
Dr. *BUTLER*'s
SERMONS

AT

Mr. Boyle's Lecture.

1709.

A
DISCOURSE,
PROVING,
That the FAITH and PRACTICE
OF
TRUE CHRISTIANS,
Are no Just Matter
OF
SHAME or REPROACH.

Being Eight SERMONS Preached at the
Cathedral Church of St. PAUL, in the Year
1709, at the LECTURE Founded by the
Honourable ROBERT BOYLE, Esq;.

By LILLY BUTLER, D. D. Minister
of St. *Mary Aldermanbury*.

L O N D O N:

Printed for *Brabazon Aylmer*, at the *Three Pigeons*
against the *Royal Exchange* in *Cornhill*. 1711.

T O T H E

Most Reverend Father in G O D,

T H O M A S

Lord Archbishop of *Canterbury*,

And Primate of all *England* ;

A N D

Sir H E N R Y A S H U R S T, Bar^t.

Trustees appointed by the Hon^{ble}

ROBERT BOTLE, Esq;

This D I S C O U R S E is
humbly Dedicated.

THE
PREFACE.

I Have endeavoured, as plainly as I could, to vindicate Religion from those Prejudices which some have entertained against the Practice, and from the Reproaches which by others have been cast out against the Principles of it. And, if this could be done effectually, I doubt not but that the Interest of Religion would be very much promoted by it. For, by all that I can observe, our Infidels seem to have renounced it, not through any Conviction by Principles of Reason, but through their Disaffection to that Piety and Virtue it obligeth them to, and a false Opinion of their being very prejudicial to their present, worldly Interest.

The P R E F A C E.

Letter to
a Lord,
concern-
ing En-
thusiasm.

terest. And those who have lately appeared against Religion, have assaulted it chiefly with Scoffing and Ridicule, which One of them hath impudently written a Defence of. It was the Reading of this Book, and some others of the same kind, which determined me in the Choice of my Subject; and made me think that to shew the Folly and Absurdity of such Writings, might be as necessary and as useful, as any other Method of pleading the Cause of Religion. If what is here said shall, in any measure, be serviceable to this end, I shall be very well satisfied with the Publishing of it; which, after so many Excellent Discourses preached and printed on the same Occasion, I hoped and endeavoured to have been excused from.

Reli-

*Religion no Matter of
Shame.*

Rom. 10. Part of the 11th Verse.

*Whosoever believeth on him, shall not be
ashamed.*

WE live in an Age wherein
prophane Men are not content
to *deny God in their Works,*
and to despise Religion in
their Hearts, but set up for publick Advo-
cates for Atheism and Infidelity. And
though they pretend to be mighty Men of
Reason, yet they seldom care to use any
serious Arguments in Defence of their Cause.
These they know have been often answered,
and are apt to put Men into a serious con-
sidering Temper, which, some of them con-
fess, would be a great Prejudice to the Suc-
cess of their Undertaking: And therefore

Letter con-
cerning En-
thusiasm, to
my Lord,
p. 51, 52.

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2. *Religion no Matter of Shame.*

are not willing to allow any to be fit Judges in these Matters, but those who are *in good Humour*, i. e. Airy and Jocosse, fit to be entertained with Droll and Comedy. Their greatest Talent is Ridiculing, and therefore they claim a Liberty to Exercise it without any Restraint, and would perswade the World that it is for the Advantage of Truth to suffer it to be jeer'd and laughed at. If we say, that the Principles of Religion are grave and serious Things, and therefore ought to be argued about in a grave and serious Manner; they tell us, that we must first prove them to be grave and serious Things, though they have been always esteemed, and often abundantly proved to be so. But why should not they first prove them to be Foolish and Ridiculous, before they be allowed to treat them with scurrilous Jest and Derision? No, says one of their late Advocates, there is no other way to find out which are truly serious Things, but by *applying the Ridicule, to see whether they will bear it or no.* And farther insinuates, *That if the Enemies of the Christian Religion, in its first Rise, had assaulted it this merry way, they would have bid fair for the Silencing and Suppressing it*; which is as much as to say, it would so well have born Ridicule, appeared so worthy of Contempt and Derision, that Men would generally have been ashamed of entertaining and professing the Belief of it. But

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But hath it not always been assaulted in this Manner? Were not *the Primitive Founders* of it brought upon the Stage, in this *pleasant way*, as well as that of *Bears Skins and Pitch Barrels*? Was not the Author of our Faith himself thus served by his Unbelieving Enemies, mocked and jested on, arrayed in Purple, and crowned with Thorns, ridiculed with mock Adorations; and by all the Methods of Derision their Prophane Wit could invent, exposed to the *Scorn of Men, and the Reproach of the People*?

And were not the Apostles of Christ treated in the same Contumelious Manner, *made a Gazing-Stock by Reproaches*, jested on, and reviled, represented as *drunken with Wine*, or *mad Enthusiasts*, as worthy of the utmost Scorn and Contempt, as *the Filth of the World, and the Off-scouring of all Things*? The Christian Religion *then* had nothing, but the Evidence of its Truth, to enable it to bear the *Trial of the cruel Mockings* of those *ungodly Scoffers*, yet it *mightily grew and prevailed*. The Publishers of it had none of *the Wise Men after the Flesh*, none of the Rich and Noble, no Prospect of any Temporal Advantage, to keep them in Countenance under all the Contempt that was poured upon them. The Wits and Jesters had *then* an Opportunity of applying their Infallible *Rule of Ridicule*, with all the Advantage it was capable of, for the

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discovery of its Truth: And if this be so sure a Test of grave and serious Truths, as we are told it is, we have, upon their own Principles, a most convincing Argument for the Truth of our Religion; which maintained its Reputation, and gained upon the Esteem and Faith of all sorts of Men, even *then*, when Mocking and Scoffing at it had no Restraint, and they that received it were sure to be *had in Derision of all that were round about them*. But they were able to give such convincing *Reasons of the Faith and Hope that was in them*, and were so well satisfied in the Excellence of the Doctrines and Precepts of the Gospel, that they could not be made ashamed of their Religion, by all the Scorn and Reproaches it brought upon them. *Whosoever, saith the Apostle in the Text, believeth on him, shall not be ashamed. Whosoever believeth on him, i. e. whosoever is a good Christian, whosoever believeth and liveth as such, shall not be ashamed, i. e. he shall have no Cause to be ashamed, either of his Faith or Practice.*

The Atheists and Infidels of our Times, after the vain Attempts of so many Ages for the Destruction of Religion, seem now to place all their Hopes of Success in breaking their Jest upon the Principles of it, and exposing them to Contempt and Derision, in the most ridiculous Disguise their impious Wit can invent. They seem to despair

spair of Reasoning it out of the World, but yet to have some hopes of jeering and laughing it out of Countenance : I shall therefore make it my chief Business, in my Discourses upon this Subject, to arm you against all such rude Assaults, wherein *their* greatest *Strength lies* ; by shewing, *That whosoever is a true Christian, both in Faith and Practice, can have no reason to be ashamed of his being so.* There is nothing Ignominious in the Matter of his Faith, or the Manner of his Life ; no real ground for Reproach, in his believing the one, or chusing the other. To this End I shall endeavour to make good these following Propositions.

First, That there is nothing in the Matter of his Faith, shameful or disgraceful to him.

Secondly, That there is nothing Shameful in his Practice.

Thirdly, That he hath wisely taken that Course, which will certainly be safe in the End and Issue of it ; and therefore hath no reason to *be ashamed,* for want of foreseeing or providing for what may, for ought any Man can know, be hereafter.

Fourthly, That he hath no reason to *be ashamed* of his Faith or Practice, so far as the Publick Good is concerned in them.

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Fifthly, That he hath no reason to *be ashamed* of them, upon the Account of any thing in them really prejudicial to the Happiness of this present Life, which is in all Respects highly promoted by them.

Sixthly, That he hath no reason to *be ashamed* of any such foolish Credulity, as the Atheists and Infidels are wont to reproach him for, and have the greatest reason to be ashamed of themselves.

First, That there is nothing in the Matter of his Faith, Shameful or Disgraceful to him.

Those Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion, which are the Object of it, are not Ignominious or Dishonourable to him. They are not any just Matter of Shame or Reproach, but rather of Glory and Rejoicing. They represent him as a far more excellent and happy Being, than Atheists and Infidels will allow themselves to be.

That he is the Workmanship of God, *made and fashioned* by a Being infinitely wise and good, the Creator of Heaven and Earth. That he is the Object of his peculiar Care and Providence, and that the vast Variety of other Beings, with which he is nourished and delighted, were designed for those Beneficial Uses to which they serve. That he hath something more in his Com-
position

position than dull and senseless Matter; that he hath nobler Powers and Faculties than can possibly spring from Body, however shaped, or sized, or moved, or tempered together. That he is endued with an Immortal Soul, formed after the Likeness of the most excellent and supreme Being, and capable of an everlasting and most happy Enjoyment of him.

How much more Honourable is this to Mankind, than to be, as the Atheist asserts him to be, the Creature of Blind Necessity or Chance, in the forming whereof no Wisdom or Counsel was employed? That he is *without any God in the World* to concern himself about him, and that no one thing was ever designed for his Use and Benefit; that he is a mere Corporeal Machine, jumbled together without any Art or Skill, and acting only as it is moved by the fatal or casual Impressions of Bodies which are round about it; incapable of any Pleasure but what they force upon him; and when, in a little while, they have put it out of Frame, nothing is able to put it in order again, or to restore its Motions, but it remains stupid and unactive for ever; its Life vanisheth into nothing, and its Hopes perish. With what Indignation should we reject such ridiculous and opprobrious Concoits as these, which make Mankind of so base a Descent, of so mean a Composition,

and void of all Capacity of Life and Happiness, beyond the short Measure of an *Hands Breadth* of Days? And what can be more absurd, than the Attempts of Atheists, to expose Men to Contempt and Reproach, because they will not join with them in thus vilifying their own Nature and Extraction?

The Christian further believeth, that God the Maker and Governor of the World, hath a tender and gracious Regard for Mankind, that he gave *his only begotten Son* to take our Nature, and to suffer the painful and ignominious Death of the Cross, to redeem us out of that State of Sin and Misery into which we were fallen, and to be the *Author of Eternal Salvation*, to all those who believe in him, and obey his holy, just, and good Laws: That this our Redeemer rose again from the Dead, ascended into Heaven, and being sat down at the Right Hand of God, sent the Holy Ghost to guide, sanctify, and comfort us; and that he will come again at the end of the World, *with Power and great Glory*, to judge the *Quick and Dead*, and to render to every Man an everlasting Recompence, according to what he hath done in the *Flesh*, whether it be good or bad.

Now what is there in all this for a Christian to be ashamed of? Is it not for the Honour of Mankind, that the Almighty Creator and Governor of the World should

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so love them, that he should value them and their Happiness at so high a rate, that he should send his only begotten Son, cloathed with our Nature and Infirmities, to purchase Eternal Redemption by shedding his precious Blood for us ; that he wiped away all the Ignominy of the Cross, and confirmed the Truth of all the *glad Tidings* of the Gospel he preached, by raising him from the Dead ; that he hath taken our Human Nature into Heaven with him, and placed the *Man Christ Jesus* on his Throne of Glory, and made him *who loved us, and washed us from our Sins with his own Blood, Head over all things* ; That our Bodies are not to perish for ever in their Graves, but shall rise again Glorious and Immortal ; and that *when Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in Glory*, and be for ever unspeakably happy with him ? These are things too glorious for us to suffer our selves to be laughed and jeered out of the Belief of them, to give up to those who assault us only with Arguments of prophane Wit and Drollery. Nothing but the clearest Evidence of our being deceived, should be able to *stop us in this our boasting*, and to make *our glorying void*.

Secondly, There is nothing shameful in his Practice, nothing but what is Honourable in the sight of all Men, but a few blind and besotted Atheists, whose Reproaches no
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wise Man will think worthy to be set against the general Esteem of all other Men; who, when ever they exercise their Talent of Scoffing at Piety and Virtue, act in Contradiction to their own Principles. For, according to these, nothing we do can deserve either Commendation or Reproach. For Virtue and Vice are all alike with them, one is neither better nor worse than the other. The Distinction of Fit and Unfit, of Duty and Sin, of Moral Good and Evil, hath no Foundation in the Nature of Things; and Robbery and Murder are every whit as good in themselves, as Justice and Charity. But if there were really any thing unseemly and contemptible in the Christian's Life, it would still be most absurd in them to reproach him for it : For they tell us, that no Man can possibly do otherwise than he doth ; that there is no such thing as Liberty, or Choice ; that every Volition is necessarily produced by some External Cause, by a violent Impulse of some Matter without us, or inspired into us, no otherwise than as a Wheel of a Mill is moved by the Wind that blows upon its Sails. And if this be true, there can be nothing more worthy of Praise or Dispraise, of Commendation or Reproach, in the Actions of a Man, than in the Motions of a Mill.

Nothing then can be more absurd, than for an Atheist to ridicule or scoff at any thing ;

thing; and surely no Man of Sense will value the Censures or Reproaches of such as not only contradict themselves by them, but the common Sense and Experience of Mankind. To be sure the good Christian can have no reason *to be ashamed* of his Practice, which is most highly Honourable upon these Accounts.

First, The Christian's Life is an Imitation of the most excellent and glorious Being in all his imitable Perfections; a conforming our selves to his Image, who is the *Lord glorious in Holiness*; and exercising, to the utmost of our Capacity, that Justice and Fidelity, that Goodness and Mercy, for which he is adored and honoured in all the Assemblies of his Saints. This certainly can be no just Matter of Shame and Reproach, nothing can be more Honourable for us, than thus to *shew forth the Virtues*, and to live the Life of God.

Secondly, The Christian's Life is doing the Will of God, and *walking according to those Laws which* the infinitely wise and gracious Lord of Heaven and Earth *hath set before us*. And can it be Matter of Shame, for a Creature to be governed by his Creator; to employ our Faculties about those Works which our Maker hath appointed for us; to be directed in all our Actions by a Being who is infinitely wise, and therefore cannot but know what is best and fittest for
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us to do ; and immensely good and kind, and therefore cannot require any thing of us which is not for our Good and Benefit to perform ? Can it be Matter of Shame, not to decline the most Honourable Service, not to withdraw our selves from his Conduct, whose *Wisdom is unsearchable*, and *Understanding infinite* ; not to be undutiful to a most kind and loving Father, or to be careful in all things to please him, who is the best Friend, and the greatest Benefactor we have in the World, who *giveth us Life, and Breath, and all things* ?

Thirdly, The Practice of a Christian is agreeable to the best Reason of Mankind, what the most wise and sober Men have always approved as most becoming and behoving us, and as most worthy of Esteem and Praise ; such as hardly any Man can in good earnest disapprove or despise ; such as, I am confident, those very Men, who wantonly scoff at it, did never seriously disallow or condemn. Did ever any Man's Reason dictate to him, that it was fit for a Creature not to honour and love his Maker ? That it was as reasonable for a Man to be lewd and drunk, as to be chaste and sober ; to be passionate and furious, as to be meek and gentle ; to be injurious and fraudulent, as to be just and faithful in his Dealing ; to be cruel and oppressive, as to be compassionate and charitable to his Neighbour ? Vain and dis-

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solute Men may, indeed, out of Pride and Envy; or an Affectation of appearing bold and witty, ridicule and scoff at those who practise these Virtues; but the Understandings of Men can hardly be so corrupted, that in Judgment, and Heart and Conscience, they should despise them for it. How little reason then can we have *to be ashamed* of such absurd Reproaches, whilst we can commend our selves to our own and every Man's Reason and Conscience? As for the peculiar Precepts, and the positive Institutions of Christianity, though they may not be dictated to us by Natural Reason, yet they are no way contrary to it; they are either Improvements of those Moral Virtues to a greater Perfection, which the decayed Understandings of Men, without the Assistance of Divine Revelation, could not so easily discern their Obligations to; or designed more strictly to oblige us, and more strongly to engage us to the most constant Practice of them; and every whit as reasonable, to one who believes the Doctrines of the Gospel, as the most acknowledged Moral Virtue is to any other Man. A Christian then can have no Cause *to be ashamed* of any part of his Practice, so far as it is Christian, till he can see Cause to be ashamed of his Reason and his Faith. I proceed now to shew,

Thirdly,

Thirdly, That he hath taken that Course, which will certainly be the most safe in the End and Issue of it.

If things should fall out contrary to his Belief, and Death should put an end to his Being, he will then be never the worse for his Religion; but if there be a God, and a future State of Happiness or Misery, according to Mens Works, he is sure it will be incomparably best for them who believed in him, and loved and served him. A late Author indeed calls this a *Beggarly Refuge*, and tells us that *the same Reason which assures us that God is so good as not to deceive us, will prove to us that God is so good, that we can have no Dread or Suspicion to make us uneasy; for it is Malice only, and not Goodness can make us afraid.* So that if there be a God and a Future State, it is all one what we believe, and how we live; the Atheists and the Prophane have no more reason to fear any thing from him, than the most Religious, *i. e.* none at all.

But before a wise Man will suffer himself to be influenced by such loose Discourse as this, he ought to see all the Arguments for the Truth of Christianity, and of the Being of a God, a perfectly Just and Righteous Governor of the World, rewarding and punishing Men according to their Behaviour towards him, unanswerably confuted. For if these be true, we are sure that there

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thusiasm,
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will be Vengeance executed hereafter, on all them *who know not God*, who *in their Hearts and Works deny him*. And if he is not sure that they are false, he must still look upon Religion as the safest way. We are sure that there can be no Malice in God, but we cannot believe against the common Sense of Mankind, that Malice and Justice are the same thing, or that it is Malice in a Governor to punish the grossest and most impudent Offenders against his Crown and Dignity. Nay, we cannot but think it would be Goodness and Mercy in Governors to punish those, who so boldly shew their Malice both to God and Men, who set themselves, in this manner, to extirpate the Fear of God out of the Hearts of Men, and to set them loose from that which is so necessary to restrain them from those Practices; which we believe are, and they cannot know that they are not, of the most pernicious Consequence to particular Persons, and which they cannot but know are most hurtful to the Publick Society.

We do not go about to persuade Men to *strive to have Faith, and to believe to the utmost; because, if after all, there will be nothing in the Matter, there will be no harm in being deceived; but if there be any thing, it will be fatal for them not to have believed to the full;* but to persuade them for this Reason, to hearken without Prejudice to the Arguments

ments for Religion; not to cast off the Belief and Practice of it, without the plainest Proof of its Falshood; not to give up their Faith to a Jest or Jeer; not to cast off the Fear of God, till they are sure there is none, or none that deserves to be feared; but to live as if there were a God and a Future State of Rewards and Punishments, till they are satisfied by substantial Reasons, which they never can be, that Atheists and Infidels are the only true Believers. And this certainly is what becomes a wise and prudent Man, not to be over-Credulous, when an Error would be of the most dangerous Consequence; and to live by those Principles he is sure can do him no hurt, but may be of infinite and everlasting Advantage to him.

Fourthly, The Christian hath no reason to be ashamed of his Principles or Practices, so far as the Publick is concerned in them: They have a mighty Tendency to promote the common Peace and Welfare of Societies, and to make a Nation or People prosperous and happy; whereas Atheism and Irreligion, with all manner of Vice and Wickedness, which are inseparable from them, do manifestly promote Publick Misery and Confusion. And therefore all, who profess and plead for them, may justly be esteemed as the common Enemies of Mankind; which is a Character Men have reason

son to be ashamed of. Righteousness exalteth a Nation: but Sin is the Reproach of any People. Religion and Virtue are highly Advantageous to the publick Prosperity; and no Men deserve so well of the Publick, as those who observe their Rules, and heartily endeavour to promote their Interest; and therefore no Men have less Reason to be ashamed.

First, What a Blessing to a Nation are such Magistrates, who are influenced by the Principles of Religion, who believe themselves *Ministers of God for the publick Good*, and therefore continually attend upon this very Thing; who own themselves Subjects of a Superior Lord, by and for whom Kings Reign, to whom they must give an Account, who without Respect of Persons will judge every Man's Works? When, from a Sense of Duty and Conscience towards God, they execute Justice Impartially, and are Merciful as he whom they represent is Merciful; and after the same Example, are always watching over their People for Good, and studying to promote the Happiness of them all to the utmost of their Power; How happy is that People who is in such a Case? We feel the Happiness of it at this Day, how much

the Reputation, and Safety, and Quiet, and Prosperity of a People is advanced by a Prince of Religion and Virtue ; we are easy under Her Care, and secure of the Continuance of all our Rights and Liberties ; because we know She Acts from a firm and constant Principle, from the Sense of Duty, and the Fear of God.

But if Princes were once perswaded, that there is no God to call them to Account, that there is no more Evil in Tyranny and Cruelty, or Danger to them who Exercise them, than in Justice and Mercy, if they can but secure their Persons, and maintain their Power and Dignity ; that they may break their Contracts, oppress their Subjects, ravish and spoil, and kill at Pleasure, without any Guilt, or fear of any thing but from Men ; what Principle could be strong enough to restrain them from the Practice of any of these Things, whenever any Lust, or Passion, or any single, private Interest urged them thereunto ? How Precarious would all our most valuable Enjoyments be under such Governors, and what else could we be sure of but continual Fears, Tumults and Disorders, or the worst of Misery and Slavery ?

Secondly,

Secondly, Let us consider how much the Happiness of a Nation depends upon the Principles of Religion, influencing the People to a due Subjection to those who are in Authority over them. When they are taught to obey Magistrates as *the Ordinance of God, not only for Fear, but for Conscience-sake*; when they are restrained from Factions and Tumults and Rebellion against those who Minister for God, and for their Good, not only by the Fear of human Power, but by Principles of Conscience, and the Dread of everlasting Damnation; then the firmest Foundation is laid for the Support of Government, and the publick Peace and Order.

But if these Principles were banished out of the World, and Atheism introduced in their stead, and Men were persuaded that there is no Guilt in Treason and Rebellion against the best of Governors, that they might follow the Dictates of Ambition and Revenge and Covetousness, to the utter Subversion of publick Peace and Order, and involving the Nation in Blood and Confusion, and were under no Obligations to consider any thing but their own particular Safety and Advantage, and had nothing to fear but

the Disappointment of their Pernicious Undertakings ; that there is as much Virtue and Goodness in doing the greatest publick Mischief, as in doing the greatest publick Good ; that no Law of Nature or of God hath made any Difference betwixt them ; that neither of them is Duty or Sin, rewardable or punishable hereafter ; all which the Atheists assert ; What a mad and miserable World would this be ? What could long restrain the *Lusts* and Passions of Men from producing *Wars* and *Fightings*, from *turning the World upside down*, and putting all Things into the utmost Disorder and Confusion ?

Thirdly, Let us consider how necessary it is to the support and welfare of Society, that Men have a great regard to the Obligation of Oaths. Whilst these are held Sacred, Men are capable of being put under the strongest Ties of Conscience, to execute Justice impartially, to perform their Trusts faithfully, and to give Testimonies of Facts, with such Truth and Sincerity, that the Innocent may be cleared, the Guilty convicted, the injured Person righted, and doubtful Controversies, wherein the Interests of Men are concerned, determined, and *an end put to all Strife*, in the most quiet
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and satisfactory Manner that can be. All which are highly necessary to the publick Safety, Peace and Welfare; which can hardly, if at all, long be upheld without them.

Of what pernicious Consequence than must the Principles of Atheism be to Humane Society; to believe that there is no God and Providence, no Searcher of the Hearts of Men, to judge and be avenged of the perjured Person? If Judges, and Juries, and Witnesses should be thus persuaded, of how little Use would the best Laws be, for the Security of publick Order and Justice, and the Lives and Properties of Men?

Fourthly, Let us consider how necessary Religion is to such a Regulation of the Affections and Behaviour of Men one towards another, as would mightily promote the common Peace and Happiness. If, as Religion requires, the Members of a Society would *put off Anger, Hatred, Malice, Pride, Covetousness, Reviling, Backbiting, Slandering, and all Unrighteous Dealing;* and *put on Bowels of Mercy, Humbleness of Mind, Meekness, universal Love and Charity, speak every Man the Truth to his Neighbour,* and do to others as they would that they should do

unto them ; how quietly and happily would they live together ? Now all this Religion not only expressly and peremptorily enjoins , but sets before us the strongest Motives to persuade us to a most exact Obedience in every Particular, threatening the Transgressors with everlasting and intolerable Punishment, and promising to Reward the Obedient with eternal and unspeakable Happiness.

And if we are defective in any of these Things, which are so Beneficial to Human Society, it is through the want or weakness of Faith in the Principles of our Religion : And therefore those ought to be esteemed as publick Enemies, who attempt to break or loosen the Obligations of Religion ; who go about to persuade Men that there is no God to require any of these Things of us, or to call us to Account for our Disobedience ; that we are no otherwise obliged to have any regard to them, than as they may conduce to our own particular Safety, Credit, or Advantage in this World.

Thus much then may suffice to shew how little Reason a good Christian can have *to be ashamed* upon the publick Account ; nothing being more Advantageous to Human Society, than the Faith he
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professeth, and the Laws he Governs himself by. This hath been often acknowledged by the most professed Atheists, who have endeavoured to perswade the World, that Religion was at first invented by some State Politicians, for the upholding of Order and Government, without which no Society can Subsist; and the more effectually to restrain Men from those Practices which are destructive of its Peace and Happiness. If then what I have said upon this Head be true, we may infer these Things.

