

If after all that has been said, you are still resolute not to be convinced, that this is doing a *great wrong*; yet my pains will not be wholly lost, if others, more open to conviction, perceive the injustice and groundlessness of your accusations. However I am as much resolved as you, that you shall have no more trouble of this nature from,

Rev. Sir,

Your, &c.

REMARKS

UPON SOME

Writers in the Controversy

CONCERNING THE

Foundation of MORAL VIRTUE

AND

MORAL OBLIGATION;

Particularly the

Translator of Archbishop King's *Origin of Evil*,

AND THE

Author of the *Divine Legation of Moses*.

To which are prefixed,

Some *Cursory Thoughts* on the Controversies concerning *necessary Existence*, *The Reality and Infinity of Space*, *The Extension and Place of Spirits*, and on Dr. *Watts's Notion of Substance*.

First printed in the Year 1743.

P R E F A C E.

I Have so great an esteem of the judgment and penetration of the translator, and author of the notes on Archbishop King's *Origin of Evil*; and have received so much light from him on several subjects, that I am sorry to be obliged to differ from him on any. But I am much more concerned to find, that one, who generally seems inclined to do justice to all the authors he has occasion to mention, should shew a *partiality* against one of the greatest lights this age has produced; a divine, whose writings are universally allowed (except on one point of great depth and difficulty) to convey the clearest and strongest convictions of the most important truths of religion, that solid reasoning, and the most judicious explications of Scripture can give, to all sober and rational enquirers. To what then can be imputed that remarkable bias against this great man in so candid a writer? I would not suppose a too partial regard for the *eminent head* of the opposition against him, whose figure in the learned world has drawn many rash adventurers to engage on his side, though few, I am persuaded, of the weight and discernment of the author of the notes. All personal regards ought undoubtedly to be laid aside, in questions of such importance, as the ultimate foundation of *Moral Virtue*, and of *Moral Obligation*; and

as the following remarks on that debate were at first drawn up only for my own use, though now thought fit to be made publick, I hope they may be excused, however different from the notions of some, for whose superior abilities I have not the less deference.

I have not meddled with the comparison of *moral* and *positive* duties, which first occasioned this controversy; because I think, if it be well proved, that the obligation to *moral virtue* is ultimately founded on the *eternal and immutable nature of things*, that will go a great way in deciding where the preference should be laid: and more especially, because I think our Saviour himself has determined that point with such exactness, as might well have superseded all arguments upon it.

On the more abstruse controversies concerning *necessary existence*, and the reality of *space*, the *extension* and *place* of spirits, and the nature of *substance*, I am only an enquirer; in order to which, a few cursory thoughts are prefixed to the principal subject of these papers. If they are thought late in appearing, after the books, to which they relate, have some years been published, let it be considered, that the most noted authors may be long unknown to those, who live in remote parts of the country, who, whenever they meet with them, will at all times think they have a right to examine subjects of universal concernment, and which can never be out of date.

R E-

R E M A R K S

ON SOME

WRITERS ON MORALITY.

*Remarks on some passages in the translator's
Notes upon Archbishop King's Origin of Evil.*

Of necessary existence.

THIS seems a subject of too abstruse a nature for human understandings to determine upon decisively; but I venture to make a few remarks upon the dispute, as it has been managed in the late opposition to Dr. Clarke; and must premise, that it looks a little unfavourable to their cause, that it obliges them to contend against all proofs from reason of the unity of God, as well as against the *eternal immutable nature* of things; both which have been esteemed essential foundations of natural religion.

I shall next observe, that it is somewhat unfair in the author of the notes to affirm, that the reason, for which necessity of existence was first introduced, was to exclude a *difference of persons* in

* P. S. Page 31.

the

the divine nature; since he could not be ignorant; that Dr. Clarke^b, in that very place, where he first introduced the notion of necessity of existence, from whence he deduces the *unity of God*, does expressly assert, that a *diversity of persons* in that one and the same nature is not inconsistent with it; and that there is no argument, by which it can be proved impossible; or unreasonable to be supposed.

This writer farther urges^c, that “necessity of existence being, as Dr. Clarke contends, simple and uniform, should exclude all difference or variety of any sort; and may exclude all diversity of perfections in the divine nature, for the *very same reason*, that it does exclude a *difference of persons*?” But who has given any reason, why it must exclude a difference of persons? The Doctor affirms, that no reason can be given for it, and has professedly proved a diversity of attributes, or perfections, to be essentially in God, as this author himself owns. The unity Dr. Clarke contends for; and which he thinks necessity of existence proves, “is a unity of nature or essence: the variety he excludes, is a difference of natures, such a variety, as appears to be in all the things of the world, which are distinguished one from another by a diversity, not only of *modes*, but also of *essential attributes*.”

The author of the notes likewise asserts^c, that “necessity of existence must exclude that perfect liberty, or absolute freedom of choice, which “is a property of God, as well as of man.” But I can see no manner of repugnance between these two, any more than there is between man’s being determined to existence by the will of God, and yet having a perfect liberty, or freedom of choice. Why must the same principle, that is the ground

^b Demonst. of the Being and Attrib. of God. ^c P. S. and Note 10. ^d Demonst. Prop. vii. ^e Note 10.

of

of the existence of any being, be the ground of all that being’s actions or determinations? Necessitated to *exist*, and necessitated to *act*, are very different ideas, and seem no way consequent one of the other. But “if we cannot admit it in one case, says he, why “should we in the other?” Answ. *Because it would be an imperfection in the last case, but is not so in the former.*

As to the question itself, whether the divine being exists by an *absolute necessity*, or without any cause, ground, or reason of his existence, it is a point of too great difficulty for me to determine on either side; but I shall venture to set down such reflections, as occur to me on both.

That the most perfect being, the cause of all other beings, should itself exist without any ground or reason at all of existence, is a supposition, that leaves in a considering mind such a void, as it cannot easily be satisfied with. Could the first cause possibly exist by mere chance? Then it might possibly never have existed. If it existed without any reason, it might *without reason* have existed but a day before the present phenomena; and may, without reason, cease to exist in any time to come. And how, upon this supposition, can those be confuted, who affirm, that the material world, and every existing substance, was eternal, *absolutely without any ground or reason of existence*? If some one thing can exist absolutely without any reason, why not every thing? The author of the notes argues upon this subject, “that “there was a time, when all beings, except one, were “indifferent to existence, or non-existence, were “nothing; and that for them to be determined to “existence, is a *change*, which cannot be effected “without a cause; whereas in eternal existence there “is no change, no effect, and therefore, no cause “wanted.” But this, instead of being an answer

^f Rem. e.

to the followers of *Spinoza*, would be a plain begging the question, since they maintain, that the universe has existed eternally, *absolutely without any cause or reason of existence*; and I see not how they can be confuted by those, who affirm the same of God. If the most perfect of all beings, can be conceived to exist absolutely without any ground or reason at all, how can we determine what may or may not be without reason? In short, may we not more justly say of *this*, what our author says of *necessity*? "It is in truth such a vague equivocal principle, that it will be hard to affirm positively what it may, or may not do."

On the other hand, *necessary existence* seems to give the mind something more satisfactory to rest on: if the first cause is necessarily existent, it must have always existed, and cannot possibly cease to exist: And not only *eternity*, but several other attributes, are deducible from this principle, as *immensity, unity, &c.* whereas from existence without any cause or reason, nothing seems to be certainly deducible. The author of the notes affirms indeed, that there may be *two or more* necessarily existing independent beings; but I think he has not proved it, nor answered what Dr. *Clarke* alledges to shew, that such a supposition implies a plain contradiction.

However, it must be confessed, that there is a great difficulty attends the notion of *necessity*, considered as a ground or reason of the existence of the first cause, since the existence must be coetaneous with the supposed reason of it. Nothing can be really antecedent in the order of nature, (whatever it may be in the order of our ideas) to an eternal being. The author of *An impartial enquiry of the being and attributes of God*, who allows the first cause to be necessarily existent, yet requires some ground of that necessity, which ground is, as he asserts, *the perfection of the divine nature*. Some perhaps will be apt to require another ground for that; but which

ever

ever part we take, the difficulty seems no way removed. Whether we suppose *perfection* the ground of necessary existence, or found the existence on an *absolute necessity*, still the perfection, the necessity, and the existence must be *coetaneous*, how then can we conceive either of them antecedent to the other, so as to be the reason of the necessity, or of the existence?

But may we not perceive, that the first cause must exist by some *internal necessity* of its own nature, so that it was not possible for it not to have existed, tho' the manner how this is, be above human comprehension? Do we not allow *necessity of existence* in the divine being, when we suppose, that it cannot be destroyed, even by his own omnipotent will, that can annihilate all other things? Why then may he not have existed by the same *necessity* from all eternity, whatever it is, or whencesoever it arises? But if we can perceive such a necessity of the divine existence, *the perfection of his nature* seems most reasonably to be supposed the ground of it, or rather to be itself the same with that *absolute necessity*.

The author of the notes argues, that necessity is a term merely relative, and that no ideas can possibly be fixed to these terms, *necessity absolute in itself*. The same he says of *truth*, that truth is relative, and all such phrases as *true in itself, absolutely such, &c.* are very absurd ones. I should be glad to know, what this gentleman thinks of self-evident truths, such as are no way deduced from any other truths, neither require, nor will admit of any proof. Can they be said to be *relative*? or would it be any absurdity, to say of them, that they are *true in themselves*? For instance, may not this proposition *I exist*, be said to be, by every one that affirms it, true in itself, or absolutely true? Most of our knowledge indeed is acquired by a deduction of one truth from another; and therefore, most of the truths we are acquainted

§ Note 4.

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with,

with, may be called relative, with respect to our manner of discovering them, tho' many of them may be in themselves *absolutely true*. Thus we deduce the existence of an independent being from the existence of dependent beings; but when we have demonstrated this truth to ourselves, by a deduction from other known truths, we may then perceive, and without absurdity affirm, that it was always true in itself, absolutely true, that this independent being existed from all eternity, when there was no other being but himself.

And may not something like this be the case of relative and *absolute necessity*? We perceive, that the first cause must necessarily have always existed, from the absurdities, that would follow the contrary supposition. This is indeed a *consequential necessity*, which infers nothing of the *modus* of the divine existence: but may not this lead us to see, that there must be some *absolute necessity* in the divine nature itself, which made it impossible, that he should ever not have existed, or that he should ever cease to exist, tho' the manner or ground of this necessity surpasses our comprehension? Perhaps it would be no less difficult for an unprejudiced mind to conceive, that we should be forced to allow the *necessity* of an eternal existence, (tho' only a consequential one) and yet that there may be no cause, reason, ground, or absolute necessity at all of that existence. O! eternal being, who can speak without error of thy incomprehensible nature, unless enlightened by thee!

Remarks on the Notes by Archbishop King's Translator concerning Space, &c. With a digression on Dr. Watts's Notion of Substance.

THOSE, who maintain the real existence of space, seem to me to have given great advantage to their adversaries, by calling it *extension*; which being a term,

term, that stands for an abstract idea, they have taken occasion from thence, to treat of space as such, as having no existence but in the mind. Mr. *Locke*, in asserting the reality of space, might, I think, have denied it to be the same with extension, for the same reason, that he denies *matter* to be so; for that cannot be the same with either, which may be predicated of both; and it may be said of space as well as of matter, that it is extended, which would be nonsense to say of extension itself. Space I take to be one of the particulars, from whence that general idea is abstracted.

The learned writer ^h quoted by the translator, owns, that the idea of space is not the idea of extension, but of *something extended*; yet he will have it to be nothing more, than an *ideal substratum* of extension. "When the mind, he says, has been considering the idea of extension, abstracted from extended bodies; it is a very easy step to frame an *imaginary substratum* to support an imaginary extension." But this seems to me a very *imaginary* account of our getting the idea of this extended something. I rather think we have that idea before we have any of extension in general, or are capable of abstracting: Nor does the mind frame it to itself; it is an idea early obtruded upon it by the senses, and unavoidably perceived by it, as something without itself. This is all the proof we have, that matter is any thing really existing without the mind; and if the translator will not admit of this evidence in behalf of space, but ⁱ require some other proof, that it is more than *mental*, he may be in a fair disposition entirely to embrace Bishop *Berkeley's* scheme, to deny, that there is any such thing as *matter* or motion but in idea. We cannot well conceive motion to be possible without space; so that if bodies are allowed really to exist and move, space will not easily be discarded. We should methinks admit or

^h Note 3.ⁱ See P. S. p. 12.

reject them all together; and to say the truth, the arguments against the reality of each of them seem much of the same kind; they serve rather to puzzle than to convince.

