordination to the welfare of creatures; on the contrary,

I know not whether the latter be not subordinate to the former, and limited by it.”

I hardly need here observe what a melancholy aspect it would have upon the creatures of God were this supposition true, that God in creating, and in his acts of providence, has various ends and designs distinct from, and in some respect opposite to their happiness; for as of the importance of many of these ends, a regard to which may limit his regard to the happiness of his creatures, we know nothing, how can we be sure that they may not so far prevail as entirely to destroy it? We are sure, indeed, that God will act towards us according to the fitness of things; but this fitness of things is very different from a fitness to produce happiness, and we must be acquainted with various other ends and designs of the divine being, before we can judge what it is fit

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him to do or not to do; and consequently before we can judge what conduct; we are to expect from him. We are apt to flatter ourselves that God designs our happiness, this is indeed allowed to be a right design, but it is not his whole design. He may perhaps have various other ends in view, ends for ought we know of much greater importance, and to which the happiness of his creatures must yield. Our author seems to suppose it impossible for us to determine how far a regard to the happiness of his creatures and the other views of the divine being do in fact interfere. I am sure then 'tis impossible that we should be certain that they will not so far interfere as wholly to destroy it; nor is it possible for us in any case to know what conduct we are to expect from God, when only one or two of those various ends that regulate his actions are known to us, and we suppose that there are various other ends, which may have as powerful influence, and may interfere with these. When therefore such melancholy consequences plainly arise from this notion, tho' it be no direct disproof of it; yet thus much will be gained by it, that I shall have every good-natured man so far on my side, as to wish it might prove false; and I may expect to be heard without prejudice, whilst disputing against an opinion, which, if true, would have such an ill aspect even upon good men.

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SECTION II.

This therefore I shall now set myself to do, and endeavor in opposition to it to prove these two points, 1. That God in his acts of creation and providence had a regard to the happiness of his creatures, and that he is really benevolent towards them. And, 2. That we have no reason to suppose that he is in his actions towards them influenced by any other principles; at least, by any other, that are not entirely coincident with, or perfectly subordinate to this. The former of these propositions I might omit the proof of, because it is not expressly denied by our author, and very plainly follows from some of his concessions; but as this is indeed a point of the highest importance, and ought to be proved before we come to consider the latter, I was unwilling wholly to pass it over. Now the only ways in which this point can be made out, are either from reason or experience: By reason, from the observations of the works of God, we justly conclude that he is a most wise, and powerful, and infinitely perfect being; and such a being can't be supposed any ways indigent, but must be perfectly happy, being liable to no infelicity from ignorance or weakness; and consequently he can't be influenced to do evil, or to lessen the happiness of his creatures from any interfering of their interests with his. Hence it is plain, that the creatures of God have no

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reason to fear any injurious treatment from him.

Thus far, I think, the case is very plain, but it is commonly apprehended that the goodness of God may from the foregoing principles be more strictly demonstrated after the following manner: The divine being, as infinitely wise, must be perfectly acquainted with the true nature and relation of things, must always know what is fit and proper to be done; and having no passions temptations to draw him aside from what is in itself reasonable and fit, must in every case act accordingly. But to make a good or innocent being miserable, is a thing in its own nature always unfit and unreasonable, and to communicate happiness to such kinds of beings, is always agreeable to reason; and therefore we may certainly conclude that God will conduct himself in this manner towards his creatures. I will not pretend to say that this argument is fallacious, but there is one part of it that to me is not so clear as I could wish. When it is asserted that to communicate happiness is a thing in itself fit and reasonable, I am at a loss to know what is the meaning of the expression. An action is, I think, then *reasonable* when there is a good reason for the performing it. But if we thus understand it in the foregoing argument, there is something still wanting to complete the demonstration; for it may then be justly asked, what is the reason why God should communicate happiness to the good and innocent?

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Will you say that the reason for it is that such a procedure is agreeable, and the contrary opposite to the nature of things? If so, I should then ask what things is such a procedure agreeable to the nature of? Is it to that of the creatures? Is it agreeable to their nature as sensible beings? It is certainly pleasing to them as such; but this is entirely besides the question, and abstracting from this sense of the word, I don't see but that pain and misery is as agreeable to the nature of a sensible being, as pleasure and happiness. Is then such a procedure agreeable to the nature of the divine being, and the contrary opposite to it? It certainly is if we suppose him benevolent; but this is begging the question; Or will you say it is agreeable to his nature, as a wise and intelligent being, without considering whether he is really benevolent or not? I should be extremely pleased to see this proved, because nothing could then be a stronger demonstration of the divine goodness. But to do this, is at present beyond my skill. I don't find (I am sorry to say it) any necessary connection between mere intelligence, though ever so great, and the love or approbation of kind and beneficent actions. I must therefore leave this proof to better hands, and content my self with showing in a more popular way, that God is really benevolent, without pretending to discover the reason why he is so. And to this purpose I would observe it as matter of fact, that God has

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made many beings capable of very great happiness, and that he has plainly made, if we only consider this world, very plentiful provision for their happiness. Now it is not conceivable with what view he has done this, if not with a design to promote their happiness. He must do it either with an intention to communicate happiness or misery to them, since we don't suppose that his felicity has any dependance on his creatures, or else with no view or design at all; for that action, by which the happiness or misery of no one being in the universe is promoted, is in effect the same as none at all. But we can't suppose that God designed the misery of his creatures; to suspect this, nothing in our minds, nothing in the appearances of things, gives us any reason: We must therefore conclude that it was with an intention to communicate happiness that the universe was created, and that the divine being is really most benevolent and kind to his creatures; and in this conclusion we shall be abundantly confirmed by observing the works of God. Take notice of

them, and where you admire their curious and beautiful contrivance, you will always observe the marks of goodness as well as wisdom. Some particular appearances it may perhaps be hard to reconcile to our ideas of perfect goodness, but we shall ordinarily find that these are the effects of general laws, that in the main are useful and beneficial; and it is not to be expected but that we, who have but

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very imperfect views of things, should sometimes meet with difficulties that we can't easily account for, though we shall never find any that really overthrow our notion of a perfectly good and benevolent Deity.

Besides this, it is plain that we are so formed as necessarily to approve of kind and beneficent actions, and to dislike a cruel and barbarous character: If this is a consequence of our being intelligent and rational creatures, God also is infinitely wise, and therefore infinitely good; but if we cannot see this connection between intelligence and goodness, or an approbation of what is kind and benevolent: yet our being thus formed, is a strong proof that our Creator is really good, since nothing can be a greater security to the general happiness than this; and a being that had no regard to the happiness of his creatures, would never have made the most sublime and satisfying pleasures the constant attendants of kind and beneficent actions. We have; I think, from such considerations as these, the justest reasons to be assured that the divine being is really benevolent, or does intend the general happiness of his creatures. I put these as equivalent expressions, because I suppose he would not design their happiness, if he did not desire it, but should be full as well pleased to see them all *ruined* and *miserable*. But our author has nicely distinguished these two things: He freely owns that God intends the happiness of his creatures,

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but seems very unwilling to allow him to be benevolent at all. He supposes he does good to them, not because he desires their happiness, but because such a conduct is agreeable to the reasons and natures of things. As if supposing the divine being, perfectly indifferent to the happiness or misery of his creatures, there could be any reason why he should choose one rather than the other. But let us hear what our author has said himself on this head:

“I cannot avoid thinking (says he, *P.9.*) that the divine goddess is very much misapprehended, when it is considered as a physical propension, or disposition of nature analogous to those affections and propensities which he has given us; such a disposition would be so far from constituting moral goodness, that it would derogate from it in proportion to its influence. To suppose in the Deity a benevolent disposition necessary in itself and in its operations, is to suppose what is utterly inconsistent with the perfections of the Creator, and the obligations of his creatures. And supposing it did not necessarily produce beneficent actions, but to be consistent with freedom and choice; yet still, in proportion to the extent of its influence, it would depreciate good actions, and detract from the merit of the agent.”