First, That how Confident soever Men are, that they are in the right in denying the Principles of Religion, that by a wonderful Sagacity, which they have above the rest of Mankind, they have discovered this Mystery, that the best, and wisest, and greatest part of Men in all Ages have been deceived, and imposed upon with false Notions of the Being of a God and Providence, and future Rewards and Punishments; yet it is certainly their wisest Course not to let the World know the mighty Discoveries they have made, nor to use any Endeavours to Convince Men of their Mistake.

When a Man professeth himself an Atheist, or of no Religion, he tells the World, that he believes himself under no Obligations of Conscience to speak Truth, to perform his Promises, to observe any Rules of Justice and Honesty in his Dealing, to have any regard to the Good of another, or to the Peace and Quiet of that Society of which he is a Member; that Lying, Cheating, Perjury, Theft, Adultery, Murder and Treason, are very innocent Things; that he may do any thing for his Advantage, how Evil soever it is esteemed by the ignorant and deluded Part of Mankind, which he can do with Safety, and without any danger of Suffering from Men. Can it be for any Man's Interest to be known to be of this Mind? Will not all who know him be afraid to give him any Credit, to trust him with the Management of any Affairs, or to have any Dealings or Commerce with him?

It is indeed better for others that his Principles should be known, that they may watch and guard themselves against him, as one who professeth to make no Conscience of committing any sort of Villany, and to be restrained by no other Consideration, but that of his own Interest,

rest. But he would have more Opportunities of advancing and enriching himself, and might more effectually accomplish any selfish Design, if he were not known to be a Man of no Conscience and Religion. He is a *Fool*, who *saieth in his Heart there is no God*; but he is a greater Fool, who tells the World he believeth there is none; and a greater still, who goeth about to perswade others to be of his Mind. For this is to tell them that they are at liberty to do him any Mischief they can get any thing to themselves by; that they may Cheat, Rob, or Kill him, or any other Person he hath the greatest Kindness and Concern for, without scruple or fear of any thing but a Discovery.

And if his Atheistical Notions should spread and prevail, he must expect to partake in all the Mischiefs which would be Consequent upon the Dissolution of Government and Society. For the strongest Foundation of Government would then be subverted, and the strongest Bands of Society broken, and every Man left at liberty, from any Tie of Conscience, to undermine the publick Peace, and to seek his own Advantage by all the Methods of Wrong and Injustice he could invent and conceal.

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Religion no Matter of Shame.

Secondly, That it is the Interest of Government, and all Publick Societies, to give no Countenance or Encouragement to those, who profess or endeavour to propagate Atheism and Infidelity, or to lessen the Credibility of those Principles of Religion, by which *the Throne is establish'd*, and the publick Safety, Peace and Prosperity so manifestly maintained and advanced. These Men are, and would make others like themselves, Cheats, Villains, Thieves, Seditious, Traytors by Principle, whenever it is for their private Interest to be so. They cannot be tied by Oaths and Promises, to do any Publick Good, or withheld from doing any Publick Mischief; and therefore are not fit to be trusted with any Publick Employment. Are they fit to be trusted with the Care and Defence of our Religion, who are Enemies to all Religion? Are they fit to be employed *for the Punishment of Evil Doers*, and the Maintenance of Piety and Virtue, who have no Notion of any thing's being good or evil, but as it is useful or hurtful to themselves? Can it be for the Interest of any Government, that they should be preferred or indulged, who have no Principle of Obedience and Submission,

mission, but fear of Punishment from Men ; who are subject only *for Wrath*, and not *for Conscience sake* ; who hold nothing unlawful, how destructive soever of the Common-Weal, which they can do with Safety and Advantage ?

Thirdly, That the Ministers of Religion are most useful Members of a Society, and ought to be esteemed and favoured, not only for their Relation to God, but for their Works sake, for the Nature of their Employment, which so highly and manifestly tends to promote the Publick Good. It is their proper Business to teach all Ranks and Conditions of Men, and by the strongest Motives and Arguments to persuade them to the Practice of their several Duties, which are so necessary to publick Peace and Happiness. And that these are so generally known and believed to be the Will of God, not to be neglected by Men, without exposing themselves to Everlasting and Intolerable Punishment ; that the Attempts of Atheists and Infidels do not more prevail to the stifling all Notions of Right and Wrong, of Good and Evil ; that Mens Consciences are so often awakened to consider their Duty to the Publick, and to one another, and all the mighty
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Arguments of the Gospel, whereby the Performance of it is enforced ; Is not all this, in a great Measure, owing to the Labours of those who Minister about Holy Things ? What other Offices of Men then are more Beneficial to the Publick, than theirs ? If therefore they had no Relation to God, and they were only Ministers of the State, it is in Matters of such vast Importance to the Common Good, and the Safety of every Man's Person and Estate is so manifestly concerned in the Success of their Labours, that nothing can be more injurious to Mankind, than to weaken their Authority in Preaching the Gospel, and to pour Contempt upon them and their Profession. *It is indeed, as to our selves, but a small thing for us to be judged by Man's Judgment, to be censured and reviled by a loose and prophane World : And tho' we cannot but be concerned for the Dishonour which is done to God, and the Mischief which is done to the Souls and Bodies of Men, by our being despitefully used, and shamefully entreated ; yet we have abundant reason to rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer Shame for the Name of Christ ; a Master that we know will not forget our Works of Faith, and Labours*

bours of Love, and Patience of Hope, that which we do and suffer for his and his Churches sake. In confidence therefore of approving our selves to God, of his Favour and Blessing, how much soever we are despised and vilified by our unbelieving Adversaries, we do and will rejoice, and esteem the Reproach of Christ greater Riches, than all the Treasures of the Ungodly.

Fifthly, I proceed to shew, That the true Christian hath no Reason to *be ashamed* of his Faith and Practice, so far as his own particular present Good and Happiness is concerned in it. If he should be mistaken in the Principles of his Religion, as he is well assured he is not, he finds himself much the Happier for them, and for those Practices they have engaged him in. There is nothing valuable in this Life, or of any Moment to the Happiness of it, which his Religion doth not in its own Nature tend to produce in him, or to procure for him. It is highly beneficial to him in respect of his Body, his Estate, and his Mind; he is the better, in all these Respects, for Believing and Living as he doth, and therefore can have no Reason to *be ashamed* upon that Account.

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First, Religion doth very much conduce to the Welfare of his Body, to its Beauty, and Ease, and Health, and Life. Meekness, Temperance, Contentment, Hope in God, Love and Charity, which are great Duties of our Religion, adorn the Countenance of Men, and give it all the Advantage of a sweet Air and pleasing Aspect it is capable of. Whereas the contrary Vices make it disagreeable, frightful or ridiculous. How wild and scaring are the Looks of Wrath, Malice and Révenge? How pale and meager those of Envy and Discontent? How dull and heavy those of Hatred and Uncharitableness? And what variety of deformed Looks may be observed in a Club of Drunkards? Bears, and Swine, and Apes are the fittest Emblems to represent them by.

How often and how justly are Men reproached for those unnatural Deformities they give themselves? And how ashamed would they be to be drawn and exposed to the World, in the Colours and Visage of their Vices? There is even a visible difference between Virtue and Vice; and, without making much use of our Reason, our Senses teach us to approve the one,
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and to dislike the other. *A Man's Wisdom makes his Face to shine; Eccl. 8. 1.* And it might probably, in some Measure at least, be the natural Effect of that Meekness, and Love, and Hope in God and Christ, which filled the Breast of St. Stephen, that *all that stedfastly looked on him saw his Face as it had been the Face of an Angel.* Act. 6. 15.

What better Course can a Man take to keep his Body Easy and Healthful, and to prolong his Life, than observing those Rules which Religion prescribes, in governing our Passions, and bodily Appetites? Violent Transports of Passion, exorbitant and unruly Desires and Appetites, are Distempers of the Body as well as of the Mind. They put the Blood and Spirits into Disorder, and raise such Comotions in the Body, as make it restless and uneasy, and incapable of relishing those Things it is wont to be Refreshed by, as other Sick Bodies are. Common Observation and Experience instruct us in this, that Pain, and Sickness, and untimely Death, are often the natural Effects of all kinds of vicious Excesses; and their *Physicians* will tell Men they are incurable without a Reformation. Health is indeed the Gift of God, and Good Men may

may be afflicted by him with Pain and Sickness, to cure and better their Minds, and to benefit others by the Example of their Patience under them : But in the natural Course of Things, which is all the *Atheist* hath any Regard to, Temperance, Chastity, and that Moderation of all our Passions, which Religion obligeth us to, are apparently more conducing to the Preservation of Health, and the prolonging of Life, than the contrary Excesses.

In this Particular therefore *the Children of this World* are not so *Wise in their Generation, as the Children of Light*. They don't pursue their own great End, the good State of the Body, and the Preservation of this present Life, by such proper Means as the Religious Man doth. His Religion keeps him from giving any just or plausible Occasion to the Wrath and Displeasure of Men ; from suffering in his Body, either from the Hands of publick Justice or private Revenge. It teacheth and obligeth him, by the strongest Ties of Conscience, *to render to all their Due*, to be respectful to the Persons, and obedient to all the lawful Commands, of those who have Power and Authority over him ; to be Humble and Meek, Kind
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and Loving, Civil and Courteous unto all Men, to *provide Things honest in the sight of all Men*, and as much as in him lieth, to *Live Peaceable with all Men*; and this, in the common and natural Course of Things, will be a Security and Protection to him. Which is evidently the Meaning of that Question of the *Apostle*, *Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?* For certain ^{1 Pet. 3: 13.} then, it can be no great Matter of Boasting to have thrown off the Principles of Religion, which prescribes, and would persuade and enable Men to observe more effectually than any thing else, the most likely Methods of securing that, which they profess to have the greatest Regard for, the Welfare of their Bodies and this present Life.

Secondly, Religion doth very much tend to his Advantage in respect of his outward State and Condition in the World. It effectually restrains him from many impoverishing Vices. He doth not consume his Estate upon his Lusts, or waste his Substance in riotous Living, or lose it at Play, or spend it in Suits at Law, meerly to gratify his Revenge, or forfeit it by any evil Practice. He is never turned out of a good Place, for any careless Mis-

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management, for any Breach of Trust, for Bribery or Extortion, or any unjust Abuse of his Power or Authority.

He is not only allowed, but obliged and encouraged to use many of those Means, which are most proper for the bettering his Condition; to be Diligent and Industrious in his Calling, Just and Honest in his Dealing, True and Faithful in his Word and Promise, Affable and Courteous in his Conversation: And these are certainly the most likely Methods of making a safe and creditable Improvement of our Estates. His Religion makes it easier for him to be Rich than other Men. He can be Rich with a great deal less than they can. He hath not the boundless Occasions of Pride and Vain-glory, of Luxury, Intemperance and Lust to supply, nor the insatiable Desire of Covetousness to satisfy. He can say, with *St. Paul*, *I have all, I am full, I abound*, if he have but enough to answer the real Conveniences of the Rank and Station he is in; and he hath *learnt in whatsoever State he is, therewith to be Content. And Godliness with Contentment is great Gain.* It is equivalent to a great Estate. He who is contented with his Condition, from a Principle of *Godliness,*
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of Faith and Hope in God and his Promises, can have no Wants. He believeth he hath as much as a wise and loving Father knows to be best for him, and therefore how small soever his Portion is, hath more Satisfaction in it than any Irreligious Man can have *in the abundance of the Things which he possesseth.* If, in the use of lawful and honest Means he Thrives and Prospers in the World, he hath this Addition to the common Advantages of his Success, that he can Rejoice in it, as the Fruit of God's Favour and Blessing, and an Earnest of infinitely better Things *reserved in Heaven* for him. He hath the Comfort, not only of supplying all his present Conveniences, and fully satisfying all his Desires, but also of believing that he is thereby enabled to *make himself Friends,* that *when he fails,* and is dispossessed by Death of all that is left, he may be *received into everlasting Habitations, to an Inheritance incorruptible and undefiled.* The good Christian then can have no Reason *to be ashamed* of his Religion, upon the account of any Methods of Gain or Profit it debars him from. It allows him to use the best and surest Means of improving his Estate. It makes him more easy under any Disappointment,

and more happy in his Success, than they can be, who scruple no Practices whereby they think they may enrich themselves, and expect a Portion in this Life only.

Thirdly, Religion doth very much conduce to the Peace and Quiet, the Delight and Pleasure of our Minds.

First, Religion doth very much conduce to the Peace and Quiet of our Minds. *The Wicked are like a troubled Sea when it cannot rest, but the Fruit of Righteousness is Peace, and the Effect of Righteousness is Quietness and Assurance for ever.* This we learn, not only from Divine Testimony, but from our own Reason and Observation. For it is most plain and evident,

First, That the Religious Man is the best armed against all disquieting tormenting Fears, whether of the Calamities of this Life, of Death, or of future Punishments.

First, Of the Calamities of this Life. He knows that these Things are common to Man, that he is born to Trouble as the Sparks fly upwards, that it is in vain to hope to Live many Days, and to Rejoice in them all; that is, never to suffer any outward Affliction or Trouble. But these are nothing so terrible and affrighting to
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him, as they are to Men of no Religion. His Religion obligeth him to *fear none of these Things*, not to suffer his Soul to be cast down, or disquieted within him, when he apprehends them coming towards him; and it makes it reasonable, and more easy for him to comply with those Obligations. For

First, It assures him, That how unavoidable soever they appear, there is yet *a way to escape*; that there is an Almighty Governor of the World, who is able to Rescue him out of the most imminent Danger; and to whom he may apply himself with a good Hope of being preserved from them. But the Atheist believeth, that there is a Chain of natural Causes, which nothing can break; that there was no Wisdom or Goodness concerned in the making of it; and that no Power can prevent those Evils which it is letting down upon him; and therefore, when he sees them coming towards him, his Fears must be proportionably greater, and more Tormenting, as he hath less Hopes of escaping.

Secondly, The Evils of this Life, which the Religious Man apprehends himself in danger of, do not appear so intolerable

to him as they do to others. *They* have nothing but their own natural Strength and Courage to depend upon, for their Support under them. But the Religious Man believes, that what Calamity soever he may fall into, God will be with him, that he will *uphold and strengthen him with the Right Hand of his Righteousness*, and lay no more upon him than he will enable him to bear. He believeth the Account the Scriptures give him, of the wonderful Patience and Chearfulness of the Holy Servants of God under the greatest Wants and Sufferings; and Confidently hopes in the Promises of God for the same Divine Grace and Assistance for his Support and Comfort; if, in his infinite Wisdom, God should think fit to bring him into the like Condition.

Thirdly, The Evils of this Life, which the Religious Man apprehends himself in Danger of, do not appear so absolutely Evil to him, as they do to Men of no Religion. The Atheist cannot expect any Benefit by them. He knows no other Good but of that kind, which the Calamities of this Life deprive him of; and therefore when he is threatned with bodily Pain, or Sickness, or with any worldly Adversity or Trouble, he can
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have no Hope of gaining any thing by them to abate the Torment of his Fear. But the Religious Man, when he sees any of these Things approaching towards him, looks upon them, not only as Things painful and grievous, but, as Things useful and beneficial to him: entirely in the Power of a Wise and Tender Father to prevent or inflict them, who designs him Good by all his Dispensations. He believes *all Things will work together for Good to them that Love God*; and that all the *Trials of his Faith and Patience*, which God will suffer him to fall under, will *be found in Praise and Honour, and Glory at the Appearing of Christ Jesus*. Men's Fears, must be more or less Disquieting according to the Opinion they have of those Evils they apprehend themselves exposed to. And therefore the Irreligious Man, who believes them altogether Hurtful, and no ways Profitable, must have greater Disturbance from his Fear of them, than he who believeth, as the sincere Christian doth, that they may be of infinite Advantage to him. How much easier must that Man be, who, in this uncertain troublesome World, can say with Holy David, *Tho' I walk through the Valley of the shadow of Death,*

encompassed with imminent Dangers, *I will fear no Evils, for God is with me*; either to Preserve me from them, or Support me under them, or to do me Good by them; than he who believeth there is no God to do any of these Things for him?

Secondly, The Religious Man is the best arm'd against the tormenting Fears of Death. *St. Paul* speaks of Infidels, as Men, *who were all their Life time through fear of Death subject to Bondage*. They do all they can to *put the Evil Day far from them*, and to keep it out of their Thoughts, but it will be continually forcing it self into them. They know that they must Die. They cannot harden themselves into unbelief of their Mortality, or Converse in the World without frequent Admonitions of it. They see it with their Eyes, and hear it with their Ears, and feel the Symptoms of it in their own Bodies. And how extremely Disquieting must the Thoughts of it be to *them*, who love and value nothing but the Enjoyments and Pleasures of this Life, which Death will certainly deprive them of; and, as they believe, put an end also to all Capacity of Enjoying any thing any more for ever? These are the best Thoughts,

Thoughts, the least Tormenting, that the most hardened Infidel can have of Death. But how much more frightful are these, than those of the Religious Man? It can be nothing so Painful to him to think of leaving a World he had no great Fondness for, and parting with Pleasures he had but little Relish of. He looks upon Death as the Improvement of Life, as an Entrance into a State of Immortal Glory and Happiness. That natural Dread of it, which is common to Men, is greatly abated by the Considerations of Religion, by his Christian Faith and Hope. And whatever Pains may attend the Separation of his Soul from his Body, he believes, whenever God shall think fit to call him hence, it will be much *better* for him *to depart, than to abide in the Flesh.* He believes that his Body only, his weaker Part is capable of Dying; that there is Life in his Soul, in his *better Part, which shall never be taken from him;* and that his Body will not Perish for ever in the Grave, but rise again Glorious and Incorruptible, that thenceforth *Death shall have no more Dominion over him;* and he *shall have perfect Consummation and Bliss both in Soul and Body in the everlasting Glory and Kingdom of God.* He who
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thus believeth, hath certainly the least Cause to be disturbed with the Fears of Death ; he may reasonably expect it with Desire and Pleasure, as many Holy Servants of God have done, when they have seen it coming towards them in the most frightful Shape it was capable of.

Thirdly, He is the best arm'd against the Fear of future Punishments. Here the Atheist will be apt to fancy that he hath much the Advantage of the Religious Man, having eased his Mind of all Fears of this kind, which are so very Troublesome and Perplexing. He pretends to be freed from the Rebukes of Conscience, from the frightful Apprehensions of a Judgment to come, and everlasting Punishments, and pitieth or laughs at, according to the Humour he is in, the groundless Fears of Religious Men. But how little Reason he hath for all this, will appear by considering these following Things.

First, How long it must be before Men, who are educated in the Principles of Religion, for with such I am chiefly concerned, can utterly Extirpate these Principles ; and how full of distracting Fears their Minds must be, till this is perfectly

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ly accomplished. The Principles Men are Educated in, whatsoever they are, cannot easily be thrown off, especially when there is, at least, a great Appearance of Truth in them; so many Arguments from Reason, and Testimony, and Experience to Confirm them, as Religion hath; such as the generality of Men of all Ranks and Conditions, and of the greatest Knowledge and Wisdom are entirely satisfied with. If Men will pretend to Act with Reason, they must use a great deal of Thought and Pains before they can establish themselves in Atheism and Unbelief; and suffer as much Trouble and Disquiet in their Attempt, as they suppose the Religious Man doth in regulating those inordinate Lusts and Passions, for whose Sake they engaged themselves in it. The Religious Man knows there is no Danger, and believes he shall reap unspeakable Advantage, by succeeding in his Undertaking. But *they* know that they Expose themselves to the utmost Danger by their Attempt, if it be rashly undertaken; and till they think themselves sure that there is no God, and no Religion, they must be often, and greatly disturbed with Terrors of Conscience, and dreadful Apprehensions of that in-
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tolerable Misery, which they cannot but fear, because they do not yet believe there is no such thing. So that a Religious Man, in as little time, with as little trouble, and with much less fear, may overcome all the Difficulties of a Holy Life, and thereby put an end to all his Fears, as the wicked Man can attain to such a confirmed and steady Infidelity, as to be able without fear to *deny the Faith*, and to *go on still in his Wickedness*. But,

Secondly, It is hardly possible for him to arrive in any time to such a degree of Infidelity. He can never be able to demonstrate the Impossibility of the Being of a God, that Power, and Wisdom, and Justice, and Goodness, can be no where in Perfection, or to baffle all the mighty Arguments, which are taken from the Frame of the World, from constant Tradition, and general Consent of Men; from Testimony and Experience, concerning Supernatural and Miraculous Effects, so as to free himself from all doubt and suspicion of their having any thing of force in them. They may fancy they have found out a way how the World might be made, and Order, and Beauty, and Harmony, in innumerable Instances produced without any Wisdom or Contrivance;

trivance; but can they pretend to be sure that it certainly was so, and could not be otherwise? They may pretend to shew how possible it is for Fear, and Policy, and the like, to frame the Notion of a God, and that it should be entertained and credited by the generality of Mankind, without any appearance of Reason to recommend or confirm it; but surely they will not say, that the Principles of Religion could have no other Original, and that it was impossible they should be so generally received upon any probable Evidence of their being true? They may plead the Fallibility of History and Tradition, and Human Testimonies, against all the Arguments taken from thence for the Being of God and Providence; but they can make no other Conclusion from it, but that it is possible they may be, not that they certainly are false. He may so far impose upon himself, in favour of his Lusts, as to arrive at some degree of Hope that he may be safe in indulging of them; but he can bring no such clear and convincing Proofs of his Cause against Religion, as can make him perfectly secure that there is no Punishment for his Prophaneness and Impiety. And yet he
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must have so much fear as he wants of such Security. And whatever he may say or seem to think, he cannot *consider*, but he must be *afraid*.

This the Atheists very well know, and therefore do all they can to amuse themselves with the Affairs and Pleasures of the World, and to divert their Minds from any serious deliberate Contemplation of Religious Matters. They seldom care to be alone, or in the Dark, or *to commune with their own Hearts*. And therefore when Sickness confines them, and Pain keeps them waking, and their Reason is rescued from those Restraints which the Hurry of the World, and their stupifying Lufts had laid upon them, their Fears will return with greater Violence, and exceedingly increase the Torment of their Minds. Their Minds then can never be easy and quiet, but whilst they cease to act like Men, and are able to stifle their Reason, and to keep off their Thoughts from those things, which it is of the greatest Importance to them not to be mistaken in. If they think as Men, as Creatures of Reason and Foresight, the least Possibility of their being obnoxious to such horrible and everlasting Torments, must affright and disturb them.

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And I doubt not but the most confident Infidel that can be found amongst us, would be heartily glad of some more strong and evincing Proofs, than any he yet knows, of his being in no danger of any Misery beyond this Life.

Thirdly, Future Punishments are not such frightful things to any but those, who are resolved upon no Account whatsoever, to part with their Lusts and Vices. A virtuous and honest Man, who lives under a just and gracious Prince, is not frightened with the thoughts of his Power, or the severest Penalties his Laws threaten Malefactors with. These can be dreadful to none but those, who are resolved to be Knaves, or Villains, or Traitors. The Christian believeth, that he and all the World are under the Government of a most just and powerful Being, but withal infinitely good and merciful, who *is good to all, and whose tender Mercies are over all his Works.* Who hath given Laws to Men which are *holy, just, and good*, and most effectually conducing to the Happiness of publick Societies, and of every particular Person; who, for the more effectual enforcing our Obedience, hath threatned the Transgressors of them with intolerable
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and eternal Punishment, but inflicts it only on the obstinate and unreclaimable: Who is not *willing that any should perish*; who is *easy to be intreated, and ready to forgive*; who overlooks the Ignorances and Infirmities of those who sincerely endeavour to do his Will, and pardons the most wilful Offenders upon their Repentance and Amendment, and at length rewards with Everlasting Life and Happiness all that faithfully serve and turn to him. Certainly no Man can reasonably be dismayed or terrified at the Apprehension of such a Being as this; none but those, who are so Irrational as to think, that a short Life of Sin, with all the Mischiefs which attend it, is greatly to be preferred before an Eternal Life of unconceivable Glory and Happiness. The Sinner cannot be sure on better Grounds, that there is no God, no Future State of Misery for him in another World, than the Religious Man is, that if there be, he hath nothing to fear from the Wrath of God, and shall never come into it. And if we suppose them but equally exempt from Fear, the Religious Man must needs have unspeakably the Advantage, upon the account of his Glorious Hopes, which the other can have no pre-
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tence to. God is the Object of the Religious Man's Desire and Love ; and, if he had any doubt of his Being, there is nothing he would more earnestly wish, than a full Assurance of it. He would not for the *World be without a God* in it, so powerful, and wise, and just, and good a Governor of it, and so Liberal a *Rewarder of all that diligently seek and serve him.* And though he believes he hath prepared severe and everlasting Punishments, yet knowing so easy and certain a way to escape them, and withal to secure to himself eternal and unconceivable Happiness, his Thoughts of a Future State are so far from giving him any tormenting Fears, that they are the greatest Support and Comfort of his Life.

The Infidel therefore vainly boasts of the Ease and Quiet he hath procured to himself, by freeing his Mind from all the Fears of Religion, the Belief and Practice whereof is the best and surest Remedy against all Disturbance from those Fears he pretends to have overcome.

