

AN
ESSAY
ON THE
NATURE and IMMUTABILITY
OF
TRUTH;
IN OPPOSITION TO
SOPHISTRY and SCEPTICISM.

A N
E S S A Y
O N T H E
NATURE and IMMUTABILITY
O F
T R U T H;
I N O P P O S I T I O N T O
S O P H I S T R Y and S C E P T I C I S M.

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Nunquam aliud Natura, aliud Sapientia dicit.

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M D C C C L X X.



INTRODUCTION.

TO those who wish well to the interests of learning and mankind, and who are more ambitious to distinguish themselves as men, than as disputants, it is matter of humiliation and regret, that names and things have so oft been mistaken for each other; that so much of the philosopher's time must be employed in ascertaining the signification of words; and that so many doctrines, of high reputation, and of ancient date, when traced to their first principles, have been found to terminate in verbal ambiguity. If I have any knowledge of my own heart, or of the subject I propose to examine, I may venture to assure the reader, that it is no part of the design of this book, to encourage verbal disputation. On the contrary, it is my sincere purpose to avoid it, and to do every thing in my power to check it; convinced as I am, that it never can do any good, and that it has been the cause of much mischief, both in philosophy and in common life. And I hope I have a fairer chance to escape it, than

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some who have gone before me in this part of science. I aim at no paradoxes; my prejudices (if certain instinctive suggestions of the understanding may be so called) are all in favour of truth and virtue; and I have no principles to support, but those which seem to me to have influenced the judgements of a great majority of mankind in all ages of the world.

Many will think, that there is but little merit in this declaration; it being as much for my own credit, as for the interest of mankind, that I guard against a practice, which is acknowledged to be in every respect unprofitable, and in some respects pernicious. A verbal disputant! what claim can he have to the title of Philosopher! what has he to do with the laws of nature, with the observation of facts, with life and manners! Let him not intrude upon the company of men of science; but repose with his brethren Aquinas and Suarez, in the corner of some Gothic cloister, dark as his understanding, and cold as his heart. Men are now become too judicious to be amused with words, and too *firm-minded* to be confuted with quibbles. — Many of my contemporaries would
readily

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readily join in this apostrophe, who yet are themselves the dupes of some of the most egregious dealers in logomachy that ever perverted the faculty of speech. In fact, from some instances that have occurred to my own observation, I have reason to believe, that verbal controversy hath not always, even in this age, been accounted a contemptible thing: and the reader, when he comes to be better acquainted with my sentiments, will perhaps think the foregoing declaration more disinterested, than at first sight it may appear.

They who form opinions concerning the manners and principles of the times, may be divided into three classes. Some will tell us, that the present age transcends all that have gone before it, in politeness, learning, and good sense; will thank Providence (or their stars) that their lot of life has been cast in so glorious a period; and wonder how men could possibly support existence amidst the ignorance and barbarism of former days. By others we are accounted a generation of triflers and profligates, sciolists in learning, hypocrites in virtue, and formalists

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in good-breeding; wise only when we follow the ancients, and foolish whenever we deviate from their footsteps. Such violent sentiments are generally wrong; and therefore I am disposed to adopt the notions of those who may be considered as forming an intermediate class; who, tho' not blind to the follies, are yet willing to acknowledge the virtues, both of past ages, and of the present. And surely, in every age, and in every man, there is something to praise, as well as something to blame.

When I survey the philosophy of the present age, I find much matter of applause and admiration. Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural History, in all their branches, have risen to a pitch of perfection, which doth signal honour to human reason, and far surpasseth what the most sanguine of former times could have expected: and the paths to further improvement in those sciences are so clearly marked out, that nothing but honesty and attention seems necessary to ensure the success of future adventurers. Moral Philosophy and Logic have not been so fortunate: yet, even here, we have happily got
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rid of much pedantry and jargon; our systems have more the appearance of liberal sentiment, good taste, and correct composition, than those of the schoolmen; we disclaim (at least in words) all attachment to hypothesis and party; profess to study men and things, as well as books and words; and assert, with the utmost vehemence of protestation, our love of truth, of candour, and of sound philosophy. But let us not be deceived by appearances. Neither Moral Philosophy, nor the kindred sciences of Logic and Criticism, are at present upon the most desirable footing. The rage of paradox and system hath transformed them (although of all sciences these ought to be the simplest and the clearest) into a mass of confusion, darkness, and absurdity. One kind of jargon is laid aside; but another has been adopted, equally frivolous, though more fashionable. Hypothesis, though verbally disclaimed, is really adhered to with as much obstinacy as ever. Words have been defined; but their ambiguity continues. Appeals have been made to experience; but with such misrepresentation and equivocation, as plainly show the authors to

