

A FREE INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE AND ORIGIN OF EVIL. IN SIX

by Soame Jenyns

Soame Jenyns's comprehensive work on fundamental Christian theology and spiritual discipline.

8 Chapters

Table of Contents

0. A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil. In Six
1. PREFACE.
2. LETTER I.
3. LETTER II.
4. LETTER III.
5. LETTER IV.
6. LETTER V.
7. LETTER VI.

A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil. In Six

PREFACE.

[page i not available]

in publick: he knows, that mankind live all in masquerade, and that whoever presumes to come amongst them barefaced must expect to be abused by the whole Assembly: he could therefore have no motive for thus imparting his free sentiments to the publick, except the dictates of his own heart, which tell him, that it is every man's duty, who comes into the world, to use his best endeavours, however insignificant, to leave it as much wiser, and as much better as he can. Induced by this motive alone he at first undertook this Inquiry; and now, actuated by the same principle, and unprovoked by all the senseless misapprehensions, and malicious misconstructions, with which it has been tortured, he will here, with all possible conciseness, endeavour to explain those parts of it, which have been so misunderstood, or misrepresented, and give satisfaction to all, who are either able or willing to understand it.

The first Letter treats of Evils in general, and endeavours to prove, that they all owe their existence, not to any voluntary admission of a benevolent Creator, but to the necessity of their own natures, that is, to the impossibility of excluding them from any system of created beings whatever; and that in all such systems, however wisely contrived, they must have, and must at all times have had a place. Against this, but one material objection has been urged; which is this, that, in order to make room for this necessity of Evil, the real existence of a paradisiacal state is represented as at all times impossible; and consequently, the Mosaick account of that state is utterly exploded, on which the whole fabrick of the Christian Religion

is erected. How far the literal belief of that account is essential to the true faith of a Christian, need not be here decided; because not the least mention of it is made in this Letter: and therefore this objection is intirely founded on a mistake. The argument there made use of, is only this, that some have endeavoured to justify the goodness of God from the introduction of Evil, by asserting, that at the beginning there was no such thing, but that, at first, all creation came out of his omnipotent hand, endued with absolute perfection, and free from all Evil, both Natural and moral: to shew, that this was an ancient opinion, some lines are quoted from Ovid's Metamorphosis, describing the Golden Age, in such a state of perfect happiness and innocence; on which the Author, thinking them to be no part of any one's Creed, imagined himself at liberty to observe, that from the nature of man, and the nature of this terrestrial globe, which he inhabits, the real existence of such a state seemed impossible; and therefore, that these descriptions of it could be nothing more, than amusing dreams, and enchanting fables. This bears not the least reference to the Mosaick Account of Paradise, in which such a State of absolute perfection, void of all Evil, is so far from being described, that the Serpent, or the Devil, the parent of all Evil, is one of the principal characters of that History; which therefore by no means contradicts the proposition here asserted.

The second Letter undertakes to shew, that Evils of Imperfection are in truth no Evils at all; but only the absence of comparative good, resulting solely from the necessary inferiority of some Beings with regard to others, which cannot be prevented in a system of creation, whose very essence consists in a chain of subordination, descending from infinite perfection to absolute nothing. To this likewise one objection only has been made; which is, that no such chain of

subordinate Beings, reaching from infinite perfection to absolute nothing, can, in fact, exist; for this notable reason; because no being can approach next to infinite perfection; nor any be contiguous to nothing. But this argument being no more than a quibble on metaphysical terms, to which no precise ideas are affixed, neither deserves, nor is capable of an answer.

The third Letter treats of Natural Evils; and attempts to shew that most of these, which we complain of, are derived likewise from the same source; that is, from the imperfection of our natures, and our station in the universal system: to this are added three conjectures; first, that many of our miseries may be owing to some secret, but invincible disposition in the nature of things, that renders it impracticable to produce pleasure exclusive of pain; a certain degree of which must therefore be endured by individuals, for the happiness and well-being of the whole: secondly, that many other of our miseries may be inflicted on us by the agency of superior Beings, to whose benefit they may possibly be as conducive as the deaths and sufferings of inferior animals are to ours: and, lastly, that by the ancient doctrine of Transmigration, the miseries, which for the sake of general utility we are obliged to suffer in one life, may be recompensed in another, and so the divine goodness be sufficiently justified from the admission of them all. To every one of these some objections have been made: against the first it has been alledged, that this impracticability to produce pleasure, without pain, whence arises this utility of the sufferings of individuals for the good of the whole, is meerly a production of the Author's own daring imagination, founded on no reason, and supported by no proof. To which he answers, that he proposes it as a conjecture only; but cannot think it ill-founded, since it is confirmed by the appearance of every thing around us, and since it is reasonable to

believe, that a benevolent Creator would not have permitted his creatures to have suffered on any other terms. In ridicule of the second conjecture, it has been asked, with an air of humour, whether we can think it credible, that superior beings should ride, or hunt, or roast, or eat us, as we make use of inferior animals? Which question is most properly to be answered by another: whether, in the unbounded system of creation, there may not be numberless methods, by which beings of different orders may be subservient to each others uses, totally above the reach of our comprehensions? To doubt of which would be like the incredulity of the ignorant peasant, who can scarce be persuaded to believe that there is any thing in the world, some specimen of which he has not beheld within the narrow limits of his own parish. To the last it is objected, that the doctrine of Transmigration being only the fanciful and exploded opinion of some ancient Philosophers, in the times of darkness, ought not, by the Author, to have been here advanced in direct contradiction to the faith and tenets of the Christian religion: to which he replies, that he neither proposes this doctrine as an article of his own belief, or imposes it on others; but mentions it only as the most rational conjecture of the human mind, uninformed by supernatural assistance concerning a future state: that it is confirmed by Revelation he does not pretend, but that it directly contradicts it, by no means appears; so silent are the Scriptures concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection, that the most learned divines still widely differ on that subject; some maintaining that it enters immediately into a state of retribution; others, of sleep; and others, of purgation from past offences: why therefore is it more repugnant to the sense of these writings, to suppose, that it may possibly animate other bodies during that period, and, at the last day, receive such punishments or rewards

as is due on the whole account of its past behaviour? Thus the probability of every one of these conjectures seems to be sufficiently established, and they appear perfectly consistent with reason, and not at all contradictory to revelation.

The fourth Letter endeavours to account for Moral Evil: the most arduous part of the whole undertaking; to which end it attempts to shew, that the common opinion, which derives it solely from the abuse of free-will in man, is ineffectual for that purpose; and that therefore, though its very essence consists in the production of natural Evil, yet it could never have been admitted into the works of a just and beneficent Creator, if it had not some remote and collateral tendency to universal good, by answering some ends beneficial to the immense and incomprehensible whole: one of which may possibly be the conversion of unpreventable miseries into just punishment by the production of guilt, without which they must have been inflicted on perfect innocence. To this account of the Origin of Moral Evil, not only many weighty objections have been made, but on it many imputations have been laid, of a most formidable nature, as that it makes God the cause of all wickedness, destroys Free-will in man, and consequently roots up the foundation of all Virtue and Morality whatever; and it is, moreover, charged with inconsistency and self-contradiction thro' every part. To all this the Author replies only, that he is assured, that, if any intelligent reader will peruse the whole Letter together with candor, and attention, it will evidently appear that these accusations are entirely groundless. He makes no manner of doubt, but that man is endued with Free-will, and is justly punishable for the abuse of it; and hopes he has so expressed himself, through this whole piece, as to leave no uncertainty of his opinion on that question: all he means is, that though the abuse of Free-will is undoubtedly the immediate cause

of Moral Evil, yet it cannot from thence derive its original admission into the works of a benevolent Creator; because man, not being a self-existent and independent being, must receive that Will itself, together with his nature and formation, from the supreme Author of all things: for which reason he cannot apprehend, that the general wickedness of mankind can be an accident proceeding from their unforeseen wrong elections, by which the whole benevolent system is defeated; but must be a part, and a material part too, of the original plan of creation, wisely calculated by the incomprehensible operations of vice, and punishment, to promote the good and happiness of the whole. For, to assert, that any thing has happened which God did not intend, or that he intended any thing which did not happen, is a language, which may be allowed to the Poet, or the Orator, but never to the Philosopher; unless we can suppose, that Omniscience can be disappointed, and Omnipotence defeated. As to Inconsistency, he denies not the charge; but believes he is not more inconsistent than all who have undertaken to write on the same subject: the Scriptures themselves are guilty of the same seeming inconsistency on this head; they all represent Man as a Being s perfectly free, punishable, and punished for his misbehaviour; yet as constantly speak of him as a creature deriving all his thought, will, and dispositions from his Creator, and under his perpetual influence, and direction: the appearance of inconsistency in which two propositions, both undoubtedly true, proceeds only from our ignorance in the nature, and limits of free-will, and divine influence, and our inability to comprehend them. In the latter part of this Letter, a few hints are flung out, to shew that on the principles of the foregoing theory some of the most abstruse doctrines of the Christian revelation, of original sin, grace, predestination, and vicarious punishment might be rendered reconcileable to the strictest

reason; a proposal from whence surely much advantage might accrue to the cause of Christianity in general, and by which possibly some articles of our own Church might be proved to be much less incompatible with common sense than they are thought to be by all those, who will not subscribe them, and by many, who do: with this, two classes of men are particularly offended; the rational dissenters, as they please to call themselves, and the Methodists: the former of these having arbitrarily expunged out of their Bibles every thing, which appears to them contradictory to reason, that is, to their own reason, or in other words, every thing which they cannot understand, are displeased to see those tenets explained, which they have thought proper to reject: the latter having embraced these very doctrines only because they appeared unintelligible, are unwilling to see them cleared up, and afraid lest those dark and thorny covers should be laid open, under which they have so long sheltered themselves from the rays of reason: with either of these all debate would be vain, and useless, because the first, though for the most part honest, religious and learned men, are unable to comprehend any reasoning, which soars above the limits of their own confined literature, and education; and the others are determined to listen to no reasoning at all, having with all reason and common-sense declared eternal warfare.

The design of the fifth Letter is to shew, that in the government of such imperfect creatures as men over each other there must be much unavoidable Evil: that all human governments, whether of the monarchical, popular, or mixed kinds, were at first founded on force or interest, and must ever be supported by the same means, that is, by compulsion, or corruption, both of which must be productive of innumerable Evils: that these ought not to be imputed to God, because he could not have prevented them without the total alteration of human

nature; much less can they be eradicated by men; but that they may in some measure be lessened by the diminution of Moral Evil, from which all Political Evils are derived; and therefore that we ought quietly to submit to these Evils, when they do not arise to any intolerable degree, and to apply principally that remedy to the faults of government, which is ever the most effectual, that is, the amendment of our own. It is no wonder, that a lesson so disagreeable to the restless humours of most men, and so repugnant to the arts and ends of faction, should call up against the Author many opponents, who have liberally bestowed on him the titles of an enemy to Liberty, and an advocate for corruption, with the same justice that a physician might be stiled an enemy to health, and an advocate for the gout, who in that distemper prescribes patience, and temperance, rather than such inflaming medicines as might convert it into a more dangerous disease. All that he has asserted in this Letter amounts to no more than this: that no government can subsist without some principle of governing; that is, that men cannot be governed without some means by which their obedience can be obtained; a proposition, which seems as incontestible, as that every effect must have a cause. That all government, must be disagreeable to those who are governed is demonstrable from the nature and essence of government itself, which being nothing more than a compulsion of individuals to act in such a manner in support of society as they are neither wise nor honest enough to do from the suggestions of their own heads, or heart this compulsion must be contrary to both their judgments, and inclinations, and consequently disagreeable, and for that reason perpetually resisted: some method must therefore be made use of to overcome the resistance, and what that method can be except force, or interest, he cannot find out he is an advocate for neither; except from their necessity; and, if any one will point out

another, he will readily declare his disapprobation of them both.

The sixth and last letter proceeds up the same plan as the rest, and endeavours to shew, that religious Evils, that is, the defects so visible in all human religion and the mischievous consequences resulting from them, are not owing to any want of wisdom or goodness in our Creator, but proceed, like all others, from our nature, and situation, and the impracticability of giving a perfect religion to an imperfect creature. In order to explain this it was necessary to point out the particular imperfections, which in fact do exist in all human religions, whether natural or revealed; not with any design to depreciate the one, or to invalidate the authority of the other, but only to account for them consistently with God's wisdom and benevolence: those charged upon natural religion have been readily enough agreed to, but those imputed to revelation have offended many, who have from thence considered the whole of this Inquiry as intended secretly to undermine the foundations of Christianity, than which nothing can be more averse from the intentions as well as from the sentiments of the Author: but indeed many late deistical writers have attacked that religion so unfairly by insinuating many cavils, which they dared not express, that they have made it very difficult for any one to treat freely on that subject, without incurring the suspicion of the same insincerity: of all such disingenuous artifices the Author sincerely declares his utmost detestation, and begs to be understood to mean all that he expresses, and nothing more: he solemnly professes, that by recounting these imperfections, he is so far from entertaining any secret designs destructive to that sacred institution, that by it he intended not only to wrest out of the hands of infidelity those weapons, with which it has ever been most successfully assaulted, but also to obviate all those doubts and difficulties, which frequently

occur to the minds of thinking men, though no infidels, on viewing the deplorable state in which all human religion has continued throughout all ages, and the ineffectual assistance it has received even from this divine interposition itself, by no means exempted from numberless Evils, and imperfections: to those, who perceive none of these Imperfections, and consequential Evils, he means not to write, nor desires to let in any new light on their tender organs, which can serve only to disturb their present repose; nor does he aspire to the honour of working for those middle sized understandings, who can be well fitted with ready made arguments from every Pulpit: to the learned, impartial, sagacious, and inquisitive, he alone applies, the establishing one of whom in a rational and well-grounded belief of the Christian Religion does more real service to that cause, than the inlisting legions under that denomination whose immoveable faith proceeds only from their ignorance; that is, who believing without any reason, can possibly have no reason for doubting. To account for the corruption of religion it was necessary to specify the particular abuses, and abusers of it: and here the Author could scarcely overlook the Clergy: but he hopes that nothing has escaped his pen, that can throw the least reflection upon them as Clergy, but as men only, subject to the same imperfections, and actuated by the same passions as other men, and pursuing the ends of self-interest and ambition by the same paths, in which all others would have trod, conducted by the same temptations, and opportunities; he has treated them with no more freedom than he has done Princes and Parliaments, Ministers and Patriots, Conquerors and Heroes, and his work would admit of no partiality; sure he is, that nothing he has said can bear the most distant relation to the present Clergy of this country, whom he sincerely thinks are a body of men as honest, learned, and

unprejudiced, as ever existed, and for whose persons and profession, he has the highest regard. In another part of this Letter there is an assertion, which has given some offence; which is, that every religion must be corrupted as soon as it becomes established: this has been thought a reflection upon all national churches, and a persuasion to schism, and dissention; but those, who think thus, totally misapprehend the tenor of this whole work, which endeavours to prove, that every thing human must be attended with Evils, which therefore ought to be submitted to with patience and resignation; that many imperfections will adhere to all governments and religions in the hands of men, but that these, unless they rise to an intolerable degree, will not justify our resistance to the one, or our dissention from the other: the assertion itself, the Author cannot retract, but the inference, which he desires may be drawn from it, is by no means favourable to dissentions, because from them he can perceive no remedy, which can accrue to these Evils: for if it was every one's duty to desert a national church on account of those corruptions which proceed from its establishment, and this duty was universally complied with, let us see the consequence! one of these things must necessarily follow; either that some dissention of superior purity, which usually arises from its being a dissention, must be established in its room; or no religion must be established at all: if the first of these methods should take place, the end proposed by it would by itself be entirely defeated; because that purer religion which was established would by that very establishment become equally corrupt with that which was deserted, and so the same reason would eternally remain for a new dissention: if the latter should be taken, that is, to establish no religion at all; this would be so far from producing the intended reformation, that it would let in such an inundation of enthusiasm, and contradictory absurdities,

as must in a short time destroy not only all religion, but all peace, and morality whatever: of which no one can entertain the least doubt, who is not totally unacquainted both with the nature, and history of mankind. From, whence it is plain, that all dissensions from a national church, not in itself sinful, arise from ignorance; that is, from a kind of short-sightedness, which enables men to pry out every imperfection within their reach, but prevents their discerning the more remote necessity for those imperfections, and the dangers of amending them.