What would be the consequence of supposing such a benevolent disposition in the Deity, as would destroy the freedom of his actions I

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am no ways concerned to mind; since all I contend for is, that God is necessarily good or benevolent, and this no more destroys his liberty, than his love of order and abhorrence of confusion, which is allowed by our author to be in the Deity, as unwilling as he is to own that he has any love to his creatures. Now against such a necessary benevolence he has said nothing, but

that according to the extent of its influence, it would *depreciate good actions, and detract from the merit of th, agent,* I can't but observe here, that by the same way of reasoning exactly he might prove that there is a contrary disposition in the divine being; for that would enhance the value of good actions, and exalt the merit of the agent; and his illustration of his argument from moral goodness in men, will as well suit this case as the other. If a person producing a certain quantity of beneficence, has the greater moral merit the less he is supposed influenced by benevolence ; and if we suppose him entirely without any natural affection, his moral merit would still be increased: by parity of reason, 'tis certain it must follow, that to produce the same quantity of beneficence with a contrary natural disposition must imply still a much higher degree of moral merit. But it is, I think, plain enough that there is no great force in such reasoning as this; for in what sense does the supposition of benevolence in the divine being depreciate his good actions? Does it

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render them less fit to be performed? This certainly can't be said, consequently the actions are full as good in themselves, as if he were altogether destitute of benevolence. Or does the performance of them imply less perfection in him? This will probably be said, because the more he is supposed influenced by benevolence, the less he appears to regard the moral fitness of things, or moral rectitude. This indeed might be the consequence if actions were not therefore fit to be performed, because they have a tendency to promote happiness; or, which is the same thing; if benevolence were not the main part of divine rectitude, which seems to be a point extremely plain, and is very agreeable to the concessions of our author. He owns it is intrinsically right and fit for God to communicate happiness to his creatures; if so, to desire their happiness, must be a right affection, and consequently there would be a defect in the divine rectitude if he were not benevolent. But for what reason should I go about to show that the perfection of the divine being is no ways lessened by supposing benevolence to be the principle of his actions, when 'tis plain that we hardly have any other notion of a good and amiable action, but that it proceeds from this principle? If kindness or a good disposition be not the spring, no matter what the nature or consequence of the action be, however beneficial it may be to us, we like the being that produced it never

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the better; we don't think our selves obliged to gratitude, or imagine him any ways the more perfect, as to his moral character on the account of it.

As to the other part of the objection against this truth, that it detracts from the divine merit to suppose him influenced by benevolence, I confess I really don't well understand it, and therefore can't give a particular answer to it. But if there be sense in saying that the divine being merits by way of his actions, kind and benevolentaActions surely can't be the least meritorious. However, we may allow our author his own way of reasoning, and suppose that necessary benevolence in the divine being depreciates the value of his actions, and detracts from his merit as much as he pleases. But does it do this any other wise than as it adds to perfection of his nature? If the more imperfect any being is, whether it be by want of benevolence or ability, though he should merit the more by the same good actions, does it yet follow for this reason that we are confusing the honor of any one by denying or lessening his natural perfections, in order to enhance the merit of his actions? In this case we may more admire the actions, but in the other shall more admire and love the being that was the author of them. If God have no benevolent disposition towards his creatures, 'tis indeed vastly admirable that he should be so constant in

doing good to them; but still if they had just reason to apprehend
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that all the good they receive from him was very far from being the effect of any real kindness to them, they could not, I think, according to the present constitution of our nature, be hence induced to love or gratitude. Take away the supposition the divine benevolence, and he no longer appears amiable and lovely, he no longer remains the object of our trust and confidence; other perfections render him awful and great, but 'tis this alone renders him the delightful object of our contemplation and trust.

SECTION III.

This point therefore being, I hope, sufficiently clear, *viz.* That we ought to conceive of God as truly benevolent. I come now to consider whether we have any reason to imagine that he is actuated by any other principles distinct from this, or which are in any case opposite to it; and that he is not, will sufficiently be manifested, if it should appear that to a wise and rational being those things that have no relation to happiness, must necessarily be looked upon as indifferent. In order to make out which, let us suppose a person entirely unconcerned with any sensible being whatsoever, and see if you can observe any reason why he should at any time act contrary to his own happiness, or esteem any actions fit and proper to be performed that are not conducive to his own felicity. For it's plain, since we suppose him to be a solitary

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being, that has no connection with any other, no desire of their happiness or influence upon it, his condition can't be rendered better, or worse, more or less eligible, but by that which increases or diminishes his own happiness; for what reason then can he choose or approve of any action, but as it tends to this end? I don't deny but such a solitary being might have various inclinations and affections distinct from a calm regard to his own interest, some of which might engage him to do things whereby his own real happiness would be diminished. He might be led also by the constitution of his nature to approve of some actions as amiable and decent, without thinking of their tendency to happiness; but then, if he acted as a wise and rational being, he would reflect on these his inclinations, and affections, and determinations of his mind; and as far as he found that they were really prejudicial to him, so far he would be willing to alter and correct them: nor can any one possibly blame him for such a conduct, since being supposed to have no concern with any other sensible beings, he can't regard them; and on his own account, nothing can be eligible but what is conducive to his happiness. 'Tis easy to say that some actions are fit and reasonable in themselves, without any regard to happiness, on which account they ought to be performed; but really to conceive of any such fitness in the case of the being we have supposed is, I think, absolutely impossible.

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For what is it can render an action fit to be performed, but the effects it tends to produce? and what can any effect be to such a solitary being, that is not an addition or diminution to his happiness? Does not every one at first view see, that to him it is to all intents and purposes the very same as none at all, and therefore must be utterly unworthy of his choice?

Besides, if this being could be reasonably influenced by any motives not entirely subordinate to a regard to his own happiness, these motives must have some weight even in opposition to it; otherwise their force will (if I may so speak) be infinitely small, or nothing: and from hence it would follow, that a person may have just reason to do those actions that will be

hurtful to himself, when he knows no one being in the world can be the better for them. But if such a conduct can be fit and reasonable in itself, it would puzzle the wisest head to tell what can be absurd and foolish. And if it be allowed that there are some reasons which may justly sway with me to prejudice my self where none receives any advantage by it; since I can't be obliged to have a greater regard to another than my self, the fame, or like reasons, may justly incline me to hurt him, where neither I, nor any one besides receives any advantage from what he suffers; which positions make morality, instead of consisting in following the dictates of a regular self-love and real benevolence, to be

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an obedience to those reasons, which every sensible benevolent mind must wish should often be disregarded.

Now, if it be allowed me that such a solitary being as has been supposed cannot reasonably act but from a view to his own happiness, it is plain that the same thing must hold true of all other beings with respect to that part of their conduct in which none besides themselves have any concern, *i.e.* which does good or harm to one besides themselves; and therefore all actions which produce neither happiness nor misery, either immediately or in their natural tendency, must be absolutely indifferent.

But surely this is a proposition that need not be enlarged upon, since an indifferent action and one that does neither good nor harm, seem to be phrases that differ only in sound, when in sense they are exactly the same; and a person that can choose to busy himself in such actions as these; seems to be something beneath the character of a fool. And yet the concession of this one principle will certainly go a great way toward confuting this notion of our author. For if actions doing neither good nor harm are indifferent, and even according to him it is *coet. par.* Reasonable and fit to produce happiness and to prevent misery, the rectitude or obliquity of actions must altogether consist in their tendency to produce happiness or misery. Those actions that have no good tendency, but only occasion

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misery, must always be evil; and those only are really good in themselves, that produce more happiness than misery; the former therefore can never be chosen, but by a malicious or mistaken being.

