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D I A L O G U E S

CONCERNING

NATURAL RELIGION.

B Y

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THE SECOND EDITION,

L O N D O N :

M.DCC.LXXIX.

P A R T II.

I MUST own, CLEANTHES, said PART II.

DEMEA, that nothing can more surprise me, than the light in which you have all along put this argument. By the whole tenor of your discourse, one would imagine that you were maintaining the Being of a God, against the cavils of Atheists and Infidels; and were necessitated to become a champion for that fundamental principle of all religion. But this, I hope, is not, by any means, a question among us. No man; no man, at least, of common sense, I am persuaded, ever entertained a serious doubt with regard to a truth so certain and self-evident. The question is not concerning

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cerning the BEING, but the NATURE, of GOD. This I affirm, from the infirmities of human understanding, to be altogether incomprehensible and unknown to us. The essence of that Supreme Mind, his attributes, the manner of his existence, the very nature of his duration; these, and every particular which regards so divine a Being, are mysterious to men. Finite, weak, and blind creatures, we ought to humble ourselves in his august presence; and, conscious of our frailties, adore in silence his infinite perfections, which eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. They are covered in a deep cloud from human curiosity: It is profaneness to attempt penetrating thro' these sacred obscurities: And next to the impiety of denying his existence, is the temerity of prying into his nature and essence, decrees and attributes.

BUT

BUT lest you should think, that my *piety* has here got the better of my *philosophy*, I shall support my opinion, if it needs any support, by a very great authority. I might cite all the divines, almost, from the foundation of Christianity, who have ever treated of this or any other theological subject: But I shall confine myself, at present, to one equally celebrated for piety and philosophy. It is Father MALEBRANCHE, who, I remember, thus expresses himself *. “ One ought not so much (says he) to call God a spirit, in order to express positively what he is, as in order to signify that he is not matter. He is a Being infinitely perfect: Of this we cannot doubt. But in the same manner as we ought not to imagine, even supposing him corporeal, that he is clothed with a human body, as the ANTHROPOMORPHITES asserted, under colour that that figure was

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* Recherche de la Verité, liv. 3. cap. 9.

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“ the most perfect of any; so neither
 “ ought we to imagine, that the Spirit
 “ of God has human ideas, or bears
 “ any resemblance to our spirit; under
 “ colour that we know nothing more
 “ perfect than a human mind. We
 “ ought rather to believe, that as he
 “ comprehends the perfections of mat-
 “ ter without being material
 “ he comprehends also the perfections
 “ of created spirits, without being spi-
 “ rit, in the manner we conceive spi-
 “ rit: That his true name is, *He that is*;
 “ or, in other words, Being without re-
 “ striction, All Being, the Being infi-
 “ finite and universal.”

AFTER so great an authority, DEMEA,
 replied PHILO, as that which you have
 produced, and a thousand more which
 you might produce, it would appear ri-
 diculous in me to add my sentiment, or
 express my approbation of your doc-
 trine. But surely, where reasonable
 men

men treat these subjects, the question ^{PART II.} can never be concerning the *Being*, but only the *Nature*, of the Deity. The former truth, as you well observe, is unquestionable and self-evident. Nothing exists without a cause; and the original cause of this universe (whatever it be) we call God; and piously ascribe to him every species of perfection. Whoever scruples this fundamental truth, deserves every punishment which can be inflicted among philosophers, to wit, the greatest ridicule, contempt, and disapprobation. But as all perfection is entirely relative, we ought never to imagine that we comprehend the attributes of this divine Being, or to suppose that his perfections have any analogy or likeness to the perfections of a human creature. Wisdom, Thought, Design, Knowledge; these we justly ascribe to him; because these words are honourable among men, and we have no other language or other conceptions
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by which we can express our adoration of him. But let us beware, lest we think, that our ideas any wise correspond to his perfections, or that his attributes have any resemblance to these qualities among men. He is infinitely superior to our limited view and comprehension; and is more the object of worship in the temple, than of disputation in the schools.