To conclude: the Author of this Inquiry having heard it so much, and as he thought so unjustly calumniated, has reviewed it with all possible care and impartiality; and though he finds many things in the style, and composition, which have need enough of amendment, he sees nothing in the sentiments which ought to be retracted. His intentions were to reconcile the numerous evils so conspicuous in the Creation with the wisdom, power and goodness of the Creator; to shew, that no more of them are admitted by him, than are necessary towards promoting universal good; and from thence to persuade men to an intire resignation to his all-wise, but incomprehensible dispensations. To ascertain the nature of virtue, and to enforce the practice of it: to prove the certainty of a future state, and the justice of the rewards and punishments that will attend it: to recommend submission to national governments, and conformity to national religions, notwithstanding the Evils and Defects, which must unavoidably adhere to them: and lastly, to shew the excellence and credibility of the Christian revelation, to reconcile some of its most abstruse doctrines with reason, and to answer all those objections to its authority, which have been drawn from its imperfections, and abuses. These, and these only were the intentions of the Author; and if after all, a work so

designed, however unably executed, should by the united force of ignorance, and malevolence, of faction, bigotry, and enthusiasm, be represented as introductive of fatalism, immorality, slavery, corruption, and infidelity, he shall be little concerned, and shall only look upon it as an additional instance of that Imperfection of mankind, which he has here treated of: from them he desires only an exemption from calumny: honour and applause he has not the vanity to hope for; these, he knows, they bestow not on their benefactors, or instructors, but reserve for those alone, who deceive, disturb, and destroy them.

LETTER I.

ON

Evils of Imperfection.

LETTER I.

On Evil in general.

SIR,

HAVING enjoyed the pleasure of many accidental conferences with you on metaphysical, moral, political, and religious subjects; on which you ever seemed to converse with more sagacity, as well as more candor, than is usual on the like occasions; I imagined it might not be unentertaining either to you, or myself, to put together my sentiments on these important topics, and communicate them to you from time to time as the absence of business, or of more agreeable amusements may afford this life; apprehensive of still greater in another, and can give no probable account of this our wretched situation, what sentiments must we entertain of the justice and benevolence of our Creator, who placed us in it, without our sollicitations, or consent? The works of the Creation sufficiently demonstrate his existence, their beauty, perfection and magnificence, his infinite power and wisdom; but it is the Happiness only, which we enjoy, or hope for, which can convince us of his Goodness.

It is the solution therefore of this important question alone, that can ascertain the moral Characteristic of God, and upon that only must all human Virtue eternally depend.

If there's a power above us, (And that there is all Nature cries aloud Thro' all her works) he must delight in Virtue,
And that, which he delights in, must be happy.

But shou'd this divine reasoning of the philosopher be at last inconclusive; cou'd we once entertain such blasphemous notions of the Supreme being, as that He might not delight in Virtue, neither adhere to it himself, nor reward it in others; that He could make any part of his creation miserable, or suffer them to make themselves so, without a just cause, and a benevolent end; all moral considerations must be vain, and useless; we can have no rule by which to direct our actions, nor if we had, any kind of obligation to pursue it; nor in this case can any Revelation in the least assist us, the belief of all Revelation being in its own sature subsequent, not only to the belief of God's existence, but of his justice and veracity; for if God can injure us, he may also deceive us; and then there is an end of all distinctions between good and evil, truth and falsehood, and of all confidence in God or man.

I mean not by this to insinuate the least possibility of a doubt concerning the Justice or Goodness of our Creator, but only to shew the importance of this Inquiry, and the utility of it towards settling our notions of his Attributes, and the regulation of our own behaviour in conformity to them. I intend not by it to prove the benevolence of God, but to reconcile the miseries we see and suffer, with that uncontrovertable benevolence: I design not to shew that God approves Virtue; but that the admission of moral Evil is not inconsistent with that undoubted approbation: nor would I be understood to assert, that our obligation to be virtuous depends on this abstruse Speculation, but only that our right understanding it will remove all doubts concerning the nature of virtue, and our obligation to pursue it, and fix them on the most firm, and immoveable Basis.

To find out therefore, how Evil of any kind can be the production of infinite Goodness, joined with infinite power, should be the first step

in all our religious inquiries; the examination into which wonderful paradox will lead us into many useful and sublime truths; and its perfect comprehension, was that possible for our narrow capacities, would, I doubt not, make as surprising discoveries in the Moral World, as mathematical and physical knowledge have in the Natural.

To clear up this difficulty, some ancient Philosophers have had recourse to the supposition of two first Causes, one Good, and the other Evil, perpetually counteracting each other's designs. This system was afterwards adopted by the Manichæan Heresy, and has since been defended by the ingenious Mons. Bayle but as the supposition of two first Causes is even in itself a contradiction, and as the whole scheme has been demonstrated by the best metaphysical Writers to be as false as it is impious, all further arguments to disprove it would be needless.

Others have endeavoured to account for this by the introduction of a Golden Age, or Paradisiacal State, in which all was innocence and happiness.

Poeena metusque aberant, nec verba minacia fixo

Ære legebantur, nec supplex turba timebant

Judicis ora sui; sed erant sine vindice tuti.

When Man yet new,

No rule but uncorrupted reason knew, And with a native bent did Good pursue;

Unforc'd by punishment, unaw'd by fear,

His words were simple, and his soul sincere:

Needless was written law, when none opprest,

The law of Man was written in his breast:

No suppliant crowds before the Judge appear'd,

No court erected yet, nor cause was heard,

But all was safe, for Conscience was their Guard.

Ver erat æternum, placidisque tepentibus auris

Mulcebant Zephyri natos sine semine flores;

Mox etiam fruges tellus inarata ferebat,

Nec renovatus ager gravidis canebat aristas,

Flumina jam lactis, jam flumina nectaris ibant,

Flavaque de viridi stillabant ilice mella.

The flow'rs unsown in fields and meadows reign'd,

And Western Winds immortal Spring maintain'd.

In following years the bearded corn ensu'd

From Earth unask'd, nor was that Earth renew'd.

From veins of valleys milk and nectar broke,

And honey sweated from the pores of oak

Amusing dreams! as absurd in philosophy as in poetry delightful! For though it is probable, from the most ancient history as well as from analogy drawn from the Nature's productions, that the World be more happy and more innocent in its fancy, than in more advanced Ages; it could ever be totally free from Vi., Misery, may easily, I think, be impossible, both from the nature of the terrestrial Globe, and the nature of its inhabitants. So that these enchanting ... can in fact never have existed: but, had, the short duration of this period... is equally incontinent with infinite joined to infinite Wisdom and Good... as any original imperfection whatever. Fables then of this kind can never in the least account for the Origin of Evil: they are all but mean expedients, which will never be able to take away the difficulty, and can at most but obscure it, by shifting it a little backward into a less clear light; like that Indian philosophy, accounting for the support of the World, which informs us, that it is sustained by a vast Elephant, that Elephant by a Tortoise, and then prudently drops any

further inquiry.

The Divines and Moralists of later ages seem perfectly satisfied that they have loosed this Gordian knot, by imputing the source of all Evil to the abuse of Free-will in Created Beings. God, they say, never design'd any such thing should exist as Evil, moral or natural; but that giving to some beings, for good and wise purposes, a power of Free-agency, they perverted this power to bad ends, contrary to his intentions and commands; and thus their accidental wickedness produced consequential Misery. But to suppose in this manner, that God intended all things to be good and happy, and at the same time gave being to creatures able and willing to obstruct his benevolent designs, is a notion so inconsistent with his wisdom, goodness, omniscience, and omnipotence, that it seems equally unphilosophical, and more evidently absurd than the other. They have been led into this error by ridiculously judging of the dispensation of a Creator to his creatures, by the same rules which they apply to the dealings of Men towards each other; between which there is not the least proportion or similitude. A Man who endeavours, to the utmost of his power, to make others virtuous and happy, however unsuccessful, is sufficiently justified; but in a Being omnipotent and omniscient, the Cause of all causes, the Origin of all thought, will, and action; who sees all things past, present, and to come, in one instantaneous view, the case is widely different; his active and permissive will must be exactly the same; and, in regard to him, all consequential and future Evils, through every moment of time, are actually present.

Since therefore none of these pretended solutions can, I am certain, give such satisfaction to your comprehensive understanding, let us now try to find out one more rational, and more consistent with the analogy of every thing around us.

That there is a Supreme Being infinitely powerful, wise and benevolent, the great Creator and Preserver of all things, is a truth so clearly demonstrated, that it shall be here taken for granted. That there is also in the universal system of things, the works of his almighty hand, much misery and wickedness, that is, much natural and moral Evil, is another truth, of which every hour's fatal experience cannot fail to convince us. How these two undoubted, yet seeming contradictory truths can be reconciled, that is, how Evils of any sort could have place in the works of an omnipotent and good Being, is very difficult to account for. If we assert that he could not prevent them, we destroy his power; if that he would not, we arraign his goodness; and therefore his power and goodness cannot both be infinite.

But however conclusive this argument may seem, there is somewhere or other an error in it; and this error I take to arise from our wrong notions of Omnipotence. Omnipotence cannot work contradictions, it can only effect all possible things. But so little are we acquainted with the whole system of nature, that we know not what are possible, and what are not: but if we may judge from that constant mixture of pain with pleasure, and of inconvenience with advantage, which we must observe in every thing around us, we have reason to conclude, that to endue created beings with perfection, that is, to produce Good exclusive of Evil, is one of those impossibilities which even infinite Power cannot accomplish.

The true solution then of this incomprehensible paradox must be this, that all Evils owe their existence solely to the necessity of their own natures, by which I mean they could not possibly have been prevented, without the loss of some superior Good, or the permission of some greater Evil than themselves; or that many Evils will unavoidably insinuate themselves by the natural relations and circumstances of

things into the most perfect system of Created Beings, even in opposition to the will of an almighty Creator, by reason they cannot be excluded without working contradictions; which not being proper objects of power, it is no diminution of Omnipotence to affirm that it cannot effect them.

And here it will be proper to make a previous apology for an expression, which will frequently occur in the following pages, which is, that God cannot do such and such things: by which is always to be understood not any retrenchment of the divine Omnipotence, but only that such things are in their own natures impracticable, and impossible to be performed.

That the Almighty should be thus limited, and circumscribed by the nature of things, of which he himself is the Author, may to some seem not very intelligible: but surely it is not at all difficult to conceive, that in every possible method of ordering, disposing, and framing the universal system of things, such numberless inconveniencies might necessarily arise, that all that infinite Power and Wisdom could do, was to make choice of that method, which was attended with the least and fewest; and this not proceeding from any defect of power in the Creator; but from that imperfection which is inherent in the nature of all created things.

This necessity, I imagine, is what the Ancients meant by Fate, to which they fancied that Jupiter, and all the Gods, were obliged to submit, and which was to be controuled by no power whatever. The Stoicks seem to have had some dark and unintelligible notions of this kind, which they neither understood themselves, nor knew how to explain to others; that the untractableness of Matter was the cause of Evil; that God would have made all things perfect, but that there was in Matter an evil bias, repugnant to his benevolence, which drew another way, whence

arose all manner of Evils. Of the like kind is a Maxim of the same Philosophers, That Pain is no Evil; which, if asserted with regard to the individuals who suffer it, is downright nonsense; but if considered as it affects the universal System, is an undoubted truth, and means only that there is no more pain in it than what is necessary to the production of happiness. How many soever of these Evils then force themselves into the Creation, so long as the Good preponderates, it is a work well worthy of infinite Wisdom and Benevolence; and, notwithstanding the imperfections of its parts, the whole is most undoubtedly perfect.

Hence then we may plainly see that much Evil may exist, not at all inconsistent with the power and goodness of God: and the further we pursue this clue, the more we shall at every step discern new lights break out; which will discover clearly numberless examples, where the infinite power and goodness of God is fairly reconcilable with the misery and wickedness of his Creatures, from the impossibility of preventing them; and if, in the very small part of the universal System that lies within the reach of our imperfect capacities, many instances of this kind appear, in which they are visibly consistent, we ought with the utmost assurance to conclude, what is undoubtedly true, that they are really so in all, tho' we are not able to comprehend them.

This is the kind of Faith most worthy of the human understanding, and most meritorious in the sight of God, as it is the offspring of Reason, as well as the Parent of all Virtue and Resignation to the just, but unscrutable, dispensations of Providence.

But, in order more clearly to explain this abstruse speculation, it will be necessary to divide Evils into their different species, and bestow on each a separate confederation. This I shall do under the following heads: Evils of Imperfection, Natural Evils, Moral Evils,

Political Evils, and Religious Evils, which, I think, will comprehend most of those to which human Nature is unhappily liable. And now, Sir, lest I should add one more Evil to this melancholy Catalogue, which is that of a long and tedious Epistle, I shall reserve the examination into each of these particulars for the subject of a future Letter; and conclude this by assuring you, that I am,
S I R, &c.

LETTER II.

ON

EVILS of Imperfection.

LETTER II.

On Evils of imperfection.

SIR,

IN pursuance of the plan proposed in my last, I shall now proceed to examine into the Nature of each particular kind of Evil, and in the first place of those therein denominated Evils of Imperfection; which are in truth no Evils at all, but rather the absence of some comparative Good; and therefore I shall not have occasion to detain you long on this part of my subject.

No System can possibly be formed, even in imagination, without a subordination of parts. Every animal body must have different members subservient to each other; every picture must be composed of various colours, and of light and shade; all harmony must be formed of trebles, tenors, and basses; every beautiful and useful edifice must consist of higher and lower, more and less magnificent apartments. This is in the very essence of all created things, and therefore cannot be prevented by any means whatever, unless by not creating them at all: for which reason, in the formation of the Universe, God was obliged, in order to carry on that just subordination so necessary to the very existence of the whole, to create Beings of different ranks; and to bestow on various species of animals, and also on the individuals of the same species, various degrees of understanding, strength, beauty, and perfection; to the comparative want of which advantages we give the names of folly, weakness, deformity, and imperfection, and very

unjustly repute them Evils: whereas in truth they are blessings as far as they extend, tho' of an inferior degree. They are no more actual Evils, than a small estate is a real misfortune, because many may be possessed of greater.

Whatever we enjoy, is purely a free gift from our Creator; but that we enjoy no more, can never sure be deemed an injury, or a just reason to question his infinite benevolence. All our happiness is owing to his goodness; but that it is no greater, is owing only to ourselves, that is, to our not having any inherent right to any happiness, or even to any existence at all. This is no more to be imputed to God, than the wants of a beggar to the person who has relieved him: that he had something, was owing to his benefactor; but that he had no more, only to his original poverty.

They who look upon the privation of all the good they see others enjoy, or think possible for infinite power to bestow, as positive Evil, understand not that the Universe is a system whose very essence consists in subordination; a scale of beings descending by insensible degrees from infinite perfection to absolute nothing; in which, tho' we may justly expect to find perfection in the whole, could we possibly comprehend it; yet would it be the highest absurdity to hope for it in all its parts, because the beauty and happiness of the whole depend altogether on the just inferiority of its parts, that is, on the comparative imperfections of the several Beings of which it is composed.