I am sensible what Objections he will be ready to make against this. But nothing more needs to be said in answer to them than this ; That pure and uncorrupted Christianity is not to be accu-

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fed as the Cause of those Fears, which are the Effects of Error or Superstition, or a melancholy Temper and Constitution, or the want of a due Regard to the Obligations of it. It is enough for our Purpose, if a firm Belief and sincere Practice of the Religion we profess, be a more sure and reasonable Ground of Quiet from all tormenting Fears of God, and future Punishments, and of a more easy and comfortable State of Mind, than Infidelity and a wicked Life can be. And this I conceive must be sufficiently manifest to the Reason of all, who impartially consider the Principles of true Religion, and to the Experience of those who believe and live as becomes the Gospel. It is at best but a meer dull Security the Atheist can make any Pretences to : But that of the Religious Man is sprightly and reviving, attended with lively and vigorous Hopes of a Glorious Immortality.

From all that hath been said, it plainly appears, that Religion is the best Remedy against all Disquieting Fears, and that those Words of our Saviour were most highly Rational, *Let not your Heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid ; ye believe in God, believe also in me.*

Secondly,

Secondly, Religion is the most effectual Means of preserving the Mind in Peace and Quiet, from those Disturbances, which Anger, Envy, and Malice, are wont to give it. The Mind of a Froward Man can hardly ever be at Ease; it's like a troubled Sea when it cannot rest. Every little Provocation makes the Waves to rise, and hurls it into Disorder. The Envious Man hath no quiet Enjoyment of what is his *own*, because something is *another* Man's; and pines and frets within himself, not meerly because *he* wants, but because *another* doth not. Malice preys first upon the Breast which entertains it, and torments it with Fear and Impatience, and a restless Thirst after Revenge; whilst it is laying and pursuing its mischievous Designs.

But that Love and Charity which the Christian learns from the Precepts and Example of his Master, easeth the Soul of these vexatious and painful Vices. *Charity is not easily provoked, Charity envieth not; Charity thinks and works no Evil to his Neighbour.* And this fervent Love and Charity, which so effectually calms our boisterous Passions, and maintains the Peace and Quiet of our Minds against the most violent Assaults of Injury and Provocation, is

not so difficult a thing for a Christian to attain and practise. His Religion not only most strictly requires it of him, but also lays before him the most powerful Considerations to excite it in him, and to raise it to the highest Perfection. In respect of its Precepts it is a Law of Love, and in respect of its Principles it is a Doctrine of Love. The chief Matter it instructs us in, is, how *God loved the World*; how *excellent his Loving-Kindness is towards us*; how *ready he is to forgive*, and how forward to be reconciled to the greatest Offenders; with how great a Price he hath redeemed us all; and how he *gave his only begotten Son that we might not Perish, but have everlasting Life*. Now what can more effectually engage us to Love one another, than the Belief and Consideration of these Things? What Ingratitude must there be in our Disobedience to a Command, which a God of so much Love hath laid the greatest Strefs upon? How can we have a mean Esteem for that Virtue, which the God we Adore and Worship is so Glorious in, whose Name and Nature is Love? What can be more shameful than for us to give entertainment to Anger, and Envy, and Malice against our Brethren, who are so kindly and
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mercifully dealt with by that Almighty Creator, whom we have so often and so highly Offended? If we believe that *God hath so loved us*, nothing can appear more reasonable to us, than that *we also should love one another*. O! how easy and quiet in our Minds would this Divine Grace and Virtue make us? How effectually would it suppress the troublesome Com-motions of our angry Passions, and *still the Waves thereof when they arise*? How Calm and Serene would all within us be, whilst this best of Graces ruled in our Hearts, and kept us in the most easy and delightful Temper of shewing Kindness, and doing Good? Such Tranquillity of Mind is the natural and necessary Effect of that universal and fervent Love, which no true Christian can be without; which his Religion indispensably requires; and his Faith is the most prevailing Means of exciting and maintaining in him, far beyond all the Rules and Principles of Philosophy. But as for Atheists, they have no Principles of Love and Charity; they profess themselves under no Obligation either to God or Nature, to entertain them in their Hearts. Their State of Nature is a State of War, wherein every Man's Heart and Hand is against every

Man. And if at length they become weary of striving and fighting for Power and Possessions, and enter into Society, and engage themselves to one another, to observe certain Laws and Rules for their greater Quiet and Security, every one doth it only for his own particular Advantage.

If this be a true Character of Mankind, if they are naturally so fierce, so selfish, so utterly void of all Goodness, as these Atheists describe them, what Foundation can there be for Love and Good Will? How can they Love those of whom they have so ill an Opinion? How can they but Hate those of whom they give so odious a Character? This however I conceive is plain and manifest, that they can give no manner of Reason why they should be Loving and Meek and Charitable, unless they will own what I am now proving, that the Quiet of the Mind is promoted by their being so. For they believe that Love and Hatred, Meekness and Malice, have nothing in their own Nature to oblige us to prefer the one before the other; that there is nothing of Duty or Sin in either of them: But as fear of Mischiefe from others, is that they chiefly Govern themselves by; so Hatred
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and Malice are likely to be thought of the greatest Use to them. It is indeed to wrong an Atheist, to believe that he doth not Dissemble, when he pretends any real and hearty Love to another Man; for it is to believe he entertains an Affection which he hath no Foundation for, no Obligation to, and which is more likely to hinder than farther his main Design, which is to secure himself, and advance his own particular Interest. But it may be for his Interest, to pretend and dissemble Love to them he hopes to make Advantage of. He cannot Act agreeably to his own Principles in doing Good to another, when he hath no prospect of Advantage to himself, or may receive any Prejudice by it, which hearty Love and Charity would sometimes urge him to. But perhaps he may say, that he knows by Experience that he can Love, and Forgive, and be Kind and Charitable, without any prospect of Advantage to himself, as well as others. But if this be true, it can only prove, that the Principles of Human Nature may be too strong for his Principles of Atheism; and that there is something within him which inclines him to, recommends and approves these Things as fit and reasonable, which

as an Atheist he can by no means allow them to be. This however is very plain and evident, that every good Christian hath attained these Virtues, in such a measure, as gives a great deal of Ease and Quiet to his Mind; and that nothing doth more effectually tend to the producing of them, than that *Religion* he professeth, which is *pure and peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, and full of Mercy.*

Thirdly, Religion is the best means of preserving the Mind in Peace and Quiet from any Disturbances of Discontent and Impatience under the Evils and Sufferings of this Life. It not only Commands us, and makes it our indispensable Duty to be contented in every Condition, and *patient in all our Tribulations,* but it also furnisheth us with such Motives and Considerations, as make it a far more easy and reasonable Service to a Man of Religion, than it can be to any other. The *Atheist* believes, that all his Wants and Troubles are the Effects of undesigning Chance or Fate. The *Religious Man* believes that nothing betals him, but by the wise Appointment of a tender and loving Father.

The *Atheist* hath no hope of Relief from any thing, unless it should happen
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that natural Causes should fall into such an Order, as may at length produce some advantageous Change in his Condition. But the *Christian* believes that there is an infinitely wise and powerful Being, who is always *watching over him for Good*, who hath the absolute Management of all those Causes, and makes them accomplish the *Counsel of his own Will*, which he believes is always good to Religious and Good Men.

The *Atheist* hath only this to say for the quieting his Mind; If the continuance of my Misery be in the Course of Fate, I know nothing can remove it, it cannot be helped, and therefore I will bear it as well as I can; that is, as well as Fate will let me; for, by his Principles, the Temper of his Mind is as fatal and necessary as his outward Afflictions. But the *Christian* believes that there is a Being, who can hear, and help him, and deliver him out of all his Troubles; who will not suffer them to continue any longer than *it is good for him to be afflicted* with them; and in the mean time, will give him *Grace sufficient* for him, *that he may be able to bear them*. Perhaps the *Atheist* may think to Comfort himself by considering that his Misery is not endless,

less, that Death will certainly put an end to it : But this can Administer but poor Comfort to *him*, who believes also that it will put an end to his Being, and his capacity of Enjoying any thing any more for ever. But the good *Christian's* Mind is supported and comforted with a firm Belief, that the *Afflictions* of his *present* Life are *but for a Moment* of his Life and Being ; and are designed by one, who is able to accomplish all his kind Intentions, to *work for him a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory*, which he hopes by Death to be translated to. If an *Atheist* fall into Want and Trouble, or is afflicted with Pain and Sickneis, *he is of all Men most miserable*, because he hath *hope in this Life only*, and believeth there is no Good, no Happiness, but what is to be found in it. But the good Christian never thought of taking up his Rest here, his Heart is *crucified to the World*, to all the Pleasures and Enjoyments of it ; his Affections are chiefly fix'd upon God and Heaven, upon the Happiness of a future State, which he believes his Afflictions are a proper Means to prepare him for ; and therefore he *faints not, though his outward Man perish, while he looks not at the Things which*
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are seen, and are but temporal; but at the Things which are not seen, and are eternal. The utmost which an *Atheist* can arrive at, by any Considerations agreeable to his Principles, is but a Negative Content, a stupid sort of Indolence. But the Considerations of Religion are proper and sufficient to give the Soul a positive Content, Complacence and Satisfaction in every Condition, under any of the outward Troubles and Afflictions of this Life. The Wisdom, and Goodness, and Providence of a Divine Being, Governor of the World, these were the Topicks from whence the Heathen Moralists deduced all their Arguments, which had Strength and Substance in them, for Patience and Tranquillity of Mind in Adversity, Want or Sufferings. But Christianity improves and adds to all the Arguments of Natural Religion; and all who heartily embrace it have a Principle in them, of far greater Efficacy to support and revive their Spirits in the Day of Calamity, than any meer *Philosopher* ever had.

It discovers such amazing Instances of the Love and Goodness of God, as can leave us no room to imagine that he can design any thing but Good, to those who
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faithfully serve him, by any of his Dispensations ; such as lay the strongest Obligations upon us willingly and chearfully to bear whatever we may suffer by his Appointment, or for his Sake. It doth not leave us to Comfort our selves meerly by such Deductions, as our own Reason can make from the Contemplation of the Perfections of the Divine Nature, but lays before us plain and express Declarations of the gracious Intentions of God, in every afflicting Act of his Providence, with respect to Religious and Good Men ; and most great and precious Promises of Improvement by them, and *a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory* for the Reward of their Patience under them.

The Arguments our Religion furnishes us with, not only carry the greatest force of Reason with them, but are fitted for the Use of the meanest Capacity ; and have given the World a multitude of Examples of all sorts and conditions of Men, enduring the sharpest Afflictions with such Courage and Chearfulness, as hath been to the Wonder and Conviction of their unbelieving Enemies. In this uncertain World then, where all Afflictions are so *common to Men*, and we are *compassed*

passed about with so many Infirmities, and liable to so many Pains and Diseases, in so many Things, and by so many Means to suffer Loss and Trouble ; how unreasonable would it be to be ashamed of that Faith, or to part with it upon easy Terms, which is incomparably the best Support under them ?

Secondly, Religion doth very much conduce to the Delight and Pleasure of the Mind. There is great Joy, as well as Peace, in believing and obeying the Gospel, more and better than any Irreligious Man can pretend to. For he can have no inward Joy, but what depends upon sensible, uncertain and temporary Objects and Enjoyments. Now the Religious Man hath as much of this sort of Pleasure as he thinks is safe and reasonable ; and hath other Pleasures of the Mind, which are peculiar to him, the Foundation whereof is laid in his Faith, which furnisheth him with spiritual and everlasting Objects for Matter to Rejoice in, and obligeth him to, and qualifies him for the most delightful Exercises of the inward Man, such as Men of no Religion can have no Sense or Experience of.

First,

Religion no Matter of Shame.

First, What incomparable Pleasure doth he feel in the Contemplation of the Glorious and Delightful Objects of his Faith, the Beauties and Excellencies of the Divine Nature, the Power and Wisdom and Goodness of God, by whom he believeth all things were made, and are entirely governed? With what Pleasure doth he observe the Bounty and Goodness of this great Being, in producing so goodly a Frame, so plentiful a Store, so wonderful a Variety of things, with so particular a Respect to the Service and Benefit; the Delight and Pleasure of Mankind? And how can he chuse but *be glad and rejoice*, when he considers that the same *Lord God Omnipotent* upholds and *reigns* over all; That *his Goodness is over all his Works*, and engageth his Power, in a more especial manner, to manifest its self on the behalf of the Children of Men, to preserve and to provide for us; That he is able to supply all our Wants, to rescue us out of the greatest Dangers, to deliver us from our strongest Enemies, and to *do for us abundantly above what we can ask or think*; That he loves us with the Tenderness of a Father, would have us as happy as we can be, and hath put it out of the Power of all but our selves,

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to hinder our being so? Is it not extremely pleasant, to consider that unsearchable Riches of Love, which the Christian believes this Almighty Creator and Governor of the World hath manifested towards us, in the amazing Method of our Redemption by *Christ Jesus*, in sending down from Heaven his only begotten Son to take our Human Nature, that we might be made Partakers of his Divine Nature; to be humbled that we might be exalted; to be condemned that we might be justified; and to die that we might live for ever? How delightful must it be, with the Eye of Faith to behold this our Redeemer triumphing over Death and the Grave, over his and all our Enemies, *sitting at the Right Hand of God*, making continual Intercession for us, governing all things for the Good of his Church, and liberally dispensing his Grace and Blessing to the Members of it? *Though now we see him not*, yet believing and considering him thus exalted and thus employed, how can we forbear *rejoicing with joy unspeakable, and full of glory?*

With what Pleasure may a Believing Soul consider its self, its Divine Original, its Spiritual and Immortal Nature, its great and excellent Capacities, of which

which the Atheist confesseth he hath no Notion, no Persuasion ? He believes himself nothing but Matter, jumbled together he knows not how ; that what we call the Soul hath no better Employment, than to taste the Pleasures of Sense, to make Provision for the Flesh, and the Lusts of it ; to contrive how to *heap up Riches*, which he *knows not who shall gather* ; to advance himself to *Glory*, which, *as the Flower of Grass*, soon fadeth and withereth ; and to amuse himself with Imaginations of such future Enjoyments only, as he believes in a very little while must perish for ever with him. How low and taint a Pleasure must that be, which such Thoughts of himself can give him, in Comparison of that which a Religious Man feels, when he considers himself endued with an Immortal Soul, inspired into him by the Father of Spirits, with Signal Characters of his own Divine Essence impress'd upon it, and capable of attaining a far more Glorious Resemblance of him ; of gaining the Friendship of infinite Power and Wisdom and Goodness ; of *laying up Treasures in Heaven* ; of entering into the Everlasting Kingdom of the most high and lofty One, and of seeing and enjoying him for ever, who is
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an Immense and All-comprehending Good, an inexhaustible Fountain of Joy and Happiness ?

Secondly, What great Pleasure doth a good Christian feel, in reflecting upon his Life and Actions, from the Testimony of a good Conscience, which a Man of no Religion can have no share in. He believeth himself under no Obligations of Conscience, to do, or to forbear any thing. He owns nothing to be Duty or Sin, to be commanded or forbidden by any Superior Being, to whom he must give an Account, or from whom he may receive Reward or Punishment. The utmost therefore that he can pretend to, is the stupid Quiet of a seared Conscience ; which, acknowledging no Divine or Moral Law, hath no Sense of Guilt or Transgression : Neither is this easy for him to attain, or to preserve at all times. But then he cannot possibly partake of those unspeakable Joys which are produced by the Testimony of a Good Conscience : He can have no such Pleasure, in reflecting upon his past Life and Actions, as the *Religious Man* hath ; because no Actions can appear to *him* so good, so honourable, so beneficial, so worthy to be remembered with Joy and Satisfaction.

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He thinks all Actions alike, as to any Intrinsic Goodness or Obligation of Conscience, and therefore can have no Pleasure in reflecting upon what he hath done, as more becoming and behoving him to do, as better in its self, or more his Duty, than any thing else would have been. In looking back upon his Life past, and reviewing the Actions of it, he can find nothing to delight himself with the Remembrance of, which hath yielded him any better Fruit than a little sensual Pleasure, or perishing Advantage, or can ever be of any greater use to him. And how successful soever his Mind tells him he hath been, in the pursuit of these things, he can have no Satisfaction or Pleasure from the Consideration of the Wisdom of his Choice or Management, because he believes he could not have chosen or done otherwise; not because it was so determined by any Superior Intelligent Being, who had a favourable Regard for him, but merely because such a Motion was given to the Matter he is composed of, he cannot tell either when or how, which made it necessary he should so act, and so succeed.

But how transporting are those Joys, which are produced in the Mind of a
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good *Christian*, of one who believes and obeys the Gospel, by the *Testimony of his Conscience*, that in *Simplicity and Godly Sincerity*, not with *Fleshly Wisdom*, but by the *Grace of God*, he hath had his *Conversation in the World*. When his own *Conscience* tells him, that he hath done the things which are most excellent, attained the most noble *Accomplishments*, and secured a *Title to the most valuable Blessings*: That he hath not wasted his time in brutish *Pleasures*, and mean *Pursuits*, in *Employments unworthy of the Dignity of his Nature*, the *Excellence of his Faculties*, or the *Obligations of his Duty*: That he hath been chiefly exercised in *Business Great and Honourable*, of the highest and everlasting *Importance*; in *serving and glorifying his Maker*; in making acceptable *Returns of Duty and Gratitude* to his greatest *Friend and Benefactor*; in regaining to his *Soul that Image of God it had lost*; in practising those *Divine Virtues of Righteousness, Mercy, and Goodness*, which are the supreme *Glory of the most excellent and happy Being*; and in doing all those things which are pleasing in his sight, whose *Loving-kindness is better than Life*, who is the *Giver of every good and perfect Gift*;

who hath the Comforts of this Life, and inestimable Treasures, Immortal Honour, endless and unexpressible Joys in another, entirely at his Disposal? What unspeakable Joy must a believing holy Soul be filled with, whilst his Conscience is testifying these things, and giving him a lively and actual Sense of all the becoming, improving, and most beneficial things he hath done, and the most honourable and happy State he hath brought himself into, *through Christ who strengthened him?*

Thirdly, How great also is the *Rejoicing* of a good *Christian's Hope*? When he considers and applies to himself all the *great and precious Promises* of the Gospel. The *Atheist* can have little Pleasure in looking forward, from the hope of any thing which is to come: For, how great a Value soever he may set upon any thing he thinks himself capable of, he knows he can enjoy it but a little while. And his hope of it can have no other Foundation, but a Belief that if it fall in the way of blind and necessary Causes to procure it for him, then he shall, but, that otherwise it is impossible that he should obtain it. But the *Hopes* of a *Christian* are built upon a
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firm Belief, that the Good Things he hopes for are promised to him by a Being, who *can do whatever he pleases*, and cannot but do whatever he hath promised. And the Objects of his Hopes are as large as the *Promises* he believes he hath made, *both of the Life which now is, and of that which is to come*; of every thing which is best, and most expedient for him in this World, and the utmost Happiness he is capable of for ever in Heaven.

The Hopes of a *Christian* then, which have so greatly the Advantage, in respect of the Grounds and Objects of them, must needs be far more pleasing and delightful, than any which the Irreligious Man can pretend to rejoice in. When the Christian's Faith lifts up his Soul to Heaven, and gives him a Prospect of all the Glorious Things which *are spoken of that City of God*; those unfading Crowns, those inestimable Treasures, those Divine, never ending, never ceasing Joys which are there prepared; and from a careful Reflection upon his Heart and Ways, he can say to himself, This is my Portion, This is my Inheritance, Here shall I dwell for ever, Here shall I rest from all my Labours, and be unconceivably hap-

py with all those Noble Beings which are about the Throne of God, beholding his Glory, and partaking of it to all Eternity. When a believing holy Soul, with a lively Faith and Hope, is thus viewing and appropriating all this Happiness, what can equal or interrupt its Joy? If now we seriously and impartially consider what hath been said, we cannot certainly but think it reasonable to conclude, that, as to the Pleasures of the Mind, the *Christian* hath abundantly the advantage of the *Atheist*; who hath no God, no such lovely, and excellent, and helpful Being to delight himself in the Contemplation of; no such pleasing Thoughts of his own Nature and Capacity, as the *Christian* hath; no Rule of Conscience to approve himself by; no hope of any thing beyond this present Life to rejoice in.

But here the *Atheist* will be apt to object and say, That he hath however other Pleasures, which the Religious Man denies himself; Pleasures which proceed from a free and full Indulgence of his Bodily Senses and Appetites; from gratifying all his Desires, and tasting all the Delights this World can afford, without
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any Scruple or Remorse. In Answer to this, I shall shew,

First, That the Atheist hath not so much the Advantage of the Religious Man, as he is apt to Boast of, even with respect to the Pleasures of the Body.
And

Secondly, That those Pleasures of the Mind, which are peculiar to Religious Souls, are greatly to be preferred before them.

First, That the Atheist hath not so much the Advantage of the Religious Man, as he is apt to Boast of, with respect to the Pleasures of the Body. For the Religious Man denies himself none of these Pleasures, but such as he is well assured do naturally tend to impair his Health, to weaken his Understanding, to stupify his Faculties, to stain his Reputation, to waste his Estate, to steal away his Time from more necessary, important and delightful Employments, and to lay a Foundation for Shame and Remorse, when at length he should come to see and feel the hurtful Effects of them. He dares therefore take as much Pleasure, not only as his Faith, but as his Reason, Experience

rience and Observation tell him is Expedient for him, and he is sure will do him no real Harm or Prejudice. He is so far therefore from complaining of the unreasonable Restraints of Religion, that he is heartily glad, that, by the Laws of a most wise and gracious Being, he knows what Bounds to set to those Desires and Appetites which, by too much Indulgence, have led so many Men into Mischief and Folly, and brought them *down with Disgrace and Sorrow to the Grave*. If there should be a little more Pleasure in those kinds and degrees of bodily Gratifications, which are not consistent with what we call Temperance and Virtue; the Religious Man can have no Reason to Envy those who partake of it, when he considers how dearly it is purchased, and how fatal and mischievous the Consequences of it are. And tho' these Consequences may not always be visible and apparent, yet they so very often are so, that certainly no Man who is *Wise for himself*, even for this present Life, how much Liberty soever he thought he had, would make use of it to give himself up to Lewdness and Intemperance.

Secondly, That those Pleasures which are peculiar to Religious Souls, such as I
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have already mentioned, are much to be preferred to those Gratifications of Sense and Appetite, which the Irreligious Man sets so great a Value upon. The Pleasures of Sense are common to us, and the Beasts which serve us; but the other are the greatest Pleasures which those Faculties can give us, by which we excel, and are distinguish'd from the Beasts of the Earth. The *Atheist* surely will allow, whatever his Opinion is of the Nature of Human Souls, that they have a Power of Contemplating, of Reflecting and Hoping, which the brute Creatures have not; that these are nobler Faculties than any they have. And if there be proper Objects for all these Powers of the Soul, as delightful as can be desired or imagin'd, as I have already shewed there are to the Religious Man; then certainly it must be acknowledg'd, that the Pleasures he receives from the Exercise of these Faculties upon these Objects, must be the most excellent Pleasures of Men. The Friends indeed of *Epicurus* think it for his Honour to tell us, that he preferred the Pleasures of the Mind to those of Sense; but it is very manifest, that by the Pleasures of the Mind, he understood only the Remembrance of past, and the Hope of future

ture Pleasures of Sense ; and so far as he thinks them worthy of him, the *Religious Man* may share in these Pleasures ; but the *Atheist* can in no Degree partake with him in those far more joyful Thoughts and Hopes, which have God and Providence, and eternal Life and Happiness for their Object. These are Pleasures which are always near us. The *eternal Things which are not seen*, lie always open to the Views of Faith. The *Temporal Things* of this World are oftentimes at a distance from us, when they should Minister to our Comfort and Delight ; and our Senses and Appetites cannot always reach them, or use them to their Pleasure and Gratification. But our Faith can always reach the most distant and invisible Objects of it : It can in a Moment fly to Heaven, and lay all its Glories before us. The Power and Malice of Men may deprive us of the Matter of our Carnal and Worldly Pleasures, and restrain us from exercising those Senses, and gratifying those Appetites of the Body, whereby these Pleasures are produced. They may spoil us of our Wealth, divest us of our Honours, stop our Ears, blind our Eyes, withhold those Things which should satisfy our Hunger and Thirst,

Thirst, and separate our Bodies from all those Earthly Objects which are pleasing and grateful to them. But this is the noble Prerogative of Faith, it can always see and enjoy its Object, though at the greatest distance of Time and Place; no Bounds can tie it down, no Prison confine it; no Earthly Power can hinder its Intercourse with God and Heaven. It can break through all Opposition the World can make, and through the darkest Clouds of External Evils; can see *the Heavens open, and Jesus standing at the Right Hand of God*, preparing an Everlasting Crown of Bliss and Glory for his faithful Servants, and Charm the Soul with that ravishing Prospect. From what hath been said, we have abundant Reason to conclude, that the best and greatest Pleasures the Soul of Man is capable of, are such as are derived from the Principles of Religion; and that it is impossible an *Atheist* should Boast of any, which are worthy to be compared with them; that he should have any so great, so excellent, so reasonable, so constant a Cause of Rejoicing as the true *Christian* hath. The good *Christian* cannot then have any Reason to *be ashamed* of his Faith and Practice, as if they were destructive of the
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Comforts and Pleasures of this present Life, which they naturally tend to procure for us in the utmost Degree we are capable of them. Thus have I endeavoured to Demonstrate, That Religion, and more especially the Christian Religion, believing and obeying the Gospel, most highly conduce to the present Benefit of particular Persons, to every real Interest of this Life, whether it respect their Bodies or Estates, or their Minds; that nothing can make a Man so Happy in this World, as the Christian Faith and Practice. I have purposely avoided those Arguments, which suppose the Being of a God, and the Truth of our Religion; and have reasoned only from the natural Tendency of believing and obeying the Gospel to the Happiness of this present Life. It is not the Truth of our Religion, but the hearty Belief of it, upon which the Strength of those Proofs I have given depend; and they are of equal Force for demonstrating the Efficacy of it, for promoting our Interest, and bettering our Condition here; though the Christian should happen to be mistaken, and to believe otherwise than Matters in Truth are. I shall make an Inference or two from what hath been said. From hence we may learn *First,*

First, How unreasonable and ridiculous the Boasts of *Atheists* and *Infidels* are, who would be thought to deserve mightily of Mankind by their Attempts to destroy their Faith in the Principles of Religion, and to free their Consciences from all regard to the Laws of it. For whether our Religion be true or false, the Belief of it, and such a way of Living as it requires of us, are most for every Man's Advantage; we are the better for them here, and we cannot be the worse for them hereafter. The *Atheist* owns himself under no Obligation of Conscience to make Profelytes; and if he should make any, he makes them but the more Miserable. What Reason then can he have to Boast, either of the Zeal, or the Success of his Endeavours? Can it be any Merit, or Matter of Triumph, to perswade Men, that there is no such powerful, wise and good Being to take Care of them, as the *Religious Man* believes there is; that they have nothing in them but dull senseless Matter, and are capable of doing no good or worthy Thing; that they are at liberty from any Restraints of Conscience, to Expose themselves to all the hurtful Effects of Lewdness and Intemperance;

to endure all the Pain and Vexation of extravagant Desires and Passions ; to torment themselves, with Anger, Hatred, Envy, Malice, Discontent and Impatience as much as they please ; to Cheat and Rob, and to do what Mischief they will to one another ; that there is no such thing as the Favour of God, the Testimony of a good Conscience, or a well-grounded Hope of future Happiness to Rejoice in ? To be a Convert to Atheism is to be thus perswaded ; and this is certainly very much to our Disadvantage, on which side soever the Truth lies ; and therefore we cannot be obliged to an *Atheist* for his Attempts, to jear or dispute us out of our Faith, tho' he were never so certain we were mistaken in it.