IN reality, CLEANTHES, continued he, there is no need of having recourse to that affected scepticism, so displeasing to you, in order to come at this determination. Our ideas reach no farther than our experience: We have no experience of divine attributes and operations: I need not conclude my syllogism: You can draw the inference yourself. And it is a pleasure to me (and I hope to you too) that just reasoning and sound piety here concur in the same conclusion, and both of them establish
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the adorably mysterious and incomprehensible nature of the Supreme Being. PART
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NOT to lose any time in circumlocutions, said CLEANTHES, addressing himself to DEMEA, much less in replying to the pious declamations of PHILO; I shall briefly explain how I conceive this matter. Look round the world: contemplate the whole and every part of it: You will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy, which ravishes into admiration all men who have ever contemplated them. The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance;



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trivance; of human design, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble; and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man; though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work which he has executed. By this argument *a posteriori*, and by this argument alone, do we prove at once the existence of a Deity, and his similarity to human mind and intelligence.

I SHALL be so free, CLEANTHES, said DEMEA, as to tell you, that from the beginning I could not approve of your conclusion concerning the similarity of the Deity to men; still less can I approve of the mediums by which you endeavour to establish it. What! No demonstration of the Being of God! No abstract arguments! No proofs *a priori*!


Are

Are these, which have hitherto been so much insisted on by philosophers, all fallacy, all sophism? Can we reach no farther in this subject than experience and probability? I will not say, that this is betraying the cause of a Deity: But surely, by this affected candor, you give advantages to Atheists, which they never could obtain by the mere dint of argument and reasoning.

WHAT I chiefly scruple in this subject, said PHILO, is not so much that all religious arguments are by CLEANTHES reduced to experience, as that they appear not to be even the most certain and irrefragable of that inferior kind. That a stone will fall, that fire will burn, that the earth has solidity, we have observed a thousand and a thousand times; and when any new instance of this nature is presented, we draw without hesitation the accustomed inference. The exact similarity of the cases