It would have been no more an instance of God's wisdom to have created no Beings but of the highest and most perfect order, than it would be of a painter's art, to cover his whole piece with one single colour, the most beautiful he could compose. Had he confined himself to such, nothing could have existed but demi-gods, or archangels, and then all

inferior orders must have been void and uninhabited: but as it is surely more agreeable to infinite benevolence, that all these should be filled up with Beings capable of enjoying happiness themselves, and contributing to that of others, they must necessarily be filled with inferior Beings, that is, with such as are less perfect, but from whose existence, notwithstanding that less perfection, more felicity upon the whole accrues to the Universe, than if no such had been created. It is moreover highly probable that there is such a connexion between all ranks and orders by subordinate degrees, that they mutually support each other's existence, and every one in its place is absolutely necessary towards sustaining the whole vast and magnificent fabrick. You see therefore, that it is utterly impracticable, even for infinite power, to exclude from Creation this necessary inferiority of some Beings in comparison with others. All that it can do is to make each as happy as their respective situations will permit: and this it has done in so extraordinary a manner, as to leave the benevolence of our great Creator not to be doubted of; for tho' he cannot make all superior, yet in the dispensations of his blessings his wisdom and goodness both are well worthy the highest admiration; for, amongst all the wide distinctions which he was obliged to make in the dignity and perfections of his Creatures, he has made much less in their happiness than is usually imagined, or indeed can be believed from outward appearances. He has given many advantages to Brutes, which Man cannot attain to with all his superiority, and many probably to Man which are denied to Angels; amongst which his ignorance is perhaps none of the least. With regard to him, tho' it was necessary to the great purposes of human life to bestow riches, understanding, and health, on individuals in very partial proportions; yet has the Almighty so contrived the nature of things, that happiness is distributed with a

more equal hand. His goodness, we may observe, is always striving with these our necessary imperfections, setting bounds to the inconveniencies it cannot totally prevent, by balancing the wants, and repaying the sufferings of all by some kind of equivalent naturally resulting from their particular situations and circumstances. Thus, for example, poverty, or the want of riches, is generally compensated by having more hopes, and fewer fears, by a greater share of health, and a more exquisite relish of the smallest enjoyments, than those who possess them are usually blessed with. The want of taste and genius, with all the pleasures that arise from them, are commonly recompensed by a more useful kind of common sense, together with a wonderful delight, as well as success, in the busy pursuits of a scrambling world. The sufferings of the Sick are greatly relieved by many trifling gratifications imperceptible to others, and sometimes almost repaid by the inconceivable transports occasioned by the return of health and vigour. Folly cannot be very grievous, because imperceptible; and I doubt not but there is some truth in that rant of a mad Poet, that there is a pleasure in being mad, which none but madmen know. Ignorance, or the want of knowledge and literature, the appointed lot of all born to poverty, and the drudgeries of life, is the only opiate capable of infusing that insensibility which can enable them to endure the miseries of the one, and the fatigues of the other. It is a cordial administered by the gracious hand of Providence; of which they ought never to be deprived by an ill-judged and improper Education. It is the basis of all subordination, the support of society, and the privilege of individuals: and I have ever thought it a most remarkable instance of the Divine Wisdom, that whereas in all animals, whose individuals rise little above the rest of their species, knowledge is instinctive; in Man, whose individuals are so widely different, it is acquired by

Education; by which means the Prince and the Labourer, the Philosopher, and the Peasant, are in some measure fitted for their respective situations. The same parental care extends to every part of the animal creation. Brutes are exempted from numberless anxieties, by that happy want of reflection on past, and apprehension of future sufferings, which are annexed to their inferiority. Those amongst them who devour others, are taught by Nature to dispatch them as easily as possible; and Man, the most merciless devourer of all, is induced, by his own advantage, to feast those designed for his sustenance, the more luxuriously to feast upon them himself. Thus misery, by all possible methods, is diminished or repaid; and happiness, like fluids, is ever tending towards an Equilibrium.

But was it ever so unequally divided, our pretence for complaint could be of this only, that we are not so high in the scale of existence as our ignorant ambition may desire: a pretence which must eternally subsist; because, were we ever so much higher, there would be still room for infinite power to exalt us; and since no link in the chain can be broke, the same reason for disquiet must remain to those who succeed to that chasm, which must be occasioned by our preferment. A man can have no reason to repine, that he is not an Angel; nor a Horse, that he is not a Man; much less, that in their several stations they possess not the faculties of another; for this would be an insufferable misfortune. And doubtless it would be as inconvenient for a Man to be endued with the knowledge of an Angel, as for a Horse to have the reason of a Man; but, as they are now formed by the consummate wisdom of their Creator, each enjoys pleasures peculiar to his situation: and tho' the happiness of one may perhaps consist in divine Contemplation, of another in the acquisition of wealth and power, and that of a third, in wandering amongst limpid stream, and luxuriant pastures; yet the

meanest of these enjoyments give no interruption to the most sublime,
but altogether undoubtedly increase the aggregate sum of felicity
bestowed upon the universe. Greatly indeed must that be lessened, were
there no Beings but of the highest orders. Did there not, for instance,
exist on this terrestrial Globe any sensitive creatures inferior to
Man, how great a quantity of happiness must have been lost, which is
now enjoy'd by millions, who at present inhabit every part of its
surface, in fields and gardens, in extended deserts, impenetrable
woods, and immense oceans; by monarchies of Bees, republics of Ants,
and innumerable families of insects dwelling on every leaf and flower,
who are all possessed of as great a share of pleasure, and a greater of
innocence, than their arrogant Sovereign, and at the same time not a
little contribute to his convenience and happiness!

Has God, thou Fool! work'd solely for thy good!

Thy Joy, thy Pastime, thy Attire, thy Food!

Who for thy Table feeds the wanton Fawn,

For him as kindly spreads the flow'ry lawn.

Is it for thee the Lark ascends and sings?

Joy tunes his Voice, joy elevates his Wings.

Is it for thee the Linnet pours his Throat?

Loves of his own, and raptures, swell the note.

The bounding Steed you pompously bestride,

Shares with his Lord the pleasure and the pride.

Is thine alone the seed that strews the plain?

The birds of Heav'n shall vindicate their grain.

Thine the full harvest of the Golden Year?

Part pays, and justly, the deferring Steer.

Pope.

Thus the Universe resembles a large and well-regulated Family, in which

all the officers and servants, and even the domestic animals, are subservient to each other in a proper subordination: each enjoys the privileges and perquisites peculiar to his place, and at the same time contributes by that just subordination to the magnificence and happiness of the whole.

It is evident, therefore, that these Evils of Imperfection, proceeding from the necessary inferiority of some Beings in comparison of others, can in no sense be called any Evils at all: but if they could, it is as evident from thence, that there are many which even infinite power cannot prevent; it being sufficiently demonstrable, that to produce a system of created Beings, all supreme in happiness and dignity, a government composed of all Kings, an army of all Generals, or a universe of all Gods, must be impracticable for Omnipotence itself.

We have here then made a large stride towards our intended Goal, having at once acquitted the Divine Goodness, and freed Mankind from a numerous train of imaginary Evils, by most clearly shewing them to be no Evils at all; and yet under this head are really comprehended all the Evils we perpetually complain of, except actual pain, the nature of which, and how it came to have a place in the works of an omnipotent and good Being, shall be considered in the next Letter from,

S I R, &c.

LETTER III.

ON

Natural Evils.

LETTER III.

On Natural Evils.

SIR,

I Shall now lay before you my free sentiments concerning the Origin of Natural Evils, by which I understand the sufferings of sensitive Beings only; for tempests, inundations and earthquakes, with all the disorders of the material World, are no farther Evils than they affect the sensitive: so that under this head can be only comprehended pains of body, and inquietudes of mind. That these are real Evils, I readily acknowledge; and if any one is philosopher enough to doubt of it, I shall only beg leave to refer him to a severe fit of sickness, or a tedious lawsuit, for farther satisfaction.

The production of Happiness seems to be the only motive that could induce infinite Goodness to exert infinite Power to create all things: for, to say truth, Happiness is the only thing of real value in existence; neither riches, nor power, nor wisdom, nor learning, nor strength, nor beauty, nor virtue, nor religion, nor even life itself, being of any importance but as they contribute to its production. All these are in themselves neither Good nor Evil; Happiness alone is their great end, and they desirable only as they tend to promote it. Most astonishing therefore it must appear to every one who looks round him, to observe all creatures blessed with life and sensation, that is, all creatures made capable of Happiness, at the same time by their own natures condemned to innumerable and unavoidable miseries. Whence can

it proceed, that Providence should thus seem to counteract his own benevolent intentions? To what strange and invisible cause are all these numerous and invincible Evils indebted for their existence? If God is a good and benevolent Being, what end could he propose from creation, but the propagation of Happiness? and if Happiness is the end of all existence, why are not all creatures that do exist happy?

The true solution of this important question, so long and so vainly searched for by the philosophers of all ages and all countries, I take to be at last no more than this, That these real Evils proceed from the same source as those imaginary ones of Imperfection before treated of, namely, from that subordination, without which no created system can subsist; all subordination implying imperfection; all Imperfection Evil, and all Evil some kind of inconvenience or suffering; so that there must be particular inconveniences and sufferings annexed to every particular rank of created Beings by the circumstances of things, and their modes of existence. Most of those to which we ourselves are liable may be easily shewn to be of this kind, the effects only of human nature, and the station Man occupies in the universe: and therefore their Origin is plainly deducible from necessity; that is, they could not have been prevented without the loss of greater good, or the admission of greater Evils than themselves; or by not creating any such creatures as Men at all. And tho' this upon a general view of things, does not so forcibly us; yet, on a more minute inspection into every grievance attendant on human nature, it will most evidently appear. Most of these, I think, may be comprehended under the following heads: poverty, labour, inquietudes of mind, pains of body, and death; from none of which we may venture to affirm Man could ever have been exempted, so long as he continued to be Man. God indeed might have made us quite other creatures, and placed us in a world quite otherwise

constituted; but then we had been no longer Men; and whatever Beings had occupied our stations in the universal System, they must have been liable to the same inconveniences.

Poverty, for example, is what all could not possibly have been exempted from, not only by reason of the fluctuating nature of human possessions, but because the world could not subsist without it; for had all been rich, none would have submitted to the commands of another, or the drudgeries of life; thence all governments must have been dissolved, arts neglected, and lands uncultivated, and so an universal penury have overwhelmed all, instead of now and then pinching a few. Hence by the bye, appears the great excellence of Charity, by which men are enabled by a particular distribution of the blessings and enjoyments of life, on proper occasions, to prevent that poverty which by a general one Omnipotence itself could never have prevented: so that, by enforcing this duty, God as it were demands our assistance to promote universal happiness, and to shut out Misery at every door, where it strives to intrude itself.

Labour, indeed, God might easily have excused us from, since at his command the Earth would readily have poured forth all her treasures without our inconsiderable assistance: but if the severest Labour cannot sufficiently subdue the malignity of human nature, what plots and machinations, what wars, rapine, and devastation, what profligacy, and licentiousness, must have been the consequence of universal idleness! So that Labour ought only to be looked upon as a task kindly imposed upon us by our indulgent Creator, necessary to preserve our health, our safety, and our innocence.

Inquietudes of mind cannot be prevented without first eradicating all our inclinations and passions, the winds and tides that preserve the great Ocean of human life from perpetual stagnation. So long as Men

have pursuits, they must meet with disappointments; and whilst they have disappointments they must be disquieted; whilst they are injured, they must be enflamed with anger; and whilst they see cruelties, they must be melted with pity; whilst they perceive danger, they must be sensible of fear; and whilst they behold beauty, they must be inflamed by love: nor can they be exempted from the various anxieties attendant on these various and turbulent passions. Yet without them we should be undoubtedly less happy and less safe; for without anger we should not defend ourselves, and without pity we should not assist others; without fear we should not preserve our lives, and without love they would not be worth preserving.

Pains of body are perhaps but the necessary consequences of the union of material and spiritual essences; for matter being by nature divisible, when endued with sensibility, must probably be affected by pains and pleasures by its different modifications: therefore, to have been freed from our sufferings, we must have been deprived of all our sensual enjoyments; a composition by which few surely would be gainers. Besides, the pains of our bodies are necessary to make us continually mindful of their preservation; for what numberless lives would be lost in every trifling pursuit, or flung away in ill humour, was the piercing of a sword no more painful than the tickling of a feather. Death, the last and most dreadful of all Evils, is so far from being one, that it is the infallible cure of all others.

To die is landing on some silent shore,
Where billows never beat, nor tempests roar.
Ere well we feel the friendly strole 'tis o'er.
Garth.

For, abstracted from the sickness and sufferings usually attending it, it is no more than the expiration of that term of life, God was pleased

to bestow on us, without any claim or merit on our part. But was it an Evil ever so great, it could not be remedied but by one much greater, which is by living for ever; by which means our wickedness, unrestrained by the prospect of a future state, would grow so insupportable, our sufferings so intolerable by perseverance, and our pleasures so tiresome by repetition, that no being in the Universe could be so compleatly miserable as a species of immortal men. We have no reason therefore to look upon death as an Evil, or to fear it as a punishment, even without any supposition of a future life: but if we consider it as a passage to a more perfect state, or a remove only in an eternal succession of still improving states (for which we have the strongest reasons) it will then appear a new favour from the divine munificence; and a man must be as absurd to repine at dying, as a traveller would be, who proposed to himself a delightful tour thro' various unknown countries, to lament that he cannot take up his residence at the first dirty Inn which he baits at on the road. The instability of human life, or the hasty changes of its successive periods, of which we so frequently complain, are no more than the necessary progress of it to this necessary conclusion; and are so far from being Evils deserving these complaints, that they are the source of our greatest pleasures, as they are the source of all novelty, from which our greatest pleasures are ever derived. The continual succession of Seasons in the human life, by daily presenting to us new scenes, render it agreeable, and like those of the year, afford us delights by their change, which the choicest of them could not give us by their continuance. In the Spring of Life, the gilding of the sun-shine, the verdure of the fields, and the variegated paintings of the Sky, are so exquisite in the eyes of Infants at their first looking abroad into a new World, as nothing perhaps afterwards can equal. The heat and vigour

of the succeeding Summer of Youth ripens for us new pleasures, the blooming maid, the nightly revel, and the jovial chace: the serene Autumn of compleat Manhood feasts us with the golden harvests of our worldly pursuits: nor is the hoary Winter of old age destitute of its peculiar comforts and enjoyments, of which the recollection and relation of those past are perhaps none of the least; and at last death opens to us a new prospect, from whence we shall probably look back upon the diversions and occupations of this world with the same contempt we do now on our Tops, and Hobby-horses, and with the same surprise, that they could ever so much entertain or engage us.

Thus we see all these evils could never have been prevented even by infinite Power, without the introduction of greater, or the loss of superior good; they are but the necessary consequences of human Nature; from which it can no more be divested, than matter from extension, or heat from motion, which proceed from the very modes of their existence.

If it be objected, that, after all that has been said, there are innumerable miseries entailed upon all things that have life, and particularly on man; many diseases of the body, and afflictions of mind, in which Nature seems to play the Tyrant, ingenious in contriving torments for her children; that we cannot avoid seeing every moment with horror numbers of our fellow-creatures condemned to tedious and intolerable miseries, some expiring on racks, others roasting in flames, some starving in dungeons, others raving in mad houses; some broiling in fevers, others groaning whole months under the exquisite tortures of gout and stone: If it be said further, that some men being exempted from many calamities with which others are afflicted proves plainly that all might have been exempted from all; the charge can by no means be disputed, nor can it be alledged that infinite Power could not have prevented most of these dreadful calamities. From hence

therefore I am persuaded, that there is something in the abstract nature of pain, conducive to pleasure: that the sufferings of individuals are absolutely necessary to universal happiness; and that, from connections to us inconceivable, it was impracticable for Omnipotence to produce the one, without at the same time permitting the other. Their constant and uniform concomitancy thro' every part of Nature with which we are acquainted, very much corroborates this conjecture, in which scarce one instance, I believe, can be produced of the acquisition of pleasure or convenience by any means, which is not purchased by the previous or consequential sufferings of themselves or others; pointing out, as it were, that a certain allay of Pain must be cast into universal mass of created Happiness, inflicted somewhere for the benefit of the whole. Over what mountains of slain every mighty Empire rolled up to the summit of Prosperity and Luxury, and new scenes of desolation attend its fall? what infinite toil of Men, and other animals, is every flourishing City indebted for all the conveniences and enjoyments of it... and what vice and misery do those very enjoyments introduce? The pleasures peculiar to the continuing our species are several paid for by pains and perils in one and by cares and anxieties in both. Those annexed to the preservation of ourselves are both preceded and followed by numberless sufferings; preceded by the massacres and tortures of various animals preparatory to a feast, and followed by as many diseases lying in wait in every dish to pour forth vengeance on their destroyers. Our riches and honours are acquired by laborious or perilous occupations, and our sports are pursued with scarce less fatigue or danger, and usually attended with distresses and destruction of innocent animals. This universal connection of pain with pleasure seems, I think, strongly to intimate, that pain abstractedly considered must have its uses; and since we may be assured, that it is never

admitted but with the reluctance of the supreme Author, those uses must be of the highest importance, tho' we have no faculties to conceive them.