And for this reason we may safely conclude, that the divine being is *by no consideration whatsoever* inclined to lessen the happiness of his creatures; but that whenever he inflicts evils on particular persons, societies, it is for the sake of a greater or more general benefit: for since he himself can receive no advantage by hurting his creatures, since there can't be supposed to be any competition of interests between him and them; his method of conduct towards them must be regulated solely by a regard to their general happiness, if we suppose any good design in it at all.

Now such a notion of the divine conduct as this, renders him really most amiable, and lays all his creatures under the strongest obligations to love, gratitude, and obedience, and is the firmest foundation of our trust and dependence upon him: But to imagine that he would do infinitely more good to his creatures than he does, were it not for other motives, by which he is influenced by opposition to their happiness, destroys the glory of his goodness, and renders all our expectations from him perfectly uncertain.

SECTION IV.

After what has been said, I think, I might leave the controversy with any unprejudiced

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person; but as it seems to me to be one of the greatest importance, I am unwilling to pass by any thing, that has been advanced by our author in favor of the opposite sentiment, without a particular answer. I shall therefore now set my self to consider the several *reasons* of the divine conduct, that he has mentioned, and represented as *entirely distinct* from a regard to the happiness of his creatures; and, if I can plainly show that none of these can be such *distinct reasons* of his action, it will follow at least that he has not proved his point, but has left the matter as he found it, and still may be true for any thing he has said to the contrary, that happiness only is the end of God in his works.

His first instance is the regard which God has to beauty and order in his works. This our author represents, as an end which the divine being pursues, entirely distinct from, and in a great measure opposite to the creatures happiness.

“It may falsely be presumed, (says he, *P. 14*) that the Deity necessarily loves order, and abhors confusion. Were it possible that deformity and disorder could be more conducive to the happiness of his creatures than the contrary; even upon this supposition it seems not probable that they would have been submitted to.”

And afterwards he tells us, that he apprehends these two ends a regard to happiness, and regard to order and beauty do sometimes interfere, and that the former is rather subordinate to the latter than contrary wise.

I am sensible it could not but appear very odd should I, in opposition to this sentiment of
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our author, assert, that God had no regard to order and beauty in his works; neither do I say that, I only deny that this was an end of his action distinct from the happiness of his creatures, and on the contrary affirm, that it was a regard to their felicity which was the reason why he has made and disposes of all things in so orderly and beautiful a manner. It is very plain, that the beauty and regularity of the divine works does contribute to happiness; and it is impossible for any one to imagine that irregularity and confusion should answer this end as well as the contrary: This therefore is a plain reason why the beauty of any work is esteemed a recommendation of it; nor is it, I think, possible for us to find out any other excellency in the most beautiful object, besides its tendency to give pleasure in the contemplation, or to promote some other useful purpose. If there be, why are we not informed what that excellency is? To say that such objects are in themselves more perfect than others, is only to deliver your opinion that they are truly excellent. I also am of opinion that they are excellent; my reason for it is that they give delight in the contemplation of them, or are some ways beneficial; and any further than they tend to these ends, can imagine no perfection, no excellency in them. Beauty in any object seems to be nothing else, *but such a relation, order and proportion of its parts, as renders the contemplation of it agreeable*: In the object itself therefore this nothing else; but a certain relation, order, and proportion of its parts. Now, I appeal to any one, whether he can possibly

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conceive of any objects being the more perfect merely on the account of the order and proportion of its parts, any farther than as that order and proportion renders it more agreeable or more useful, *i.e.* any farther than that order and proportion contributes to happiness; and if this be true, 'tis plain that the divine being could never design beauty in his works, but in order to promote happiness. But let us fairly examine what our author has said to prove the contrary: And here his first argument is drawn from scripture, where God is said to have created all things *for his own*

glory. By this I understand that in all his works he designed the illustration of his own perfections, that his creatures might discern and adore his infinite excellencies; but then he cannot be supposed to have done this for his own sake, for he cannot be profited by the praises and applauses of his creatures. For what then? undoubtedly for the happiness of his creatures themselves, whose glory and happiness it is to know, and love, and serve their great Creator. This phrase therefore thus interpreted is no objection against the opinion of those, who suppose that the end of all God's actions towards his creatures is their happiness. But our author has given a very different interpretation of it, and supposes that the glory, for which God created all things, is that glory which conflicts in the approbation of his own works, *i.e.* as I gather from what follows, in the approbation of his works and actions as perfect and beautiful. This, I confess, is a very odd interpretation of

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the word; however, I shan't dispute it; nor do I deny that God did so make, and does to govern the world, that infinite wisdom approves of every part of his conduct, and of all his works as the most perfect, and if you please also as most beautiful; nor will he on any account do that which he can't approve of. But it still remains to be shown, that he can approve of anything in his works that is an hindrance to his creatures happiness, or that he can approve of that as beautiful which is noways beneficial; otherwise such places of scripture as describe God as acting for his own glory, that is, in our author's sense of them, as action out of regard to his own approbation, do not in the least favor his sentiments. However, properly speaking, it seems plain, that God cannot make his own approbation a distinct end in his actions; for a wise being designs, acts, and approves of his own actions for the very same reasons. His own approbation cannot make his actions more fit to be performed, does not make him think them the more so (for that would be to suppose that he approves because he approves) and therefore cannot be any distinct reason of his acting. As for those other expressions which he has produced from scripture, that *God has made all things for himself* and that *for his pleasure they are, and were created*, I might very well neglect to take any notice of them, since he has made no particular use of them, nor any ways endeavored to show how they favor his hypothesis; especially as I apprehend, that any reader, who is not carried away with the first sound

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of words, cannot possibly so far mistake them, as to imagine that they are at all to our author's purpose. The first of these expressions I find *Prov. xvi. 4. The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea even the wicked for the day of evil*. The meaning of which verse is, I apprehend, very well expressed in bishop *Patrick's* paraphrase of it.

“The Lord disposes all things throughout the world to serve such ends as he thinks fit to design, which they cannot refuse to comply with. For if any men be so wicked as to oppose his will, he will not lose their service; but when he brings a public calamity on a country, employ them as the executioners of his wrath”².

The other expression is in *Rev. IV, 11 . Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honor,*

²Or, if this interpretation be disliked, we may translate the words thus: The Lord hath made all things suited to each other; yea, even the wicked to the day of evil. This *Dr. Clarke* says is their proper rendering. See his *Sermons, Vol. VII, page 315*.

and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created.

The meaning of which is, not that God made all things for his own pleasure, and entertainment, and delight; or, that his own pleasure was any end of his works of creation or providence: but that all things were made, and do exist *by his will*. This is plain in the original, the words of which are, διὰ τὸ θέλημα σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν.

It would be to abuse the reader's patience to say anything more to show that these texts have no concern in the controversy before us: As for that other place, where it is said, that *God saw*

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everything that he had made, and behold it was very good in which by this goodness in the works of God, our author says, that we must needs understand something more, than a tendency and conduciveness in every thing to the benefit of living creatures, I need only observe, that I apprehend he cannot prove that any thing farther is intended, and till that be done, I am not disposed to take it for granted. 'Tis certain things are most properly said to be good, because they are fitted to do good, or to promote happiness. Why then may we not suppose that this is the reason, for which God says of the things that he had made, that they were all very good ?

But to leave the consideration of arguments drawn from scripture, by which kind of arguments, it is, I apprehend, impossible to decide such a controversy as this, let us proceed to consider what he has farther observed in confirmation of his hypothesis. And here the strength of his reasoning seems to be this: Order and beauty are real perfections in any work, and consequently the works of God could not have been so perfect, if they had not been so beautiful; wherefore, as we cannot but suppose that the works of God are most perfect, he must have had a regard to beauty as well as happiness in them. Here I don't deny the consequence, the only debate between us is, whether beauty be any inherent perfection in an object, and not merely a sentiment in our minds, arising from some particular order and proportion in the parts of the object we contemplate. To

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prove that beauty is a real perfection, our author argues from matter of fact, in the following manner, *P. 16.*

“If beauty and order are not real, but relative; if they consist wholly in an arbitrary agreement between the object and the sense, what means that wonderful apparatus, that boundless profusion of art and skill, which we every where meet with among the Creator's works? What means that curious contexture and elaborate arrangement of parts? Why are they so nicely adjusted to each other, and all made subservient to the grandeur and magnificence of the whole ? According to the perfect supposition, how shall we avoid looking on this as mere waste of workmanship? If there be no objective perfections, no real improvements hereby introduced, I am forced to conclude that a chaos would have answered the purpose full as well.”

