On Religion and Philosophy

I am deep in a world that is very entertaining; or rather the demolitions of the metaphysical world; which that intellectual Sampson of Battersea has pulled down about our ears: but with the difference, that here the Philistine is the Hero and the poor Saints are crushed. I have gone through the *Essay on Human Knowledge* and will confess that fine as it is and irresistible as the vogue for writings of that kind may be, I cannot think it the greatest performance that ever was, as I had been made to expect. Old matter new dressed and often tawdry enough. . . .

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THE history of thought recounts numerous controversies which arose after a scholarly thesis had been exposed to public consideration. But these controversies seem to belong to the more distant past, and hence it often surprises us to discover that many speculative writings of the eighteenth century were regarded as controversial by contemporaries, for to us today they seem so 'reasonable' as to be commonplace, simply because we have accepted and taken for granted the results of those controversies. One is all too prone to see the eighteenth century as the *Aufklärung*, and to regard the sentiments of the enlightened as the unanimous verdict of society. In fact, what we see are only the sentiments of the age's most brilliant and witty spokesmen. Then, as now, the intellectuals stood apart from the

Weltanschauung of the age, while the great mass of society was unadaptable and conservative and was as suspicious of new ideas as any generally uneducated group can be. It is not surprising that popular reaction to Bolingbroke's criticisms of christianity were violent. Although many people may have doubted the verbal inspiration of the sacred scriptures, there was no general approbation for an onslaught on the traditional chart of religion. Bolingbroke's temerity was met with universal execration when his philosophical and religious tracts were published. None of his religious writings appeared before his death, for he had rightly estimated the sentimentality of society, even though this was often hidden beneath an icing of rationalism, and had kept his subversive and critical ideas to himself or imparted them only to a very select group of friends.

Bolingbroke's religious and philosophical writings are all of a piece. They have the common aim of clearing away the jungle of myth and superstition in religion and philosophy, and of erecting an elegant and precise system of his own.[1] His aims were not particularly new or original, since many others have undertaken to clean the Augean stables of philosophy and religion, to carry out the socratic elenchus or to fulfil the command of Jeremiah to root out and pull down. But it was the vehemence of his attacks, the brilliance of his exposition and the amazing and contradictory attitudes which he struck that were astounding. The overall effect was that his contemporaries were appalled; but if they had recollected his career, its strengths and its weaknesses, they would have found them reflected in his writings. As in politics, so in religion, he failed, in spite of his skill and brilliance, to convert many to his ideas: ideas which had more heat than light, more ingenuity in their conception than validity in their exposition, and more elegance in their phraseology than depth in their meaning. Nevertheless his writings have a double significance. First, they are one of the best examples of the eighteenth-century intellect in action; and secondly, they attempt to establish a set of rational precepts for religion which would withstand the criticism of later ages even less inclined to superstition than his own. That the attempt did not succeed does not mean that it is without value, for all experiments lead man to a greater understanding of the truth, even if that understanding lies in a reaction against the experiment. One such reaction, that of William Blake, may help to put Bolingbroke into perspective. 'Your Religion, O Deists! is the worship of the God of this world by the means of what you call natural religion and natural philosophy, and of natural morality or

self-righteousness, the selfish virtues of the natural heart. This was the religion of the Pharisees who murder'd Jesus. Deism is the same and ends in the same.'[2]

Bolingbroke said that he was not an atheist; although he said many things apparently to the contrary, it seems reasonable to assume that in disavowing atheism he was being truthful. He accepted the existence of God, and in the *Letters to M. De Pouilly* written in 1720 he proves to his own satisfaction, through the concept of a continuous creation counteracting the disintegration of the forces of the natural order, that the world must owe its existence and survival to a creator.