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II. cases gives us a perfect assurance of a  
 ~~~~~ similar event ; and a stronger evidence  
 is never desired nor sought after. But
 where-ever you depart, in the least,
 from the similarity of the cases, you di-
 minish proportionably the evidence ;
 and may at last bring it to a very weak
analogy, which is confessedly liable to
 error and uncertainty. After having
 experienced the circulation of the blood
 in human creatures, we make no doubt
 that it takes place in TITIVS and MÆVI-
 US : But from its circulation in frogs
 and fishes, it is only a presumption,
 though a strong one, from analogy, that
 it takes place in men and other animals.
 The analogical reasoning is much weak-
 er, when we infer the circulation of
 the sap in vegetables from our experi-
 ence that the blood circulates in ani-
 mals ; and those, who hastily followed
 that imperfect analogy, are found, by
 more accurate experiments, to have been
 mistaken.

IF

IF we see a house, CLEANTHES, we ^{PART II.} conclude, with the greatest certainty,  that it had an architect or builder ; because this is precisely that species of effect which we have experienced to proceed from that species of cause. But surely you will not affirm, that the universe bears such a resemblance to a house, that we can with the same certainty infer a similar cause, or that the analogy is here entire and perfect. The dissimilitude is so striking, that the utmost you can here pretend to is a guess, a conjecture, a presumption concerning a similar cause ; and how that pretension will be received in the world, I leave you to consider,

It would surely be very ill received, replied CLEANTHES ; and I should be deservedly blamed and detested, did I allow, that the proofs of a Deity amounted to no more than a guess or conjecture. But is the whole adjustment

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ment of means to ends in a house and in the universe so flight a resemblance? The œconomy of final causes? The order, proportion, and arrangement of every part? Steps of a stair are plainly contrived, that human legs may use them in mounting; and this inference is certain and infallible. Human legs are also contrived for walking and mounting; and this inference, I allow, is not altogether so certain, because of the dissimilarity which you remark; but does it, therefore, deserve the name only of presumption or conjecture?

GOOD God! cried DEMEA, interrupting him, where are we? Zealous defenders of religion allow, that the proofs of a Deity fall short of perfect evidence! And you, PHILO, on whose assistance I depended in proving the adorable mysteriousness of the Divine Nature, do you assent to all these extravagant opinions of CLEANTHES? For what

what other name can I give them? Or ^{PART II.} why spare my censure, when such principles are advanced, supported by such an authority, before so young a man as PAMPHILUS?

You seem not to apprehend, replied PHILO, that I argue with CLEANTHES in his own way; and by showing him the dangerous consequences of his tenets, hope at last to reduce him to our opinion. But what sticks most with you, I observe, is the representation which CLEANTHES has made of the argument *a posteriori*; and finding that that argument is likely to escape your hold and vanish into air, you think it so disguised, that you can scarcely believe it to be set in its true light. Now, however much I may dissent, in other respects, from the dangerous principles of CLEANTHES, I must allow, that he has fairly represented that argument; and I shall endeavour so to state the

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matter

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PART matter to you, that you will entertain
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no farther scruples with regard to it.

WERE a man to abstract from every thing which he knows or has seen, he would be altogether incapable, merely from his own ideas, to determine what kind of scene the universe must be, or to give the preference to one state or situation of things above another. For as nothing which he clearly conceives could be esteemed impossible or implying a contradiction, every chimera of his fancy would be upon an equal footing; nor could he assign any just reason, why he adheres to one idea or system, and rejects the others which are equally possible.

AGAIN; after he opens his eyes, and contemplates the world as it really is, it would be impossible for him, at first, to assign the cause of any one event, much less of the whole of things or of
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the universe. He might set his Fancy ^{PART II.} a rambling; and she might bring him in an infinite variety of reports and representations. These would all be possible; but being all equally possible, he would never, of himself, give a satisfactory account for his preferring one of them to the rest. Experience alone can point out to him the true cause of any phenomenon.

Now according to this method of reasoning, DEMEA, it follows (and is, indeed, tacitly allowed by CLEANTHES himself), that order, arrangement, or the adjustment of final causes, is not, of itself, any proof of design; but only so far as it has been experienced to proceed from that principle. For aught we can know *a priori*, matter may contain the source or spring of order originally, within itself, as well as mind does; and there is no more difficulty in conceiving, that the several elements,

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from an internal unknown cause, may fall into the most exquisite arrangement, than to conceive that their ideas, in the great, universal mind, from a like internal unknown cause, fall into that arrangement. The equal possibility of both these suppositions is allowed. But by experience we find, (according to CLEANTHES), that there is a difference between them. Throw several pieces of steel together, without shape or form; they will never arrange themselves so as to compose a watch. Stone, and mortar, and wood, without an architect, never erect a house. But the ideas in a human mind, we see, by an unknown, inexplicable œconomy, arrange themselves so as to form the plan of a watch or house. Experience, therefore, proves, that there is an original principle of order in mind, not in matter. From similar effects we infer similar causes. The adjustment of means to ends is alike in the universe, as in a machine

machine of human contrivance. The ^{PART II.} causes, therefore, must be resembling. ~~~~~

I WAS from the beginning scandalised, I must own, with this resemblance, which is asserted, between the Deity and human creatures; and must conceive it to imply such a degradation of the Supreme Being as no sound Theist could endure. With your assistance, therefore, DEMEA, I shall endeavour to defend what you justly call the adorable mysteriousness of the Divine Nature, and shall refute this reasoning of CLEANTHES; provided he allows, that I have made a fair representation of it.

WHEN CLEANTHES had assented, PHILO, after a short pause, proceeded in the following manner.

THAT all inferences, CLEANTHES, concerning fact, are founded on experience;

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rience; and that all experimental reasonings are founded on the supposition, that similar causes prove similar effects, and similar effects similar causes; I shall not, at present, much dispute with you. But observe, I intreat you, with what extreme caution all just reasoners proceed in the transferring of experiments to similar cases. Unless the cases be exactly similar, they repose no perfect confidence in applying their past observation to any particular phenomenon. Every alteration of circumstances occasions a doubt concerning the event; and it requires new experiments to prove certainly, that the new circumstances are of no moment or importance. A change in bulk, situation, arrangement, age, disposition of the air, or surrounding bodies; any of these particulars may be attended with the most unexpected consequences: And unless the objects be quite familiar to us, it is the highest temerity to expect with assurance,

