
A C O N T E M P L A T I O N
O N T H E
I N S U F F I C I E N C Y O F R E A S O N .

The NATURE of human REASON described.—The INSUFFICIENCY of REASON to give proper DISCOVERIES concerning GOD and his infinite PERFECTIONS.—The true MANNER of worshipping GOD.—The supreme GOOD of MAN.—The perfect RULE of MORALITY.—The most powerful MOTIVES to VIRTUE and RELIGION.—The PARDON of SIN.—The REFINEMENT of the SOUL by SANCTIFICATION.—SUPPORT under the AFFLICTIONS and TROUBLES of LIFE.—CONSOLATIONS against the STINGS and TERRORS of DEATH.—The INSUFFICIENCY of REASON proved from a six-fold VIEW of the EXPERIENCE of the whole WORLD.—The glaring ABSURDITIES of the DEISTICAL SCHEME, in ten VIEWS.

REASON is a power of the mind to discern certain truths* which GOD has established in the natural and moral world.

REASON

* We chiefly mean the natural truths of geometry, of experimental philosophy, and some of the grand outlines of morality: these are the clearest truths that can be discerned by reason alone; to which may be added some undoubted facts in ancient and modern history.

REASON is a power of receiving ideas; of comparing those ideas, and of drawing consequences or conclusions from any truth already known or given.

REASON is a power of the mind to discern that all things are not alike true, good, fit, and beautiful; and to see that all tempers, actions, and qualities, are not alike evil, unfit, wrong, and deformed.

REASON is a power of judging of the nature, relations, and uses of things—the fitness or unfitness of actions—the good or evil qualities of tempers, and the truth or falsehood of propositions.

Let us now comprehend the substance of these various views of human reason in the following description of it.

REASON is that power which any intelligent being has of surveying his own existence and ideas, and comparing them; and of forming to himself, out of his clearest ideas, such general and fundamental truths, as he can be sure of, i. e. axioms, or self-evident propositions, and of making such inferences as are agreeable to truth, in order to find out more truth—prove some assertion, or disprove some objection—resolve some question—determine what is fit to be done on any special and difficult occasion;—the thing under consideration

sideration being first clearly defined, fairly stated, fully prepared, and well understood.

True reason is nothing else but the real nature of things, and their relations and proportions to each other, clearly apprehended in the mind to be as they are in themselves:—and thus reason must be the same for kind in all intelligent beings.—Dr. Leng, *serm. x.* p. 298, 2d edit. 8vo.

Reason* is that power of the human mind by which we draw inferences.

It is that power by which we discern that a relation subsists between two ideas, on account of our having found that these ideas bear certain relations to other ideas, which we call third ideas.

It is that power which enables us, from ideas that are known, to find out such as are unknown.

Without this power of drawing inferences, we never could proceed a single step beyond first principles, or intuitive axioms, in the discovery of any truth whatsoever.

These are some of the best representations of human reason, taken from Dr. Cotton Mather, Brine, Grove, and Dr. Leng; with that great master of reason, Wollaston, in his *Religion of Nature* delineated. I apprehend that better definitions of reason will not easily be found.—Our business now is to shew, that reason in man, with
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* Dr. Beattie, in his *Essay on the Immutability of Truth*.

all its utmost improvements by art, science, and learning, is not sufficient to lead us to the true knowledge of God, to a clear acquaintance with the whole extent of our duty, and to the certain enjoyment of eternal happiness, without the assistance of divine revelation.

I. REASON alone, without the AID of SCRIPTURE, cannot, in our present fallen STATE, discover GOD so clearly and fully to MAN, as to enable him to form affectionate APPREHENSIONS of GOD, and excite MAN to love and adore him, that he may enjoy his vital and blissful PRESENCE for ever.

1. *Reason cannot give us easy and plain notices of a GOD.*

Reason, in the Pagan world, never did furnish such familiar ideas of the being, presence, power, and wisdom of GOD, as were clear to the weakest mind, affecting to the most stupid heart, and suitable to the meanest understanding.