This indeed is a very heavy charge laid against those that deny the real intrinsic perfection of beautiful objects: They represent, according to our author all that curious art, that fine contrivance which is apparent in the works of God, as mere waste of workmanship, since a chaos would have answered the purpose full as well. But this is a charge which I would hope our author himself, after more cool deliberation, will not be willing to maintain. He will say, that in all the curious contexture of the parts of the universe it was only beauty and not use that was

intended? Or if he should, will he not be confuted, almost in every instance? Was it usefulness or beauty

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that was chiefly intended in the internal structure of animals and plants? Here 'tis evident that the former was chiefly designed; since in these we can see no beauty, but that of exquisite contrivance to answer a kind intention; and yet in this part of the divine workmanship, beyond any other, there appears the nicest art. Nor can there, I believe, be many instances given, where we can discern beauty in the works of God, and yet see no use in that contrivance which renders them beautiful. The ingenious author of the inquiry concerning beauty and virtue has observed, that that very quality in objects, which occasions their beauty, would render them more eligible, supposing we had no sense of beauty at all, *Treat. I. Sect. 8 Par. 2*

Now if this be really the case, there can be no reason to ask what occasion was there for such a profusion of beauty amidst the works of God, if there be no other excellency in beautiful objects besides their tendency to promote happiness? For the answer is very plain. The world is so framed, that every particular part of it is of use to promote happiness, and a sense of beauty was given still farther to advance this end. And it must be very absurd to say, that all the curious contexture and elaborate arrangement of the parts of the universe was upon this supposition mere waste of workmanship; since things were thus ordered to promote the most useful purposes, and no less display the benignity than the wisdom of the Deity. Whether our sense of beauty see arbitrary or not, happiness alone required that a

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regular world should be chosen, rather than a confused chaos; and therefore that the world is thus regular, can be no argument that our sense of beauty does not arise from the arbitrary constitution of the divine being.

“But are not uniformity and variety real relations belonging to the objects themselves? Are they not independent on us and our faculties? And would they not be what they are, whether we perceived them or no?” *P. 17.*

There is never any one denied this; yet hence our author seems to draw a very strange and surprising conclusion, when he asserts, that for this reason the author of the inquiry concerning beauty and virtue has fixed beauty on such a foundation, as is entirely inconsistent with his own hypothesis.

His hypothesis is, that those objects appear beautiful to us, in which there is *uniformity amidst variety*. He never imagined that uniformity and variety were themselves beauty, or that objects thus qualified must necessarily appear beautiful to every rational mind, either of which assertions seem inconsistent with his notions. But he asserts it only as matter of fact, that such objects, as are uniformly various, do appear beautiful to us. And this I suppose none who have examined the matter, but will acknowledge is pretty near the truth.

But what follows from hence? Does it follow because our perception of beauty arises from objects uniformly various, and uniformity and variety are real relations belonging to the objects themselves; that therefore beauty, which it is plain is neither uniformity nor variety, nor

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any mixture of the two, is a real quality in objects, and not only a sensation in our minds, occasioned by somewhat real in objects themselves. Is it not possible that the sour taste of vinegar may arise from the acuteness of its particles? Now supposing this to be the real case, then the acuteness of the particles of vinegar are as much the foundation of its sourness, as uniformity and

variety are the foundation of beauty. But did ever any man in his wits imagine that sourness is a real quality in vinegar ? I cannot therefore but wonder that when Mr. *Hutcheson* (*Sect. 2.*) professed that it was his design to investigate what it is in objects that occasions their appearing beautiful to us, he should ever be taxed as contradicting his own hypothesis, for saying it is *uniformity amidst variety*.

The charge is no more just than if because a person should say that the intestine motion of the particles of bodies is the cause of heat, he should be represented as asserting, that heat is a real quality belonging to such bodies themselves. Again our author says, (*Pag. 21.*)

“It is not to be doubted, but that the universe is most regular, most harmonious, and most beautiful in the sight of the divine being. These beauties therefore must be real, absolute and objective perfections; for whatever the Creator sees in his works or ideas, must be actually in them. What they appear to him, that they are precisely in themselves; either therefore the natural and moral world appear to the divine mind without beauty, or the
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beauties he perceives in them must be real and inherent.”

Here I can't but just take notice of the unfairness of this argument. Our author had before taken notice that order and beauty are therefore amiable in the sight of God, because they are real perfections; and had acknowledged that all that he had said concerning the Deities regard to order and beauty, was altogether groundless, but upon the supposition that these are real and inherent perfections in any object. From whence, I think, one may fairly conclude, that even he himself has no other reason to believe that God does discern any beauty in his works, or makes this a distinct end of his acting, but this, *that beauty is an inherent perfection in an object*. To what purpose then are the scales now turned, and that must be made a medium of proof, which before was the conclusion ?

Before God could not produce disorder, and be the author of confusion; because beauty and order being real perfections in any work, must be perceived by him as such, and be amiable in his sight. *Now* he sees beauty and order in his works, and therefore they are real perfections in them; which last way of arguing is certainly very absurd, because it is impossible that we should know that God can discerns any quality in an object, but by knowing first that it is a quality which does belong to it, unless it were by the help of a revelation. We can't know that the works of God appear beautiful to him, but by first knowing that they are beautiful in themselves, and must appear so to every one that
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perceives them to be what they are; whilst this latter therefore is in debate, to take the former for granted is really begging the question that ought to be proved. I am sensible, that to doubt, whether the works of God appear beautiful to him or not, must appear strange to those that are used to conceive of beauty as a real distinct perfection in objects themselves. As to assert, that bodies appear without all color to the divine mind, would for the same reason appear very surprising to the vulgar; and he that can free himself of one of these prejudices, may as easily get rid of the other.

But I must here observe, for fear of being misunderstood, that I by no means doubt that the works of God are contrived in the most exact and regular manner to accomplish the ends he intended by them; the sum of which I take to be the happiness of his creatures. And this may, if you please, be called the beauty of his works; but without regarding an useful end and design, I think, there is no manner of reason to suppose, that any particular order and proportion of things

appears to the divine mind more excellent and beautiful than another.

But I may here be asked, does confusion then and disorder in itself appear as amiable and lovely to him, as order, proportion and harmony? I answer, if we speak properly, nothing can appear to him confused and disorderly in itself, without a regard had to the end for which it may be designed. These are terms, that have an evident relation to the imperfection of our minds. Let an heap of stones be thrown together

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without any design, and there will appear to us no order, no proportion in them; but still there is as real proportion in their sizes and distances, as if they had been ranged by the nicest hand, so as to make the most beautiful appearance to us. It is not any order and proportion of the parts of an object that render it beautiful, as our author seems to imagine; for he says, *P. 20.*

“The essentials of beauty are order, symmetry and proportion; without these no works of art are, or can be beautiful and according to the degree wherein those prevail, the beauty of these is greater or less.”

But there are only some particular orders, and some particular proportions of the parts of an object that appear agreeable and beautiful to us. Now, by what medium can we possibly prove that such an order, and such proportions in the parts of an object, which renders it most beautiful to us, must also make it appear so to the divine mind? especially when we often perceive beauty in an object, without so much as knowing what those proportions are which render it agreeable to us; nor ‘till this be done, which has not been so much as attempted, can we have any reason to believe, that beauty, which in objects themselves is nothing else but a particular order and proportion of their parts, was any distinct end in the works of creation and providence.