In human experience it is difficult to conceive that matter is not eternal and that things have not always been much as they now are. 'The same nature, and the same course of things, that exist actually, have always existed.'[3] This might seem to reduce God to the rôle of the Demiurge, but in fact it points to the coexistence of creator and creation. If the world is thereby eternal and in some sense self-existent, it is by definition the only eternal: everything that exists must have a cause 'either out of itself, or in itself'; but the only eternal has no 'cause of its existence out of itself' and must exist entirely 'by the necessity of its own nature'.[4] What is meant by the phrase 'necessity of its own nature'? If it has no meaning then there is no eternity, but if there is a first cause and the world is a creation, then it may partake in the eternal necessity of the first cause. Now this first cause may not be 'God', but it is definitely something and once the something is accepted it might be God. Having declared that he accepts that God is this first cause, Bolingbroke has *ipso facto* established for himself the necessary existence of God. In one of his occasional pieces, *A Letter on One of Archbishop Tillotson's Sermons*, he says very specifically and explicitly: 'There is a God, a first intelligent Cause of all things, whose infinite wisdom and power appear in all His works.'[5] In saying this he did not advocate what he called the fictions of 'theistical poets, philosophers and legislators'[6] who have conjured up a number of explanations for the first principles and the operations of divine powers. There are no hypothetical worlds as advocated by these artistic naturalists: there is only one actual and existent world, eternal because God is eternal.

He argued 'from the intuitive knowledge of ourselves, and the sensitive knowledge of objects exterior to ourselves, which we have, up to that demonstrative knowledge of God's existence, which we are able to acquire by due use of our reason'.[7] There are two points to be

made here. First, that Bolingbroke recognises the rôle of the supra-sensible in converting sense-data into intelligible perceptions. A refutation of this would in fact deny all 'sensitive knowledge', because 'sensitive knowledge' cannot in itself bring knowledge of 'inward constitutions of substances and their real essences'.[8] Sensitive knowledge does not, on the other hand, deny existence. Secondly, this passage illustrates Bolingbroke's one-sided view of the relationship between natural and revealed theology. He accepts only what Aquinas calls the first half of the tension between 'an ascent by the natural light of reason through created things to the knowledge of God', and 'a descent by the mode of revelation of divine truth which exceeds the human intellect . . . not demonstrated to our sight but delivered for our belief'.[9]

Bolingbroke denies the validity of revelation on the ground that it is unnecessary since nature supplies what is necessary in all instances. The law of nature is perfect, and this perfection is such that it has never shown any need of further elaboration by revelation. Neglecting the origins of the criteria by which he judges 'nature', he exalts the general laws of nature at the expense of individual insight. 'God has not made any particular systems, nor established particular providences for particular nations, much less for particular men, as far as we can discover by the help of reason and experience.'[10] But because men seem to have a peculiar penchant for revelation either personal or vicarious, and because they refuse to surrender this belief even when reason and experience seem to indicate the contrary, Bolingbroke is willing to accept for the moment this general belief. He implies that he is willing to accept the idea of revelation, but he totally rejects the arguments presented for it; his view is that the arguments given in defence of revelation are specious but the idea of it is not necessarily so.

This is pure casuistry, of course, but jesuitical argument was never far from Bolingbroke at any time. He is willing to predicate revelation of all knowledge, but is unwilling, in common with his age, to accept the intrusive element of a higher revelation by which his natural theology or objectified revelation may be judged. He ignores that 'once a thing has been revealed it can be shown to be "conformable to right reason", but it cannot therefore be said that reason alone could prove it—that surely is to name a *vaticinium ex eventu*. What is more, all knowledge may come within the circle of revelation, but that circle can only be meaningful with the revelation of its centre.'[11] By discarding the specious arguments for the truth of revelation, Bolingbroke

considers that 'revelation' will be acceptable, and by analogy he will be able to be a christian for, once this great stumbling-block is discarded, christianity and Bolingbroke's true natural religion are one.

