

# A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God more particularly in answer to Hobbes, Spinoza, and their followers

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis . . . . indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal-sized type. Cross-headings in ·SMALL CAPS· are not Clarke's; they are added to mark certain places where something new is introduced into the discussion; they imply nothing about where that introduced material ends.—Two systematic changes should be confessed at once: 50 occurrences of 'must of necessity', 7 of 'must needs', and 6 of 'must necessarily' are reduced to 'must'; and every occurrence of 'trumpet' replaces Clarke's 'triangle'.—Each of the bold-type numerals **1** through **12** is used to name •the proposition at the head of the relevant section and also to name •the section itself.

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## Contents

<b>Introduction: The cause of atheism</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1: Something must have existed from eternity</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. There must have existed from eternity one independent being</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. The unchangeable and independent Being that has existed from eternity, without any external cause of its existence, must exist necessarily.</b>	<b>8</b>

<b>4. The essence of the self-existent Being is incomprehensible</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>5. The self-existent Being must be eternal</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>6. The self-existent Being must be infinite and omnipresent</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>7. There can only be one self-existent Being</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>8. The self-existent Being must be intelligent</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>9. The self-existent Being must be a free agent</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>10. The self-existent Being must be all-powerful</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>11. The supreme cause and author of all things must be infinitely wise</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>12. The supreme author of all things must be infinitely good, just, and true.</b>	<b>47</b>

## Glossary

**actually:** Wherever this version has Clarke speaking of whether something could have been different from how it *actually* is, what he wrote concerned its being different from how it *now* is. Taken strictly, that is just wrong, and it has seemed better to correct it each time.

**a priori, a posteriori:** Before Kant, these phrases were seldom used to mark the difference between •‘independently of experience’ and •‘on the basis of experience’. Their usual meaning—as in the present work—was to mark the difference between •knowing that something is the case and working out what must follow from it and •knowing that something is the case and working out what must have led to it.

**arbitrary:** In early modern uses, this means ‘chosen’, resulting from someone’s decision, or the like. There’s no implication (as there is in today’s use of the term) that there weren’t good reasons for the choice.

**communicate:** To say that x ‘communicates’ a quality or power to y is to say that x causes y to have it; usually with a strong implication that x already has it; e.g. a moving thing communicates motion to something it collides with; God, who has freedom, communicates freedom to certain of his creatures. When on page 49 Clarke speaks of God as communicating *himself* to his creatures, this is presumably a rhetorical flourish.

**corruption:** This sometimes means ‘going bad’, ‘rotting’. More generally, falling to pieces.

**determined:** To say that x is ‘determined’ to do A is to say that it is somehow fixed, settled, pinned down, that x will do A; it doesn’t mean that x firmly intends to do A. In many contexts it could be a way of saying that x is *caused* to do

A, but not when, as on page 12, x is God. We needn’t worry over what exactly ‘determine’ does mean there, because in that passage Clarke’s interest lies elsewhere.

**evil:** In this work ‘evil’ (noun) means ‘something bad, nasty, unwelcome’ or the like; this is standard philosophical jargon, even today, as when we say that ‘pain is an evil’ or speak of ‘the problem of evil’ meaning ‘the problem posed by the existence of bad states of affairs’.

**fatal, fate:** The words’ origin in Latin connects it with the idea that *It is x’s fate to become F* means that x’s becoming F has been ordained, laid down, ordered by some supreme power. But in the writings of Clarke and some other early modern writers the meaning is broadened to include also the proposition that x’s becoming F is settled as a causally inevitable upshot of the previous state of the world. For him, ‘the maintainers of fate’ are those who deny that there is any freedom of the will; and he thinks of them as holding that everything that happens is a causally inevitable upshot of the immediately preceding state of the world.

**frame:** To ‘frame’ something is to make it, construct it, set it up—where the ‘it’ is not a physical thing but rather a class, a conception, an hypothesis, or the like.

**immensity:** This conventionally means ‘infinite largeness’, but Clarke sometimes seems to use it as a name of Space, e.g. on page 9 where he says that the Cartesians equated immensity with matter.

**in a higher degree:** When on page 23 Clarke says that if x causes y, then every perfection y has must have been possessed by x ‘actually or in a higher degree’, he is bringing in a scholastic notion that was invented to deal with the

difficulty that God presumably doesn't actually or straightforwardly have many of the qualities he causes other things to have—he isn't cheerful or tidy or well-dressed.

**independent:** A thing is 'independent' in Clarke's usage if it does not depend on anything else for its existence, i.e. was not caused to come into existence. It may be that for Clarke 'independent' is synonymous with 'self-existent' (qv).

**intelligent:** When Clarke speaks of the cause of all things as 'intelligent' he means that it (or he) *has thoughts*. So 'intelligence' isn't a matter of degree. On page 23 he speaks of 'the power that we call thought, intelligence, consciousness, perception or knowledge'.

**material cause:** The material cause of a thing is the whatever-it-is that the thing is composed of. It might be *matter*; but the meaning of the phrase allows for other kinds of stuff if there are any. (It's an odd-seeming use of 'cause', but there's an explanation for it.)

**necessary agent:** In Clarke's usage 'x is a necessary agent' means that x does whatever x is caused to do, compelled to do, with no freedom to intervene in the causal chain.

**occasion:** This word (noun or verb) began its philosophical career in opposition to 'cause'. According to the 'occasionalist' theory about body-mind relations: when you are kicked, you feel pain; what causes the pain is not the kick but God, and the kick comes into it not as *causing* God to give you pain (because nothing causes God to do anything) but as the 'occasion' for his doing so. Perhaps something like a signal or a trigger.

**physical efficient cause:** Here 'physical' isn't confined to 'material': mental events could be physical causes. The word means something like 'out there in the world, available for

objective scientific study'. And the 'efficient cause' of x is whatever it is that *makes* x happen.

**principle:** In this work Clarke sometimes uses 'principle' as you and I do, a principle being a kind of proposition. But on twenty occasions he uses it only in a once-common but now-obsolete sense, in which 'principle' means 'source', 'cause', 'driver', 'energizer', or the like. The first such use is on page 1; the second is on page 15, and from there on the word is used only in that old sense.

**providence:** Clarke uses it to mean something like 'God's goodness to us'.

**schoolmen:** Philosophers and theologians whose thought is dominated by what they believe to be Aristotle's ideas.

**self-existent:** To call x 'self-existent' is to say that to understand why x exists you don't have to look at anything except x. On page 8 Clarke says that the only way that can be true is for x to exist *necessarily*, meaning that to understand why x exists you have only to grasp x's intrinsic nature.

**speculative:** This means 'having to do with non-moral propositions'. Ethics is a 'practical' discipline, chemistry is a 'speculative' one.

**spirits:** When Clarke uses this term on page 35, it is short-hand for 'animal spirits'—super-fluid stuff that was supposed to be even more finely divided (more 'subtle') than air, and to move extremely fast, seep into tiny crevices, and generally manage most of the changes in the body.

**substance of:** The expression **(a)** 'substance of' (often in the form 'substance or essence of') occurs quite often in this work, which also frequently uses **(b)** 'substance' in its more standard meaning. In **(b)** we can ask whether (say) a pebble is 'a substance' or whether any of the 'substances' in the

world have property F, but no provision is made for **(a)** talk about 'the substance *of* something. In Clarke's uses of it, the 'substance of x' seems to be x's basic nature; it's a deplorable usage, but this version lets it stand because fixing it would

be too intrusive. There's a clear sign of Clarke's not having thought hard enough about this on page 32 where he clearly equates **(a)** understanding what the substance of matter is with **(b)** understanding what a material substance is.

## Preface

Because many good books already been published proving the Being and Attributes of God, I have chosen to shrink what I have to say on this subject into as narrow a compass—and to express what I had to offer in as few words—as I could without loss of clarity. For that reason I have confined myself to one only continued thread of argument, trying to bring it as near to *mathematical* as the nature of such a discourse would allow. I have omitted other arguments that I couldn't see to be as obviously conclusive; . . . but I haven't opposed any of those arguments, because I don't think it's the best way to recommend my performance by looking for faults in the work of others who are aiming as I am to promote the interests of true religion and virtue. Everyone ought to use only arguments that appear to him to be clear and strong; it's for the readers to judge whether they truly prove the conclusion. [In the title of this work, and throughout it, issues about 'the being and attributes of God' are issues about •whether God exists and •whether (if he exists) he is benevolent, fair, omniscient, omnipotent, etc.]

## Introduction: The cause of atheism

All those who either are or claim to be atheists—

who don't believe that God exists or want to be thought not to believe it; or (what is really the same thing) deny the principal attributes of the divine nature and suppose God to be an unintelligent being that acts merely by necessity, i.e. that doesn't (in plain correct speech) *act* but is only acted on

—all men who are 'atheists' in this sense must be explained in one or other of these three ways.

**(i)** Being extremely ignorant and stupid, they have never duly considered *anything* or made any good use of their natural reason to discover even the plainest and most obvious truths; and have spent their time in a way of life very little superior to that of beasts.

**(ii)** Being totally debauched and corrupted in their conduct, they have through a vicious and degenerate life •corrupted the principles [see Glossary] of their nature and

•defaced the reason of their own minds; and, instead of fairly and impartially inquiring into the rules and obligations of nature, and the reason and fitness of things, they have acquired the habit of mocking religion; and, being under the power of bad habits and the slavery of unreasonable and indulged lusts [Clarke's phrase], they are resolved not to listen to any reasoning that would oblige them to give up their beloved vices.

**(iii)** On the strength of speculative [see Glossary] reasoning and the principles of philosophy they claim that the arguments used against the being or attributes of God seem to them, after the strictest and fullest inquiry, to be stronger and more conclusive than the arguments by which we try to prove these great truths.

These seem the only conceivable causes for any man's disbelieving the being or attributes of God; no-one can be supposed to be an atheist except in one or other of

these three ways. In the present work I am not going to address either **(i)** those who are wholly ignorant and stupid or **(ii)** those who through habitual debauchery have brought themselves to a custom of mocking and scoffing at all religion, and won't listen to any fair reasoning. One of these needs to be instructed in the first principles of reason as well as of religion. The other disbelieves only because he *wants* the thing not be true. One hasn't yet arrived to the use of his natural faculties; the other has renounced them, and declares that he won't be argued with as a rational creature. So the third sort of atheists. . . .are the only ones to whom my present discourse can be supposed to be directed. . . .

Before entering on the main argument, I shall state three concessions that these men, on their own principles, are committed to making.

**(1)** They must admit that even if it can't be proved to be *true* that there is a God, a Being who is intelligent and wise, just and good, to govern the world, it is at least very *desirable*—something that any wise man would wish to be true, for the great benefit and happiness of men. Whatever hypothesis these men can possibly frame [see Glossary], whatever argument they can invent, to exclude God and providence [see Glossary] from the world, that very argument or hypothesis will force them to this concession. There are five ways in which this might happen. **(i)** If they argue that our notion of God arises not from nature and reason but from the skill and cunning of politicians, that argument forces them to confess that it is obviously in the interests of human society that it should be believed there is a God. [It's not clear how this argument is supposed to work; and anyway it shifts from 'would wish to be true' to 'would wish to be believed'.] **(ii)** If they suppose that the world was made by chance and could at any moment be destroyed by chance again, no-one can be so absurd as to contend that it is as comfortable and desirable

to live •in such uncertainty with a continual exposure to ruin with no hope of rescue as •in a world under the preservation and conduct of a powerful, wise, and good God. **(iii)** If they argue against God's existence from the faults and defects that they imagine they can find in the constitution of the visible and material world, this obliges them to admit that it would have been better if the world had been made by an intelligent and wise Being who might have prevented all faults and imperfections. **(iv)** If they argue against providence from the faultiness and inequality they think they find in the management of the moral world, this is a plain confession that it is more fit and desirable that the world should be governed by a just and good Being than by mere chance or unintelligent necessity. **(v)** If they suppose the world to be eternally and necessarily self-existent [see Glossary], and thus that everything in it is established by a blind and eternal fatality [see Glossary], they can't rationally deny that it would be better to have liberty and choice, or a free power of acting, than to be determined in all our actions—as a stone is to move downward—by an absolute and inevitable fate [see Glossary]. In short, whichever way they turn and whatever hypothesis they make concerning the origin and constitution of things, nothing is as certain and undeniable as that

man, considered without the protection and conduct of a superior being, is in a far worse situation than upon supposition of the being and government of God, and of men's being under his special conduct, protection, and favour.

Man, unaided, is infinitely insufficient for his own happiness. As Archbishop Tillotson said in one of his sermons:

'He is liable to many evils and miseries that he can't prevent or redress; he is full of wants that he can't supply, boxed in with infirmities that he can't remove, and open to dangers that he can never sufficiently

provide against. . . He doesn't *securely* have anything that he enjoys in this world, and he's uncertain of everything he hopes for; he is apt to grieve for what he can't help, and eagerly to desire what he is never able to obtain.'

In these terrible circumstances it's obvious that the only sufficient support we can have is •from the belief in a wise and good God and •from the hopes that true religion affords. Whether the being and attributes of God can be demonstrated or not, therefore, it must at least be accepted by all rational and wise men that it would be a very desirable thing—something they would heartily wish to be true—that there was a God, an intelligent and wise, a just and good Being, to govern the world.

Suppose the men I am arguing with do make this concession, what use can I make of it? Just this: If they have to concede that it is (at least) very desirable that there should be a God, they are committed by their own principles to •want above all things to be convinced that their present opinion is an error, and to •hope sincerely that the truth of the contrary may be demonstrated to them; so they are bound to consider—with all seriousness, attention, and impartiality—the weight of the arguments *for* the being and attributes of God.

(2) All the people I am speaking of, who profess themselves to be atheists. . . purely on the principles of reason and philosophy, are bound by these principles to accept that all mocking and scoffing at religion, all jesting and turning arguments of reason into drollery and ridicule, is the most unmanly and unreasonable thing in the world. So they are obliged to *disown*—as irrational and self-condemned persons who aren't fit to be argued with—all such scoffers at religion who routinely deride •their opponents• without listening to reason, and who reject the means of being convinced and

satisfied. Hearing the reason of the case, patiently and without prejudice, is something •that men owe to every truth that can in any way concern them, and •that is necessary to the discovery of every kind of error. How much more so in things of the utmost importance!

(3) Since the persons I am talking to have to admit that it is most desirable—good for the world—that it should be true that God exists, they must also admit that

- supposing the being and attributes of God to be things that can't be demonstrated to be true, only to be *possible* and thus incapable of being demonstrated to be false (as most certainly they are),
- and, much more, supposing them to be made to appear probable, •in the weak sense of• appearing more likely to be true than to be false,

it obviously follows, even on these •weak• suppositions, •that men ought in all reason to live piously and virtuously in the world, and •that vice and immorality are, on all accounts and under all hypotheses the most absurd and inexcusable things in nature.

[Clarke doesn't help us to understand why if I believe that 'God exists and has such-and-such attributes' is *possible* I am committed to living piously and virtuously. Presumably he has in mind something like the line of thought known as 'Pascal's Wager', after the 17th century mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal, who first thought it up. Briefly stated, it goes like this (using 'P' as short-hand for the statement about the being and attributes of God): P is possible, so P has a probability > 0. Now, the possibilities are these:

- (1) P is true and I live a virtuous and pious life;
- (2) P is false and I live a virtuous and pious life;
- (3) P is true and I don't live a virtuous and pious life;
- (4) P is false and I don't live a virtuous and pious life

The upshots of these, for me, are as follows:

- (1') I live happily in heaven for ever;
- (2') I suffer the mild deprivation of certain frivolous pleasures, etc.
- (3') I suffer in hell for ever;
- (4') I have a life of loose pleasures etc., and get away with it.



My payoff in **(1')** is infinitely good; my payoff in **(3')** is infinitely bad. Those outweigh the payoffs in **(2')** and **(4')** by so much that those two can be disregarded. As long as P's probability is  $> 0$  it would be absurd for me not to live a virtuous and pious life. —The argument is no good, because the items **(1')** and **(3')** reflect substantive theological doctrines whose probabilities haven't been defended. For example: suppose that P's probability  $> 0$ ; perhaps there is also a probability  $> 0$  for this proposition: The world was created by a God who is running it as an experiment, not wanting any of its inhabitants to know this. Through some slip-up, some of them began to suspect that there is God in charge, and then impudently set about convincing others of this. God is furious with them, and will punish them in the afterlife.]

With this much being granted, . . . I now proceed to the main thing I proposed at the outset, namely to try to show to such considering persons as I have already described that the being and attributes of God are not only •possible, or •barely probable in themselves, but strictly •demonstrable to any unprejudiced mind, from the most incontestable principles of right reason.

And I must suppose that the persons I am dealing with here don't believe any revelation and won't submit to any authority except the bare force of reasoning, so I shan't here draw any testimony from Scripture, or make use of any sort of authority, or put weight on any popular •man-in-the-street• arguments; but will confine myself to the rules of strict and demonstrative argumentation.

There are many arguments by which people have tried to

demonstrate the being and attributes of God. And perhaps most of those arguments, if they were

- thoroughly understood,
- rightly stated,
- fully pursued, and
- duly separated from the false or uncertain reasonings that have sometimes been mixed with them,

would eventually turn out to be substantial and conclusive. But I plan to do my best to avoid every sort of perplexity and confusion; so I shan't here use any variety of arguments, but will try, by one clear and plain series of propositions necessarily connected and following one from another, •to demonstrate that God certainly exists and •to deduce in order the attributes that he must have so far as our finite reason enables us to discover and grasp them. I shan't be trying to explain or illustrate things to believers, but only to convince unbelievers and remove doubts by strict and undeniable reasoning; so I shan't assert anything which, however really true and useful, may be open to contradiction or dispute. I'll try to make use only of propositions that can't be denied without departing from the *reason* that all atheists claim to be the basis of their unbelief. But it is absolutely necessary that they agree to lay aside all kinds of prejudices, especially ones that have tended to arise from over-use of technical terms that have no ideas belonging to them, and from routine acceptance, as true, of certain maxims of philosophy that basically seem to have no meaning or signification at all.

## 1: Something must have existed from eternity

[We have to distinguish **(a)** ‘There is something such that *it* has existed at all past times (·which go back to eternity·)’ from **(b)** ‘At every past time (·the totality of which go back to eternity·) something has existed’. On the next page Clarke will argue for the stronger **(a)**; but at present his concern is only with **(b)**, or rather with the ‘eternity’ clause that he clearly thinks is implied in both **(a)** and **(b)**.]