The human mind can comprehend but a very small part of the great and astonishing whole: for any thing we know, the sufferings (and perhaps the crimes producing those sufferings) of the Inhabitants of this terrestrial Globe may some way or other affect those of the most distant planet, and the whole animal world may be connected by some principle as general as that of attraction in the corporeal, and so the miseries of particular Beings be some way necessary to the happiness of the whole. How these things operate is indeed to us quite inconceivable; but that they do operate in some such extensive manner, is far, I think, from improbable.

All Ages and Nations seem to have had confused notions of the merits of sufferings abstracted from their tendency to any visible good, and have paid the highest honors to those who have voluntarily endured them, as to their common benefactors. Many in Christian countries have formerly so fainted for long fasting, for whipping ... tormenting themselves, for sitting whole s in uneasy postures, or exposing themselves to the inclemency of the weather on the tops of pillars. Many at this day in the East are almost deified for loading themselves with heavy chains, bending under burthens, or confining themselves in irs stuck round with pointed nails. Now, if these notions are not totally devoid of all reason and common sense, (and , I believe, are so which become universal they can be founded on no other principle than this, of the necessity of pain to induce happiness, which seems another mighty instance of the probability of this ancient and universal opinion, tho' the reasons for it are forgot or unknown, and the practices derived from it big with the most absurd and ridiculous superstitions.

One cause, I think, from which many of our severest sufferings may be derived, may be discovered by analogical reasoning, that is, by assimilating those things which are not objects of our understandings, to others which lie within their reach. Man is one link of that vast Chain, descending by insensible degrees from infinite perfection to absolute nothing. As there are many thousands below him, so must there be many more above him. If we look downwards, we see innumerable species of inferior Beings, whose happiness and lives are dependent on his will; we see him clothed by their spoils, and fed by their miseries and destruction, enslaving some, tormenting others, and murdering millions for his luxury or diversion; is it not therefore analogous and highly probable, that the happiness and life of Man should be equally dependent on the wills of his superiors? As we receive great part of our pleasures, and even subsistence from the sufferings and deaths of lower animals, may not these superior Beings do the same from ours, and that by ways as far above the reach of the most exalted human understandings, as the means by which we receive our benefits are above the capacities of the meanest creatures destined for our service? The fundamental Error in all our reasonings on this subject, is that of placing ourselves wrong in that presumptuous climax of Beast, Man, and God; from whence, as we suppose falsely, that there is nothing above us except the Supreme Being, we foolishly conclude that all the Evils we labour under must be derived immediately from his omnipotent hand: whereas there may be numberless intermediate Beings, who have power to deceive, torment, or destroy us, for the ends only of their own pleasure or utility, who may be veiled with the same privileges over their inferiors, and as much benefited by the use of them, as ourselves. In what manner these benefits accrue to them, it is impossible for us to conceive; but that impossibility lessens not the

probability of this conjecture, which by Analogy is so strongly confirmed.

Should you, Sir, have been lately employed in reading some of those sublime Authors, who, from pride and ignorance, delight to puff up the dignity of Human Nature, the notions here advanced may appear to you absurd and incredible, because inconsistent with that imaginary dignity; and you may object, that it is impossible that God should suffer innocence to be thus afflicted, and reason thus deceived; that tho' he may permit animals made solely for the use of man to be thus abused for his convenience, or recreation; yet that Man himself, the sole possessor of reason, the Lord of this terrestrial globe, his own ambassador, vicegerent, and similitude, should be thus dependent on the will of others, must be utterly inconsistent with the divine Wisdom and justice. But pray, Sir, what does all this prove, but the importance of a Man to himself? Is not the justice of God as much concerned to preserve the happiness of the meanest Insect which he has called into being, as of the greatest Man that ever lived? Are not all creatures we see made subservient to each other's uses? and what is there in Man that he should only be exempted from this common fate of all created Beings? The superiority of Man to that of other terrestrial animals is as inconsiderable, in proportion to the immense plan of universal existence, as the difference of climate between the north and south end of the paper I now write upon, with regard to the heat and distance of the Sun. There is nothing leads us into so many Errors concerning the works, and designs of Providence, as that foolish vanity that can persuade such insignificant creatures that all things were made for their service; from whence they ridiculously set up Utility to themselves as the standard of good, and conclude every thing to be Evil which appears injurious to them or their purposes. As well might a nest

of Ants imagine this Globe of Earth created only for them to cast up into hillocks, and cloathed with grain and herbage for their sustenance then accuse their Creator for permitting spades to destroy them, and plows to lay waste their habitations; the inconveniences of which they feel, but are utterly unable to comprehend their uses, as well as the relations they themselves bear to superior Beings.

It is surprizing that none of those Philosophers, who were drove to the supposition of two first Causes, and many other absurdities, to account for the Origin of Evil, should not rather have chosen to impute it to the ministration of intermediate Beings; and when they saw the happiness of all inferior animals dependent on our wills, should not have concluded, that the good order and well-being of the Universe might require that ours should be as dependent on the wills of superior Beings, accountable like ourselves to one common Lord and Father of all things. This is the more wonderful, because the existence and influence of such Beings has been an article in the Creed of all religions that have ever appeared in the world. In the beautiful system of the Pagan theology, their Sylvan and Houshold Deities, their Nymphs, Satyrs, and Fawns, were of this kind. All the barbarous nations that have ever been discovered, have been found to believe and adore intermediate spiritual Beings, both good and evil. The Jewish religion not only confirms the belief of their existence, but of their tempting, deceiving, and tormenting mankind; and the whole system of Christianity is erected entirely on this foundation.

Thus, Sir, you see, the good order of the whole, and the happiness it receives from a proper subordination, will sufficiently account for the sufferings of individuals; and all such should be considered but as the necessary taxes, which every member of this great Republick of the Universe is obliged to pay towards the support of the Community. It is

no derogation from the divine Goodness that these taxes are not always imposed equally in the present state of things; because as every individual is but a part of the great whole, so is the present state but a part of a long, or perhaps an eternal succession of others; and, like a single day in the natural life, has reference to many more, both past and to come. It is but as a page in a voluminous account, from which no judgment can be formed on the state of the whole; but of this we may be assured, that the balance will some time or other be settled with justice and impartiality. The certainty, therefore of a future state, in which we, and indeed all creatures endued with sensation, shall somehow or other exist, seems (if all our notions of justice are not erroneous) as demonstrable as the Justice of their Creator; for if he is just, all such Creatures must have their account of happiness and misery somewhere adjusted with equity, and all creatures capable of virtue and vice must, according to their behaviour, receive rewards and punishments; and, to render these punishments consistent with infinite goodness, they must not only be proportioned to their crimes, but also some way necessary to universal Good; for no creatures can be called out of their primitive nothing by an all-wise and benevolent Creator, to be losers by their existence, or to be made miserable for no beneficial end, even by their own misbehaviour: so that all future misery, as well as present, must be subservient to happiness, or other-wise infinite Power, joined with infinite Goodness, would have prevented both vice and punishment.

For this reason, amongst all the shortsighted conjectures of Man into the dispensations of Providence and a future State, the ancient doctrine of Transmigration seems the most rational and most consistent with his wisdom and goodness; as by it all the unequal dispensations of things so necessary in one Life may be set right in another, and all

creatures serve the highest and lower, the most eligible and most burthensome offices of life, by an equitable kind of rotation; by which means their rewards and punishments may not only be well proportioned to their behaviour, but also subservient towards carrying on the Business of the Universe, and thus at the same time answer the purposes both of justice and utility. But the pride of man will not suffer us to treat this subject with the seriousness it deserves; but rejects as both impious and ridiculous every supposition of inferior creatures ever arriving at its own imaginary dignity, allowing at the same time the probability of human Nature being exalted to the angelick, a much wider and more extraordinary transition, but yet such a one as may probably be the natural consequence, as well as the reward of a virtuous life: nor is it less likely that our vices may debase us to the servile condition of inferior animals, in whose forms we may be severely punished for the injuries we have done to Mankind when amongst them, and be obliged in some measure to repair them, by performing the drudgeries tyrannically imposed upon us for their service.

From what has been said, I think it plainly appears that numberless Evils do actually exist, which could not have been excluded from the works of infinite goodness even by infinite power; and from hence it may be concluded, that there are none which could; but that God has exerted all his omnipotence to introduce all possible happiness, and as far as the imperfection of created things would permit, to exclude all misery, that is, all natural Evil, from the universal system; which notwithstanding will introduce itself in many circumstances, even in opposition to infinite Power.

The Origin of Moral Evil lies much deeper, and I will venture to assert has never yet been fathomed by the short line of human understanding, That I shall be able to reach it, I have by no means the vanity to

imagine: but, laying aside all preconceived opinions and systematical
prejudice I will in my next endeavour to come as near it as lies in the
power of,
S I R, &c

LETTER IV.

ON

Moral Evil.

LETTER IV.

On Moral Evil.

SIR,

I Must now leave that plain and easy road thro' which I have hitherto conducted you, and carry you thro' unfrequented paths, and ways untrodden by philosophic feet. Already, I think, the existence of Natural Evil has been sufficiently accounted for, without any derogation from the power, wisdom, or goodness of God. What next remains to be cleared up, is the Origin of Moral Evil; which, consistently with the same Divine Attributes, I have never ken accounted for by any Author, ancient or modern, in a manner that could give tolerable satisfaction to a rational Inquirer. Nor indeed can this be ever effectually performed, without at the same time taking into consideration all those most abstruse speculations concerning the nature of Virtue, Free-will, Fate, Grace, and Predestination, the debates of ages, and matter of innumerable folio's. To attempt this, therefore, in the compass of a Letter, would be the highest presumption, did not I well know the clear and ready comprehension or the person to whom it is addressed; and also, that the most difficult of these kinds of disquisitions are usually better explained in a few lines, than by a thousand pages.

In order therefore to find out the true Origin of Moral Evil, it will be necessary, in the first place, to inquire into its nature and essence; or what it is that constitutes one action Evil, and another

Good. Various have been the opinions of various Authors on this Criterion of Virtue; and this variety has rendered that doubtful, which must otherwise have been clear and manifest to the meanest capacity. Some indeed have denied that there is any such thing, because different ages and nations have entertained different sentiments concerning it: but this is just as reasonable as to assert, that there are neither Sun, Moon, nor Stars, because Astronomers have supported different systems of the motions and magnitudes of these celestial bodies. Some have placed it in conformity to truth, some to the fitness of things, and others to the will of God. But all this is merely superficial: they resolve us not why truth, or the fitness of things, are either eligible or obligatory, or why God should require us to act in one manner rather than another. The true reason of which can possibly be no other than this, because some actions produce Happiness, and others Misery: so that all Moral Good and Evil are nothing more than the production of Natural. This alone it is that makes truth preferable to falsehood, this that determines the fitness of things; and this that induces God to command some actions and forbid others. They who extoll the truth, beauty, and harmony of Virtue, exclusive of its consequences, deal but in pompous nonsense; and they who would persuade us, that Good and Evil are things indifferent, depending wholly on the will of God, do but confound the nature of things, as well as all our notions of God himself, by representing him capable of willing contradictions; that is, that we should be, and be happy, and at the same time that we should torment and destroy each other; for injuries cannot be made benefits, pain cannot be made pleasure, and consequently vice cannot be made virtue by any power whatever. It is the consequences therefore of all human actions that must stamp their value. So far as the general practice of any action tends to produce Good, and introduce happiness

into the world, so far we may pronounce it virtuous; so much Evil as it occasions, such is the degree of vice it contains. I say, the general practice, because we must always remember in judging by this rule, to apply it only to the general species of actions, and not to particular actions; for the infinite wisdom of God, desirous to set bounds to the destructive consequences which must otherwise have followed from the universal depravity of mankind, has so wonderfully contrived the nature of things, that our most vitious actions may sometimes accidentally and collaterally, produce Good. Thus, for instance, robbery may disperse useless hoards to the benefit of the publick. Adultery may bring heirs, and good humour too, into many families, where there would otherwise have been wanting; and Murder free the world from tyrants and oppressors. Luxury maintains its thousands, and Vanity its ten thousands. Superstition and Arbitrary Power contribute to the grandeur of many nations, and the liberties of others are preserved by the perpetual contentions of avarice, knavery, selfishness and ambition: and thus the worst of vices and the worst of Men are often compelled by Providence to serve the most beneficial purposes, contrary to their own malevolent tendencies and inclinations; and thus private vices become public benefits by the force only of accidental circumstances. But this impeaches not the truth of the Criterion of Virtue before mentioned, the only solid foundation on which any true system of ethics can be built, the only plain, simple, and uniform rule by which we can pass any judgment on our actions, but by this we may be enabled, not only to determine which are good, and which are Evil, but almost mathematically to demonstrate the proportion of Virtue or Vice which belongs to each, by comparing them with the degrees of happiness or misery which they occasion. But tho' the production of happiness is the Essence of virtue, it is by no means the End: the great End is the probation of

Mankind, or the giving them an opportunity of exalting or degrading themselves in another state by their behaviour in the present. And thus indeed it answers two most important purposes; those are, the conservation of our happiness, and the test of our obedience: for had not such a test seemed necessary to God's infinite wisdom, and productive of universal Good, he would never have permitted the happiness of Men, even in this life, to have depended on so precarious a tenure, as their mutual good behaviour to each other. For it is observable, that he who best knows our formation, has trusted no one thing of importance to our reason or virtue: he trusts only to our appetites for the support of the individual, and the continuance of our species; to our vanity, or companion, for our bounty to others; and to our fears, for the preservation of ourselves; often to our vices for the support of Government, and sometimes to our follies for the preservation of our Religion. But since some test of our obedience was necessary, nothing sure could have been commanded for that end so fit and proper; and at the same time so useful, as the practice of virtue; nothing have been so justly rewarded with happiness, as the production of happiness in conformity to the will of God. It is this conformity alone which adds merit to virtue, and constitutes the essential difference between Morality and Religion. Morality obliges Men to live honestly and soberly, because such behaviour is most conducive to publick happiness, and consequently to their own; Religion, to pursue the same course, because conformable to the will of their Creator. Morality induces them to embrace virtue from prudential considerations; Religion, from those of gratitude and obedience. Morality, therefore, entirely abstracted from Religion can have nothing meritorious in it; it being but wisdom, prudence, or good oeconomy, which, like health, beauty, or riches, are rather obligations conferred upon us by God,

than merits in us towards him; for tho' we may be justly punished for injuring ourselves, we can claim no reward for self-preservation; as suicide deserves punishment and infamy, but a Man deserves no reward or honours for not being guilty of it. This I take to be the meaning of all those passages in our Scriptures in which Works are represented to have no merit without Faith; that is not without believing in historical facts, in creeds, and articles; but without being done in pursuance of our belief in God, and in obedience to his commands. [1]

And now, having mentioned Scripture, I cannot omit observing, that the Christian is the only religious or moral institution in the world that ever set in a right light these two material points, the Essence and the End of virtue; that ever founded the one in the production of happiness, that is in universal benevolence, or, in their language, Charity to all men; the other, in the probation of man, and his obedience to his Creator. Sublime and magnificent as was the philosophy of the Ancients, all their moral systems Were deficient in these two important articles. They were all built on the sandy foundations of the innate beauty of virtue, or enthusiastick patriotism; and their great point in view was the contemptible reward of human glory; foundations which were by no means able to support the magnificent structures which they erected upon them; for the beauty of virtue, independent of its effects, is unmeaning nonsense: patriotism which injures mankind in general for the sake of a particular country, is but a more extended selfishness, and really criminal; and all human glory but a mean and ridiculous delusion. The whole affair then of Religion and Morality, the subject of so many thousand volumes, is in short no more than this: The Supreme Being, infinitely good, as well as powerful, desirous to diffuse happiness by all possible means, has created innumerable ranks and orders of Beings, all subservient to each other by proper

subordination. One of these is occupied by Man, a creature endued with such a certain degree of knowledge, reason, and free-will, as is suitable to his situation, and placed for a time on this globe as in a school of probation and education. Here he has an opportunity given him of improving or debasing his nature, in such a manner, as to render himself fit for a rank of higher perfection and happiness, or to degrade himself to a state of greater imperfection and misery; necessary indeed towards carrying on the business of the Universe, but very grievous and burthensome to those individuals, who, by their own misconduct, are obliged to submit to it. The test of this his behaviour, is doing good, that is, cooperating with his Creator, as far as his narrow sphere of action will permit, in the production of happiness. And thus the happiness and misery of a future state will be the just reward or punishment of promoting or preventing happiness in this. So artificially by this means is the nature of all human virtue and vice contrived, that their rewards and punishments are woven as it were into their very essence; their immediate effects give us a foretaste of their future; and their fruits in the present life are the proper samples of what they must unavoidably produce in another. We have Reason given us to distinguish these consequences, and regulate our conduct; and lest that should neglect its post, Conscience also is appointed as an instinctive kind of monitor, perpetually to remind us both of our interest and our duty.