The only ground I can apprehend for denying the real existence of space, is, that we know not in what class of beings to place it. And indeed Dr. *Watts*, who has with great ingenuity discussed all the several opinions about it, seems at last to determine space to be *nothing*, chiefly because he cannot find out what kind of being it is. But sure our ignorance of its nature is no sufficient reason to exclude from existence a thing, which so forces itself upon the mind, that we cannot annihilate it even in imagination. It is enquired, whether space is a substance or a mode? If a substance, whether spirit or body? But how are we assured, that this is an adequate division of being? "Who has told us (as Mr. *Locke* asks^k) that there " was, or could be nothing but solid beings, which " could not think, and thinking beings, that were not " extended? which is all that is commonly meant " by body and spirit." To this question I have met with no answer, but (if that may serve instead of it) a great exclamation against *Gassendus*, quoted from *Bayle*, by the author of the notes^l, where it is said, that to avoid asserting, that a vacuum is nothing, he chose rather to plunge himself " into the *hideous abyss* " of conjecturing, that all beings are not either " substances or accidents; and that all substances " are not either spirits or bodies; and of placing " space among the beings, which are neither corporeal or spiritual," &c. Whether all beings must be divided into substances or accidents, I shall not here enquire; but as to the other part of the conjecture, I see no absurdity in supposing, that there may be other substances, than either spirits or bodies. Why is this thought such a *hideous abyss*, but that

^k Philosoph. Essays.^l Note 6.

the learned are afraid to suppose there may be any thing in nature that they are ignorant of? For my part I am inclined to take the hint from *Gassendus*, and venture to propose a consideration, which may perhaps serve to confirm his conjecture.

It has been observed by the curious, and beautifully described by Mr. *Addison* and Mr. *Locke*, that in the scale of beings, there is such a gradual progress in nature, that the most perfect of an inferior species comes very near to the most imperfect of that, which is immediately above it: that the whole chasm in nature, from a plant to a man, is filled up by such a gentle and easy ascent, that the little transitions from one species to another are almost insensible: That if the scale of beings rises by such a regular progress so high as man, we may, by a parity of reason, suppose, that it still proceeds gradually through those beings, that are of a superior nature to him; that there is no manner of chasm left, no link deficient in this great chain of beings.

Now according to this observation, which is apparent through all the known works of God, and by a parity of reason presumed of those above our knowledge, there should be in nature some being to fill up the vast chasm betwixt body and spirit; otherwise the gradation would fail, the chain would seem to be broken. What a gap betwixt *senseless material*, and *intelligent immaterial* substance, unless there is some being, which, by partaking of the nature of both, may serve as a link to unite them, and make the transition less violent? And why may not space be such a being? Might we not venture to define it, *an immaterial unintelligent substance, the place of bodies, and of spirits, having some of the properties of both.*

I should think, that space might be more fitly called the *place of spirits*, than, as Dr. *Clarke* has termed it, the *place of all ideas*, which, the author of the notes believes, few besides the doctor can apprehend.

But whatever may or may not be apprehended of the place of *ideas*, to suppose, that *spirits are in no place*, seems to me utterly inconceivable, by whatever subtle or plausible arguments it may be maintained. Dr. Watts^m has supported this notion with all his force, whose candour in representing the side he opposes, and modesty in defending his own opinion, are very insinuating. But all his reasonings on this point amount, I think, to nothing but *difficulties*, that seem to follow from allowing spirits to be in a place; as that they must be *extended*, and if so, they must have some *shape or figure*, and consequently be *divisible*. These consequences follow indeed from supposing spirits to be extended in the same manner that bodies are; but may not beings, of whose nature we have but a partial knowledge, have some other kind of extension, consistent with that indivisibility, which we suppose essential to thinking substances? Is not space an instance of extension, or expansion, without figure or divisibility, to those, who allow it any being? However, we are not to reject what is *clear*, for the sake of *difficulties*, that may be raised against it. The learned know, that there are insuperable objections against demonstrable truths; and perhaps there are few truths more clear and evident than this, that whatever has a real existence must exist *somewhere*; nor does any difficulty or inconsistency appear greater to me, than the supposition of any being really existing, yet existing *no where*. This authorⁿ argues, that tho' a body cannot be without being somewhere, yet a spirit, which is a conscious and active power, may have a real existence, and yet have *no proper place*. i. e. as he explains it, have *no proximity of situation to bodies, or fill up no supposed dimensions of space*. This qualifying expression, *no proper place*, which the doctor often uses, seems to me to imply, that he supposes spirits to be in a

^m Essay vi.ⁿ Ibid. Sect. iv.

place

place after *some manner* or other; and I would ask him, whether he can really conceive, or have any idea of a *conscious active power*, exerting its consciousness and activity, or even barely existing, without being somewhere, any more than he can conceive a body to be, without being somewhere? Should we allow him, that spirits have no proximity of situation to bodies, (a subject, which he has curiously enlarged upon, but is too far out of my way to engage in) yet I would farther enquire, whether he can possibly conceive, that they have no proximity of situation, or distance, with respect to one another? Can he suppose, that a human soul, as soon as it is free from the prison of the body, and finds itself in the world of spirits, is in that moment equally present to all the myriads of spirits, that may exist in the universe? That it can communicate its thoughts to them all in that instant, and receive communications from the whole creation of spirits at once? This surely would be to make them infinite, which, he justly says, *we know they are not*. If then finite spirits cannot be present to all of their kind at once; if they can communicate their thoughts only to some limited number at a time, what ground can we conceive of such a limitation, but that they are nearer to and farther from some spirits than from others? And that, I think, implies being in a *place*. The manner, how spirits *possess place*, we are undoubtedly ignorant of, and may content ourselves so to be, till we enter into the world of un bodied minds. But when we venture to affirm, that they are *no where*, I fear we go beyond our clear and distinct perceptions; as this ingenious author^o owns we are in danger of doing, when we endeavour to turn from sensible ideas. I should be apt to think, with Mr. Locke^p, that spirits must possess a place, so as to exclude any of the same kind from it, other-

^o Essay vi. Conclus. ^p In his chap. of ident. divers. Sect. 2.

wife

wife all distinction between them must be lost. To this Dr. *Watts* ¹ answers, that every spirit is sufficiently distinguished from all others, by its particular cogitations and consciousness. But I cannot see how the particular consciousness of any being can distinguish it from others, to any but itself. But to return to the author of the notes.

This learned writer asserts, that "space and spirit, and the distinct properties of each, appear to him as distant and incompatible, as the most remote and inconsistent things in nature; and an *extended soul* seems just such another phrase, as a *green sound*," &c. Yet a few lines after he owns, "that it is perhaps impossible for us to imagine any such thing as an *unextended substance*;" which is, I think, not very consistent with the former assertion. If it is as impossible for us to imagine an *unextended soul* or substance, as it is impossible to imagine the colour of a sound, then it should rather follow, that an *unextended soul* must seem just such a phrase as a *green sound*, since they both express things, of which we can have *no idea*. This judicious writer frequently blames others, for going beyond their ideas for knowledge: why does he go beyond his ideas, or why would he have us do so, in this case? I confess I see no reason for it, extension not seeming to me inconsistent with indivisibility, the allowed property of thinking beings. A simple uncompounded, therefore indivisible, yet extended substance, carries with it no contradiction, that I can perceive; and if ascribed even to the deity himself, as some have done, I should apprehend no inconvenience in it, provided the properties belonging to compound finite substances, be excluded from the idea.

If the author of the notes should admit of my conjecture, that there must be some being to fill up the vast chasm betwixt body and spirit, for the sake

of that beautiful gradation, which he makes so good use of, to confirm an argument of Bishop *King's*; I fear he would scarce allow, that *space*, which he treats of as a mere nothing, may possibly be such a being; much less would he admit it for the *place of spirits*; since he, as well as Dr. *Watts*, contends, that spirits are in *no place*: Nor would either of them, I suppose, allow, of an immaterial being, without the *power of thinking*; for, according to the author of the notes, "the substance of spirit consists in the powers of thinking and acting; the aggregate of the properties of any being is the being itself." But if thinking is the *action* of spirits, as it is acknowledged to be, even by those, who contend, that it is their very substance; how is it possible to conceive, that the actions of a being are the being itself? Dr. *Watts* likewise maintains, that a *power of thinking is the substance of spirit*; that this is sufficient to support all the properties of spirit, and that therefore there is no need of supposing any other *unknown* subject of them. On this point he is very large; and tho' it does not directly relate to that which I am upon, he has several passages, that incline me to go a little out of my way, to take some notice of them.

This author argues^r, that if a *power of thinking* be only a mere mode or property, then it may be destroyed, and yet the substance will remain: but destroy *thinking power*, and nothing at all remains; *we have no idea left*. We have *no idea left* indeed of what remains, unless the obscure one of something, to which that power did belong. But does it follow, that therefore nothing can remain? If there is ground, from reason and the nature of things, to conclude, that a power of thinking cannot subsist of itself, but must be the property of some being; our ignorance, or having *no idea* of what the substance

of that being is, will not hinder it from remaining, if God should think fit to take from it the power of thinking. *Logical* ways of speaking, to which this ingenious author imputes our prejudices against allowing a power of thinking to subsist without a subject, seem, in this case, forms of speaking founded on reason and truth; for what idea can we frame of a *power*, without supposing some being, to which it belongs? What is a *power of thinking in perpetual act*, but an ability or capacity perpetually exerted? And how can this be conceived, but as the property and action of some being, that exerts its ability, and therefore must be distinct from it. I do not find myself so prejudiced by logical or grammatical ways of speaking, but that I could easily agree with this author, that *solid extension* may possibly be the very substance, or only *substratum* of all the properties of *matter*; I see nothing repugnant to reason in this supposition: But I cannot so well reconcile my reason to the notion, that a *power of thinking* may be the substance of spirit: actions and abilities (and I have no other idea of powers) seem unavoidably to imply some subject of them, some being, that exerts its powers in different ways of acting.

I confess myself ignorant indeed of what the substance of that being is, but cannot think that a sufficient reason to exclude it from existence, as this new philosophy would do, tacking properties and actions together, without any subject of either; somewhat unphilosophically, as it seems to me. Nor have I found any arguments from the maintainers of this new notion, that oblige me to alter the sentiments I had, when I formerly 'endeavoured to shew, from what we know of the human soul, that thinking cannot be the substance or essence of it; and that it may continue to *be*, though it should

^f Defence of Mr. *Locke's* Essay, printed in 1702.

sometimes

sometimes cease to *act*. It has long been my opinion, that, from our ignorance of the nature of things, or of their manner of acting, how they cease to act, or how they resume their actions, no other reasonable conclusion can be drawn, but of the narrowness of our understandings. This is a lesson I early learnt from Mr. *Locke's* Essay; and if others would make the same use of a work so adapted to teach us, where to set bounds to our pretences to knowledge, there would be no fear of the dangerous consequences Dr. *Watts* apprehends from admitting, with that great man, an *unknown substratum* of the properties of matter and of spirit. Is it suitable to our limited understandings to conclude, that because we know not what the substance of either is, therefore they may be the same? Is there not at least the same ground for the very contrary conclusion? But if we must argue about the *nature* of things, which we know not, let us form our reasonings from what we do know of them; let us rather conclude, that properties so essentially different as those of matter and spirit are, must certainly belong to substances as essentially different in themselves.

'Tis but too common, I confess, to frame an hypothesis, and even to establish the most important truths, upon the nature of things we are unacquainted with. And this is what Mr. *Locke* seems to me designing to *ridicule*; not the notion of *substance in general*, as Dr. *Watts* supposes, but forming arguments, and drawing conclusions from the *nature* of substance, which we are as ignorant of, as the *Indian* was of his unknown something, that supported the tortoise, &c. A design, which agrees very well with the 'title of the section, where he introduces that comparison! It is certain, Mr. *Locke* always allows, that there is a real ground in

^f Substance and accident of little use in philosophy.

nature

nature for our general notion of substance; as that, which supports all the properties, that we observe in different beings, and which we cannot conceive to subsist of themselves; and therefore I think he could never intend to ridicule that notion. Yet I do not see how his insisting on this *unknown something* should lead his readers (as this author apprehends) into a belief, that there is such a real being as *substance in general*, the common support of all the properties of particular different beings, unless his readers mistake what he says of *our idea* of substance to be meant of the *real nature* of substance; which, perhaps, is often the case, tho' these are very different things. The Bishop of Worcester seems to have fallen into that mistake; and I fear this author has done the same; for what he quotes from Mr. Locke's first letter to the bishop for his notion of a *general substance*, plainly relates to our *general idea* of substance, which is indeed *the same every where*; an abstract idea, in which all substances must agree, though in other respects they may be essentially different. A *real universal* cannot sure be deduced from his principles, who has sufficiently exploded that notion, and expressly maintains, that every real existence is particular: And individuals of all kinds he often speaks of, as particular *distinct substances*. He "treats it as no small absurdity to suppose, that substance, when applied to God, to created spirits, and to material beings, signifies the same thing, that is, the same in its *own nature*; though we are so far from having three distinct meanings of it, that we have but one common, and that a *confused obscure idea*, not of what it *is*, but of what it *does*. Yet, as unknown as he supposes the nature of substance to be, I cannot but think he has sufficiently obviated all the objections to that notion, and secured it from any

" Essay, Book II. Chap. xiii. Sect. 18.

unhappy

unhappy consequences, by his clear demonstration, that the eternal mind cannot possibly be material; that no system of matter can of its own nature be capable of thinking; and that our certainty of the immortality of the soul does not depend upon our knowledge of what the substance of it is. And I am sorry to find, that the weight of these arguments did not give satisfaction to so candid and judicious a writer: But to return from this digression.