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have been more concerned for their theory, than for the truth. All sciences, and especially Moral Philosophy, ought to regulate human practice: practice is regulated by principles, and all principles suppose conviction: yet the aim of our most celebrated moral systems is, to divest the mind of every principle, and of all conviction; and, consequently, to disqualify man for action, and to render him as useless, and as wretched, as possible. In a word, SCEPTICISM is now the profession of every fashionable inquirer into human nature; a scepticism which is not confined to points of mere speculation, but hath been extended to practical truths of the highest importance, even to the principles of morality and religion. Proofs of all these assertions will appear in the sequel.

I said, that my prejudices are all in favour of truth and virtue. To avow any sort of prejudice, may perhaps startle some readers. If it should, I must here intreat all such to pause a moment, and ask of their own hearts these simple questions. Are virtue and truth useful to mankind? Are they matters of indifference? Or are they pernicious? If any one finds him-
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self disposed to think them pernicious, or matters of indifference, I would advise him to lay my book aside; for it doth not contain one sentiment in which he can be interested, nor one expression with which he can be pleased. But he who believes, that virtue and truth are of the highest importance, that in them is laid the foundation of human happiness, and that on them depends the very existence of human society, and of human creatures,—that person and I are of the same mind; I have no prejudices which he would wish me not to have: he may proceed; and I hope he will proceed with pleasure, and encourage, with his approbation, this honest attempt to vindicate truth and virtue; and to overturn that pretended philosophy, which supposeth, or which may lead us to suppose, every dictate of conscience, and every impulse of understanding, questionable and ambiguous.

This sceptical philosophy (as it is called) seems to me to be dangerous, not because it is ingenious, but because it is subtle and obscure. Were it rightly understood, no confutation of it would be necessary; for it does in fact confute itself,

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self, as I hope to demonstrate. But many, to my certain knowledge, have read it, and admitted its tenets, who do not understand the grounds of them; and many more, swayed by the fashion of the times, have greedily adopted its conclusions, without any knowledge whatsoever of the premises, or any concern about them. An attempt therefore to expose this pretended philosophy to public view, in its proper colours, will not, I hope, be censured as impertinent by any whose opinion I value: if it should, I shall be satisfied with the approbation of my own conscience, which will never reproach me for intending to do good.

I am sorry, that in the course of this inquiry, it will not always be in my power to speak of some celebrated names with that deference, to which superior talents, and superior virtue, are always entitled. Every friend to civil and religious liberty, every lover of mankind, every admirer of sincerity, and simplicity of manners, every heart that warms at the recollection of distinguished virtue, must consider Mr LOCKE as one of the most amiable, and most illustrious men, that ever our
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nation produced. Such he is, and such he always will be, in my estimation. The parts of his philosophy to which truth obliges me to object, are but few, and, compared with the extent and importance of his other writings, extremely inconsiderable. I object to them, because I think them erroneous and dangerous; and I am convinced, that their author, if he had lived to see the inferences that have been drawn from them, would have been the first to declare them absurd, and would have expunged them from his works with indignation. Dr BERKELEY was equally amiable in his life, and equally a friend to truth and virtue. In elegance of composition he was perhaps superior. I admire his virtues: I can never sufficiently applaud his zeal in the cause of religion: but some of his reasonings on the subject of human nature I cannot admit, without renouncing my claim to rationality. There is a Writer now alive, of whose philosophy I have much to say. By his philosophy, I mean the sentiments he hath published in a book called, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, in three volumes, printed in the year 1739; the principal doctrines of which he

hath since republished again and again, under the title of, *Essays Moral and Political*, &c. Of his other works I say nothing; nor have I at present any concern with them. Virgil is said to have been a bad prose-writer*; Cicero was certainly a bad poet: and this author, though not much acquainted with human nature, and therefore not well qualified to write a treatise upon it, may yet be an excellent politician, financier, and historian. His high merit in these three respects is indeed universally allowed: and if my suffrage could add any thing to the lustre of such distinguished reputation, I should here, with great sincerity and pleasure, join my voice to that of the public, and make such an encomium on the author of *the History of England* as would not offend any of his rational admirers. But why is this author's character so replete with inconsistency! why should his principles and his talents extort at once our esteem and detestation, our applause and contempt! That he, whose manners in private life are so agreeable, should yet, in the public ca-