2. *Reason cannot give special and distinct ideas of GOD, in such a manner, as to enable the soul, in a moment, to distinguish GOD from all other objects in the universe, and give him that distinguishing veneration which his supreme dignity requires.*

3. *Reason is unable to give us certain and convincing notices of a GOD, so as to oblige the mind*

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to assent to the truth of God's existence, convince it of the reality of the divine perfections, impress the conscience with a sense of the divine justice, and persuade the will to submit to the divine dominion.

4. *Reason cannot give extensive ideas and large apprehensions of God* in all his natural and moral perfections; nor is it able to discover all the natural and moral relations of God to our souls; so that we may be sure that no idea of God is wanting which is necessary to our real duty and final happiness.

5. *Reason is unable to give pleasant and lovely ideas of God*, such as shall suit a rational taste, and excite a tender affection to him as an amiable and good being, full of perfect beauty and love, good and beautiful in himself, fit to do us the highest good, worthy to receive all possible good from us: an object in whom we may expand our noblest powers with delight; a being that rejoices to do us good, and fill us with happiness for ever.—Reason can never furnish such sweet and satisfying discoveries of a God as shall set our hearts at rest, and be the termination of our will and reason in God, so as to have no occasion to seek any farther felicity to eternity.

6. *Reason, in its present weak and depraved state, cannot give such powerful and durable ideas of God*, as shall always abide with great force upon the
soul,

soul.—Reason cannot discern such an energy of God, working from moment to moment, and renewing the impetus every instant on the conscience, passions, and will of man; and yet such an impression is absolutely necessary for man's duty and happiness.—Here reason discovers its utter weakness and insufficiency.

It is absolutely necessary, in order that a man should know God, and perform his whole duty to him, that he should have such a rational and incessant impression of God upon his soul, as shall have a sufficient force to influence every man in the world to a compliance with every duty, in every instant, in every circumstance and state of life, from youth to manhood, from manhood to old age, and to the very moment of death.

II. REASON cannot direct us in the true MANNER of performing the solemn WORSHIP of GOD.

Worship consists in a just sense and acknowledgment of the infinite perfections of God; and this acknowledgment and veneration must be regulated by the divine will, and not by the mere fancy of the worshipper.—How can mere reason assure us that we have clear and lively apprehensions of the nature and attributes of God; and a proper veneration for his infinite majesty and dignity? Can reason infuse into us a keen abhorrence

rence of all moral disorder, and inspire us with a powerful confidence of God's goodness and fidelity? Can reason produce in us a most intense love to God, and a vigorous joy in him as our life and felicity?

Reason alone would never produce in us a sweet and easy resignation of our will to God.—Reason will never inspire us with a sweet humility, nor make us truly grateful for every favour bestowed upon us.—Reason cannot enable us to exercise a resolute self-denial, or bear afflictions with a good grace, when God demands the one, and brings on the other.—Reason alone will never inspire us with a most mighty zeal for the honour and glory of God.—Reason can never enable us to act with wisdom before God, nor will it make us honest to the very bottom of our being in his service and interest.—Reason will never inspire us with an ardent desire after an eternal fruition of his glorious perfections.

III. REASON can never discover the true HAPPINESS of MAN.

Reason cannot discern that good which makes a man happy, or prepares him for happiness, or prevents his pain, or removes his misery.—Reason cannot discern wherein true happiness consists.—Reason knows not that good which is suited to our highest powers, and is agreeable to

every situation we can be in, and every character we can sustain.—Reason cannot discern that good which may be enjoyed without shame and confusion, and possessed without suspicion of wrong conduct, or dread of future ill consequences.—Reason cannot discern that good which will support us under the troubles and vexations of life, or that will refine and ravish our affections, stand the severe test of sober reflection, improve upon longer experience, afford the highest pleasure on the most frequent repetition, and be as lasting as our existence.