It is absolutely and undeniably certain that something has existed from all eternity. This proposition is so obvious and undeniable that no atheist has ever presumed to assert the contrary; so there’s little need to go into great detail in the proof of it. Since something now *is* it’s obvious that something always *was*; otherwise the things that now exist must have been produced out of nothing, just coming into existence without cause, which is a plain contradiction in terms. For to say that *a thing is produced and yet there’s no cause of that production* is to say that *something is effected yet it is effected by nothing, i.e. that it isn’t effected*. Whatever exists has

- a cause, a reason, a ground of its existence,
- a foundation on which its existence relies,
- a ground or reason why it exists rather than not existing;

and this cause or reason must lie either •in the necessity of the thing’s own nature, in which case the thing itself must have existed from eternity, or •in the will of some other being, and then that other being must have existed before it, at least in the order of nature and causality [i.e. must have existed earlier and further back in the causal order].

That something has therefore really existed from eternity is one of the most certain and evident truths in the world—acknowledged by everyone, disputed by no-one. Yet

how can it be true? It implies that an eternal duration is now actually past; and that is as utterly impossible for our narrow understandings to comprehend as anything that isn’t an outright contradiction can be imagined to be; and yet to *deny* that an eternal duration is now actually past would be to assert something more unintelligible yet—even a real and explicit contradiction.

Here’s what I want to make of this point. In all questions about the nature and perfections of God, or about anything to which the idea of **eternity** or **infinity** is joined, even when we can demonstrate certain propositions to be true it’s impossible for us to comprehend (or frame any adequate or complete ideas of) *how* they can be true. ·But we ought not to be deterred by this impossibility·. When P has been clearly demonstrated to be true, it oughtn’t to disturb us that there may be perplexing difficulties about it—difficulties that are hard to clear up merely because we don’t have adequate ideas of *how* P can be true. ·To get an irrelevance out of the way·:

Some people have very rashly said that for some values of P it might be possible to demonstrate P and demonstrate not-P. That’s not what I am talking about. If this absurd supposition ever came true, that would be an end to all difference of true and false, all intelligent and reasoning, and the use of all our faculties.

But when a demonstration of P meets only with opposition concerning difficulties arising from our lack of adequate ideas of the content of P, this ought not to be regarded as an objection of any real weight. It is directly and clearly demonstrable (and acknowledged to be so by all the atheists,

even, that have ever lived) that something has existed from eternity: so all the objections raised against the eternity of anything, based merely on our not having an adequate idea of eternity, ought to be looked on as having no real solidity.

Similarly in other cases of the same kind; here are two examples. **(i)** It is demonstrable that something must be actually infinite; so all the metaphysical difficulties that arise from

- applying to what is infinite the measures and relations of finite things,
- from supposing finites to be *parts* of what is infinite, when really they aren't parts of the infinite, and relate to it only as sizeless mathematical points relate to quantity, and
- from imagining all infinities to be equal, when in

different kinds of things they obviously aren't so, because an infinite line is infinitely less than an infinite surface. . . .

—all metaphysical difficulties, I say, arising from false suppositions like these ought to be regarded as empty and having no force. **(ii)** It is also demonstrable that quantity is infinitely divisible. So all the objections raised

- by supposing all infinities to be equal, when in disparate parts they plainly are not so; and
- by comparing the imaginary equality or inequality of the number of the parts of unequal quantities whose parts have really no number at all because they all have numberless parts,

ought to be seen as weak and altogether inconclusive. . . .

## 2. There must have existed from eternity one independent being

There has existed from eternity at least one unchangeable and independent [see Glossary] being. Given that there must always have been something (already proved, and accepted by everyone), one of these two must be the case:

- (i)** There has always existed some one unchangeable and independent being from which all other beings that are or ever were in the universe have received their origin;
- (ii)** There has been an infinite succession of changeable and dependent beings, produced one from another in an endless series, without any original cause at all.

Now **(ii)** is so very absurd that I think very few atheists were ever so weak as openly and directly to defend it, although

all atheism must in its account of most things end up with it (as I'll show later). What is wrong with it? It is plainly impossible and self-contradictory! I shall not argue against it from the supposed impossibility of an infinite series as such (I'll explain why later). But if we consider such an infinite series as one entire endless series of dependent beings, it's obvious that this whole series can't be caused from **outside** itself because it is stipulated as including all things that are or ever were in the universe. And it's clear that it can't have any reason for its existence **within** itself. Here is why: as I'll show more fully later on, the only conceivable way the ground or reason for a thing x's existence can be within x itself is for x to be self-existent [see Glossary] or necessary; but in the

series we are considering, in which each item depends on its predecessors and therefore isn't self-existent or necessary, it's obvious that the whole can't be necessary. . . . So an infinite succession of merely dependent beings, with no original independent cause, is a series of beings that doesn't have—either within itself or from outside—any •necessity or •cause or •reason or ground for its existence. That means that it's an outright contradiction and impossibility: it supposes something to be caused (because each of its member is caused), while also supposing that the series as a whole is caused absolutely by nothing. Everyone knows that this, when you think of it in terms of what happens in time, is a contradiction; and because duration in this case makes no difference it is equally a contradiction to suppose it done from eternity. Consequently, there *must* have existed from eternity some one immutable and independent being.

To suppose •an infinite series of changeable and dependent beings produced one from another in an endless progression, without any *original* cause at all, is only pushing out of sight the question about the ground or reason for the existence of things.<sup>1</sup> It is really the same as supposing •one continued being that had no beginning and will last forever, and that

- isn't self-existent and necessary in itself, and
- doesn't owe its existence to any self-existent cause.

And this is directly absurd and contradictory.

. . . .According to the supposition that I am attacking, nothing in the universe is self-existent or necessarily existing; which implies that originally these two were equally possible:

- from eternity nothing ever existed;
- from eternity there was a succession of changeable and dependent beings.

What made it the case that the second of these came about rather than the first? It wasn't **necessity**, because on this supposition it was equally possible that there should be nothing. It wasn't **chance**, because that's a mere word without any signification. And it wasn't **something outside the series**, because on this supposition there isn't anything outside the series. In short: of two equally possible things—•always something in existence, •never anything in existence—one is determined rather than the other by *nothing*; which is an outright contradiction. So again we reach the conclusion that there *must* have existed, from eternity, some one immutable and independent being. Now let us consider what kind of being it is.

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<sup>1</sup> [In a footnote here Clarke quotes a long passage in which Wollaston compares the supposition that he and Clarke are attacking with the idea of an infinite hanging chain that dangles down to the earth, each link being supported by its higher neighbour and nothing supporting the chain as a whole.]

### 3. The unchangeable and independent Being that has existed from eternity, without any external cause of its existence, must exist necessarily.

[Clarke runs through the argument yet again, concluding that:] the being that has existed independently from eternity must be self-existent. To call *x* 'self-existent' is not to say that *x* *produced* *x*, because that is an outright contradiction. The only way we can make any sense of '*x* is self-existent' is to take it to mean 'it is absolutely necessary that *x* exists, because its existence is implied by its nature'. And this necessity must be *antecedent* to the existence of *x*. I don't mean that chronologically: *x*'s nature can't exist *before* *x* does, because *x* has existed from eternity. I mean that *in our thinking* the thought of *x*'s nature must occur before the thought of *x*'s existing: when we're thinking about *x*'s nature in any way, even in trying to suppose that no such being as *x* exists, the necessity of *x*'s existing must *force* itself upon us, willy-nilly. For example: when we're trying to suppose that no being in the universe exists necessarily, we always find in our minds—in addition to the demonstration presented in **2** above—some ideas, e.g. the ideas of infinity and eternity, of which the following is true: the proposition that there is no being, no substance, in the universe in which these attributes or modes of existence necessarily inhere is an outright contradiction. [Clarke has moved from 'some ideas' to 'these attributes or modes'. Strictly, he should have said 'the attributes or modes that these ideas are ideas of'.] For modes and attributes exist only through the existence of the substance that has them. Now, to suppose eternity and immensity [see Glossary] to be removed from the universe, and consequently the substance that has them removed also, is no easier than to suppose the removal of the relation of equality between twice two and four.

Anyone who attends to his own ideas and considers the essential nature of things will find it intuitively evident [= 'obvious] at a glance' that to suppose immensity •to be removed from the universe or •not to be necessarily eternal is an outright contradiction. To suppose any part of space to be removed is to suppose it removed from itself, and to suppose the whole of space to be taken away is supposing it to be taken away from itself, i.e. to be *taken away while it still remains*—which is a contradiction in terms. There's no obscurity in this argument except for people who think that immense space is absolutely nothing; and *that* view is another outright contradiction, because *nothing* is that which has no properties or modes whatsoever—i.e. that of which nothing can truly be affirmed, and of which everything can truly be denied—and that is not the case of immensity or space.

**A.** From **3** it follows that the only true idea of a self-existent or necessarily-existing being is the idea of

a being *x* such that the proposition *x does not exist* is an outright contradiction.

·Here is *how* that follows.· It is absolutely impossible for there not to be something self-existent, i.e. something that exists by the necessity of its own nature. Clearly that necessity can't be a case of being-necessitated-by-something-that-is-antecedently-the-case, because nothing can be antecedent to something that is self-existent. . . .; it must be a necessity that is absolute, ·not conditional or hypothetical·. Now, for *x exists* to be necessary not •relatively but •absolutely is nothing else but the contrary proposition's implying a

contradiction. For instance, the relation of equality between twice two and four is an absolute necessity only because it is an immediate contradiction in terms to suppose them unequal. This is the only idea we can frame of an absolute necessity; to use the •phrase in any other sense seems to be using it without any meaning. [Clarke wrote ‘to use the •word in any other sense’, but that seems to have been a slip; his argument concerns ‘absolute necessity’, not ‘necessity’.]

You will ask: ‘If  $x$  is something such that  $x$  *does not exist* is an outright contradiction, what sort of idea is the idea of  $x$ ?’ I answer that it is

- the first and simplest idea we can possibly frame;
- an idea necessarily and essentially included in or presupposed by every other idea;
- an idea that we can’t remove from our minds unless we give up thinking entirely;
- an idea of a most simple being, absolutely eternal and infinite, original and independent.

I have already shown that he who supposes there is no **original independent** being in the universe supposes a contradiction. I now show further that he who supposes there may be no **eternal and infinite** being in the universe also supposes a contradiction. . . . When he has tried his hardest to imagine that no such being exists, he can’t avoid imagining an eternal and infinite *nothing*—i.e. he will imagine eternity and immensity removed from the universe while at the same time continuing to be there. I clearly explained this earlier.

The Cartesians got into a tangle with this argument, because they took the idea of •immensity [see Glossary] to be the idea of •matter. They might have denied this, but in reality they were more easily been driven to •that most

intolerable absurdity of asserting matter to be a necessary being than •to remove from their minds the idea of immensity as existing necessarily and eternally.<sup>1</sup> This absurd tangle shows that they did indeed find the idea of immensity to be necessary and unremovable, and perversely applied this idea to something that it didn’t belong to. I shall show presently that *Matter exists necessarily* is absolutely impossible and contradictory.

**B.** It also follows from **3** that *any* man who makes any use of his reason can easily become more certain of •the existence of a supreme independent cause than he can be of •anything else apart from his own existence. It may require hard thought to demonstrate the **other attributes** of such a being, just as it may do to demonstrate the greatest mathematical certainties (more of this later); but as to its existence—i.e. that there is something **eternal, infinite, and self-existing**, which must be the cause and origin of all other things—this is one of the first and most natural conclusions that anyone who thinks at all can frame in his mind. No-one can doubt this any more than he can doubt whether twice two equals four. [Clarke adds that a really stupid person could be ‘ignorant of this plain truth’ because he had never thought of it; and likens this person to a blockhead to whom it has never occurred that twice two equals four. These are merely mental gaps, he says, not doubt.]

**C.** On the basis of **3** we can observe that our first certainty of the existence of God does not arise from this:

We include self-existence in the idea our minds frame of him, or rather in the definition we give the word ‘God’, as meaning ‘being with all possible perfections’; but from these:

<sup>1</sup> [Clarke has here a footnote quoting Descartes as saying that ‘it implies a contradiction for the world to be finite’, and quoting ‘his follower’ Regius elaborating on this at great length.]

- A negative argument showing that it's not possible that all things arose out of nothing, or that they have depended one on another in an endless series;
- A positive argument showing that there's something in the universe, actually existing outside us, such that the supposition of its not existing plainly implies a contradiction.

Some people have tried to get an argument out of the premise that we include self-existence in the *idea* of God or in the *definition* or *notion* we frame of him. The trouble with that line of argument is that it seems to extend only to the nominal [= 'purely verbal'] idea of a self-existent being—i.e. the mere definition of 'self-existent being'—and doesn't clearly enough connect •that general nominal idea, definition, or notion that we frame in our own mind to any •real particular being actually existing outside us. [Notice that in that sentence Clarke brings in two distinctions: •between nominal and real, and •between general and particular.] It's not enough that I have in my mind an **idea of the proposition** *There exists a being that has all possible perfections* or *There is a self-existent being*. I must also have some **idea of the thing**. I must have an idea of something actually existing outside me; and before that idea can satisfy me that the thing actually exists, I must see what makes it absolutely impossible •to remove that idea and thus •to suppose the non-existence of the thing. Merely having an idea of the proposition *There is a self-existent being* proves the thing not to be impossible (because there can't be an idea of an impossible proposition); but that the thing actually exists can't be proved from the idea. Unless the actual existence of a necessarily-existing being follows from its possibly existing; and many learned men have indeed thought that it does follow in this particular case. Their subtle arguings about this are sufficient to raise a cloud that it's hard to see through.

But there's a much clearer [here = 'better lit'] and more convincing way of arguing that there does actually exist outside us a being whose existence is necessary. . . . It consists in showing (as I have already done) that the contrary supposition is clearly self-contradictory, while also showing that it's absolutely impossible to destroy or remove some ideas, such as those of eternity and immensity, which therefore must be modes or attributes of a necessary being actually existing. For if I have in my mind an idea of a thing, and can't possibly in my imagination take away the idea of that thing as actually existing any more than I can change or take away the idea of the equality of twice two to four, then the certainty of the existence of that thing stands on the same ·secure· foundation as the certainty of that mathematical equality. . . .

Some writers have contended that it is preposterous to inquire in this way into the ground or reason for the existence of the first cause: the first cause obviously can't have anything prior to it, and so (these writers think) it must exist absolutely, without any cause at all. It is indeed self-evident that the first cause can't have any other **being** prior to it, to cause its existence. But if

- originally, absolutely, and antecedently to all supposition of existence, there is no necessary **ground or reason** why the first cause exists; i.e.
- if the first cause can truly be affirmed to exist, absolutely without any **ground or reason** for its existence;

then it will unavoidably follow, by the same argument, that it may as well stop existing, without any ground or reason for doing so; which is absurd. So the truth is plainly this: Whatever is the true reason why the first cause can never possibly cease to exist, the same is—and originally and always was—the true reason why it always did exist and can't not exist. . . .

**D.** It follows from **3** that the first and original being—uncreated, independent, and eternal—can't possibly be the material world. . . . I have shown that the being in question must be such that the supposition that it doesn't exist is outright self-contradictory; and it's *very* obvious that the material world doesn't in this way exist necessarily. Whether we consider

- the material world's *form*, i.e. how its matter is structured and how its parts move, or
- its *matter*, i.e. the sheer existence of that stuff without reference to how it is arranged,

it's clear that either way we are thinking about something that is as arbitrary [see Glossary] and dependent, and as far removed from necessity, as can possibly be imagined. It may be that these things are necessary for the well-being of the universe, but that's a merely **relative** necessity; there's not the least appearance that any of them are **absolutely** necessary, which is what the atheist must maintain. If anyone says, as every atheist must do, that the form of the world—or at least the matter and motion of it—is necessary, nothing can possibly be invented more absurd.

If the atheist says that the particular form is necessary—i.e. that the world and all its contents exist by necessity of nature—he must say that it's a contradiction to think of any part of the world as being in any respect otherwise than it now is. It must be a contradiction in terms to suppose more or fewer stars, more or fewer planets; or to suppose their sizes, shapes, or motions different from what they actually [see Glossary] are; or to suppose more or fewer plants and animals upon earth, or the present ones having different shapes and sizes from what they actually have. In all these things there is the greatest arbitrariness, in respect of power and possibility, that can be imagined; however necessary any of them may be, in respect of wisdom, and preservation

of the beauty and order of the whole.

One late author did indeed venture to assert, and claimed to prove, that the tendency to move, the power or force that produces actual motion, is essential to all matter. Here is one consideration that suffices to show how wrong that is. An essential tendency to motion in a particle of matter would have to be a tendency either •to move in some one determinate way at once, or •to move in every direction at once. There's nothing in the supposedly necessary nature of any particle to determine its motion necessarily and essentially one way rather than another, so if it has such a tendency it must have come from some external cause. And a tendency equally to move every way at once is either •an absolute contradiction or •something that would amount to a universe in which nothing ever moves.

If the atheist says that motion is necessary and essential to some matter but not to all, he is now adding to •the absurdity I have just pointed out the •further absurdity of claiming a necessity that is absolute but not universal—i.e. saying that it's a contradiction to suppose certain portions of matter to be at rest though at the same time some other portions actually are at rest.

If he only affirms bare matter to be necessary, then

besides the extreme folly of attributing motion and the form of the world to chance (a senseless opinion that I think all atheists have now given up, so I shall ignore it in the rest of this work)

it can be demonstrated that matter is not a necessary being, by many arguments drawn from the nature and states of matter itself.

[Clarke now presents two arguments (which he got from Newton's *Principia*) for the thesis that *there is vacuum*, i.e. space with no matter in it. **(i)** Tangibility, or resistance (which mathematicians call *vis inertiae*) is essential to matter,



because of the meaning of ‘matter’. If the whole of space were packed tight with matter, that resistance would be the same everywhere; but it’s not, as you can see by dropping a coin into water and into liquid mercury. **(ii)** Various experiments show that two bodies can have exactly the same size but different weights. The only thing that could explain this is that the bodies differ in how much matter each contains, i.e. in the proportions of matter and vacuum in the mix. So, again, there is vacuum. Clarke continues:]

If there is vacuum, it follows plainly that matter is not a necessary being. For if there actually is vacuum, it is evidently more than possible for matter not to be! If an atheist says ‘It could be that matter is necessary, but not necessary to be everywhere’, I reply that this is an outright contradiction because absolute necessity is absolute necessity everywhere alike. If it is possible for matter to be absent from location  $L_1$  it’s possible for it to be absent from  $L_2$  or absent from every location. I am talking here about what is absolutely (im)possible; there’s no place in this argument for relative or consequential necessity. The atheist can’t say ‘It may be that there’s no matter in  $L_1$  and that some fact F about  $L_2$  makes it impossible for there to be matter there’, because that involves impossibility-given-F, i.e. impossibility-relative-to-F, which is not our topic.