While accepting in general the concept of revelation, though not the specific arguments for it, he totally disallows Old Testament revelation. Here he could be said to be on safer ground, since the Old Testament is essentially a *praeparatio evangelica*, and the christian tends to base his belief on the New Testament. Criticism of the Old Testament does not really do too much to alarm the orthodox, and Bolingbroke considers that it would be reasonable to discard it entirely except for the prophetic indications of the coming messiah in which it is necessary to christianity. The message of Jesus, in his view, did not supplement Moses or fulfil the law, but rather began a new canon of belief that was not dependent on the mosaic tradition. Moses is singled out for particular attack. He was 'ignorant of the true system of the universe',[12] and, if really appointed by God to write for posterity, he should not have been content with writing simply about 'one God, the Creator of all things'.[13] As a divinely inspired author, Moses should have given an irrefutable demonstration 'that his history might answer all the designs of eternal wisdom, it should have been proportioned to the ignorance of the Israelites . . . without giving so much reason to people, better informed, to believe him as ignorant as any uninspired person could be'.[14] Moses, in fact, is criticised for his lack of a philosophy, with which Bolingbroke seeks to support religion.

A comparison might be made with some early christian apologists who endeavoured to translate the christian faith in terms of Greek philosophy, believing as they did that 'philosophy', as one of their number Clement of Alexandria said, 'was necessary to the Greeks to bring them to righteousness . . . for philosophy educated the Greek world as the law did the Hebrews to bring them to Christ'. Bolingbroke's philosophy is not, according to him, out of phase with true christianity, any more than Plato was out of phase with true christianity; the only difficulty is to persuade mankind who have been led into error to see this fact. Christianity has been perverted and Bolingbroke intends to restore it.

In his *Letters to M. De Pouilly* he gives as his basis for deciding what is true or false, the following categories of fact. First, the fact verifiable by experiment and therefore probable to the highest degree. Second, the fact repugnant to experience but accepted on authority.

The authority naturally must be such that there can be practically no doubt of the rightness of the views presented. Third, the fact which is frequent and notorious but not in our experience. Fourth, the fact which exists in experience but has no duplicates and no contradictions. Fifth, the fact which is conformable to experience by analogy. Lastly, the fact of which there are no examples, but to deny the existence of it is to state an absurdity. According to him the mosaic writings cannot be accepted because they cannot be assigned to any of these categories of historical fact.[15] (The failure of Moses to qualify as an historian has already been mentioned in chapter 2, page 57 and will be referred to again presently.)

What is more, facts have to be supported by a variety of proofs, and in the absence of such proofs grave doubt can be cast on their probability—although excessive remoteness in time may alter the case, and what is only in consequence of this a relative proof may be acceptable as giving relative probability to a fact.

> Common sense requires that everything proposed to the understanding, should be accompanied with such proofs as the nature of it can furnish. He who requires more, is guilty of absurdity. He who requires less, of rashness. As the nature and the proposition decides, what proofs are exigible and what not, so the kind of proof determines the class into which the proposition is to be ranged. He, for instance, who affirms that there is a God, advances a proposition which is an object of demonstrative knowledge alone, and a demonstration is required from him. If he makes the demonstration, we are obliged to own that we know there is a God, and the proposition becomes a judgment of nature, not merely an opinion, according to the distinctions made somewhere in Tully; tho' demonstrations are sometimes called opinions, as opinions are often called demonstrations. If, by his fault or by ours, we have not a clear perception of the ideas or of the connection of them which form this demonstration, or if, without troubling ourselves to follow it, we receive the proposition for true on the authority of others, it is, indeed, opinion, not knowledge in us. But whether we receive it, or whether we reject it, we can neither require nor employ, with propriety, any other proofs than those which are conformable to the nature of the proposition. Tradition is not one of them. It may prove that men have