Secondly, From hence we may learn, how much Men are obliged to the Ministers of Religion ; the Teachers and Propagators of that Religion, which is so much for their Advantage to Believe and Practice. When we are endeavouring to confirm you in your Christian Faith, and to perswade you to Live according to the Precepts of it ; we are performing the highest Office of Friendship you are capable of being obliged by ; we are promoting all your valuable Interests at oncè,
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by the most effectual Means which can be made use of. We believe you have an everlasting Interest which nothing but Religion can secure, and to this we have a principal Regard in all our Labours. But if there should be no such Thing, as we are very well assured there is, I hope it hath in some good measure been proved, that nothing can conduce more to your present Happiness, with respect to your Bodies, Estates and Minds than to believe, and to live *as becomes the Gospel* we Preach. Whether therefore Religion be true or false, it is an Instrument of so much Good to Men, that they cannot without great Ingratitude slight and despise *them*, who employ their Time, and Zeal, and Study, in perswading to the Belief and Practice of it. I should not have mentioned this, but that we live in an Age, wherein Men of loose Lives so openly employ their Wit and Malice in pouring Contempt upon Us and our Profession. They know that whilst we are respected, they must be despised; and therefore they *would Exclude us* from your Esteem, *that you might affect them*, that you might Countenance them in their shameful Impieties, and be as miserable as Vice and Infidelity can make you.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, From hence we may learn, that if Men did but truly and wisely Love themselves, they would guard their Minds against the Assaults of *Atheists* and *Infidels*, as Men that would rob them of the most valuable Thing they are possess'd of, which so directly tends even to their present Happiness, and upon all Accounts is so highly Beneficial to them. Their Religion they would *hold fast*, and would *not let it go*, unless it were forced from them by the most strong and invincible Arguments. They would despise the Attempts of scoffing Wits, and little Cavillers; and hearken to nothing but sober and serious Reasoning, and be convinced by nothing but the plainest and fullest Proof of the Truth of Atheism and Irreligion. They would hear us gladly when we are pleading the Cause of Religion; and Seriously, Attentively and Impartially weigh and consider the Reasons we urge in its Defence, and entertain no secret Wishes that it were not true; and then I am confident they would discern nothing but Vanity and Weakness in the most subtil Disputations of its Enemies against it.

What I have said on this Fifth General Head of my Discourse, I conceive, may
be

be as serviceable to the Interest of Religion, as the producing other Reasons and Arguments for it: For I cannot but think, that the Atheism and Infidelity of our Times, are chiefly to be imputed to the unjust Prejudices Men have entertained against Religion, as hurtful to some present Interest they have a great value for. And if these Prejudices can be removed, then, and not till then, we may hope they will more duly consider the Arguments brought for the Confirmation of its Truth, and of that which, for this purpose, I come now to shew,

Sixthly; That the true Christian hath no Reason to *be ashamed* of any such Credulity, as the *Atheists* and *Infidels* are wont to reproach him for. These mighty Men of Wit and Reason, in their own Conceit, ridicule and scoff at those who are Religious, as a Company of credulous Fools, who suffer themselves to be imposed upon by fallacious and insufficient Arguments, and believe things upon such weak Evidence as no Wise Man would give any Credit to. Now to wipe off these Reproaches, and to shew how little reason the Religious Man hath to be moved by them, I shall endeavour to make it appear, that they are most high-

ly absurd and unjust, and only deserved by those who vent them; by shewing,

First, That by the Principles of *Atheism*, there can be no such Matter of Re-
proach as a Foolish Credulity.

Secondly, That by the same Principles, there can be no Error or Misbelief for us to be ashamed of.

Thirdly, That if a Man can bring himself to believe the Principles of Religion upon insufficient Grounds, he can have no reason to be ashamed of such Credulity, whereby he so wisely consults his own Interest. But,

Fourthly, That if an Infidel believe the Principles of Religion false, upon insufficient Grounds, his Credulity is foolish and shameful. And,

Fifthly, That the *Atheists* and *Infidels* amongst us, are more Credulous than the *Religious Men, and Christians*; that they believe things on weaker Grounds, and that the Evidence is much the stronger on the side of Religion.

First, That by the Principles of *Atheism*, there can be no such thing as a foolish or shameful Credulity, or believing on weak and insufficient Grounds,
or

or by reason of any Biass or Prejudice in his Mind, which a Man hath any Power in himself to alter or controul: For Believing is nothing in the Opinion of an Atheist, but a certain Disposition and Motion of Matter, moved by other Matter, and so on to the beginning or no beginning of Motion; and all these Motions are fatal and necessary, carried on by Natural Causes with irresistible force, there being no free Agent to interpose, to direct, or stop, or to divert their Course. So that whatever moves the Matter of the Soul, for the *Atheist* will allow it to be nothing else but Matter, and gives it the Figure and Motion of believing any thing, doth it with so much strength as cannot be resisted. How then can a Man be charged with believing any thing too easily, who believes fatally, mechanically and irresistibly? And if the *Atheist* would argue consistently with his own Principles, he ought to allege nothing but the like Necessity for his Infidelity, and all the Wit and Reason he pretends to in pleading the Cause of it. For the finest Thoughts, the most curious Invention, and the strongest Argumentation, can be nothing else in the Opinion of an Atheist, but a Compositi-

on of Figure and Motion in the Matter he is made of ; in which he is altogether Passive, and only acted upon by some other Matter forced into him, or beating upon him. And therefore they are no otherwise to be ascribed to *him*, than the exact Motions, and the most exquisite Workmanship of a Clock are to the Clock it self. And if he write a Book for the Cause of Irreligion, he can have no other sort of Right to be called its Author, than the Pen hath with which it is written. A Man can hardly tell where to stop, when he is following an *Atheist* through all the prodigious Absurdities his avowed Principles lead him into. Surely then no Religious Man can think it reasonable to *be ashamed* of those Reproaches, which, in the Opinion of their Author, are forced from him in the same manner as, and can signifie no more than, the squeeking of a Trumpet.

Secondly, That by the Principles of Atheism, there can be no such thing as Error or Mischief ; and therefore it must be highly unjust and absurd in Atheists, to reproach any Man for being too Credulous, too easy of Belief ; when it is impossible a Man should err or mistake in Believing. They tell us that Man is no-
 thing

thing but Body modified into Flesh, Blood, Brains, &c. and so and so Organized, that there is nothing in him self active, or capable of beginning any Motion: That Cogitation or Judgment therefore, are nothing else but Passion; or, as *Hobbs* calls it, a *Tumult raised at second or third hand*, by the Pressure or Influx of something without the Person who thinks and judges. From hence it must necessarily follow, that there can be no such thing as false thinking, or false judging; for every Passion is true Passion, every Tumult raised truly raised, and every thing truly suffers whatever it doth suffer.

This Consequence is so very obvious and natural, that some Atheistick Philosophers have seen and acknowledged it, and expressly declared that every Opinion is true, because it is impossible for any Man to think otherwise than he suffers. And tho' different Passions and Tumults may be derived from the Motion and Pressure of the same External Object, such as may bear the Names of contrary Opinions; yet these Opinions must be equally true in those Persons who entertain them. If the Object excite in one Man the Passion or Phantasm of a bitter Taste, and in another of a sweet, by

Means of the Disposition of the tasting Organ, or otherwise, they are both in the right, when the one thinks and judges it bitter, and the other sweet ; for they tell us that the Object of Cogitation is nothing but such Phantasms and Appearances as are derived from Sense ; and these being true Phantasms, and true Appearances, thinking them so to be, must be thinking truly.

But if these Atheists will pretend to say with *Epicurus*, that Error may proceed notwithstanding from the Operation of the Mind, from some Action of its own upon the Passion of Sense ; this is plainly to contradict themselves, and to attribute a Self-active Power to the Mind of Man ; which they dare not, and, if they are consistent with themselves, cannot allow to any Being in the World.

If then, according to these Atheistick Principles, every Man's Thoughts or Judgment of Things are true, how absurd must it be for an Atheist to reproach Men for any foolish Credulity, for believing too easily when they believe truly. But if Believing be not altogether an involuntary Act, and forced upon the Mind ; If we suppose it to be the Issue of any Application of the Soul, managed by
Choice,

Choice, or any Power in us to correct the Appearances which are raised by Sense, as it must be if it be worthy of Praise or Reproach : If the *Atheist* will pretend to own, what is so plain a Contradiction to the Principles of *Atheistick* Philosophy, I shall proceed to shew,

Thirdly, That if a Man can bring himself, and by any voluntary Act dispose his Mind, to believe the Principles of Religion upon insufficient Grounds, he can have no reason to *be ashamed* of such Credulity, whereby he so wisely consults his own Interest. He is sure he cannot be the worse for it in another World, and he is abundantly the better for it in this ; as I have largely shewed with respect to his Body, his Estate, and his Mind. And therefore, if a Man should suffer any Biass, or Prejudice in his Mind, to incline him to believe one thing rather than another, it is certainly most reasonable he should suffer himself to be thus biass'd and prejudiced on the side of Religion, on which side only his Belief, if it should prove a Mistake, can be safe, and certainly will be most for his Advantage. A Man of no Religion, can have no reason to reproach another for doing any thing, which is in his Power to do, for promoting

ting the Interest of this present Life, for this is the Sovereign Principle he guides himself by in all his Actions; and he would never Reproach himself for being too easily led into a Mistake, which had been serviceable to him in procuring any of that Pleasure and Profit he placed his Happiness in. If therefore a Man can manage himself so as to Establish his Mind, by any means, in that Faith, which will contribute more to the Happiness of his Life than any thing else can, let his Methods be what they will, he ought to be esteemed a Wise Man in the Opinion of an *Atheist*, who thinks nothing unfit to be done which conduceth to this End. I proceed to shew

Fourthly, That on the other side, if an *Infidel* believe the Principles of Religion false upon weak and insufficient Grounds, *his* Credulity is foolish and shameful. We need not be much concerned, in Matters of little or no Moment, whether we believe on the side of Truth or not; it will hardly be worth while, to spend a great deal of Time and Study, or to be very Nice and Scrupulous in weighing the Proofs on either side of the Question. But a wise Man will not suffer himself, for want of any Care or impartial Consideration,

ration, to be imposed upon with slight and weak Arguments, where a Mistake would be of the most dangerous Consequence. He will be satisfied with no Proofs, which are not perfectly clear and convincing, for the Establishing himself in the Belief of that which, if true, he is never the better but the worse for believing it here ; and if not true, he will be unspeakably and eternally Miserable for believing it hereafter. Where a Mistake is most dangerous, there Credulity is certainly most foolish and shameful. Now it is impossible a Religious Man should suffer so much Damage by his Faith, as Men of no Religion must suffer by their Infidelity, or believing the Principles of Religion false, if it should happen to be built upon weak and insufficient Grounds. The Religious Man can venture nothing but a little sensual Pleasure, or worldly Advantage, which are but for a Season : But the Irreligious Man ventures the Loss of Eternal Happiness, and the suffering Eternal Misery and Torment ; and therefore, if it can be made appear that he is too easy of Belief, in giving Credit to Irreligious Principles, his Credulity must be extremely foolish and shameful. I proceed therefore to shew

Fifthly,

Religion no Matter of Shame.

Fifthly, That the *Atheists* and *Infidels* amongst us, are more Credulous than the *Religious Men* and *Christians*; that they believe Things upon weaker Grounds; and that the Evidence is much the stronger on the side of Religion, both natural and revealed. I have Two Things therefore to be consider'd,

First, The Credulity of the *Atheists*.
And

Secondly, The Credulity of the *Infidels* amongst us.

First, I shall consider the Credulity of the *Atheists*, and endeavour to shew, That they are much more Credulous than the *Religious Man*; and believe Things upon much less Evidence of Reason than he doth. I shall shew

First, What we mean by an *Atheist*.
Secondly, What degrees of Evidence are necessary to vindicate such a one from the Shame of a foolish Credulity. And
Thirdly, The Reasonableness of our Belief, That there is a God: By which it will appear that he can have no such Evidence.

First,

First, I shall shew what we mean by an Atheist. There is nothing more common, than for *Atheists* to call something God, and to talk as if they believed there were such a Being, but of another sort than we suppose him to be. They are willing enough that something should be called by that Name, so it were something neither to be loved, feared, nor obeyed. And on the other hand, we do not call all them *Atheists*, who are not exactly of our Mind in every thing we ascribe to that Being we call God, if their Opinions are not destructive of those Obligations we conceive all Men are under, to pay a Religious and Dutiful Regard to him. By *Atheists* then I understand all and only such, who believe that there is no Eternal Intelligent Being, perfectly Wise, Just, and Good, from whom all other Beings derive their Being, and by whom all things are preserved and governed; and therefore have no regard to any such Being, and renounce all Obligation to serve and worship him, at the Hazard of being eternally miserable, if they should be mistaken in their Belief.

Secondly, I shall now consider what degrees of Evidence are necessary, to vindicate

dicate such Men from the Shame of a foolish Credulity. If these Men will pretend not to be over-credulous, they ought in a Case of so much Danger, to be very certain, from strong and unanswerable Reasons, that there can be no such Being or Obligation. Their Proofs ought to be such as they would venture their Lives upon, and all that is dear to them in this World, and act wisely in doing so. Indeed they venture a great deal more, and therefore are more obliged in Prudence to be fully assured by the most convincing Proofs, of the Truth of those Principles on which they act; otherwise they cannot but be guilty of a foolish Credulity. And this I take to be the true State of the Case before us: Not only, Whether an *Atheist* hath any thing to say for his Belief that there is no God; but whether he be able to produce such Arguments, as make it so very evident that there is none, that he hath no reason to be afraid of governing himself by that Principle, notwithstanding the dreadful Consequences of a Mistake. For this Question, Whether there be a God or not, is not a Question of mere Speculation, wherein we have no Interest concerned, on which side soever we determine. And tho if
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we should suppose the Probabilities to be equal on both sides, and that then a Man might without any Censure of Credulity believe them to be equally probable; nay, tho we should suppose the Probability were something greater on the side of *Atheism*, and that then it would be no foolish Credulity to believe them so to be; yet there would another Question arise, Whether those Probabilities were sufficient to justify him, in giving so full an Assent to the Truth of that they are alledged to prove, as to depend upon them in the Government of himself, when he runs the greatest and most apparent Hazard if he should be mistaken. So that in this Case, there is a Question, not only of mere Speculation, but also a Question of Prudence; and tho the *Atheist* should not be over-credulous in the one, yet he may be so in the other. This therefore we should always carry in our Minds, when we are considering the Arguments for and against Religion, Whether the Arguments for it are sufficient to justify our embracing it for the Government of our Lives, whereby we can run no considerable Hazard, and are likely to attain many great Advantages: And whether the Arguments against Religion are
strong

strong and conclusive enough to justify us in denying and despising God and Religion, when Eternal Ruin would be the Consequence of a wrong Persuasion. He that ventures more upon any Probabilities, than it becomes a Wise Man to venture upon them, is certainly too credulous, he gives more Credit to them, and puts more Confidence in them, than he hath Reason for. I have insisted upon this, not that we have any Reason to doubt of the far greater Strength of the Arguments for Religion and the Existence of a God, but that we may the better discern the Height of those Degrees of Folly in the Credulity of an *Atheist*, who believes there is no God, upon Arguments which have little or no Strength in them. Alas! What is it the common Herd of Atheists are able to say for themselves, for their Confidence in denying the Being of a God, in defying his Power and Vengeance, in deriding every thing which is accounted Sacred and Religious, and offering all the Affronts and Indignities they can invent, to the Divine Majesty, to their utter and eternal Undoing, if there be such a Being in the World? Tho' nothing but the most clear and plain Demonstrations can be sufficient Ground for
such

such daring Confidence, and such prodigious Heights of Irreligion it encourages them to, yet I dare challenge the greatest part of the most lewd and impious amongst them, to produce any thing of more Weight in Defence of their Principles, than some such trifling Reasons as these: That some Men, who have been esteemed by some others as Men of great Reputation for Wit or Philosophy, have been of the same Mind: That they have heard of, and perhaps seen, some notable Books written against the Assertors of the Being of a God, and the Truth of Religion: That they never met with any Arguments for them, so fully demonstrative as to force their Assent: That they have heard many pretty Jestts thrown out against them, and seen them laught at, when they have been ridiculed by those great Oracles of Reason, *Poets* and *Stage-players*. Can there then be any more credulous Fools in the World, than these *Atheists* are, who suffer themselves to be persuaded, that such Arguments as these are a sufficient Ground for such a full Assurance that there is no God, as is fit to venture their Souls, and Bodies, and Eternity upon? And indeed, if we enquire into the Arguments of those others
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who pretend to more Reason and Philosophy, I doubt not but that it will appear, that howsoever great a Shew of Learning they seem to make, they have very little more of Strength and Substance in them, and are by no means fit to come in competition with the Proofs of a Deity. I shall therefore apply myself to shew,

Thirdly, The Reasonableness of our Belief, That there is a God. I shall not pretend to present you with new Arguments upon a Subject, which hath been so fully discussed by so very many Persons of the greatest Eminence for Learning, and clear and sound Reasoning. It is a great Advantage to our Cause, that we don't want new Arguments; Those which have been always used, ever since it hath been made a Matter of Dispute, being still retained as a sufficient Proof of the Existence of a God, which we assert. Whereas on the contrary, the Schemes of Atheism are various, and oppose and contradict one another as much as they do the Existence of a God, and there is no one Way of disproving his Existence, which hath not been contuted even by Atheists themselves; which is a plain Argument, that their Principles are
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by no means such as are agreeable to the general Reason of Mankind, or even to *theirs*, who are the most hearty Friends to the Cause of *Atheism*. To prove then that the Belief of the Being of a God may justly be esteemed most reasonable, and not to be imputed to any foolish Credulity, I shall consider the Arguments taken from the general Consent, and from the Existence, Frame, and Powers of Mankind.

First, I shall consider the Argument taken from general Consent ; which I shall endeavour , *1st*. To Explain ; and *2dly*, To Vindicate from those Objections whereby the Atheists attempt to weaken and evade the Force of it.

First, I shall explain the Argument taken from general Consent, and shew wherein its Strength lies. The Belief of a Deity hath been the Profession of all Nations, as far as we can make any certain Discovery, from the beginning of Time unto this day. How different soever they have been in their Laws, and Customs, and Dispositions, they have generally agreed in this. And therefore it may reasonably be esteemed naturally to arise in the Minds of Men, from the Use
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of their Reason and Understanding, and to be the Perception of a plain and obvious Truth. *Epicurus* himself, observing how general this Belief was, before and in his time, calls it a common *Prolepsis*. Where there is a general Agreement in the Perception of the Objects of Sense, we make no doubt of the Truth of that Sensation. And if a great Number of Men should agree in determining any Object of Sight to be Red, tho' one or two should tell us it had the Appearance of another Colour to them, should we not think it reasonable to believe that the vast Majority were rather in the right, and that it was either an obstinate Humour of contradicting others, or some Defect in the Organ of Sight, in the one or two who dissented from them? And have we not the same Reason to believe those Opinions, or Determinations of the understanding Faculties of Men, most likely to be true, wherein almost all Men do agree, Men of all Ages, Tempers, Capacities, Educations and Interests; and persevere in this Agreement, after all the Attempts that have been made by some few, who have employed the utmost of their Wit and Invention, for the maintaining and propagating the contrary Opinion?

pinion? What Reason can be given of so universal and constant a Consent, but that it is founded upon such Grounds as are an obvious Proof of the Matter of it to the Minds and Understandings of Men; to those Faculties whereby we are capable of making a Judgment of them? If it be most probable that that is the most true Judgment of Sense, from which there are but very few Dissenters; why is it not as probable that that also should be the most true Judgment of the Mind, concerning those things which are Matter of Opinion and Belief, in which almost all Men, who apply themselves to the Consideration of them, are agreed? If the Atheists will pretend to say, that they can give a plain Reason for the different Appearances of the Objects of Sense, and how it may come to pass, through the Condition of the Medium, or the Disposition of the Organ, that they should thus differ: Can they not give as good a Reason for the Difference of Mens Judgment in Matters of Opinion, that this may proceed, not from the want of sufficient Evidence on one side, but from some Byass and Prejudice in the Minds of Men on the other side, which distemper their understanding Faculty, and pervert

the Judgment of it? And in this Case, on which side is this Byass most likely to be? On the side of the Generality, or on the side of some very few, and but a very few, even of those, who by their vicious Inclinations and Practices have made it their Interest that there should be no God? That there is a God, hath been the general Opinion, not only of the Friends of Sobriety and Virtue, but even of the Loose and Vicious, who would be glad to have the Truth of it sufficiently disproved; who can have no Byass or Prejudice, but on the side of Irreligion; and yet how very few of these have been able to withstand that Light with which it shines into their Minds, or to wear out the Sense and Persuasion of a Divine Being? And I am confident, if there be any Atheists amongst us, who have no Doubts remaining concerning the Truth of those Principles which they pretend to believe, that it is with great difficulty they have overcome them, and with as much Industry, and Partiality, and Affection to their Cause, as might bring Men to believe the grossest Absurdity whatsoever. If those who are doubtful or wavering in their Opinion in this Matter, would but ask themselves at what Times and Seasons they

they

they had the weakest Doubts, and the strongest Apprehensions of the Existence of a God, I question not but they will find it was *then*, when they were most sober, and most retired, and their Minds were most free from the Influence and Disturbance of Lust, and Passion, and Worldly Projects, and best disposed for serious Consideration, and impartial Judgment. Now let any Man judge which of these two hath most Reason to *be ashamed* of a foolish Credulity; the Religious Man, who believes that there is a God, to his great Comfort and Benefit; for the Truth whereof he hath almost the universal Testimony of the Minds and Reason of Men of all Ages and Nations, and runs no considerable Hazard by it; or he who believes there is no God, whereby he runs most unspeakable Hazard, and in which very few are able to bring themselves to be of the same mind, and hardly any of them, at some Times, and upon some Occasions, when they are best disposed to make a right Judgment, can throw off all Doubt and Distrust concerning it. Can there then be any more foolish Credulity, than that of our Atheist, who gives more Credit, in a Case of the greatest Importance, to the wavering Testi-

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mony of a few, than to the general, constant, and peremptory Suffrage of all the World beside? And believes his own Opinion, and that of a few other arrogant, self-conceited Pretenders to Wit and Philosophy, more than a sufficient Balance against the general Authority of Men throughout the whole Course of Time? He is wont indeed to alledge some things, whereby he endeavours to weaken and evade the Force of this Argument. I proceed therefore,

Secondly, To vindicate it from those Objections which the Atheists are wont to urge against it. As,

First, That there hath been no such general Consent as we argue from. And

Secondly, That supposing such a general Consent as we pretend there hath been; this might probably arise from other Causes, than the Reasonableness of the Subject of this Consent.