·SPINOZA ON NECESSARY EXISTENCE·

**Spinoza**, the most celebrated patron of atheism in our time, taught that •there aren’t different substances, that •the whole and every part of the material world is one necessarily-existing being, and that •the only God is the

universe. Wanting to (seemingly) avoid the many absurdities of that opinion, he develops the thoughts in his book by using ambiguous expressions that he hoped would let him elude the arguments by which (he foresaw) his doctrine would be confuted.<sup>1</sup> Having first plainly asserted that all substance is necessarily-existing, he seems then to explain this away by asserting that the reason why everything exists necessarily and couldn’t possibly have been in any respect different from what it actually is, is that everything flows from the necessity of the divine nature.<sup>2</sup> An unwary reader might understand this in any of three ways.

**(a)** Spinoza means that things are necessarily the way they are because infinite wisdom and goodness couldn’t possibly make things in any way except what is fittest and wisest on the whole.

That interpretation is very much mistaken, because it doesn’t concern natural necessity but only a moral and consequential necessity, which is directly contrary to Spinoza’s true intention.

**(b)** Spinoza holds that God is determined [see Glossary] to make all things just as they actually are, not by a necessity of wisdom and goodness but by a mere natural necessity in which will and choice play no part.

This avoids the trouble that **(a)** ran into, but it still doesn’t give the whole of Spinoza’s meaning, because it . . . is still supposing God to be a substance distinct from the material world, which Spinoza explicitly denies.<sup>3</sup> Well, then:

<sup>1</sup> [Clarke in a footnote quotes from Part 1 of Spinoza’s *Ethics* propositions 6, 8, 7, and 14 in that order.]

<sup>2</sup> [Footnote quoting propositions 7, 33, and 16 in that order.]

<sup>3</sup> [Footnote quoting the first corollary to proposition 32, and referring to the note to proposition 17.]

(c) Spinoza's view is that all the substances in the world are only modifications of the divine essence [= 'are only states or qualities or properties of God'], so that when we talk about how God affects substances we are talking about how God affects himself, thus avoiding the objection that was brought against (b).

That still doesn't get it, because it allows us to suppose that God is an agent, acting on himself at least, and manifesting himself in various ways according to his own will; which Spinoza explicitly denies. Well, then, what *does* he mean to say? Although he sometimes speaks darkly and ambiguously, that question can be answered. If he means anything at all consistent with himself [Clarke's phrase] it must be this:

(d) Because it is

absolutely impossible for anything to be created or produced by something else,

and also

absolutely impossible for God to have caused anything to be in any way different from what it actually is,

everything that exists must belong to the divine substance not as •a modification that the substance has wanted or chosen to give to itself, but as •something that is absolutely necessary in itself, so that '... could not possibly have not existed or been different from how it actually is' fits not only the whole divine substance but also each part of it.<sup>1</sup>

So Spinoza's opinion when expressed plainly and consistently comes to this: The only self-existent or necessarily-existing being is the material world—every part of it in every

detail. So he is committed to all the conclusions that I have shown to follow demonstrably from that opinion. He can't possibly avoid affirming that it is a contradiction for anything to be, or to be imagined as being, in any way different from how it actually is. (I mean that any such thought is in itself self-contradictory; I don't mean merely that it 'contradicts God's perfections'; that phrase, if used by someone who maintains that there's only one substance in the universe, would be mere senseless confusing cant.) Spinoza must say that it is a contradiction to suppose the number or shape or order of the various parts of the world could possibly have been different from what they actually are. He must say one of these two things:

(i) Motion is necessary of itself, so that it's a contradiction in terms to suppose any matter to be at rest.

(ii) Motion, as a dependent being, has been eternally communicated [see Glossary] from one piece of matter to another, without having any original cause within itself or from outside.<sup>2</sup>

Of these, (ii) is the more absurd, as you can see from my discussion of **2** above; yet Spinoza has chosen to affirm it. This thesis and its kin refute any premise that they follow from; they do follow from Spinoza's doctrine that the universe—i.e. the whole world—is the self-existent or necessarily-existing being; so that doctrine is demonstrated to be false. [In (i) above Clarke wrote 'is necessarily of itself—obviously a slip of the pen.]

In this attempt to show that the material world can't be the first and original being—uncreated, independent, and self-existent—I have omitted the argument usually drawn from the these that it is absolutely impossible, in the nature

<sup>1</sup> [Footnote quoting propositions 6, 33, 14, corollary to 32, in that order.]

<sup>2</sup> [Footnote quoting from Part 2 of Spinoza's *Ethics*, lemma L3 after proposition 13.]

of the thing itself, for the world •to be eternal or •to have existed through an infinitely long period of time. I have two reasons for that omission. [The second begins on page 16.]

(i) The first reason is that the question between us and the atheists is not ‘Can the world possibly have been eternal?’ but ‘Can the world possibly be the original, independent self-existing being?’—a very different question. Many who have answered Yes to one of the questions have flatly answered No to the other. Our modern atheists triumphantly boast of the support they get from the authority and reasons of certain ancient philosophers who accepted the eternity of the world; but most of the ancients defended their opinion by arguments that plainly show that they did *not* intend to assert that the material world is the original, independent, self-existing being, in opposition to the belief in the existence of God = a supreme all-governing mind. So the deniers of the existence of God would get no advantage from *that* opinion that the world is eternal, even if couldn’t be disproved.

·ANCIENT PHILOSOPHERS ON NECESSARY EXISTENCE·

The old philosophers who accepted the eternity of the world didn’t have arguments that tended to prove that it was independent and self-existent; their arguments are directed only at proving

- that something must be eternal, and that the universe couldn’t possibly arise out of nothing, absolutely and without cause;

which is all that Ocellus Lucanus’s arguments amount to; or

- that the world is an eternal and necessary effect, flowing from the essential and unchangeable energy of the divine nature;

which seems to have been Aristotle’s opinion; or else

- that the world is an eternal voluntary emanation from the all-wise and supreme cause;

which was the opinion of many of Plato’s followers. None of these opinions or arguments give any help to our modern atheists, who want to exclude supreme mind and intelligence [see Glossary] from the universe. Even if the opinion of the eternity of the world is really inconsistent with the belief that it was created in time, the defenders of the ‘eternity’ opinion either •didn’t think it inconsistent with the belief that the world is something produced by an eternal, all-wise, all-powerful mind, or at least •could defend the ‘eternity’ opinion by arguments that gave no support to the thesis of the world’s self-existence or independence, and mostly supported the contrary view. So it’s enormously unjust and unreasonable for modern atheists (who wouldn’t care about the world’s eternity if they didn’t think it implied the non-existence of a sovereign eternal intelligence or mind) to claim either the authority or the reasons of these men to be on their side.

Ocellus Lucanus, one of the earliest asserters of the eternity of the world [5th century BCE], in delivering his opinion, does indeed write like someone who believes the material world to be self-existent; saying

- that it is utterly incapable either of generation or corruption, of beginning or end;
- that it is of itself eternal and perfect, and permanent for ever; and
- that the frame and parts of the world must be eternal as well as the substance and matter of the whole.

But when he produces his reasons for his opinion, they are either •so absurd and ridiculous that any atheist today ought to be ashamed to repeat them (e.g. he tries to prove that the world must be eternal, without beginning or end, because its shape and its motion are both circular, and a circle has neither beginning nor end); or else •arguments that only prove what no-one ever really denied, namely that *something*

must be eternal because it is impossible for everything to arise out of nothing or fall into nothing (e.g. he says that the world must have been eternal because it's a contradiction for the universe to have had a beginning, since if it did have a beginning it must have been caused by something else, in which case it isn't the universe). Everything he says in his whole book plainly comes down to that one argument. So it's obvious that all he really proves is only •that there must be an eternal being in the universe, and not that matter, in contrast to intelligence and mind, is self-existent. . . . And in some passages of this very book he is forced to admit explicitly that, however eternal and necessary everything in the world is imagined to be, that necessity must flow from an eternal and intelligent mind whose necessary perfections are the cause of the harmony and beauty of the world, and particularly of men's having faculties, organs of sense, appetites, etc. fitted even to final causes.<sup>1</sup>

Aristotle was another great asserter of the eternity of the world, but not *in opposition to* the belief in God's existence or his power, wisdom, or goodness. On the contrary, his only reason for saying that the world is eternal was that he fancied that such an effect must eternally proceed from such an eternal cause •as he thought God to be. Far from teaching that matter is the first and original cause of everything, Aristotle everywhere explicitly •describes God as an intelligent being, incorporeal, the first mover of all things, and himself immovable, and •asserts that if there were nothing but matter in the world, there would be no first cause but only an infinite series of causes—which is absurd.

Some philosophers taught plainly and openly that matter is not only eternal but also self-existent and entirely independent, co-existing from eternity with God, independent of him as a second principle [see Glossary] . I have already shown that this is impossible, when a few pages back I proved that matter couldn't possibly be self-existent: and I shall further demonstrate it to be false when I come to prove that there is only one self-existent being.<sup>2</sup>

Plato, whatever his opinion was about the origin of matter, declares at length and in detail his view about the formation of the world, namely that it was composed and framed by an intelligent and wise God. And he speaks more excellently about God's nature and attributes than any other ancient philosopher. As for the question of *when* the world began to be formed, he seems to make this indefinite, when he says that the world must be an eternal resemblance of the eternal idea. At least that's how his followers understood him, apparently taking •the creation of the world not to be •a creation in time, but only an order of nature, causality and dependence. On this view, God's will and power of acting, being necessarily as eternal as his essence, must have had effects that were coeval with [= 'that related to time in the same way as'] that will and power themselves; in the same way that light would eternally come from the sun, or a shadow from an interposed body, or an impression from an imposed seal, if the causes of these effects were eternal.<sup>3</sup>

All this shows clearly how little reason modern atheists have to boast of either the authority or the reasons of the ancient philosophers who maintained the eternity of

<sup>1</sup> [This paragraph has three footnotes, quoting (in Greek) eight brief passages from Ocellus Lucanus.]

<sup>2</sup> [Footnote quoting (in Greek) three supporting passages, one from Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* and two from Aristotle.]

<sup>3</sup> [This paragraph has three footnotes, quoting Plato, Plotinus, Augustine (three times), Macrobius, and Zacharias of Mytilene.]

the world. Those these men didn't even try to prove that the material world was original to itself, independent, or self-existing, but only that it was an eternal effect of an eternal cause, namely God. . . .

(ii) I said on page 14 that I have two reasons for not using this argument against atheism:

It is absolutely impossible that the world should be eternal—i.e. should have existed through an infinite period of time. Therefore the material world can't possibly be the first and original being, uncreated, independent and self-existent.

Having given one reason for this omission, I now come to the other. It is simply the fact that this argument is useless for convincing or affecting the mind of an atheist. A modern atheist must not be supposed to come to battle already armed with a transcendent idea of the eternity of God! Because an atheist can't be supposed to accept the fine-grained and subtle (and indeed unintelligible) distinctions of the scholastics, he is sure to regard this argument against the possibility of •the world's being eternal as an argument equally against the possibility of •anything's being eternal; so he'll say that it doesn't prove anything, and is only a difficulty arising from our not having a good enough grasp of the notion of eternity. [At this point Clarke shifts from

what the atheist will say to what *he* says.] I have already shown that this proposition:

the material world doesn't exist necessarily, but is the product of some distinct superior agent  
can be strictly demonstrated by bare reason against the most obstinate atheist in the world. But *when* the world was created, or whether its creation was properly speaking *in time* at all is not so easy to demonstrate strictly by bare reason. . . . and the proof of it can be taken only from revelation. To try to prove that there can't possibly be any such thing as infinite time or space, arguing from the premise that

- an addition of finite parts can't ever compose or exhaust an infinite, or that
- there would be more hours than days in an infinite time, and more days than years; and similarly for miles, yards and feet in an infinite space

is supposing infinities to be made up of numbers of finites,<sup>1</sup> i.e. supposing finite quantities to be constituent parts of •something• infinite. In fact are not so [and Clarke explains why. If time is infinite, he says in effect, the years relate to it in the same way as its hours; there's no such thing as *the number of* years or hours; each of these relates to the whole in the way mathematical points relate to a line. And similarly for space.]

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<sup>1</sup> [Footnote referring to Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe*.]

#### 4. The essence of the self-existent Being is incomprehensible

We have no idea of what the substance [see Glossary] or essence is of the self-existent or necessarily-existing being—there's no way we can comprehend it. That *there is* such a being actually existing outside us is, as I have shown, something we are made sure of by strict and undeniable demonstration. I have also demonstrated what it *isn't*, i.e. that it isn't the material world, as modern atheists would have it. But what it *is*, I mean as regards its substance and essence, is something that is infinitely far out of our reach. This doesn't weaken the demonstration of its existence, for it's •one thing to know certainly that a being exists and •another to know what its essence is. And it may be that one is capable of strict demonstration while the other is absolutely beyond the reach of all our faculties to understand. A blind or deaf man has infinitely more reason to deny the existence—or the possibility of the existence—of light or sounds than any atheist can have to deny or doubt the existence of God. Why? Because the blind man can have no proof of the existence of certain things except credible testimony, and it's absolutely impossible for him to frame any sort of idea of the essence of those things or even of their effects or properties; whereas the atheist can with the least use of his reason be assured by undeniable demonstration of the existence of a Supreme Being, and can also certainly know many of the Being's attributes (as I'll show later on), though its substance or essence is entirely incomprehensible. So it is utterly unreasonable and weak for an atheist to deny the existence of God merely because his weak and finite understanding can't frame to itself any adequate notion of the substance or essence of that first and supreme cause. We are utterly ignorant of the substance or essence of all other things, even

things that we talk about most comfortably and think we understand best. Every plant or animal, however low-down and negligible, defeats the most enlarged understanding upon earth; indeed, even the simplest and plainest inanimate beings have their essence or substance hidden from us in the deepest and most impenetrable obscurity. How weak and foolish it is, then, to object to the thesis that God exists on the grounds that his essence is incomprehensible! . . .

I must stress, in passing, that it doesn't follow from this that the unknown substance or essence of God could possibly contain anything contradictory to our clear ideas. Just as a blind man, though he has no idea of light and colours, yet knows certainly and infallibly that there can't possibly be any kind of light that isn't light, or any sort of colour that isn't a colour; so also we, though we have no idea of the substance of God or indeed of the substance of anything else, are infallibly certain that there can't possibly be—in God or in anything else—any contradictory modes or properties; we wouldn't be more sure of this if we had the clearest and most distinct idea of them.

There are two things we should notice here. (i) One is the weakness of the thesis that infinite space is a just representation—an adequate idea—of the essence of the supreme cause. This weak fantasy arises from the fact that

men are accustomed to judging everything by their senses only, and are led to imagine spiritual or immaterial substances to be mere nothings, so to speak, because they are not objects of their corporeal senses; in the way children imagine air to be mere emptiness and nothing, because they can't see it.

But the fallacy is too gross to deserve much attention. There

may be countless substances whose essences are as entirely unknown and unimaginable by us as colours are to a man born blind or sounds to one who has always been deaf. Indeed, there is no substance of which we know more than a certain number of its properties or attributes—fewer in some things and more in others. Infinite space is nothing but abstract immensity or infinity, just as infinite duration is abstract eternity. And it would be just as proper to say that eternity is the essence of the supreme cause as to say that immensity is so. Indeed, they seem both to be merely modes of an essence or substance that is incomprehensible to us; and when we try to use our weak imaginations to represent to ourselves the real substance of *any* being we'll find ourselves deceived in the same way.

(ii) The second thing to notice is the futility of the schoolmen [see Glossary], who, in their disputes about the self-existent being as in every other context, when they come to something they can't understand or explain, they try to avoid seeming ignorant by giving us technical terms and words of confusion—mere empty sounds which, under pretence of explaining the matter before them, are really entirely meaningless. Thus, when they tell us concerning God's essence that he is *purus actus, mera forma* [= 'pure act, pure form'] and the like, if the words mean anything they express only the perfection of God's power and other attributes, which is not what these men intend to express by them.

## 5. The self-existent Being must be eternal

Though the substance or essence of the self-existent being is in itself absolutely incomprehensible to us, many of his essential attributes are strictly demonstrable, as well as his existence. I shall deal with one of his attributes here, and two more in 6. The self-existent being must be eternal. The ideas of eternity and self-existence are so closely connected that both of these hold:

- If something must be eternal independently and without any outward cause of its being, it must be self-existent; and
- if it is necessary that something x is self-existent, then x must be eternal.

For something x to be self-existent is (as I have shown) for x to exist by an absolute necessity in its own nature.

Because this necessity is absolute—and thus doesn't depend on anything external to x—it must be always unalterably the same; an alterable thing is something that can be affected by something outside itself. So the being that has no other cause of its existence but the absolute necessity of its own nature, must have existed from everlasting, without beginning; and must exist to everlasting without end.

As for the manner of this eternal existence: it's obvious that it infinitely transcends the manner in which created beings exist (even ones that will exist for ever) in this way:

- The finite mind of a created being can't comprehend all that is past, or understand perfectly everything that is present, much less know all that is future or have entirely in its power anything that is to come.

Its thoughts and knowledge and power must have degrees and periods, and be as successive and transient as the created thing itself.

•The eternal supreme cause (if he is an intelligent being, which I shall prove him to be in **8**) must have such a perfect, independent, and unchangeable grasp of all things that at every point or instant of his eternal duration all things that are past, present, or to come are entirely known and represented to him in one single thought or view; and all things present and future are just as entirely in his power *as if* there were really no succession and all things were actually present at once.

We can intelligibly say that much about the eternal duration of the self-existent being; and no atheist can call this is an impossible, absurd, or insufficient account. It is in the most

proper and intelligible sense of the words. . . .*interminabilis viae tota simul et perfecta possessio*—the entire and perfect possession of an endless life. [The Latin phrase is quoted from Boethius, a 6th century Latin philosopher and theologian.]

