

THE
WORKS
OF
JOHN LOCKE.

A NEW EDITION, CORRECTED.

IN TEN VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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search after knowledge and philosophical verity, in that children, being taught words whilst they have but imperfect notions of things, apply them at random, and without much thinking, and seldom frame determined ideas to be signified by them. Which custom (it being easy, and serving well enough for the ordinary affairs of life and conversation) they are apt to continue when they are men: and so begin at the wrong end, learning words first and perfectly, but make the notions to which they apply those words afterwards very overtly. By this means it comes to pass, that men speaking the proper language of their country, i. e. according to grammar rules of that language, do yet speak very improperly of things themselves; and, by their arguing one with another, make but small progress in the discoveries of useful truths, and the knowledge of things, as they are to be found in themselves, and not in our imaginations; and it matters not much, for the improvement of our knowledge, how they are called.

Not easy to be made so. § 25. It were therefore to be wished, that men, versed in physical inquiries, and acquainted with the several sorts of natural bodies, would set down those simple ideas, wherein they observe the individuals of each sort constantly to agree. This would remedy a great deal of that confusion which comes from several persons applying the same name to a collection of a smaller or greater number of sensible qualities, proportionably as they have been more or less acquainted with, or accurate in examining the qualities of any sort of things which come under one denomination. But a dictionary of this sort containing, as it were, a natural history, requires too many hands, as well as too much time, cost, pains, and sagacity, ever to be hoped for; and till that be done, we must content ourselves with such definitions of the names of substances as explain the sense men use them in. And it would be well, where there is occasion, if they would afford us so much.

This yet is not usually done; but men talk to one another, and dispute in words, whose meaning is not agreed between them, out of a mistake, that the significations of common words are certainly established, and the precise ideas they stand for perfectly known; and that it is a shame to be ignorant of them. Both which suppositions are false: no names of complex ideas having so settled determined significations, that they are constantly used for the same precise ideas. Nor is it a shame for a man not to have a certain knowledge of any thing, but by the necessary ways of attaining it; and so it is no discredit not to know what precise idea any sound stands for in another man's mind, without he declare it to me by some other way than barely using that sound; there being no other way, without such a declaration, certainly to know it. Indeed, the necessity of communication by language brings men to an agreement in the signification of common words, within some tolerable latitude, that may serve for ordinary conversation: and so a man cannot be supposed wholly ignorant of the ideas which are annexed to words by common use, in a language familiar to him. But common use, being but a very uncertain rule, which reduces itself at last to the ideas of particular men, proves often but a very variable standard. But though such a dictionary, as I have above-mentioned, will require too much time, cost, and pains, to be hoped for in this age; yet methinks it is not unreasonable to propose, that words standing for things, which are known and distinguished by their outward shapes, should be expressed by little draughts and prints made of them. A vocabulary made after this fashion would perhaps, with more ease, and in less time, teach the true signification of many terms, especially in languages of remote countries or ages, and settle truer ideas in men's minds of several things, whereof we read the names in ancient authors, than all the large and laborious comments of learned critics. Naturalists, that treat of plants and animals, have found the benefit of this way: and he that has

received so much harm, and so little advantage from controversies in religion.

These are the arguments which your lordship has brought to confute one saying in my book, by other passages in it; which therefore being all but *argumenta ad hominem*, if they did prove what they do not, are of no other use than to gain a victory over me: a thing methinks, so much beneath your lordship, that it does not deserve one of your pages. The question is, whether God can, if he pleases, bestow on any parcel of matter, ordered as he thinks fit, a faculty of perception and thinking. You say, * you look upon a mistake herein to be of dangerous consequence, as to the great ends of religion and morality. If this be so, my lord, I think one may well wonder why your lordship has brought no arguments to establish the truth itself which you look on to be of such dangerous consequence to be mistaken in; but have spent so many pages only in a personal matter, in endeavouring to show, that I had inconsistencies in my book; which if any such thing had been showed, the question would be still as far from being decided, and the danger of mistaking about it as little prevented, as if nothing of all this had been said. If therefore your lordship's care of the great ends of religion and morality have made you think it necessary to clear this question, the world has reason to conclude there is little to be said against that proposition which is to be found in my book, concerning the possibility, that some parcels of matter might be so ordered by Omnipotence, as to be endued with a faculty of thinking, if God so pleased; since your lordship's concern for the promoting the great ends of religion and morality has not enabled you to produce one argument against a proposition that you think of so dangerous consequence to them.