* Seneca, Controv. lib. 3.

capacity of an author, have given so much
 cause of just offence to all who love virtue
 and mankind, is to me matter of astonish-
 ment and sorrow, as well as of indigna-
 tion. That he, who succeeds so well in
 describing the fates of nations, should yet
 have failed so egregiously in explaining the
 operations of the mind, is one of those
 incongruities in human genius, for which
 perhaps philosophy will never be able fully
 to account. That he, who so impartially
 hath stated the opposite pleas and princi-
 ples of our political factions, should yet
 have adopted the most illiberal prejudices
 against natural and revealed religion ;
 that he, who on some occasions hath dis-
 played even a profound erudition, should
 at other times, when intoxicated with a
 favourite theory, have suffered affirma-
 tions to escape him, which would have
 fixed the opprobrious name of Sciolist on
 a less celebrated author ; and, finally,
 that a moral philosopher, who seems to
 have exerted his utmost ingenuity in
 searching after paradoxes, should yet hap-
 pen to light on none, but such as are all,
 without exception, on the side of licen-
 tiousness and scepticism: these are in-

consistencies perhaps equally inexplicable; at least they are such as I do not at present chuse to explain. And yet, that this author is chargeable with all these inconsistencies, will not, I think, be denied by any person of sense and candour, who hath read his works with attention. His philosophy hath done great harm. Its admirers, I know, are very numerous; but I have not as yet met with one person, who both admired and understood it. We are prone to believe what we wish to be true: and most of this author's philosophical tenets are so well adapted to what I fear I may call the fashionable notions of the times, that those who are ambitious to conform themselves to the latter will hardly be disposed to examine scrupulously the evidence of the former. — Having made this declaration, which I do in the spirit of an honest man, I must take the liberty to treat this author with that plainness, which the cause of truth, the interests of society, and my own conscience, require. The same candour that prompts me to praise, will also oblige me to blame. The inconsistency is not in me, but in him. Had I done but half as much

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as he, in labouring to subvert principles which ought ever to be held sacred, I know not whether the friends of truth would have granted me any indulgence; I am sure they ought not. Let me be treated with the lenity due to a good citizen, no longer than I act as becomes one.

If it shall be acknowledged by the candid and intelligent reader, that I have in this book contributed something to the establishment of old truths, I shall not be much offended, though others should pretend to discover, that I have advanced nothing new. Indeed I would not wish to say any thing on these subjects, that hath not often occurred to the common sense of mankind. In Logic and Morals, we may have new treatises, and new theories; but we are not now to expect new discoveries. The principles of moral duty have long been understood in these enlightened parts of the world; and mankind, in the time that is past, have had more truth under their consideration, than they will probably have in the time to come. Yet he who makes these sciences the study of his life, may perhaps collect
 particulars

particulars concerning their evidence, which, though known to a few, are unknown to many; may set some objects in a more striking light, than that in which they have been formerly viewed; may devise methods of confuting new errors, and exposing new paradoxes; and may hit upon a more popular way of expressing what has hitherto been exhibited in too dark and mysterious a form.

It is commonly acknowledged, that the science of human nature is of all human sciences the most curious and important. To know ourselves, is a precept which the wise in all ages have recommended, and which is enjoined by the authority of revelation itself. Can any thing be of more consequence to man, than to know what is his duty, and how he may arrive at happiness? It is from the examination of his own heart that he receives the first intimations of the one, and the only sure criterion of the other.—What can be more useful, more delightful, and more sublime, than to contemplate the Deity? It is in the works of nature, particularly in the constitution of the human soul, that we discern the first and most conspicuous traces

traces of the Almighty: for without some previous acquaintance with our own moral nature, we could not possibly have any certain knowledge of His.—Destitute of the hope of immortality, and a future retribution, how contemptible, how miserable is man! And yet, did not our moral feelings, in concert with what our reason discovers of the Deity, evidence the necessity of a future state, in vain should we pretend to judge rationally of that revelation by which life and immortality have been brought to light.