Others have thought that whereas •the existence of created beings is a continual transient succession of duration, •the eternal existence of the supreme cause is one eternal point or instant in which all things are really co-existent. This is irrelevant to the present dispute because it couldn't possibly be proved and explained in such a way as to convince any atheist that there is anything in it; and anyway although the schoolmen have indeed generally chosen to defend it, many other learned men—ones with much better understanding and judgment than the schoolmen—have rejected and opposed it.<sup>1</sup>

## 6. The self-existent Being must be infinite and omnipresent

The self-existent Being must be infinite and omnipresent. Anything self-existent must be infinite, and here is why. For a thing to be self-existent is (as I have shown) to exist by an absolute necessity in the nature of the thing itself. Because this necessity is absolute in itself, and doesn't depend on any external cause, it is evident it must be unalterably the same *everywhere* as well as *always*. It's obvious that any necessity that isn't everywhere the same is a merely consequential necessity, depending on some external cause, not an absolute one in its own nature. [Clarke's development

of this theme is presented in a way that hides its basic straightforwardness. It comes down to this:

- 'x is self-existent' means that it's a contradiction to suppose that x doesn't exist.
- 'x is finite' implies that there are places at which x doesn't exist.

Therefore:

- It is a flat-out contradiction to suppose that something is both self-existent and finite.

Clarke mixes into this paragraph an argument for the

<sup>1</sup> [Clarke has a footnote here quoting Gassendi and Tillotson (twice).]



converse thesis that *whatever is infinite must be self-existent*; but this is irrelevant to his campaign against atheism.]

(i) It follows from this that the infinity of the self-existent being must be an infinity of •fulness as well as of •immensity; i.e. it must be not only without limits but also without diversity, defect, or interruption. If matter, for example, were supposed to be limitless, that wouldn't make it 'infinite' in this complete sense; because although it had no limits it might have within itself many stretches of empty space. But something that is self-existent must exist absolutely in every place alike, and be equally present everywhere; and consequently must have a true and absolute infinity, both of immensity and fulness.

(ii) It also follows that the self-existent being must be a most simple, unchangeable, incorruptible [see Glossary entry on 'corruption'] being; without parts, shape, motion, divisibility, or any other of the properties we find in matter. All these properties plainly and necessarily imply finiteness, and are utterly inconsistent with complete infinity. •Divisibility is a separation of parts, real or mental, . . . and this involves really or mentally setting bounds, either of which destroys infinity. •Motion, for the same reason, implies finiteness; and •having parts, properly speaking, either signifies difference and diversity of existence, which is inconsistent with necessity, or else it signifies divisibility, real or mental, which I have just dealt with. •Corruption, change, or any alteration whatsoever implies motion, separation of parts, and finiteness. And any sort of •compositeness, in opposition to the most perfect

simplicity, signifies difference and diversity in the manner of existence—which is inconsistent with necessity.

It is evident, therefore, that the self-existent being must be 'infinite' in the strictest and most complete sense. But exactly *how* is he infinite or present everywhere, in contrast to how created things are present in such and such finite places? Our finite understandings can't possibly comprehend or expound any answer to this, any more than we can form an adequate idea of infinity. But it's true that he *is* actually omnipresent; we're as certain of that as we are that there must something be infinite, which no-one who has given any thought to these things has ever denied. The schoolmen, indeed, have presumed to assert that God's immensity is **a point**, as his eternity (they think) is **an instant**. But that is altogether unintelligible. What we can more safely affirm is this:

Whereas all finite and created beings can be present in only one definite place at once, and bodies. . . . can exercise power or activity only by the successive motion of different limbs and organs, the Supreme Cause, being an infinite and most simple essence and comprehending all things perfectly in himself, is at all times equally present—both in his simple essence, and by the immediate and perfect exercise of all his attributes—to every point of the boundless immensity, as if it were really all just one single point.

That is enough for all wise and good purposes, and no atheist can call it absurd.

## 7. There can only be one self-existent Being

The self-existent being must be *one*. This follows from his being necessarily-existent, because absolute necessity in itself is simple and uniform and universal, without any possible difference, non-uniformity, or variety whatsoever; and all variety or difference of existence must •arise from some external cause, •depend on it, and •be proportional to the power of that cause, whatever it is. Absolute necessity, which can't have any variation in kind or degree, can't be the basis for the existence of a number of beings, however alike they may be; because even when there's no other difference, the sheer *number* is itself an obvious non-uniformity or inequality. . . .

Another argument: The proposition that *two distinct beings exist of themselves, necessarily, and independently of each other* implies that each of them, being independent of the other, can be supposed to exist alone, so that it won't be a contradiction to imagine the other not to exist. So neither of them will be necessarily-existing. Whatever exists necessarily, therefore, is the one simple essence of the self-existent being; and anything that differs from that is not necessarily-existing. . . . There may be countless other beings, but none of them can be self-existent. . . .

(i) From this it follows that the *unity* of God is true and real, not metaphorical. This prime foundation of natural religion is perfectly consistent with the scripture-doctrine of the Trinity; I have tried elsewhere to show this in detail.

(ii) It also follows that there can't possibly be two different self-existent independent principles [see Glossary], as some philosophers have imagined—e.g. God and matter. [Clarke

repeats the argument given before. [Most of the ellipses. . . in this part of the work mark the omission of unneeded repetitions.]]

(iii) Now we can see the emptiness, folly, and weakness of Spinoza who, because the self-existent being must be only *one*, infers that the whole world and everything in it is one uniform substance, eternal, uncreated, and necessary.<sup>1</sup> What he ought to have concluded was the exact opposite, namely: because

- all things in the world have all sorts of variety, and bear all the marks of will and choice and changeableness (and none of necessity), and because
- they are clearly equipped with very different powers for very different ends, and distinguished from one another by differences not only in their modes but also in their essential attributes. . . .

therefore none of these things is necessary or self-existent; all of them must depend on some external cause, i.e. on the one supreme, unchangeable, self-existent being.

What led Spinoza into his foolish and destructive opinion, which is the base on which all his argumentation is built, is his absurd definition of substance as *something the idea of which doesn't depend on or presuppose the idea of any other thing from which it might proceed; but includes in itself necessary-existence*. This definition is either false and signifies nothing, in which case Spinoza's whole doctrine built on it collapses; or **if it is true** then neither matter nor spirit nor any finite being whatsoever is in Spinoza's sense a 'substance', the only substance being the self-existent being. In that case, despite all his show of 'demonstration' he gets

<sup>1</sup> [Footnote quoting from Part 1 of Spinoza's *Ethics*—propositions 6, 7, 14.]

from this nothing that serves his main purpose, which was to convince us that there is no such thing as power or liberty in the universe, and that every particular thing in the world is what it is by an absolute necessity and couldn't possibly have been different in any way. And anyway his definition of *substance*, even **if it is true**, wouldn't imply his main view about the necessity of all things. According to that definition, neither matter nor spirit nor any finite beings whatsoever are •substances, but only •modes; so how will it follow that because substance is self-existent these modes are so too?

## 8. The self-existent Being must be intelligent

The self-existent and original cause of all things must be an intelligent [see Glossary] being. This proposition marks the main issue between us and the atheists. There's not much room for dispute over the propositions •that something must be self-existent, and •that what is self-existent must be eternal and infinite, and the original cause of all things. But all atheists—whether they hold •the world to be of itself eternal both in matter and form, or •matter only to be necessary and the form contingent, or •whatever hypothesis they frame—have always held that the self-existent being is not an intelligent being but is pure unactive matter. Or they have held that is a mere necessary agent, but that's really the same thing. A mere necessary agent must either

be plainly in the grossest sense unintelligent

which is what the ancient atheists thought about it, or

have intelligence that isn't connected with any power of will and choice

Why, because 'from an infinite cause infinite effects must follow'. Very true, supposing that the infinite self-existent cause is not a voluntary agent but a mere necessary agent [see Glossary for that phrase], i.e. no agent at all; and supposing also that in mere necessity there could and must be all or any variety [that last clause is verbatim from Clarke]. He takes those two suppositions for granted in the present argument; he tries to prove them later, and I shall discuss those attempts in the proper place.<sup>1</sup>

which is what Spinoza and some other moderns say. In the latter case this is an 'intelligence' the common sense declares not to be intelligence at all; it certainly isn't a kind of intelligence that counts as an excellence, a perfection.

Now, the proposition that

the self-existent being is not that sort of blind and unintelligent necessary agent but a being which *understands* and really *acts* in the most proper sense of those terms

isn't something we can find obviously true by *a priori* [see Glossary] considerations. That is because we with our imperfect faculties don't know what intelligence consists in, and can't see the immediate and necessary connection between it and self-existence, as we can that of eternity, infinity, unity, etc. But *a posteriori* almost everything in the world demonstrates to us this great truth, and offers undeniable arguments to prove that the world and all things in it are the effects of an

<sup>1</sup> [This paragraph has three footnotes, quoting from Spinoza's propositions 7 (and proof), 33, and 16 in that order.]

intelligent and knowing cause. I shall present four of these.

**A.** Because things in general have various kinds of powers, and very different excellences and degrees of perfection, it must be the case that in any causal chain a cause is always more excellent than the effect. If an effect had a perfection that wasn't in the cause, that perfection would be *caused by nothing*—which is a plain contradiction. Now an unintelligent being obviously can't have all the perfections of all things in the world; because intelligence is one of those perfections. So it can't be the case that all things arise from an unintelligent original; so the self-existent being, whatever it is, must be intelligent. . . .

If an atheist is to avoid the force of this argument he has to say either

- (i) that there is no intelligent being in the universe; or
- (ii) that intelligence is not a distinct perfection but merely a composition of shape and motion, as colour and sounds are vulgarly supposed to be.

Every man's own consciousness is an abundant refutation of (i). Those who contend that beasts are mere machines have never gone so far as to conjecture that men are so too. The main strength of atheism lies in (ii); but if (ii) could be supposed to be true, it would still follow that the self-existent being must be intelligent, as I'll prove in **D** below. My present task is to show that (ii) is absurd and impossible.

**B.** Since men in particular undeniably have the power that we call thought, intelligence, consciousness, perception or knowledge, one of the following must be the case:

- (a) There has been from eternity, with no original cause, an infinite succession of men each of whom was brought into existence by something else.
- (b) These beings that have perception and consciousness arose at some time purely out of something that had

no such quality as sense, perception, or consciousness.

- (c) These beings that have perception etc. have been produced by some intelligent superior being.

No atheist can deny that one of these three suppositions must be the truth; so if (a) and (b) can be proved to be false and impossible, (c) must be admitted to be demonstrably true. The impossibility of (a) is evident from what I have said in proof of **2**; and that (b) is likewise impossible can be demonstrated as follows. If perception or intelligence is a distinct quality or perfection, and not a mere effect or composition of unintelligent shape and motion, then beings with with perception or consciousness can't have arisen purely out of a cause that had no such quality as perception or consciousness; because nothing can ever give another thing any perfection that it doesn't have itself, either *actually* or *in a higher degree* [see Glossary]. . . .

A recent writer has objected to this on the following grounds [this is not a quotation]:

•Colours, sounds, tastes etc. arise from shape and motion, which don't themselves have colours, sounds etc. •Also, shape, divisibility, mobility, and other qualities of matter are agreed to be given by God, but it would be extremely blasphemous to say that God himself has a shape, is divisible, etc.; so in the same way perception or intelligence might arise out of something that has no intelligence itself.

This is easy to answer. •To the first part of it I reply that colours, sounds, tastes, and the like are *not* effects arising from mere shape and motion, because there's nothing in the bodies that we see, hear, etc. that has any kind of likeness to any of these qualities. Colours etc. are obviously thoughts—i.e. states of the mind itself, which is an intelligent being; they aren't really *caused* but only *occasioned* [see

Glossary] by the impressions of shape and motion. If we allow the atheist the greatest possible advantage, and concede (absurdly!) that the mind itself is mere matter and not an immaterial substance, this won't give him any help with regard to the present question. Even supposing it to be mere matter, the atheist must admit that it is matter that possesses not only shape and motion but also the quality of intelligence and perception; and consequently, as to the present question, it will still come to the same thing. . . .

•Secondly, as to the other part of the objection. . . .the answer is even easier. It is that shape, divisibility, mobility, and other such qualities of matter are not real, proper, distinct, and positive powers, but only negative qualities, deficiencies, or imperfections. Although no cause can give its effect any real perfection that it doesn't have itself, yet the effect can easily have many imperfections, deficiencies, or negative qualities that are not in the cause. But this doesn't apply to intelligence, which is a distinct ·positive· quality (which no-one can say is a mere negation), as I shall now prove.

. . . .Why do I say that perception or intelligence is really a distinct quality or perfection, and can't be a mere effect of, or composition of, unintelligent shape and motion? For the plain reason that intelligence isn't shape and consciousness isn't motion. Anything that arises from, or is compounded of, any things is still only those very things that it was compounded of.

[Look at that last sentence: it goes from 'arises from, or is compounded of' to the simple 'that it was compounded of—why was 'arises from' dropped? The answer is that Clarke is here using 'arises from' not to mean 'is caused by' (his most usual meaning for it) but more broadly 'is an upshot of, and in this context he is thinking of only one way in which the Fs could be an upshot of the Gs, namely by every F's being a compound of Gs. And the same holds for 'effect of'. In the next few paragraphs 'effect' seems to skip in and out of the text in a way

that is just bewildering if you think of 'Fs are effects of Gs' as meaning something quite distinct from 'Fs are compounds of Gs'.]

And if infinitely many compositions or divisions are made eternally, the ·resultant· things will still be eternally the same, and their effects can't possibly be anything but repetitions of the same. For instance, all possible changes, compositions, or divisions of shape are still nothing but shape; and all possible compositions or effects of motion can eternally be nothing but mere motion. So if there was ever a time when there was nothing in the universe but matter and motion, there *never* could have been anything else in it but matter and motion. And it would have been as impossible for there ever to exist any such thing as intelligence or consciousness—or even any such thing as light, or heat, or sound, or colour, or any of the 'secondary qualities' of matter—as it is now impossible for motion to be blue or red, or for a trumpet to be transformed into a sound.

What has been apt to deceive men about this is their imagining compounds to be really different from the elements they are compounded out of; which is a great mistake. All the cases men have this opinion about fall into two categories: in thinking that **(a)** the Fs are just compounds or effects of Gs and that **(b)** Fness is something really different from Gness, they are either

- wrong about **(a)**: for example when the vulgar think that colours and sounds are properties of bodies, when really they are thoughts of the mind; or
- wrong about **(b)**: if F things are really compounds and effects of G things, then they they are exactly the same as they ever were—e.g. when two triangles are assembled to make a square, that square is still nothing but two triangles; or when a square is cut to make two triangles, those two triangles are still only the two halves of a square; or when the mixture of a

blue and yellow powder makes a green, that green is still nothing but blue and yellow intermixed, as can easily be seen with a microscope. . . .

Thus, . . . anyone who says that intelligence is the effect of a system of unintelligent matter in motion must either

- say that ‘intelligence’ is a mere name. . . .of certain shapes and motions, differing from unintelligent shapes and motions only in the way a circle or triangle differs from a square; or
- say that intelligence is a real distinct quality that arises from certain motions of a system of matter that isn’t itself intelligent.

These two are equally absurd. The second of them implies that one quality is possessed by another *quality*; because it presents a situation in which what has intelligence is not the substance whose particles the system consists of, but the mere mode ·or quality—·the particular mode of motion and shape.

Hobbes seems to have been aware of this, yet •finding himself pressed in his own mind with problem that sense or consciousness can’t possibly be merely the effect of shape and motion, and •seeing that his purpose wouldn’t be served by supposing that God, by an immediate and voluntary act of his almighty power, endows certain systems of matter with consciousness and thought. . . ., he is forced to fall back on the absurd supposition that all matter, just as matter, is endowed not only with shape and a capacity for motion

but also with actual sense or perception, and lacks only the organs and memory of animals to express its sensation.<sup>1</sup>

**C.** That the self-existent and original cause of all things is an intelligent being shows abundantly in their excellent variety, order, and beauty, and in how wonderfully everything in the world is structured and adapted to its particular end ·or purpose·. This argument has been so learnedly and fully presented by ancient and modern writers that I merely mention it without enlarging on it. In this place I’ll make just one observation, as follows. Whereas Descartes and others have tried to give a possible account (*possible?*—actually a most *impossible* and ridiculous account!) of how the world might be formed by the necessary laws of motion alone, they have narrowed this seemingly vast undertaking to a mere attempt to explain in terms of physics how the inanimate part of the world has been framed—that is a part of the world that is *infinitely* less considerable than the rest. As for plants and animals, in which the Creator’s wisdom principally appears, the Cartesians have never presented even a remotely plausible account of how they were originally formed. In these things, matter and the laws of motion can’t do anything at all. And ·perhaps I should mention· the ridiculous Epicurean hypothesis that the earth produced all the plants and animals by chance—though I think that even the atheists have given that up. Its falsity was shown by a recent scientific discovery, namely that there is no such thing as the spontaneous generation of even the lowest and

<sup>1</sup> [Clarke in the main text leads into the accusation that Hobbes is guilty of the ‘absurd supposition’ with the words ‘though he is very sparing, and as it were ashamed to speak out’; this suggests some caution about the accusation. Decide for yourself whether it is cautious enough. Here is the passage from Hobbes that Clarke quotes in its support:] ‘I know that there have been philosophers, and those learned men, who have maintained that all bodies are endowed with sense. Nor do I see how they can be refuted if the nature of sense be placed in reaction only. However, although by the reaction of other bodies a phantasm might arise, it would nevertheless cease as soon as the object was removed. For unless those bodies had organs fit for the retaining of motion made in them, as animals have, their sense would be such that they would never remember they sensed. . . Hence, some memory necessarily pertains to sense as it is commonly understood.’ (*De Corpore* IV.25:5)

simplest animal or plant; the sun, earth, water, and all the powers of nature cannot jointly contribute to the production of anything endowed with even a vegetable life ·let alone an animal one·. (This most excellent discovery shows the usefulness of empirical science, sometimes even in matters of religion.) Since that is how things stand, therefore, even the most obstinate atheist must accept that plants and animals

- (a) are originally the work of an intelligent being, and created by him in time; or
- (b) have from eternity had the same structure and workings that they now have, and are an eternal effect of an eternal intelligent cause who continually exerts his infinite power and wisdom; or
- (c) have no self-existent [see Glossary] cause at all, and have been derived from one another in an eternal succession, by an infinite causal chain.