assurance, after any of these changes, an event similar to that which before fell under our observation. The slow and deliberate steps of philosophers, here, if any where, are distinguished from the precipitate march of the vulgar, who, hurried on by the smallest similitude, are incapable of all discernment or consideration.

BUT can you think, CLEANTHES, that your usual phlegm and philosophy have been preserved in so wide a step as you have taken, when you compared to the universe, houses, ships, furniture, machines; and from their similarity in some circumstances inferred a similarity in their causes? Thought, design, intelligence, such as we discover in men and other animals, is no more than one of the springs and principles of the universe, as well as heat or cold, attraction or repulsion, and a hundred others, which fall under daily observation. It


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is an active cause, by which some particular parts of nature, we find, produce alterations on other parts. But can a conclusion, with any propriety, be transferred from parts to the whole? Does not the great disproportion bar all comparison and inference? From observing the growth of a hair, can we learn any thing concerning the generation of a man? Would the manner of a leaf's blowing, even though perfectly known, afford us any instruction concerning the vegetation of a tree?


BUT allowing that we were to take the *operations* of one part of nature upon another for the foundation of our judgment concerning the *origin* of the whole, (which never can be admitted); yet why select so minute, so weak, so bounded a principle as the reason and design of animals is found to be upon this planet? What peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the brain which
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we call *thought*, that we must thus make ^{PART II.} it the model of the whole universe? 

Our partiality in our own favour does indeed present it on all occasions; but sound philosophy ought carefully to guard against so natural an illusion.

So far from admitting, continued PHILO, that the operations of a part can afford us any just conclusion concerning the origin of the whole, I will not allow any one part to form a rule for another part, if the latter be very remote from the former. Is there any reasonable ground to conclude, that the inhabitants of other planets possess thought, intelligence, reason, or any thing similar to these faculties in men? When nature has so extremely diversified her manner of operation in this small globe; can we imagine, that she incessantly copies herself throughout so immense a universe? And if thought, as we may well suppose, be confined merely to this narrow

PART narrow corner, and has even there so
II.  limited a sphere of action; with what propriety can we assign it for the original cause of all things? The narrow views of a peasant, who makes his domestic œconomy the rule for the government of kingdoms, is in comparison a pardonable sophism.

BUT were we ever so much assured, that a thought and reason, resembling the human, were to be found throughout the whole universe, and were its activity elsewhere vastly greater and more commanding than it appears in this globe; yet I cannot see, why the operations of a world constituted, arranged, adjusted, can with any propriety be extended to a world which is in its embryo-state, and is advancing towards that constitution and arrangement. By observation, we know somewhat of the œconomy, action, and nourishment of a finished animal; but we must transfer

fer with great caution that observation ^{PART II.} to the growth of a foetus in the womb, and still more to the formation of an animalcule in the loins of its male parent. Nature, we find, even from our limited experience, possesses an infinite number of springs and principles, which incessantly discover themselves on every change of her position and situation. And what new and unknown principles would actuate her in so new and unknown a situation as that of the formation of a universe, we cannot, without the utmost temerity, pretend to determine,

A VERY small part of this great system, during a very short time, is very imperfectly discovered to us; and do we thence pronounce decisively concerning the origin of the whole?


ADMIRABLE conclusion! Stone, wood, brick, iron, brass, have not, at this time,

PART II. time, in this minute globe of earth, an order or arrangement without human art and contrivance: therefore the universe could not originally attain its order and arrangement, without something similar to human art. But is a part of nature a rule for another part very wide of the former? Is it a rule for the whole? Is a very small part a rule for the universe? Is nature in one situation, a certain rule for nature in another situation vastly different from the former?

AND can you blame me, CLEANTHES, if I here imitate the prudent reserve of SIMONIDES, who, according to the noted story, being asked by HIERO, *What God was?* desired a day to think of it, and then two days more; and after that manner continually prolonged the term, without ever bringing in his definition or description? Could you even blame me, if I had answered at first, *that I did not*

not know, and was sensible that this sub-
ject lay vastly beyond the reach of my
faculties? You might cry out sceptic
and rallier, as much as you pleased: but
having found, in so many other sub-
jects much more familiar, the imper-
fections and even contradictions of hu-
man reason, I never should expect any
success from its feeble conjectures, in a
subject so sublime, and so remote from
the sphere of our observation. When
two *species* of objects have always been
observed to be conjoined together, I can
infer, by custom, the existence of one
wherever I *see* the existence of the other:
and this I call an argument from expe-
rience. But how this argument can
have place, where the objects, as in the
present case, are single, individual, with-
out parallel, or specific resemblance,
may be difficult to explain. And will
any man tell me with a serious counte-
nance, that an orderly universe must a-
rise from some thought and art, like
the

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PART the human; because we have experi-
II.  ence of it? To ascertain this reasoning,
 it were requisite, that we had experience
 of the origin of worlds; and it is not
 sufficient, surely, that we have seen ships
 and cities arise from human art and
 contrivance.

PHILO was proceeding in this vehement manner, somewhat between jest and earnest, as it appeared to me; when he observed some signs of impatience in CLEANTHES, and then immediately stopped short. What I had to suggest, said CLEANTHES, is only that you would not abuse terms, or make use of popular expressions to subvert philosophical reasonings. You know, that the vulgar often distinguish reason from experience, even where the question relates only to matter of fact and existence; though it is found, where that *reason* is properly analyzed, that it is nothing but a species of experience. To
 prove

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prove by experience the origin of the universe from mind, is not more contrary to common speech, than to prove the motion of the earth from the same principle. And a caviller might raise all the same objections to the COPERNICAN system, which you have urged against my reasonings. Have you other earths, might he say, which you have seen to move? Have

YES! we have other earths. Is not the moon and its earth, which we see to turn round its centre? Is not Venus another earth, where we observe the same phenomenon? Are not the revolutions of the sun also a confirmation, from analogy, of the same theory? All the planets, are they not earths, which revolve about the sun? Are not the satellites moons, which move round Jupiter and Saturn, and along with these primary planets round the sun? These analogies and


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II. and resemblances, with others which I
 ~~~~~ have not mentioned, are the sole proofs  
 of the COPERNICAN system: and to  
 you it belongs to consider, whether you  
 have any analogies of the same kind to  
 support your theory.