IV. REASON cannot discern a complete BODY of MORALS or universal VIRTUE, as the MEANS of HAPPINESS.

Reason never did give us a complete body of morality without defect or darkness.—A perfect scheme of mortality must be easy and clear, in order to be useful to man.—A confused and indeterminate rule of duty is of no use.—A sound plan of morals must be universal to oppose every sin, and urge to every duty.—There must be nothing defective, nothing corrupt or vicious in the whole system.—Sound morality must have no pernicious maxim to draw after it any bad consequences. This plan must be avowed by GOD himself as a rule of duty, and enforced by his authority.—Reason leaves poor blind man to draw the rule of duty from the source of his own nature.

nature.—Man cannot frame a complete body of morality.—He could make no progress in a system of morals of his own, while he is a raw giddy youth, full of impure appetites and passions.—If clear rules could be found out, motives would be wanting.—If motives were discerned by man, even then assistances of light, warmth, and strength would be wanting, and we should freeze to ice amidst maxims of wisdom, and motives to virtue.

V. REASON cannot discover any powerful and effectual MOTIVES TO VIRTUE.

I. REASON cannot give us a full VIEW of the immediate PRESENCE of the LAW-GIVER, and the infinite AUTHORITY of his LAWS, as the invariable RULE of OBEDIENCE.—Reason is unable to recommend the law, by shewing us the glorious qualifications of the law-giver in his power and greatness. It cannot give us right notions of his wisdom, justice, goodness, and clemency; and yet the discoveries of these glorious properties must be attained, in order to promote universal and genuine virtue.—Reason cannot give such a clear evidence of God from moment to moment, as shall strike strongly, affect warmly, leave a lively impression, and have a pungent influence, to quicken us to the practice of virtue.

Reason cannot shew us that our Governor is always near; that he is every moment conversant

with us; that we have every day convincing and delightful evidences of his goodness, wisdom, justice, and kindness; with all other beautiful perfections fitting him for government. These notices are absolutely necessary to enforce a regard to the will of God.

Reason cannot powerfully excite to obedience, by shewing us that title of the law-giver is indisputable, and the ground of his claim to our affection clearly made known. Such is the transcendent excellence of the nature of God, as to render him the only fit being to govern; but reason is blind to this excellence. Reason doth not clearly discern that God is the creator of all things, that he has a propriety in all his creatures. Reason is blind as to God's preserving us in being, and his special care of us, and inspection into our existence, and the many precious benefits he has bestowed upon us. All this close influence of God upon us, from moment to moment, is basely disregarded by the unenlightened mind.

Reason is unable to give us a clear and satisfying discovery of God's concernment in his own laws, i. e. that the God who is thus qualified for, and rightly possessed of, the government, has made such laws, and stamped his authority upon them.

Reason is incapable of forming great and venerable ideas of the excellency of God, and
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his right to give laws. But if we had brighter apprehensions of his dignity and right to govern, yet this would have no weight with us, if we were not clearly satisfied that the laws of nature are the laws of God.

Reason is unable to discern that the laws of God, in the nature and contents of them, are fully agreeable to the glorious perfections we desire in a law-giver; such as wisdom, justice, goodness, and clemency, or kind affection to man. But as these perfections are either not at all, or but obscurely known by the light of reason, so the impress of the attributes of God on the laws of nature has not been discovered by the best geniuses of the Pagan world; nor is it discoverable by our blind reason. No truth in the world is more certain; we not only dare affirm it, but we can clearly make it appear even to demonstration, viz. that the frame of the universe, and the whole system of the laws of nature, are adapted to the powers and passions of man in a state of innocence and rectitude; which is not the case with man now: no, verily, this is far from being his present state.