I assert (a); so far as the cause of atheism is concerned, (b) comes to the very same thing; and I have already shown in **2** above that (c) is absolutely impossible, a contradiction.

**D.** Supposing it was possible that the form of the world and all its visible contents—including the order, beauty, and exquisite fitness of their parts—resulted from mere unintelligent matter, shape, and motion; indeed, supposing that intelligence itself results from that same source; even with this, the most unreasonable and impossible supposition in the world, there would still be an undeniable demonstration that the self-existent being must be intelligent. For even these principles themselves—·unintelligent shape and motion·—could never have existed unless there was before them an intelligent cause. I'll take the case of motion. The motion that there is now in the world either •began at some time or •was eternal. If it began at a time, then it follows

that the first cause is an intelligent being; because mere unintelligent *unmoving* matter could never get itself to begin moving. If on the other hand motion was eternal, then ·there are three ways of continuing the story·:

- (i) motion was eternally caused by some eternal intelligent being;
- (ii) motion is itself necessary and self-existent;
- (iii) without any external necessary cause and without being necessary in itself, motion must have existed from eternity by an endless causal chain.

Of these, (i) is the conclusion I am arguing for. If (ii) were right, it would be a contradiction in terms to suppose that any matter is ever at rest; and yet at the same time, because there's nothing to give direction to this self-existent motion it must go in every direction at once, which means that everything would, after all, be at rest! And there's another point (there's no end of absurdities once they get started): according to (ii) it must be a contradiction to suppose that there might originally have been more or less motion in the universe than there actually was; which is so very absurd that Spinoza himself, though he explicitly says that all things are necessary, seems ashamed here to state his opinion openly, or rather plainly contradicts himself on the question about the original of motion. He does this by asserting (iii).<sup>1</sup> This, as I showed in **2** above, is a plain contradiction. So we have to conclude that motion must be originally caused by something that is intelligent, or else there never could have been any such thing as motion in the world; and consequently the self-existent being, the original cause of all things. . . . must be an intelligent being.

It follows, again, that the material world can't possibly be the original self-existent being. The self-existent being

<sup>1</sup> [A footnote quotes from *Ethics* part 2, lemma L3 after proposition 13.]

is demonstrated to be intelligent, and the material world plainly is not so; so it follows that the material world can't possibly be self-existent. What some have foolishly imagined concerning a 'soul of the world', if they mean a created,

dependent being, is irrelevant to the present argument; but if they understand by 'the soul of the world' something necessary and self-existent, then it's nothing else but a false, corrupt, and imperfect notion of God.

## 9. The self-existent Being must be a free agent

The self-existent and original cause of all things is not a necessary agent [see Glossary] but a being endowed with liberty and choice. The denial of this proposition is the foundation and the sum of what Spinoza and his followers have said about the nature of God. What reasons or arguments have they offered for their opinion? I'll take my opportunities to answer that in the course of proving the proposition itself. I shall present five reasons for thinking it to be true.

**A.** It is a necessary consequence of the proposition **8**, because intelligence without liberty is (as I hinted in the first paragraph of the discussion of **8**) is really (in respect of any power, excellence, or perfection) no intelligence at all. It is indeed a consciousness, but a merely passive one—a consciousness not of acting but purely of being acted on. Without liberty, nothing can properly be said to be 'an agent' or 'a cause' of anything. To *act necessarily* is really and properly not to act at all, but only to be acted on.

·SPINOZA ON GOD'S FREEDOM·

What Spinoza and his followers say about the production of all things 'from the necessity of the divine nature' is mere jargon and words, without any meaning at all. One could use the phrase 'the necessity of the divine nature' to refer to the perfection and rectitude of God's will, by which he

is unalterably determined to do always what is best on the whole; but Spinozists can't mean it in that way because *that* 'necessity' is consistent with the most perfect liberty and choice. They have to mean an absolute and strictly natural necessity; so when they say that God by 'the necessity of his nature' is the cause and author of all things, they're using the words in the same way as someone who says that a stone by 'the necessity of its nature' is the cause of its own falling to the ground—which is really not to be an agent or cause at all. Their opinion amounts to this: all things are equally self-existent, so the material world is God; which I have already proved to be a contradiction. Similarly, when they speak of God's intelligence and knowledge, they attribute those powers to him only in the sense in which some ancient philosophers attributed them to all matter. According to them, when a stone falls it has a sensation and consciousness, a consciousness that isn't a cause or power of acting. That kind of intelligence, in any reasonable propriety of speech, is no intelligence at all. So the arguments that proved the supreme cause to be properly an intelligent and active being also undeniably prove that he is also endowed with liberty and choice, which is the only power of acting.

**B.** If the supreme cause is not a being endowed with liberty and choice but a mere necessary agent whose actions are



all as absolutely and naturally [here = 'causally'] necessary as his existence, then

- nothing that doesn't exist could possibly have existed,
- nothing that exists could possibly have not existed;
- and
- no property or feature of anything that exists could possibly have been in any way different from how it actually is.

This is all obviously false and absurd, so the supreme cause is not a mere necessary agent but a being endowed with liberty and choice.

That absurd triple proposition is openly admitted by Spinoza to be the unavoidable consequence of his own opinion.<sup>1</sup> So he tries to maintain that no thing, or mode of existence of any thing, could possibly have been in any way different from what it actually is,

- (1)** because from an infinitely perfect nature, infinite things in infinite ways must proceed;
- (2)** because if anything could possibly be otherwise than it is, God's will and nature must be supposed capable of change; and
- (3)** because if all possible things in all possible ways do not always and necessarily exist, they never can all exist; some things that don't exist will still always be merely possible and can't ever actually exist; and so God's actual omnipotence is taken away.

Of these arguments **(1)** clearly assumes the thing that it is supposed to be proving. That an infinitely perfect nature *can* indeed produce infinite things in infinite ways is certainly true; but that it must always actually *do so*—by an absolute necessity of nature, without any power of choice regarding time or manner or circumstances—doesn't follow from the

perfection of its nature unless it is first supposed to be a necessary agent. . . . But that is to •suppose the very thing that was to be •proved. And argument **(2)** is (if possible!) still weaker: if God, according to his eternal unerring purpose and infinite wisdom, produces different things at different times and in different ways, how does it follow that his will and nature is changeable? This is exactly on a par with arguing that if God (as Spinoza supposes) does always necessarily produce all possible differences and varieties of things, then his will and nature is always necessarily infinitely various, unequal, and dissimilar to itself. Argument **(3)** is mere metaphysical trifling; it is on a par with reasoning that if all possible eternal duration isn't always actually exhausted, it never can be actually exhausted; and therefore God's eternity is taken away. Everyone can see at a glance the weakness of that argument.

[Clarke now devotes two pages to saying that even if Spinoza's arguments were much better than they are. their conclusion is simply incredible. (He has two footnotes quoting Newton in support of this.) Of course there could have been more planets than there are; their directions of rotation could have been different; there didn't have to be precisely *this* number of plant species and *that* number of animal species; and so on. Who could 'without blushing' say the things that Spinoza does on this topic? 'All things in the world appear plainly to be. . . wholly the effects not of necessity but of wisdom and choice.' It seems to be true that 'things couldn't have been different from how they are without diminishing the beauty, order, and well-being of the whole'; so there may be a 'necessity of fitness'; but this implies 'that all things were made and ordered by a free and wise agent', and this would not at all serve Spinoza's

<sup>1</sup> [Footnote quoting from *Ethics* Part 1, note to 17, proof of 29, proof of 33, 35, first corollary to 32, 33, proof of 33, corollary to 17, in that order.]

purpose. Clarke concludes:] For this is a necessity not of nature and fate [see Glossary] but of fitness and wisdom; a necessity consistent with the greatest freedom and most perfect choice. For the only foundation of this necessity is such an unalterable rightness of will and perfection of wisdom as make it impossible for a wise being to choose to act foolishly, or for an infinitely good being to choose to do something bad. I'll return to this in **12**, where my topic will be the moral attributes of God.

**C.** If anything in the universe has a final cause [= 'has a purpose', 'is *for* something'], then the supreme cause is not a necessary agent but a free one. Spinoza acknowledges this too to be unavoidable; so his only escape is to announce with a strange confidence that all final causes are the fictions of ignorant and superstitious men, and to laugh at those who are so foolish and childish as to fancy that eyes were designed and fitted to see with, teeth to chew with, food to be eaten for nourishment, the sun to give light, etc. When someone comes to this position I don't think anyone will regard him a someone to be argued with. If you do want arguments, I refer you to Galen's *De Usu Partium*, Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, Boyle's *Of Final Causes* and Ray's *Of the Wisdom of God in the Creation*. To all this I'll add just the remark that the larger the improvements and discoveries are that are daily made in astronomy and natural science, the more clearly this question is continually answered in a way bringing shame and confusion to the atheists.

·IN DEFENCE OF LIBERTY·

**D.** If the supreme cause is a mere necessary agent, it is impossible that any effect or product of that cause should be finite. Something that acts necessarily can't govern or direct its own actions; it is compelled to produce whatever can be the effect or product of its nature; so it's obvious that every

effect of such an *infinite uniform nature acting everywhere necessarily alike* must be immense, i.e. infinite in extent; so no creature in the universe could possibly be finite; which is infinitely absurd and contrary to experience. Spinoza tries to shuffle off this absurdity by expressing the consequence of his doctrine thus:

From the necessity of the divine nature, infinite things (meaning infinite in number) in infinite ways must follow.

But anyone who •reads his demonstration of this proposition and •has had some experience with such speculations can hardly fail to see that if it proved anything it would equally prove:

From the necessity of the divine nature, only infinite things (meaning infinite in extension) can possibly arise.

That demonstration alone is a sufficient refutation of the opinion it was designed to establish.

**E.** If the supreme cause isn't a free and voluntary agent, then in every effect (e.g. in motion) there must have been a series of causes *in infinitum*, with no original cause at all. For if there's no liberty anywhere, then there's no agent—no cause, mover, principle, or beginning of motion—anywhere. Everything in the universe must be passive and nothing active, everything moved and no mover, everything an effect and nothing a cause. Spinoza, indeed, assigns all things to the necessity of the divine nature as their real cause and original; but this is mere jargon, meaningless words, and won't at all help him over the present difficulty. For if by things existing through 'the necessity of the divine nature' he means (**a**) absolutely a necessity of existence, so as to make the world and everything in it self-existent, then it follows (as I showed earlier) that it must be a contradiction in terms to suppose motion etc. not to exist, which Spinoza

himself is ashamed to assert. But if by ‘the necessity of the divine nature’ he means only **(b)** the necessary following of an effect from its cause, or the cause necessarily producing its effect, this •necessity must still always be determined by something antecedent, and so on infinitely. [That’s what Clarke wrote; but it’s pretty sure that he meant ‘this •cause must still’ etc.] And Spinoza openly admits that **(b)** is his meaning. There can be no volition, he says, except from some cause, which cause must likewise be caused by some other cause, and so on infinitely.<sup>1</sup> Again, he says that *will* belongs to the nature of God only in the way that motion and rest do; so that ‘God can act by the liberty of his will’ is no more acceptable than ‘God can act by the liberty of motion and rest’. [Clarke goes on about this, insisting in unnecessary detail that Spinoza is committed to view that motion involves an infinite causal chain with no first member, and reminding us that back in **2** he ‘demonstrated’ that this ‘implies a contradiction’. He concludes:] And since the only possible way to avoid this absurdity is to grant that there must be somewhere a principle of motion and action, which is liberty. I think that it is now sufficiently proved that the supreme cause must be a being endowed with liberty and choice.

The defenders of necessity and fate contend that liberty is in itself—in the very notion of the thing—an absolute contradiction and impossibility; and that’s the main thrust of their argument. What I have said here shows well enough that this is wrong. Something that actually *is* is certainly not impossible! And I have proved that liberty actually *is*—indeed that it’s impossible for it not to be—in the first and supreme

cause. The principal argument used by the maintainers of fate [see Glossary] against the possibility of liberty, is this:

Everything must have a cause; so every volition or determination of the will of an intelligent being must arise from some cause, and that cause from some other cause, and so on infinitely.

In this sort of reasoning, these men always ignorantly confuse moral motives with physical efficient causes—two things with no sort of relation between them. But anyway this argument of theirs really proves the direct contrary of what they intend. Since •everything must indeed have a cause of its existence, either from outside or in the necessity of its own nature, and •it’s a plain contradiction (as I have demonstrated) to suppose an infinite series of dependent effects of which none are necessary in themselves, i.e. self-existent, there *must* be in the universe

some being whose existence is founded in the necessity of its own nature, and which must have *in itself* a principle of acting, a power of beginning motion;

and that is the idea of liberty. Admittedly this argument proves only the liberty of the first and supreme cause, and and doesn’t extend to any created being; but it proves the general point—which is all I need for present purposes—that liberty is so far from being impossible and contradictory in itself that on the contrary but there must really be liberty somewhere. Once this is established, it will be easy to show later that it is a power that can be passed on to created beings. I’ll deal with that in its proper place.

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<sup>1</sup> [Footnote quoting from the proof of proposition 32.]

## 10. The self-existent Being must be all-powerful

The self-existent being, the supreme cause of all things, must have infinite power. This proposition is evident and undeniable. As I have already proved, he is the only thing that can be self-existent; so •all things in the universe were made by him and are entirely dependent on him; •so all the powers things have are derived from him and must therefore be perfectly subject to him; •so it's obvious that nothing can make any difficulty or resistance to the carrying out of his will, and he must have absolute power to do everything he pleases, doing it with perfect ease and in the most perfect manner, at once and in a moment, whenever he wills it. The descriptions the scripture gives of this power are so lively and emphatic that I can't forbear to mention one or two passages. [Clarke now devotes a page to three biblical passages exclaiming about the greatness of God's power. They start at *Job* 11:4, 26:6 and *Isaiah* 40:12. He continues:] But I don't urge •authority to the persons I am at present speaking to! It is sufficiently evident from •reason that the supreme cause must be infinitely powerful. The only question is: What is the true meaning of what we call *infinite power*? and what things must it be understood to extend to?

Two parts of the answer to this question are uncontroversial; I'll just mention them.

(a) Infinite power reaches to all possible things, but doesn't extend to the doing of anything that implies a contradiction, such as •that a thing should be and not be at the same time, •that a thing should be made and not be made, or have existed and not have existed, •that twice two should not make four, or •that something that is necessarily false should be true. The reason for this is plain: the power of making a thing exist at a time when it doesn't exist is only a power of doing that which is nothing, i.e. is no power at all.

(b) Infinite power can't be said to extend to the doing of things that imply natural imperfection in the being to whom the power is ascribed, such as destroying itself, weakening itself, or the like. These things imply natural imperfection, and everyone accepts that they can't possibly belong to the necessary self-existent being. Other things imply imperfection of another kind, namely moral imperfection; but atheism sweeps that aside by wholly rejecting the category of moral good and evil; so I'll set this aside until I come in **12** to deduce the moral attributes of God.

But the nearly principal difference between us and the atheists—second only to the question of whether the supreme cause is an intelligent being—largely consists in some disagreements about the extent of infinite power.

(i) Infinite power includes a power of creating matter. This has been constantly denied by all atheists, ancient and modern, and as constantly affirmed by all who believe that God exists and have sound notions of his attributes. The only reason the atheists have or can claim to have for their opinion is that the thing [here = 'the coming into existence of matter'] is in its own nature absolutely impossible. But it appears to them to be impossible only because they can't comprehend how it can be. Real impossibility involves contradictoriness, and the atheists haven't been able to reduce the coming into existence of matter to a contradiction. To say that

something that once didn't exist may since then have begun to exist

isn't self-contradictory and doesn't imply anything that is so. It doesn't imply that something that doesn't exist can exist while it doesn't, or that something that does exist can not-exist while it does. It is true that we who •have been used to speaking in terms of generations and corruptions

[see Glossary] and •have never seen anything made or created, but only formed or framed, are apt to try to conform our idea of *creation* to that of *formation*, and to imagine that

just as in all formations there is some pre-existing matter out of which the thing is formed, so in creation there must be a pre-existing nothing out of which—as out of a real material cause [see Glossary]—the thing is created;

and that does indeed look like a contradiction. But this is only a confusion of ideas, like children’s imagining that darkness is some real thing that is driven away by the morning light; whereas the true notion of creation is not a forming something out of nothing, as out of a material cause, but only. . . .a causing to exist now something that didn’t exist earlier. . . . No-one can ever reduce that to a contradiction, any more than *forming something into a shape that it didn’t have earlier* can be reduced to a contradiction.

Furthermore, the creation of matter is not only •not impossible but can be demonstrated by bare reason to be something that •has actually happened. For it is a contradiction (as I have shown) to suppose that matter exists necessarily.

(ii) It is possible for infinite power to create an •immaterial thinking substance, •endowed with a power of beginning motion and with •liberty of will or choice. This proposition too has always been denied by all atheists; and because it is of the greatest significance for religion and morality, I shall be carefully detailed in trying to prove its various parts.

•IMMATERIAL SUBSTANCES•

(iia) It is possible for infinite power to create an immaterial thinking substance. Everyone accepts that there can be such a thing as a substance endowed with consciousness and thought, because everyone’s own experience convinces

him that *he* is such a substance. Furthermore, if there *can be* any such thing as immaterial substance then it is most reasonable to believe that substances endowed with consciousness and thought—properties the most distant from the known properties of matter, and the most unlike them, that can possibly be imagined—are immaterial substances; and I think everyone will accept this too. All that remains to be proved, therefore, is that immaterial substances are not impossible, i.e. that *immaterial substance* is not a contradictory notion.

Anyone who says that it is contradictory must assert that whatever isn’t matter is nothing, and that to say that something exists that isn’t matter is saying that there exists something that is nothing.