On this single point the whole controversy seems to me to turn, and therefore I cannot but think it very well deserves a fresh consideration from our author. He says, the essentials of beauty are

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order and proportion ; but if I mistake not, the essence of deformity may as truly be asserted to be also order and proportion. In the same sense that one kind of order and proportion constitutes beauty, another kind of order and proportion seems to constitute deformity. Objects are not therefore ugly because they want order and proportion; for these as necessarily belong to all objects that have parts of the same kind, and that may be compared as to situation and quantity, as ³ figure does to all bodies. Divide any object into its several parts and place them how you will they will still be in some order or other; though perhaps in that order they may be of no use, and make no beautiful appearance. Again, enlarge, lessen, or change the parts of an object how you please, still every part must be in some proportion to the whole, and to every other part. ‘Tis true indeed, that we usually say of objects that are deformed, that they want order and proportion, but the meaning of this is, only that they want that order and proportion that is necessary to their appearing beautiful to us. And the expression itself is no more proper, than when we call that body shapeless which is ill-shapen. The reader will observe that I use the word proportion in that which is the common sense of it, as I apprehend, among all writers (unless we must except some of the mathematicians) to denote the comparative greatness of two quantities, in which sense we use the word when we

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³Figure is nothing else, but the order and proportion of the external parts of a body.

speak of the proportion between the circumference and the diameter of the circle; between the height of a building, and its length or breadth, and the like. But I thought it proper to observe, that some mathematicians using the word *ratio* instead of proportion in the foregoing sense, define *proportion* to be an *equality of ratios*; because in this sense of the word, it must be acknowledged that proportion has a considerable effect upon the beauty of an object; but not so much as that where there are the same proportions in this sense, or the same number of equal ratios, there must always be the same beauty. Take, for instance, two human faces, the one perfectly beautiful, the other exactly like the former in all other respects only let the eyes be too little, the nose too long, or the nostrils too wide; and I apprehend, that though these must needs differ in beauty, yet it will be impossible to show that in any sense there is more order or proportion in one than the other. So that it can't be justly said, that the essence of beauty is order and proportion; or that we have any reason to think that every being that perceives the same order and proportion in an object, must have the same sentiments of its beauty. When I say that order and proportion are not the essence of beauty, my meaning is, that it is not every order and proportion that constitutes beauty, but only some; and why these rather than others should make a beautiful appearance even to us, we can't assign any reason; and therefore can't possibly conclude, that they must raise the same sense of beauty in every other rational

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mind that perceives them. But enough has been said on this head, at least to show that our author has given no sufficient proof of his assertion, that a regard to beauty and order was any distinct end of the divine being in his works.

SECTION V.

I proceed therefore now to another assertion of our author, which contradicts the opinion of those who suppose that God has no ends in his actions towards his creatures which are not entirely coincident with their happiness; which is this, (*P. 52. See also P. 33, &c.*) that

“every instance, every degree of sin, is a just ground for suitable punishment, whether the ends and intentions of government require it or not;”

and therefore, that when neither the reformation of the offender himself, nor the good of others is designed, the desert of sin it self is a sufficient inducement to the divine being to punish him in proportion to the greatness of his fault.

I should very readily own, that every instance, every degree of sin is a just ground for suitable punishment; because it is for the general happiness that every sin should be discouraged, and that all the rational creatures of God should be convinced that they can never offend against his righteous laws without injuring themselves. But if a person will abstract from this which is a plain reason, and, I think, the only true reason of punishment; and will suppose the case, that no good is done or designed by

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punishment, he certainly is obliged to assign some other reason for it. In order to do which, our author supposes that there was but one moral agent in the universe, and that he was obstinately and incorrigibly wicked; and on this supposition says (*P. 34.*)

“It is not to be doubted, but he would feel the effects of his Maker's displeasure: nay, that there are good grounds to believe that his punishment would be proportioned to his crimes; and that this is highly probable on many accounts, and if he mistakes not, conformable to the doctrines both of reason and revelation.”

I might here, I apprehend, very justly question the possibility of the fact supposed by our

author, and therefore have still reason to doubt of his opinion, tho' it should be a just deduction from it. But I don't insist on this; and on the supposition of the reality of this case, I would willingly own that such a being might be punished, as far as this was necessary to prevent, his future wickedness. But this will, I suppose, be hardly allowed to be any proper punishment; because it would be a less evil to the criminal himself, than his own wickedness would have been which is supposed to be prevented by it. However, 'tis plain this can't come up to our author's intention; for he supposes (or I strangely mistake his design) that punishment may and ought to be inflicted on a wicked person merely on the account of the defect of sin, tho' no good were hereby derived to himself, or to any one else.

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To prove which he argues in the following manner, (*P. 34.*)

“If we attend to the principle of *divine rectitude*, we shall find the Deity ever acting, and ever determined to act according to the *reason of the thing* and the *right of the case*. If then it be right and reasonable in itself to punish *wickedness*, as well as to reward *goodness*, he will assuredly do both.”

Thus far we have no controversy, God will assuredly reward the virtuous, and punish the vicious; as far as it is reasonable, and fit he should. But what do we learn from hence? He goes on,

“If *virtue* be necessarily amiable in his sight, *vice* is necessarily odious; if there be *merit* in the one, which naturally recommends it to his favor and esteem, there is equal *demerit* in the other, which unavoidably excites his displeasure and indignation.”

This also is allowed, if I rightly understand the unusual phrases, that there is a merit in virtue that recommends it, and a demerit in sin that excites indignation against it. I suppose no more is intended by them, than what was as plainly said before, that virtue is necessarily amiable, and vice necessarily odious. But what is the proper consequence from this? Is it any thing more than this, that God will therefore take all proper methods to secure the cause of virtue, and to discountenance all sin and wickedness? Certainly it by no means follows, as our author would insinuate, that therefore it is always in itself morally fit, and agreeable to the rectitude and

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sanctity of the divine nature, to punish the vicious and to reward the virtuous; even supposing the case, that such rewards and punishments had no tendency to answer the ends of the divine government, which are the promoting virtue and happiness. A love to virtue can't dispose a person to reward, but with a design to promote and encourage virtue. An hatred of vice can't dispose a person to punish, but with a design to discourage and discountenance vice. We may be very great enemies to vice, and yet not be enemies to vicious men, or inclined to hurt them, any further than an opposition to their vices may make it necessary. Otherwise no good Christian could be a virtuous man, since with the greatest aversion to sin he is obliged to maintain the most real benevolence towards sinful men. And if this be commanded us as our constant duty, I can't see how we can assert that it is inconsistent with the divine rectitude to show mercy to sinners, and to make them experience the effects of his benevolence, where this can be done without prejudicing the cause of virtue and goodness. But

“should God communicate good, and finally dispense happiness to all deserving or undeserving promiscuously; how could he be said upon this supposition to act according to the true nature, and reason of things? Virtue and Vice are essentially opposite, and therefore it is not possible that the same treatment should suit the votaries of each.” (*P.*

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It is here readily acknowledged, that it would not be right to communicate
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happiness equally to all sorts of persons without any difference, that it would not be right to give as great rewards to the evil as to the good. Such a procedure would not be treating persons according to their real character, nor the way most effectually to promote virtue and happiness. But what is all this to the point in view, which was to show, that without a regard to the deterring from sin, there is sufficient reason to punish bad men? Is there not as great a difference made between the virtuous and the vicious, as any wise and good being would desire; if the virtuous are always rewarded for what they do well, and the vicious are always punished, where their punishment is conducive to the general good and necessary to deter from sin? Is not the very reason why virtuous and vicious men should be treated differently, that virtue ought to be encouraged and vice discountenanced? And therefore where these ends are out of the question, there does not appear any reason from these opposite characters for an opposite treatment. But can we suppose that God would suffer an incorrigible sinner to go unpunished, when the quite contrary is deserved? Is not this essentially repugnant to the rectitude and purity of his nature ?