> generally believed in God, but it cannot prove that such a Being exists. Nothing can be more trifling, therefore to insist, as theists are apt to do, on this proof, as if the opinion proved the fact; as if all men had been alike capable of the demonstration; or, as if the demonstration was not necessary to establish the truth of the opinion. Demonstration, indeed, is not necessary on the hypothesis, that all men have an innate idea of God. But this hypothesis has been, I think, long exploded. I do not remember, at least to have it maintained by more than one archbishop, two or three ignorant monks, and as many devout ladies.[16]

It is not essential to give here a detailed review of Bolingbroke's criticisms of mosaic writings and of historical proof in general. (See chapter 2.) It need only be said that in accordance with his notion of a general law of nature excluding individual inspiration, he takes the lack of independent testimony for the mosaic account of Creation and the Fall as proof of its impossibility. He attempts to show that the accounts written by Moses of the history of the world are simply not corroborated anywhere else, but he is not entirely consistent in this attempt since he recognises that all civilisations account in their histories for the beginning of creation in a fashion not dissimilar to that used by Moses. If, moreover, Bolingbroke had truly searched, or had been able to search, through ancient records, he would have found certain corroborations of the first five books of the Old Testament. As he places so much emphasis on reason and on the value of independent testimony, it would have been impossible for him not to have given some acknowledgement of the validity of the mosaic writings. As it is he sweeps any cavils aside with the statement that on every page there 'are gross defects, and palpable falsehoods . . . and the whole tenor of them is such as no man, who acknowledges a supreme, all perfect Being, can believe it to be His word',[17] and goes on to say that the 'testimony of Moses cannot be reputed an historical testimony, if we give no more credit to him than we should give to any other historian' and that we cannot 'admit his testimony, for divine, without absurdity and blasphemy'.[18] The whole is improbable and opposed to experience; it is so many 'tales that would appear fit to amuse children alone'.[19] What is worse, it sanctifies 'pagan rites and ceremonies in theological language' and profanes 'the pure worship of God'.[20] Moses is not acceptable as an historian because he is too credulous, and if he is unreliable

in his factual presentation he is even more so in his theological or extra-factual accounts. Mosaic revelation is inadmissible.

Bolingbroke therefore has demolished mosaic revelation, and by so doing has attacked the foundations of all revelation. He has, in short, 'rejected any revelation which was not accompanied by miraculous evidence for want of authority, and any which was so accompanied for want of probability'.[21] However, this does not mean that he denies the christian religion. In fact, he says of the latter that

> 'no religion ever appeared in the world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind. If it has had a contrary effect, it has had it apparently, not really. . . . Christianity is founded on the universal law of nature . . . the gospel teaches the great and fundamental principle of this law, universal benevolence recommends the precepts of it, and commends the observation of them in particular instances occasionally, always supposes them, always enforces them, and makes the law of right reason a law in every possible definition of the word beyond all cavil. . . . Christianity, genuine Christianity, is contained in the gospels, it is the word of God, it requires, therefore, our veneration, and a strict conformity to it.'[22]

These are statements that could hardly be considered unorthodox, and the fact that christianity could evoke such sentiments illumines its ability to win universal approbation even in the hardened rationalism of the eighteenth century. Bolingbroke's sentiments may express true christianity, but it is not, he considers, true christianity which is being taught to society. Lucifer's emissaries, the theologians, have appeared and have dissected and distorted the gospel teachings. 'Theology is in fault, not religion. Theology is a science that may be compared justly to the box of Pandora. Many good things lie uppermost in it. But many evil lie under them, and scatter plagues and desolation through the world.'[23]

The gospels alone are acceptable. The New Testament 'is in truth the system of natural religion, and such it might have continued to the unspeakable advantage of mankind, if it had been propagated with the same simplicity with which it was originally taught by Christ himself'.[24] Unfortunately this did not occur, and distortions of the *ipsissima verba* of Christ appeared almost immediately. Christians ought to have accepted the message as it was given and not tried to explain it, for