First, It is alledged by the Advocates of *Atheism*, That Men have not so generally consented in the Belief of the Existence of a God, as we pretend and suppose they have. For,

First,

First, They tell us, That there have been some whole Nations, who have been perfect Strangers to the Notion of a Divine Being. To which it may be replied,

First, That in the most Ancient Times no such People were known, as is often asserted by the Writers of those Times, who appeal to all Mankind, as Witnesses of the Truth of what they affirmed, and have been never contradicted by the boldest Patrons of *Atheism*. The Matter of Fact was so apparent, that *Epicurus* himself was forced to acknowledge, that the Notion of a Divine Being was a common *Prolepsis*, a Principle either innate, or most early entertained in the Minds of Men. And therefore he is magnified by *Lucretius* for his Heroick Courage, in venturing first and singly to engage the united Forces of all the rest of Mankind; and to bring his Arguments into the Field of Disputation, against those Principles of Religion in which they so universally conspired. It's certain, that not only *Moses*, but all others, who in the most Ancient Times gave or published any Rules for Religion, supposed the Being of a God to be generally acknowledged; and thought it needless

to attempt the Proof of his Existence, because they were satisfied it was no where questioned or denied. Otherwise they would hardly have attempted to prescribe Rites and Methods for the Worship of God, without some Endeavours, in the first place, to convince Men of his Being.

Secondly, We find that those Countries which for so many Ages were unknown to, and without any Communication with these other Parts of the World, were not without the Acknowledgment of a Deity. And tho some of the most rude and barbarous amongst them, upon the first Discovery, were suspected of Irreligion, which our *Atheists* have been very forward to observe; yet upon farther Search and Enquiry, even *these* have been found to have their Gods and Worship. So hard a thing is it for the Minds of Men to be so blinded, as not to discern the Proofs and Evidences of a Divine Being. But

Thirdly, The Advocates of *Atheism* have never been able to produce an Instance of one civilized Nation in the World, without the Belief of such a Being. They have not pretended to affirm this of any, but some who have been
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rude and savage to the highest degree; so grossly stupid and ignorant, that they seem to have nothing more than the Outside of Men, to distinguish them from the Brutes *which have no understanding.* And if we should allow what they pretend, of one or two such Herds of Men, to be true, and give them leave to rank them on the Atheists side, they would add but little Strength to the Defence of their Cause. Men who have thus entirely given up themselves to the Conduct of Bodily Sense and Appetite, and cast off all Search and Enquiry after every thing but what relates to the gratifying of them; and almost lost the Understanding of Men, by neglecting to excite their higher Faculties, and to exercise their Reason, may well be supposed, without any Prejudice to the Truth or Evidence of them, not to discern those Consequences which naturally result from a judicious Consideration of those things which lye plain before them. In such Cases it is no wonder if they come short of that Knowledge of many obvious Truths they were naturally capable of finding out, and without such a Depravation and Neglect could not well be ignorant of. The *Atheists* might with as
much

much Reason plead the Instance of Children, who are not yet come to the Use of their Understanding Faculty, as of such a People, who, they cannot but own, have in a great measure lost it. And they might as well argue that Light and Colour are not obvious to the Sense of Mankind, because they are not discerned by Men who are blind, or shut their Eyes; as that the Existence of a God is not obvious to the Reason of Mankind, because some dull and sottish People, who have almost lost their Reason, and never apply themselves with due Attention to consider the Causes and Consequences of things, are ignorant of it. They sometimes pretend, that Ignorance of the Power of Matter and Natural Causes, hath led Men into an Imagination of a Divine Being; but surely they will not pretend that these People have searched more curiously into them, and that their not acknowledging such a Being, is the effect of their greater Attainments in Philosophy.

Secondly, It is objected, that even amongst the most knowing and civilized People, there have been always some Men, and those of more than common Abilities, who have openly professed and
main-

maintained the Principles of Atheism, or have been reputed or censured as Men of such Principles. Some of these have been Men of Learning and Philosophy, and cannot well be supposed not to have discerned the Evidences of a Divine Being, if they had been so obvious to Human Understanding, and if the general Belief of his Existence had proceeded, from its being so agreeable to the Reason of Mankind, as we pretend. To this it may be replied,

First, That our *Atheists* can give no Proof that there have been always some Men of Learning and Philosophy, who have professed themselves *Atheists*, or philosophized *Atheistically*. *Leucippus* and *Democritus* are the first of this kind they can produce. For tho some of the more Ancient Philosophers, in their *Physicks*, take no notice of an Efficient Cause, but only of the First Material, yet it doth not follow that they believed no other. For they might probably mention no other Cause, because they thought this was the only proper Subject of Natural Philosophy ; or because this was the only thing in dispute, out of what Matter all things were formed, by the generally acknowledged Efficient Cause of all. And accordingly

cordingly *Simplicius* tells us, that they designed only to philosophize concerning Natural Causes, but by no means concerning those which are above Nature. And tho' *Aristotle* in some places tells us, That many of the more ancient *Ionicks* thought that Matter alone was the Principle of all things, yet, in this Case, no great Credit is to be given to his Authority: For it's well known, that in every part of his Philosophy, he industriously sets himself to lessen the Esteem of all that were before him, and triumphs in his own pretended Discoveries. However at length he thought fit to soften his Accusation, and allows it to be probable, that they rather omitted to mention, than denied an Efficient Cause.

Arist. Met.
lib. 1. c. 3.

Secondly, Not only the Superstitious Vulgar, especially at *Athens*, but their grave Judges the *Areopagites*, reproached and censured those as *Atheists*, who only shewed Contempt of their Idols, and the filthy and ridiculous things their lewd *Poets* had invented of the Gods they worshipped. Insomuch that *Socrates*, the most express Assertor of a Deity, for this only Reason was condemned and punished as an Atheist. And it is the general Complaint of the Christian *Apologists*,
that

that notwithstanding their open Profession of their Belief of a Deity, merely because they opposed the Heathen Superstition, they were daily accused and prosecuted as Atheists, as the Philosophers of old were for the same Cause.

Thirdly, It hath been an Humour and Practice which hath very much prevailed amongst the Philosophers, for the procuring to themselves a Name and Reputation in the World, for Men of singular Capacities and Understanding, to contradict common and received Opinions; to maintain the most absurd and paradoxical Assertions, to invent and defend with their utmost Sophistry some new Notion, which before was generally thought contrary to all Sense and Reason. Thus we find some disputing against the Possibility of Motion; others attempting to prove that Snow is black; and others, that contradictory Propositions might both be true. This Pride and Affectation was more especially manifest in the Atheistick Philosophers; as might easily be shewed down from *Democritus*, who was continually laughing at other Men for Fools; to our own Countreyman *Mr. Hobbs*, who boasts himself as the great Enlightener of Mankind, and to have made such
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wonderful Discoveries in Nature and Politicks, as the ignorant World before knew nothing of. And surely we cannot reasonably believe, that the Authority of a few such proud and vain-glorious Boasters is to be preferred to the general Consent of the rest of Mankind; or make the most probable Judgment of what is most agreeable to the Faculties of Human Nature, by the appearance it hath only to some few such Persons as these, who have neither more Learning, nor better Capacities, than many Thousands of those who differ from them. If some Men are blind or deaf, or want any usual Member of the Body, would it be reasonable to infer from hence, that it is not natural for Men to see and hear; to have two Hands and two Feet, or the like; or to believe that the Blind, and Deaf, and Lame, are the truest Standard of Human Perfection? The true Nature of any Being is rather to be taken from the most of its Kind; and the truest Judgment of any of its Faculties, is most likely to be that which is almost general. We think ourselves sufficiently assured, that Reason belongs to the Nature of Man, tho' there be some Idiots and Madmen in the World. And for the same Reason we may certainly

tainly think it most probable at least, that those Opinions are the Natural Result of a due Exercise of our Rational Faculties, in which Men of all Ages and Capacities have generally agreed, tho some few profess to believe the contrary. In such Cases nothing can justify our Dissent from the common Opinion, but such manifest Proof and Demonstration of the contrary, as no *Atheist* can pretend to have for contradicting the common Notion of the Existence of a Divine Being.

Fourthly, Amongst those who have philosophized Atheistically, or have argued and discoursed against the Being of a God, very few, if any, have been constant, undoubting, absolute *Atheists*. They have been rather endeavouring, by the utmost Stretch of their Invention, to reason themselves into an Opinion so agreeable to their Wishes, than delivering those Arguments to the World, by which they have been perfectly convinced in their own Minds that there is no God. This was the Case of the Impious Despisers of Religion amongst the Heathen; *Mentuntur qui dicunt se non sentire esse Deum, nam etsi tibi affirmant interdum, noctu tamen & sibi dubitant*, saith *Seneca*. They lied when they pretended to disbelieve the Existence
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of a God ; and how confidently soever they proclaimed their Unbelief to others in the Day-time, when they were by themselves in the Night, they were not able to clear their Minds from all Doubts and Fears about it. And if this was the Case of the Professors of *Atheism* in the Heathen World, it must certainly be much more so of the same sort of Men amongst us ; who have been educated in the Principles of Religion, and the Notion and Worship of a Divine Being, so much more rational than any *They* were acquainted with. They may, for the sake of their Lusts and Vices, with the help of a subtil Invention, find out some Difficulties, and raise some Doubts in their Minds, but they can never attain to an assured and uninterrupted Persuasion that there is no God ; they can never perfectly erase those Impressions of a Divine Being, which their Minds so readily received, before the Interest of their Lusts and Vices made it their chief desire that there should be none. I am confident that there are no Pretenders to *Atheism* amongst us, but upon an impartial Enquiry into their Hearts will find this to be their own Case ; that they are not able to extinguish all Doubts and Fears ; and that
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their Assurance that there is no God, is far short of what they could wish it to be: That how industriously soever they apply themselves to suppress the Belief of the Principles of Religion, they cannot so wholly stifle them, but that they frequently find them rising in their Minds, haunting and pursuing them wherever they go. And if the Case be thus with them, notwithstanding that their Wishes and Interests are against Religion, and urge them with their utmost Industry to dispossess their Minds of it; what Argument can be taken from such Instances as these, against the Universality of the Acknowledgment of a God. They are *Atheists* in Will and Affection, not in Understanding and Opinion; and are Instances of the Reasonableness and Naturalness of that Notion of a God, which cleaves so fast to their Minds, and baffles all their Attempts to get rid of so hateful and troublesome a Guest.

But some perhaps may think that the like Argument may be brought against us; and accordingly they tell us *Thirdly*, That the Belief of a Deity cannot be so general as we pretend it is, because many who make Profession of this Faith, and endeavour to propagate it in the
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Minds of others, do manifestly shew by their wicked Lives, that they do not believe as they would be thought to do; *they profess to know God, but in their works deny him.*

In Answer to this, it may be observed, That the Belief of a Deity, and a correspondent Behaviour towards him, are two different things, and not inseparable the one from the other. This will very plainly appear, by considering our common Practice in other things. When we see a Child obstinately persisting in such Practices as are extremely grievous and injurious to his kind and tender Parents, shall we conclude from hence, that he doth not believe that they are his Parents, or that he is under any Obligations of Duty and Gratitude to them? Shall we say that Thieves and Murderers do not believe there are Judges and Laws to punish them, because they boldly venture to steal and kill? Alas! It is but too well known, that Men, by the Violence of their Carnal Lusts, and the Perverseness and Obstinacy of their depraved Wills, are hurried on to commit such things as they certainly Believe, but will not duly consider, are very hurtful and pernicious to them. Thus *Men may know God, and*
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not glorify him as God ; they may deny him in their works ; that is, they may follow such a Course of Life as no Man, in Reason and Prudence would persist in, who believes that there is a God, a Just and Holy Governor of the World, and Judge of Men : Which amounts to no more than this, That reasonable Creatures may do unreasonable things ; that Men, who are neither Idiots nor distracted, may act very foolishly and madly, neglect the pursuit of their most apparent Interest, and knowingly undo themselves. And this is no more than what we have daily Sense and Experience of.

Fourthly, It may be objected , That there can be no such thing as a general Agreement of Mankind in the Belief of a God, because it is impossible that Men should have any Notion or Idea of such a Being to which they give the Name of God. And therefore if all Men should agree in saying there is a God , they would only agree in uttering the same Words, in affirming the Existence of they know not what. Now to confirm this, they assert,

First, That we can have no Object of Conception or Thought of any thing, but what is the Object of some Bodily
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Sense, and hath a sensible Phantasm answering to it. And it being acknowledged by us, that the word *God* doth not signify any such thing, it must therefore signify nothing; and when we affirm the Existence of a God, we affirm the Existence of nothing. But this is arguing upon a Supposition of the Truth of that which they can never prove; and is contradicted by the common Sense and Experience of Mankind, who know that they have in their Minds Thoughts and Conceptions answering to those Words, of which they neither have nor can have any Corporeal Phantasms, besides those which their Sound produces. These Men might as well say that Power, Wisdom, Justice and Goodness are nothing, because they are not subject to any Corporeal Sense; and that when we say Men are generally agreed that these are great Accomplishments in a Prince, they are agreed only in putting together an unintelligible Proposition, made up of Words which have no corresponding Ideas, nothing in the Mind express'd by them: For how sensible soever their Effects are, the abstract Notion of them is not sensible. Thus when the *Epicurean Atheists* tell us, that the Origine of the World is to be
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ascribed to the Motion of Atoms in empty Space; we must say, for a Reason of their own, that they talk Nonsense: For these words, Atoms and Empty Space, signifying nothing which is sensible, and therefore, according to their Principles, signifying nothing at all, are mere words, without any meaning. And thus the Discourses of Men would be little different from the talking of *Daws* and *Parrots*; it being hardly possible to utter a Sentence, wherein every Word signifies the Object of some Sense, or hath any Phantasm derived from it, but what proceeds from the Sound of the Words, which for ought I know these Birds may have as well as Men.

Secondly, For a farther Confirmation of what they object against the possibility of an universal Agreement in acknowledging a Deity, They tell us, that by our own Confession, the Nature of that Being we call God, if there be any such, is incomprehensible, too big for our narrow Capacities to contain the Idea of; and therefore they argue, that we cannot truly say, that the generality of Men agree in the Belief of the Existence of a God: For whatever Idea we pretend they have in their Minds answering to the word *God*,

is not the Idea of such a Being, whose Existence, we say, they agree in the Acknowledgment of. That therefore which they are said so unanimously to affirm doth exist, is not God, it is something contained in the narrow Capacity of our Conception, which nothing Infinite or Incomprehensible can be. In Answer to this, I shall propose these following things to be consider'd:

First, If this be a true and fair way of Reasoning, it will equally serve us to prove, that there never was an *Atheist* in the World, one who *said in his heart, there was no God*: For a Man can no more disbelieve or deny *in his heart*, than he can believe and affirm *in his heart*, the Existence of a Being of which he can have no Conception, of which no Idea can enter into his Heart. All sorts of *Atheists* say that they believe that Matter is Eternal: But if there be Truth in their way of arguing, by this Affirmation of theirs they agree only in attributing to Matter a limited Duration: For they can affirm nothing of Matter in their Minds, but what their Minds contain the Idea of; which can be nothing but what is finite and limited. And thus, how much soever they differ in words, who say Mat-
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ter is Eternal, from those who say it is not Eternal, there is no such difference in the Idea or Conception in their Minds, answering to their words. But if we may be allowed to dispute in this manner, we must accuse all Philosophy and Discourses on such Subjects as these, on which side soever they are, as nothing but Nonsense and Contradiction. But,

Secondly, I appeal to every Man's own Experience, whether he hath not a different Conception answering to these Words *Finite* and *Infinite*, an *Eternal* and *Limited* Duration: Whether he means the same thing, when he says that Quantity is infinitely divisible, and when he says it hath a determinate Number of Parts: Surely no Man will in good earnest affirm that he doth. How extremely credulous then must they be, who in a Matter they are infinitely concerned not to be mistaken in, suffer themselves to be imposed upon by such Arguments as are urged from Principles so manifestly contrary to their own Sense and Experience?

Thirdly, We do however readily acknowledge, that we cannot *find out God to perfection*; that we cannot have such a comprehensive Knowledge of him as is commensurate to the Divine Perfections;

or run up our Thoughts to that boundless Height to which they are extended : Yet we may frame such a singular Idea of God, as is proportionate to our Nature and Understanding, and sufficient for our purpose ; a reasonable Foundation for Adoration and Worship, for our Fear, Love, and Obedience, such as we cannot think due to any other Being. We can certainly conceive a Being endued with Knowledge, Wisdom, Power, Justice, Goodness and Truth ; and when we extend these Perfections as far as it is possible for us, and conceive them still farther and farther to be extended indefinitely, beyond the reach of our imperfect Understandings, we form a true, tho not an adequate Idea of God ; we find such a Conception of a Divine Being in our Minds, as represents him worthy of all that Honour and Service Religion obligeth us to. And for the Existence of such a Being, we have the common Consent of Mankind.

I proceed now to consider what is farther alledged by the *Atbeists*, whereby they endeavour to evade the Force of this Argument taken from general Consent ; *viz.*

Secondly, That supposing such a general

ral Consent as we pretend there hath been, this might probably arise from other Causes than the Reasonableness of the Subject of this Consent.

That I may give a full and particular Answer to this Plea, as it is managed by them, I shall consider the several Causes to which the *Atheists* assign the Original of that general Consent in the Notion of a God, and the Belief of his Existence, which our Argument supposes, whereby they endeavour to weaken the Force of it.

First, One Cause to which they ascribe this general Consent is Tradition. One Generation hath taught and communicated this Notion to another. That it hath been thus taught and transmitted, by the Care of Parents to instruct their Children in a matter of so great Importance, hath no doubt been some Help to the preserving and propagating of it. But this Pretence of Tradition can be of no Advantage to the Cause of *Atheists*, unless they mean either,

First, That it was an Eternal Tradition, that there never was a Time when Men began to be of this Opinion: But as according to the Principles of one sort of *Atheists*, there hath been an Eternal Succes-

Succession of Men generated one from another, without any first Parents; so there hath been an Eternal Propagation of this Opinion from one Generation to another, without any Original Authors of it. If this were so, then Mankind must have been eternally in an Error, if there be no God: And if Mankind did exist eternally, without deriving their Being in any Sense from any other Being, they must be self or necessarily existent, such as they did exist from Eternity, and therefore with a false Notion of God in their Minds; and what is thus necessary, must be also Natural, and as truly of the Essence of a perfect Man, as any thing else which belongs to him. And if this be so, I would desire such Atheists to shew, if they can, why they are not to be esteemed Monsters, as much as any other of the Race of Mankind can be supposed to be. It must be also a very monstrous Faith, which believes any such thing as an Eternal Tradition of any thing, one Generation teaching it another, without any first Teacher. And as monstrously foolish must their Credulity be, who can entertain a Belief of an Hypothesis so prodigiously absurd and unintelligible, to such a degree of Confidence
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in the Assurance of it, as to venture Eternal Life and Salvation upon it. But if this Pretence of Tradition be made use of by another sort of *Atheists*, who believe Mankind, and the Notion of a God, and the Tradition of it were not Eternal, but that they all had a Beginning, they must mean,

Secondly, That it happen'd once upon a time, no body knows when or how, that wise and mighty Matter formed it self into such Order and Figure, and gave its self such Motions, that at length Men were produced: And tho in other Respects these Noble Machines seem'd to be most curiously framed; yet by means of some unlucky Contexture of the Matter of their Minds, the false Notion of the Existence of a God was formed in it; which when these Men came to beget Sons and Daughters, they were very careful to communicate to them; by which means it hath been transmitted through all Times, and so generally consented to. But this also supposeth the Notion of a God to be natural, and inherent in the Original Constitution of Man; and if so, then the *Atheists* must have something in them unnatural, and consequently may justly be reckon'd amongst the Monsters
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of Mankind. If they will pretend to say, that those Deviations from the Nature of Man, as it was at first framed, are not to be called monstrous, which correct the Error of Nature, and give to a Being a better Contexture, which they believe is done by obliterating the false and troublesome Notion of a God, which was at first engraven upon it; this is supposing and taking for granted what they should prove, That there is no God, and that the Opinion of his Existence is false and erroneous. But if this also be not what they intend, by ascribing the immemorial and general Consent of all Nations in the Belief of a God, to Tradition, then they must mean,

Thirdly, That either from all Eternity to a certain Time, or when Men at first happen'd to start up into the World, they were all Atheists; but at length some or more of them unluckily got this Notion in their Heads; and by some unaccountable Methods of Art or Force, brought all the rest to be of the same Opinion, or at least to pretend to be so, and to instil these Principles into their Children; and this Method having been always continued, the Belief of a God hath been kept up in all Places, and through all succeeding

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ing Generations, though contrary both to the Reason and Interest of Mankind. Certainly that Man who can easily acquiesce in this Account, and believe it a sufficient Confutation of our Argument taken from the general and constant Consent of Men, must be so extremely credulous, as to be capable of believing any thing, upon the bare Authority of an *Atheist*, how destitute soever of all other Proof. For he hath no History, no Record, no Testimony of any one Writer to produce, for the Proof of what he asserts, that there was a Time when Mankind lived without any Thoughts or Acknowledgment of a God. But if it had been so, what tolerable Account can he give, how they came so generally to entertain an Opinion of his Existence, which he believes to be the most vexatious and tormenting Principle in the World? If they found no very good Reason for it, how came they so easily to quit the contrary Opinion, which he pretends they all brought into the World with them, or had received from their Forefathers? How came it to pass, that Tradition should so effectually convey the Notion of a God, but should not be able to preserve and convey the Principles of Atheism, if these were more agree-

agreeable to the Reason of Mankind? How came this fatal Error to creep into, and to fix its self in the Minds of Men of all Nations and Languages, so widely spread over the face of the Earth? Will they say that it began when Men were but a small Company, and lived together in one Place? But how can they suppose this, without believing with us, that the Generations of Men had a Beginning, and proceeded from one common Stock. For if Men were produced any of those ways our Atheists tell us they were, by the Power of undirected Matter, why might not this have happen'd in divers Parts of the World at the greatest Distance from one another: Why might not the Earth, or Water, or the casual Concourse of Atoms, have been as fruitful in this kind, in more than one Place of this wide World? What precarious Principles do these Men pretend to reason upon? And what credulous Fools must those be, who, in a Matter of such vast and infinite Importance, suffer themselves to be led and persuaded by them? It is very hard to imagine that Tradition should so effectually convey the Notion of a God into all Nations, and through all Ages, and maintain in the Minds of Men so strong and

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constant a Persuasion of the Truth of it, unless we suppose it was first taught when Men first began to live upon the face of the Earth, by the first Parents of Mankind ; who could not well be ignorant of their own Original, how and by whom they were made and fashioned ; and that there were some obvious and strenuous Proofs of it, to the Reason and Understandings of Men of all Capacities, through all succeeding Generations. If the Opinion of the Existence of a God came first into the Minds of Men any of those other ways the *Atheists* would have us believe it did, and were so contrary to Reason as they pretend it is, it would certainly have been long since rejected by the more Learned Nations, and lost amongst the Ignorant and Barbarous, notwithstanding the Care of the first Assertors of it, to teach it their Children, and to convey it down to Posterity. I proceed therefore to consider what farther Account the *Atheists* give us of this Matter.

Secondly, They tell us that the Notion of a God came first into the Minds of Men by Fear ; and that the general Persuasion of his Existence hath been maintained by the Power of this prevailing
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Passion in Human Nature, whereby we are apt *to fear where no Fear is* ; where there is no frightful Object, but what is the Creature of our own timorous Fancy. But in Answer to this, I have these following things to offer.

First, These *Atheists* also take for granted, what they have no Evidence for, that there was a Time when there was no such Notion or Persuasion in the Minds of Men : Whereas the most Ancient Histories and Records assure us, that they have been immemorial. He must therefore be very credulous, who will believe their Supposition concerning a Matter of Fact, for which they are not able to produce one Witness.

Secondly, This Account of the Original of the Notion of a God, is not consistent with their own *Atheistick* Principles. For they tell us that Sense, and Understanding, and all Perception, are the Creatures of their Objects, and not the Makers of them : That Things must be, before they can be perceived ; or at least there must be some Corporeal Sensible Things without us, which raise a Phantasm or Image within us, such as we perceive. Thus in their Mechanical way, the Actions, or rather Passions, of
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the Body or Minds of Men, are caused by the Motion of Matter without us, which may produce such a Contexture and Motion of the Matter within us, as forms a frightful Image, the Apprehension whereof excites our Fear, and if so, the Thing affrighting must necessarily be before the Fear of it. And I would gladly know what it was, which in their Mechanical Way, produced the Phantasm or Idea of a God. They cannot say that it was some-body's describing and asserting the Existence of such a Being, for we are now enquiring how the Notion of a God came into the Minds of the first Authors of it. It must therefore, according to their Principles, be some dreadful Noise, or some horrible affrighting Object of Sight, which made the terrible Figure of a God somewhere in their Brain, or where else they will assign the Place for such an Impression; at the Apprehension whereof they were put into so great a Fright, and the Frame of their Minds so disordered, that it was never able to recover its true and original Figure and Motion. It's possible indeed that Thunder and Lightning, which they particular mention, and some other wonderful and amazing Appearances in the World,

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might excite Men's Fear and move them to consider how they were caused, and so lead them to an Apprehension of the Existence of a Being of greater Power than any they had knowledge of. But this is a discovery made by Reason, and occasioned only by Fear, which excited the Mind to enquire into the Causes of those frightful Appearances.