I don't apprehend that God will suffer any impenitent sinner to go unpunished, but not merely because this is deserved; for then no sin must go unpunished: but because his punishment is necessary to secure the respect due to the divine laws. And supposing this end out of
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the question, no one can say, that merely the deserving punishment is a sufficient reason for its being inflicted, that will allow any room for the exercise of pardoning mercy and grace.

As for what our author says, after having represented a most villainous character, which he desires us to reflect upon without the emotions of resentment, *viz.* that the most merciful man in the world would pronounce sentence upon such an offender, and give him up to condign punishment; it is not improbable that this would be true in fact, because the most merciful man in the world has his resentments; and it is impossible, but he should believe there would be good consequences from punishing such a person. But if we could suppose the contrary, that sparing him would certainly do no hurt, that punishing would do no good, I can by no means be of our author's opinion, that to spare would not be goodness, but weakness. For what weakness is it to spare, when all the reasons of punishment are supposed away? His reason for it, that to spare would be violating truth and nature, and acting contrary to the plainest reasons of things, is only a more fashionable way of saying that he is very positive, 'twould be exceeding wrong; for he does not tell us one truth that would be violated by it, nor give us one of those plainest reasons, which should persuade us to a contrary conduct. And I am satisfied I should be far from being singular if I should deliver my opinion on the opposite side of the question, in the same way with our author,
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that to give pain to any sensible being where no good end is answered by it, nor any mischief prevented, is violating truth and nature, and action contrary to the plainest reasons of things; 'tis certainly acting a mischievous and ill-natured part.

Section VI.

There is only one opinion more of our author, which, I think, it is needful to take notice of, as seeming too much to consine the divine goodness, and supported by no reason and that is, "that it is not consistent with the divine rectitude to bestow that supreme felicity, that indefectible state, wherein consist the rewards of the righteous on any that have not first

gone through a state of probation,” P.46.

Which is as much as to say, that God can’t, consistently with his own attributes, create any being in such a degree of perfection, that he should be in no more danger of falling from his favor, than good men will be after death.

This proposition, I am sure, must appear at first view so inconsistent with our notions of the boundless goodness of God, that it can’t be expected we should admit it without the plainest proof. ‘Tis acknowledged by all, that God may bestow what favor he pleases on his creatures, antecedently to their doing anything to deserve it. Why may he not then make creatures with the most pure and uncorrupt affections, and with such a large and distinct knowledge of the nature (56)

of things, as to discern the connection between virtue and their own interest, as plainly as we know by experience the connection between eating and living? Now only allow that beings may be created thus perfect; and there will be no more danger of their falling, than there is that a man in his wits, for no reason at all, should thrust his hand into the midst of the fire, that is, there will be no danger of it at all. And if you deny this, how can you acknowledge that God may grant what favors he pleases to his creatures? Yea, if no beings were at first made thus perfect, what will become of the beauty of that scale of beings which our author speaks of, the highest of which was in danger of falling below the condition of the meanest sensible being, that is, into a state of misery? And is it not wrong in us to presume so far to limit the divine goodness, as to say that he can’t bestow on any a favor that is perfect and complete before they have deserved it, which it’s plain no favor can be whilst there is any hazard of losing it?

But let us hear what our author says to justify this surprising position.

“Perfect happiness (*he says, P. 41.*) was and ought to be reserved for the proper objects of God’s love and favor; which none of his creatures could be without virtuous qualifications and moral merit: and these imply a state of probation.”

That as to confer the same happiness on the *faithful*, and on the *unfaithful* and *disobedient* would be a manifest violation of truth

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and nature; so

“by parity of reason it was morally unfit to treat those who had never been tried; and by consequence merited nothing; in the same manner as if they had been tried and found faithful; because such persons are in a moral sense worthless, and by consequence are in a station as much below *merit* as it is above *demerit*.”

I have given; I apprehend, the full strength of our author’s argument; and before I come to give an answer to it, I find it necessary to say somewhat in order to settle the meaning of the terms here made use of by him, on the ambiguity of which, if I mistake not, all the seeming strength of his reasoning entirely depends.

First then, let us enquire what we are to understand by *virtuous qualifications*; these cannot here signify merely good dispositions, and such valuable qualifications of temper, as fit a person for the greatest serviceableness to himself and others. Even though a person have the strongest desires to promote the honor of the Creator, and the kindest affection towards his fellow creatures; if these arise from his original make, and are not acquired by himself with some difficulty, they are not according to our author virtuous qualifications; for these, he says, imply a state of probation, *i.e.* a state of difficulty and temptation. By virtuous qualifications therefore, I suppose, he must mean, what I would call, in opposition to those good dispositions which we

receive more directly from our Creator, *acquired virtues*.

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The next word, that needs explication, is that of *moral merit*; by this he cannot mean only real worth and excellency; for that does not necessarily imply a state of probation. But by moral merit we must, I apprehend, understand *a right to a reward* or that which gives such a right; in which sense of the word, I allow it can't be applied to any untried creatures. Those creatures, which by their original make are so constituted, that their desires and their duty always necessarily coincide, can't, I think, be laid to have any claim to a reward: whereas those who are surrounded with difficulty and temptation, and who are obliged to deny themselves and submit to great inconveniences that they may maintain their integrity, if notwithstanding this, they do behave uprightly, seem on this account to have an equitable claim to it, which they may deduce from this principle; that a wise and good God will certainly, in every instance, make it the interest of his creatures to behave virtuously. In this sense therefore creatures only in a state of probation can be said to merit.

I am sensible that to many it will seem absurd to say that a creature can any ways merit at the hands of God; and I confess, that in that sense in which men by showing kindness to each other merit a return of favor, it is absurd to say that any being whatsoever can merit at the divine hands. It seems also plain to me, that in particular the happiness that is promised to the righteous in the gospel, cannot be looked upon

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as what they are capable of meriting by their obedience. Perfect and unalterable happiness is really of infinite value; and therefore cannot but appear as a reward greatly disproportionate to the temporary services of any creatures, and much more so to the imperfect obedience of men in this short life. So that if none must receive but according to their merit, which is the principle on which, if I mistake not, all our author's reasoning depends; mankind must for ever despair of a state of perfect and unalterable happiness. But if we take the word *merit* in the sense before mentioned, as signifying an equitable claim to a reward, *i.e.* to a reward proportional to the difficulty of performing, or the inconvenience that is submitted to in the performance of any virtuous action in this sense, I think, a person may be said to merit, and thus it is plain he can merit only in a state of probation. And in analogy to this sense of the word must we understand that very harsh assertion of our author, that all beings that have not undergone a state of trial, are in a *moral sense worthless*, *viz.* that they have no proper claim to a reward. For in any other sense, nothing can be more strangely absurd, than to say that any creature is therefore in a moral sense worthless, because he was always possessed of so much wisdom and goodness as not to be in danger of offending, *i.e.* because he is most like the infinitely perfect being.

These things being observed, the forementioned

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argument may be answered with very little difficulty. I readily allow, that perfect happiness will be given only to the proper objects of God's love, and favor, and esteem; but in order to these acquired virtues and moral merit, in the sense before explained, are not, I apprehend, absolutely necessary. For good dispositions and inclinations, a right temper and bias of mind, are of themselves a just foundation for love, favor, and esteem; though they don't seem to give a person a proper title to a reward. Nor does it follow, that because one has undergone the feverest trials and overcome in them, that therefore he is a better and more valuable person than another that has not been thus tried; and consequently this latter may possibly have as much of the divine favor and

esteem, as the former. We indeed can only value persons from their actions, because 'tis by this means only we form a judgment of their internal temper; but he, who immediately discerns the inward dispositions of the mind, can have no reason to wait till these be discovered by external actions, in order to know where his love and esteem should be fixed. Esteem, if I mistake not, ought always to be proportional to the good qualities of which a person is possessed, however these have been acquired; for *to have one in due esteem* is to apprehend him to be what he really is in himself. And where a person is justly esteemed for his good dispositions of mind, it
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can be no reason against granting him any favors which he is not likely to abuse, that he has no just claim to them as the reward of his actions. But, says our author,

“ if rewards are due to the righteous, and punishments to the wicked; those who have never been tried can deserve neither, and therefore cannot, agreeably to truth and rectitude, be treated like either of the other.”