How then is this science to be learned? In what manner are we to study human nature? Doubtless by examining our own hearts and feelings, and by attending to the conduct of other men. But are not the writings of philosophers useful towards the attainment of this science? Most certainly they are: for whatever improves the sagacity of judgement, the sensibility of moral perception, or the delicacy of taste; whatever renders our knowledge of moral and intellectual facts more extensive; whatever impresseth us with stronger and more enlarged sentiments of duty, with more affecting views of God and Providence,

dence, and with greater energy of belief in the doctrines of natural religion; — every thing of this sort either makes us more thoroughly acquainted, or prepares us for becoming more thoroughly acquainted, with our own nature, with the nature of other beings, and with the relations which they and we bear to one another. But I fear we shall not be able to improve ourselves in any one of these respects, by reading the modern systems of scepticism. What account then are we to make of those systems, and their authors? The following dissertation is partly designed as an answer to this question. But it has a further view. It proposes to examine the foundations of this scepticism, and to see whether these be consistent with what all mankind must acknowledge to be the foundations of truth; to inquire whether the cultivation of scepticism be salutary or pernicious to science and mankind; and whether it may not be possible to devise certain *criteria*, by which the absurdity of its conclusions may be detected, even by those who may not have leisure, or subtlety, or metaphysical knowledge, sufficient to qualify them for a logical confutation of all

all its premises. If it be confessed, that the present age hath some tendency to licentiousness, both in principle and practice, and that the works of sceptical writers have some tendency to favour that licentiousness; it will also be confessed, that this design is neither absurd nor unseasonable.

A celebrated writer * on human nature hath observed, that “if truth be at all
 “within the reach of human capacity, it
 “is certain it must lie very deep and ab-
 “struse:” and a little after he adds, “that
 “he would esteem it a strong presump-
 “tion against the philosophy he is going
 “to unfold, were it so very easy and ob-
 “vious.” I am so far from adopting this opinion, that I declare, in regard to the few things I have to say on human nature, that I should esteem it a very strong presumption against them, if they were not easy and obvious. Physical and mathematical truths are often exceedingly abstruse; but facts and experiments relating to the human mind, when expressed in proper words, ought to be obvious to

* Treatise of Human Nature, vol. 1. p. 3. 4.

all. I find, that those poets, historians, and novelists, who have given the most lively displays of human nature, and who abound most in sentiments easily comprehended, and readily admitted as true, are the most entertaining, as well as the most useful. How then should the philosophy of the human mind be so difficult and obscure? Indeed, if it be an author's determined purpose to advance paradoxes, some of which are incredible, and others incomprehensible; if he be willing to avail himself all he can of the natural ambiguity of language in supporting those paradoxes; or if he enter upon inquiries too refined for human understanding; he must often be obscure, and often unintelligible. But my views are very different. I only intend to suggest some hints for guarding the mind against error; and these, I hope, will be found to be deduced from principles which every man of common capacity may examine by his daily experience.

It is true, that several subjects of intricate speculation are examined in this book: but I have endeavoured, by constant appeals to fact and experience, by
 illustrations

illustrations and examples the most familiar I could think of, and by a plainness and perspicuity of expression which sometimes may appear too much affected, to examine them in such a way, as I hope cannot fail to render them intelligible, even to those who are not much conversant in studies of this kind. Truth, like virtue, to be loved, needs only to be seen. My principles require no disguise; on the contrary, they will, if I mistake not, be most easily admitted by those who best understand them. And I am persuaded, that the sceptical system would never have made such an alarming progress, if it had been well understood. The ambiguity of its language, and the intricacy and length of some of its fundamental investigations, have unhappily been too successful in producing that confusion of ideas, and indistinctness of apprehension, in the minds both of authors and readers, which are so favourable to error and sophistry.

Few men have ever engaged in controversy, religious, political, or philosophical, without being in some degree chargeable with misapprehension of the adver-

ry's meaning. That I have never erred in this way, I dare not affirm. But I am conscious of having done every thing in my power to guard against it. The greater part of these papers have lain by me for several years; they have been repeatedly perused by some of the acutest philosophers of the age, whom I have the honour to call my friends, and to whose advice and assistance, on this, as on other occasions, I am deeply indebted. I have availed myself all I could of reading and conversation; and endeavoured, with all the candour I am master of, to profit by every hint of improvement, and to examine to the bottom every objection, which others have offered, or myself could devise. And may I not be permitted to add, that every one of those who have perused this essay, has advised the author to publish it; and that many of them have encouraged him by this insinuation, to him the most flattering of all others, That by so doing, he would probably be of some service to the cause of truth, virtue, and mankind? In this hope he submits it to the public. And it is this hope only that could have induced him to attempt polemical

mical disquisition: a species of writing, which, in his own judgement, is not the most creditable; which he knows, to his cost, is not the most pleasing; and of which he is well aware, that it can hardly fail to draw upon him the resentment of a numerous and very fashionable party. But,