When we consider how wonderfully the practice of Virtue is thus enforced by our Great Creator, and that all which he requires of us under that title is only to be happy, that is, to make each other so; and when at the same time we look round us, and see the whole race of mankind thro' every successive generation tormenting, injuring and destroying each other, and perpetually counteracting the gracious

designs of their Maker, it is a most astonishing paradox how all this comes to pass; why God should suffer himself to be thus defeated in his best purposes by creatures of his own making; or why man should be made with dispositions to defeat them at the expence of his own present and future happiness; why infinite Goodness should form creatures inclined to oppose its own benevolent designs, or why infinite Power should thus suffer itself to be opposed.

There are some, I know, who extricate themselves from this difficulty very concisely by asserting, that there is in fact no such original depravity, no such innate propensity to vice in human nature; but as this assertion is directly contrary to the express declaration of the Scriptures, to the opinion of the Philosophers and Moralists of all ages, and to the most constant, and invariable experience of every hour; I think they no more deserve an answer, than they who would affirm, that a stone has no tendency to the Center by its natural gravity, or that flame has no inclination to ascend.

.But the usual solution applied to this difficulty by the ablest Philosophers and Divines, with which they themselves, and most of their readers, seem perfectly satisfied, is comprehended in the following reasoning: that Man came perfect out of the hands of his Creator, both in virtue and happiness, but it being more eligible that he should be a free-agent, than a mere machine, God endued him with Freedom of will; from the abuse of which Freedom, all Misery and Sin, that is, all natural and moral Evils, derive their existence: from all such therefore the Divine Goodness is sufficiently justified, by reason they could not be prevented without the loss of superior Good: for to create Men free, and at the same time compel them to be virtuous, is utterly impossible.

But whatever air of demonstration this argument may assume, by whatever

fam'd Preachers it may have been used, or by whatever learned Audiences it may have been approved, I will venture to affirm, that it is false in all its Principles, and in its Conclusion also; and I think it may be clearly shewn, that God did not make Man absolutely perfect, nor absolutely Free: nor, if he had, would this in the least` have justified the introduction of wickedness and misery.

That Man came perfect, that is endued with all possible perfections, out of the hands of his Creator, is evidently a false notion derived from the Philosophers of the first ages, founded on their ignorance of the Origin of Evil, and inability to account for it on any other hypothesis: they understood not that the universal System required Subordination, and consequently comparative Imperfections; nor that in the Scale of Beings there must be somewhere such a creature as Man with all his infirmities about him: that the total removal of these would be altering his very nature; and that as soon as he became Perfect he must cease to be Man. The truth of this, I think, has been sufficiently proved; and besides, the very supposition of a Being originally perfect, and yet capable of rendering itself wicked and miserable, is undoubtedly a Contradiction, that very power being the highest imperfection imaginable.

That God made Man perfectly free is no less false: Men have certainly such a degree of Free-will as to make them accountable, and justly punishable for the abuse of it; but absolute and independent Free-will is what, I believe, no created Being can be possessed of. Our actions proceed from our Wills, but our wills must be derived from the natural dispositions implanted in us by the Author of our Being: wrong elections proceed from wrong apprehensions, or unruly passions; and these from our original Frame or accidental Education: these must determine all our actions, for we have no power to act differently,

these previous circumstances continuing exactly the same. Had God thought proper to have made all Men with the same heads, and the same hearts, which he has given to the most virtuous of the species, they would all have excelled in the same virtues: or had the Bias implanted in Human Nature drawn as strongly towards the good side, as it now apparently does towards the bad, it would have operated as successfully, and with as little infringement on human Liberty. Men, as well as all other animals, are exactly fitted for the purposes they are designed for; and have inclinations and dispositions given them accordingly: He, who implanted patience in the Lamb, obedience in the Horse, fidelity in the Dog, and innocence in the Dove, might as easily have inspired the breast of Man with these and all other virtues; and then his actions would have certainly corresponded with his Formation: therefore, in the strict philosophical sense, we have certainly no Free-will; that is, none independent of our Frame, our Natures, and the Author of them.

But were both these propositions true, were Men originally created both perfect and free, yet this would by no means justify the introduction of moral Evil; because, if his perfection was immediately to be destroyed by his Free-will, he might as well never have been possess of the one, and much better have been prevented from making use of the other: let us dispute therefore as long as we please, it must eternally be the same thing, whether a Creator of infinite power and knowledge created Beings originally wicked and miserable, or gave them a power to make themselves so, foreknowing they would employ that power to their own destruction.

If moral Evil therefore cannot be derived from the Abuse of Free-will in Man, from whence can we trace its origin? Can it proceed from a just, a wise, and a benevolent God? Can such a God form Creatures with

dispositions to do Evil, and then punish them for acting in conformity to those evil dispositions? Strange and astonishing indeed must this appear to us, who know so little of the universal Plan! but it is far, I think, from being irreconcilable with the justice of the Supreme Disposer of all things: for let us but once acknowledge the truth of our first great proposition, (and most certainly true it is) that natural Evils exist from some necessity in the nature of things, which no power can dispense with or prevent, the expediency of moral Evil will perhaps follow on course: for if misery could not be excluded from the works of a benevolent Creator by infinite power, these miseries must be endured by some creatures or other for the good of the whole: and if there were none capable of wickedness, then they must fall to the share of those who are perfectly innocent. Here again we see our difficulties arise from our wrong notions of Omnipotence, and forgetting how many difficulties it has to contend with: in the present instance it is obliged either to afflict Innocence or be the cause of Wickedness; it has plainly no other Option: what then could infinite Wisdom, Justice, and Goodness do in this situation, more consistent with itself, than to call into being Creatures formed with such depravity, in their dispositions, as to induce many of them to act in such a manner as to render themselves proper subjects for such necessary sufferings, and yet at the same time indued with such a degree [2] of Reason and Free-will as to put it in the power of every individual to escape them by their good behaviour: such a Creature is Man; so corrupt, base, cruel and wicked as to convert these unavoidable miseries into just punishments, and at the same time so sensible of his own depravity and the fatal consequences of guilt, as to be well able to correct the one, and to avoid the other. Here we see a substantial Reason for the depravity of Man, and the admittance of Moral Evil in

these circumstances seems not only compatible with the justice of God, but one of the highest instances of his consummate wisdom in ordering and disposing all things in the best manner their imperfect natures will admit.

I presume not by what has been here said to determine on the councils of the Almighty, to triumph in the compleat discovery of the Origin of Moral Evil, or to assert that this is the certain or sole cause of its existence; I propose it only as a Guess concerning the reason of its admission, more probable, and less derogatory from the divine wisdom, and justice, than any, that has hitherto been offered for that purpose.

There is undoubtedly something farther in the general Depravity of Mankind than we are aware of, and probably many great and wise ends are answered by it to us totally incomprehensible. God, as has been shewn, would never have permitted the existence of Natural Evil, but from the impossibility of preventing it without the loss of superior Good: and on the same principle the admission of Moral Evil is equally consistent with the divine Goodness: and who is he so knowing in the whole stupendous system of Nature as to assert, that the Wickedness of some Beings may not, by means inconceivable to us, be beneficial to innumerable unknown Orders of others? or that the Punishment of some may not contribute to the Felicity of numbers infinitely superior?

To this purpose the learned Hugenius says with great sagacity, *Præterea credibile est, ipsa illa animi vitia magnæ hominum parti, non sine summo concilio data esse: Cum enim Dei providentiâ talis sit Tellus, ejusque incolæ, quales cernimus, absurdum enim foret existimare omnia hæc alia facta esse, quam ille voluerit, sciveritque futura.* [3]

But let us not forget that this necessity of Vice and Punishment, and its subserviency to publick Good, makes no alteration in their natures with regard to Man; for, tho' the wisdom of God may extract from the

wickedness of Men some remote benefits to the Universe; yet that alters not the case with regard to them, nor in the least extenuates their Guilt. He has given them reason sufficient to inform them, that their injuries to each other are displeasing to him, and Free-will sufficient to refrain from such actions, and may therefore punish their disobedience without any infringement of justice: He knows indeed, that though none are under any compulsion to do Evil, yet that they are all so framed, that many will certainly do it; and He knows also that incomprehensible secret why it is necessary that many should: but his knowledge having no relation to their determinations renders not their vices less criminal, nor the punishment of them less equitable: for, tho' with regard to God, Vice may be perhaps the consequence of Misery; that is, Men may be inclined to Vice in order to render them proper objects of such a degree of Misery as was unavoidably necessary, and previously determined for the sake of publick Good, yet, in regard to Man, Misery is the consequence of Vice; that is, all human Vices produce Misery, and are justly punished by its infliction.

If it be objected that this makes God the Author of Sin, I answer, God is and must be the Author of every thing; and to say that any thing is, or happens, independent of the first Cause, is to say that something exists, or happens, without any Cause at all. God is the Author, if it may be so expressed, of all the natural Evils, in the Universe; that is, of the fewest possible in the nature of things; and why may he not be the Author of all moral Evil in the same manner and on the same principle? If natural Evil owes its existence to necessity, why may not moral? If Misery brings with it its Utility, why may not Wickedness?

"If storms and earthquakes break not Heav'n's design,

"Why then a Borgia or a Catiline!"

Wherefore, it ought always to be considered, that, tho' Sin in Us, who

see no farther than the Evils it produces, is Evil, and justly punishable; yet in God, who sees the causes and connections of all things, and the necessity of its admission, that admission may be no Evil at all, and that necessity a sufficient vindication of his Goodness.

But it may be alledged that this principle totally changes the Nature of Vice, destroys the Criterion before affixed to it, and encourages the universal practice of wickedness: for if Moral Evil, and the punishment of it, are necessary towards promoting universal Good, then the more wicked men are, the more they promote that Good; and the more they co-operate with their Creator in compleating his great and benevolent plan of universal happiness. But this reasoning is extremely fallacious: because no collateral, remote, unknown and undesigned Good resulting from Vice can alter the Nature of it, or divest it of criminality; and moreover if that Good arises only from its punishment, so far is it from an encouragement to wickedness, that it proves only that the punishment of it is necessary, and unpreventable; nay in its nature incapable of remission, without a penal satisfaction from some Being or other, nor does its co-operation with the designs of Providence render it less criminal, or less worthy of his just indignation: all Histories are filled with instances of the wickedness of Men conspiring to bring about the Councils of the Almighty; such were the ambition and ferocity of the Romans, the obstinacy of the Jews, the cruelty of Herod, and the treachery of Judas, yet were these never esteemed for that reason meritorious, or innocent.

From this important proposition, that all Natural Evil derives its existence from necessity, and all Moral from expediency arising from that necessity; I say, from this important proposition, well considered and pursued, such new lights might be struck out as could not fail, if

directed by the hands of Learning and Impartiality, to lead the human Mind thro' the unknown regions of speculation, and to produce the most surprising and useful discoveries in Ethicks, Metaphysicks, and in Christianity too: I add Christianity, because it is a Master-key, which will, I am certain, at once unlock all the mysterious and perplexing doctrines of that amazing Institution, and explain fairly, without the least assistance from theological artifice, all those abstruse speculations of Original Sin, Grace and Predestination, and vicarious punishments, which the most learned, for want of this Clue, have never yet been able to make consistent with Reason or Common-sense.

In the first place, for instance, the Doctrine [4] of Original Sin is really nothing more than the very System here laid down, into which we have been led by closely pursuing Reason, and without which the Origin of Moral Evil cannot be accounted for on any principle whatever.

Indeed, according to the common notions of the absolute Omnipotence of God, and the absolute Free-will in Man, it is most absurd and impious, as it represents the Deity voluntarily bringing Men into Being with depraved Dispositions, tending to no good purposes, and then arbitrarily punishing them for the sins which they occasion with torments which answer no ends, either of their reformation or utility to the Universe: but when we see, by the foregoing explanation, the difficulties with which Omnipotence was environed, and that it was obliged by the necessity of Natural Evils to admit Moral, all these absurdities at once vanish, and the Original Depravity of Man appears fairly consistent with the Justice, and even Goodness of his Creator.

The Doctrines of Predestination and Grace as set forth in the Scriptures, on the most impartial Interpretation, I take to be these: that some men come into the world with dispositions so extremely bad, that God foreknows that they will certainly be guilty of many crimes,

and in consequence be punished for them; that to others He has given better dispositions, and moreover protects them from vice by a powerful but invisible influence, in the language of those writings called Grace: this Scheme has appeared to many so partial and unjust that they have totally rejected it, and endeavoured, by forced interpretations, to explain it quite out of the Bible, in contradiction to all the sense of language and the whole tenour of those writings: and indeed, on the old plan of God's absolute Omnipotence, uncontrouled by any previous necessity, in the nature of things, to admit both Natural and Moral Evil, it is highly derogatory from His wisdom and goodness: but, on the supposition of that previous necessity, there appears nothing incredible in it, nor the least inconsistent with divine; because if God was obliged by the nature of things, and for the good of the whole, to suffer some to be wicked, and consequently miserable, he certainly might protect others both from guilt and punishment. He in this light may be compared to the commander of a numerous army, who, tho' he is obliged to expose many to danger, and some to destruction, yet protects others with ramparts and covert-ways; but so long as he exercises this power for the good of the whole, these distinctions amongst individuals ought never to be imputed to Partiality or Injustice.

The Doctrine [5] of Sacrifice, or Vicarious punishment, is the most universal, and yet exclusive of this plan the most absurd, of all religious Tenets that ever entered into the Mind of Man: so absurd is it, that how it came to be so universal is not easy to be accounted for: Pagans, Jews and Christians, have all agreed in this one point, tho' differing in all others; and have all treated it as a self-evident principle, that the Sins of one Creature might be attoned for by the Sufferings of another: but from whence they derived this strange opinion, none of them have pretended to give any account, or to produce

in its defence the least shadow of a Reason: for that there should be any manner of connection between the Miseries of one Being and the Guilt of another; or, that the punishing the Innocent, and excusing the Guilty, should be a mark of God's Detestation of Sin; or, that two acts of the highest Injustice should make one of Justice, is so fundamentally wrong, so diametrically opposite to common-sense, and all our ideas of justice, that it is equally astonishing that so many should believe it themselves, or impose it upon others. But on the foregoing theory this also may be a little cleared up, and will by no means appear so very inconsistent with Reason: for if a certain quantity of Misery in some part of the Universal System is necessary to the Happiness and Well-being of the Whole; and if this necessity arises from its answering some purposes incomprehensible to the human Understanding; I will ask any impartial Reasoner, Why the Sufferings of one Being may not answer the same Ends, or be as effectual towards promoting Universal Good as the Sufferings of another? If the Miseries of Individuals are to be looked upon as taxes which they are obliged to pay towards the support of the Publick, why may not the sufferings of one Creature serve the same purposes, or absolve as much of that necessary tax as the Sufferings of another, and on that account be accepted as a payment or satisfaction for their Sufferings; that is, for the Sufferings due to the Publick Utility from the punishment of their crimes, without which the happiness of the whole could not subsist, unless they should be replaced by the Sufferings of others? As we are entirely ignorant why Misery has any existence at all, or what interest it serves in the general System of things, this may possibly be the case for any thing we know; and that it is not, I am certain no one can affirm; with Reason: Reason indeed cannot inform us that it is so, but that it may be, is undoubtedly no contradiction to Reason.

If I mistake not it might be shewn, that this principle of the necessity of Moral Evil, and its punishment, is the foundation on which the whole fabrick of the Christian Dispensation is erected; the principle itself is avowed by the Author of that Dispensation in clear, and express words: It must needs be, says he, that offences come; but woe unto that man by whom the Offence cometh. That is, it is necessary towards compleating the designs of Providence, that some men should commit crimes; but as no Individual is compelled by necessity to commit them, Woe unto all, who are thus guilty. He came by his excellent precepts, and example, to diminish the quantity of Moral Evil in the World, and of Misery consequential from its punishment, but found it necessary to replace that Misery in some degree by his own voluntary, and unmerited Sufferings: and perhaps the unparallel'd tortures inflicted on his disciples and followers might be also necessary, and subservient to the same purposes.