And, therefore, how to reconcile the perfection of these laws to the most rational apprehensions of God, and the present state of man, is an incomprehensible speculation of infinite consequence, and of the most prodigious difficulty, so that
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human reason never could have got through it : its utmost force could never have surmounted it : the whole united world of minds could never have solved the difficulty, if GOD had not graciously given us another guide beside reason and the light of nature.

Reason cannot give a certain knowledge that GOD has a great regard to his laws, and accurately inspects whether or no these laws are observed and obeyed. The knowledge of this would be a strong inducement to us to regard his laws. Here reason likewise fails.

Reason, in this respect, is no less in the dark than in other points of the utmost importance.

The face of things in the world hath so various, so contrary, and so horrid an appearance, that we never could see clearly thro' this difficult matter, if we were left to judge of GOD and his laws by the mere light of nature.

The aboundings of sin in all parts of the globe —the temporal prosperity of millions of sinners —the sufferings of the best men, and the afflicted state of the most virtuous, have led multitudes to deny the providence and government of GOD ; and many of the wiser and better sort of mankind have felt the most painful doubts concerning the wisdom and rectitude of the divine administration.

Reason

Reason cannot draw forth our best powers into action: the inducements to obedience must shine with the brightest light and ardour, so as to illuminate and fire the mind; and not only dissipate our doubts concerning the will and dominion of God, but likewise shew the excellency of submission, and the beauty and pleasure of humble and faithful obedience.

The mind of man is so strangely tossed between hope and fear, concerning the goodness and justice of God's providential government, that he cannot, by the force of reason, come to any certain conclusion what God will do with him in time and eternity.

Rational men, at some times, are astonished to see God so patiently bear the most wicked insults on his law. At other times, they are filled with the most alarming fears at the terrible effects of his punishing justice. The reasons of the divine government in the exertions of patience and punishment, are absolutely impenetrable by the force of reason, and bid defiance to the greatest acuteness and sagacity.

On these tossings between hope and fear, read the nervous Halyburton,* p. 144, and the great John Maclaurin on the Glorifying in the Cross, p. 68.

II. REASON is defective in a second MOTIVE to DUTY.—It doth not clearly discern the present pleasures of obedience, nor satisfy us with respect

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* In his admirable book against the Deists, 4to. 1714.

to the present rewards of virtue. Reason cannot produce in us such a serious and delightful sense of God in the soul, nor impress upon us such a feeling conviction of our intire dependance upon, and obligations to him, as shall excite us to love him with a lively gratitude, zealously strive to promote his glory, and proclaim, to the utmost of our capacity, the excellence of his perfections.

I. *Reason, in our present state of depravity, is unable to discern the certainty and evidence of a virtuous and religious life.*—Man, without divine aid, cannot discern and know that he is always in the right; he cannot see his way clear, and his end sure. The way of his duty will be always perplexed; he will be ever without clear true light—that light which produces a lively conviction and rest of mind in a course of obedience. Man, by the force of reason, cannot be absolutely sure that he complies with the whole will of God, nor attain to satisfaction that he sincerely endeavours to please Him. Man, by mere reason, cannot be sure that the path he walks in is the path of eternal life and happiness. The way of mere reason is covered with so much darkness, that he cannot see all through to the end. His prospect is obscure; and eternal objects are so confused before him, that he cannot discover where his path ends; he cannot conclude that it will terminate in God.

II. *Reason,*

II. *Reason, in its present state, cannot clearly and steadily discover the great beauty and excellence of a religious and virtuous life.*—There is nothing more lovely than light in the whole creation of God; nothing more needful or useful. Light is not a greater natural beauty in the material world, than virtue is a moral beauty in the rational world. True virtue is the beauty of human life, the splendor and glory of human actions. It is that active principle by which our whole mind and heart are intentionally directed to produce good towards all the objects of our free agency in heaven and earth.

But how blind has human reason, in all ages, been to this beauty of temper and action—this most lovely quality and ornament of the soul!