*Welcome for thee, fair Virtue! all the past;
For thee, fair Virtue! welcome even the last.*

If these pages, which he hopes none will condemn who have not read, shall throw any light on the first principles of moral science; if they shall suggest, to the young and unwary, any cautions against that sophistry, and licentiousness of principle, which too much infect the conversations and compositions of the age; if they shall, in any measure, contribute to the satisfaction of any of the friends of truth and virtue; his purpose will be completely answered: and he will, to the end of his life, rejoice in the recollection of those painful hours which he passed in the examination of this most important controversy.

C H A P. III.

Consequences of Metaphysical Scepticism.

A Fter all, it will perhaps be objected to this discourse, that I have laid too much stress upon the consequences of metaphysical absurdity, and represented them as much more dangerous than they are found to be in fact. I shall be told, that many of the controversies in metaphysics are merely verbal; and the errors proceeding from them of so abstract a nature, that philosophers run little risk, and the vulgar no risk at all, of being influenced by them in practice. It will be said, that I never heard of any man who fell a sacrifice to BERKELEY'S system, by breaking his neck over a material precipice, which he had taken for an ideal one; nor of any Fatalist, whose morals were, upon the whole, more exceptionable than those of the asserters of free agency: in a word, that whatever effect such tenets may have upon
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the understanding, they seldom or never produce any sensible effects upon the heart. In considering this objection, I must confine myself to a few topics, for the subject to which it leads is of vast extent. The influence of the metaphysical spirit upon art, science, and manners, would furnish matter for a large treatise. It will suffice at present to show, that metaphysical errors are not harmless, but may produce, and actually have produced, some very important and interesting consequences.

I begin with an observation often made, and indeed obvious enough, namely, That happiness is the end of our being; and that knowledge, and even truth itself, are valuable only as they tend to promote it. Every useless study is a pernicious thing, because it wastes our time, and misemploys our faculties. To prove that metaphysical absurdities do no good, would therefore sufficiently justify the present undertaking. But it requires no profound sagacity to be able to prove a great deal more.

We acknowledge, however, that all metaphysical errors are not equally dangerous. There is an obscurity in the abstract sciences,

sciences, as they are commonly taught, which is often no bad preservative against their influence. This obscurity is sometimes unavoidable, on account of the insufficiency of language: sometimes it is owing to the spiritless or slovenly style of the writer: and sometimes it is affected; as when a philosopher, from prudential considerations, thinks fit to disguise any occasional attack on the religion or laws of his country, by some artful equivocation, in the form of allegory, dialogue, or fable*.

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* Mr HUME is not unacquainted with this piece of policy. His apology for Atheism he delivers by the mouth of a *friend*, in the way of conference, prefaced with a declaration, that though he cannot by any means approve many of the sentiments of that friend, yet he thinks they bear some relation to the chain of reasoning carried on in his Inquiry concerning Human Nature. He had something, it seems, to say against his Maker, which he modestly acknowledges to be curious, and worthy of attention, and which he thought, no doubt, to be mighty smart and clever. To call it what it really is, An attempt to vindicate Atheism, or what he probably thought it, A vindication of Atheism, seemed dangerous, and might disgust many of his well-meaning readers. He calls it, therefore, *An Essay on a Particular Providence and a Future State*, and puts his capital arguments in the mouth of another person: thus providing, by the same generous, candid, and manly expedient, a snare for the unwary reader, and an evasion for himself. Perhaps it will

The style of *The Treatise of Human Nature* is so obscure and uninteresting, that if the author had not in his *Essays* republished the capital doctrines of that work in a more elegant and sprightly manner, a confutation of them would have been altogether unnecessary. And, after all, though this author is one of the deadliest, he is not perhaps one of the most dangerous enemies of religion. Bolingbroke, his inferior in subtlety, but far superior in wit, eloquence, and knowledge of mankind, is more dangerous, because more entertaining. So that though the reader may be disposed to applaud the patriotism of the grand jury of Westminster, who presented the posthumous works of that Noble Lord as a public nuisance, he must be sensible, that there was no necessity for affixing any such stigma to the philosophical writings of the Scottish author. And yet, it cannot be denied, that even these,

will be asked, what I mean by the word *Atheist*? I answer, A reasonable creature, who disbelieves the being of God, or thinks it inconsistent with sound reason, to believe, that the Great First Cause is perfect in holiness, power, wisdom, justice, and beneficence, — is a speculative Atheist; and he who endeavours to instil the same unbelief into others, is a practical Atheist.