Among many eminent philosophers, Mr. Locke, in particular, as I just observed, has demonstrated, that the first cause of all things must be immaterial. He too maintains it to be in the highest degree probable, that the soul of man is also immaterial, grounding the possibility he supposes, that some systems of matter may have a power of perception and thought, tho' we cannot conceive how matter can be capable of it, solely on that omnipotent will, which, in uniting the human soul and body, has given them powers of acting on each other, which we can no more conceive how they can be capable of. Other learned men have professed to demonstrate, that *all thinking beings* must necessarily be immaterial; and we should in reason allow of their demonstrations, as agreeing with our best conception of things, so far as may be without limiting the divine omnipotence. But from the strongest proofs, that *all thinking beings* must be immaterial, it does not follow, that every immaterial being must think; thinking not being a necessary consequence of immateriality, for aught that can appear to us, till the new philosophy is better established than it yet seems to be, which would make a power of thinking and immaterial substance to be the same thing. The author of the *Enquiry into the nature of the human soul*, in diffusing immaterial beings through the whole sensible creation, (though he has much laboured to prove, that every being capable of perception must always actually perceive) has brought

brought them down to so low a degree of sensation or perception, according to the bodies they inform, so very near to none, that it seems but an easy step farther to imagine with me, some *immaterial* beings placed in such circumstances, as to have no perception at all; thus linking the *intelligent* and *material* world together by an easy gradation; into which class I would willingly introduce *space*, the subject from whence I have insensibly wandered.

Of infinite space.

Most of those, who have maintained the real existence of space, (perhaps all of them) have likewise asserted it to be *infinite*; and it may be thought a bold singularity to dispute it. But, as the translator of the *Origin of Evil* judiciously observes, the equivocal use of that word, by jumbling mathematics and metaphysics together, has occasioned a great deal of confusion in subjects of this kind; and, in regard to our ignorance of the extent of space, I think it is more fitly styled *indefinite*.

Some have ascribed a *positive* infinity to space; others only a *negative* one, which are very opposite things. If by the former Dr. *Clarke* meant a metaphysical infinity, *viz.* absolute perfection, to which nothing can be added, I see not how positive infinity, in that sense, can be applied to any thing but the deity and his attributes. The Doctor seems indeed to make infinite space something near a divine attribute, when he calls it "an *abstract idea of immensity*", which I confess I do not understand.

As to that other kind of infinity, which Mr. *Locke* has explained at large, and ascribes to space, that perpetual addibility or encreaseableness without end, it seems utterly inconsistent with being positively or absolutely infinite; and, according to my notions, that kind of negative infinity cannot, without a con-

* Demonstr. Prop. iv.

tradition be applied to any thing, that has a real actual compleat existence; and therefore I think it should not be ascribed to space, by those, who allow space to be a real particular being, and not a mere *idea*. *Negative infinity* can only be applied to general *abstract ideas*, as number, duration, extension, &c. which have no existence but in the mind. To those *ideas* we can always add indeed, without ever being able to come to an end; and *there is no great mystery in that*, as the author quoted by the translator observes*.

But it is not the power the mind has of enlarging its idea of extension *in infinitum*, that is the ground of ascribing infinity to space, as that author seems to suppose; for we have the same power of adding to number, and yet are not apt to think there is any such thing as a number actually infinite. The true reason, that has inclined so many great men to think, that space must be boundless, seems to be, that they cannot conceive what should set bounds to it; as Dr. *Clarke* and others have argued. 'Tis impossible, say they, since that would be to suppose space bounded by something, which itself occupies space, or else nothing, both which are contradictions; and Mr. *Locke* has reasonings, that tend to the same purpose. But these kind of arguments seem to me to prove nothing but the narrowness of our understandings. As I cannot conclude space to be *nothing*, because we know not *what* it is, neither can I conclude it to be *infinite*, because we are ignorant *what can set bounds to it*. May there not be many ways of setting bounds to space, that we know nothing of? It may be bounded by its own nature, or by the will of God, or by some kind of beings, that we are not acquainted with. In short, whatever *contradiction* may be supposed in setting bounds to space,

* Note 3.

† *ibid.*

nothing can seem a more palpable one to me, than to imagine an actual real compleat being, which implies existing in all its parts together, and yet to be encreaseable without end, or absolutely boundless, an idea, as I think, utterly inconsistent with real existence.

O thou sole infinite being, *whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain!* how art thou hid in impenetrable darkness! or how short-sighted are we! and with what diffidence should we reason upon things, which thou hast placed out of our reach, when *that*, which some have thought to be the divine *immensity*, nay thy very *essence*, and to which most have ascribed *infinity*, is by others pronounced to be a mere *nothing*!

Remarks upon some writers in the controversy concerning the foundation of Moral Virtue, and Moral Obligation, particularly the translator of archbishop King's Origin of Evil, in his notes on that work.

THE translator of archbishop *King*, when he opposes in his notes those, who maintain the reason, nature, and fitness of things to be the foundation of virtue, and of moral obligation, seems to have forgot that due candour² himself recommends, of not always taking the words of writers on morality in the common acceptation, but in the sense we find they are used by the author we are reading. A little of this candour might have spared his cavilling at the word *fit*; for however it may be commonly applied, it is very evident, that the authors he opposes mean by it, *a suitableness of actions to the relations of things*, and by *fit* or *unfit* in themselves,

² Prelim. Dissert.]

that

that this fitness or unfitness depends not on the will of any being, or on any reward or punishment annexed to them. When this is sufficiently explained to be the meaning of those expressions, it seems not very candid to cavil at them as solecisms, or an absurdity of language: and after all, whatever dispute there may be about the truth of their notion, can any words be found more proper to express what they contend for? That there is a moral fitness and unfitness in actions, resulting from the nature of things, antecedent to all positive appointment, and to any consideration of reward and punishment.

The defender of Dr. *Clarke*, as quoted by this author, in the^a postscript to his notes, gives for instance on this subject, "that it is absolutely right and fit in itself, antecedent to any command, that a creature should reverence his creator. Where (says he) can be any absurdity in this proposition? Is not reverence from a creature to his creator suitable to the nature of each of them?"

To this the author of the notes answers, "It is suitable to the nature of the *first*, as productive of its happiness, and to that of the *second*, as agreeable to his will, who originally designed the happiness of his creatures, and therefore bound this and the like duties on them." Thus he resolves all moral fitness into *will* on the one hand, and interest on the other. But surely this is reversing the order of things. Should we not rather conclude, that reverence from a creature to his creator is therefore productive of happiness to the one, and agreeable to the will of the other, because suitable to their respective natures? If this were not so, if there was no fitness or suitableness in the thing itself, antecedent to the will of God, or the happiness it produces; then God might *originally* have

^a P. S. p. 21.

annexed the happiness of his creatures to their *irreverence* towards him, and *bound that as a duty upon them*. If this appears an absurd or impossible supposition, to those, who deny any antecedent fitness or unfitness in things, (as Dr. *Waterland*, and some other writers on his side, affirm such suppositions to be) 'tis a plain giving up their cause; for what absurdity can there be in that supposition, if the suitability of reverence from a creature to the creator depends solely on the creator's will, and the happiness he has made consequent upon it? Since, in that case, his willing the direct contrary would make *irreverence* as suitable to the nature of both.

The opposers of Dr. *Clarke*, who have of late introduced the doctrine of founding moral good and evil on the sole will of God, in order to establish *positive duties* on the same ground with *moral*, seem labouring to overthrow the most solid and immutable foundation of moral virtue, and even to take away our only certain criterion of the will of God, the *eternal immutable nature, and necessary relation of things*.

"We cannot (says the author of the notes^b) imagine these relations to be *strictly eternal*, or independent of the will of God, because they must necessarily presuppose a determination of that will, and are in truth only consequences of the existence of things proceeding from that determination."

To this I answer, the necessary relations of all possible things are *strictly eternal*, as they are eternally perceived by the divine understanding to be unalterably what they are. This depends not on a determination of the will of God, tho' the bringing any possible nature, with its necessary relations, into *actual* existence, proceeds solely from that determination. This distinction the writers on the

^b Remark i.

other

other side are very apt either *weakly* or *wilfully* to overlook, though a very obvious and a very important one in this controversy. Whether God will bring into actual existence a particular system of beings, of any determinate nature, depends undeniably on his sole will and pleasure; but whether that system of beings shall have such and such relations, from whence certain fitnesses and unfitnesses must result, depends not on his will, but on the nature of the beings he is determined to create. To suppose, that he may will them to have other relations, &c. is to suppose, that he may will them to be another kind of beings than he determined to create; for if they are the same, the relations and fitnesses resulting from their nature, are necessary and immutable.

This writer further adds, "much less can we apprehend how these relations, &c. are to be chosen for their own sakes and intrinsic worth, or have a full obligatory power antecedent to any reward or punishment, annexed either by natural consequence, or positive appointment, to the observance or neglect of them; since the natural good or happiness consequent upon, and connected with, the observance of them, is to us their sole criterion, the argument and indication of their worth, the ground of all their obligation." And what then? There is nothing in this at all inconsistent with what Dr. *Clarke* maintains in those words quoted from him: he does not say, that those things are to be chosen, &c. antecedent to any *natural* good or happiness consequent upon them, but antecedent to any *reward or punishment* annexed to the observance or neglect of them, either by natural consequence, or positive appointment; and it sufficiently appears in many places of the Doctor's works, that *natural good* is to him the criterion of *moral good*, as it re-

^c These are Dr. *Clarke's* words.

spects ourselves, or our fellow creatures; though *reward and punishment* is not. A distinction, which it is strange so penetrating a judgment should have been at a loss to *apprehend*.

But let it here be observed, that though the fitness of moral actions consists in their general tendency to produce natural good to the objects of them, yet there are particular cases, where the fitness remains, though no natural good should be consequent upon it. Respect to parents, gratitude to benefactors, are always fit in themselves, that is, have a rectitude in them, that makes them fit to be chosen, whether any benefit can accrue from them to either side or not. And in whatever regards our duties to the supreme being, *natural good* seems not at all the criterion of them: the object of them we are sure can receive no advantage by them; and I would ask those gentlemen, who assert ^d, that *nothing can be our duty, that is not our interest into the bargain*, whether reverence and gratitude to the creator would not always be the duty of a creature, though we should suppose him unalterably placed in a state of the utmost happiness he was capable of? Whether there is not a rectitude in such a behaviour, a fitness necessarily resulting from the relation he stands in to his maker and benefactor, which a rational mind must be *conscious* is his duty, though (as in the supposed case) there could be *no interest into the bargain*.

The author of the notes allows this conscious approbation and disapprobation, to be of itself both *rule and obligation*; but to make this consistent with his scheme of resolving all obligation into interest or private happiness, he ^e founds the obligation of moral sense upon the *uneasiness* we feel, when we neglect what it approves, or practise what it disap-

^a *Turner*, quoted by Author of the Notes in Rem. i. ^e *ibid*.

proves,

proves, as it makes our conformity to it necessary to our happiness. But the obligation seems plainly founded on the *approbation* itself: the uneasiness we feel upon the practice of any thing contrary to what moral sense approves, is a *consequence* of the obligation, not the *foundation* of it, and only shews, that we are conscious of being obliged to certain actions, which we cannot neglect without standing self-condemned; self-condemnation manifestly presupposing some *obligation*, that we judge ourselves to have transgressed.

But though Dr. *Clarke* and his followers maintain, that the *fitness of things*, and conscience or the *moral sense* (by which they never understand, nor would I be understood to mean, a blind instinct, but a consciousness consequent upon the perceptions of the rational mind) have *in themselves* an obligatory power, yet it must be allowed, and they as earnestly maintain, that the *will of God*, with the sanctions of his laws, can only enforce this obligation, so as to extend to all times and all cases. These therefore, as Mr. *Warburton* ^f judiciously observes, make a threefold cord, that ought never to be untwisted. The consideration of the *will of God* must necessarily be taken into all schemes of morality, as the author of the notes justly says; but an endeavour to establish it upon that alone, exclusive of the other principles, seems to me no less a defect in *some*, than the want of that has been in *many* of our modern systems.

Remarks on Note 53, in the second part of the Origin of Evil, concerning the Foundation of Virtue, and of Moral Obligation.

THIS large note has suggested some farther reflections on the foregoing subjects. 'Tis

^f *Divine Legation*.

strongly

strongly urged, both by archbishop *King*, and in the notes by his translator, that it depended solely on the will of God whether he should create any world, and, among many possible worlds, which he should choose, there being no *best* among created things, that could absolutely determine him. All which, I think, is very justly argued, and solidly refutes Mr. *Leibnitz*'s notion, of there being nothing equal or indifferent in nature. But I do not see how this at all affects the arguments of those, who maintain a fitness in things antecedent to the divine will; though the artful mingling this contest with the other, which has no dependance on it, casts a mist upon the subject that a little perplexes it. The defenders of this antecedent fitness, have no need of supposing, that the present system is *absolutely best*. There may be many possible, nay actually created worlds as good or perhaps better than this: each of these may have different systems producing different relations, and fitnesses resulting from them, which will be as eternal and immutable as those of our system are asserted to be; for the relations of all *possible* systems must be eternally in the divine *mind*, as the translator owns; they cannot therefore be dependent on *will*.