From what has been here said, I think, it is evident that the Origin of Evil is by no means so difficult to account for as at first sight it appears; for it has been plainly shewn that most of those we usually complain of are Evils of Imperfection, which are rather the absence of comparative Advantages than positive Evils, and therefore, properly speaking, no Evils at all; and as such, ought to be intirely struck out of the Catalogue. It has likewise been made appear, that of natural Evils, which are the sufferings of sensitive Beings, many are but the consequences naturally resulting from the particular circumstances of particular ranks in the scale of Existence, which could not have been omitted without the destruction of the Whole; and that many more are in all probability necessary, by means to us incomprehensible, to the production of Universal Good. Lastly, it has been suggested, that from this necessity of Natural Evils may arise the expediency of Moral,

without which those necessary Sufferings

[page is not available]

more, I am sure, of all it would require) encouraged by your Favour, and assisted by your Sagacity, would undertake it, and condescend to fill up these out-lines so inaccurately sketched out by,

S I R, &c.

[1] What was that Faith, which the Author of the Christian Religion indispensably required in all his disciples? It could not be a literal, and implicit belief of the divine inspiration of all the Books of the Old Testament; and consequently of all the History, Chronology, Geography, and Philosophy contained in them; because to these he Jews, who rejected it, adhered with the most superstitious exactness: it could not be the same kind of belief in the writings of the New Testament, because these in his life-time had no existence: much less could it consist in a blind assent to the numberless explanations of these books, and least of all in the Belief of Creeds, Articles, and theological Systems founded on such explanations, for all these were the productions of later Ages. It must therefore have been this, and this alone; a sincere Belief in the divine Authority of his mission, and a constant practice of all Moral duties from a sense of their being agreeable to his commands.

[2] Some have asserted that there can be no degrees of Free-will, but that every Being must be absolutely free, or possessed of no Freedom at all: and this seems to have been the principal error that has led those who have supported both sides of this Question into so many absurdities; as it well might, since they were both equally wrong in espousing a proposition, which contradicts both reason, and experience, Brutes have a certain degree of Free-will; else why do we correct them for their misbehaviour, or why do they amend upon correction? yet

certainly they have not so great a degree as ourselves. A man raving mad is not, nor is considered as a Free-agent; a man less mad has a greater portion of Freedom; and a man not mad at all has the greatest; but still the degree of his Freedom must bear a proportion to the weakness of his understanding, and the strength of his passions, and prejudices; all which are a perversion of reason, and madness as far as they extend, and operate on Free-will in the very same manner: so that it is so far from being true, that all men are equally free, that probably there are no two men, who are possessed of exactly the same degree of Freedom.

[3] Cosmotheoros, Lib, I. p. 34.

[4] Original Sin is a contradiction in terms; Original signifying innate, and Sin the act of an accountable Being: by this expression therefore of Original Sin cannot be meant original or innate Guilt, for that is absolute nonsense, but only an original depravity, or an innate disposition to Sin.

[5] If the punishments of the wicked serve not some ends with which we are unacquainted, the sufferings of the innocent can possibly bear no manner of relation to them; and consequently the words Sacrifice, Attonement, Propitiation, and Vicarious Punishments can no more have any ideas affixed to them than the ringing of a bell, or the blowing of a trumpet, but are mere Sounds without any meaning at all.

LETTER V.

ON

Political Evils.

LETTER V.

On Political Evils.

SIR,

ACCORDING to my proposed Plan there still remain two sorts of Evils to be accounted for, Political and Religious; under which heads, (if you are not already tired with so abstruse and unentertaining a correspondence) I shall endeavour to shew you, that it is utterly impossible, even for Omnipotence itself, to give a perfect Government, or a perfect Religion to an imperfect Creature; and therefore, that the numberless imperfections inherent in all human Governments and Religions, are not imputable to God, nor any defect of power, wisdom, or goodness in Him; but only to the inferiority of Man's station in the Universe, which necessarily exposes him to Natural and Moral Evils, and must, for the same reason, to Political and Religious; which are indeed but the Consequences of the other Superior Beings may probably form to themselves, or receive from their Creator, Government without tyranny or Corruption, and Religions without Delusions or Absurdities; but Man cannot: God indeed may remove him into so exalted a Society; but whilst he continues to be Man, he must be subject to innumerable Evils; amongst which those I call Political and Religious are far from being the least.

But as these two kinds of Evils are very different, they will require different considerations; I shall therefore, in the present confine myself to the Political only; by which I mean all those grievous

burthens of Tyranny and Oppression, of Violence and Corruption, of War and Desolation, under which all Ages and nations have ever groaned on account of Government: little less destructive perhaps to the happiness of Mankind than even Anarchy itself; but notwithstanding, are so woven into the very essence of all Human Governments from the Depravity of Man, that without them none can be either established, maintained or administered, nor consequently can they be prevented without changing that Depravity into perfection; that is, without a compleat Alteration in Human Nature. How this comes to pass may be easily explained by a short examination, first into the nature and origin of Government in general, and afterwards into those of particular Forms and Policies; than which nothing has been more commonly misunderstood and misrepresented.

As to Government in general, it is no wonder, that it is so productive of Evil, since its very Nature consists of Power trusted in the hands of such imperfect and vicious Creatures as Men, and exercised over others as imperfect and vicious as themselves; in which there must be Pride, Avarice and Cruelty on one Side, Envy, ignorance and Obstinacy on the other; and Injustice and Self-Interest on both. Its Origin also arises from the same impure source of human Imperfection; that is, Men being neither wise nor honest enough, to pursue their common or mutual interests without Compulsion, are obliged to submit to some, in order to secure their lives and properties from the depredations of all: but tho' this Necessity drives them into some kind of Government, yet it can never decide who govern, because all Men being by nature equal, every one has an equal right to this superiority: this therefore can be determined only by more Imperfections: that is, by the Struggles of Ambition, Treachery, Violence and Corruption; from success in which universal scramble are derived all the mighty Empires of the Earth: One

Man at first by some of these methods acquiring the command over a few, then by their aid extending his power over greater numbers, and at last by the assistance of those numbers, united by the advantage of plundering others, subduing all opposition: and thus we see all human Government is the Offspring of Violence and Corruption, and must inherit the imperfection of both its parents. It is plain also that national Governments can never be supported by any other methods than those by which they were at first rais'd; for, being all independent of each other, and retaining still their original inclination to devour each other; and having no superior tribunal to refer to for justice, they can have no means to secure their own possessions, or to repel their mutual encroachments, but by force, which is call'd the Right of War; that is, the right of doing all the wrong that lies in their power: For war, however dignified with honours and encomiums by conquerors and their flatterers, is in fact nothing else but robbery and murder. Nations having no more right to plunder each other than Parishes, nor Men to kill one another in their political than in their private capacities.

If we look into the internal constitutions of all these Governments, we shall find likewise, that they must be administered by the same violence and corruption to which they are indebted for their Origin; that is, by hiring one part of the society to force the other into subjection; and that none of them ever subsisted any longer than whilst the stronger part, not always the most numerous, found it for their advantage to keep the weaker in obedience: for it should be ever remembered, as the fundamental of all politics, that men will never submit to each other merely for the sake of public Utility, [6] too remote a benefit to make any impression on the dull senses of the multitude; but must be always beat or bribed into obedience. Higher

orders of Beings may submit to each other on nobler motives, from their sense of Virtue or of universal Benefit; but Man can be governed by nothing but the Fear of Punishment or the hopes of Reward; that is, by Self-interest, the great Principle that operates in the political World in the same manner that Attraction does in the natural, preserving order and restraining every thing to its proper course by the continual endeavours of every individual to draw all power and property to himself. [7]

If we descend to the examination of particular forms of government, we shall see them all exactly correspond with this general plan; we shall find that none of them owe their Origin to patriarchal power, the divine right of Princes, or the uninfluenced choice of the people; things which never existed but in the idle dreams of visionary politicians; but all to the struggles of Ambition and Self-Interest, subsiding at last into some kind of policy; either into absolute Monarchy or some species of popular Government more or less remote from it, as the different parts of it have had Strength or Fortune to prevail; all which must be carried on by the same vitious methods of Violence or Corruption, and consequently be productive of numberless, if not of equal, Evils.

In absolute Monarchies, for instance, great violence must be exercised to keep men, by nature equal, in so unnatural a Subjection; this must produce plots, rebellions, civil wars and massacres; and these most require more Violence to repress them: but this violence cannot be used without much corruption; for it is not the person of the sovereign, his crown and scepter, that can preserve his authority, nor can he destroy thousands with his own hand, like a Hero in a Romance; a powerful army must be kept in pay to enslave the people, and a numerous clergy to deceive them; [8] whose ambition, avarice, luxury and cruelty must be

satiated with the blood and treasures of that very People as a reward for their services: hence infinite Evils must arise, the lives, liberties and properties of all must be dependent on the capricious will of One, or, what is worse, on the wills of his pimps, flatterers and favourites: justice must be perverted by favour, and that favour can seldom be obtained but by adulation, servility and treachery: this produces all kinds of Moral Evils, and these beget more Political. In Democratical governments, if there is less Violence there is more Corruption; which in these indeed is the Basis of all Power, and productive of the most mischievous effects; here all things are at the disposal of an ignorant and giddy Multitude, always led to their own destruction by the flimsy eloquence and pretended patriotism of Knaves, Fools, and enthusiastic Madmen; or commonly of some extraordinary Genius, formed for popularity by a lucky composition of all these excellent ingredients; all subordination is subverted; and the most insolent and vitious of the people must be caressed, bribed and intoxicated, and by that means rendered still more insolent and vitious; and all who by their methods acquire their favour must: be no less vitious than themselves. If in despotic Governments power cannot be attained but by Servility and Adulation, in Democratical it can never be acquired but by the more pernicious vices of Turbulence and Faction; for which Reason these are ever sure to be governed by the most wicked, ambitious, avaricious, and mischievous of their Members. Mixed Governments, tho' perhaps productive of fewer Evils than either of the former, yet must necessarily partake of those belonging to both, and be supported by more or less of violence, as they more or less approach the Despotic; or of Corruption, as they come nearer to the Democratical principles: the further they shrink from the iron scourges of the one, the more will they be entangled in the golden fetters of

the other; for Corruption most always increase in due proportion to the decrease of arbitrary power, since where there is less power to command obedience, there must be more bribery to purchase it, or there can be no government at all. These have besides many Evils peculiar to themselves, the very excellence of these of constitutions being productive of conveniences: for this excellence consisting principally in this, that their different parts are able to counteract each others mischievous intentions, the reins of Government are kept tight only by each pulling a different way, and they subsist by a perpetual contention, like a body kept steady by the opposite effects of contrary forces: a very precarious and uneasy kind of existence! This exposes them in some measure to all the Evils incident to both absolute and popular Governments, tho' in a less degree: to the oppression of the people, and the licentiousness of the other, factions at home, weakness abroad, and expence in all parts of their administration yet are there mixed together the very best that human wisdom could ever discover for the regulation of human societies.

All these Evils arise from the nature of Things and the Nature of Man, and not from the Weakness or Wickedness of particular Men, or their accidental ascendancy in particular Governments: the degrees of them may indeed be owing to these, but their existence is immutable. So long as the Imperfection of human nature continues, so long will Princes, for the most part, convert that power with which they are trusted for the sake of publick Utility, to the ignoble ends of their own avarice; luxury or ambition; so long will the people prefer present Self-interest to remote benefits arising from national prosperity; and so long will corrupt ministers employ this popular venality to their own private advantage; and how many soever are lopt off, Non deficit aureus alter.

It is the misapprehension of this, that is the fundamental error of all ignorant, but well-meaning, speculative politicians, [9] of all others the most untractable in government, and mischievous in business, the engines with which knaves work, and the ladders on which they mount to preferment: who endeavour to destroy all governments, because they are not perfect; and oppose all administrations, because they cannot govern men by such means as they are not design'd, or form'd to be governed by: who, by a Sisyphæan kind of politics, are ever labouring to roll up a stone, that must recoil upon them; and to render that faultless, which infinite power and wisdom cannot exempt from inconveniences, abuses, and imperfections.

Should one enumerate all of this kind, which cannot be excluded from Government without the total alteration of human nature, they would be endless; to instance but a few: all political bodies, like the natural, must have the seeds of their own dissolution sown in their very essence, and like them be destroyed by every excess; by excess of poverty or riches, of slavery or liberty, of ignorance or knowledge, of adversity or prosperity: a strong proof of their imperfection, that they cannot bear excess even of the greatest good; and yet they cannot be formed of more durable materials, so long as they are constituted of human creatures. All power trusted in the hands of so imperfect a creature as man, must be pernicious and oppressive, and yet somewhere such power must be trusted. All human Laws must be liable to misconstruction, and uncertainty, yet without Laws property cannot be secur'd. All popular Elections must be attended with corruption, licentiousness, and the perversion of justice, yet without them the liberty of no country can be preserv'd. All national provisions for the poor must not only be encouragements to idleness, but productive of contests, and oftentimes of cruelty, yet without such many honest but

unfortunate people must inevitably perish. All religious tests, and subscriptions, are in their own natures subversive of truth and morals; yet the folly of one part of mankind, and the knavery of the other, will scarcely permit any government to subsist without them; Trade and wealth are the strength and the pursuit of every wise nation, yet these must certainly produce Luxury, which no less certainly must produce their destruction. All War is a complication of all manner of Evils natural and moral, that is of misery and wickedness; yet without it national contentions can never be determined. No Government can be carried on, nor subordination preserv'd, without forms, and ceremonials, pomp, and parade; yet all such, from the inferiority of human nature giving itself airs of grandeur and magnificence, and the despicable expedients it is obliged to have recourse to support it, must always have something mean and ridiculous in them to exalted understandings. All Governments are in a great measure upheld by absurd notions infused into the minds of the people, of the divine right of some particular person or family to reign over them; a foolish partiality for some particular spot of ground; an outrageous zeal for some religion which they cannot understand, or a senseless pursuit of Glory which they can never attain; these are all false principles, yet without them, or some like them, no nation can long subsist: they can never be defended by reason, yet reason can produce no others that can supply their places. Every flourishing nation endeavours to improve Arts, and cultivate Reason and good sense; yet if these are extended too far, or too universally diffus'd, no national government or national religion can long stand their ground; for it is with old establishments as with old houses, their deformities are commonly their supports, and these can never be remov'd without endangering the whole fabrick. In short, no Government can be administer'd without in some

degree deceiving the people, oppressing the mean, indulging the great, corrupting the venal, opposing factions to each other, and temporising with parties.

It is this necessity for Evil in all Government, which gives that weight and popularity, which usually attends all those who oppose, and calumniate any Government whatever; appearing always to have reason on their side, because the Evils of ...1 power are conspicuous to the meanest capacity, whereas the necessity for those evils are perceivable only to superior understandings: every one can feel the burthen of taxes, and see the inconveniences of armies, places, and pensions, that must encrease them, but very few are able to comprehend that no Government can be supported without them in a certain degree; and that the more liberty any nation enjoys, the greater must be their number and necessity. The most ignorant can perceive the mischiefs that must arise from corrupt Ministers and venal Parliaments; but it requires some sagacity to discern, that assemblies of men unconnected by self-interest will no more draw together in the business of the publick than horses without harness or bridles; but, like them, instead of being quietly guided in the right road of general utility, will immediately run riot, stop the wheels of government, and tear all the political machine to pieces.