'explanations in all these cases serve only to multiply disputes, on human, instead of divine authority'.[25] Bolingbroke would agree with the Cambridge Platonists that, although there was much room for controversy *about* religion, religion itself was clear and certain. The man most guilty of introducing explanation and controversy was Saint Paul, whose ideas were a combination of 'oral tradition, cabalistic mysteries, and scraps of Pythagorician, Platonic, and even Stoican doctrines'.[26] He was, moreover, one who had 'a great deal of that assuming air which is apt to accompany much learning, or the opinion of it'.[27]

A return to the gospels will undo all the mischief of Saint Paul, and once more there will be found a 'plain system of belief and practice, fitted for all times, and proportioned to all understandings'.[28] There must be an uncompromising rejection of other writings which are but 'an intricate and dark system . . . that casts no light on the rest'.[29] Bolingbroke avows that even Locke, who has given 'an air of coherence, consistency and rationality'[30] to the pauline writings, cannot really unravel the skein of his esoteric formulae. The gospels and the gospels alone have Christ's teachings, which are good; all else is but a series of glosses by theologians making the simple obscure, the natural unnatural, and the straightforward complicated.

It must be observed that, in accepting the gospels, one cannot avoid belief in revelation, but this does not seem to trouble Bolingbroke at all. Initially, of course, he had objected to revelation as something unnecessary and therefore non-existent. Revelation, he held, was contrary to the law of nature, and therefore it had never existed. Yet christianity, which is revelational, is acceptable and is held to conform to the law of nature; and so it is logical to assume that revelation must exist as well. This apparent inconsistency does not seem to have occurred to Bolingbroke, or if it did he studiously avoided a problem discussion of which would have damaged so many of his nicely established theorems.

Having lulled his critics by his seeming orthodoxy, he now moves into a position from which he can attack the universal authority of christianity itself. He starts by declaring that christianity has made no original contributions to the history of thought. Its basic ideology could be found in the writings of the classical Greek philosophers before the appearance of Christ. Platonism, he observes, was established in the Jewish religion, and with it came the 'doctrines of the immortality of

the soul, of a future state of rewards and punishments, and even that of a metempsychosis'.[31] All these doctrines are considered by the orthodox christian to be original but they are in fact merely a Greek philosophical addendum to mosaic theology. All that the christians did was to extend these Greek philosophical precepts more widely. One wonders how Bolingbroke would have dealt with the attitude of the primitive church itself, for example in Tertullian's question: 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?' His criticism, of course, is far from original, since as early as the fourth century we find Julian the Apostate complaining that christianity has grafted his beloved hellenism on to a Hebrew stock. Having assumed a relationship between the two, Bolingbroke pretends to be astonished that the early christians were so desirous of deriving their own theology from classical philosophy. He even suggests that the grossest of forgeries have been perpetrated in order to give verisimilitude to the claim of christianity that it is supported by classical authority. Actually, the search for authorities, he observes, was entirely unnecessary when all that was needed could be found in Plato, who is 'a sufficient repository of the logical fables and symbols, and of metaphysical mysteries'.[32]

The logical implications of this line of argument, although never explicitly stated, are that the gospels are merely a restatement of the 'theology of Plato', and not, as might have been previously suggested, a restatement of the law of nature, unless one assumes that the former is in accord with the latter. As Plato is portrayed as 'a man whose passion for courtesans, and handsome boys, inspired [him] . . . to write . . . lewd verses',[33] it is hardly possible that his teachings could be in accord with the sublime law of nature. To Bolingbroke, Plato is not a friend to truth but rather the seducer of the intellect, diverting the innocent from truth to falsehood.