God is indeed perfectly free to choose, which of them he will bring into actual existence; but when he has fixed on any particular system, the relations and fitnesses resulting from it are necessary; and to act suitably to them, must be an immutable rule to that system of beings. To this reason, nature, and fitness of things, the divine will always conforms itself. God cannot, for instance, will, that pain shall be suitable, and pleasure unsuitable, to a sensible being; or that it shall be morally good to give causeless pain to such a being. Nor can he will the existence of innocent creatures on purpose to make them miserable; not because *this would be*
contrary

contrary to what he has willed already, (as this writer & argues) or inconsistent with what he supposes to be the sole end of God's acting, viz. a communication of happiness; but because there is an *unfitness* in the thing itself, inconsistent with *rectitude*, and therefore morally evil. If there was no unfitness in this, if making creatures to be happy or miserable was indifferent in the nature of things, antecedent to the will of God, no reason can be given, why he may not change his will concerning them, or make misery instead of happiness the end of his acting. But let us suppose God to have had some other end in the creation, as the exercise and manifestation of his power; this end might be answered by making innocent creatures on purpose to be miserable: but can any one think this would be equally fit, right, and good, as to design them for happiness? And yet this must be the case, if the fitness or goodness of things depends merely on God's willing them, as Dr. *Clarke*'s opposers maintain. But further; if this was so, if there was no essential difference in the nature of good and evil, we could never be certain, either that God would deal with us according to truth, justice, and the reason of things, (if upon that supposition there would be any meaning in those words) or that we ourselves were under any obligation of dealing equitably with our fellow creatures. He might decree us to eternal misery, merely to shew his sovereignty; or have a secret will contrary to his revealed one, as some upon this very principle have taught: So that we could neither know what we might expect from God, or what he required of us, by any kind of declaration, that he could make of his will; since, according to this notion, it would be no more *unfit from the nature of things*, that he should will to break his promise, and to deal de-

ceitfully with us, than that he should will to act with faithfulness, with equity, and veracity.

When the author of the notes finds himself pressed with the danger of this principle, of founding good and evil, and placing the obligation to virtue, on the mere will of God, he owns, that ^b *mere will* would of itself be no ground of obligation at all, and that *the will of God must not be separated from his other attributes*; which is, I think, giving up all that is contended for. The moral attributes of God, his goodness, justice, truth, and rectitude, are chiefly understood by us with relation to his dealings with his creatures, suitably to the nature he has given them, and to their demeanour in it. To say then, that the will of God *must not be separated* from these attributes, *i. e.* must be considered as determining itself agreeably to, or in conformity with them, is the same thing, in other words, with conforming itself to the reason, nature, and fitness of things.

What ill consequences this author ⁱ apprehends, from founding moral obligation on the fitness of things, antecedent to any consideration of reward and punishment, (for which he has taken so much pains to oppose it) he has not been pleased to tell us: but the ill consequences of the contrary notions, of making good and evil depend upon *mere will*, and all obligation to virtue upon *private happiness*, are obvious enough, though he so earnestly contends for them. Upon his scheme, the Heathens, who considered not the law of nature as the will of the supreme being, and knew nothing of a future recompence, could have no obligation to virtue at all; and consequently could not be justly punishable for the neglect of it. The blessed in heaven, as we suppose them confirmed in unalterable bliss, can have no duties to perform; there can be no-

^b Ibid.ⁱ Ibid.

thing

thing fit or right for them to do, since they can have no advantage by it. But we have good reason to believe, that they are worthily employed in acts of gratitude to their creator, and of benevolence to his creatures, who in a lower or more imperfect state may need their assistance; and therefore we are taught to pray, that the will of God *may be done on earth as it is in heaven*. But what is worst of all, upon this scheme (as I had occasion before to observe) if there is nothing right or fit in itself, but only as it tends to the happiness of the agent, we could never depend upon being equitably dealt with by the deity, since he could receive no addition of happiness from it.

The author of the notes indeed supposes, that "God was always determined to pursue the best end, and by the best means: but why he is so determined, and in what sense this was *better* and *fitter for him*, who could receive no addition of happiness from it, I confess, says he, I do not understand." In truth, upon his principles, this is not only unaccountable, but must be very doubtful. There could indeed be no such thing as *best end*, or *best means*, nor any motive of action, to a perfectly happy being; which sufficiently shews, that the principle itself must be false. Whereas those, who maintain the *essential difference* of good and evil, right and wrong, and the immutable relations of things, as they were eternally in the divine mind, will easily understand, why a perfectly happy being, of infinite knowledge and power, who unerringly sees, what is in its own nature good, right, and fit, and can be under no influence to bias the rectitude of his will, should always determine himself to do what he perceives to have a goodness in it. Nor will they be at a loss to know, in what sense it is *better and fitter*, that such a being should pursue the best ends, should promote order, rectitude, and happiness; these things being necessarily approved, and

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^h Ibid.ⁱ Ibid.

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consequently objects of choice, to every rational mind, that is under no wrong influence.

And as the most perfectly *happy being* has thought it fit, right, and good to communicate happiness to his creatures, tho' himself could have no advantage by it; may it not seem to be a part of that image of God, in which he is said to have created mankind, that he has made us capable of taking delight in doing good to others, without any regard to our own interest? If it be said, that this *delight* is our reward for doing good, and that therefore our own happiness is the real end of our acting; let it be observed, that the delight of doing good is never the end in view. A benevolent agent has no other prospect, but the interest or happiness of another. The delight he finds in having obtained that end, is either the *consequence* of his benevolence, or of the approbation of his own mind, for having done what was right and fit; but in no case the motive of his acting.

Tho' the author of the notes will not allow, that there is any such thing as *disinterested benevolence* in nature, yet he owns*, that it is matter of fact, that there are great variety of instances of mens practising virtue, without knowing, that it tends to their own private happiness, nay even when it appears destructive of it. And he argues very justly against Mr. *Hutchinson*, that this is no proof, that the *moral sense and publick affections* (in his language) are mere *instincts* implanted in us, since they are all resolvable into *reason*, and are undeniably cultivated and improved, by making a right use of our faculties. But when he goes on to say, that "they are resolvable into reason *pointing out private happiness*; and "that whenever this end is not perceived, they are "to be accounted for from the *association of ideas*, "and may properly enough be called habits," I

* Prelim. Dissert.

question

question whether this is reconcileable either to reason or matter of fact. There are many instances of benevolent affections; and a disinterested approbation of virtue, that cannot be accounted for by any supposed *association of ideas*; nor does reason direct a social creature to think, that there is nothing fit for him to aim at, but his own private happiness. On the contrary, right reason will inform him, that it is suitable to the nature of such a being, and worthy of approbation, to do all the good he can for others, whether his own advantage is included in it or not.

Mankind is a system of creatures, that continually need one another's assistance, without which they could not long subsist. It is therefore necessary, that every one, according to his capacity and station, should contribute his part towards the good and preservation of the whole, and avoid whatever may be detrimental to it. For this end they are made capable of acquiring social or benevolent affections, (probably have the seeds of them implanted in their nature) with a moral sense or conscience, that approves of virtuous actions, and disapproves the contrary. This plainly shews them, that virtue is the law of their nature, and that it must be their duty to observe it, from whence arises *moral obligation*, tho' the sanctions of that law are unknown; for the consideration of what the event of an action may be to the agent, alters not at all the rule of his duty, which is fixed in the nature of things. Thus, as *St. Paul* tell us, *those who had not the law* (the revealed law) *were a law unto themselves*: the obligation of living suitably to a rational and social nature was plain; the consequence was to be trusted to the author of that nature.

Thus undeniably stood the cause of moral obligation, where revelation was not known. But our beneficent creator, foreseeing, that many would be drawn by irregular passions, to deviate from the rule of their duty, by which those, who steddily adhered

to it, would be liable to great disadvantages, determined, agreeably to his goodness and rectitude, to make suitable retributions in a future state, that no one should be finally a loser by obeying the law of his nature, or a gainer by transgressing it. This determination, it is plain, introduces no *new moral obligation*, in the usual sense of that word; and I see not why we should give up to this writer his *arbitrary definition* of it: on the contrary, the very notion of reward and punishment implies an *antecedent duty* or obligation, the conforming or not conforming to which, is the only ground of reward and punishment. These cannot, therefore, be the foundation of the obligation; tho' the translator supposes all obligation to arise solely from a prospect of them.

When God was pleased to declare to the world this his determination, in making known to mankind more explicitly, that the law of their nature was likewise *the will* of their creator, he brought them indeed under an *additional* obligation to observe it, obedience to his will being one of the principal fitnesses resulting from the nature and relations of things. But in declaring, that he would eternally *reward or punish* those, who obeyed or disobeyed, he gave them only a new *motive* to the performance of their duty, but no new *foundation* of it: the rule, and reason, and obligation of virtue remained as before, in the immutable nature and necessary relations of things.

At the end of this long note, the author asks, "What will become of the obligation, in cases where virtue fails to produce happiness, which must often happen in the present state?" for in such cases, according to his explication of the word, there can be no obligation. "To deduce one, continues he, from the prospect of a future reward, is having recourse to the *will of God* to supply *defects*: It is owning, that the obligation supposed to arise from the relations of things, is not in it-

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"self adequate and indispensable, and seems to be quite giving up that full obligatory power of theirs, antecedent to any reward or punishment." But by what has been said above, the inconclusiveness of this reasoning may appear. Having recourse to the *will of God*, and the prospect of a *future reward*, is not to supply the *defects of the obligation*, but the defects of our strength and resolution to comply with it. The *right* of obliging may be full, the obligation indispensable, and yet there may be great need of assistance to our frailty, for the discharge of it in cases of severe trial. The prospect of future rewards and punishments is allowed to be the only motive suited to all capacities and conditions: And therefore, no divines have more strongly pressed the consideration of the will of God, and of future retributions, than those, who maintain a full obligatory power in the relations and fitness of things. Dr. Clarke, in particular, constantly insists on them, throughout all his admirable practical discourses; and very judiciously refutes the notion of those, who would depreciate the principle of practising virtue, with a view to future rewards, as mercenary or selfish.

The assurance of equitable retributions in another life is of too great importance to be neglected in any schemes of morality, where revelation is known: but to place all obligation to virtue solely on that, seems to be confounding the *sanctions* of a law with the *reasons and grounds* of it. To make *private happiness* the only foundation of moral obligation, as the author of the notes does, is, I fear, setting it on a principle, that, in case a future state is not known, or not attended to, would leave men free to every kind of profitable wickedness, that they could commit with impunity. Whilst, on the other hand, I see not how there can be any danger in asserting, that there is an indispensable obligation to virtue, founded on the nature, relations, and fitness of things; since that leads us to conclude, that it must be

be likewise the will of our creator, who gave us a nature, from whence such relations arise; and that himself will act suitably to those necessary relations, in every dispensation to his creatures through all eternity.

Remarks upon an Essay on Moral Obligation.

THE author of this *Essay*, who writes on Dr. *Waterland's* side, against a reply to his supplement, ¹ pretends, that *moral obligation*, as built upon the supposed fitnesses of things, must resolve at last into conscience, or the *moral sense*; and that the scheme of Dr. *Clarke* and his followers (which this author opposes) is no otherwise intelligible, but upon that supposition. On this account he has taken ^m a great deal of pains to confute the notion of an *innate moral sense*: a labour, that might well have been spared in opposing Dr. *Clarke*, since there cannot easily be imagined two schemes more different, than that of founding virtue and *moral obligation* on a *moral sense*, considered as an *innate instinct*, and that of founding them on the nature, reason, and relations of things. These are the objects of the understanding, and can only be apprehended by reasoning and reflection, not by sense, or a *blind instinct*. On what grounds then can this author be persuaded, that “if Dr. *Clarke* and his followers “had gone deeper in their enquiries, they must “have got to this *natural instinct or moral sense*.” This would indeed have been going much lower, if he means that by *deeper*. But “some of them, “says he, I know do readily grant it.” What do they grant, that the nature of virtue, or the obligation to practise it, is founded on a *moral sense*? If they grant this, they are no followers of Dr. *Clarke*, having intirely departed from his principles.

¹ P. 43.

^m P. 30.

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But perhaps they may grant, that there is such ^a principle or faculty in man; for a *moral sense* or *conscience* (if these mean the same thing) is not inconsistent with their foundation of virtue, and *moral obligation*; nay, they may even maintain, that it has an obliging power; for Dr. *Clarke* has gone so deep in his enquiries as to tell us ^a, that natural conscience is founded on the perception, that every rational mind necessarily has, of the natural and essential difference between good and evil. But 'tis sufficiently plain through all his works, that by conscience he does not mean a *blind sense or instinct*, but some principle or faculty, the operations of which depend on the judgment of the understanding.

That there is such a principle in man, whatever it be called, or whether innate or acquired, something that distinguishes between right and wrong, and condemns or approves of actions accordingly, is undeniable. Whether this is a faculty of the understanding, or any thing distinct, I presume not to determine; but am inclined to think the faculty *innate*, since it operates in some measure on all mankind, whether they will or will not: Though I allow it to be very evident, that the exercise of it, the manner of its exerting itself, depends upon custom, education, or whatever means and opportunities it has had of being informed; and agree with this writer, that “its determinations therefore can be “no certain rule to act by, no solid foundation for “morality.” To which I add, nor can it possibly be admitted for such, by those, who with Dr. *Clarke* found morality on the *immutable nature of things*. But as this faculty is of great use, when duly informed, and rightly set on work, they may allow its proper place in their scheme. Their principle is not of the *excluding* kind; they readily admit whatever

^a Vol. vii. Serm. xv.