**how Clarke starts the next sentence:** Which in other words is plainly this,

**what he ought to have said:** Which ultimately involves the proposition

that anything we have no idea of •is nothing and •can’t exist. That is because the only way to reduce *immaterial substance* to a contradiction is to suppose that ‘immaterial’ means the same as ‘having no existence’; and the only possible way to ‘prove’ this is by saying that we have no idea of it and therefore it doesn’t and can’t exist. If that is valid then *material substance* will also be a contradiction, because we have no idea of that either (i.e. no idea of the substance to which solidity belongs). But supposing it were true (as it is indeed most false) that we have a clearer idea of the substance of [see Glossary] matter than we have of immaterial substance, still the argument the atheist uses to ‘prove’ that immaterial substance is impossible can be used by a man who was born blind to demonstrate conclusively that *light* or *colour* is an impossible and contradictory notion

because it isn't a sound or a smell! The power of seeing light or colour is, for a man born blind, every bit as incomprehensible and absolutely beyond the reach of all his ideas as the operations and perceptions (or even the simple nature) of a pure immaterial substance of spirit can be to any of us. ·I challenge· the atheists: If the blind man's lack of ideas isn't a sufficient proof of the impossibility of light or colour, how does our bare lack of ideas come to be a demonstration of the impossibility of the existence of immaterial substances? 'A blind man', they will say, 'has testimony of the existence of light.' Very true, but so have we of the existence of immaterial substances.

In this comparison there is a further advantage on our side: a blind man doesn't find by any reasoning within himself the least likelihood or probability that there can be any such thing as light or colour; all he has to go by is the testimony of others. Whereas we have not only testimony but also great and strong reasons from experience and from reason for thinking that there are such things as immaterial substances, although we have no knowledge of their simple nature. . . . ·To atheists who regard *matter* as the intellectually secure and deeply understood topic, I say: All that matter can do is for material things to act on one another's surfaces; but even the very first and most universal principle [see Glossary] of gravitation itself, in all matter, is always proportional not to bodies' *surfaces*. . . .but exactly to their solid [here = 'three-dimensional'] content; so it obviously can't be caused by matter acting on the surfaces of matter, but must (either immediately or mediately) be caused by something that continually penetrates its solid substance. But in animals, which have a power of self-motion, and in the more perfect species of them that have still higher faculties,

the thing is even more evident; for we see and feel, and observe daily in ourselves and others, powers and operations and perceptions that undeniably show themselves to be properties of immaterial substances—unless we attribute them to material substances, in which case we have as little idea of the essential powers of matter as we have of immaterial beings; and in that case how are immaterial substances more impossible than material ones? But more about this later.

It will now be easy to answer all the objections atheists have brought against the notion of human souls being immaterial substances and distinct from body. It is possible there *could be* such things as immaterial substances; and there's all the reason in the world to believe that •conscious and •thinking substances are immaterial, because •these properties are utterly remote—the most remote that can be conceived—from the known properties of matter. So the foundation of all the objections against the immateriality of the soul is entirely taken away. I shan't consider the particular objections that have been often and fully answered by learned pens. I'll discuss only one—all the rest depend on it and can be reduced to it. It is this:

Our only means of perception are the five senses, which all plainly depend on the organs of the body; so the soul without the body can't have any perception, and consequently is nothing.<sup>1</sup>

First, a preliminary point. These senses or perceptions of ours can indeed be obstructed by bodily indisposition, which shows that they do indeed depend on the organs of the body for their present use; but in their nature they are really entirely distinct powers, and I have shown that they can't possibly be ultimately founded on or arise from any of the

<sup>1</sup> [Footnote quoting from an obscure Latin source and from Aristotle.]

known properties or qualities of matter. Then the main point: for the person who argues in this way I have only this one question ·formulated in three ways·:

- Is it absolutely necessary in the nature of the thing that our five senses provide the only possible ways of perception?
- Is it impossible and contradictory that there should exist any being endowed with means of perception different from the ones that result from our present make-up?
- Mightn't it be the case, rather, that these things are purely arbitrary [see Glossary], and that the same power that gave us these means of perception might (if he had pleased) have given us different ones, and may have given different ones to other beings?

If they are purely arbitrary, the lack of them doesn't at all imply a total lack of perception. It might easily be that a soul that has the powers of reflection, reason and judgment—faculties entirely different from sense, ·with no dependence on bodily sense-organs·—could in another state have different ways of perception also. If someone contends that these senses of ours are *necessarily* the *only* ways of perception, I reply that the soul may be capable of having these very same means of perception restored to it at any time. Just as that which sees doesn't cease to exist when in the dark all objects are removed, so also that which perceives doesn't necessarily cease to exist when by death all organs of perception are removed.

But what reason can anyone give for holding that our present senses are the only possible means of perception? Isn't it infinitely more reasonable to suppose that this is a mere prejudice arising from custom—a case of attending

to bare •sense in opposition to •reason?<sup>1</sup> Supposing men had been created with only four senses, and had never known the use of sight, wouldn't they then have had the very same reason to conclude there were only four possible ways of perception as they have now to fancy that there are only five? And wouldn't they then have thought sight to be an impossible, chimerical, and merely imaginary power, with absolutely the same reason as they now presume the faculties of immaterial beings to be so? That is, with no reason at all! [Clarke pours further scorn on those who treat their ignorance as though it were a reason for denying something, and then switches to a not-previously-announced point that also concerns recognising ignorance for what it is;] As for the difficulty of conceiving the nature and manner of the union between soul and body, we know as much about that as we do about the nature of the union or holding-together of the infinitely divisible parts of body, ·namely nothing·; yet no-one doubts that the latter union does exist. So our ignorance can't be a reason against the union of body and soul any more than it is a bar to our belief in the holding together of the parts of bodies.

·THE ABILITY TO BEGIN MOTION·

**(iib)** It is possible for infinite power to endow a creature with the power of beginning motion. This is constantly denied by all the atheists because it implies a liberty of the will (which I'll have occasion to speak of soon). But the proposition is true, as I now prove. If the power of beginning motion is •possible in itself, and is also •something it's possible to communicate [see Glossary], then a creature can be endowed with that power. Now, I have already proved that the power of beginning motion is in itself a possible thing, by showing that there *must* be somewhere a power of

<sup>1</sup> [Footnote quoting something to the same effect by Cicero.]

beginning motion, thus:

If nothing has a power of beginning motion, then motion must have existed from eternity with no external cause of its being; but it doesn't have necessity of existence in its own nature. So if there isn't somewhere a principle or power of beginning motion, then motion must exist without any cause or reason for its existence either •from within itself or •from outside; and I have shown that that's an outright contradiction. So the existence of a principle or power of beginning motion, so far from being impossible, is necessary.

Furthermore, the supreme cause's power to begin motion can be communicated to created beings. The reason is simply that no powers are impossible to communicate except ones that imply self-existence and absolute independence. To suppose that a subordinate being should be self-existent or absolutely independent is indeed a contradiction; but it's not a contradiction to suppose it endowed with any other power whatsoever. I know that the maintainers of fate are very confident that

•having a power of beginning motion is •being really independent, i.e. being able to act independently of any superior cause.

But this is only a childish fooling with words. For a power of acting 'independently' in *this* sense—communicated at the pleasure of the supreme cause and continued only during the same good pleasure—is no more a real and absolute independence than the power of existing or the power of being conscious or any other power whatsoever can be said to imply independence. [Clarke builds into that sentence the passing remark that he doesn't think 'the defenders of fate' will be as keen to make •existing a •continual creation as they are to make the •power of self-motion a •continual push.]

Actually, it's quite as hard to conceive how consciousness—i.e. the power of perception—should be communicated to a created being as to conceive how the power of self-motion should be so; unless perception is merely a passive reception of impulses, and I think it's clear that it is *not*; as clear indeed as it is that a trumpet isn't a sound or that a globe isn't a colour. Yet no-one doubts that he and others truly have a power of perception. And in the same way I suppose that no considering man can doubt that he also has a power of self-motion. . . . The reasons we get from continual experience and observation to prove that we have such a power are so strong that nothing could make us in the least doubt that we have it except a strict demonstration that the thing is absolutely impossible and implies an outright contradiction. Let the most rigid fatalist set the bar to suit himself—stipulate what evidence would be needed to satisfy him that we have a power of self-motion; it will all be evidence that we actually have in our own experience. There's nothing such a man can imagine should follow from the supposition of self-motion that everyone doesn't now feel and experience in himself. . . .

To say, despite all this, that the •spirits [see Glossary] by which a man moves the parts of his body and sorts out the thoughts of his mind are themselves moved wholly by •air or subtler matter drawn into the body, which in turn is moved by •other external matter, and so on—as the wheels of a clock are moved by the weights, and those weights by gravitation, and so on—without a man's having the least power by any principle within himself to think any one thought, or impel his own spirits to move any part of his body: all this is so contrary to experience and the reason of things that a man ought to be ashamed to talk in that way. . . . Some people who deny men the power of *beginning* motion seem in a way to account for their actions by allowing them a power of



*determining* motion: ·they can't start something moving but once it is moving they can steer it·. But this also is mere ludicrous word-play; for if a man's power of determining motion is the same as a stone's power to reflect a ball in one direction, this is just nothing at all. And if a man has a power to determine the motion of his spirits any way he pleases, that is exactly the same as the power to begin motion.

·FREEDOM OF THE WILL IS POSSIBLE·

(ii.c) It is possible for infinite power to endow a creature with freedom or liberty of will. [Clarke says he **could** prove this along the lines of his proof relating to the power of beginning motion: the supreme cause must have liberty (proved in 9), so liberty isn't intrinsically impossible; and it's possible for it to be communicated, because there's no conceptual obstacle to that, and our experience suggests that it actually happens. He could, but he **won't**, because, he says:] this is the question of the greatest concern of all in matters of religion and of human life, and both Spinoza and Hobbes and their followers have with great noise and confidence denied it. So I shan't content myself with the above line of argument, but will try to show in detail the weakness of the principal arguments by which these men have claimed to demonstrate that there can't possibly be any such power in man as a liberty of will. As for the propriety of that wording—is the will the seat of liberty?—is not relevant to my present topic. I'm concerned with the question not of •where the seat of liberty is but •whether there is in man somehow any such power as a liberty of choice and of determining his own actions. The arguments by which Spinoza and Hobbes have tried to support the answer No, and to maintain that men's actions are all as necessary as the motions of a clock, are clearly reducible to two that I shall discuss separately.

·FIRST ARGUMENT AGAINST FREEDOM OF THE HUMAN WILL·

Since every effect must be produced by some cause, so that every motion in a body must have been caused by a push from some other body, and the motion of that by the push of a third, so also every volition (i.e. determination of the will of man) must be produced by some external cause, which must be an effect of some third; and consequently that there can't possibly be any such thing in nature as liberty or freedom of will.

I contend against this •that it can't possibly be the case that every effect is a product of external causes; •that there must be somewhere a beginning of operation (i.e. a power of acting without being acted on); and •that human beings can and indeed do have this power.

The various parts of this proposition have been already proved in 2 and 9 and in the discussion ·starting on page 35· of the possibility of the power of self-motion being communicated to created beings. I shan't repeat the proofs here, but will only apply them to Spinoza's and Hobbes's arguments, aiming to show the weakness of what they have said along these lines when arguing for the impossibility of liberty or freedom of will. Now, the way they argue goes like this:

Every effect must come from a cause; and that cause must produce the effect *necessarily*, because if it's a sufficient cause the effect has to follow, and if it's not a sufficient cause it isn't a cause of that thing at all. Thus, for instance, any body that is moved must be moved by some other body, which in turn must be moved by some third body, and so on ·backwards· without end. Similarly, the will of any voluntary agent [i.e. any agent that *has* a will, or that ever chooses or decides] must be determined by some external cause and not by internal any power of determining itself; that external cause must be determined necessarily

by some other cause that is external to it, and so on  
·backwards· without end.<sup>1</sup>

From this it evidently appears that what these men urge against the possibility of freedom for human beings or for anything else (including the Supreme Being), and Spinoza explicitly says this.<sup>2</sup> Thus, whatever noise they make about the strength of their arguments, all that they say finally comes down to the absurd conclusion that

Nowhere is there or *can* there be any principle of motion or beginning of operation; everything is caused necessarily by an eternal chain of dependent causes and effects, with no independent [= ‘uncaused’] original.

So all their arguments were answered in **2** and **9** above, where I proved that there must be an original, independent, and free principle of motion or action; and that to suppose an endless succession of dependent causes and effects, with no first self-actuating principle, is supposing a series of dependent things to be from eternity produced by nothing, which is the very same absurdity and contradiction as to suppose things produced by nothing at some definite time; because it’s obvious that the ability of *nothing* to produce something is the same in time as in eternity. And I proved in **10** •that the power to begin motion is not only possible and certain in itself but also possible to be communicated to finite beings, and •that it actually is in man.

·SECOND ARGUMENT AGAINST FREEDOM OF THE HUMAN WILL·

Thinking, and all its modes such as willing and the like, are qualities or states of matter; and obviously matter doesn’t have in itself a power of beginning motion or giving itself *any*

kind of determination; therefore it is also obvious that there can’t possibly be any such thing as freedom of will.

I reply that thinking and willing are not and *cannot* be qualities and states of matter, and therefore don’t fall under the laws of matter. I have already shown in **10** that it’s possible that there are immaterial substances, because that notion doesn’t imply a contradiction in itself. And I have also proved in **8** that thinking and willing are entirely different powers from solidity, shape, and motion; and if they’re different from them they can’t possibly arise from them or be compounded out of them. It follows that thinking and willing can be—indeed they certainly and necessarily *are*—faculties or powers of immaterial substances, seeing that they can’t possibly be qualities or states of matter. [Clarke now mentions and blocks a possible escape from his argument by a certain radical misuse of the word ‘matter’. He continues:] To show how absurd it is to suppose thinking and willing to be qualities or states of matter, in the proper and usual sense of ‘matter’, we don’t have to bring in any argument from the outside; all we need is to attend to the senselessness of Hobbes’s own account of the nature and origin of sensation and consciousness. The immediate cause of sensation, he says, is this [not a quotation];

The object or something flowing from it presses the outermost part of the sense-organ, and that pressure is passed along to the innermost parts of the organ. There the resistance or reaction of the organ causes a pressure outwards in opposition to the pressure of the object inwards, and this counter-pressure causes a phantasm—i.e. image—to be formed; and

<sup>1</sup> [This displayed passage is not a quotation. Clarke backs it up with footnotes referring to Hobbes’s *De Corpore* II.ix.5; Spinoza’s *Ethics* part 2, lemma L3 after proposition 13; proof of part I, proposition 32; a pamphlet by Hobbes; *Ethics* part 2, 48—in that order.]

<sup>2</sup> [Footnote quoting corollary 1 of *Ethics* part 1, proposition 32.]

this 'phantasm' is the sensation itself.<sup>1</sup>

And elsewhere he says that the cause of sensation is an object pressing the organ, which pressure is by means of the nerves conveyed to the brain, and so to the heart, where the heart's resistance or counter-pressure creates an image or phantasm which is sensation.<sup>2</sup> Now, what is there in all this that has the slightest tendency to explain—i.e. to make intelligible—the real and inward nature of sense or consciousness? The object, by communicating a pressure through the sense-organ to the relevant part of the brain, does indeed raise a phantasm or image, i.e. make a certain impression on the brain. But the power of •perceiving this impression and of •being aware of it—what does *that* consist in? In what way is this impression similar to the sense itself, i.e. to the thought aroused in the mind?

Well, I'll tell you. The •physical• impression resembles the corresponding thought in exactly the way a square resembles blueness, or a trumpet resembles a sound, or a needle resembles the sense of pain; or a tennis-ball's bouncing resembles the reason and understanding of a man!

Thus Hobbes's definition of sensation—according to which a sensation is in its innermost nature nothing but the phantasm or image made in the brain by the pressure communicated from the object—is in effect defining *blueness* to be the image of a square, or *sound* the picture of a trumpet, or *pain* the likeness of a needle. I'm not in any way misrepresenting him. He openly declares that •all sensible

qualities such as colour, sound, and the like are nothing in the objects themselves but motion, and that because •motion can produce nothing but motion therefore •the perceptions of these sensible qualities are nothing in us but different motions.<sup>3</sup> (And obviously •shape and all its possible compositions can produce nothing but shape.) So if the phantasm—i.e. the image of the object made in the brain by shape and motion—is (as he says) the sensation itself, doesn't it follow that sensation is bare shape and motion? And aren't all the absurdities he has mentioned unavoidable consequences of his opinion?

Hobbes seems not to have been altogether unaware of this insuperable difficulty, but he works to conceal it from his readers and to deceive them by the ambiguity of the word 'phantasm'. Yet for a back-stop, to use in case he is too hard pressed, he gives us a hint that sensation *may* be something more, namely a power of perception or consciousness that is naturally and essentially inherent in all matter, though •inanimate• matter lacks the organs and memory of animals to express its sensation. And •he hints• that if a man had no other sense but seeing, and his eyes were always immovably fixed on a single object that didn't change and had no variety, he couldn't properly be said to *see* but only to be in an unintelligible state of amazement. So it may be that all inorganic bodies have sensation or perception, and it seems to us that they don't because they lack •the sense-organs that would put variety into it and •any memory or means of expressing that sensation.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Footnotes quoting from *De Corpore* IV.25.2–3.]

<sup>2</sup> [Footnote quoting from *Leviathan* chapter 1.]

<sup>3</sup> [Footnote quoting from *Leviathan* chapter 1.]

<sup>4</sup> [Long footnote quoting two passages from Hobbes's *De Corpore* IV.25.5. In neither of them does Hobbes speak of what all bodies 'essentially' have.]

Hobbes mentions this as possible, but he does it in such a hesitant, diffident, sparing way that we can easily see that he meant it only as a last subterfuge [= 'dodge', 'trick'] to fall back on if he was pressed with the absurdities consequent on supposing that sensation is only shape and motion. Well might he be sparing, as though ashamed of this subterfuge! It is as absurd as the other opinion, about thought being mere motion; for what can be more ridiculous than to imagine that matter is as essentially conscious as it is extended? Doesn't that imply that every piece of matter, being made up of endlessly separable parts (i.e. parts that are really distinct beings, as distinct as if they had been a thousand miles apart), is made up of innumerable consciousnesses and infinite confusion? But it is a shame to trouble you with even the mention of any of the countless absurdities following from that monstrous supposition.

Others who want to make thinking a state of matter, and are ashamed to use either of those two ways to do it, contend that God by his almighty and supreme power *chooses* to endow certain systems of matter with the ability to think. But this also amounts to nothing. For one thing, it's absurd to suppose God to make •an innumerable crowd of distinct beings (which is what the particles of every system of matter are) to be at the same time •one individual conscious being. •And there's a further line of argument against it, or rather a choice of two arguments, depending on •whether our idea of *matter* is a true and distinct idea.