And here I crave leave to observe, that though in your title-page you promise to prove, that my notion of ideas is inconsistent with itself, (which if it were, it could hardly be proved to be inconsistent with any thing else) and with the articles of the christian faith; yet your attempts all along have been to prove me, in some passages of my book, inconsistent with myself, without having shown any proposition in my book inconsistent with any article of the christian faith.

I think your lordship has indeed made use of one argument of your own: but it is such an one, that I confess I do not see how it is apt much to promote religion, especially the christian religion, founded on revelation. I shall set down your lordship's words, that they may be considered. You say, † that you are of opinion, that the great ends of religion and morality are best secured by the proofs of the immortality of the soul from its nature and properties; and which you think prove it immaterial. Your lordship does not question whether God can give immortality to a material

* 1st Answer.

† Ibid.

substance; but you say it takes off very much from the evidence of immortality, if it depend wholly upon God's giving that, which of its own nature it is not capable of, &c. So likewise you say, * If a man cannot be certain, but that matter may think, (as I affirm) then what becomes of the soul's immateriality (and consequently immortality) from its operations? But for all this, say I, his assurance of faith remains on its own basis. Now you appeal to any man of sense, whether the finding the uncertainty of his own principles, which he went upon, in point of reason, doth not weaken the credibility of these fundamental articles, when they are considered purely as matters of faith? For before, there was a natural credibility in them on account of reason; but by going on wrong grounds of certainty, all that is lost, and, instead of being certain, he is more doubtful than ever. And if the evidence of faith fall so much short of that of reason, it must needs have less effect upon men's minds, when the subserviency of reason is taken away; as it must be when the grounds of certainty by reason are vanished. Is it at all probable, that he who finds his reason deceive him in such fundamental points, shall have his faith stand firm and unmoveable on the account of revelation? For in matters of revelation there must be some antecedent principles supposed, before we can believe any thing on the account of it.

More to the same purpose we have some pages farther, where, from some of my words your lordship says, † you cannot but observe, that we have no certainty, upon my grounds, that self-consciousness depends upon an individual immaterial substance, and consequently that a material substance may, according to my principles, have self-consciousness in it; at least, that I am not certain of the contrary. Whereupon your lordship bids me consider, whether this doth not a little affect the whole article of the resurrection. What does all this tend to, but to make the world believe that I have lessened the credibility of the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection, by saying, that though it be most highly probable, that the soul is immaterial, yet upon my principles in cannot be demonstrated; because it is not impossible to God's omnipotency, if he pleases, to bestow upon some parcels of matter, disposed as he sees fit, a faculty of thinking?

This your accusation of my lessening the credibility of these articles of faith is founded on this, that the article of the immortality of the soul abates of its credibility, if it be allowed, that its immateriality (which is the supposed proof from reason and philosophy of its immortality) cannot be demonstrated from natural reason: which argument of your lordship's bottoms, as I humbly conceive, on this, that divine revelation abates of its credibility in all those articles it proposes, proportionably as human reason fails to support the testimony of God. And all that your lordship in those passages has said, when examined, will, I suppose, be found

* 2d Answer.

† Ibid.