As this argument stands, the utmost that it can prove is, that an untried person ought neither to be rewarded nor punished; which is very different from that which he undertook to prove, that such an one ought not, through the undeserved goodness of God, to be made partaker of perfect happiness. But if this argument had been intended to have proved the point in view, it should have run in the following manner:

If perfect and unalterable happiness be due to the righteous as the reward of their services in a state of probation, and misery be the just portion of the wicked; those who have never been tried, and consequently have deserved neither, ought not to be treated like either of the other, *i.e.* ought not to be made either perfectly happy, or miserable. But in answer to this, I say, *perfect* happiness is not due to the righteous as the reward of their services; 'tis not on the merits of their own works, but on the gracious promise of God, through Christ, that their expedition of this is founded: and therefore, since they at last must not receive it, but as an undeserved
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favor; why mayn't the same favor be conferred on others that are equally fitted for it, though supposed unequal to them in merit? Nor would it follow, if we could suppose a person capable of meriting perfect happiness; that therefore it should be bellowed on none, but those that do thus merit it; and that no room should be left for the exercise of undeserved favor. Because one has a just claim upon me, that is no reason why I may not freely give to another, even more than what the former can in justice demand.

'Tis a mighty weak way of arguing, to say that two persons ought not to be treated alike, that is, that they should not both receive the same happiness; because one has a particular claim to it, which the other has not: if one has merit, he will receive according to his merit, and when this is done, with regard to undeserved favors, he stands upon a level with the other creatures of God; and it is no absurdity to suppose, that it may in some cases at least seem good to his infinite wisdom to bestow these in the largest proportions on those that have not the greatest merit. Yea, as I think that none can deny, that God has a right to make a difference between the conditions of his creatures by his undeserved goodness, without any regard to their merits; so none can pretend to fix the bounds beyond which the difference hence arising ought not to proceed: and therefore we can't
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possibly have any reason to assert, that God may not give some creatures greater happiness before they have merited it by any actual obedience in a state of trial; than what it is possible for others to

gain by their merit.

But is not this to represent the divine being as action in an arbitrary manner, and as having a particular fondness for some more than others without any reason at all? I answer, this no more follows from what I have said, than from the common opinion, that God has originally made creatures of different ranks and capacities for happiness. A man, for instance, has no more reason to complain of any arbitrary or partial proceeding in the divine being, though with all his boasted merit he should not be able to attain the happiness of angels; than a brute can complain that he is utterly incapable even of that happiness, which men may enjoy in this life. But all that follows from what I have asserted is, that God has other reasons for bestowing happiness upon, and for diversifying the happiness of his creatures, besides a regard to their merit; which is what every one must allow that will not run contrary to the plainest matter of fact, as far as we are capable of judging concerning it. Besides this argument drawn from the divine equity, our author adds another taken from the natural connection between virtue and happiness. Says he, supreme felicity is the peculiar portion of those that have gone through state of probation,

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“partly by God’s appointment, and partly from the very nature of the thing; for since a state of probation is necessary for the exercise and improvement of virtue, it is by consequence necessary for the consummation and perfection of happiness.”

That good or virtuous dispositions and actions are necessary to the perfection of happiness is most certainly true: but I must confess, I can’t imagine what our author intends by *virtue*, when he says that a state of probation, *i.e.* a state of temptation is necessary for the improvement, and even the exercise of it. Does the ignorance of men’s minds, the irregularity of their affections, the external difficulties and temptations they meet with, which are what render the present a state of trial, give them any advantage for improvement in virtue? Or rather are not these very things hindrances to their progress in it? Are not these the reason that almost all men in this life are so very imperfect in virtue? But however this be, it is, I apprehend, certain, that but few even of good men do in this life arrive at that perfection in virtue, as without any farther improvement in it will fit them for a state of complete happiness; so that if there can be no improvement after they have gone through this state of probation, I don’t see how they can ever be capable of a state of the most perfect felicity. And if, good men after death are capable of increasing in goodness and virtue, it can’t be said that a state

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of trial is necessary for this purpose; and therefore such a supposed necessity can be no solid objection against God’s placing some creatures in a state of perfect happiness without obliging them first to go through the dangers, and temptations of a state of probation.

Section VII.

I have now gone through the several positions of our author, which seemed to me to contradict the notion of such as suppose that God has no other design in his dispensations towards his creatures but their happiness; and I hope, that what has been said sufficiently shows that he has not proved his point in a single instance. There is however one considerable objection still remaining against the opinion I have defended, which I have hitherto taken no notice of; because though adduced by our author in support of his notion of the divine Being’s having a regard to the beauty and order of his works, as an end entirely distinct from the happiness of his creatures; it is not so properly a proof of his particular opinion with regard to beauty, as a general objection against his adversaries notion of happiness being the only end of God in his works; and

for this reason I thought proper to defer the consideration of it to this place. The objection is, that if happiness had been the only end of God in his works, the greatest possible quantities (66)

of it must have been produced at all times, and in all places; and it is thus urged by our author (*P. 14.*)

“Had the production of *Happiness* been the sole end which the Creator had in view, it is not, I think, to be doubted, but the utmost possibilities of it would have been produced at all times and in all places. But as far as we are capable of judging from the phenomena within our reach, this seems not to be the case. That scale and subordination of beings before mentioned, may seem to promote the *order* and harmony of the world more than the happiness of its inhabitants. Had their several powers been more nearly equal, what would have been the result? It seems probable that the latter of these ends would have been advanced; and the former obstructed, if not destroyed.”

This is indeed at first view a very difficult objection; that small degree of happiness, that evil we see in the world, has been strongly urged against those that have believed that the world is governed by a wise, and powerful, and good God. But I hope it will not oblige us to let go this important truth; or incline us to imagine that the Deity is influenced by any principles of acting, that contradict his goodness.

In order to solve this objection, it will be proper first to enquire, whether the Divine Being was obliged by any of his perfections to create any beings at all. Indeed (67)

after a universe of creatures is formed, his goodness seems to incline him to confer the greatest happiness upon it, of which it is capable; but it does not appear that even goodness itself obliged him to make those creatures. Creation is an argument of the goodness of God; because he would not have made any creatures at all, if he had not intended to communicate happiness to them; but I question whether in strict propriety it is always an instance of it. An act of goodness, one would think should require that the object of it should before exist; but as this argument may appear too subtle, and as I can't myself lay any great stress upon it, I only just hint at it, that the reader may further consider it, or pass it over, as he thinks fit. But I think we may more securely conclude, that God was not obliged by any of his perfections to create, at least not to create the universe in any particular degree of perfection, from the consequences that necessarily follow from such a supposition. Should we, for instance, suppose that the divine goodness obliged him to make a world, that there might be creatures to whom he might communicate happiness; the consequence of this seems plainly to be, that a universe must have been from eternity, in which there must have been the greatest possible happiness or, if we should go upon our author's hypothesis, that the influence of the divine goodness is limited by his regard to the order and beauty of his works, (68)

shall we be able to avoid the main part of this difficulty.

For if, notwithstanding a regard to order and beauty, the divine perfections did at any time oblige him to create; in every instant before that time there must have been the same obligation upon him, from his perfections, to have formed a most perfect and beautiful, though not a most happy world. It must follow also, even upon his hypothesis, that the world must be infinite as well as eternal, for no regard to beauty can set bounds to it; and that every creature must enjoy as much happiness as is consistent with the perfection of the whole; and that no more can possibly be created without destroying this perfection.