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can be of *additional* obligation, or assist to the practice of virtue. The will of God, the sanctions of his laws, benevolent affections, and the *moral sense*, have each their weight and importance with them. They leave to their opposers to exclude from having any thing to do with virtue, every principle, but their favourites, self-love and self-interest.

This author begins chap. iv. (in which he is to shew, that his adversary's scheme must resolve into an innate moral sense) with this preliminary remark: "'Tis very observable, says he, that the 'maintainers of this natural, necessary, or independent fitness of things and actions, have constantly declined letting us know, what they mean by '*moral obligation*, except a synonymous term can be called a definition.'" But this seems to me a very groundless observation. Dr. Clarke and his followers use that term in the plain well known common acceptation of it: if they have not defined it, 'tis perhaps because they could find no words more clear or intelligible than itself. Nor have I met with any definition of it, that has not rather obscured it. A plain man, of an ordinary capacity, readily understands what is meant, when he is told, that he is *obliged* to do to every one as he would be done by: he apprehends that he *ought*, that it is his *duty* to do so. If these are *synonymous* terms, who can help it, when no other can be found to explain it better?

If it be said, that though a man may know *what* is meant by his being obliged to do a thing, that will not make him understand *why* he is so, or on what grounds he is under such an obligation; this is very true; but then this is not the defect imputed by the author of the *Essay* to the writers he opposes. He cannot pretend, that they have declined to let us know, what they understand by the *foundation* of moral obligation; for it is their plain de-

clarations of that, which he so strenuously contends against. What is it then, that they have declined to do? Truly nothing, that I know of, unless it be an omission not to have put their *grounds* of moral obligation into a definition of the term, as their opposers do, and they might with as good reason have done. They might have told us, that by moral obligation they mean a necessity of action arising from the nature and relations of things; which would have been as just an explication of the term, as that, which Archbishop King's translator, and after him this author gives us, when they say, that by moral obligation they mean a necessity of action, arising from a prospect of obtaining happiness or avoiding misery. But in a controversy, about what is the true original ground of moral obligation, this would have been in them, as I take it to be in these authors, a plain *begging the question in debate*: An error, which did not fall in my way to take notice of, in my remarks on the translator's notes.

However, our present author gives us the reason, from whence he concludes, that he has hit on the true meaning of moral obligation. "Before it can be determined, says he, what can bring such a necessity upon an agent, as is consistent with perfect liberty, which *moral obligation* is supposed to do, it must first be known, what it is he would chuse or refuse as an intelligent free agent: and as it is self-evident, that to every *sensible* being happiness is preferable to misery, and consequently that happiness must be his choice, and misery his aversion, it is plain, that *moral obligation* can be founded upon this principle only."

This may be a true conclusion, if there are any intelligent free agents, that are to be considered as *sensible beings only*; but that seems to be a very partial consideration of *man*. He is a *rational* and *social* as well as a *sensible* being, and may, nay must be under some obligations as such. Let man be al-

lowed as a sensible being, to chuse natural or sensible good, and even to be under a *moral obligation* of so doing; but let him likewise be allowed in his other capacities to have other views, and to be under other obligations. A rational being ought to act suitably to the reason and nature of things: a social being ought to promote the good of others: an approbation of these ends is unavoidable, a regard to them implied in the very nature of such beings, which must therefore bring on them the strongest *moral obligations*. To ask, why a rational being should chuse to act according to reason, or why a social being should desire the good of others, is full as absurd, as to ask why a sensible being should chuse pleasure rather than pain. If such a question is to be answered, the answer will be the same in either case, these ends are to be chosen, because suitable to the nature of beings with such and such capacities. To act contrary to the reason, relations, and fitness of things, may not improperly be called the *pain* of rational beings. Vice would naturally be the *misery*, and virtue the *happiness* of such beings, if there was no reward or punishment appointed for them.

But this kind of refined happiness these writers seem to have no notion of. This, I presume, is not the happiness the author of the *Essay* has in view, when he tells us, "that in the case of moral ideas, to say it signifies nothing whether I am to be a gainer or loser, seems to me to be *banishing morality* out of the world; as all the relation in moral ideas, that I can possibly discern, is the relation of certain actions to the agents happiness." If this gentleman cannot *possibly discern* the relation or fitness of gratitude to a benefactor, of fidelity to trust, of relief to a miserable object, unless the agent is to be a gainer by these virtues, I believe no

body else can possibly discern, how requiring the practice of such moral virtues, without a regard to self-interest, can seem to be *banishing morality* out of the world. If he had said, it seemed to be *banishing happiness* out of the world, there might have been some more appearance of ground for it; though I dare venture to engage, that neither of them will be in danger by it.

I readily grant, however, in answer to this author's question, that the relation of things to our own happiness, as *sensible* beings, is a very material relation, worth examining into; but it does not follow, that there is no other worth considering; which seems to be the judgment of all this class of writers; and very particularly of the author of the *Essay*, as appears by many passages in it, of which the following is not the least worth noting.

"If, says he, we must talk in the language of these advocates for fitnesses, we should call the fitnesses, which they speak of, partial fitnesses, or rather *unfitnesses*, as wanting the most essential part of the fitness of an action, *viz.* Beneficialness to the agent himself. God's command supplies that part of fitness before wanting, and makes it now wise and fitting to chuse what before could not have been *wisely* chosen; for what is not fit upon the whole, is *really unfit*." This writer seems to have had a mind to outdo all, who had gone before him on his side of the controversy; they have contented themselves with maintaining, that man would have been under *no obligation* to practise virtue, if God had not promised a reward for it. None of them, that I have met with, have ventured to affirm, that without such a prospect the practice of virtue would have been *foolish* and *unfit*. This seems to be a peculiarity of the author of the *Essay*. It was indeed sufficiently contrary to our

natural notions of the *essential* difference of good and evil to affirm, that moral virtues are in their own nature *indifferent* till God commanded them, and that he might, if he pleased, have made the direct contrary to have been our duty, as some of the writers, who found virtue solely on the *will of God*, have maintained. But if it was not only *indifferent*, but *unwise* and *really unfit* for a moral agent to be just, to be grateful, faithful to a trust, or any way beneficent to his fellow creatures, before God commanded it, as this adventurous writer asserts; on what grounds can God be supposed to have commanded it at all? Or how can this be made to agree with what himself had before affirmed? *viz.* That God could not have given to man any other rule of action but the law of virtue. "If, says he, "God determined to create man, that is, a rational and social being, 'tis impossible, or rather absurd, that he should give him any other rule of action, than what he has given him: 'tis impossible he should have made it his duty to act unjustly, ungratefully, &c. or to live viciously, intemperately, &c. because this would have destroyed the very end and design of his being, and frustrated that very scheme, which God himself had purposed." One would think the author was arguing here for the other side of the question, that the fitness of moral virtue; of justice, gratitude, temperance, &c. and the necessity of these to the well-being of mankind, did not depend upon the will or command of God, but upon the nature of the things themselves; (which, by the way, is all the necessity and independence contended for, by Dr. Clarke and his followers.) But if it is granted, that the practice of moral virtue was so *necessary*, as is here said, that without it the very end and design of God's creating man, yea

his whole scheme, had been *frustrated*, how could it have been *unfit* for man to practise it *antecedently* to God's command? It could never be unfit or unwise for man to act with the same views his maker had, to pursue what was *necessary* to the well-being of the creation. This sure must have been right and good, though there had been, no command about it. Nor can a wise and good being make a thing, that is *really unfit* in itself, the subject of his command. Virtue therefore does not acquire its fitness from *command*: But God commanded it, because he saw, that it was absolutely right and fit, the indispensable duty of a rational and social being.

Though our author allows this, agreeably to the sentiments of Archbishop King's translator, (whom he closely copies in every thing but his prudence) though I say they both allow, that moral virtue is the necessary consequence of the nature of man, they notwithstanding maintain, not only that *moral obligation*, but that *moral virtue* too, is founded on the will of God. But with such inconsistencies their principles seem to me to abound. The great argument, by which they support their notion, is thus express'd in the *Essay*: "Every thing, every relation, every fitness, is owing to God's will in its first instance: he sees, at one view, through all the causes, effects, and consequences of things; and therefore in that very act of volition, whereby he determines the existence of certain things, he determines their modes, relations, and every thing else belonging to them: and therefore if morality be supposed to flow *immediately* from those relations, yet still it must be *ultimately* resolved into the *will of God*, the author of nature, as its first and true foundation." To this I answer, that if God saw with one view, (as he

undeniably did from all eternity) the *necessary* relation of moral virtue to a rational and social being, saw, that he *could not possibly* give any other rule of action to such a being (as this writer asserts) if according to that view he determined to create man; then morality may indeed be *ultimately* resolved into the divine *understanding*, (that is the nature of things, as they exist in it) but cannot be resolved into the *will* of God, in any other sense, than that it depended solely on his will, whether any beings should exist, whose nature required the practice of morality, which I believe no body denies.

But the *will* of God must be supposed at any rate to be the foundation of *moral virtue*, by those, who will allow no other ground of *moral obligation* but rewards and punishments; by those, who, with this author, can see no fitness in any action, that brings no advantage to the agent. All concern for the good of others is, with him, unreasonable and unaccountable; every generous benevolent action, would be *madness and folly*, setting aside the consideration of a future reward. "Without that, he" says, no single reason can be given why one "ought to suffer the *least* degree of pain to remove "from another the *greatest*;" and page 64 he puts this question: "What can induce a man to communicate happiness to another rather than not?" "What is the exciting reason? You must either "assign one, or tell me 'tis preferable in itself as an "ultimate end, and then the *pleasure of doing it* "will be the true reason: now this, says he, is recurring to a moral sense." Not at all. Though pleasure may be generally consequent upon doing a right or morally good action, that is not the true reason of doing it, is not the end the agent has in view; the rectitude or goodness of the action makes it preferable in itself, and is the *exciting reason*. To

ask, why a man should chuse to do good rather than not, or rather than do evil, is to ask, why good is better than evil, and why a man perceives it to be so. That a man should chuse to do what his understanding perceives to be good, worthy of approbation, and consequently of choice, carries its own reason with it. *If no single reason can be given* for such a conduct, it must be upon the same grounds, that no proof can be given, that it is daylight, when the sun shines, if any one should take it in his head to deny it; not on account of the uncertainty or obscurity of the thing, but because no evidence can be stronger than the glare of its own light.

'Tis surprizing to observe, that judicious, and (as I am willing to believe) well-meaning men, can argue against the common sentiments of humanity, contradict the most natural perceptions of their own minds, and admit the greatest inconsistencies into their schemes, to support a favourite hypothesis.

The author of the *Essay*, according to the general scheme or the writers on that side, (who are for taking away every motive to virtue but self-interest) denies^t, that there are any benevolent or disinterested affections natural to man: but as he cannot deny, that there are some *appearances* of such affections, and that men are apt to think they find them in themselves; he accounts for this, after Archbishop King's translator, from an early *association of ideas*. "The great Mr. *Locke*, he says, was the first, who "gave any hint towards a solution of this phenomenon in human nature; and his scheme has "lately been improved upon, in a preliminary "dissertation to an *English* version of Archbishop "King's *Origin of Evil*." Which improvement is adopted by our author.

I dare say, when that great man wrote his very

useful chapter *Of the association of ideas*, in which he so rationally accounts for the groundless fears, *unnatural aversions*, whimsical affections, and obstinate adherence to error, observable among men, by an *accidental association of ideas*, not at all united in nature, he little imagined any *hint* could be taken from thence, to account in the same way for the most reasonable affections, the most *suited to our nature*; so general, and even so necessary, that if they were wanting, it might justly be esteemed a defect in the forming of a social being.

But our author can supply this *defect* with his *association of ideas*. 'Tis but to suppose, that "at first a man perceives, or is taught from his fancy, that as he lives in a social state, so his happiness is necessarily connected with that of other men; that the esteem of others is useful to him; this esteem only to be procured by beneficent actions, and an inward concern manifested by his outward actions for the good of others. Hence he desires the happiness of others, and joins pleasure to that idea: thus the association is formed, thus benevolence is rooted in our minds; and, forgetting how it came there, we are apt to think it *natural*, and act upon it as a principle intirely distinct from self-love."

This detail of an *unnatural* progress of the mind, in acquiring benevolent affections, will scarce satisfy any one, who consults *nature*, or what in fact passes in the world, or in his own mind; however plausible it may seem to a speculative recluse, shut up in his study, only to *imagine* by what means such affections might possibly arise. Our author thinks, they so wholly depend on this *imaginary association*, that he tells us *, that "they, who are not sensible how nearly private and public happiness are united, (as a great part of mankind, 'tis to be feared,

* P. 40.

* P. 36.

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"are not) have no benevolent affections, but are "indifferent to the happiness or misery, the virtue "or vice, of every one else."