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notwithstanding their obscurity, have done mischief enough to make every sober-minded person earnestly wish, that they had never existed.

Further, some metaphysical errors are so grossly absurd, that there is hardly a possibility of their perverting our conduct. Such, considered in itself, is the doctrine of the non-existence of matter; which no man in his senses was ever capable of believing for a single moment. Pyrrho was a vain hypocrite: he took it into his head to say, that he believed nothing, because he wanted to be taken notice of: he affected, too, to act up to this pretended disbelief; and would not of his own accord step aside to avoid a dog, a chariot, or a precipice: but he always took care to have some friends or servants at hand, whose business it was to keep the philosopher out of harm's way. — That the universe is nothing but a *heap* of impressions and ideas unperceived by any substance, is another of those profound mysteries, from which we need not apprehend much danger; because it is so perfectly absurd, that no words, but such as imply a contradiction, will express it. I know not

whether the absurdity of a system was ever before urged as an apology for its author. But it is better to be absurd than mischievous: and happy it were for the world, and much to the credit of some persons now in it, if metaphysicians were chargeable with nothing worse than absurdity.

Again, certain errors in our theories of human nature, considered in themselves, are in some measure harmless, when the principles that oppose their influence are strong and active. A gentle disposition, confirmed habits of virtue, obedience to law, a regard to order, or even the fear of punishment, often prove antidotes to metaphysical poison. When Fatality hath these principles to combat, it may puzzle the judgement, but will not corrupt the heart. Natural instinct never fails to oppose it; all men believe themselves free agents, as long at least as they keep clear of metaphysic; nay, so powerful is the sentiment of moral liberty, that I cannot think it was ever entirely subdued in any rational being. But if it were subdued, (and surely no Fatalist will acknowledge it invincible); if the opposite principles should at the same time cease to act; and
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if debauchery, bad example, and licentious writings, should extinguish or weaken the sense of duty; what might not be apprehended from men who are above law, or can screen themselves from punishment? What virtue is to be expected from a being who believes itself a mere machine? If I were persuaded, that the evil I commit is imposed upon me by fatal necessity, I should think repentance as absurd as Xerxes scourging the waves of the Hellespont; and be as little disposed to form resolutions of amendment, as to contrive schemes for preventing the frequent eclipses of the satellites of Jupiter. Every author who publishes an essay in behalf of Fatality, is willing to run the risk of bringing all men over to his opinion. What if this should be the consequence? If it be possible to make one reasonable creature a Fatalist, may it not be possible to make many such? And would this be a matter of little or no moment? It is demonstrable that it would not. But we have already explained ourselves on this head.

Other metaphysical errors there are, which, though they do not strike more di-

rectly at the foundations of virtue, are more apt to influence mankind, because they are not so vigorously counteracted by any particular propensity. What shall we say to the theory of HOBBS, who makes the distinction between vice and virtue to be wholly artificial, without any foundation in the divine will, or human constitution, and depending entirely on the will of governors? According to this account, no action that is commanded by a king can be vitious, and none virtuous except warranted by that authority. Were this opinion universal, what could deter men from secret wickedness, or such as is not cognisable by law? What could restrain governors from the utmost insolence of tyranny? What but a miracle could save the human race from perdition?

In the preface to one of Mr HUME'S late publications, we are presented with an elaborate panegyric on the author. "He hath exerted," says the writer of the preface, "those great talents he received from Nature, and the acquisitions he made by study, in the search of truth, and in promoting the good of mankind." A noble encomium indeed! If
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it be a true one, what are we to think of a Douglas, a Campbell, a Gerard, a Reid, and some others, who have attacked many of Mr HUME's opinions, and proved them to be contrary to truth, and subversive of the good of mankind? I thought indeed, that the works of those excellent writers had given great satisfaction to the friends of truth and virtue, and done an important service to society: but, if I believe this prefacer *, I must look on them, as well as on this attempt of my own, with detestation and horror. But before

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* I have been told, that the preface to Mr HUME's account of his dispute with Rousseau was not written by Mr HUME himself, but by some person in France. I am very willing to believe this; but I cannot account for his having so long neglected to contradict publicly an unfair representation contained in that preface, from which some, who were ignorant of the true state of the case, have formed strange conjectures. "His love of peace," says the prefacer, "is so well known, that the criticisms written against his pieces have been *often* brought to him by their respective authors, for him to revise and correct them." In justice to these authors, I think it my duty to inform the public, that some of the pieces written against Mr HUME's philosophy were shown to him before publication, not for the reason here given, but because the authors wanted to know from himself, whether they had in any place mistaken his meaning.