finds it not so easy to give an account how those mysteries are; and which therefore, according to your principles, must be less credible than other articles, that create less difficulty to the understanding. For your lordship says, * that you appeal to any man of sense, whether to a man, who thought by his principles he could from natural grounds demonstrate the immortality of the soul, the finding the uncertainty of those principles he went upon in point of reason, *i. e.* the finding he could not certainly prove it by natural reason, doth not weaken the credibility of that fundamental article, when it is considered purely as a matter of faith? which, in effect, I humbly conceive, amounts to this, that a proposition divinely revealed, that cannot be proved by natural reason, is less credible than one that can: which seems to me to come very little short of this, with due reverence be it spoken, that God is less to be believed when he affirms a proposition that cannot be proved by natural reason, than when he proposes what can be proved by it. The direct contrary to which is my opinion, though you endeavour to make it good by these following words; † If the evidence of faith fall so much short of that of reason, it must needs have less effect upon men's minds, when the subserviency of reason is taken away; as it must be when the grounds of certainty by reason are vanished. Is it at all probable, that he who finds his reason deceive him in such fundamental points, should have his faith stand firm and unmoveable on the account of revelation? Than which I think there are hardly plainer words to be found out to declare, that the credibility of God's testimony depends on the natural evidence of probability of the things we receive from revelation, and rises and falls with it; and that the truths of God, or the articles of mere faith, lose so much of their credibility, as they want proof from reason: which if true, revelation may come to have no credibility at all. For if, in this present case, the credibility of this proposition, the souls of men shall live for ever, revealed in the scripture, be lessened by confessing it cannot be demonstratively proved from reason; though it be asserted to be most highly probable: must not, by the same rule, its credibility dwindle away to nothing, if natural reason should not be able to make it out to be so much as probable, or should place the probability from natural principles on the other side? For, if mere want of demonstration lessens the credibility of any proposition divinely revealed, must not want of probability, or contrary probability from natural reason, quite take away its credibility? Here at last it must end, if in any one case the veracity of God, and the credibility of the truths we receive from him by revelation, be subjected to the verdicts of human reason, and be allowed to receive any accession or diminution from other proofs, or want of other proofs of its certainty or probability.

If this be your lordship's way to promote religion, or defend it

* 2d Answer.

† Ibid.

articles, I know not what argument the greatest enemies of it could use more effectual for the subversion of those you have undertaken to defend; this being to resolve all revelation perfectly and purely into natural reason, to bound its credibility by that, and leave no room for faith in other things, than what can be accounted for by natural reason without revelation.

Your lordship * insists much upon it, as if I had contradicted what I have said in my essay, by saying † that upon my principles it cannot be demonstratively proved, that it is an immaterial substance in us that thinks, however probable it be. He that will be at the pains to read that chapter of mine, and consider it, will find, that my business there was to show, that it was no harder to conceive an immaterial than a material substance; and that from the ideas of thought, and a power of moving of matter, which we experienced in ourselves, (ideas originally not belonging to matter as matter) there was no more difficulty to conclude there was an immaterial substance in us, than that we had material parts. These ideas of thinking, and power of moving of matter, I in another place showed, did demonstratively lead us to the certain knowledge of the existence of an immaterial thinking being, in whom we have the idea of spirit in the strictest sense; in which sense I also applied it to the soul, in the 23d ch. of my essay; the easily conceivable possibility, nay great probability, that the thinking substance in us is immaterial, giving me sufficient ground for it: in which sense I shall think I may safely attribute it to the thinking substance in us, till your lordship shall have better proved from my words, that it is impossible it should be immaterial. For I only say, that it is possible, *i. e.* involves no contradiction, that God, the omnipotent immaterial spirit, should, if he pleases, give to some parcels of matter, disposed as he thinks fit, a power of thinking and moving; which parcels of matter, so endued with a power of thinking and motion, might properly be called spirits, in contradistinction to unthinking matter. In all which, I presume, there is no manner of contradiction.

I justified my use of the word spirit, in that sense, from the authorities of Cicero and Virgil, applying the Latin word spiritus, from whence spirit is derived, to the soul as a thinking thing, without excluding materiality out of it. To which your lordship replies, ‡ That Cicero, in his Tusculan Questions, supposes the soul not to be a finer sort of body, but of a different nature from the body—That he calls the body the prison of the soul—And says, that a wise man's business is to draw off his soul from his body. And then your lordship concludes, as is usual, with a question, Is it possible now to think so great a man looked on the soul but as a modification of the body, which must be at an end with life? Ans. No; it is impossible that a man of so good sense as Tully, when he uses the word corpus or body for the gross and

* 1st Answer.

† B. 2. C. 23.

‡ 1st Answer.