To expect consistency in Bolingbroke's religious ideas is impossible. He seeks to remove theological foundation stones and yet wishes to defend the City of God; and, in spite of his apparent assertions to the contrary, the gospels are not treated as repositories of false doctrines. 'Genuine Christianity was taught by God. Theological Christianity is a religion that men have invented. . . .'[34] Bolingbroke sits in judgment like a latter-day Marcion, retaining what appeals to reason and excising what he finds incomprehensible. It is this perverted christianity that contains the platonic teachings. Plato had postulated some of 'the wildest hypotheses . . . [which passed] for systems of sublime knowledge', though at the same time 'he blundered on some divine truths that were

not quite beyond human apprehension'.[35] The latter were repeated in the gospels and had value, the former were repeated and expanded and unduly influenced the New Testament, creating a system which denied the law of nature. 'No man ever dreamed so wildly as this author [Plato] writ.'[36] The theologians 'applied Platonic philosophy to introduce and explain Christian, and the authority of Plato to confirm what they received for true on the authority of Christ. They added the epistles to the gospels, the doctrines of Paul to those of Christ; and to all of these, the reveries of heathen philosophy, Rabbinical extravagance, and Christian enthusiasm.'[37] One would have thought that platonic confirmation of christian truth would have supplied the corroboration that Bolingbroke desired for Moses but deemed lacking. In this case, however, he considers that the result was a religion far from the truth and far from the law of nature.

Bolingbroke was not always clear in his thinking; theology was for him a morass of contradictions and inconsistencies, but in elaborating his own views he had fallen prey to many of the evils that, with cavalier amateurism, he had ascribed to theology. It is clear that he accepted God, and he seems to have accepted the gospels, although believing them to err in their repetition of platonic precepts. He is critical of all theologians, beginning with Saint Paul, and seems to reject any idea that is inconsistent with the natural light of reason. Therefore, he appears to discard trinitarianism, for which he finds no support in his two opponents Moses or Plato, and which he thinks antithetical to the teachings of Christ. He is obdurate in his opposition to specific revelation, contending that it violates the law of nature and that this law could not be violated with impunity by anyone wishing to commend his beliefs to men of reason. The 'law of nature' becomes a consensory sanction for what is generally accepted, and covers a multitude of theological sins. Because of many incongruities in his argument, because of a sophisticated pride in his own reason, and because he was not well versed in the sphere which he undertook to attack, his general criticism of religion is not very convincing.

Bolingbroke was always better in attack than in defence, in destruction than construction, and consequently his own system, while well enough stated, is less plausible than the system which he undertook to demolish. As stated earlier, he accepts, apparently without question, that God exists, and he provides a positive demonstration of this, or rather what he denominates as a positive demonstration. If this

demonstration can show that God is, then Bolingbroke's initial proposition is no longer his opinion but is a judgment of nature. He refuses to accept the argument from the *consensus gentium*, namely, that all people seem to affirm a belief in a god or gods, that therefore God exists. Instead he reverts to his view that the world is not of itself eternal, and that if so it must have had a creator. The cause of the world order was God, and to reject the existence of such a God whose prime function is to impart order and system and thus intelligibility to the world, is to reject 'almost all we know'. But we will not and cannot do this, and all we know 'leads men to acknowledge a supreme Being'.[38] In this way it is obvious that God exists.

In addition to this philosophical demonstration of the existence of God, Bolingbroke, having affirmed a law of nature and a mechanical universe, accepted the view that such machinery required a mechanic to start it and this mechanic or demiurge he was willing to call God. The concept of a purely mechanical universe was quite in harmony with many of the scientific notions of his own day, and seemed to derive support from the newtonian theories of gravity and motion. Moreover it had apparent support from the attractive and generally received, but deceptively simple, belief that the world is built on a principle of law. It was inconceivable that the universe and life upon it began without a creator acting in accordance with law. It must be emphasised that, for Bolingbroke, the act of creation was God's only act of revelation, although he appears to believe in a theory of continuous creation.