I'm not talking about whether it is a true idea of the substance of matter, because we have no idea of simple substance. My topic is our idea of the properties that essentially distinguish the substance and entitle it to the name 'matter'—namely the idea of *matter* as that of a solid substance, capable only of division, shape, and motion, with all the possible

effects of their various compositions.

[The crucial word there is 'only'.] It appears to us, on the best examination we can make of it, that this *is* the **true** idea of matter, and most of our adversaries agree. But then it is absolutely impossible for thinking to belong to matter, because thinking (as I showed earlier) can't possibly arise from any modification or composition of any or all of these qualities. If someone holds that our idea of matter is **wrong**, and that by 'matter' he means *substance in general, capable of thinking and of numberless unknown properties besides*, then he is cheating only in using the word 'matter' where he ought to use 'substance'. And to suppose that thinking could be done 'by matter', meaning 'by substance in general'. . . •achieves nothing to our adversaries' advantage, and •isn't a clearer and more intelligible way of talking than to attribute thinking to an immaterial substance, and keep the idea of matter and its properties clear and distinct. That's because I contend. . .

•THE IRRELEVANCE OF THOSE ARGUMENTS•

. . . that even supposing (in these men's confused way) that the soul was really not a distinct substance from body, and that thinking and willing could be—and indeed *are*—only qualities or states of matter, even this wouldn't at all affect the present question about liberty, nor prove freedom of will to be impossible. I have demonstrated that thinking and willing can't possibly be effects or compositions of shape and motion, so anyone who contends that thinking and willing are qualities or states of matter must suppose matter to be capable of properties entirely different from shape and motion. And in that case the premise that •the effects of shape and motion are all necessary doesn't imply the conclusion that •the effects of those other and totally distinct properties must also be necessary.

So Hobbes and his followers are guilty of a shameful fallacy in the very argument that they rely on for their main strength. . . . Trying to prove the soul to be mere matter, they suppose matter to be capable not only of shape and motion but also of other unknown properties; then trying to prove that the will and all the soul's other operations are necessary, they divest matter of all its unknown properties and return it to being mere solidity endowed with nothing but shape and motion. [Clarke now devotes more than a page to repeating this line of argument in more detail, and then yet again in even more detail still. None of this is needed, because he has stated it quite clearly already.]

·THE LAST JUDGMENT OF THE UNDERSTANDING·

There are some other arguments against the possibility of liberty that men have made to look considerable by trying to answer them, though really they are just irrelevant. I shall discuss three of them, starting with the argument that the will is not free because it is determined by the understanding's last judgment.

The ·alleged· 'necessity' of the will's being determined by the last judgment of the understanding is only a *necessity upon supposition*, i.e. a necessity that a man wills a thing when it is supposed that he *does* will it. This is like saying

- that everything that exists necessarily exists because when it exists it can't not exist;
- that the true church is infallible because truth cannot err; and
- that those who are in the right can't possibly, while they are so, be in the wrong.

Thus, whatever a man at any time freely wills or does, it's obvious (even on supposition of the most perfect liberty) that he cannot at that time *not* will or do it, because it is impossible that anything should be willed and not willed—or

done and not done—at the same time. And this holds whether the willing or doing is free or necessary. . . . The last judgment of the understanding is nothing but a man's final determining (after more or less consideration) either to choose or not to choose a thing—i.e. it is the act of volition. And if that is denied, and the act of volition is distinguished from the last judgment of the understanding, then the act of volition (or rather the beginning of action) resulting from the last judgment of the understanding is not determined by that last judgment as by the physical efficient cause [see Glossary for that phrase] but only as the moral motive. The true, proper, immediate, physical efficient cause of action is the power of self-motion in men, which exerts itself freely in consequence of the last judgment of the understanding. That last judgment is not itself •a physical efficient cause, but merely •a moral motive that spurs the physical efficient cause, i.e. the motive power, to begin to act.

So the necessity by which the power of acting follows the judgment of the understanding is only a moral necessity, i.e. no necessity at all in the sense in which the opposers of liberty understand 'necessity'; because moral necessity is obviously consistent with the most perfect natural liberty. Consider a man who is entirely free from all pain of body and disorder of mind, and judges it unreasonable for him to hurt or destroy himself. Being under no temptation or external compulsion he can't possibly act contrary to this judgment, not because •he lacks a natural or physical power so to do, but because •it is absurd, mischievous, and morally impossible for him to choose to do it. That is also the reason why the most perfect rational creatures, superior to men, can't do evil; not because they lack a natural power to perform the material action [= 'to make those movements'] but because it is *morally impossible* that their will should determine itself to choose to act foolishly and

unreasonably when they have a perfect knowledge of what is best and no temptation to evil. At last we have come to it—the fundamental error of those who argue against the liberty of the will and of those who confusedly defend it, namely that they don't clearly distinguish •moral motives from •physically efficient causes, two things that have no resemblance at all. Lastly, if the maintainers of fate say this—

A man who is free from all pain of body and disorder of mind is under not only a •moral but also a •natural impossibility of hurting or destroying himself, because neither his judgment nor his will, without some impulse from outside both, can any more possibly be determined to any action than one body can begin to move without being impelled by another

—I answer that this walks out on the argument drawn from the necessity of the will's following the understanding, and reverts to the earlier argument concerning the absolute impossibility of there being anywhere a first principle of motion, which I have abundantly answered already.

•FREEDOM NOT TO WILL?•

Some ingenious and able writers have spoken with much confusion about human freedom, by mistaking (as it seems to me) •the subject of the question and •what the nature of liberty consists in.

Obviously a free agent can't choose whether to have a will or no will—i.e. whether to be what he is or not; but the two contradictories of acting or not acting are always necessarily before him, so he must. . . .perpetually will one of these two things, either to act or to forbear acting. This has raised doubts concerning the possibility of liberty, in the minds even of some thoughtful persons.

But this difficulty (if it is one) arises merely from not grasping what liberty is. For the essence of liberty doesn't consist in the agent's choosing

- whether he'll have a will, i.e.
- whether he'll be an agent at all,
- whether he'll be what he is.

It consists in his *being an agent*, i.e. having a continual power of choosing whether to act or forbear acting. This power of •agency or •free choice (these mean exactly the same; 'necessary agent' is an outright contradiction) is not prevented by chains or prisons; for a man who chooses to try to move away from where he is is as much a free agent in this as one who actually moves away from where he is. And this free agency isn't at all diminished by the impossibility of his choosing two contradictories at once; or by the necessity that one of two contradictories must always be done. A man who sits, whether or not he's a free agent, can't possibly both sit and stand up at the same time; nor can he possibly choose both to act and not to act at the same time. Not because he lacks freedom, but because when he exercises the freedom that he does have by freely choosing one of the alternatives, he thereby makes the contrary alternative impossible at that time. And freedom of the will doesn't imply the agent's having a power to choose whether to will at all. A free agent must be necessarily free—he has no power not to be free.

God is by necessity of nature [Clarke's phrase] a free agent; and he can't cease to be so any more than he can cease to exist. He must at every moment either choose to act or choose to forbear acting; . . .but he is at perfect liberty about which option he chooses; and to suppose him not to be so is contradictorily supposing him not to be the first cause but to be acted by some superior power, meaning that he isn't an agent at all. . . .

## ·THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE·

Another argument that has frequently been urged against the possibility of liberty is the certainty of God's foreknowledge. But this too is entirely besides the question. If no other argument can prove independently that all actions are necessary, they certainly can't be made to appear necessary simply on the grounds of foreknowledge. That is if on other accounts there's no impossibility in men's actions' being free, the bare certainty of divine foreknowledge can never be proved to •destroy that freedom or •make any alteration in the nature of men's actions; so the certainty of foreknowledge, separated from other arguments, has no role in the debate over liberty. (Other arguments are usually mixed in with this one; I think they have all been answered already.) It is obvious that if there's no other reason to hold that the actions of men can't be free, the mere certainty of the divine foreknowledge can't be proved to destroy that freedom. For bare foreknowledge has no influence at all in any respect; it doesn't have the slightest effect on the manner of the existence of anything. All that the greatest opposers of liberty ever have or ever could urge on this topic amounts only to this: •foreknowledge implies certainty, and •certainty implies necessity. But **(a)** certainty doesn't imply necessity, and **(b)** foreknowledge doesn't imply any certainty except a certainty that would be in things even if there was no foreknowledge. ·I shall now argue for those two propositions·.

**(a)** The certainty of foreknowledge doesn't •cause the certainty of things, but is itself •based on the reality of their existence. Whatever is now the case, it is certain that it is the case; and it was yesterday and from eternity as •certainly true that it would be the case today as it is •now certain that it is the case. And this certainty of event [Clarke's phrase; see note on page 43] is just the same whether or not it is supposed that the thing could be foreknown. . . . Bare foreknowledge

has no influence on anything, and doesn't contribute in the least towards the making the foreknown state of affairs necessary. Compare this with our own knowledge. We know certainly that some things are the case; and when we know that they are, they can't not be; but obviously our knowledge doesn't at all affect the things to make them more necessary or more certain. Now, foreknowledge in God is the very same as knowledge. For all purposes of knowledge and power, all things are to him as if they were equally present. He knows perfectly everything that is; and he knows whatever •will be in the same way that he knows what •is. Thus, just as knowledge has no influence on things that are, so also foreknowledge has no influence on things that shall be.

*How* exactly does God foresee future things without a chain of necessary causes? We can't say clearly how he does this, but we can get some sort of general notion of it.

- A man who has no influence over another person's actions can nevertheless often perceive beforehand what that other will do;
- A wiser and more experienced man, thinking about another person whose disposition he is perfectly acquainted with, can foresee what the other person will do in certain circumstances, this foresight having greater probability and looking further ahead than in the more ordinary cases;
- An angel, with an even lower chance of error may have a still longer-reaching foresight of men's future actions;

so it is very reasonable to think that

- God, without influencing men's wills by his power, can't help having a more secure knowledge of future free events than men or angels can have.

How much more secure? By the amount that the perfection of his nature is greater than the perfection of theirs!

The precise manner in which he foresees these things is indeed impossible for us to explain; but so also are countless other things that no-one doubts the truth of. And if there were any strength in this argument from •divine foreknowledge to •the impossibility of liberty, it would count against foreknowledge, not against liberty. Suppose that these two things are inconsistent, so that one of them must be destroyed. Then we must either

(a) introduce an absolute and universal fatality [see Glossary], or

(b) deny that God has foreknowledge.

Of these two, (a) obviously destroys all religion and morality, and tends to the dishonour of God much more than (b) does. On the supposition that we are working with here—namely that the two things are inconsistent and that (a) is being rejected—foreknowledge is impossible; it implies a contradiction to conceive God to have it; so that •denying that he has it doesn't detract from his omniscience any more than denying him the power to make it the case that  $2 + 2 = 5$  detracts from his omnipotence. But that is not how things stand. Though we indeed can't clearly and distinctly set out the manner in which God foresees the actions of free agents, we do know this much:

The bare foreknowledge of any action that would otherwise count as free can't alter or lessen that freedom, because it's obvious that whatever level of certainty now belongs to *P will be the case at future time t* wouldn't be increased if someone had foreknowledge of the occurrence of P at t.

... So bare foreknowledge, which doesn't alter anything, isn't in any way inconsistent with liberty, however hard we find it to grasp how such foreknowledge is achieved. For if liberty is in itself possible, the bare *foresight* of a free action before it is done is not different (in any way that is relevant

to the present question) from a simple *knowledge* of it when it is done. Clearly both these kinds of knowledge imply only a **certainty of the event** (which would be the same even if there were no such knowledge) and not at all any **necessity of the thing**. [If you are wondering what distinction Clarke means to draw here, you *may* be helped by the four occurrences of 'certainty of event' in the next paragraph. Because things are becoming tricky here, the paragraph will appear in an untouched form at the end of this text.]

(b) Just as foreknowledge doesn't imply any certainty that wouldn't be equally in things if there was no foreknowledge, so also this •certainty of event doesn't in any way imply necessity. . . . Suppose that a man performs some particular action today, doing this by an internal principle of motion and an absolute freedom of will, without any external cause or impulse; and suppose it wasn't possible for this action to have been foreseen yesterday; wasn't there nevertheless the same •certainty of event •yesterday• as if it had been foreseen? That is, notwithstanding the supposed freedom wouldn't it have been as certain a truth yesterday and from eternity that this action was to be performed today. . . . as it is now a certain and infallible truth that it is •being• performed •now•? Mere •certainty of event, therefore, doesn't in the slightest imply necessity; so foreknowledge, however hard it is for us to say how it happens, implies no other certainty but the •certainty of event that the thing would have even if it wasn't foreknown, so obviously it doesn't imply necessity.

•THE PROBLEM OF EVIL•

And now having (I hope) sufficiently proved both the possibility and the real existence of liberty, I shall use what I have said about this as a basis for just one inference, namely that it enables us to answer the ancient and great question 'What is the cause and origin of evil?' There has to be a possibility of evil, because



- Liberty involves a natural power to do evil as well as to do good;
- The imperfect nature of finite beings makes it possible for them to misuse this liberty of theirs by actually doing evil; and
- For the order and beauty of the universe and for displaying the infinite wisdom of the Creator there *must* be various degrees of creatures, so that some must be less perfect than others.

From those premises it follows necessarily that there's a possibility of evil, although the Creator is infinitely good. So it comes down to this: Everything that we call 'evil' is either

- (i)** an evil of imperfection, such as the lack of certain faculties and excellences that other creatures have; or
- (ii)** natural evil such as pain, death, and the like; or
- (iii)** moral evil, such as all kinds of vice.

Of these **(i)** is not properly an evil; for every power, faculty, or perfection that any creature enjoys is the free gift of God, which he was no more obliged to give than he was to confer existence itself; so it's clear that the lack of any particular

faculty or perfection in any kind of creatures, which never belonged to their nature, is no more an *evil* to them than their never having been brought into existence in the first place could properly have been called an evil. The kind **(ii)** of evil that we call 'natural evil' either •is a necessary consequence of **(i)** (e.g. death for a creature on whose nature immortality was never conferred) or •is counterbalanced by as great or greater good (e.g. the afflictions and sufferings of good men); and in neither of those cases is it properly an evil, any more than **(i)** is. Or else it •is a punishment, in which case it is a necessary consequent of **(iii)** moral evil. This arises wholly from the misuse of the liberty that God gave to his creatures for other purposes. It was reasonable and appropriate to give them this liberty, for the perfection and order of the whole creation; but they, contrary to God's intention and command, have taken what was necessary for the perfection of the whole and misused it for their own corruption and depravity. Thus all sorts of evils have entered into the world without any lessening of the infinite goodness of its creator and governor.

## 11. The supreme cause and author of all things must be infinitely wise

This proposition obviously follows from ones that I have already proved; so there's no need for me to spend long on it here. For nothing is more obvious than these three truths:

- (a) An infinite, omnipresent, intelligent being must know perfectly all things that are.
- (b) He who alone is
  - self-existent and eternal,
  - the sole cause and author of all things,
  - the source of all their powers and
  - the thing they continually depend on
 must also know perfectly all the consequences of those powers, i.e. all possibilities of things to come, and what is over-all best and wisest to be done.
- (c) Having infinite power, he can never be controlled or prevented from doing what he thus knows to be fittest.

From all this it obviously follows that every effect of the supreme cause must be the product of infinite wisdom. I'll go through that in more detail. The supreme being, because he is infinite, must be present everywhere; and because he is an infinite mind or intelligence, wherever he is, his knowledge is; and because his knowledge is inseparable from his being, it must be infinite as he is; and wherever his infinite knowledge is, it must have a full and perfect view of all things, with nothing concealed from its inspection. He includes and surrounds all things with his boundless presence, and penetrates every part of their substance with his all-seeing eye; so that the inmost nature and essence of all things are perfectly open to his view, and even the deepest thoughts of intelligent beings manifest themselves in his sight.

It is also obvious that just as he knows all things that are, he must likewise know all possibilities of things, i.e. all effects that *can* be. That is because all things are not only present to him but also entirely dependent on him, and have received their existence and all their powers and faculties from him. . . . Of course he must know perfectly what each of those powers and faculties that come wholly from himself can possibly produce; and because

he sees in one boundless view all the possible compositions and divisions, variations and changes, circumstances and dependences of things; all their possible relations to one another, and their fitness for their various purposes,

he must •know exactly, without possibility of error, what is best and most proper in every one of the infinite possible cases or methods of disposing things; and •understand perfectly how to order and direct the respective means, to bring about what he knows to be best. . . . This is what we mean by 'infinite wisdom'. I have shown (and anyway it is obvious) that the supreme cause is all-powerful; so that he can't be •hindered by error or mistake from doing what is absolutely fittest and wisest to be done any more than he can be •blocked from it by force or opposition. [Clarke has •these two items reversed; obviously a slip.] It follows undeniably that he is actually and effectively 'infinitely wise' in the highest and most complete sense •of that phrase•; and that the world and all things in it must be effects of infinite wisdom. This is demonstration *a priori* [see Glossary].

There's an equally strong and undeniable proof *a posteriori* of God's infinite wisdom, from the consideration of the exquisite perfection and consummate excellency of his

works. But I shan't go on about this argument, because it has often already been accurately and strongly urged—to the everlasting shame and confusion of the atheists—by the ablest and most learned writers of ancient and of modern times.<sup>1</sup> All I shall say here is that this argument continually grows stronger as the world grows older, as men inquire more deeply into things, as they conduct more precise and careful observations, and as they make more and greater discoveries. This is powerful evidence that it is founded in truth.<sup>2</sup> If Galen centuries ago could find in the construction and constitution of the parts of a human body such undeniable marks of planning and design that he was forced to acknowledge and admire the wisdom of its author, what would he have said if he had known the recent discoveries in anatomy and medicine—

- the circulation of the blood,
- the exact structure of the heart and brain,
- the uses of countless glands and valves for secreting and moving the juices in the body,

and various other veins, vessels, and receptacles that weren't known or even dreamed of in Galen's day but are now found to serve the wisest and most exquisite ends imaginable? Epicurus and his follower Lucretius argued against the belief in the existence of an all-wise creator and governor of the world, on the basis of the faults they imagined they could find in the frame and constitution of the earth. Their arguments were so poor and inconsiderable that even in that infancy of natural science people in general despised

them and brushed them aside as having no force; how ashamed those philosophers would be if they were alive today when the very things they thought to be faults and blunders in the constitution of nature have been found to be very useful—exceedingly beneficial to the preservation and well-being of the whole!