From hence it comes to pass that all ignorant wrongheaded people naturally run into opposition and faction, whilst the wise man knows that those Evils cannot be eradicated, and that their excess only can be prevented; that thus far every honest man still endeavour to his utmost, but to proceed farther only fools will hope for, or knaves pretend. He knows that numbers of men must always act in the same manner, if in the same circumstances; that Politics are a science as reducible to certainty as Mathematicks, and in them effects as

invariably follow their causes: that the operations of Will are as uniform, as those of matter and motion; and that tho' the actions of individuals are contingencies, those of numbers are constant, and invariable: that tho' a single man may possibly prefer publick utility to private advantage, it is utterly impossible, that the majority of numerous bodies should be actuated by the same generous and patriotic principles; [10] these can spring only from Virtue and Wisdom, benevolent hearts, and comprehensive understandings; which, being the portion but of a few more exalted individuals, can never be found in the multitude to be govern'd: nor can they be bestow'd in any extraordinary degree on those who govern, who would thereby be rendered unfit for their occupations: Statesmen and Ministers, who must be hackney'd in the ways of men, cannot be made of such pure and refin'd materials; peculiar must be the composition of that little creature call'd a Great Man. He must be formed of all kinds of contradictions: he must be indefatigable in business, to fit him for the labours of his station, and at the same time fond of pleasures, to enable him to attach many to his interests by a participation of their vices: He must be master of much artifice and knavery, his situation requiring him to employ, and be employed by, so many knaves; yet he must have some honesty, or those very knaves will be unwilling to trust him: He must be possess'd of great magnanimity perpetually to confront surrounding enemies, and impending dangers; yet of great meanness, to flatter those enemies, and suffer tamely continual injuries, and abuses: He must be wise enough to conduct the great affairs of Mankind with sagacity and success, and to acquire riches and honours for his reward; and at the same time foolish enough to think it worth a wise man's while to meddle with such affairs at all, and to accept of such imaginary rewards for real sufferings. Since then in all human Governments such must the

Governors, and such the Governed eternally be, it is certain they must be ever big with numberless imperfections, and productive of abundant Evils and it is no less pain, that if infinite Goodness could not exclude natural and moral Evils, infinite Power can never prevent Political.

I hope, Sir, the picture I have here drawn of human nature, and human Government, will not appear to you too much of the Caricature kind: your experience in both must inform you that it is like, tho' your good nature may incline you to be sorry that it is so. I trust likewise to your good sense to distinguish, that what has here been said of their imperfections, and abuses, is by no means intended as a defence of them, but meant only to shew their necessity: to this every wise man ought quietly to submit, endeavouring at the same time to redress them to the utmost of his power; which can be effected by one method only; that is, by a reformation of Manners: for as all Political Evils derive their Original from Moral, these can never be remov'd, until those are first amended. He therefore, who strictly adheres to Virtue and Sobriety in his conduct, and inforces them by his example, does more real service to a State, than he who displaces a Minister, or dethrones a Tyrant; this gives but a temporary relief, but that exterminates the Cause of the disease. No immoral Man then can possibly be a true patriot; and all those who profess outrageous zeal for the liberty and prosperity of their Country, and at the same time infringe her laws, affront her religion, and debauch her people, are but despicable Quacks, by fraud or ignorance increasing the disorders they pretend to remedy: as such, I know, they have always appear'd to your superior judgment, and such they are ever esteem'd by,

S I R, &c.

[6] If any one is so ignorant of human nature, as to fancy that they

will, let him make the experiment in a single parish, and there, if without Power or Compulsion, Interest or Gratitude, solely by the strength of reason, and motives of public advantage, he can persuade the inhabitants to submit to equal and necessary taxes, to repair roads, build bridges, inclose commons, drain marshes, employ their poor, or perform any works of general Utility: if he can accomplish this let him retain his opinion, but if he finds it utterly impracticable, let him not expect, that it can ever be done in a whole Nation, in which there are so many more factions, interests and absurdities to contend with.

[7] There is indeed one other method of Government frequently made use of by the most illustrious Princes and Legislators, that is Fraud; but, as this operates only by the appearance of Self-Interest, it may properly be comprehended under that head.

[8] It has been represented as if the Author by this designed to insinuate that the whole business of the Clergy was to deceive the people; than which nothing can be more distant from his intentions: all that he means is, that Men will not easily submit to Tyranny unless their consciences are first enslaved; or that popery is the the most effectual support of arbitrary power: a proposition which he supposes no one will presume to contradict.

[9] It is a strange, but a certain Truth, that in politicks most principles speculatively right are practically wrong: to give a few instances of this kind out of many commonly adopted: viz. that those who are possessors of most property will fight best in its defence: that national business is most successfully carried on by assemblies of Men uninfluenced and unconnected: that unbounded Liberty, civil and ecclesiastical, is most conducive to publick happiness and virtue: all these Propositions have reason on their side, but experience against

them: they all captivate vulgar minds, because they look like truth, and they look like truth, because they would be true if mankind in general acted upon honest or even upon rational principles; but as in fact they do neither they are utterly Life, and all political structures built on such unstable foundations will inevitably fall to the Ground.

[10] This may be demonstrated by a familiar Instance: It is by no means uncommon for a single Die to come up a Six, altho' the odds against it are five to one, but that a Majority of five hundred Dice should at the same time come up Six's is scarcely within the power of Fortune; because the odds against each individual become almost infinite when operating upon the whole five hundred together. For the same reason, supposing every Sixth Man to be wise, honest, and public-spirited, which surely in any Country is a very liberal allowance, there would not be the smallest probability that the Majority of any five hundred to be chosen out of the whole, would be of that sort, tho' elected with the utmost impartiality; but, if ambition, self-interest, and corruption interfere in the choice, as they most infallibly will, these will render it totally impossible.

LETTER VI.

ON

Religious Evils.

LETTER VI.

On Religious Evils.

SIR,

I NOW come to my last head of Evils which I call Religious; by which I mean all that madness, and folly, into which mankind have perpetually fallen under the name of Religion; together with all those Persecutions, Massacres, and Martyrdoms, which some have been induced to inflict, and others to suffer, from an Enthusiastic zeal for those errors and absurdities: Evils of the most enormous size, and which of all others are the most difficult to be accounted for, as their existence seems most inconsistent with infinite Goodness, and most easily preventable by infinite Power, For, tho' human nature could not be exempted from natural and moral Evil (as has been shewn) even by Omnipotence, yet, one would think, a far less degree of power might have been sufficient to have defended it from Religious; by imparting to Mankind a true, rational, and explicit system of Theology and Ethics; by which means all the absurdities of false Religions, and all the calamities flowing from those absurdities, would have been effectually prevented. Wonderful therefore must it appear, since the happiness of Men, thro' every part of their existence, so much depends on their Religion, that is, on their entertaining right notions of God and his Attributes, of their duty to him, and their behaviour to each other; most wonderful, I say, and astonishing it must appear, that a wise and benevolent Creator should so far have deserted his Creatures

on this important occasion, as to have suffered them, thro' all generations, to have wandered amidst such perilous precipices in the dark; or if at any time he has vouchsafed them any supernatural light, that it should have been so faint and glimmering that it has rather served to terrify them with the gloomy prospect of their danger, than to enable them to avoid it.

If we look back as far as history will carry us, we shall find all ages and nations practising, under the name of Religion, such inhuman, obscene, stupid and execrable Idolatries, that it would disgrace human Nature but to enumerate them: we shall see the wisest Men of the wisest Countries consulting Oracles of wood and stone, and confiding in the foolish superstition of the flight of birds, the entrails of beasts, and the pecking of chickens; we shall see them butchering their innocent herds and flocks as an attonement for their vices, and sacrificing their enemies, their slaves, their children, and sometimes themselves, to appease the wrath of their imaginary Deities, of whose worship no cruelty was too horrid to be made a part; and by whose infamous examples no wickedness was too execrable to be patronised. At length Christianity appeared, a sketch of Morality, the most rational, and of Religion the most sublime the world had ever seen; which, if ever God condescended to reveal his Will to Man, undoubtedly makes the fairest pretensions to be that Revelation: and indeed, if we seriously consider its internal Excellence, the reasonableness of its Morality, the sublimity of its Theology, that it alone has fixed the right Criterion of Virtue, alone discovered the magnanimity of Forgiveness: that its notions of the Deity, his attributes and dispensations, are so unlike all that ever entered into the heads of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages, and yet so well confirmed by the learned discoveries of all succeeding times; so far exalted above all human reason, and yet

so consonant with it, and what is most conclusive, so infinitely above the Capacities of those who published them to the World; if we add to this its obscure rise and amazing progress, I think, we can scarcely doubt but that there must be something Supernatural in it: and yet, with all these marks of Divinity stamped upon it, far from answering that idea of Perfection which we might expect from the divine Interposition, it was but a Sketch, whose Out-lines indeed appear the Work of a consummate Matter, but filled up from time to time by unequal and injudicious hands. It had many defeats in its institution, and was attended with many and great Evils in its consequences; in its institution it wanted Universality, [11] Authenticity, [12] Perspicuity, and [13] Policy, and in its consequences it was soon corrupted, and from that corruption productive of the most mischievous effects. Its great Author designed it not to be exempted from any of these Imperfections. He revealed it only to a small and obscure corner of the World in Parables and Mysteries: He guarded not its original Purity, which seems to have died with himself, by committing it to any written Records, but left it in the hands of illiterate Men, who, tho' they were honest enough to die for it, were never wise enough perfectly to understand it. All Policy he disclaims in express Words, saying, My kingdom is not of this World; that is, I meddle not with the Political Affairs of Mankind; I teach Men to despise the World, but not to govern it. Nor did He expect any better consequences from its progress than those which actually followed: He was by no means ignorant of its future corruption, and that, tho' his primitive institution breathed nothing but Peace, and Forbearance, Good-will and Benevolence; yet that in mixing with the Policies and Interests of Mankind, it would be productive of tyranny and oppression, of martyrdoms and massacres, of national wars and family dissensions. Think not, says he, I come to

send peace on Earth, I come not to send peace but a Sword: for I am come to set a man at Variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

A Prophecy too fatally fulfilled!

From what inscrutable source can all these imperfections, and all these consequent Evils, derive their existence? On what incomprehensible plan must the wise Disposer of all things proceed, to suffer men thus to bewilder themselves in the labyrinths of error, and from thence to plunge into the gulphs of wickedness and misery, when the least direction from his omnipotent hand would lead them thro' the flowery paths of Truth to Virtue and Felicity? Strange! that he has not given them reason sufficient to perform this important office! Stranger! that, if ever he condescended to assist that Reason with his infinite Wisdom, even the Religion that results from that supernatural assistance should be still deficient in almost every one of the principal requisites necessary towards accomplishing the great and beneficent ends it was designed for! that it should want Universality to render it impartial, Authenticity to make it demonstrable, Perspicuity to make it intelligible, and Policy to make it useful to Mankind: that it should immediately have been corrupted, and from that corruption been productive of all the Misery and Wickedness it seemed calculated to prevent. But on examination we shall find, that these Evils, like all those of which we have before treated, owe their existence to no defect of goodness or power in God, but to the imperfection of Man and their own necessity: that is, to the impracticability of giving a perfect Religion to an imperfect Creature. From whence this impracticability arises I will endeavour to explain. There are but two methods, that we know of, by which God can communicate a Religion to mankind: that is, either by the deductions

which he has impowered him to make by the Force of that natural Reason which he has implanted in him, or by the extraordinary interposition of Divine Revelation: now from the first of these little need be said to shew that nothing perfect can be expected: our Reason is unstable in its foundations, and uncertain in its conclusions; our lives are extremely short, and our progress in science no less tedious, and retarded by numberless obstacles: much of our time is employed in getting ideas, and much in acquiring language to express them: few Men have capacities to reason, and fewer leisure: some having sense but no learning, want materials to work with: others having learning and no sense, become more absurd by having amassed much matter to mistake about: so that to raise any tolerable system of Religion, or Morals, from human reason, requires the labours of many generations; from all which have already part how little truth can we collect? and yet perhaps much of that little is owing to Revelation, which we are apt to think unnecessary from the very assistance we have received from it; like the Country-man who despised the Sun because it shined in the daytime. We see but a very small part of the great Whole, and see that small part so superficially, that we comprehend not the essence of any thing; neither of [14] Body or Spirit, of [15] Space or Time, of [16] Infinity or Eternity; we know scarce any thing of any thing, and least of all of the nature of God or ourselves; and therefore it is by no means surprisng that all Religions derived from such a source should be full of Errors and Absurdities. If it be asserted that God might have given to Man a more comprehensive Reason and a greater Insight into Nature and Futurity: I answer, he certainly might, and he might also have given him the strength of the Horse and the swiftness of the Stag, as well as the understanding of an Angel; but then he had not continued to be Man; or if he had, he would have suffered many superior Evils

from there unhappy acquisitions.

If we consider the other method, by which God can communicate a Religion to Mankind, we shall find it no less incapable of producing a perfect one; because tho' God is sufficiently able to give a perfect Religion, Man is utterly unable to receive it. God cannot impart knowledge to Creatures, of which he himself has made them incapable by their nature and formation he cannot instruct a Mole in Astronomy, or an Oyster in Musick, because he has not given, them Members nor Faculties necessary for the acquisition of those sciences: neither is this any diminution of his Omnipotence, because acting in such a manner would be willing Contraries at the same time: it would be opposing his own Designs, making Creatures what they are not, and granting them Powers which he thought proper to deny them: a Revelation therefore from God can never be such as we might expect from infinite Power, Wisdom and Goodness, but must condescend to the Ignorance and Infirmities of Man. Was the wisest Legislator in the World to compose Laws for a nursery, they must be childish Laws: so was God to reveal a Religion to Mankind, tho' the Revealer was divine, the Religion must be human, or it could be of no use to those for whose sake it was revealed: and therefore, like them, it must be liable to numberless Imperfections, amongst which all those Deficiencies before-mentioned are absolutely unavoidable, and impossible to be prevented by any power whatever these are the Want of Universality, Authenticity, Perspicuity and Policy; its certain Corruption, with all that inundation of Wickedness and Misery which must flow from that Corruption. Great and numerous Evils! from which it is not difficult to shew, that no Revelation communicated to Man can be exempted by an Omnipotent Revealer.

First then it must want Universality: that is, however conducive it may

be to the virtue and happiness of Mankind in general, it cannot be alike communicated to all Men in all ages and all nations of the World; because, from the nature of things, it must have a beginning and a progression: it must at first be revealed at some time and in some place; and when-ever and where-ever that is, there must have been times and places in which it was not revealed; and therefore it is impossible it can be Universal; and this not proceeding from any impotence or partiality in the Revealer; but from the modes of existence of all human affairs.