One of the fundamental principles of the christian message is that the soul is immortal: a belief reinforced by the more specific doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Bolingbroke found that he could not accept the immortality of the soul, or rather, he refused to consider it because his reasoning could not establish its validity. The concept of immortality is a vexatious, puzzling and confounding philosophical problem, not least because the speculative reason alone, when arguing for it, can only establish the *sine qua non*, and when arguing against it can only make an argument *ex silentio*. It may arise from some revelation, now long since forgotten, or from a more simple source, namely, man's inability to believe that with death there is no more, that only a decaying physical object is left. Because the thinking process, the whole life of the mind, is not conditioned by the categories of space and time which it itself employs, because it does not consist simply in sensation

and the whole thinking process cannot be observed immediately by sense, it is possible to attribute some immaterial and everlasting qualities to it. In other words, it is possible (in spite of scientific thought that tends to reduce the soul, which is properly speaking a subject, into an impersonal object) to believe in an immortal soul in which something has been created out of nothing. However, this idea is highly ambiguous and confusing unless the materialism implied in some-*thing* and no-*thing* is consciously excluded.

Confronted by this confusion, Bolingbroke rejects the immortality of the soul on the grounds that experience totally disproves it, for as entities cannot be annihilated, they must always exist, although their outward appearance may change. Indivisible particles of matter never change and are by nature eternal: *ex nihilo nihil fit*, and on this basis the immortality of the individually created soul is disproved. Bolingbroke, however, fails to consider creation as more a matter of relationship and composition than of particles which, logically speaking, must be divisible to exist in space, but, if divisible, are not eternal. Moreover he forgets—in pointing to an ultimate indivisibility—that this is the argument by which Plato defends the concept of the immortality of the soul, since bodies only consisting of things made up of component parts are divisible, and thereby destructible, while non-material entities such as the soul are made up of indivisible elements and are, thereby, physically speaking, indestructible and immortal.

To resolve the problem of the soul's creation one can assume that the soul is part of a 'first cause' which will reclaim the soul after death. The soul obviously had a pre-existence, and the 'first cause' is therefore constantly in a process of loss and gain. But from all that is assumed of the 'first cause' this is absurd. Bolingbroke then attempted to resolve the dilemma in which he had placed himself, through trying to combine his non-revelatory materialism with christianity, by denying that the soul was material, but in so doing he did not, of course, resolve any of his difficulties. His solution for the problem is ingenious but hardly profound. He suggests that some matter is given by God the powers of cognition. 'I am persuaded that God can make material systems capable of thought, not only because I must renounce one of the kinds of knowledge that he has given me and the first, though not the principle in the order of knowing, or admit that he has done so; but because the original principles and many of the properties of matter being alike unknown to me, he has not shown to me that it implies any contradiction to assert a material thinking substance.'[39] On this view it would

appear to be obvious that there can be no life hereafter, and thus he swept away one of the fundamental precepts of christianity. It can hardly be surprising that his works were received so unfavourably, when he sought to undermine a belief so deeply cherished and so universally held: 'that futurity to which we are all impelled by an inextinguishable thirst for immortality', as Shelley expressed it.

What is God like? Bolingbroke believes in His goodness, which is not prior to, but rather a property of, His wisdom.

> Tho' I think that the moral attributes of the Supreme Being are absorbed, as I expressed myself before, in his wisdom, that we should consider them only as different modifications of this physical attribute, whatever ideas we may frame on the phaenomena, and that we must always talk precariously and impertinently when we presume to apply our ideas of them to the appearances of things; yet I think it proper to shew the divine and the atheist that even the goodness of God is not hard to defend against them both, by everyone who denies, as everyone may most reasonably, the question they beg, and grant in consequence of their alliance to one another.
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> The wisdom is not discernible by us, as the power of God, nor the goodness as the wisdom. But a multitude of the phaenomena being conformable to our ideas of goodness, we may reason about it . . . If our adversaries shew that men are exposed to many physical and moral evils, we can shew much more good of both kinds that God has bestowed on us, or put it into our power to procure to ourselves. The evils we complain of are constant or occasional effects of the constitution of a world not made for our sakes. But the means to soften some to prevent others, and to palliate and even to cure those that cannot be prevented are so many instances of the positive goodness of God, which ought to be brought to account and set against the evils with greater gratitude and more fairly than they are by men who pass them slightly over, whilst they descend into every particular of the other sort, aggravate the least and declaim pathetically and partially on all.
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> It would be easy to confirm and illustrate, what is advanced in the physical part of numerous and unanswerable proofs, which are to be found in the writings of natural philosophers. These men have done more service to true theism than all the