Just one more example: If Cicero, from the partial and very imperfect knowledge of astronomy that could be had at his time, could be so confident of the heavenly bodies' being placed and moved by a wise and understanding mind that he said that anyone who disagreed with this was void of all understanding,<sup>3</sup> what would he have said if he had known the modern discoveries in astronomy? —the immense greatness of the visible part of the world, vastly bigger than they imagined it to be in Cicero's day? —the exquisite regularity of all the planets' motions, without epicycles, stoppages, backward movements, or any other deviation or confusion whatsoever? [and on this goes, through seven further modern astronomical discoveries, after which Clarke winds up:] what would Cicero, that great master of reason, have thought and said if these and other newly discovered instances of the inexpressible precision and wisdom of God's works had been known in his time? Certainly atheism, which even then was altogether unable to withstand the arguments drawn from astronomy, must now in the light of these later observations each one of which is an unanswerable proof of the incomprehensible wisdom of the Creator, be utterly ashamed to show its head. . . .

<sup>1</sup> [Footnote citing works by Galen, Cicero, Boyle, and two other moderns.]

<sup>2</sup> [Footnote quoting Cicero on the separating of fact from fiction by the passage of time.]

<sup>3</sup> [Footnote quoting Cicero saying this—*De Natura Deorum* II.21.]

## 12. The supreme author of all things must be infinitely good, just, and true.

Lastly, the supreme cause and author of all things must be a being of infinite goodness, justice, truth, and all other moral perfections that are fitting for the supreme governor and judge of the world. Before showing this I need to explain and defend the concept of *fittingness*. That

things have different relations to one another is as certain as that there are different things in the world. That

from these different relations of different things there necessarily arise agreements or disagreements of some things to others, or a fitness or unfitness in the application of different things or relations to one another

is likewise as certain as that there are differences in the nature of things, i.e. that different things do exist. Furthermore, that

there's a fitness or suitability of certain features to certain persons, and an unsuitability of others, this being based on the nature of things and the qualities of persons and not depending *at all* on anyone's will or on any choice or decision

must unavoidably be acknowledged by everyone who won't affirm that it is equally fit and suitable in the nature and reason of things that •an innocent being should be extremely and eternally miserable as that •it should be free from such misery. So there is such a thing as *fitness and unfitness*—eternally, necessarily, and unchangeably—in the nature and reason of things.

Now, •what these relations of things absolutely and necessarily *are* in themselves is •what they *appear to be* to the understanding of all intelligent beings except those

who understand things to be what they are not, i.e. whose understandings are either very imperfect or very depraved; and the actions of all intelligent beings are constantly •directed by this understanding or knowledge of the natural and necessary relations of things unless their will is corrupted by individual self-interest or emotion or swayed by some unreasonable and prevailing desire. (This •direction, by the way, is the true ground and foundation of all morality.)

The supreme cause must always do what he knows to be fittest to be done; i.e. he must always act according to the strictest rules of infinite goodness, justice, truth, and all other moral perfections. When I say 'must' I am invoking not a necessity of fate [see Glossary] but a moral necessity which is consistent with the most perfect liberty. Why must this be true of author of all things? Because (as I have already proved)

he must have infinite knowledge and the perfection of wisdom, so that it's absolutely impossible that he should •err or be in any respect ignorant of the true relations and fitness or unfitness of things, or •be by any means deceived or tricked;

and because

he is self-existent, absolutely independent and all-powerful: so that, not lacking anything, his will can't be influenced by any wrong emotion; and not depending on anything, his power can't be limited by any superior strength.

•Let us now apply this to the three virtues that are listed in proposition 12•.

(a) The supreme cause must be infinitely **good**, and here is why. . . . He is necessarily happy in the eternal enjoyment

of his own infinite perfections, so the only motive he can possibly have for making any creatures at all is to communicate to them his own perfections, according to their different capacities (arising from the variety of natures that it was fit for infinite wisdom to produce), and according to their different improvements (arising from the liberty that is essential to the constitution of intelligent and active beings. A further reason for holding that he must be infinitely good is this: being necessarily all-sufficient he must be infinitely removed from all malice and envy, and from all other possible causes or temptations of doing evil—which obviously can only be effects of lack and weakness, of imperfection or of depravity.

**(b)** He must in the same way be infinitely **just**; and here is why. The rule of equity [= ‘fairness’, ‘justice’] is nothing but the very nature of things and their necessary relations one to another; and acting justly is nothing but suiting the features of things to the qualifications of persons, according to the basic fitness and agreeableness that I earlier showed to be necessarily in nature in advance of anyone’s choices or decisions. Obviously, then, he who •knows perfectly this rule of equity and necessarily •judges things as they are; who has complete power to carry out justice according to that knowledge, and no possible temptation to deviate from it; who can’t be imposed upon by any deceit, swayed by any bias, or awed by any power; *must* always do what is right, without unfairness or partiality, without prejudice or favouritism.

**(c)** He must be **true** and faithful, in all his declarations and all his promises. This is very obvious. The only possible reason for speaking falsely is •rashness, •forgetfulness, •inconstancy or weakness, •fear of evil, or •hope of gain;

and an infinitely wise, all-sufficient, and good being must be infinitely removed from all these.<sup>1</sup> Thus, just as it is impossible for him to be deceived, it is impossible for him to deceive others in any way. In brief, all evil and all imperfections whatsoever plainly arise either from •shortness of understanding, •defect of power, or •faultiness of will. . . . It’s clear that the supreme cause and author of all things must be infinitely distant from all these things, so it follows undeniably that he must be a being of infinite goodness, justice, truth, and all other moral perfections.

I know of only one objection to this line of argument. While the argument is *a priori* the objection is *a posteriori*, being based on experience and observation of the unequal distributions of providence in the world. But—

even if we set aside the just vindication of the wisdom and goodness of providence in its dispensations, even with respect to this present world only, that Plutarch and other heathen writers have judiciously made—this objection itself is entirely wide of the question. Concerning the justice and goodness of God (as of any governor) no judgment is to be made from a partial view of a few small portions of his dispensations, but from an entire consideration of the whole; that includes not only how the world is now but also all that is past and all that is still to come; and when these are taken into account everything will clearly appear just and right.

From this account of the moral attributes of God, six things follow. (Each of **(2)**–**(5)** follows from its immediate predecessor.)

**(1)** All God’s actions are entirely free, so that the exercise of his moral attributes can’t be called ‘necessary’ in the sense in which his existence and eternity are ‘necessary’; but •the

<sup>1</sup> [A footnote quoting an expression of this view from Plato’s *Republic*.]

actions flowing from these attributes are really and truly necessary, by a necessity that is consistent with liberty yet is as certain, infallible, and dependable as even God's existence and his eternity. Though nothing is more certain (as I proved in **9** above) than that God acts

not necessarily but voluntarily, with particular intention and design, knowing that he does good and intending to do so, freely and out of choice with no constraint on him but the fact that his goodness inclines his will to communicate [see Glossary] himself and to do good; so that the only necessity the divine nature is under is consistent with the most perfect liberty and freest choice,

it is nevertheless as truly and absolutely impossible for God to do anything contrary to what his moral attributes require him to do as if he was really not a free but a necessary agent. (The way his goodness inclines his will is the ground of all our prayers and thanksgivings—the reason why we pray to him to be good to us and gracious, and thank him for being just and merciful, whereas no-one prays to him to be omnipresent, or thanks him for being omnipotent or for knowing everything!) It's clear why this is so: it is because infinite knowledge, power, and goodness in conjunction can, despite the most perfect freedom and choice, act with as much certainty and unalterable steadiness as the necessity of fate can be supposed to do. Indeed, these perfections can't possibly *not* act in that way; because free choice, in a being of infinite knowledge, power, and goodness, can no more choose to act contrary to these perfections than knowledge can be ignorance, power be weakness, or goodness malice; so that free choice in such a being can be as certain and steady a principle [see Glossary] of action as the necessity of fate.

So we can rely upon God's moral attributes as certainly and infallibly as we can on his natural attributes; because it is as absolutely impossible for him to

**(a)** act contrary to any of his moral attributes as it is for him to

**(b)** divest himself of any of his natural attributes. and as much a contradiction to suppose him **(a)** choosing to do anything inconsistent with his justice, goodness, and truth as to suppose him **(b)** divesting himself of infinity, power, or existence. . . . The supposition that God does **(b)** is in itself an immediate contradiction in the terms, while the supposition that he does **(a)** is an outright contradiction to the necessary perfections of his nature. The **(b)** supposition says absolutely that something *is* at the same time that it *is not*; the **(a)** supposition says that infinite knowledge can act ignorantly, infinite power weakly, or that infinite wisdom and goodness can do things that are not good or wise to be done—all of which are equally great and equally obvious absurdities. I see this as a very intelligible account of God's moral attributes, satisfactory to the mind, and without puzzles or confusion of ideas. I could have come at it more directly, because justice, goodness, and all God's other moral attributes are as essential to his nature as are the natural attributes of eternity, infinity, and the like. But atheists, after they are fully convinced that there must be in the universe some one eternal, necessary, infinite, and all-powerful being, will still say (with unreasonable obstinacy) that they can't see that goodness, justice, or any other •moral attribute is necessarily connected with these •natural perfections; which is why I chose to try to demonstrate the moral attributes by a detailed deduction, as I have now done.

**(2)** Although God is a most perfectly free agent, he can't *not* always do what is best and wisest on the whole. It is easy to see why: it's because perfect wisdom and goodness are

as steady and certain principles of action as necessity itself. And an infinitely wise and good being, endowed with the most perfect liberty, can no more choose to act in contradiction to wisdom and goodness than a necessary agent can act contrary to the necessity by which it is driven, because it's as great an absurdity and impossibility •in choice

for infinite wisdom to choose to act unwisely, or  
infinite goodness to choose what is not good,

as it would be •in nature

for absolute necessity to fail to produce its necessary effect.

Because God is in himself infinitely happy and all-sufficient, there was indeed no necessity in nature that he should at first create such beings as he has created, or indeed any beings at all. There was also no necessity in nature that he should keep things in existence after they were created, because he would be as self-sufficient without their continuance as he was before their creation. But it was fit, wise, and good that infinite wisdom should show itself and infinite goodness communicate itself. [The next sentence is very unlike Clarke's, but it does preserve his meaning.] So it was necessary (in the sense of 'necessary' I am now speaking of) that

Every truth of the form

a thing of kind K is created at time T and stays  
in existence for duration D

is true for the values of K, T, and D that infinite  
wisdom and goodness saw as wisest and best.

And those same moral perfections make it necessary that while things are in existence they should be disposed and governed according to the exact and unchangeable laws of eternal justice, goodness, and truth. . . .

(3) Although God is perfectly free and infinitely powerful, he can't possibly do anything bad. It's easy to see why.

Just as it's obvious that •infinite power can't extend to natural contradictions, which imply a destruction of the very power by which they're supposed to be brought about, so also it can't extend to moral contradictions, which imply a destruction of some other attributes that belong to God's nature as necessarily as power does. . . . It is no diminution of power to be unable to do things that are no object of power; and similarly it is no diminution of either power or liberty to have such a perfect and unalterable rightness of will that it's never possible to choose to do anything inconsistent with it.

(4) Liberty, properly speaking, is not in itself an imperfection but a perfection. For it is in the highest and completest degree present in God himself: every act in which he exercises any moral attribute such as goodness, justice, or truth, comes from the most perfect liberty and freest choice; otherwise goodness wouldn't be goodness, nor would justice and truth be excellences, because these things in the very idea and formal notion of them utterly exclude all necessity. It has sometimes been taught that liberty is a great imperfection because it is the source of all sin and misery. But properly speaking what exposes us to misery is not liberty but the misuse of it. It's true that liberty makes men •capable of sin and consequently •liable to misery—and they couldn't be either of those if they didn't have liberty. But if you say that any power is an imperfection if by the misuse of it a creature can become more unhappy than if God had never given it that power at all, you'll have to say that a stone is a more excellent and perfect creature than man because unlike man it isn't capable of making itself miserable. And you'll be committed to saying that reason and knowledge and every other perfection—indeed, even existence itself—are all imperfections because without them a creature couldn't be miserable! In short, the only cause of creatures' misery is the misuse of liberty, i.e. the corruption of something that no

creature could be happy without; but liberty itself is a great perfection; the more perfect a creature is, the more perfect is its liberty; and the most perfect liberty is liberty that can never—by any ignorance, deceit, or corruption—be biased or diverted from choosing the proper object of free choice, namely the greatest good.

(5) [This is a short paragraph about ‘the state of good angels and of the saints in heaven’: great knowledge and closeness to God and freedom from temptation etc., giving them ‘unchangeable happiness in the everlasting choice and enjoyment of their greatest good’.]

(6) From what I have said on this topic it follows that the true ground and foundation of all eternal moral obligations, is this: The same reasons that (as I have shown) always necessarily determine the will of God—

namely the necessary and eternal different relations that different things have to one another, and the consequent fitness or unfitness of the application of different things (or different relations) to one another, unavoidably arising from the differences among the things themselves

—ought also constantly to determine the will of all subordinate intelligent beings. And when they do not, then such beings are setting up their own unreasonable self-will in opposition to the nature and reason of things and doing

I hope that what I have said about this debate has made it clear enough that the being and attributes of God are, to attentive and considering minds, abundantly capable of sound proof and demonstration; and that the adversaries of God and religion have no reason on their side. They claim to adhere strictly to reason, but all they have on their side

their best to make things be what they aren’t and can’t be, which is the highest presumption and greatest insolence imaginable. It is •acting contrary to their own reason and knowledge, •attempting to destroy the order by which the universe subsists, and therefore •offering the highest insult imaginable to the creator of all things, who governs all *his* actions by these rules and has to require the same of all his reasonable creatures. Those who base all moral obligations ultimately on the will of God must eventually come to this same position, except that they don’t clearly explain how God’s nature and will must necessarily be good and just, as I have tried to do. Those who base all moral obligations on laws made for the good of societies hold an opinion which, as well as being fully refuted by what I have said about the eternal and necessary difference of things, is directly and obviously self-contradictory. . . . If there’s no difference between good and evil until there are laws, there can’t be any reason to make laws. . . . To say that laws are needed ‘for the good of mankind’ is to accept that certain •things tend to the good of mankind, i.e. to the preserving and perfecting of their nature—•things that wise men therefore think should be established by laws. If the reason why certain things are established by wise and good laws is that they tend to the good of mankind, it’s obvious that they were good before being confirmed by laws!

\* \* \* \* \*

in this argument is vain confidence and great blindness and prejudice: they want to convince us that God has left himself wholly without witness in the fabric of the world, and that all the natural evidence is on the side of atheism and irreligion. I know that some people who haven’t ever turned their minds in this direction think that these things are all absolutely



above our comprehension, and when we dispute about these questions we don't know what we are talking about. But the most considerable atheists and pleaders for universal fatality have all thought fit to argue in this way in their attempts to undermine religion, so it is reasonable and necessary to oppose them in their own way. And this is also a good tactic because any argumentation that can possibly be used on the side of error can also be used with much greater advantage on the behalf of truth.

From what I have said about this debate we can see how it comes about that although nothing is so certain and undeniable as the necessary existence of God and the consequent deduction of all his attributes, men who have never attended to the evidence of reason and to the evidence of himself that God has given us can easily be in great measure ignorant of both. That the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right ones is so certain and evident that anyone who denies it is affirming something that can easily be reduced to an outright contradiction; but someone who never gives any thought to such things can easily be ignorant of this and countless other such infallible mathematical truths.

Yet the notices that God has been pleased to give us of himself are so many and so obvious—

- in the constitution, order, beauty, and harmony of the various parts of the world,
- in the frame and structure of our own bodies, and the wonderful powers and faculties of our souls,
- in the unavoidable thoughts of our own minds, and the common consent of all other men,

•in everything within us and everything outside us

—that there is absolutely no excuse for any man's being ignorant of God, even one with very low intelligence and great disadvantages of all sorts, who pays only slight and superficial attention to the works of God and thinks about reasons for things in the most low-down and commonplace way. He may indeed be unable to understand or be affected by fine-grained metaphysical demonstrations of the being and attributes of God, but then for the same reason he oughtn't allow himself to be shaken and unsettled by the subtle sophistries of sceptics and atheists. He can't answer them because he can't understand them; but he is obliged to adhere to the things he does know and the reasonings he can evaluate; and these are abundantly sufficient to determine and to guide the practice of sober and considering men.

But this is not all. God has by a clear and open revelation of himself, brought down from heaven by his own Son, our blessed Lord and Redeemer, and suited to every capacity and understanding, put to silence the ignorance of foolish men and the futility of sceptical and profane ones. By himself declaring to us his own nature and attributes, he has effectively headed off all the mistakes that we might be led into by the weakness of our reason, the negligence of our application, the corruption of our nature, or the false philosophy of wicked and profane men; and in this way he has infallibly provided us with sufficient knowledge to enable us to do our duty in this life, and to obtain our happiness in the life to come.

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UNDOCTORED ORIGINAL OF PARAGRAPH **(b)** ON PAGE 43

For, secondly, as foreknowledge implies not any other certainty than such as would be equally in things, though there was no foreknowledge; so neither does this certainty of event in any sort imply necessity. For let a fatalist suppose what he does not yet grant, that there was in man, as we assert, a power of beginning motion, that is, of acting freely; and let him suppose further, if he please, that those actions could not possibly be foreknown; will there not yet, notwithstanding this supposition, be in the nature of things the same certainty of event in every one of the man's actions, as if they were never so fatal and necessary? For instance, suppose the man, by an internal principle of motion and an absolute freedom of will, without any external cause or impulse at all, does some particular action today; and suppose it was not possible that this action should have been foreseen yesterday; was there not nevertheless the same certainty of event as if it had been foreseen? That is, would it not, notwithstanding the supposed freedom, have been as certain a truth yesterday and from eternity that this action was an event to be performed today, (though supposed never so impossible to have been foreknown) as it is now a certain and infallible truth that it is performed? Mere certainty of event, therefore, does not in any measure imply necessity; and consequently foreknowledge, however difficult to be explained as to the manner of it, yet, (since it is manifest it implies no other certainty but only that certainty of event which the thing would equally have without being foreknown) it is evident that it also implies no necessity.