Thirdly, If the Notion of a God was only an Impression thus made by some affrighting Object, without any use of Reason, I can't see why the Beasts of the Field, and the Fowls of the Air, who are capable of Fear as well as Men, may not have this Notion of a God too: Why the same Objects, acting mechanically, and causing Fear, should not cause the same Motions and Impressions in the one as in the other, so far as Reason is not concerned. For tho' some *Atheists* tells us that Reason can be no where, but where there is the Figure of a Man, and consequently nothing which any way depends upon Reason; yet seeing Brutes are capable of Fear as well as Men, why not also of every thing else which Fear produces without Reason? They may perhaps say, that the Matter, on which the frightful Impression is made in Man only,

only, is of such a particular Form and Contexture, as disposeth it to receive such a particular Impression from affrighting Objects. This however makes the Notion of a God Natural and Necessary, and supposeth an unhappy Error in the Constitution of Man, whereby he is render'd unable to keep out of his Mind a Notion which they think is most troublesome and vexatious.

Fourthly, If this Account were true, it would seem that the most certain way to plant the Notion and Persuasion of the Existence of a God in the Minds of those People, who, as they pretend, are destitute of it, would be to try all manner of ways of frightening them, and by this means, in their mechanical way, we might at length force the Notion of a God into them, and so fix in them a Persuasion of his Existence, that it should not be in the Power of Reason to root it out. These things are so very absurd, that it may be thought loss of time to mention and insist upon them. But I think we cannot sufficiently expose the sottish and pernicious Principles of these *Atheistical* Men, who pretend to be the greatest Masters of Reason and Philosophy. And this cannot be more effectually

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ly done, than by shewing the Ridiculousness of their general Principles, when they come to be applied to particular Subjects.

Fifthly, This pretence of *Atheists*, that the Notion of a God owes its Original to Fear, in plain Terms imports, that those frightful Objects which sleeping or waking appeared to them, and occasion'd the Notion of a God to come and fix in the Minds of men, put them into such a terrible Fright as distemper'd their Understanding Faculties, by which means they could not make a right Judgment, but formed and embraced the Notion of a Deity. Which is as much as to say, that they were frightened out of their Wits, and in this Distraction their wild Imagination compos'd the dreadful Idea [of a God, which they had not Reason enough left to discern was nothing but an Imposture. So that if you will believe this Plea of *Atheists*, you must believe, that the first Authors of the Notion of a God were crazed and mad, and propagated the same Madness throughout the World with such force, that none were able to withstand it, but only a few sturdy stout-hearted *Atheists*, whose Brains were so well tempered that they could not be moved to
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such an excess of Fear, as was able to disturb their Reason. But if they can give us no better Proof than this, that their Brains are of a better Temper than those of the rest of Mankind, and that they are the only Men in their right Senses, I shall leave it to every one to judge, whether any but the most credulous Fools can be capable of any great Esteem of their Understanding.

Sixthly, The Notion of a God, which Men have so generally entertained, is not so frightful as the *Atheists* Account of its Original supposeth it to be. It includes Almighty Power indeed, but managed by equal Wisdom, Justice and Goodness. Men have all along conceived the Divine Being, whose Existence they acknowledged, to be one who is able to hear and help us in all our Wants and Distress, a great Lover of Mankind, ready to do us good, and continually bestowing Favours upon us. This is plain from those Exercises of Praying and giving Thanks to him; in which, in all times, Men have been so universally employed. And therefore the *Atheists* might as well have assigned Love, or Desire, or Hope to have been the Cause of the Opinion of the Existence of a God, as Fear; for he is

as proper an Object to excite all *those* as this one Affection. But this Account of theirs may help us to discern, that though our *Atheists* make such mighty Boasts of their undaunted Courage, yet they are in truth the most Fearful of Mankind; that they find this Passion of Fear to have the strongest Influence upon them; and therefore are so ready to ascribe every thing to it. Thus it is Fear with them, which not only first made and introduced into the World the Notion of a God; but also first drove Men into Society, and obligeth some to be subject to others; and is the only true Foundation of mutual Charity and Benevolence, a Fear of being hurt by a greater Power, and some time or other standing in need of another's help. But;

Seventhly, It is much more probable that Fear was the Cause of *Atheism*, than that it was the Cause of *Religion*: For the *Atheists* generally agree in this, That the Notion of a God is very frightful; and they mightily boast when they have said or done any thing, which may conduce to the Banishing of these Fears, which the Apprehension of such a Being is apt to disturb their guilty Souls with. Whereby they plainly declare, that they
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think it very much for their Interest that there should be no God, and that their Minds should be freed from the Belief of his Existence. And this may reasonably enough be supposed to be the Cause of their taking so much Pains, and trying so many Tricks in Philosophy, to deliver themselves and others from the Terror of a God; and of their so easily giving Credit to those weak and insufficient Arguments they alledge to disprove his Being.

If now we seriously reflect upon what hath been said, we may with very good Reason conclude, That those Men are extremely Credulous, who suffer themselves to be persuaded, that the *Atheists* give a true or probable Account of the Original and Continuance of so general a Belief of the Existence of a God, when they ascribe it to Fear without and against Reason. This is indeed but a very trifling Pretence; but having been so generally pleaded and insisted on by the Advocates of *Atheism*, from their first Appearance even to our Times, I have thought fit to give it a particular and thorough Examination, and to expose the Folly and Absurdity of it. And after all, if we should grant, that the Idea or Phantasm of a God was first formed in the

Minds of Men by Fear, this Question would still remain entire and unresolved, *viz.* Whether the believing it to be the Representation of a real and existent Being, was with Reason or against it? If with Reason, it's no matter how it came first there; if without or against Reason, we are still at a loss to know how it should come to pass, that the Reason and Understanding of Men, excepting in a few *Atheists*, no wiser than other Men, but in their own Conceit, should never be able to find out that it was nothing but an Imposture of their own Fears. But if this Pretence of Fear will not satisfy us, they have another way of accounting for the Original of the Notion and the universal Consent of Mankind in the Belief of a God; whereby they endeavour to weaken the Argument we make from it: And tell us,

Thirdly, That the Notion of a God came first into the Minds of Men, and hath been so long and so generally maintained, by means of their Ignorance of the Power of Matter to form its self into the System of the World, as it now is, without any such Artificer; or of its Existing eternally, such as we now see it, without any sort of Dependance up-

on any other Being distinct from it. When Men found themselves at a Loss in seeking into the Causes of the Excellent Frame and Beauty of the whole visible World, and the wonderful Effects and Appearances observable in it; to excuse their Ignorance in Natural Causes, they pretended to resolve them into some Supernatural or Divine Power and Wisdom; and so framed to themselves, and insinuated into others the Notion of a God. But, in Answer to this,

First, We may observe a very easy, but withal a very arrogant way of maintaining any Opinion we have undertaken to defend. It is but calling all the rest of the World Fools, and the Cause is gained; and so it might be, if they were indeed such Fools as these *Atheists* represent them. This is in truth the common Method of *Atheists*, to insult over all that oppose them, as Men of little Brains and great Ignorance, and therefore fit to be treated with Scorn and Ridicule. They seem to inherit the proud Humour of one of their most Ancient Predecessors, of Laughing at the Follies of Mankind. But how will *they* excuse themselves from a foolish
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Credulity, who are brought to contemn the Principles of Religion, merely because the Opposers of them insolently boast of their own Knowledge, and pretend that tho' they have been so generally believed, even by Men of the most general Esteem for Learning and Philosophy, yet they deserve no other Confutation, than Jestings and Laughing at their Folly? And yet I am very confident, the greatest part of our pretended Atheists have been more influenced, by the arrogant Boasts and impious Jestings of the Enemies of Religion, than by their Reasoning and Philosophy; which, through the Vanity of their Minds, and Importunity of their Lusts, they have neither Disposition nor Leisure for a serious and impartial Consideration of. And therefore one of the late Advocates of Infidelity hath publickly pleaded for the Liberty of Ridiculing Religion, and Exposing it in Farce and Drolls, as the best way of discovering the Truth or Falshood of it; knowing very well how little is to be done to the Advantage of their Cause by sober and serious Reasoning; and trusting more to their prophane Wit than to that superior Knowledge they

*Letter to
my Lord----*

they make such confident Pretences to.
But,

Secondly, I would enquire of those, who impute the Original of the Notion of a God, and the general Belief of his Existence, to the general Ignorance of Men, as to the Powers of Matter, and the Chain of Natural Causes; who those knowing Men were who have searched so accurately into these Matters, that we may safely rely upon the Discovery they pretend to have made, how all the *Phænomena* of the Universe may be solved, without any first Intelligent and Intending Cause. One will magnify the Performance of *Leucippus* and *Democritus*; Another will tell us, that these were but Bunglers at Making a World, in Comparison of *Epicurus*, who found out something they were ignorant, or took no notice of; without which their Hypothesis was very unreasonable and absurd. Another will tell you, *Epicurus* himself hath not mended the Matter; and that nothing is to be done without Forms and Qualities. One will pretend to account for every thing by stupid senseless Matter, only put into Motion by some magnetick Virtue or Gravity inherent in it; that is, by something,

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they know not what. Another will tell us, that dead Matter, howsoever moved, could not be sufficient for all these Things ; and therefore supposeth, that every Crum of Matter hath Life Essential to it. And others will as confidently tell us, that unless we also suppose Sense ; nay, and others, Reason too, to be of the Essence of Matter, the Work can never be done.

Now, how shall we know, amongst all this contradicting Variety of Opinions of *Atheistick* Philosophers, where that Truth and Certainty lies, which they all with equal Confidence pretend to? When one mighty Architect hath started up, and pretended to have found what no body could before, how all Things came to be as they are without a God, and hath boasted and triumph'd in the Discovery, as if he deserved to be honoured as a sort of God himself for it : For a time, some, who have had a good Affection for the Conclusion, have embraced and cried up his Principles, and given him the vain Applause he was so ambitious of. But in a little while, they have been found deficient, their Reputation hath sunk ; and after a great many Trials and Experiments,

periments, another has arisen, and pretended to mend the former, or to give us a new System of Philosophy in Favour of their beloved Cause *Atheism*; hath admired his own Performance, and been received as an Oracle by some loose and vicious Persons, who were prepared for giving an easy Credit to every thing, which tends to free them from the Terrors of Conscience and Religion. But in a little time this new Invention hath been found weak and insufficient too, and undergone the same Fate, to be despised and rejected as the other was. And thus, what the Atheists of one Age and Sect have applauded as Demonstration, those of another have exploded as false and absurd, even to this Day.

That late *French* Philosophy, which our *Atheists* thought so very serviceable to their Purposes, we have at length seen demonstrated to proceed upon Principles manifestly false and unreasonable. And I doubt not, but this will be the Fate of all the Attempts of vain conceited Men, to account for all the *unsearchable Works of God*, without him.

Thirdly, We are well assured that a Multitude of those, who have consider-
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ed all the Discoveries of Philosophy, and studiously enquired into the Nature and Causes of Things ; the more they have searched, and the more they have discover'd, the more they have been convinced of the Necessity of recurring to a First Cause, Eternal, Wise and Good ; that is, a God.

How then can Men, with any Reason, pretend so confidently to impute that to Ignorance in Natural and Mechanical Causes, which not only vulgar Understandings, but far the greatest Part of the Learned World, in all Ages, have been more strongly confirmed in the Belief of, the more curiously they have searched into the Power and Influence of them ? And how foolishly Credulous must they be, who, in a Matter of such vast Concernment, can rest satisfied in such Pretences, and confide in *them* as the most knowing and infallible Guides ; who can by no means agree in the Principles and Premises from which they infer their *Atheistical* Conclusion, and charge one another with Ignorance and Folly, as well as the Assertors of of a Divine Being ?

Fourthly, If we should suppose that the Assertors of a Deity had not so much

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Skill in Physiology as our *Atheists* pretend to have, the Existence of a God might have such Proofs as are obvious to the common Reason of Mankind, without the Assistance of Philosophy ; and Men might be very ignorant of the immediate Causes of particular Effects, and yet from the general View and Contemplation of the whole System of the World, and the several Parts of it ; the exquisite Frame , the beautiful Order, the mutual Serviceableness of what they behold , discern *the invisible things of God, even his Eternal Power and Godhead.*

There is no Necessity of a Man's being skilled in the Mechanism of a Clock , to make it reasonable for him to conclude, by observing the Use, and Form and Motions of it , that Art and Design were engaged in the making of it. And indeed , if we suppose that there is a God , it is but reasonable to think that he hath set such a Mark of himself upon his own Workmanship , that he may be known to any of his Reasonable Creatures *by the Things which he hath made* ; if they will but exercise their Faculties in a serious Contemplation of them , and make use of those Helps
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they may have from Discourse and Conversation with Persons of greater Knowledge and Experience. But,

Fifthly, It may not be unfit upon this Occasion, to enquire a little into the Proofs of that great Knowledge in the Causes of Things, and the Original of the World, which Atheistical Men pretend to; and to make some Trial of that wonderful Skill they boast of in these Matters.

If you ask one Sort of them, how all Things came to be as they are, in such excellent Order, so various, so beautiful, so useful, so exact and constant in their Motions; they will only tell you, that it always was so; which is in plain *English* to confess their Ignorance, and to say they know nothing of the Matter. Another will tell us, that Things came to the State they are in, by the Efficacy of some Causes void of all Intention, acting necessarily to the producing their Effects; which is as much as to say, Things are as they are, because they could not be otherwise.

Another will tell us, that an innumerable Company of little Crums of Matter, after they had been confusedly rambling about and jostling one another,
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for no body knows how long, in infinite Space, at length by mere Chance ranked and fixed themselves in the best Order that the most perfect Art and Wisdom could have disposed them into. This indeed is such a wonderful Discovery of the Power and Skill of blind Chance and Fortune, as the ordinary Reason of Mankind could never have made. But after all, it doth not inform us, what the Cause was which put Things into the State and Order they are in; but only, what it was not; for Chance is nothing but the Absence of an Intending Cause; and for the Proof of a Supposition so prodigiously absurd, they give us nothing but their own confident Assertion.

If we should enter upon a more particular Examination, as I may hereafter, of the Reason and Causes of Things assign'd by Atheistick Philosophers, they might easily be made to appear so senseless and extravagant, as are fit to be imputed to nothing else but the most stupid Ignorance, or the wildest *Phanaticism*. But what hath been already said, I hope may be enough to satisfy us, that we cannot easily excuse *them* from being very foolishly Credulous; who, in

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a Matter of no less Importance than an Eternal Life of Happiness or Misery, suffer themselves to be determined on the most dangerous Side by this Plea of *Atheists*, That nothing but Ignorance of Causes was the Original of the Notion of a God, and the Cause of the General Consent of Mankind in the Belief of his Existence. But if we will not allow their Pretence, that the Notion of a God was the Creature of Ignorance, they have another very different Account to give us of its Original; and tell us,

Fourthly, That it was the Invention of some very wise and subtil Politicians; who, finding it might be of great Use to keep the People in Subjection, employed their utmost Art and Power for the Propagation of it; which they found no difficult matter to accomplish; the Credulous Vulgar being easily perswaded to believe whatever their Princes and Governors confidently affirmed for a most certain Truth. But, in answer to this, I shall observe,

First, That this depends upon the Truth of divers Matters of Fact, of which they have not the least Degree
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of Proof. It's grounded upon a Supposition, as the former Objections are, that there was a Time when all the World were *Atheists*; when the Existence of a Divine Being was not so much as thought of; when, if Men made any Enquiry into the Causes of Things, it never came into their Heads to imagine, that there was any wise intelligent Being concerned in producing or ordering of them. It also farther supposeth, that Princes and Statesmen were the first Devisers and Teachers of the Principles of Religion; and farther yet, that they learnt them *not* from any real Proofs and Arguments, which they were better capable of observing than Persons of meaner Parts and Education; but purely invented and framed the Notion of a God, for the sake of such ends they thought it serviceable to. But now they are not able to produce one single Testimony in Confirmation of any part of their Supposition; but on the contrary the most ancient Histories and Records are Evidences against them, and, as far as we can know any thing of the Matter, it is manifestly groundless and false. Can it then with any tolerable Reason be censured, as the Effect of a foolish Credulity in us,

in a Matter of such infinite Concern, not to confide in their Conjectures, or to question the Truth of an Assertion which hath nothing but a bare Supposition so arbitrary and precarious to support it? But,

Secondly, The Supposition its self is not consistent with the Principles, and the other Pretences of *Atheistical* Men. For if the Notion of a God was invented by crafty Politicians, then it was not forced into their Minds by Fear, nor the Creature of the more dull and ignorant Souls. But what Power of Invention can there be in the Minds of Men, which, the *Atheists* tell us, are only acted upon, and can find out nothing but what is thrown into them from without, which have no domestick self-active Power, and can form no Ideas but what are made for them by something Foreign and Extrinsic, by such Motions as sensible Objects necessarily and irresistibly excite in them? If therefore they will own, what they must, if they are Consistent with themselves, that when they say the Notion of a God was invented by Politicians, they mean only that it happened to be first formed and found in their Minds, in this their mechanical way; then,

Thirdly,

Thirdly, It is reasonable for us to enquire, how it came to pass that the Brains of these Politicians above all others came to be so figured or temper'd as to be most apt to receive such Impressions. A Man would think that the Matter of these Minds, which were improved to a higher Degree of Wisdom and Rationality, should be least capable of having any foolish or unreasonable Idea formed in them, and should not be the first should feel that Passion, from the Motion of Matter without, wherein it consists. And if this Notion of a God did come first into the Minds of these Men of Art and Policy, when the Phantasm appeared there, how came they to know it to be false, and not the Representation of a real Existing Being? Or what Credit is to be given to *their* Judgment in thinking it false, who, being so thoroughly disposed to cheat and oppress Mankind, must needs be greatly prejudiced against the Belief of so mighty and righteous a Judge of Men?

Fourthly, It will be reasonable also to enquire farther, Whether we are to take it for granted, that there were no Wise and Rational Men, at that time in the World, but Princes and their Mini-

sters of State. Were all the rest of the People so blind and ignorant, as to be imposed upon with their pretended new Discovery of so slavish a Principle, as this Plea of theirs supposeth the Belief of a God to be, without any Evidence or Proof of the Truth of it? Or was it at a time when there was nothing of that jealous Humour, which, at all other times, hath so generally prevailed, and makes People fearful and suspicious of their Governors designing to impose upon them for their own Interest and Advantage?

Fifthly, If we should suppose all this to be true Matter of Fact; that this was the state of Mankind, when they were first taught that there was a God; that they were so perfectly prepared *then* to question nothing how incredible soever, which their Governors thought fit to affirm to them; yet how unreasonable is it to believe that it hath been always so? That, through all succeeding Generations, Men should never be able to discover the Falshood of an Opinion, which had no better Foundation than the Authority of some cunning Statesmen, who were the first Inventors and Teachers of it? If it had no Foundation in Sense and Reason,
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but was a meer Counterfeit Thing, a Fiction of Sovereigns to cheat the People into Fear and Bondage ; is it not strange that amongst all the Struggles of the People for Liberty, and prying into the Designs of their Governors , and industriously setting themselves to find out every thing which might increase their Exasperations against them, and put a better Colour upon their violent Attempts to overthrow their Power and Dominion, they should never discover and plead their cheating them into the Belief of the Being of a God, and challenge the Liberty of being *Atheists* , and free themselves from the Awe and Fear of such State-Devices to enslave them ? That the Belief of a Deity should continue so general and fixed in the Minds of Men, for some thousands of Years, as long as we have any Account of Things, and be nothing but the Imposture of Men in Power to abuse their People : That though several Persons , in several Ages, have made it their Business to perswade them it was nothing but a Cheat, and so few could ever be brought to esteem it so, that yet it should have no other Original, no probable Evidence of its Truth : That even Princes and Politicians themselves

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should

should be awed with the Fear of a God, and the Checks of Conscience, as well as other Men: That many of these should maintain the Principles of Religion with the greatest Firmness and Constancy, and deny themselves those Satisfaction which their Power made safe and easy for them to take, for fear of a Being which was only a Creature of the Invention of their Predecessors no wiser than themselves: These are such unaccountable Things, as nothing but extreme Folly and Credulity could ever bring Men to venture their Eternal Life and Happiness upon.

Scarcely, If the Notion of a God was the Invention of some very politick Head, (as if it were an Invention, it certainly must be, it being the most useful, and carrying the fairest Appearance of Truth that ever any Fiction did,) How came it to be found amongst the most rude and ignorant Nations, where there were no Tokens of *any* considerable Art or Invention, where there were no *other* Proofs of the Policy of their Princes and Statesmen, and where they knew so little of the use of this subtil Invention to the Purposes for which the *Atheist* pretends it was devised and taught. If they will
say,

say, That they might have some wiser Heads amongst them in former times ; they also should tell us, how it came to pass that no other Appearances should remain of their wise Instructions ; that this only should stick and abide in their Minds, if there were not some obvious Reasons, even to the lowest and least improved Understandings, of the Truth and Certainty of it.

Seventhly, The Notion of a God, which hath so generally prevailed, is of a Being, who is a Supreme Lawgiver, a curious Inspector of the Actions of Men, and a Revenger of them who do evil ; a Being to whom Princes and Statesmen, as well as the common People, owe Subjection, and are Accountable. Whereas if it had been the pure Invention of these great Men, they would have made it more Serviceable to their particular Interest, Honour and Security. Their Fiction of a God would have been of a Being, who regarded only the Manners of the People, who had given to themselves the Power of declaring what was Virtue or Vice, and would punish nothing but the Breach of Human Laws. God hath indeed been represented as such a Being, by a late Pretender to the utmost

most Skill in Politicks. He hath framed a Notion of a God extremely fit for their Purposes ; one who hath granted the Supreme Magistrate the sole Power of creating Good and Evil, and declaring what is True and False ; what every Man is to Believe and Profess ; and what he is to Deny and Reject as Error, even with Respect to his own Divine Nature and Perfections ; and makes no other Discovery of his own Will but by the Commands of the Prince. Now if this had been the Notion of a Divine Being, which had been so generally received, then indeed it might reasonably enough have been ascribed to no other Original but the Invention of Men in Power and Authority. But we know that the Case is far otherwise, and this Author himself owns it to be so, and boasts of himself that he was the first Inventor of this Scheme of Politicks ; and that this Doctrine of Civil Government was never known to the ignorant and deluded World 'till he happily made the Discovery. I come now,

Fifthly, To consider another Cause, to which a late *Letter-Writer* imputes the Original of that Notion of a God, which hath been so generally entertained, and the

Letter concerning Enthusiasm to my Lord.

the Belief of the Existence of such a Being; and that is, *ill Humour*, and the Want or Defect of Goodness in Mankind. There being in Appearance something new in this Writer's Management and Defence of the Cause of *Atheism*, I think my self obliged to give them a particular Consideration. The *Honourable Founder* of this *Lecture* requiring the Preachers of it, *to be ready to answer such new Objections or Difficulties, as shall be started, to which good Answers have not been made.* And though several such Answers have been made, yet I think it will become me to add something to them, as a farther Discovery of the *Atheistick* Principles of this Writer, and the Weakness of his Defence of them; and consequently the foolish Credulity of those Persons who can be prevailed upon, by such Discourses, to throw off all Fear of a Divine Being, which is the chief Design of his *Letter* to persuade Men to. He talks indeed of a God and a Deity, as other *Atheists* will, which he calls by several Names, not very properly applicable to one and the same Being, as a *Supreme Manager*, a *Common Parent*, a *General Mind*, and a *Perfect and Universal Being*; and seems inclined rather to believe

- lieve there is some such Being, than to
Pag. 36. imagine that *all ran at Adventures* ; and, *that the World, as wise a Face as it carried, had neither Sense nor Meaning in it.*
- P. 62.* He acknowledgeth the Notion of a *Common Parent* to be less frightful than that of a *forlorn Nature, and a fatherless World.* And yet he tells us, a few Lines after,
- P. 63.* that *no body trembles to think that there should be no God ; but that there should be one.* I suppose, he means such a one as we profess to believe, or otherwise he plainly contradicts himself. Now Fear being what he is an utter Enemy to, as inconsistent with that *good Humour, that pleasant and ridiculing Temper,* he would above all Things maintain himself in, at any rate ; he is resolved to reject both these Opinions ; our Notion of a God, or a *Common Parent* who is a proper Object of Fear ; and the other, of *forlorn Nature, and a Fatherless World ;* and to form to himself such a Notion of a *Supreme Manager,* as will exclude all Fear ; and plainly declares, that either there is no such Manager, nothing but mere Chance to trust to ; or if there be,
- P. 52.* he can be no Object of Fear. *God, saith he, either is not at all, or truly and perfectly good ; that is, as he explains himself,*
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he hath nothing of what we call Justice; he is an easy good-natur'd Being, who cannot be provoked, in any measure, to hurt any of his Creatures; whatever they say or do against him, they can have no Cause to fear in any Case his Anger or Resentment.