III. *Mere reason cannot afford that light which will inspire the pleasures and joys of a virtuous life.*—To have the eyes of reason opened, and the understanding brightly illuminated, what a rapture and pleasing surprise must it be! how new, how beautiful, how charming must every object appear! But reason cannot furnish these pleasures. Reason utterly fails in giving us the pleasures of moral perception, of religious action, of virtuous reflection, pure fruition, and the hope of future happiness in perfection.

(I.) *Reason cannot supply the pleasures of virtuous action.*—All pleasure supposes action.—God has

made man an active being, so that idleness is its own torment.—GOD has so framed man, that the best pleasures always attend the best actions.—Every good action is pleasant: and the better the action, the greater is the pleasure that attends it.

Pleasures, flowing from bad actions, are of a low sordid nature: the divine wisdom suffers only some mean dreggy pleasures to attend vicious actions, on purpose to put the powers of reason to the proof. Vicious pleasures are hollow and unsatisfying; they are momentary and soon gone; are attended with fear of bad consequences, with a painful suspicion of wrong conduct; sicken us with frequent repetition, and are bitter and tormenting on the review.—Mere reason can furnish us with no pleasure that will wait on every step of human life. The life of a man that has nothing more than reason to conduct him, has many barren spots on which no pleasures grow.

Reason alone can never raise us to that sublime devotion to GOD, which is the most rapturous exercise of the human soul. It can never inspire us with just and enlarged ideas of the divine perfections, nor impress upon us the divine image, nor produce in us a happy warmth and flow of affection to the first and best cause of all things.

(2.) *Reason alone cannot enable us to enjoy the sweet pleasures of reflection, after the performance of a*
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good action.—This is a rich privilege indeed! but reason cannot bestow it. A truly good man can enjoy the time past as well as the time present. The time past is gone, considered as a part of duration; and in this sense can never be recalled. But time, as filled with good actions, is never lost, while memory and recollection remain. But as reason is insufficient to excite us to good actions, so consequently it can furnish us with no pleasing reflections on our past conduct.

(3.) *Reason alone can never furnish the pleasures of exquisite fruition of the presence and love of God.*—A poor depraved man's time is worse than lost; he has no fruit, but that of a vitiated heart; no good fruit at all—yet must give an account to God of every thought, word, and action. Vice, which allures the wretch with an harlot's face, now viewed behind, appears as a cursed hag, an ill-favoured forceress. Conscience turns his enraged enemy, and torments his very soul.

If man was truly good, reflection would prove a rich, wonderful, and delightful faculty. By the help of this wondrous power, things past may be made present to the mind, and it may be made an inlet to very great and lasting pleasures. If a man was truly good, his life would be spent in innocence and usefulness; he would feel a pleasure that he could repeat a thousand times; and the more exquisite, in that, while it arose from

time past, it would run on into time future, and terminate in a vast eternity. On the other hand, the pains of fruition in sin and vice are far beyond all its pleasures.

(4.) *Reason can never furnish the pleasures of hope and trust in GOD for all future time.*—It can never enable us to enjoy the future duration of the next life in the present. If a man was truly good, hope would grow up into a kind of assurance; it would fix the soul on a rock, and fortify the mind in the prospect of ill, by a firm persuasion that GOD would not forsake us; it would teach a man to say, I fix my confidence in infinite presence, infinite power, infinite faithfulness, and infinite love. I am resolutely fixed on GOD; I have new desires and vast expectations. Thus, time past, present, and to come, would all conspire in the pleasures of religion and virtue. But where is the man to be found in the whole world, that, by the mere force of reason, can feel these hopes and these pleasures?

iv. *Reason is unable to exhibit the alluring and instructive nature of a religious and virtuous life.*

Light allures and attracts the eyes of all men. The light of virtue in a good man is the most instructive and attractive in the whole world; it vastly excels all the finest declamations in favour of virtue. The light and life which vital virtue diffuses around it, would invite other men into the
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