> metaphysical reasoners *a priori*: or to say something stronger and equally true, they have done it more service than divines and atheists in confederacy have done it hurt. It is impossible to read, with attention and without prejudice, what the former have writ, and not to be convinced by the fact, and by reason grounded on fact, not on hypothesis, first that we ought to consider the world we inhabit no otherwise than as a little wheel in our solar system; nor our solar system any otherwise than as a little but larger wheel in the immense machine of the universe; and both the one and the other necessary perhaps to the motion of the whole and to the preordained revolutions in it: nor without being convinced, secondly, that the wisdom, or, if you had rather say so, the goodness of God has provided amply for the well-being of man in this world, and of the whole animal kind, who are objects of the divine care as well as he, according to their various destinations.[40]

In exalting the wisdom, goodness and power of God Bolingbroke recognises the perfection of the Deity, but does not presume to say that this perfection necessarily entails a mechanical theory of rewards and punishments, salvation and damnation. Justice is no doubt an integral part of the divine nature, but the precise sphere of its operation is never indicated by Bolingbroke.

The wisdom of God is reflected in the powers of reason which he has bestowed on man.

> ... in man, instinct does no more than point out the first rudiments of the law of nature. Reason, instructed by experience, shews the law, and the sanctions of it, which are as invariable and uniform as the law; for in all ages of the world, and among all the societies of men, the well-being or the ill-being of these societies of men, and, therefore, of all mankind has borne a constant proportion to the observation or neglect of it. God has given to his human creatures the materials of physical and moral happiness, if I may so say, in the physical and moral constitution of things. He has given them faculties, and powers necessary to collect and apply these materials, and to carry on the work, of which reason is the architect, as far as these materials, these faculties, these powers, and the skill of this architect admit. This the Creator has done for us. What we shall do for ourselves he has left to the freedom of our elections; for

> free-will seems so essential to rational beings, that I presume we cannot conceive any such to be without it, tho' we easily conceive them restrained in the execution of what they will. The plan is that of the divine wisdom; and whatever our imaginations may suggest, we know nothing more particular, and, indeed, nothing at all more of the constitution and order of the human system, nor of the dispensations of providence, than this.[41]

Bolingbroke's religious views may at times have been contradictory, but he was able nevertheless to construct a remarkable system which abandoned all arguments that seemed in any way unreasonable. God was the perfect and omnipotent Being, but He was omnipotent without being omnipresent and, with an olympian aloofness, never indulged in revelation or demonstrated himself particularly. On the other side, man is only an animal endowed with reason whose actions are dominated, not by fears, but by virtue which it is in man's true self-interest to pursue. Man possesses reason and so external authorities are quite superfluous, as with Pope:

> . . . Whatever is, is right;
> That reason, passion, answer one great aim;
> That true self-love and social are the same;
> That virtue only makes our Bliss below;
> And all our Knowledge is, ourselves to know.[42]

In this much of Bolingbroke is summed up. He was a child of his age, and the creed of the eighteenth century was rational behaviour with enlightened self-interest as its driving spirit. This 'true self-love' was as much extolled by Pope and by Bolingbroke as it was damned by Blake who also condemned their natural religion.

> Love seeketh only Self to please,
> To bind another to its delight,
> Joys in another's loss of ease,
> And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite.[43]

It might be said that in Bolingbroke's self-love lay his neglect of party, of country even, and revelational religion. His Hell was a life of loneliness and political exile, a life of rebellion and reflection.