But as these consequences, particularly the last, are what I should by no means be willing to defend, I cannot entertain a favorable opinion of the principle from which they flow; and I think our author himself ought herein to agree with me, as he is in opinion for the ⁴non eternity of the world. I know it is usually presumed that all the works of God are most perfect; and thus they undoubtedly are, if by this be meant, that they are exactly agreeable to the highest goodness and wisdom, and have nothing in them that implies want of perfection in their author. But that the universe has such a degree and quantity of perfection, as that no addition
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can possibly be made to it even by infinite wisdom and power, seems to me so far from being what we ought to suppose true; that I question whether the notion itself be not perfectly unintelligible. It is certain, that to speak of the greatest possible number, or the greatest possible triangle, is to use words without any meaning at all.

A triangle maybe made as large as you please, yet the largest possible cannot be; for such a one could not be a triangle, which is a surface bounded with three straight lines. In like manner we may, I apprehend, speak in relation to the happiness and perfection of the universe. God may make it as happy, and as perfect as he pleases, and may continually increase this in any proportion he thinks fit; but still I apprehend 'tis capable of this increase, without limits, and without end; and that to suppose the greatest possible quantity of happiness or perfection diffused through it, is to suppose that there is a certain fixed and determinate quantity of happiness and perfection, beyond which it is impossible, even for the power of God to proceed; which I must own seems to me absurd. So that to argue against the goodness of God, because there is not the greatest quantity of happiness and perfection in the universe, is to use an argument that can have no force, since, if put into form, one of the premises is unintelligible. I add moreover, that if it be a contradiction to
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suppose that the universe should be absolutely most perfect, or most happy, so as to be incapable of further improvement, even from infinite wisdom and power; we can see no possible reason, [original unreadable] amongst the several degrees of perfection that might have been communicated, one should be chosen rather than another; for if one ought not to be chosen because there is another greater conceivable, for the same reason this ought also to be rejected, and so on forever. And on this account we must be forced, I think, to acknowledge, that, for any thing we know to the contrary, God was not obliged to create the universe with any particular degree or quantity of perfection, or even to create it at all; and if this be true, 'tis very far from being a just consequence that God must be influenced by other principles that contradict his goodness, because we don't find the greatest possible happiness at all times and in all places. I have insisted something the longer on this point, because I take this to be the true answer to the objection before mentioned; and also because, if what has been said be true, it will make the solution much easier of many difficulties that are raised against the divine dispensations. If we conceive of the goodness of God as an unbounded inclination to create happiness, and consequently suppose he has made the world as happy and as perfect as he possibly could, there are undoubtedly abundance

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of *phenomena* the consistence of which with this supposition we cannot discern, and which we shall find some difficulty to persuade men are not incompatible with it: But if we only conceive of

⁴Letter to a Diest, p.7

the divine goodness as a most kind affection towards his creatures, and as inclining him to confer upon that universe of creatures he has made the greatest happiness of which they are capable, still supposing that their original capacities for happiness were fixed by his will and pleasure, we shall find it much easier to satisfy ourselves, that there is nothing in any of the appearances of providence contrary to the most perfect goodness of the divine nature.

But though, I think, the way I have already taken is really the proper way of answering our author's objection; yet, as I am sensible many will not readily come into it, I shall now make the most favorable supposition on his side, and see whether even then his argument will not admit of a fair answer. I will allow, that the consequence of supposing the Deity influenced by benevolence only, and no other principle contrary to it, is, that the universe must be created in the most perfect manner, and that the greatest possible quantity of happiness must be diffused through it; for even upon the supposition of the justness of this consequence, nothing that appears in the divine conduct towards his creatures, will oblige us to allow that the Deity is influenced by any other principle

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of acting that contradicts or limits his benevolence. Our author supposes, that if the end of God in his works was only the good of his creatures, there must have been the greatest quantity of happiness communicated at all times, and in all places; and therefore that the universe must have been perfectly uniform, without any variety, and consequently without any beauty and order. For which reason he imagines that the world was formed in a different manner but this is a consequence he can never possibly make good. All that can be imagined to follow from the most unbounded goodness, is, that the greatest quantity of happiness should be communicated to the universe; but it no ways appears that this must arise from the same happiness at all times, and in all places. Such a perfect uniformity may, for any thing we know to the contrary, be as inconsistent with the greatest happiness of the whole, as it is with its beauty. If the universe were to consist of one uniform sort of beings, however happy they might be, 'tis evident that they could not in some respects enjoy so great happiness as they might by variety; there would be then but one uniform object of contemplation, one uniform relation among all the creatures of the universe; which could never afford so great happiness as variety of these to intelligent and rational creatures, whose happiness is in a great measure derived from objects of contemplation

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and the relation they stand to one another. Hence, I think, 'tis very plain, that from the greatest variety imaginable observed on the several creatures of God, a defect of happiness in the whole cannot be conferred.

Besides this, it ought to be considered, that a most happy universe is so far from implying the same happiness in all creatures, and thereby contradicting that variety which is necessary to beauty; that the quite contrary is implied in it: For the most happy universe is not one that consists of the greatest possible number of the most happy beings only; but one that consists of that, and the greatest possible number of beings next inferior to the first rank, and so downward, 'till we come to those that approach the nearest to insensible matter. This certainly must be allowed, unless it can be proved that the greatest possible number of the most happy beings having been created, no others can possibly be made. So that a most happy universe is so far from being unbeautifully uniform, that it must be most beautifully various; a most regular and orderly advance of perfection being made from insensible matter, *without breaking the scale of beings*, quite up to the highest possible rank. Strange therefore it is, that any, because he only sees the

lowest part of this scale, should from hence infer a defeat of happiness in the whole, and imagine a necessity of asserting another principle of acting in the Deity,

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which in a great measure hinders those communications of goodness that would otherwise have been dispensed. To me it seems plain, that even upon this supposition we can have no reason to conclude, that the Deity has any other intention in his actions towards his creatures besides their good.

And I cannot but apprehend, that every person that wishes well to his fellow creature, must be pleased to see there is so little reason to support an opinion, which if true would render all our expectations of happiness perfectly precarious and uncertain. To suppose that the almighty and infinitely wise governor of the world, who can do what he will with his creatures, has ends of acting any ways inconsistent with their general happiness, must needs be a very uneasy and uncomfortable reflection to every truly good and benevolent mind; especially as it is confessed, that we know not particularly what these ends are, and how far they may prevail. But to look upon God as the tender father of his creatures, as in all his actions towards them, not excepting those of judgment and vengeance, consulting the general happiness, is to represent him to our selves under a notion the most amiable and lovely that can be imagined. Separate infinite goodness from almighty power and perfect knowledge, and the idea is only awful and terrible; but that these are necessarily conjoined in the glorious

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Author of our beings, renders him the object of our most delightful contemplation as well as of our highest reverence. That the governor of the world is the best as well as the greatest of all beings, is the support of a good man under all his troubles; this is his comfort and joy under all the evils he observes in this present state; this is his most powerful engagement to his duty, and gives him the greatest delight and satisfaction in acts of obedience and devotion. Yea, would sinners themselves be persuaded rightly to confider this attribute of the Divine Being; would they look upon God, though not as fond and partial, with respect to particular persons, to the general detriment of his creatures; yet as truly benevolent to them all, nothing could be more proper to make them ashamed of their disobedience, and thereby lead them to the truest repentance. And I may add, that in reason nothing can make them more afraid of continuing in a course of vice and wickedness; for whilst God is good the cause of virtue and goodness must be maintained and supported, which necessarily requires that sin should be punished, as well as that virtue should be honored and rewarded

ERRATA - applied to text

FINIS

Remaining text concerning others texts printed for J. Noon omitted due to poor quality of original scan.