IN reality, CLEANTHES, continued he,  
 the modern system of astronomy is now  
 so much received by all inquirers, and  
 has become so essential a part even of  
 our earliest education, that we are not  
 commonly very scrupulous in examin-  
 ing the reasons upon which it is found-  
 ed. It is now become a matter of mere  
 curiosity to study the first writers on  
 that subject, who had the full force of  
 prejudice to encounter, and were obli-  
 ged to turn their arguments on every  
 side in order to render them popular  
 and convincing. But if we peruse GA-  
 LILÆO's famous Dialogues concerning  
 the system of the world, we shall find,  
 that that great genius, one of the sub-  
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him ~~that~~ <sup>it</sup> that ever existed, first bent all his  
 endeavours to prove, that there was no foundation for the distinc-  
 tion commonly made between elemen-  
 tary and celestial substances. The  
 schools, proceeding from the illusions of  
 sense, had carried this distinction very  
 far; and had established the latter sub-  
 stances to be ingenerable, incorruptible,  
 unalterable, impassible; and had as-  
 signed all the opposite qualities to the  
 former. But GALILÆO, beginning with  
 the regular motion, proved its similarity in every  
 particular to the earth; its convex fi-  
 gurality, its density, its distinction in-  
 to solid and liquid, the variations of its  
 phase, the mutual illuminations of the  
 earth and moon, their mutual eclipses,  
 the inequalities of the lunar surface, &c.  
 After many instances of this kind, with  
 regard to all the planets, men plainly  
 saw that these bodies became proper ob-  
 jects of experience; and that the simi-  
 larity

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**II.**  larity of their nature enabled us to extend the same arguments and phenomena from one to the other.

IN this cautious proceeding of the astronomers, you may read your own condemnation, CLEANTHES; or rather may see, that the subject in which you are engaged exceeds all human reason and inquiry. Can you pretend to show any such similitude between the fabric of a house, and the generation of a universe? Have you ever seen Nature in any such situation as resembles the first arrangement of the elements? Have worlds ever been formed under your eye; and have you had leisure to observe the whole progress of the phenomenon, from the first appearance of order to its final consummation? If you have, then cite your experience, and deliver your theory.

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