And this I take to be a plain Profession of *Atheism*, a Declaring his Disbelief of the Existence of a Just and Righteous Governor of the World, who observes the Behaviour of Men, is capable of discerning the Eternal and Necessary Differences of their morally Good and Evil Actions, and disposed and able to make suitable Applications to them of Rewards and Punishments. Now, this our Notion of a God, of a most Perfect Being governing the World in Righteousness, which he declares against, he imputes to the Ill Nature of Men; who finding in themselves such Anger and Resentments as make them fear one another, they have fancied a *Supreme Manager* like themselves, an Object of Fear and Dread. *I am perswaded, saith P. 35.*
he, *that nothing but ill Humour can give us dreadful Thoughts of a Supreme Manager. Nothing but ill Humour, either natural or forced, can bring a Man to think that the*
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World is governed by any Devilish or malicious Power : By which he means a Power, the Belief whereof upon any Account can give us any Dread or Uneasiness.

- P. 61. For, saith he, It is Malice only, and not Goodness, that can make us afraid. Nothing can persuade us of Sullenness or Sowreness ; that is, any thing which can make us afraid, in a Supreme Manager, but the*
- P. 36. forefeeling of somewhat of this kind in our selves.*

This then is the Substance of this Writer's Argument, against the Notion of a Just and Righteous Governor of the World, when it comes to be laid together, and stript of that Disguize of Wit and Banter which serves only to keep the Libertine Reader from a serious Consideration of it, in order to the Discovery of its Weakness. If there be a Supreme Manager, he must be perfectly good ; and if he be perfectly good, there can be no Reason for us to be afraid of him ; he can have nothing of that Justice we vulgarly suppose in him ; no Inclination to punish any thing we think displeasing to him. And Men had never entertained the Notion of a God, of a Powerful Being to be feared upon any Account, but because they were not good
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themselves, and therefore could not understand what true Goodness is. But being ill-natured themselves, and *liable to Offence and Indignation*, they could not separate these Things, these Imperfections, from their Idea of a Divine Being; all Men being apt to imagine, that if there is any such Being, he must be such as they are. In Answer to this, I shall observe and propose several Things to be considered.

First, That Justice, or distributing Rewards and Punishments according to the Lives and Actions of Men, hath been always included in that Notion of a God Mankind hath so generally consented in; and therefore whatever Argument there is, in this general and constant Consent of Mankind in believing the Existence of a God, to prove that he is, doth equally prove that he is such a Just and Righteous Being. Great and Publick Calamities have been generally esteemed Effects of God's Displeasure, and Punishments inflicted for some Offence committed against him; and therefore divers Methods have been always observed and used for appeasing the Wrath they have provoked; Supplications and Expiations
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by Sacrifice, and otherwise. Those Terrors of Conscience, those fearful Apprehensions, which have so generally disturbed the Minds of all Sorts and Ranks of Men, when they have been Conscious to themselves of some enormous Crime committed by them, do manifestly prove their Agreement in the Notion of a Just and Righteous God, who *executes wrath upon them that do evil.* And that universal Practice, in all Times and Places, of attesting and appealing to God by solemn Oaths, doth evidently imply their Belief, that God doth concern himself to punish Falshood and Injustice. This was so generally thought to belong to the true Idea and Notion of a Deity, that *Diagoras* is said to have turned a perfect professed *Atheist*, because one who had robb'd him of a Poem, and sworn before the *Senate of Athens*, that he had not, was not presently struck dead for his Perjury. And though it might be his *ill Nature* which led him into a wrong Notion of the Justice of God, yet his pleading the failing of what he thought must have followed, if there had been a just Governor of the World, an Observer and Punisher of Evil Doers, against the Being of any God at all, doth sufficiently
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prove that this sort of Justice was included in the common Notion Men had of a Deity. He reasoned upon this Principle, If there be a God he must be so just as to be a Terror to Evil Doers: Whereas our *Letter Writer* argues from a Principle exactly contrary, *viz.* If there be a God he must be so good as to have no such Justice as may give any Man cause to fear him. The one won't believe there is a God, unless he speedily take Vengeance of those who affront him; and the other tells us, There can be no God, unless he will for ever patiently suffer Men to break their Jest upon him, and ridicule every thing which hath relation to him, and forbear to punish the greatest Offenders now and hereafter. And in this he confesseth he contradicts the common Notion Men have of a Deity. For, saith he, *no Body trembles to think there should be no God, but that there should be one*; which is plainly to acknowledge, That every Body, who believes there is a God, believes he is a Being to be feared. He allows that there is a great and general Disposition in Mankind to fear God, from whence he hath taught us to infer, that the Idea of a God to be feared is in a manner *innate*,

or such as Men were really born to, and could hardly by any means avoid. And from this Concession we may raise a good Argument for the Truth of our Notion of a Deity; as he tells us, a Divine might raise against Epicurus, from the like Concession, for the Truth and Usefulness of Religion.

Secondly, If this Writer's Account of the Original and Continuance of the Notion of a God to be feared be true, then none but ill-natured Men did ever believe their was a Just and Righteous Governor of the World, or at least, the worse humoured any Men were, the less Goodness they felt in themselves, the more ready they were to acknowledge the Being, and to fear the Displeasure of a Righteous God: And then we should find that the most cruel Tyrants and Persecutors, the most malicious and bloody-minded Men, had the most awful Apprehensions of a Divine Being, and had the most confident Persuasion, and were most afraid of his Power and Vengeance; not because they thought he would be displeas'd with their own ill Nature and Cruelty, but because they thought the like ill Nature and Cruelty to be Perfections of God, the most worthy and excellent Being, and to be that Justice and Judgment we

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vulgarly ascribe to him. For where the Cause, the *only* Cause, is in the greatest Height and Strength, there the Effect is most likely to be produced in the greatest Perfection, and consequently where there is the most *ill Nature*, the *only* Cause of Fearing God, there will in all Reason be the most and the highest Degree of this Fear. And yet we find many of these ill natured Men, *making as bold with God*, and as venturous to ridicule Religion and all that is related to him, as this Writer himself in that *Height of Goodness* he pretends to have raised himself to.

Thirdly, If the Notion of a Divine Being, a just Object of Fear, be wholly owing to the *ill Nature* of Men, if the more we are improved in Goodness, the less apt we should be to believe the Existence of such a Being, then it would follow that the best Christians, as to their Temper and Practice, would be most inclined and most easily persuaded to embrace this sort of *Atbeism*, to believe that there was no such Governor of the World as would be offended with, or punish any thing we do. For Love, Meekness, Gentleness, Patience, wishing well and doing good to all, even to them who hate, ridicule, revile and persecute us,

most indispensable Duties of Christianity, recommended and enjoined as the most distinguishing and most necessary Marks and Characters of a true Disciple of Christ. So that the best Christians are the best humoured Men in the World ; and yet I am confident that in their *noblest Heights of Love and Goodness*, in the *sweetest and kindest Disposition of their Lives*, they have been nothing the more inclined to deny the Justice of God, or to think the Execution of his Threatnings can proceed from nothing but Malice ; but rather have *then* had the most tender Sense of the dangerous State of Wicked Men, and have felt the greatest Uneasiness of Fear for them, of that Wrath and Vengeance they were *treasuring up against the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God* : And were never farther, than at such times, from any Inclination to ridicule and laugh at those, who endeavoured to *save them with Fear*, and to set the *Terrors of the Lord* before them. That Prayer of St. Stephen, for his spiteful and cruel Enemies, *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*, plainly sheweth that he was not only in *ordinary good Humour*, but in the *best of Humours* at that time ; he was in *so sweet and kind a Dis-*
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position of Mind, so full of Love and Goodness, that in the very Moment they were stoning him to Death, he kneeled down and thus prayed to God for them; and yet, at that very time, he had a great Sense of the Danger they were in of feeling the Effects of the Divine Vengeance, and therefore cried to him with a loud Voice, That he would not lay their sin to their charge. Our Blessed Saviour, P. 48.

the divinest Man that ever appeared on Earth, according to the Opinion of this Writer, if the Character we have of his Goodness be true, of which we have certainly as good Proof as he hath for the like Character he gives of Socrates, was as highly sensible of the Justice of God, of his Resolution to punish obstinate Unbelief and Impenitence as ever any Man was. To love the Publick, to study universal Good, and to promote the Interest of the whole World, is surely the height of Goodness, and makes that Temper which we call Divine, says this Writer. Of such a Temper was the Man Christ Jesus, who went about doing good, all manner of good Offices to the Bodies and Souls of Men: Who gave all the Proofs imaginable of a mild, and gentle, and saving Spirit; tender of the Interest of Men, grieving for

their Evils and Miseries ; and denying himself in the Comforts and Conveniences of Human Life, that he might promote their present and future Happiness, Who was reviled by his Enemies, for too much Freedom and Easiness in his Conversation ; Whom no Injuries or Reproaches could provoke to Impatience or Desire of Revenge ; who maintained his *good Humour*, when he was suffering the utmost Contempt and Scorn, when he was not, as *Socrates*, only represented on the Stage in a ridiculous Figure, but was in his own Person exposed to the view of the People, in a Garb contrived on purpose to provoke them to ridicule and jest upon him ; when he was mocked and spit upon, when the Pangs of Death were sharp upon him, and the wicked Hands of his Enemies had nailed him to the Cross. No Person ever appeared in the World, who gave more or greater Testimonies of invincible Goodness, Meekness, and Gentleness, or gave less Cause to be suspected of any Degree of Malice or ill-Nature ; and therefore, according to this Writer's own Confession, he must have been excellently qualified to judge whether *those Forms of Justice, those Degrees of Punishment, and those Measures*
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of Offence and Indignation, we suppose in God, are consistent with the true Idea of Goodness. And for the same Reason he ought not to be suspected for an Enthusiast; for, saith he, good Humour is the best P. 35, Security against Enthusiasm. And yet 83. those very *Forms of Justice, those Degrees of Punishment, those Measures of Offence,* which he tells us could be nothing but the Invention of ill Nature, and the Dictates of Enthusiasm, were plainly taught and peremptorily asserted by him, as most real and manifest Truths. He not only *brought life and immortality to light,* but also the eternal Death and Damnation of Hell, and expressly warns us to *fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in it, who hath prepared everlasting punishment for all the workers of iniquity.* And can this unknown Ridiculer of our Holy Religion have the confidence to expect to persuade the World, that he ever felt in himself greater Degrees of Goodness than those, which *the Author and Finisher of our Faith* hath given such plentiful Demonstration of; and therefore that he is better qualified to understand what true Goodness is, than the Meek, and Loving and most Compassionate *Jesus* was; or that never any Man who feared God was

in so good a *Humour*, in so kind and sweet a *Disposition* as he was, when he wrote his prophane and impious Letter, and so boldly affirmed that there can be no such thing as a Divine Being to be feared, in the Opinion of any but ill natured Men.

Fourthly, Goodness its self in the highest Perfection, is so far from rendring a Being, endued with it, not at all to be feared, that in some Cases, and upon some Account of Offences at least, it must be a just Cause for Men to fear him. If it be a Being on whom we depend, who observes our Temper and Behaviour, and concerns himself about us, a *Supreme Manager*, the more he abounds in Goodness, the more Reason certainly will envious and malicious, cruel and revengeful Men have to fear his Displeasure; and it seems impossible to conceive how such abundant Goodness should have the same kind and affectionate Regard for what is so contrary to it, as for Love, and Meekness, and Charity; that it should shew no more Displeasure at those, who are continually acting the most savage and barbarous Cruelty, than at those, who are continually acting, to the utmost of their Power, the same Divine

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Virtue ; that it should indulge and cherish, and shew Favour and Bounty to them all alike. What can be more absurd than to imagine that a Being, because he is a *Common Parent* and *perfectly Good*, should therefore be incapable of being offended with those Children, who spoil, and wrong, and wound, and kill their Brethren ; that he should love *them*, and wish *them* as well, and be no more inclined to do any thing worthy of Fear to *them*, than those who are kind and charitable, and as they *have Opportunity* do all the *good* they can to *all Men* ? Goodness, even as it is Goodness, cannot but detest that Evil which is contrary and prejudicial to it, ἔπειτα τῷ ἀγαθῷ, ἢ ἀγαθόν, ἢ μωροπονεία, saith an Ancient Learned Author. Some Offenders then must have great and just Cause to *Fear the Lord and his goodness* ; the Malicious and Cruel cannot reasonably expect but that the more good any Being is, the more Danger they are in of suffering under his Displeasure, especially if it be a Being to whose Authority they are subject, and whose Power they are not able to resist. And this Letter-Writer himself, in that *best of Humours* he pretends to have put himself into, cannot forbear

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Alex.

to shew his Displeasure against those, who are disposed to persecute prophane Wit, and to restrain the Freedom of ridiculing Religion, and making bold with him we call our God, and endeavours to expose them to Contempt and Laughter, which is all the Punishment he hath Power to inflict ; and what he pretends is more grievous to them, and more prejudicial to their Cause, than the most bitter Railing and the severest Persecution.

Fifthly, Not only those Things, which are opposite to Goodness, must be displeasing to, and discountenanced by a Perfect Being, because he is good ; but these, and all other Kinds of moral Evil, because he must as necessarily be Just ; and his Goodness can only be such as is consistent with Justice, or a different Dealing with Men, according as they and their Works are good or evil. If there be any such thing in Nature as *moral Good and Excellence*, as certainly there is, and is allowed to be by this Writer ; then there must also be some Things which are in like manner morally bad ; Things which are not fit and becoming a reasonable Creature to do, and therefore also which they ought not to do ; and such Things

Things must be offensive to, and contrary to the Will of a Perfect Being, who cannot but know what is unfit for Men to do, and cannot but will that they should not do it.

And if Virtue and Vice are different Things in their own Nature, the one good and the other evil, the one agreeable and the other disagreeable to the Mind and Will of a perfect intelligent Being; then there must be a different Relation of Things and Circumstances to the one and to the other; and Rebuke and Punishment will have the same Relation to Vice, as Praise and Reward to Virtue; and there will be as much Reason for a Vicious Man to stand in Awe, and to be afraid of the Justice of a *Supreme Manager*, as for a Virtuous Man to hope and rejoice in his Goodness. For, to suppose him to regard and treat in the same manner, Things, which in their Nature and Relations are so very different, is to suppose him to do what in nature necessarily is not fit to be done; and to make a wrong and unfit Application of Things, and not to render to every Man the *Recompence which is meet*.

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What Perfection of Goodness soever we ascribe to a Divine Being, cannot be such as takes away all Ground of Fear, whatever we say or do ; for such Goodness, if it may be so called, is in truth inconsistent with the Natural as well as Moral Perfections of such a Being ; and implies either want of Understanding of the different Nature of Things, or want of Power or Will to treat them in a manner befitting their different Nature, and to suit the Condition to the Qualifications of the Persons. We cannot therefore deny the Justice of God, unless we also deny the Perfection of his Power, or Knowledge, or Wisdom, or suppose him capable of being swayed by some Temptation or other, to act contrary to these Perfections ; to make such Applications of Affection and Circumstances to Things and Persons, as he knows are not fit to be made, and is no ways constrained to by any Superior Power. It is therefore a manifest Contradiction in this Writer, to acknowledge a perfect Being without Justice, or such a Regard to the moral Actions of Men, as may and ought to be a *Terror to Evil Doers.*

Our

Our *Letter-Writer* pleads for a Liberty of Ridiculing every thing ; which should seem to intimate a Belief that there was no real Difference in Things : But he pretends for the Ground of this Plea, that we cannot know what is grave and serious, and fit to be treated as such with Honour and Reverence, till by applying his infallible Rule of Ridiculing , and trying how well Things will bear it, we come to know what Things are grave and serious, and what not ; what to be loved and praised, and what to be despised and exposed : But when we thus come to know the true Nature of Things, we must then regard and treat them suitably to their Nature , or we make our selves *ridiculous* , and *shew that we have no Justness of Thought*. By his own Confession then, there can be no Excuse for the Injustice of treating every thing alike, but our Ignorance of the true Nature of Things, or Inability to do otherwise ; neither of which can be supposed in a *Perfect Being*.

P. 17.

Sixthly , This Writer , for the better Establishing the Libertine Opinion he is so fond of , that if there be a Divine or Perfect Being , he must be so good that no Man can have any Reason to be afraid
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of him, represents him under the Notion and Character of a *general Mind*, that *hath Relation to the whole*: I suppose, he means as the Soul to the Body. For, P. 61, saith he, *If there be a general Mind, it can have no particular Interest; but the general Good, or the Good of the whole; and its private Good, must needs be one and the same. It can intend nothing besides, nor aim at any thing beyond, nor be provoked to any thing contrary; no more without doubt, he would have us believe, than the Mind of Man can design or inflict any thing evil or hurtful upon any Part or Member of him, or forbear desiring they should all be in the most easy and best State they are capable of. But if we should suppose that there is such a general Mind, it is certainly very weak, or ignorant, or very far from being so perfectly good as is pretended. For it is evident, that Mankind, who are no inconsiderable Part of the Universe, are not in the best and happiest State they are capable of. They would certainly be much more easy and happy, if they were in constant Health and Peace, if they laboured under no Pains or Diseases, if they never felt Sword, or Famine, or Pesti-*

Pestilence, or any of those many other Calamities they are subject to.

These Evils, in the Opinion of this Writer, can have nothing of Discipline or Punishment in them, no Relation to any Offence or Guilt; they can be no Warnings of greater and future Evils in another State; no Tokens of any Displeasure conceived against us by the *Supreme Manager*; no Means designed to bring us to Repentance, that *worse things* may not hereafter *come* to us. He cannot consistently alledge any of these, and the like Reasons, whereby our Religion teacheth us to account for them. According to his Principles therefore, his general Mind must be supposed to be no great Lover of Mankind, or to want Power to exercise his Goodness towards them, or to understand but little of what concerns *them*, that is a considerable Part of himself. And thus there will be little Difference betwixt the Notion of *forlorn Nature and a fatherless World*, and his Notion of a *general Mind*, a Mind which hath so little Regard of its own Welfare, or so little Power or Knowledge to help himself.

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As Religion, therefore, now stands amongst us, how confidently soever he asserts the contrary, good People must have less Fear and more Ease and Comfort in their Minds, from the Principles of our Religion, from the Belief of a perfectly wise, and powerful, and just and good God, who is continually watching over them for good, and by all their Afflictions, working for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; than from the Belief either of forlorn Nature, or such a general Mind, which regards only their present Good, as being all they are capable of; and yet suffers them, in their present State, oftentimes of all men to be most miserable.

And here I cannot but take notice of the Inconsistency and Contradiction of this Letter-Writer's Notions and Characters of what he calls a *Divine and Perfect Being*. According to the Purposes he hath to serve; it is sometimes a *general Mind*, and at other times a *common Parent* and Father of the World; which Characters must needs give us very different and inconsistent Ideas of that Being, which is represented by them.

As for this *general Mind*, he tells us, that *the general Good, or the Good of the whole, and its own private Good, must be one and the same*: Which seems to suppose this *general Mind* and the *Universe* to be one and the same Being. And if so, how can this *Mind* be called a *common Parent, or Father of the World*; or, which would be all one, the *Father of it self*? And if we may be allowed to give what *Names and Titles* we please to the *Supreme Manager*, and then reason from them, as he doth from that of a *general Mind*; that what is so can intend nothing but the *Good of the whole*, and therefore cannot be a proper *Object of Fear*; Why may we not as well argue from his other *Name and Title of a common Parent*, that if there be such a one, it is reasonable to expect he should be differently affected towards his *Children*, according as they are obedient or disobedient to him; and deal otherwise with those who honour and respect him, than with those who contemn and ridicule him?

Seventhly, This *Writer's Notion of the Goodness of a Perfect Being*, according to his own *Principles*, can appear reasonable but in one particular *Humour*, that

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P. 51.

which he calls the *best of Humours*. For, saith he, *we must not only be in ordinary good Humour, but in the best of Humours, and in the sweetest and kindest Disposition of our Lives, to understand well what true Goodness is, and what those Attributes imply, which we ascribe with such Applause and Honour to the Deity.*

P. 34.

It is only *then*, it seems, in such a Humour, that we can see the Goodness, which we ascribe to God, to be such as utterly excludes any thing else we attribute to him, which upon any Account can make us afraid of him. And therefore he confesseth, that he doth not *care so much as to think on the Subject of Religion, much less to write on it, without endeavouring to put himself in as good a Humour as is possible.* But if Truth be always the same, that will be likely to be most reasonable and true, which appears so to Men in all Humours; as many good Christians know by Experience the Notion of perfect Goodness accompanied with Justice in the Divine Being; doth; except in his *good Humour* of Ridiculing and Scoffing at Religion and the Fear of God, which they can never attain to. And certainly, it is very absurd for any Man to pretend to this *good Hu-*

Humour, before he hath cast out of his Mind all dreadful Thoughts of a Supreme Manager; and yet to own, as this Writer doth, that we must be first in this *good Humour*, before we can cast them out.

But this confirms the Truth of what he observes, That *Atheism* is not exempt from *Enthusiasm*; and that some have well remark'd, that there are *Euthusiastical Atheists*: That Men, by a very warm Passion for Vice and Pleasure, and the Working of a strong Imagination, may bring themselves to believe that they are delivering the Oracles of Reason, when they are uttering the grossest Absurdities and Contradictions, for the disproving those Perfections which all other Persons acknowledge, and even they themselves, when the Fit of Transport is over, cannot but believe, belong to a Divine Being. *In Adversity, or in ill Health, or under Affliction, or Disturbance of Mind, or Discomposure of Temper; in such a dark Hour, then, saith he, it is we see Wrath, and Fury, and Revenge, and Terrors in the Deity.* When his *good Humour* fails, then his pleasing Notion of the Divine Goodness fails him too, when he hath most need of Support and Comfort from it.

P. 50.

But *then* it is that the good Christian, by having Recourse to his Faith in the Goodness and Promises of this Being, so justly dreadful to all prophane and vicious Men, calms all his disturbing Passions, delights himself in his God, and *rejoiceth in hope* of that Eternal Glory and Happiness, he believes *these* his *light Afflictions* for a moment are working for him.

P. 62. It's nothing but a fond Affection for Vice and Wickedness, can dispose Men to wish against the Being of such a Just and Righteous God as our Holy Religion describes to us : And I believe there are no thorowly good Men, how confidently soever this Writer asserts the contrary, but had rather be under his Government, than that either of *blind Chance*, or such *Goodness*, to how great a Height soever his Imagination can raise it, which extends only to this present Life, wherein Things however *happen* so much *alike to all*. They had rather there should be a Hell, than no Heaven; that there should be *Wrath*, than no *Life* and Happiness *to come*. For having secured their Escape from the one, and their Title to the other, they have infinitely greater Cause of Rejoicing than the most prosperous Libertine upon Earth, who expects
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a Portion *in this Life only*, and no other Happiness but *the Pleasures of Sin for a Season*.

Is it not then a foolish Credulity, which entertains that for the true Notion of Divine Goodness, against the general Consent of Mankind, which appears to be so only to some few loose Persons, in one *Humour* of their Lives, without any Reason to support it but this, that in this *Humour* they find by Experience, they have *no Fear of God before their Eyes*, and can venture to deal as freely with him as they please.

Eighthly, This Writer's Notion of perfect Goodness in a Supreme Manager, is not only contrary to the constant general Idea which Men have had of a Divine Being, but hath all the Evidence and Proofs of the Truth of the *Gospel* against it; for therein the *Wrath of God* is plainly revealed against all *Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men*. And yet, tho' in a Christian Nation, he doth not think fit, to bring any Arguments against the possibility of a Divine Revelation, or against the many Proofs we alledge for the Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures; but only insinuates, that our Faith hath no other Foundation but *the specious*

Pretext of Moral Evidence, and Matter of Fact; that is, the best Evidence it is capable of; and tells us, That when he is in a very good *Humour* he cannot believe as we do. But doth not his own Argument, if there were any thing in it, depend upon Moral Evidence? For what other kind of Proof have we, that he was in so good a *Humour*, in the *sweetest and kindest Disposition of his Life* when he was writing this Letter; *that* he had no *dreadful Thoughts* of that Justice he was ridiculing, no secret Enmity against the *Awfulness of a Church*, or the Persons and Authority of its Ministers; or that he was not making Trial only how witty he could be in breaking his Jests on so grave a Subject; or to use his own Words; that he was fit to judge his own Spirit whether it were of Reason and sound Sense, by being *Sedate, Cool and Impartial*, free of every *byassing Passion*, and every *giddy Vapour*? We have nothing but the moral Evidence of his own bare Word for the Truth of all this. How foolishly credulous then must they be, who, in a Case of Infinite Concern, have more regard to the pretended Sense or the single Testimony of one unknown trifling Writer, than to the common Sense of Mankind, and all those Numerous Testimonies of
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the Truth of our Religion, by which it was so successfully confirmed.