It must likewise want Authenticity; that is, tho' its divine Authority may be more or less credible according to the circumstances of the evidence, yet it can never be capable of a direct or demonstrative proof; because God must communicate this Revelation to Mankind either by a general or a particular Inspiration: that is, either by inspiring all men, or by inspiring a few to teach it to others: the first of these methods, or a Universal Inspiration, is impossible in nature, and absurd even in imagination, and would be the total alteration of human nature: the other must ever be liable to infinite uncertainty, because tho' a Man may possibly know when he himself is inspired, (tho' that, I think, may be very well questioned) yet, that he should ever produce indubitable credentials of a Divine Commission to others, who are uninspired, seems utterly impracticable, there being no marks by which the fact can be ascertained, nor any faculties in the human mind which are able to distinguish it: the excellence of the Revelation he teaches, its beneficent ends, and the miracles he may work in its confirmation, may altogether render it more or less probable, but can never amount to a certain proof, because we know so little of the ends and consequences of things, and so much less of the nature of Miracles: we understand indeed nothing about them, but that we ourselves are

unable to perform them; but what Beings of superior Orders may be able to do we cannot tell; nor yet what power, inclination or permission such Beings may have to deceive us: If it is impossible therefore we can be certain of the divine Authority of a Revelation, even by a personal communication with its first Author, much less can we be assured of it thro' the fallacious mediums of Tradition or History; for whoever observes the propensity men have to impose upon themselves and others, how difficult it is to come at a true representation of the commonest fact, even at the distance of a few miles or a few years, will be easily convinced, that all human Tradition can be nothing more than a Complication of designed Fraud and inevitable Error; a Glass which misrepresents all objects by magnifying or diminishing them, just as it is placed by the hand of Knavery for the inspection of Folly and Credulity. History indeed carries with it a greater Authority, but must ever be liable to infinite Imperfections: we can never be certain that the Writers of it, being Men, were not imposed upon themselves, or did not intend to impose on others; and therefore its original evidence cannot be conclusive, and must grow daily weaker in proportion to its antiquity: it must necessarily be subject to all uncertainties proceeding from the variation of languages and customs, ignorant transcribers, false translations, interpolations and forgeries; and as the histories of Religions are more connected with Mens interests than those of other occurrences, so they must be ever more subject to these Frauds and Impositions; for the same reason that a Bank-note is more likely to be counterfeited than a Newspaper. It is therefore impossible that History can afford us any certain proof of a supernatural and miraculous dispensation, because a Fact, unlikely to be true, can never be demonstrated by a relation not impossible to be false. If it be said, that God may inspire the writers of such important Records with

Infallibility; I answer, the Proof that he has so inspired them will be attended with no less difficulty than the proof of that divine authority which is to be established by it; and it must ever be absurd to prove the truth of a Revelation by the infallibility of its Records, and the infallibility of its Records from the truth of the Revelation. It is plain therefore, that, tho' infinite Goodness may reveal a Religion to so imperfect a creature as Man, yet infinite Power cannot, by reason of that Imperfection, give to that Revelation such a degree of Authenticity, that is, such a demonstrable proof of its divine Authority, as some Men unreasonably expect, and others as ridiculously bestow upon it. [17]

It must want Perspicuity: that is, it must be much more obscure both in its speculative and practical Doctrines, than might be expected from the interposition of infinite wisdom, truth and benevolence. In its speculative Doctrines, Obscurity must be unavoidable, because they must treat of subjects above the reach of our Comprehensions: which neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of Man to conceive; and therefore no Power can impart to us clear and explicit Ideas of such things without first bestowing on us new faculties and new senses; that is, without the total alteration of our Natures. But what is most of all extraordinary is, that it must be likewise to a certain degree obscure in its practical and moral precepts; and this from a reason not the less valid for having never before been insisted on; which is, from the Necessity of Moral Evil: that is, since God, as has been shewn, was obliged by Necessity to admit Moral Evil into the Creation, he must probably be obliged, by the same Necessity, to suffer it in some degree to continue; and therefore cannot enforce the universal practice of Virtue by laws so explicit, by threats and promises so glaring, and by commands so incontestably of divine

Authority, as can admit of no doubt; for these would be so absolutely irresistible as at once to eradicate all human Vice, which has already been proved to have been admitted only from the impossibility of its exclusion without the introduction of greater Evils, or the loss of superior Good. If Omnipotence could not prevent the existence of Moral Evil by the original formation of Man, totally to extirpate it by Revelation would be to counteract his own wise, tho' incomprehensible designs and therefore a Divine Revelation can never be a regular Body of practical institutes, clear and perspicuous, free from all doubts and altercations, enforced by perpetual Miracles, by visible and immediate Rewards and Punishments; but a still Voice whispering gentle Warnings, divine Admonitions and supernatural Truths; a Light shining, in a dark place, illuminating to a certain degree the native obscurity of the human Mind, and discovering by faint glimmerings the Deigns of Providence, and a distant prospect of a future Life.

It must also want Policy: that is, it can never prescribe political rules by which Mankind can be conducted in the Government of Nations, or their pretended rights of War and Peace, because all these affairs being incapable (as has been shewn) of being carried on by any other means than those of violence, fraud, and corruption; a Divine Revelation cannot possibly give any directions about them; because all such must be necessarily inconsistent either with Virtue or with practicability: totally to forbid these methods of governing mankind, who can be governed by no other, would be destructive of all government; to allow them, of all Morality: and therefore it is necessary that Men should be left to act in these matters at their peril, as particular circumstances may require, with only a general system of religion and morality for their guide. If a divine Revelation can give no laws for the management of Civil Government, much less can

it institute any new policies peculiar to itself, under the names of Spiritual or Ecclesiastical; all which, however divine in their Original, must necessarily be administer'd, if administer'd by Man, by the same unjustifiable methods as others, with this additional inconvenience, that they could never be justly resisted. God cannot therefore, I apprehend, delegate Spiritual power to Man, without patronizing all that Violence, Corruption, and Iniquity, which must result from it, and without which no power in the hands of Men can be exercised over men. For the imperfection of Man is incompatible with the purity of a Divine Government. The Government of all creatures must correspond with their natures; and it seems to me as impossible that Societies of Men should submit under a Divine Government, as that Wolves and Tygers shou'd live together under the regulations of human Policy: but most of all impossible it must be that a divine and human Government should subsist together in the same Society, for they must immediately clash: and whenever that happens, the least spark of divine authority, if really divine, must infallibly consume all human power, and destroy all Civil Government whatever.

Lastly, it must very soon be corrupted, and from that corruption be productive of the most mischievous effects: for, as the purest stream pour'd into an impure vessel must partake of its impurity; so must the most perfect Religion, that can be reveal'd by God to so imperfect a Creature as Man, partake of his imperfection, and produce many and great Evils, both natural and moral; that is, much of that misery, and wickedness, which it was intended to prevent: this no wisdom can obviate, no power put a stop to, so long as that imperfection remains; but it must constantly come to pass from a train of unavoidable consequences, which must invariably follow their causes, so long as human nature continues what it is.

For instance, when a Divine Revelation is first communicated to mankind, it must be received (if received at all) because its precepts are approved, and its authority believed; and all those nations who thus approve the one, and believe the other, must esteem it both their interest and their duty to encourage and support it. This they can effect by no other means than by granting peculiar privileges to all who profess it, by forming from it their national Religion, and publick worship, and by maintaining an Order of Men to preach that Religion, and minister that worship to the people; all which amounts to a National Establishment. Now the moment any Religion becomes national, or established, its purity must certainly be lost, because it is then impossible to keep it unconnected with men's interests; and if connected, it must inevitably be perverted by them. Whenever temporal advantages are annex'd to any religious profession, they will be sure to call in all those who have no religion at all: knaves will embrace it for the sake of interest, fools will follow them for the sake of fashion; and when once it is in such hands, Omnipotence itself can never preserve its purity. That very Order of Men, who are maintained to support its interests, will sacrifice them to their own; and being in the sole possession of all its promises, and all its terrors, and having the tenderness of Childhood, the weakness of Age, and the ignorance of the vulgar to work upon; I say, these Men, vested with all these powers, yet being but Men, will not fail to convert all the mighty influence they must derive from them to the selfish ends of their own avarice and ambition, and consequently to the total destruction of its Original Purity: from it they will lay claim to powers which it never design'd them, and to possessions to which they have no right; to make good these false pretensions, false histories will be forg'd, and fabulous traditions invented; groundless terrors

will be flung out to operate on superstition and timidity; Creeds and Articles will be contriv'd to confound all Reason, and tests imposed to sift out all who have honesty or courage enough to resist these unwarrantable encroachments. Devotion will be turned into farce and pageantry, to captivate men's eyes, that their pockets may with more facility be invaded: they will convert Piety into Superstition, Zeal into Rancour, and this Religion, notwithstanding all its Divinity, into diabolical malevolence. By degrees knaves will join them, fools believe them, and cowards be afraid of them; and having gained to considerable a part of the World to their interests, they will erect an independent dominion among themselves dangerous to the liberties of Mankind, and representing all those who oppose their tyranny as God's enemies, teach it to be meritorious in his fight to persecute them in this world and damn them in another. Hence must arise Hierarchies, Inquisitions, and Popery; for Popery is but the consummation of that tyranny which every religious System in the hands of Men is in perpetual pursuit of, and whose principles they are all ready to adopt whenever they are fortunate enough to meet with its success.

This Tyranny cannot subsist without fierce and formidable Opposition, from whence innumerable Sects, Schisms, and Dissentions will lift up their contentious heads, each gaping for that very power, which they are fighting to destroy, tho' unable either to acquire or retain it; and introductive only of their constant concomitants, Ignorance, Self-conceit, Ill-breeding, Obstinacy, Anarchy, and Confusion. From these contests all kinds of Evils must derive their existence, blood-shed and desolation, persecutions, massacres, and martyrdoms. All these Evils, you see, are but the necessary Consequences of the national Establishment of any Religion which God can communicate to Man, in whose hands its Divinity can never long preserve its purity or

keep it unmixed with his imperfections, his folly and wickedness. Nay, so far is the Divinity of a Revelation from being able to prevent its corruption, that it will but increase and hasten it; for the greater share of Divinity it partakes, the greater must be its Excellence; the greater its Excellence, the more universal must be its Approbation; the more it is approved, the more it must be encouraged; the more it is encouraged, the sooner it will be established; and the sooner it is established, the sooner it must be corrupted and made subservient to the worst purposes of the worst of men; yet it is plain this Establishment is no more than the consequence of its excellence, and men's approbation; no more than the alternative of its total extinction, and without which it cannot be preserved at all; and therefore the corruption of every divine Revelation communicated to Man, is, by the nature of Man, clearly unavoidable.

From what has been here said it appears plainly, that all the numerous Evils which adhere to, and all the mischievous effects which follow all human Religions, whether natural or revealed, by no means owe their existence to any want of power, wisdom or goodness in God, but like all others, to the imperfection of Man; that is, to his folly and wickedness, which must inevitably corrupt them. It is also, I think, no less evident, that all arguments levelled against the divine Original of Christianity, founded on its imperfections and pernicious consequences, (which are all, I think, that have any weight) may be proved to be vain and inconclusive; and this not by concealing or denying those imperfections and pernicious consequences, as many have absurdly attempted, but by fairly shewing, that they all proceed from the imperfections of those Creatures to whom it is revealed; and that, so long as those continue, there cannot be prevented by any wisdom, goodness, or power whatever. [18]

Thus, Sir, if I mistake not, I have sufficiently, tho' concisely, answered that most abstruse and important Question, Whence came Evil? and proved, that all the Evils we feel, and all which we see around us, derogate not in the least from the wisdom, power, or goodness of our Creator; but proceed entirely from that subordination which is so necessary to the happiness and even to the existence of the great and incomprehensible Whole. I have shewn that all subordination must imply imperfection in some Beings or other; and that all imperfection must consist in the absence of comparative good, or the admission of positive Evil. I have shewn that most of the Evils we usually complain of are of the first kind; the want only of those perfections we see others enjoy, or imagine infinite power might have bestowed upon ourselves; which are therefore in fact no Evils at all; that those of the latter sort, or positive Evils, are such as from the nature of things must intrude themselves into Creation, and therefore that Omnipotence can do no more than make choice of that System which admits the fewest; being obliged by the imperfection of all created Beings, the untractableness of Matter, and some incomprehensible connection between Good and Evil, Happiness and Misery, to admit both, or to give existence to neither. I have likewise shewn that Moral Evil may have its necessity and utility, as well as Natural; at least, that if Natural Evils are necessary, Moral ones are expedient, to prevent that necessary Misery from falling to the share of perfect. Innocence, and to convert unavoidable sufferings into just punishments; that tho' the essence of all Moral Evil consists in the production of Natural, yet it may have some collateral tendency to Good; and that the Wicked, whilst they are justly punished for the miseries which they occasion, may probably, by that very guilt and punishment, some way remotely contribute to universal happiness. I have shewn that if Natural and

Moral Evils could not be prevented, the existence of Political and Religious Evils must of course be unavoidable, they being but the certain consequences of the other: that all human Government must be in the highest degree imperfect, and big with all manner of Evils, being the dominion of ignorant and wicked creatures over each other; that, as such creatures can be governed only by fear of punishment or hopes of reward, all Government amongst them must be founded on Violence or Corruption, and ever supported and administred by the same vitious and unjustifiable methods: that no power whatever can give a perfect Religion to so imperfect a creature as Man, either by Nature or Revelation; not by nature, because, whilst that is human nature, he can never discover by Reason the Truths on which a Perfect system of Theology or Ethics can be erected; not by Revelation, because he wants faculties to comprehend such supernatural discoveries, altho' they should be imparted to him; that, was he capable of once receiving a perfect Religion, it is not possible he could long retain it; because, if it could be kept entirely separate from his worldly interests, it would soon be neglected and perish in oblivion; and, if it was not, such a connection would quickly corrupt its purity, and destroy its essence, so that national establishments would be necessary for its support, and yet infallibly productive of its destruction. That all these Evils proceed not from wrong dispositions or accidental causes, but singly and solely from the imperfection of Man; and yet that in the gradation from infinite perfection to absolute nothing, there must be one rank occupied by such a Creature as Man with all his imperfections about him; that these imperfections must be annexed to his situation, and adhere to every thing that relates to him, to his happiness, to his morals, to his government, and to his religion: that, in like manner, all other created Beings must have Evils and Imperfections peculiar to

their stations and proportioned to their inferiority; notwithstanding all which, there is as much Good, and as little Evil in the universal system as the nature of Creation will admit of; and that therefore it is a work equal to what we might expect from the Operations of infinite Benevolence joined with infinite Power.

F I N I S.

[11] By want of Authenticity is here meant only the want of that demonstrable, and infallible Authority, of which all historical Facts are in their own Natures incapable; and which, had the friends of the Christian Revelation never pretended to bestow upon it, the truth of that event had been no more disputed, than the truth of any other well-attested History whatsoever.

[12] The want of Perspicuity in this Revelation needs surely no other testimony, than the Millions of Writers, who for seventeen Centuries have laboured to demonstrate, harmonise, systemise, illustrate, and explain every one of its Doctrines; and the no less numberless, and various Opinions, that remain to this Day concerning them all: much indeed of this obscurity has proceeded from Men's endeavours to make it what they fancied it should have been, but for which it was never intended; that is, a regular, clear, and explicit body of moral and political Institutes.

[13] By Policy is here meant all Institutions and Regulations of human Government, both civil, and ecclesiastical; concerning which the Author of the Christian Religion has carefully avoided giving any directions. All these he has left to be ordered by every State in such a manner as shall appear to them most convenient, and has commanded his disciples to be subject, as Men, to their ordinances, not only for Wrath but for Conscience sake; but foreseeing the infinite mischiefs that must arise from trusting human Creatures with a divine power, he has forbid them

as Christians, either to exercise, or submit to any authority over each other, under any pretence of its being derived from himself: Ye know, he says, that the Princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them; But it shall not be so among you; &c. Matt. xx. 25. And perhaps there is no stronger proof of the divine Wisdom of this great Instructor of Mankind, than the extraordinary caution with which he has passed over a subject, on which no rules could be prescribed not inconsistent either with Practice or with Virtue: and yet a Subject which all other Legislators have considered as their most important Object.

[14] Metaphysicians divide all Being into Spirit and Matter: to Spirit they attribute motion, activity, sensibility, thought, will, and reason, free from all solidity, and extension; to Matter they ascribe solidity and extension only, void of all self-motion, sense, and perception: but these descriptions are quite arbitrary, founded only upon their own imaginations, and by no means consistent with experience: for Spirit seems to have many properties not so distinct from Matter by its intimate Union with it in the composition of all animals; and matter has certainly many qualities contradictory to this distinction, such as cohesion, attraction, elasticity, electricity, fermentation, heat, and vegetation, none of which can be accounted for from the mere passive principles of solidity and extension.

[15] Many philosophers have considered Time and Space as real essences; whereas they have certainly no more than an imaginary existence derived solely from the imperfection of human conceptions, and human language. They are in themselves really nothing, and the attributes we bestow upon them are applicable with equal propriety to nothing: that is, nothing has neither beginning nor end, nor can be comprehended within any bounds. The intervening period between historical facts we

distinguish by the names of days and years; the distances between places we call yards and miles, and from this manner of expressing ourselves they gain the appearance of being something; whereas abstracted from those facts, and places, they are really nothing: so that if all things were annihilated, Space would immediately vanish, and literally speaking, Time would be no more.

[16] All the Ideas we have of Infinity and Eternity are acquired by adding in our imagination Miles to Miles and Years to Years, by which means we come never the nearer to them: for no addition of parts can ever make any thing infinite or eternal; no two objects can be placed at an infinite distance, because they would then be the two ends of Infinity: an infinite number is a contradiction in terms; and therefore every thing that is infinite or eternal must exist in some manner which bears no manner of relation to Space, or Time, and which must therefore be to us totally incomprehensible.

[17] Nothing here offered is meant by any means to invalidate the authority of Revelation: that of the Christian is possessed of as much certainty as the nature of the fact, and the nature of its evidence will admit of. Those who endeavour to bestow more upon it, do in reality but make it less; and, like unskillful Architects, weaken a building already sufficiently strong, by overloading it with unnecessary supporters.

[18] If we look into the Deistical Writings of all times, we shall find, that they have always attacked the Christian Religion most successfully from this Ground; they have shewed the many Imperfections that adhere to it, and then concluded, that nothing imperfect could drive its Original from God: their adversaries have injudiciously denied those Imperfections, which for the most part are true, and agreed to their Conclusion, which is indisputably false; for every thing

we possess is derived from God, and yet we possess nothing endowed with absolute Perfection.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net