I am persuaded this remark was made in the *study*, with the above *detail*, without looking into what really passes in the world; for though it may be pretty true, that the bulk of mankind have no distinct notions of the connection of public and private happiness, that is, they form no general propositions about it, and perhaps such kind of maxims enter into the education of very few, even of the better sort; yet 'tis far from being true, that for want of this they have no *benevolent affections*. If these depended on such notions or instructions, as this author has imagined, 'tis to be feared they would be much rarer than we find them. When we examine the real fact, those, whose understandings are least improved, and who reason least, will perhaps be often found to have the strongest affections. Men need not be *taught*, they *feel*, that their happiness is not independent on that of others; they find themselves unavoidably involved, or affected with the miseries of others, and can form no idea of happiness, into which some kind of communication with others does not enter. The very supposition of being happy alone, without regard to any person in the world, or whilst all about him were miserable, must appear a contradiction to a social nature: But this dependence of his happiness on that of others is the *effect* of his benevolent affections, not the *cause* or *ground* of them.

Can any one think, that the fondness of a mother, and her tender concern for the happiness of her child, is owing to her "having perceived, or been taught "from her infancy, that her happiness is necessarily "connected with that of others; that their esteem "is useful to her, this esteem only to be procured by "beneficent actions, &c." How far unequal to such an effect are reflections of this nature! The connection
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of her happiness with that of her child must be owing solely to her kind affections, an association of *nature's* forming, quite different from that, which Mr. Locke has observed of ideas *accidentally* united, that have *no connection in nature*. Is it possible, from the hypothesis of these writers, to account for parents sacrificing a great part of their ease and happiness in this world, to provide for the welfare of their children; and sometimes by methods, that allow them no title to a reward for it in the next? What desire of esteem, what secret aim at their own happiness, can lurk at the bottom of this?

But it seems we have not the whole of their scheme at once; the parts of it are not consistent enough to be shewn together: benevolence, in the view, wherein it has hitherto appeared, is nothing but a secret aim at *our own* happiness; but we are now to have a prospect of it as intirely disinterested. "We maintain" (says the author of the *Essay*) that in this "social state benevolence or disinterested affection" is a proper *principle of action*; and how it comes "to be so, we have shewn before; nay, we farther maintain, that a disinterested benevolence is *rational, commendable*, and indeed the very thing, that gives the name or character to virtuous actions among mankind." This, he pretends, is not in the least inconsistent with what he has said before, of *private happiness* being the *ultimate end* and *true principle of action*; "for doing good to others, says he, is a necessary means to *that end*; these means are valuable, therefore desired, approved, hence by habit loved; but the object of love is a real end, or desired for its own sake, without an *immediate* view to any thing else. This is what we mean by disinterested benevolence; 'tis not necessary, that the agent should have no remote view towards *his own happiness in the main*." All I

* P. 66, 67.

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can gather of these gentlemen's meaning, in whose name this author speaks, from his account of it here, compared with what has been before quoted from him, is, that men first deceive the world, and then *themselves*, with an *appearance* of disinterested benevolence, to gain esteem, and the character of virtuous, though there is really no such thing in nature. But if this scheme were true, how could it come to pass, that all mankind should expect from one another what none of them has? How did they agree in making the *name and character* of virtuous actions to consist in what they all must know had not a being? Why should they not rather esteem one another, for doing beneficent actions upon an avowed principle of self-interest, if that were really the only *natural and reasonable motive of action*, as these gentlemen professedly maintain?

But it is at last pretended, that upon their principles a disinterested benevolence is *rational and commendable*, which was before said to be "madness, folly, and unfit, as wanting the most essential part of fitness, beneficialness to the agent." Doing good to others is now become, "an object of love, a real end, or desired for its own sake;" though but two pages before it was asked, "What can induce a man to communicate happiness to another rather than not?" And his adversaries affirming it to be *preferable in itself as an ultimate end*, is exploded, as *recurring to the moral sense*. These passages seem to me *absolute inconsistencies*; but if our author can find a way to reconcile them in his scheme, it may help to reconcile him, at the same time, to those who, more consistently with their own principles, maintain virtue, rectitude, or the fitness of things, to be an *object of love*, and as such, a *real end, desirable for its own sake*. And he may come to a better understanding of this *enthusiastic, unintelligible* language, which he finds fault with in them, since himself begins to talk

talk at the same rate, though at the hazard of overthrowing the doctrine he is labouring to support.

Several of the writers in this controversy argue against the followers of Dr. *Clark's* doctrine, from the *ill use* they pretend has been made of it; tho' nothing can be more fallacious, than to condemn a principle for the *abuse* of it, or for consequences *falsely* drawn from it, which the most sacred and uncontested truths cannot be secure against.

The author of the *Essay*, in particular, reasons thus: " 'Tis easy to see what *pernicious tendency* the scheme of independent fitnesses is of, from what use has been made of it by a late advocate for Deism. His whole book is built upon this principle, that duty and obligation arises from the nature and relation of things, which are so independent, that no command can alter them, or make that fit, which is in itself unfit; and consequently man must always have the same religion." This is a very false consequence, from a very true principle. Our author is so charitable as to believe, that neither of the persons he writes against, were aware of this consequence; but he can't see how they will get off it, if the premises are granted; because what is once fit in itself, must be always *fit in itself*, not having relation to any end, and not being alterable by any change of circumstances whatever.

But who has maintained such *independent fitnesses*, as these writers have imagined? It is affirmed indeed, that there is a fitness in things independent of any *positive institution*, and of all *consideration of reward and punishment*; and on that account they are said to be fit in themselves, or fit without being commanded. But how does it follow, that they are independent of every thing else, or that they have no relation to any end? This is as false a consequence as that of the late advocate for Deism; and

yet the premises, from which both *pretend* to be drawn, are undeniably true, even from these authors own concessions. For though they maintain, that virtue is founded ultimately on the will of God, they yet own (as has been before observed, how consistently need not here be said) that " when God determined to create a rational and social being, it was *impossible* he should give him any other rule of action than what he has given him." The moral law then is equally allowed to be *necessary and unalterable* upon either scheme; and if it be a true consequence, that therefore *man must always have the same religion*, it follows as much from the concessions of these authors, as from the principles of those they oppose; and therefore cannot reasonably be urged by them, as an argument of the *pernicious tendency* of their adversaries doctrine, since it would equally involve their own. But in truth it is no just consequence of either.

It is undeniably true, that what was at first a law to man necessarily resulting from his nature, is *still*, and always must continue so to be. But the error of the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation* lay, in not seeing, or being unwilling to see, that notwithstanding this, some change might happen in the circumstances of man, as a free agent, from whence new duties, new wants, might arise, or new assistances be requisite. And the mistake of the author of the *Essay* lies, in supposing, that independent fitnesses (as he affects to call them, though improperly) have no relation to any end, and are not alterable by any change of circumstances. Whereas the fitness of moral actions has always a respect to some end, and is intirely *dependent* on the nature and relation of things, considered in their various *circumstances*. The same action may be fit and right in some circumstances of things, which would be unfit in others; for an action is then only morally fit, when it is suitable to the agent, and the object,

object, according to their respective relations and circumstances.

It then any change has happened in man, that introduced new wants, and required new assistances, *revelation* might be necessary to supply them, notwithstanding the false reasoning of that author; and new duties, *new fitnesses*, might arise, notwithstanding the mistakes of this. *Repentance*, for instance, is a fitness introduced among mankind by sin, the sinner standing in a different relation to God from that, which he had as an innocent person: But this does not hinder the moral law from retaining its *immutable nature*, or the fitness of moral actions from being *independent of positive appointment*, or of rewards and punishments; their fitness resulting *necessarily* from the nature, relations, and circumstances of things. Nor would there be any absurdity in saying, that repentance for sin was *eternally fit in itself*.

The opposers of Dr. Clarke in general are, I find, greatly prejudiced against the word *fitness*. Let us consider it therefore a little more particularly. Absolute fitness, or *fit in itself*, is an absurdity with them. The term is relative, they say, and must be unintelligible, when used without relation to an *end*; (for it is a mistake, common to all the writers on that side, to suppose, that the words *fit in itself*, are meant to exclude all manner of *end*, or relation to any thing;) and some of them, particularly the author of the *Essay*, complain of "a mist and confusion in the language of the advocates for fitnesses." Perhaps there may be some ambiguity in applying that term indifferently to the foundation of virtue in the *abstract*, and to the practice of it by moral agents, which may have given ground for such a complaint: But as these authors, in whatever respect they speak of the *fitness of things*, have expressed their meaning with great clearness, it seems a needless trifling to cavil so much about words. Those, who speak of the

the abstract idea of virtue in general, as a conformity to the reason of things, and the proper ultimate end of moral agents, use the word *fit*, when so applied, in an *absolute* sense; for, as a ² fine writer upon these subjects says, why must this term be confined to a *relative* signification, any more than the *æquum* and *rectum* of the ancients? But when they speak of the practice of particular virtues, tho' every right action may be said to be absolutely fit in itself, yet this cannot be so understood, as to exclude such actions from having any relation to an end: for instance, if it should be said, that to relieve a distressed person is *fit in itself*, could this be reasonably understood to mean, that it is fit, without a relation to any end? Or where would be the difficulty to apprehend, that the goodness of the end made the action right and fit in itself, *i. e.* fit without being commanded, fit without a prospect of advantage to the agent? What is there *unintelligible* in this? The absolute fitness of virtue in general consists in its tendency to promote the order, harmony, and happiness of the world; and every particular virtue, (such at least as respects our fellow-creatures) tends to some good or other, towards the object of it; but the immediate, the proper end of a moral agent, is the rectitude or moral fitness of the action, whatever other ends that action may respect. In this it is the mind finds a complacence: And therefore, the followers of Dr. Clarke, often speak of virtue itself as a real end, amiable and desirable for its own sake; and that sometimes with a rapture, that may seem to favour more of the enthusiasm of poetry, than of the sedateness of philosophy, tho' there is a real and solid foundation for it.

This their opposers call *the error of the Stoics*, and accuse them of falling into the same folly, of mistaking *means for ends*. But these authors mistake the error of *the Stoics*; it did not consist in

² Mr. Balguy, author of several tracts on these subjects.

object, according to their respective relations and circumstances.

It then any change has happened in man, that introduced new wants, and required new assistances, *revelation* might be necessary to supply them, notwithstanding the false reasoning of that author; and new duties, *new fitnesses*, might arise, notwithstanding the mistakes of this. *Repentance*, for instance, is a fitness introduced among mankind by sin, the sinner standing in a different relation to God from that, which he had as an innocent person: But this does not hinder the moral law from retaining its *immutable nature*, or the fitness of moral actions from being *independent of positive appointment*, or of rewards and punishments; their fitness resulting *necessarily* from the nature, relations, and circumstances of things. Nor would there be any absurdity in saying, that repentance for sin was *eternally fit in itself*.

The opposers of Dr. Clarke in general are, I find, greatly prejudiced against the word *fitness*. Let us consider it therefore a little more particularly. Absolute fitness, or *fit in itself*, is an absurdity with them. The term is relative, they say, and must be unintelligible, when used without relation to an *end*; (for it is a mistake, common to all the writers on that side, to suppose, that the words *fit in itself*, are meant to exclude all manner of *end*, or relation to any thing;) and some of them, particularly the author of the *Essay*, complain of "a mist and confusion in the language of the advocates for fitnesses." Perhaps there may be some ambiguity in applying that term indifferently to the foundation of virtue in the *abstract*, and to the practice of it by moral agents, which is the proper ground for such a complaint:

the abstract idea of virtue in general, as a conformity to the reason of things, and the proper ultimate end of moral agents, use the word *fit*, when so applied, in an *absolute* sense; for, as a ² fine writer upon these subjects says, why must this term be confined to a *relative* signification, any more than the *equum* and *rectum* of the ancients? But when they speak of the practice of particular virtues, tho' every right action may be said to be absolutely fit in itself, yet this cannot be so understood, as to exclude such actions from having any relation to an end: for instance, if it should be said, that to relieve a distressed person is *fit in itself*, could this be reasonably understood to mean, that it is fit, without a relation to any end? Or where would be the difficulty to apprehend, that the goodness of the end made the action right and fit in itself, *i. e.* fit without being commanded, fit without a prospect of advantage to the agent? What is there *unintelligible* in this? The absolute fitness of virtue in general consists in its tendency to promote the order, harmony, and happiness of the world; and every particular virtue, (such at least as respects our fellow-creatures) tends to some good or other, towards the object of it; but the immediate, the proper end of a moral agent, is the rectitude or moral fitness of the action, whatever other ends that action may respect. In this it is the mind finds a complacence: And therefore, the followers of Dr. Clarke, often speak of virtue itself as a real end, amiable and desirable for its own sake; and that sometimes with a rapture, that may seem to favour more of the enthusiasm of poetry, than of the sedateness of philosophy, tho' there is a real and solid foundation for it.