Lastly, I shall consider the *Humour* this Writer was in, when the Notion of a Divine Being, of such *perfect Goodness* as not to be teared by any, was so confidently maintained by him ; whether it was so *good* as he pretends, whether he was in the *best of Humours, in the kindest and sweetest Disposition*, which he tells us it is necessary we should be in, to *understand well what true Goodness is, and what those Attributes imply, which we ascribe with so much Applause and Honour to the Deity*. If Pride and Self-conceit, a general Contempt of the Understanding of Mankind, treating all who dissent from him with Scorn and Derision ; scoffing at the Zeal and Courage of Martyrs and Confessors, whose Names have been revered for so many Generations ; reviling and slandering the Ministers of Religion, and endeavouring to expose them to the Hatred and Contempt of the People, as *Lovers of Blood, and believing in Fairies* ; encouraging Men to be as wicked as they please, to injure the Publick and one another, without any fear of provoking God, or any future Punishment of their Sin ; if these are Instances and Proofs of

ill Humour, then it is certain he must be in very *ill Humour* at the writing of this Letter, and by his own Confession, not fit to judge of the Perfections of a Divine Being. He tells us, That *it is impossible that any but an ill-natur'd Man can wish against the Being of a God. For this is wishing against the Publick, and even against ones privates Good too, if rightly understood.* But it is the Belief of a Just and Righteous God, a God to be feared by those who do publick or private Mischief, which is so serviceable to the publick and private Good of Men. And therefore, according to his own Principles, he must be a very ill-natured Man indeed, who not only wishes, but argues against the Being of such a God, and endeavours to perswade Men, that there is no Punishment to be feared from a Divine Being, for Tyranny and Oppression, for Robbery and Murder, or any Injury we can do to one another.

If now we reflect upon what hath been said, we cannot but observe what poor Shifts prophane and vicious Men are forced to make, to get rid of the Principles of Religion, and to stifle those common Notions of a Divine Being, which are apt to give them so much
Disturbance,

Disturbance, in *making Provision for the Flesh, and fulfilling the Lusts of it.* They pass the grossest Absurdities upon themselves for real and substantial Arguments; and where it is of the utmost Importance not to be mistaken, suffer their Judgment to be byassed by the most absurd and inconsistent Principles on the most dangerous Side. And when they have done, triumph in their own Delusion, and laugh at the Folly of those who are not as Credulous as themselves, who expect better Proof of their Atheistick Principles, before they cast off the Restraints of Religion and the Fear of God, if it were their Interest to do it. It is necessary that the Folly of such Men should be exposed; but it does not become us to do it in their pleasant Way of jesting and Ridicule; we cannot but be deeply concerned to observe what Pains they take to cheat and undo themselves; and heartily pray to God for them, that he would open their Eyes and turn them from Darkness unto Light, and from the Power of Satan unto God.

Thus I have endeavoured to explain and vindicate the Argument, taken from general Consent, to prove the Being of a God; to shew wherein the Strength of
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it lies , and to answer the several Objections of Atheistical Men , whereby they endeavour to weaken the Force of it.

And now I think I may appeal to all, who will seriously and impartially consider the Case, Whether the Atheist is not much more Credulous than the *Religious Man*, in believing that to be most natural and agreeable to Human Understanding, which hardly any Man did ever so firmly believe as not to have any Fear or Doubting of the contrary , and which hath been so universally and constantly acknowledged false and irrational ; in believing it so far as to venture his Soul and Eternity upon the Truth of it, by casting off all Regard to a Divine Being, and living as if he were sure there were no *God in the World*. This which I have thus far insisted on, is an Argument of Testimony , not indeed of the Senses, but of the Reason of Mankind ; and if we may suppose our Faculties true, I cannot see why so general and constant Agreement of the Understandings of Men, of all Capacities, Dispositions and Interests, in acknowledging the Existence of a God, should not be as good a Proof of the Reasonableness of the thing asserted,

as the like Agreement in judging of an Object of Sense, would be of the Truth of that Judgment : At least, it must have such an Appearance of Reason, as every wise Man will think sufficient to justify his Assent to it, 'till he can be informed of some very plain and evident Demonstration to the contrary, such as no Man ever did, or can produce. Alas ! Our common *Atheists* seldom spend a serious Thought, but what is in a manner forced into them, about this Matter. Their Time is so taken up, and their Minds are so entirely possess'd, with worldly Lusts and Projects, that they have neither Leisure nor Capacity for a deliberate and impartial Consideration of the Arguments used in this Controversy. And tho' it be of the utmost Importance to them, not to reject the Principles of Religion, if they are true ; they presume them false for no tolerable Reason which they can alledge, but merely thro' an implicate Faith, in some few loose and prophane Talkers, or one or two self-conceited Pretenders to Philosophy, of whom they know little but their Names ; whose Testimony however, they prefer to that of the most, and best, and wisest of Mankind thro' all Ages. And yet
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these poor ignorant Wretches will pretend to laugh and jest at the Folly and Credulity of Religious Men; as if they were imposed upon by an Authority of no Account, in comparison of that they run the most extreme hazard in depending upon.

I have now done with this Argument of general Consent; which tho' it may seem of less weight than some others, yet I conceive it is alone sufficient for my Purpose, to shew, that we have no reason to *be ashamed* of any foolish Credulity in believing that there is a God; seeing this is not only to believe on that Side of the Question which is most comfortable and safe, most for the private and publick Interest of Mankind, but on which also the Odds is so vastly great in the Number of Persons, of all Ranks and Capacities, of all Tempers and Interests. The Credulity is certainly on the Atheist's Side, who embraceth that for a certain Truth, and with unspeakable hazard governs himself by it; which hath been so generally and constantly contradicted by all Sorts of Men, and for which no Reasons have ever been produced, which have not appeared weak and insufficient to all but himself, and a
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very few more; who, in favour of their *foolish and hurtful Lusts*, have been disposed to entertain any Opinion, which might help to secure their Minds from Trouble and Disquiet in the free Indulgence of them.

I should proceed now, according to what I had at first designed, to another Argument to prove the Reasonableness of our Belief of a God; which may be taken from the Contemplation of the whole visible World, the exquisite Frame, the Beauty and Order of that vast Variety of Beings contained in it, their mutual Subserviency towards one another, and their exact fitness to their proper Uses. This Argument hath been always thought a most convincing Proof of a most Powerful, Wise, and good Being, the first Cause of all Things. But this being too large and copious to be duly enquired into, in that little Room I have now left, I shall content my self with considering,

Secondly, The Evidence we have of a Divine Being, from the Contemplation of our selves, of our own human Nature, of our Existence, of the Frame and Powers of Mankind. No probable, no tolerable Account can be given of these things

things without the Acknowledgment of a God, of an Eternal, Wise, and good Being, the Author of them. This will appear by considering the Account which the *Atheists* give of these things.

First, That Men have been from all Eternity such as they now are. Or,

Secondly, That Men were formed in time, out of Eternal Self-existent Matter, by the casual and unguided Motion of the Parts of it.

First, That Men have been from all Eternity such as they now are. But if Man were an Eternal Being, he must be an Eternal Independent, or an Eternal Dependent Being. If Independent of any other Being, then he must exist by the Internal Necessity of his own Nature; Existence must be included in his very Essence; and if so, then it must be impossible, and a Contradiction, to suppose that Man should not exist. But surely no Man will venture to say, that there ever was a Man whose Existence was thus necessary; for then there must have been an Immortal Man, a Man of whose Essence it was necessarily to exist; and therefore always to exist. They cannot say that Human
Nature

Nature is thus necessary, for that can have no Existence but in Singulars. And if it be possible, that all Men should *perish from off the Face of the Earth*, then it is possible, that Human Nature may be utterly extinguished. They were once, we say, very near such a general Destruction; and when it will serve their turn, our *Atheists* will tell us, that it is probable they may have been often so, that there may have been many Floods, which have prevented the World's being overstock'd with Inhabitants, as supposing it Eternal, it might otherwise have been; and destroyed those Records, which might have proved its Original of an earlier Date than we suppose it was. If Man were an Eternal Dependent Being, an Eternal Effect of an Eternal Cause; if that Cause be allowed to be Intelligent, Wise and Good, this would be to acknowledge a God.

If it were a stupid unintelligent Being, as the *Atheists* must suppose it to be mere unactive Matter, they can never make it credible, that that should be, a Competent Cause of such an Effect; and it is equally absurd to make it so from Eternity as to make it so in time; and whosoever supposeth it to have been so
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from Eternity, runs into all the Absurdities of the *Epicurean* Hypothesis, which he seeks to avoid, by supposing Mankind to be Eternal. For Time or Eternity make no difference in this Case; and whatever is alledged, to shew the unreasonableness of supposing unintelligent Matter to produce such an Effect as Man in time, equally proves it to have been always so, that it never was or could be a sufficient Cause, to which the Existence of such a Being as Man can, with any tolerable Pretence of Reason, be ascrib'd. I proceed therefore to shew the unreasonableness of the other Account the *Atheists* give of the Existence of Mankind, *viz.*

Secondly, That they were formed in Time, out of Self-existent Matter, by the Casual Concourse of the Parts of it. To this end, I shall consider.

First, The Nature of the Effect, Man.
And,

Secondly, The Insufficiency of the Cause they assign of its Production.

First, I shall consider the Nature of the Effect, Man. For the more perfectly we understand this, the better we shall

shall be able to judge of the sufficiency of any Cause to produce it.

First, then, Let us consider the Frame of our Bodies. Of what a vast variety of Materials is the noble Fabrick of an Human Body composed; as Skin, and Flesh, and Bones, Cartilages, Veins and Arteries, Nerves and Ligaments, Membranes and Fibres, and how many excellent Organs of Nutrition, Sense and Action are they formed into? How fine, how curious and proportionable are they, how far surpassing all the most celebrated Works of the most nice and skilful Artificers? How manifestly are every one of its numerous and various Parts set in such Places, and in such Order, as may best serve their proper Ends, so as no one can hinder another from performing its Office; but that they should be mutually serviceable to one another, and to the common good of the little World, Man; that there should be no interfering, no injurious crossing or pressing upon one another, *no Schism in the Body*. How hath every Part such a Fence, such a Situation, such a Figure, such a Proportion, such a Temperament, as is most conducing to Ease, Safety, Beauty and Use? To how many excellent

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lent Purposes do the Parts and Organs of our Bodies serve; to the supply of our Necessities, to the comfort and pleasure of our Lives, to the delightful Enjoyment of the several Creatures of this World in which we live, to a grateful Perception of their Beauty, Sweetness and Harmony? How useful, and yet how wonderful and unaccountable are the continual Motions of some of our Parts, the Peristaltick Motion of the Intestines, the Motion of the Diaphragma for the assisting Respiration, and the Systole and Diastole of the Heart; whereby the Blood is driven, through various Channels, into the several Parts of the Body, to supply them with vital Heat and Nourishment. The use of these Motions is plainly discerned, but the manner how they are begun and continued, sometimes for an Hundred Years and more, hath baffled the Attempts of the acutest Philosophers, and the most Curious Anatomists to find out. But,

Secondly, Let us consider the Power and Faculties of the yet more Noble Part of Man of the Soul. How Excellent, how Capacious are they? How swift are their Motions, how delightful their Exercises? What Rich Treasures of
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Wisdom and Knowledge is the Soul of Man capable of containing; what various Arts, what Copious Sciences, what Volumes of History? It can embrace whatever it pleaseth, and run from one Object to another swifter than Wind or Lightning. It can in an Instant bring into present View things which were done some Thousand Years ago, and things which may be yet as many Thousand Years to come? How numerous, how useful, how admirable are the Inventions of it? What subtil Reasonings, what abstract Notions, what sweet Meditations, what joyful Remembrances, what delightful Hopes, what Divine Virtues is it capable of? It's hardly at a loss in any thing more than in recounting the Excellencies of its own Nature and Abilities.

When therefore we consider all these things, how *fearfully and wonderfully* we are *made*, the many Arguments and Characters of Wisdom and Goodness in a Being, so excellently framed and qualified; we cannot but think it highly reasonable for us, as the *Prophet* speaks, to *see, and know and consider, that the Hand of the Lord hath done this, that the Holy One of Israel hath created us, that we are made and fashioned by a Being Powerful,* *Isa. 41. 20.*

Wise and Good beyond all Expression. And that this may appear a very just Conclusion, and at least the most probable Account of the Cause of such an Effect as Man ; I shall consider,

Secondly, The Insufficiency of the Cause which the *Atheists* assign of its Production, and of the Frame and Powers of Mankind. They will allow no previous Wisdom, Counsel, or Contrivance to have any hand in producing this admirable Effect ; but ascribe it wholly to eternal blind Necessity, or the lucky jumble of the insensible Parts of Matter. They suppose that all that vast variety of curious Parts, that all those excellent Organs to be observed in Man, so exactly fitted to such innumerable and excellent Ends, were never designed for any ; that all things in us happened into such a Form, into one such agreeing and conspiring Harmony, by a casual Fluctuation of things ; that the most wise and wonderful Contrivances were the mere Effect of dulness, stupidity and blunder ; that all the Noble Operations of our Souls are nothing else but the various friskings of senseless Matter ; that Sense and Reason were the Product of an insensible and unintelligent Cause ;
that

that Thought and Remembrance, Wisdom and Consciousness, Will, and a Self-determining Power, are nothing else but a fortunate Mixture, and undirected Motion of those little Atoms of which they assert our Souls and Bodies are composed. But certainly these are such gross and palpable Delusions, as nothing but the most obstinate Aversion to the Belief of a Deity could ever betray Men into. And yet these are the Notions they are not ashamed to own and defend; and at the same time insolently boast of their Wit, and Reason, and Philosophy, and laugh at the Folly and Credulity of those Men, who suffer any thing to gain their Assent but the most convincing Evidence, and the clearest Demonstration. But after all, nothing can be more precarious or void of Evidence than those Principles, on which they ground their Belief, that we are not the Workmanship of such a Being as we call God. Can they alledge any thing to prove that there can be no Self-Existent Intelligent Being, capable of producing such a Being as Man? That there is something Eternal and Self-Existent, they all do and must allow, and also that there was something capable of producing such a Being. And

why must that needs be senseless and un-intelligent? Are blind Chance or Necessity more probable Causes of such an Effect, of a Work contrived with such astonishing Art and Skill, than Wisdom and Counsel? Have they ever seen or heard of any thing like it, but the Image or Statue of a Man, which hath been formed by an undefining and inconscio-ous Cause. Can they give any tolerable Account of the Noble Faculties and Operations of the Soul of Man, from dull passive Matter alone; how from the various Size and Shape, Situation and Agitation of the little Parts of it, and this too without any Director, should arise a Subject capable of such rare Endowments of Wisdom and Virtue, of such large Knowledge and curious Invention, able to design and perform all those Excellent Effects of Art and Industry, we are constant Witnesses, and have daily Sense and Experience of? Can they make it credible against our own Experience, that we are nothing but mere Corporeal Machines; that all our Thoughts, and Resolutions, and Actions whatsoever, are only the Effect of the forceable Impressions or impulse of Bodies without us; that we cannot move

a Hand or Foot, or conceive a Thought, but as we are constrained by External things acting upon us, and that all our Motions are as necessary and void of Liberty as those of the Wind or Seas? Can any thing be more precarious than the Supposition, or more incredible than the Truth of these Things, or more worthy of our Indignation than the Attempts of Men to persuade us to believe them? Can we bear to think, that Men should deem us capable of entertaining such senseless and absurd Conceits, to hear them arguing against the Being of a God from such Principles, as would prove ourselves to be no Men; that we have no Reason or Liberty, none of those Perfections, which are the Glory of our Human Nature; that we are nothing but mere Engines of Fate or Chance, made up of Springs and Wheels, and no Body knows what, jumbled together without any Art, and effecting nothing but as they are moved by the irresistible Force of Bodies all about them? If we can believe such things as these, which are the Principles into which all Atheism must be resolved, or the most evident Consequences from them, without any Proof but the bare Authority of a few

Vain-glorious Pretenders to Wit and Philosophy, we may justly *be ashamed* of our Credulity. This is, in a Case wherein we are Eternally undone if we are mistaken, to renounce the Testimony of our own Sense, Reason and Experience in a credulous Respect to such Authority. I come now,

Secondly, To consider the Credulity of the *Infidels* amongst us, who believe, that it is more reasonable to renounce than to persist in the Christian Faith. I express it thus, because I take this to be the Question here in a Christian Nation, Whether is more reasonable to reject, or to continue steadfast in the Belief of the Principles of that Religion we were educated in? Whether when we come to be capable of judging for our selves, and examining the Grounds and Proofs of our Religion, we find them strong enough to establish us in that Faith, which till then we entertained upon the Credit of our Instructors, who taught us to believe, that the *Holy Scriptures* of the *New-Testament* contain in them a Rule of Faith and Life revealed to us by *Jesus Christ*, a *Teacher sent from God*. I am now to suppose, that we have considered the Proofs, and are thorowly convinced by
them

them of the Truth of the Principles of Natural Religion, that there is a God, an Almighty, most Just, and Wise, and Good Being, the Creator and Governor of the World, whom we are obliged to believe and obey in all things ; and that we are to enquire into the Credibility of the Truth of the *Gospel*, *whether it be of God, or of Men* ; whether is more reasonable for us to renounce or to persevere in our Christian Faith. I can only very briefly mention those things, which are proper to be considered by us, whilst we are making this Enquiry, in order to the giving a right Judgment of the Case before us. And,

First, It will be proper for us to consider the Possibility of a Divine Revelation. And surely we cannot think it above the Power of an Almighty Being, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, in Ways unknown to us, to enlighten the Minds, and to improve the Understandings of Men, and to make them capable of declaring such things with great Sincerity, which he thus filleth them with the Knowledge of. And if we act reasonably we must allow it possible, how difficult soever it may appear to us, unless

Religion no Matter of Shame.

unless we can find a manifest Contradiction in the Nature of the thing supposed to be done, which I presume never was, or can be discovered.

Secondly, Let us consider the Probability of God's exercising his Power in this manner. And surely we cannot think it improbable, that such a perfectly Good Being, as God is, should make such a Revelation, if it might be serviceable to the Benefit of Mankind. And I conceive no Man will pretend to prove, that it is so very easie for all Men, by the Strength of their own Natural Abilities; to attain the Knowledge of all things which are of use to them, that they are incapable of receiving any considerable Benefit by such extraordinary Methods of Information.

Thirdly, There is nothing we can think of, if we suppose God should be inclined to make any such Revelation to us, more likely to be the Subject of it, than those things, which are contained in the *Gospel of Jesus Christ*. For what could be more needful or useful for us to be instructed in, than a true and a more perfect Knowledge of God and our selves; how we are to live, and what we are to expect; what Happiness and Misery we
are

are capable of and liable to, and how we may secure the one, and escape the other. What End can we suppose so becoming a Wise, and Just, and Holy God to design, by making a Revelation, as to reform the World, to *renew us after his own Image*; and to lead us into those Paths of Piety and Vertue, which so manifestly tend, as I have largely shewed, to the private and publick Happiness of Mankind? And what more powerful Arguments can be thought of, to persuade us to live and act accordingly, than those Assurances of the Divine Assistance, those wonderful Manifestations of the Love of God towards us, those *great and precious Promises*, and those severe and dreadful Threatnings, which the *Gospel* lays before us? And,

Fourthly, Though there be some Doctrines, which are above our Comprehension, contained in the *Gospel*, which we have been taught to believe is a Revelation of God by *Jesus Christ*; some things asserted, which our Understandings are at a loss how to account for, and have some difficulties in them which we cannot perfectly resolve; yet this alone cannot be a sufficient Reason to renounce our Christian Faith, unless it can be reasonable

sonable to believe, that God can tell us nothing is, but what we can perfectly understand how it should be, and fully comprehend all, even the unrevealed Circumstances of it. Our Senses and our Reason inform us of many Thousand Things, that they are, and we make no doubt of their Being, though upon Supposition that they are, as we believe them to be, there are many things relating to them, which puzzle our Understandings, and with our most diligent Search and Study, we are never able to find out how they are or can be.

If now, upon a due and impartial Consideration of these things, we are satisfied, that a Divine Revelation is not an impossible thing, and that there is nothing in in the Gospel of Christ, but what might probably enough be the Subject of such a Revelation, if God should think fit to make one; it will then be proper for us to consider,

Fifthly, What Proof we have that the Gospel is such a Revelation. And here we may observe.

First, That it is plainly asserted by the Writers of the *New-Testament*, that Christ Jesus was a *Teacher come from God*, and that his Disciples, and the first Preachers of the Gospel, were inspired
by

by the *Holy Spirit*, whom their Master had sent to *lead them into all Truth*, and *to bring all things to their Remembrance, whatsoever he had said unto them.*

Secondly, That we find such Matters of Fact therein related by them, which if they are true, sufficiently confirm the Truth of their Assertion, *viz.* The many great and publick Miracles which were wrought by our Saviour; his rising from the Dead the third Day according to his own Prediction, his ascending into Heaven, and sending the Holy Ghost, whereby his Disciples were enabled to speak all Languages, and to do as great Works as he himself had done.

Thirdly, That we have no Reason to doubt, but that they had Means and Opportunities, and were sufficiently qualified, to know the Truth and Certainty of those Matters of Fact which they relate. They were things which they had *seen with their Eyes, and heard with their Ears, and their Hands had handled of the Word of Life.* Nay, they were some of them miraculous Works wrought upon, and done by the Relators themselves.

Fourthly, That we can find no just Cause to suspect, that they should affirm
and

and publish these things to the World, as certain Truths, if they had not believed and known that they were so. They could have no Prospect of Worldly Glory, or Profit, or Advantage to themselves; but on the contrary very well knew, that by relating and publishing these things, they should expose themselves to the Scorn, and Hatred, and Persecution of the Incredulous *Jews*, and Idolatrous *Gentiles*. And as they were *nothing terrified or dismayed* by the Threats of their unbelieving Enemies, so neither can any Instance be given of any one of them, who, by the most grievous Tortures and Miseries they endured, could ever be brought to confess himself guilty of any Imposture. And,

Fifthly, That this cannot reasonably be supposed to be the Effect of Enthusiasm or Obstinacy, when we consider, what we are assured of by the concurrent Testimony of all History, that in their time *the Word* which they preached *mightily grew and prevailed*, and Multitudes of Believers *were daily added to the Church*, even in *Jerusalem* its self, where their Testimony was most easy to be confuted, and most unlikely to be submitted to, if they had not given the
most

most convincing Proofs of the Truth of it; if they had not confirmed it by such *Signs and Wonders, and Miracles, and Gifts of the Holy Ghost,* as the Holy Scriptures relate. For how credulous soever we may suppose Men to be, with respect to such Matters as are favourable to their Lusts and Interest in the World, or to the Customs and Religion they have been educated in, yet we may reasonably expect the utmost Aversion in them to the believing and professing a Religion, which required them to contradict their strongest Inclinations, to renounce the Principles and Worship they had derived from their Fore-fathers, and charged them with the guilt of the most barbarous Murder, in killing the Lord of Life, the Saviour and Redeemer of Mankind. I know nothing we have more to consider, than.

Lastly, Whether the Books of the New-Testament were written by the Apostles, and have been transmitted faithfully to us, without any variation in the Principal Doctrines and Facts contained in them. And for this we have as good Proof, as a thing of this Nature is capable of, which in other Cases is generally allowed to be sufficient, and Men are
not

not afraid to venture their greatest worldly Concerns upon. If we consider how early, how universally these Books were received, as written by the Authors whose Names they bear, how vain the most subtil and industrious Attempts of the Enemies of our Religion have been to destroy the Credit of them; what Care hath been taken to compare the several Copies of these Books which have been dispersed throughout the World, and how exactly the Doctrines and Matters now contained in them, agree with what we find in all other Authors, nearest to those times, and what sort of Men they generally are, who shew their despite to them: If we seriously and impartially consider these things, I know no Reason we can have to throw off that reverend Regard to them, which we have been taught they deserve and require from us.

Thus have I briefly mentioned some of those Arguments, by which we are confirmed in our Christian Faith, and which if duly weighed without any bias in the Mind of Men from the Interest of their Lusts and Vices, I doubt not, would be sufficient to shew, That our Reasons for persevering in it, are much stronger than any our Infidels

fidels can produce for their renouncing it, and consequently, That the Folly and Credulity is on their Side.

Let us then hold fast the Profession of our Faith without wavering, and not be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; the Truth whereof is so strongly attested, and the Design whereof is so much to our Advantage in this present Life; and which, if we reject without Cause, we run the most apparent hazard of being eternally and unspeakably miserable in another World.

But let us also take care, that we do not hold the Faith *in Unrighteousness*, for then our Faith will be just Cause of Shame and Reproach to us; we shall be justly condemned for Fools, for acting contrary to our own Principles; for practising Wickedness and Vice, whilst we profess our selves to be under the strongest Obligations to Piety and Virtue; for neglecting to do that good which we believe will be rewarded with everlasting Life and Happiness; and chusing to do that Evil which we believe will be punished with endless and intolerable Misery.

To conclude then, Let us *add to our Faith, Virtue, and to Virtue Knowledge, and to Knowledge Temperance, and to Temperance Patience, and to Patience Godliness, and to Godliness Brotherly Kindness, and to Brotherly Kindness Charity; for if these things be in us and abound, we shall adorn both our selves and our Profession; and we shall take the most effectual Course to stop the Mouths of Infidels from speaking Evil of us or our Religion; and display the Beauties of the Doctrine of Christ in so advantageous a manner, as that it will hardly fail of taking hold of the Hearts and Affections of Men; and then we should not need to be ashamed of the most confident Hopes of an Entrance being administred unto us into the Everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To whom with the Father and the Eternal Spirit, be Glory and Honour, Adoration and Praise throughout all the Nations of the Earth, and for evermore.*

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Source Citation: "A discourse, proving, that the faith and practice of true Christians, are no just matter of shame or reproach. Being eight sermons preached at the cathedral church of St. Paul, in the year 1709, at the lecture founded by the Honourable Robert Boyle, Esq;. By Lilly Butler, ..." London, 1711. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. History Society Trial. 28 Jan. 2009
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