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so great a change in my sentiments can take place, it will be necessary, that Mr HUME prove, to my satisfaction, that he is neither the author nor the publisher of the *Essays* that bear his name, nor of the *Treatise of Human Nature*. For I will not take it on his, nor on any man's word, that religion, both revealed and natural, and all conviction in regard to truth, are detrimental to mankind. And it is most certain, that he, if he is indeed the author of those *Essays*, and of that *Treatise*, hath exerted his great talents, and employed several years of his life, in endeavouring to persuade the world, that the fundamental doctrines of natural religion are irrational, the proofs of revealed religion such as ought not to satisfy an impartial mind, and that there is not in any science an evidence of truth sufficient to produce certainty. Suppose these opinions established in the world, and say, if you can,

He pays himself too great a compliment, and claims a merit with the public to which he has no title, if he believes, and would have the world to believe, that their design was to get their compositions corrected by him. Some of them, to my certain knowledge, had nothing less in view.

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that the good of mankind would be promoted by them. To me it seems impossible for society to exist under the influence of such opinions. Nor let it be thought, that we give an unfavourable view of human nature, when we insist on the necessity of good principles for the preservation of good order. Such a total subversion of human sentiment is, I believe, impossible: mankind, at their very worst, are not such monsters as to admit it; reason, conscience, taste, habit, interest, fear, must perpetually oppose it: but the philosophy that aims at a total subversion of human sentiment is not on that account the less detestable. And yet it is said of the authors of this philosophy, that they exert their great talents in promoting the good of mankind. What an insult on human nature and common sense! If mankind are tame enough to acquiesce in such an insult, and servile enough to reply, "It is true, we have been much obliged to the celebrated sceptics of this most enlightened age,"—they would almost tempt one to express himself in the style of misanthropy, and say, "Si populus vult decipi, decipiatur."

Every

Every doctrine is dangerous that tends to discredit the evidence of our senses, external or internal, and to subvert the original instinctive principles of human belief. In this respect the most unnatural and incomprehensible absurdities, such as the doctrine of the non-existence of matter, and of perceptions without a percipient, are far from being harmless; as they seem to lead, and actually have led, to universal scepticism; and set an example of a method of reasoning sufficient to overturn all truth, and pervert every human faculty. In this respect also we have proved the doctrine of Fatality to be of most pernicious tendency, as it leads men to suppose their moral sentiments fallacious or equivocal; not to mention its influence on our notions of God, and natural religion. When a sceptic attacks one principle of common sense, he doth in effect attack all; for if we are made distrustful of the veracity of instinctive conviction in one instance, we must, or at least we may, become equally distrustful in every other. A little scepticism introduced into science will soon assimilate the whole to its own nature; the fatal fermentation,

mentation, once begun, spreads wider and wider every moment, till all the mass be transformed into rottenness and poison.

There is no exaggeration here. The present state of the abstract sciences is a melancholy proof, that what I say is true. This is called the age of reason and philosophy; and this is the age of avowed and dogmatical atheism. Sceptics have at last grown weary of doubting; and have now discovered, by the force of their great talents, that one thing at least is certain, namely, that God, and religion, and immortality, are empty sounds. This is the final triumph of our so much boasted philosophic spirit; these are the limits of the dominion of error, beyond which we can hardly conceive it possible for human sophistry to penetrate. Exult, O Metaphysic, at the consummation of thy glories. More thou canst not hope, more thou canst not desire. Fall down, ye mortals, and acknowledge the stupendous blessing: adore those men of great talents, those daring spirits, those patterns of modesty, gentleness, and candour, those prodigies of genius, those heroes in beneficence,

ficence, who have thus laboured — to strip you of every rational consolation, and to make your condition ten thousand times worse than that of the beasts that perish.