This their opposers call *the error of the Stoics*, and accuse them of falling into the same folly, of

taking means for ends, but in a *partial* consideration of human nature: an error, which themselves have fallen into, though in another instance. They consider man only as he is a sensible being, and conclude, that he can have no other views but to his own happiness as such. The *Stoics*, on the other hand, considered man as a rational and social being *only*; and as such, they rightly judged, that virtue must be his *end* and his happiness; but then they neglected to consider, that he was likewise a *sensible* being, liable to many external accidents, to pains and sufferings, under which virtue alone, with all its excellence, could not be sufficient for his happiness. This consideration might have led them to the knowledge of a future state, where virtue would meet with no impediments; but whilst they were ignorant or uncertain of *that*, and yet plainly saw, that virtue had an intrinsic goodness, independent of any external advantages or disadvantages, that might attend it, they were forced into the absurdities of maintaining, that *pain was no evil*, that a wise man was master of his own happiness, and that virtue was itself a sufficient compensation for all the sufferings in the world. This was the real, and, if the expression may be allowed, the *noble* error of the *Stoics*.

But in this Dr. *Clarke*, and those who adhere to his principles, having the advantage of a better light, have been far from following them: they have, with great strength of reason and variety of argument, insisted on the necessity of having recourse to the expectation of rewards and punishments in another life, for the support of virtue under the temptations and calamities of *this*. They tell us indeed, that virtue will be a great part of the happiness of that future state; and if their opposers would a little refine or exalt their notions of happiness, (which surely does not wholly consist in *sensible pleasure*) they might perhaps come to see, that there can be

be no absurdity, in making *that* to be the *end* of rational agents *here*, the perfection of which may probably be in a great measure their happiness *hereafter*.

Some observations on a pamphlet, entitled, The eternal obligation of natural Religion, &c. being an Answer to Dr. Wright's Remarks upon Mr. Mole's Sermon.

THIS author, who styles himself *Phil-orthos*, is an instance, that happening to be on the side of truth, does not secure warm heads from running into extravagancies in the defence of it. His chief design is to maintain, that morality is founded on the eternal truth and the immutable nature of things. But in order to this, instead of considering those eternal truths, and immutable natures, in the view, that some eminent authors have done, as *proofs* of the existence of an *eternal mind*, there being no other intelligible support of eternal *abstract ideas*; he has fallen into the unintelligible whimsies of those, who assert, that *universal natures, abstract ideas*, and the moral differences of things, are real entities subsisting of themselves, independent of any mind. But as these visionary gentlemen have not been pleased to tell us the place of their residence, I fear those, who go to look for them, will be at a great loss where to find them.

However, according to this author, their existence is rather more necessary and certain, than the existence of God himself; for he says: "Whether there were a divinity or not, any creator, creature, or not, such moral entities would always subsist, and be just the same that they are now." But if these moral entities, the moral natures and differences of things, refer, as this author says they do, to *pos-*

^a Dr. Cudworth and Mr. Norris. ^b Page 15. ^c Page 31.

fible existences, he should have considered, that by supposing there were no divinity, no creator, he supposes away the only ground of *possible existence*; if there was no divinity, there could be no possible existences, and consequently no truths concerning them.

In maintaining these self-existent moral entities, this author has three main arguments^d; first, "That to speak of abstract ideas arising from any mind, is a flat contradiction in terms,—because *we understand* by them such moral entities, as are self-existent, or that do not depend upon any being for their existence, but may be considered abstractly or separately, without the consideration of any subject: and therefore to say, that they must arise from the mind of God, is to destroy *our notion* of them; or to say, that they are both abstract, and not abstract, at the same time; which is absurd."

Answer. Who can help it, if asserting truth destroys peoples *false notions* of things? Where can ideas exist but in some mind? And whatever this writer *understands* by *abstract ideas*, what *should* be understood by them, but the general natures of things, considered by *some mind*, separately from particular existencies? For the nature of things is never in *fact* separate, or abstracted from particular existences: that is only done by an act of the mind: The *consideration* of them, separate from any subject, is that, which makes them *abstract ideas*, and their being *in the mind*, that abstracts them from their subject, cannot make them at the same time *not abstract*. To speak of them therefore, as existing *out of mind*, may with much more reason be said to be a *flat contradiction in terms*.

His second argument is, "That whatever ideas did arise in the mind of God, before the creation of the world, must be supposed to have had some moral nature or entity for their object: otherwise

"they could not be ideas or images of any thing, but mere *reveries*, floating at random, and corresponding to nothing at all."

Answer. If God perceives by *ideas*, there is no need of looking out of the *divine understanding* to find objects for them. Abstract ideas are not images of any thing without the mind, as ideas of *sensible* things are supposed to be, but are formed by the mind itself: *possible* existencies are real objects to it; and tho' there is nothing in being to represent them, they are no *reveries*, if they correspond to some power adequate to the production of them. Before all creation, God undoubtedly had ideas of all *possible natures*, not by looking out of himself for objects of them, but by contemplating his own infinite power and wisdom; for he must necessarily see all the objects, and the whole extent of his own power. But to imagine, that whilst things were only in *possibility*, their general natures and essential differences had an actual existence, I know not where, out of the divine mind; that they were self-existent objects of the divine ideas, tho' themselves are allowed to be only ideas; seems indeed to be a mere *reverie, corresponding to nothing at all*; and which I doubt if our author can form any *image* of. If he can, I should be glad to be informed, what sort of entities the *differences* of things are. The *essential difference* between a circle and a square, an angel and a man, or between a moral good and evil, I allow to be eternal, immutable, and independent of any will; but cannot comprehend this to mean any thing else, than that is was eternally true, that none of these things are the same with those, from which they essentially differ; or can be made so by any will. But that their differences should be something subsisting distinctly from the things themselves, real self-existent entities, or, in plain English, *real beings*, is, I think, utterly inconceivable.

Nor is there any occasion for such an unintelligible supposition, to support the truth, which this author chiefly designs to maintain. The eternal and immutable nature of things, their necessary relations, and essential differences, unalterable by any will, are sufficiently secured by being in the divine understanding, eternally and unchangeably what they are. If God sees the possible existence of a triangle, he sees, that it must *necessarily* be different from a circle, and that he cannot will it to be the same; for to will a thing to be the same with that, from which it is essentially different, is a contradiction, and therefore no object of power.

His third argument is, "That, if the moral natures and differences of things did primarily *arise* from the *mind* of God, or if his *mind* were the foundation or support of them; he must as naturally will evil as good, and approve of vice and virtue alike. There is no avoiding this consequence, says he, unless it can be proved, that there may be a difference, without different ideas or objects." In the same paragraph he expresses his argument thus: "If the nature of moral good, or of truth, did wholly *arise* from the divine *will*, then the nature of moral evil and of falshood, by parity of reason, must arise from it, and be equally conformable to it."

Here he quite changes the state of the supposition, and whatever consequences he may draw of *rank Epicurism*, or *downright Manicheism*, from supposing the moral nature and truth of things, to arise from the divine *will*, they no way concern those, who assert these things to have been eternally in the divine *mind*. If this author takes these two suppositions to be the same, he very much mistakes them. But indeed I cannot guess what he understands by the moral nature of things, *arising from or in* the divine

* P. 28.

f P. 29.

mind,

mind, when he draws so absurd a consequence from it. The expression itself I think very exceptionable, as it seems to imply things coming to the mind of God, which were not always there: but if he means by it what sober writers mean, who maintain, that the abstract natures or ideas of all things were eternally in the divine mind, or that God eternally perceived in his own comprehensive understanding, the moral natures of thing to be what they are, I see not how it will follow from thence, that *God must as naturally will evil as good, and approve of vice and virtue alike*. There is no avoiding this, he says, *unless there may be a difference without different ideas or object*. But what ground is there to imagine, that because good and evil are equally perceived by the divine *mind*, therefore he has not *different ideas* of them, or that they must be equally *conformable to his will*? How wild a consequence is this! Our author sure knows of no distinction, between the divine *understanding* and the divine *will*. Let him consider, that if God saw before the creation the possible existence of an intelligent *free agent*, he must see, that the idea of such a being necessarily implies a power of chusing either to act suitably to the nature of things, and agreeably to his will, which is moral good; or to act unsuitably to both, which is moral evil. These ideas must be essentially different in his mind, and their being equally perceived by him can by no rule of logic or metaphysics infer, that they are equally conformable to his *will*, or equally approved by him. How far this reasoning may affect those, who maintain, that truth and falshood, good and evil, depend on the *mere will* of God, I need not enquire: But it is a sufficient defence against that erroneous notion, to shew, that these things must necessarily be, from all eternity, in the divine *understanding* immutably the same. We need not have recourse to unintelligible self-existent entities, *abstract ideas*, that yet are *objects* of ideas independent of

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any *mind*; and which I am persuaded no rational mind can comprehend.

The same author, if I remember right, (for I have not his performance by me at present) has run into another extravagance, tho' in maintaining a solid truth; affecting to talk of God, as under a moral *obligation* of making nature, and the essential difference of things, the *rule* of his actions; with many daring and unusual expressions, which must give great offence to those, who have accustomed themselves to join with the term *obligation*, the idea of a *superior will*, and of reward and punishment: Since it will not only appear to them an absurdity, but the highest irreverence, when applied to the supreme being; and therefore ought in prudence to be avoided.

The truth which this author should, and which perhaps he did mean, has been asserted by the best writers on these subjects; but then they did it with decency and dignity. They did not subject the supreme being to rule his actions, by imaginary self-existences, that have no dependence on him: acting in conformity to moral truth is, with them, acting in conformity to *himself*, in whom all essential truth exists. And I think, it can no way derogate from him to assert, that the perfection of the divine nature *obliges* him to acting conformably to the essential difference of things, because acting contrary to them would be an imperfection: it is the same as acting contrary to goodness, justice, truth, or, in one word, the rectitude, which every one, who allows the immutable nature of these things, readily owns to be inconsistent with absolute perfection.

And if the supreme being may be thus *obliged* by his own essential perfections, to act conformably to the immutable nature of things, on the same grounds it is maintained, that every rational being must be *obliged* to act suitably to his perceptions of those things; because, in doing otherwise, he must fall short of that degree of *perfection*, and consequently

of happiness, which belongs to his nature: For the happiness of every being is dependent on, and in proportion to the perfection, which belongs to it.

This consideration leads me to reflect, that the writers on the other side, who maintain, that nothing can induce *moral obligation*, but rewards and punishments annexed to the law of a superior, can only mean, that if there was no such expectation, should men disregard the perfection of their nature, fall from their moral character, and forfeit the happiness of rational beings, by chusing to act contrary to the reason and truth of things, they may do it with impunity. And that indeed is very true. But does it follow, that there is nothing *wrong* in such a choice? Is it not unsuitable to, and unworthy of such a being, and inconsistent with the true happiness of a reasonable nature? And is virtue nothing but mere aiming at reward, or a care to avoid punishment? I do not know what notions the partisans of that doctrine can have of virtue and moral goodness, whilst they talk of it as nothing but a regard of *interest*. Could they think any one a virtuous and truly good man, who would willingly counteract his sense of right and wrong, and all the dictates of his reason, from the nature and fitness of things, if he might do it with impunity? I am persuaded they could not; the *natural* sentiments of their hearts; I doubt not, get the better of their *artificial* schemes; and whilst they contend, that nothing can *oblige* them to do just or kind actions, but the prospect of a reward, they feel the charms of rectitude and benevolence determine them to act independent of other views, with all the force of *moral obligation*.

Eternal truth! instruct us so to learn thy *perfect will*, in the essential difference of good and evil, that aspiring to perfect our nature *here*, by a conformity thereto, we may be qualified for that blessed state *hereafter*, which thou hast promised as the *reward*, and which is itself *the perfection of virtue*.

Remarks on some passages of the first book of the Divine Legation of Moses.

SINCE I drew up the foregoing remarks, I have met with the second edition of the *Divine Legation*, in which I find a great deal upon the *foundation of morality and of obligation*, which either was not in the first edition, from whence I have quoted a just observation relating to those subjects, or I did not then advert to it. Otherwise the sentiments of so great a writer would not have been the last in my consideration: but I cannot allow myself now to omit taking notice of them, and it may be no improper conclusion of these papers.

This penetrating author with great judgment observes all the extremes, into which the contenders about the true foundation of moral virtue have run, whilst each would advance his own favourite principle upon the ruins of others. But tho' he judiciously avoids all their extravagancies, some of which have been taken notice of in these remarks, I am sorry to find, that, in establishing morality and obligation on the *will of a superior*, he too acts upon the *exterminating model*, will not allow, that a *moral difference* of things, or *obligation* to practice, can be deduced from either of the other two principles, the *moral sense*, or the *eternal relations and essential difference of things*.

If the important point he is proving, required his argument to be carried thus far, I should very unwillingly oppose it: But there is no need of it: he has strongly proved, throughout the course of this learned work, the absolute necessity of religion to society; and particularly, in opposition^s to Mr. Bayle, the insufficiency of the *moral sense*, and the knowledge of the *essential difference of things*, to influence society to the practice of virtue. Against this I am far from contending. My only purpose

^s From p. 53, to 58.

this

is to plead, that these principles have so far a *right* of obliging, that whosoever is not influenced by them, deserves blame and punishment, tho' he knows nothing of a superior will with power to inflict it. The contrary notion seems to give the Atheists a greater advantage, than I am persuaded was ever intended them by an adversary, who had attacked them in their strongest holds, and turned their own artillery against them, with abilities equal to his arduous undertaking. I beg leave therefore, to examine the grounds, upon which this great author maintains, "That an Atheist is not under any obligation to act agreeable to right reason," *i. e.* to practise virtue.

And first he urges, that an Atheist cannot arrive at the knowledge of morality properly so called: that tho' he may have a knowledge of the *natural* essential difference of things, this does not induce the knowledge of the *moral difference*:^h That this

^h In order to judge of this point, let us suppose of a society of Atheists, one fallen into a pit, where he multinevitably perish if unassisted; and another of them happening to travel that way, who could with great ease relieve him. Will these two persons perceive nothing, but the *natural* essential difference between leaving a man to perish in a pit, and helping him out of it? Would not the distressed consider one of these as an inhumanity to be detested, and the other as a good action deserving grateful return? Might not the traveller be too conscious, that one of these actions would be better than the other, have a goodness in it more to be approved? Yet we will suppose some business or pleasure he is intent upon, stifles this consciousness and prevails with him, to leave the distressed to his miserable fate: and that he afterwards relates to the rest of the society, how he had hurried from the melancholly object, in pursuit of his inclinations. Can it be imagined, that they would coldly consider this action, only as not agreeable to reason? Or would they not rather judge it to be wrong, inhuman, and worthy of detestation. It cannot, I think, be doubted, that such a society might be capable of these sentiments. And what is this but to perceive the *moral difference* of things, tho' they have not discovered a *superior will* to enforce the observance of them? Or tho' they may think the guilty secure from that punishment, which they must be conscious so great an immorality deserves.

distinction

distinction has been much unobserved, the contenders for this principle, as well as their adversaries, being under the same prepossession, that *one* inferred the *other*: But that it is a mistake, for nothing but *will*, or the law of a superior, can constitute the morality of actions. This in short is the sum of what is insisted on in several pages¹. To which, with submission I reply, that which properly constitutes the morality of an action, is the free choice of the agent, judging it to be right or wrong, praise or blame worthy. The law of a superior does not make an action morally good or evil; it only declares what is so, or restrains and incites by the sanctions of punishment and reward, (I speak not of *positive duties*, the morality of which depends solely on the law of a superior.) Neither do I find, that the contenders for the *natural essential difference of things* have^k mistaken it for the *moral difference*; they plainly saw, that these were distinct things, but they saw too, that one, was so dependent on the other, that when they had clearly demonstrated the former, they needed not give themselves much trouble to prove the latter: For perhaps this great author is the first, who, acknowledging *the natural essential difference*, has denied, that the *moral difference* was deducible from it.

“The natural essential difference of things, he says¹, if we mean any thing by the terms, hath this apparent property, that it creates a *fitness* in the agent to act agreeably thereto: As the moral difference of things creates, besides this fitness, “an obligation likewise.” But what is this fitness and unfitness, that results from the natural essential difference? Not indeed the same with that, which creates it, but surely the very same with the *moral difference*; or else I know not what we mean by either. An action fit or unfit, made the object of

¹ See pag. 42, 46, 52. ^k See pag. 52. ^l P. 44.

choice

choice, is morally good or morally evil. And therefore it is maintained, that *fitness* creates an *obligation*, because it implies, or is the same with moral difference, from which our judicious author allows, that *obligation* is inseparable.

He further argues, “that the essential differences of things are the adequate objects of the understanding; and for this reason, the understanding is necessitated in its perceptions, but the will is not necessitated in its determinations: For instance, “that three are less than five, the understanding is necessitated to judge; but the will is not necessitated to chuse five before three: Therefore the essential differences of things are not the adequate objects of the will; the law of a superior must be taken in, to constitute obligation in choice, or morality in actions.” But if this reasoning holds good, it will prove too, that *the law of a superior* is not the adequate object of the will; for neither does such a law *necessitate* the determinations of the will: if it did, there would be no longer any *choice*, and consequently no morality in actions; *obligation* would then differ nothing from *compulsion*. But all the *necessity* that a *free-agent* can be laid under, either from the law of a superior, or from the essential differences of things, is that of standing self-condemned, if he chuses to do what he cannot avoid judging, and in the case of another, would pronounce to be unfit, wrong, and deserving punishment. This judgment of his therefore brings him equally under the strongest of *obligations*, upon whatsoever principle it is founded, or how inconsistent soever it may be with the absurd notions of an *atheistic fatalist*.

It is urged in the preceding page, that *obligation* in general necessarily implies an *obligor*. And elsewhereⁿ, that, “upon the discovery of a superior

^m Page 46.

ⁿ Page 37.

“will,

“ will, and not till then, human actions became the “ subject of *obligation*.” To this I answer, that, in the common acceptation of the word, obligation implies only a perception of some ground or reason, upon which it is founded, but not necessarily a superior will. When we say a man is under an obligation to be grateful to a benefactor, we mean; that the relation interceding between them requires it of him; and so that he is obliged to do to others, as he would have them do to him, implies an *equity* in the thing, that brings him under such an obligation. Again it is urged, “ That the *obligor* must be different from, and not the same with the *obliged*. To “ found *obligation* upon *reason* is an absurdity, because *reason* is only an attribute of the person “ obliged: To make this then the obliger, is to “ make a man oblige himself.” Very true, but it is just the same, whatever principle we suppose obligation to be originally founded on; a free-agent must be always the *immediate* obliger of himself: Whether he judges, that the will of a superior is to be the only rule of his actions; or that he ought to act conformably to the necessary relations, and essential differences of things, or to his consciousness of right and wrong; or that a prospect of rewards and punishments should solely influence his actions; in either case it is equally the perception and judgment of his own mind, or his *reason*, that obliges him to act accordingly; and this is so far from being an absurdity, that it is essential to *moral choice* and *free agency*.

But it does not follow, because that a man’s own reason has a right in this sense to oblige him, that therefore *he may relinquish that right*. That maxim, which Mr. Warburton^o says, “ is an unexceptionable rule of right reason, that whoever acquires “ a right to any thing from the obligation of

“ another towards him, may relinquish that right,” takes place I suppose in those rights alone, that are acquired by voluntary compact, not in those, which are deduced from the nature of things. But it is the nature of things, the essential differences, which is maintained to be the original ground of obligation; over which reason has no power, tho’ by its perception of them it becomes the *immediate obliger* to act suitably thereto.

This great writer farther argues^p, that “ from “ the *nature* of any action morality cannot arise, “ nor from its *effects*: Not from the *first*, because, “ being only reasonable, or unreasonable, nothing “ follows but a fitness in doing one, and an absurdity in doing the other: Not from the *second*, because “ did the productive good or evil make the “ action moral, brutes, from whose actions proceed “ both one and the other, would have morality.” To this last I reply, that from the *effects* of an action, where there is no *choice*, or *free-agency*, (of both which brutes are supposed incapable) no morality can arise: But where these are, morality does arise from the *effects* of an action made the objects of choice. To the *first* I reply, that if from the *nature* of an action follows a *fitness*, from *fitness* follows *obligation*, and consequently morality, in actions.

This methinks our judicious author should readily assent to, as agreeable to his own principles; for tho’ he founds obligation on the *will of God*, he disclaims the error of those, who place it solely on a view of rewards and punishments. “ The true “ principle of morality^q, he owns, should have the “ worthiest motive to enforce it; and the legitimate “ motive to virtue on that principle is compliance “ with the will of God. It is a mistake^r, he says, “ that will could not oblige without happiness;

“ will could not indeed oblige to unhappiness, but
 “ it would oblige to what should produce neither
 “ one nor the other, tho’ all considerations of the
 “ consequences of obeying or disobeying were
 “ away.” Now if this be so, (and one would scarce
 imagine it could be denied) this obligation to obey,
independent of all consequences, which our author
 justly contends for, can be founded on nothing but
 a *fitness* resulting from the relation of a creature to
 his creator and benefactor. To argue from hence,
 that therefore *it is fitness, which obliges, and not will*,
 is indeed a *metaphysical quibble*, and, as ‘ this author
 has represented it, not a little absurd, fit only, as
 he designed it, to *divert* the reader. But I think it
 may with great solidity be concluded, that if the
 will of God obliges from a fitness, that arises on ac-
 count of the relation of a creature to his creator,
 whatever fitnesses arise from other relations, and the
 essential difference of things, will likewise oblige in
 their proportion.

This great writer ‘urges, indeed, “ that the fit-
 ness, that a creature, who depends entirely on his
 “ creator, should obey him, is infinitely different
 “ from any other fitness, that arises to a supposed in-
 “ dependent being, from the comparing and per-
 “ ceiving the relations between his ideas.” But if
 these relations, or our perceptions of the essential
 difference of things, are, as he farther argues, the
 rule, that God hath given his creatures to bring them
 to the knowledge of his will, then it must be a rule
 to all his creatures, whether they consider it as his will
 or not; and therefore, as reasonable beings, the fit-
 ness of obeying the creator’s will must be so far from
 being *infinitely different* from the fitness of comply-
 ing with a man’s perceptions of the necessary rela-
 tions and difference of things, that, supposing all
 consideration of the consequences were away, there

must be an equal obligation to either, according to
 the opportunities of discovering them: Besides
 that without a regard to the right, and reason, and
 equity of the case, whatever mens actions may be,
 there is no virtue or real goodness in the person, that
 does them: the nature and reason of things there-
 fore should seem to be the genuine principle of true
 morality.

That the knowledge of the *essential difference of*
things would not alone be generally effectual to
 influence a society of Atheists to the practice of
 virtue, I readily grant. But that is no more an
 objection against the truth of the principle, and its
right to oblige, than it is against the right, which
 the *will* of God has to oblige, *independent of its conse-*
quences, that the knowledge of it would not be ef-
 fectual to keep the bulk of mankind to the practice
 of virtue, without enforcing it by the sanctions of
 reward and punishment. ’Tis nevertheless true,
 that there is an indispensable obligation to obey the
 will of God, *though all consideration of the conse-*
quence of obeying and disobeying were away, as this au-
 thor justly maintains: And the same obligation
 there is without consideration of the consequence,
 to act suitably to that fitness, which results from the
 essential difference, and relations of things; and to
 the unavoidable judgment of our own minds, that
 actions are accordingly right or wrong, worthy of
 reward or punishment.

Now an Atheist is undeniably capable of these af-
 fections of the mind, by which this great author^w
 accounts for men’s being disposed to place morality
 in the essential difference of things, *viz.* “ that
 “ sense of *right* and *wrong* so strongly impressed, as
 “ to be attended with a consciousness, that the one
 “ deserves reward, and the other punishment, *even*
 “ *though there were no God.*” This consciousness

therefore, which the Atheist is allowed to be capable of, though he is so blind as not to see, that that very sensation is the plainest indication of *will*; though, from the eternal truths which he perceives, he is so absurd, as not to discern an *eternal mind*, from which they result; yet this consciousness of his brings him under obligation to act suitably to what he *does see*, to do, or to forbear what he unavoidably judges to be right or wrong; for no stronger obligation can be laid upon a *free-agent*, than that of standing self-approved, or self-condemned.

If this be not so, I should be glad to be informed, whether we are to suppose, that an Atheist is not accountable in a future state for any enormities he may commit here? Or if this be too great a privilege to allow him, upon what principle he can be justly punishable for doing or not doing, what it is maintained he is under *no obligation* to do or to forbear? If the author of the *Divine Legation* is pleased to take occasion of giving an answer to this question, when he publishes the impatiently expected remainder of his valuable work, it will be acknowledged a great instance of goodness and condescension, to overlook the obscurity and low abilities of the enquirer, in regard to the importance of the *difficulty*.

APPENDIX.

There are two arguments relating to the subjects of the foregoing *Remarks*, that seem to be of great weight with the opposers of Dr. *Clarke*, being frequently insisted on, and repeated by the best writers among them; though one of them is a mere *fallacy*, (which perhaps themselves are not aware of) and the other at least a very precarious supposition.

sition. It may therefore be of some service in this controversy to set them both in a true light, which I shall here endeavour to do, having but lately had occasion to observe the importance they are thought to be of.

It is maintained by Dr. *Clarke* and his followers, that there are eternal and immutable relations, essential differences of things, and fitnesses resulting from them, independently of the will of God, which are obligatory to all reasonable beings, *antecedent to any positive appointment or declaration* of the will of God concerning them. In opposition to this, several of their adversaries, in order to establish virtue and moral obligation *solely* on the will of God, have argued in different forms of expression to this purpose: That those relations and fitnesses &c. cannot be eternal, or independent on the will of God, since they are *consequences of the existence of things*, proceeding from the determination of his will. And, for the same reason, they urge, that moral obligation cannot be *antecedent* to the will of God, because it could not commence, till *after the will of God* had exhibited certain relations and fitnesses in the creation, from whence morality arises. Now here is the plain *fallacy* of substituting a quite different consideration of things in the room of that, which they pretend to oppose, viz. *particular existences*, instead of *general abstract ideas*; and the will of God, *as expressed or implied in the creation*, for the will of God *explicitly declared* by the command of moral virtues. And who is concerned in this argument I know not, for surely Dr. *Clarke* or his followers never pretended, that particular existences were eternal, and independent of the will of God; or that the eternal reason and truth of things were obligatory to reasonable creatures, before the will of God had brought any such into existence. The relations and fitnesses, they speak of, are *truths eternally, in the divine understanding*,