Why can I not express myself with less warmth! Why can I not devise an apology for these philosophers, to screen them from this dreadful imputation of being the enemies and plagues of mankind! — Perhaps they do not themselves believe their own tenets, but publish them only as the means of getting a name and a fortune. But I hope this is not the case; God forbid that it should! for then the enormity of their guilt would surpass all power of language; we could only gaze at it, and tremble. Compared with such wickedness, the crimes of the thief, the robber, the incendiary, would almost disappear. These sacrifice the fortunes or the lives of some of their fellow-creatures, to their own necessity or outrageous appetite: but those would run the hazard of sacrificing, to their own avarice or vanity, the happiness of all mankind, both here and hereafter. No; I cannot suppose it: the heart of man, however

however depraved, is not capable of such infernal malignity. — Perhaps they do not foresee the consequences of their doctrines. BERKELEY most certainly did not. — But BERKELEY did not attack the religion of his country, did not seek to undermine the foundations of virtue, did not preach or recommend Atheism. He erred; and who is free from error? but his intentions were irreproachable; and his conduct as a man, and a Christian, did honour to human nature. — Perhaps our modern sceptics are ignorant, that, without the belief of a God, and the hope of immortality, the miseries of human life would often be insupportable. But can I suppose them in a state of total and invincible stupidity, utter strangers to the human heart, and to human affairs! Sure they would not thank me for such a supposition. Yet this I must suppose, or I must believe them to be the most cruel, the most perfidious, and the most profligate of men.

Careless by those who call themselves the great, ingrossed by the formalities of life, intoxicated with vanity, pampered

with adulation, dissipated in the tumult of business, or amidst the vicissitudes of folly, they perhaps have little need and little relish for the consolations of religion. But let them know, that in the solitary scenes of life, there is many an honest and tender heart pining with incurable anguish, pierced with the sharpest sting of disappointment, bereft of friends, chilled with poverty, racked with disease, scourged by the oppressor; whom nothing but trust in Providence, and the hope of a future retribution, could preserve from the agonies of despair. And do they, with sacrilegious hands, attempt to violate this last refuge of the miserable, and to rob them of the only comfort that had survived the ravages of misfortune, malice, and tyranny! Did it ever happen, that the influence of their execrable tenets disturbed the tranquillity of virtuous retirement, deepened the gloom of human distress, or aggravated the horrors of the grave? Is it possible, that this may have happened in many instances? Is it probable, that this hath happened, or may happen, in one single instance? — Ye traitors to human
man

man kind, ye murderers of the human soul, how can ye answer for it to your own hearts! Surely every spark of your generosity is extinguished for ever, if this consideration do not awaken in you the keenest remorse, and make you wish in bitterness of soul——But I remonstrate in vain. All this must have often occurred to you, and been as often rejected as utterly frivolous. Could I inforce the present topic by an appeal to your vanity, I might possibly make some impresson: but to plead with you on the principles of benevolence or generosity, is to address you in a language ye do not, or will not, understand; and as to the shame of being convicted of absurdity, ignorance, or want of candour, ye have long ago proved yourselves superior to the sense of it.

But let not the lovers of truth be discouraged. Atheism cannot be of long continuance, nor is there much danger of its becoming universal. The influence of some conspicuous characters hath brought it too much into fashion; which, in a thoughtless and profligate age, it is no difficult matter to accomplish. But when men
have

have retrieved the powers of serious reflection, they will find it a frightful phantom; and the mind will return gladly and eagerly to its old endearments. One thing we certainly know; the fashion of sceptical and metaphysical systems passeth speedily away. Those unnatural productions, the vile effusion of a hard and stupid heart, that mistakes its own restlessness for the activity of genius, and its own captiousness for sagacity of understanding, may, like other monsters, please a while by their singularity; but the charm is soon over; and the succeeding age will be astonished to hear, that their forefathers were deluded, or amused, with such fooleries. The measure of scepticism seems indeed to be full; it is time for truth to vindicate its rights, and we trust they shall yet be completely vindicated. Such are the hopes and the earnest wishes of one, who hath seldom made controversy his study, who never took pleasure in argumentation, and who utterly disclaims all ambition of being reputed a subtle disputant; but who, as a friend to human nature, would account it

it his honour to be instrumental in promoting, though by means unpleasant to himself, the cause of virtue and true science, and in bringing to contempt that sceptical sophistry which is equally subversive of both.

T H E E N D.

E R R A T A.

- Page 55. *lin. 1.* read *apagogical*,
107. *lin. ult. note,* read *Part 3. chap. 2.*
171. *lin. ult.* read *our belief*
200. *lin. 16.* read *of putting*
330. *lin. 21.* read *each of which*
381. *lin. 9.* read *it cannot be, true;*

