

PROPOSITION X. That the self-existent being must be all-powerful. The self-existent being, the supreme cause of all things, must of necessity have infinite power.—This proposition is evident, and undeniable. For since nothing (as has been already proved,) can possibly be self-existent, besides himself; and consequently all things in the universe were made by him, and are entirely dependent upon him; and all the powers of all things are derived from him, and must therefore be perfectly subject and subordinate to him; it is manifest that nothing can make any difficulty or resistance to the execution of his will, but he must of necessity have absolute power to do every thing he pleases, with the perfectest ease, and in the perfectest manner, at once, and in a moment, whenever he wills it. . . . The only question is, what the true meaning of what we call infinite power is; and to what things it must be understood to extend, or not to extend.

Now, in determining this question, there are some propositions about which there is no dispute; which therefore, I shall but just mention.

As,

1st, Of working contradictions. That infinite power reaches to all possible things, but cannot be said to extend to the working any thing which implies a contradiction: As, that a thing should be and not be at the same time; that the same thing should be made and not be made, or have been and not have been; that twice two should not make four, or that that which is necessarily false should be true: The reason whereof is plain; because the power of making a thing to be, at the same time that it is not, is only a power of doing that which is nothing, that is, no power at all.

2dly. Or natural and moral evils. Infinite power cannot be said to extend to those things which imply natural imperfection in the being to whom such power is ascribed; as, that it should destroy its own being, weaken itself, or the like. These things imply natural imperfection, and are by all men confessed to be such as cannot possibly belong to the necessary self-existent being. There are also other things which imply imperfection in another kind, viz. moral imperfection;

* Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), *A Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God, the Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*. Glasgow: Printed for Richard Griffin and Co., 1823. Taken from http://www.ccel.org/ccel/clarke_s/being.txt

concerning which, atheism takes away the subject of the question, by denying wholly the difference of moral good and evil; and therefore I shall omit the consideration of them until I come to deduce the moral attributes of God.

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PROPOSITION XII. . . . For though nothing is more certain (as has been already proved in the ninth proposition of this discourse,) 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, and when he has no other constraint upon him but this, that his goodness inclines his will to communicate himself and to do good; so that the divine nature is under no necessity but such as is consistent with the most perfect liberty and freest choice; (which 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 man prays to him to be omnipresent, or thanks him for being omnipotent, or for knowing all things:) though nothing, I say, is more certain than that God acts, not necessarily, but voluntarily; yet it is nevertheless as truly and absolutely impossible for God not to do (or to do any thing contrary to) what his moral attributes require him to do; as if he was really not a free but a necessary agent. And the reason hereof is plain: because infinite knowledge, power, and goodness in conjunction, may, notwithstanding the most perfect freedom and choice, act with altogether as much certainty and unalterable steadiness, as even the necessity of fate can be supposed to do. Nay, these perfections cannot possibly but so act; 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, may be as certain and steady a principle of action as the necessity of fate. We may, therefore, as certainly and infallibly rely upon the moral as upon the natural attributes of God; it being as absolutely impossible for him to act contrary to the one as to divest himself of the other; and as much a contradiction to suppose him choosing to do any thing inconsistent with his justice, goodness, and truth, as to suppose him divested of infinity, power, or existence. The one is contrary to the im-

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mediate and absolute necessity of his nature, the other to the unalterable rectitude of his will: The one is in itself an immediate contradiction in the terms, the other is an express contradiction to the necessary perfections of the divine nature. To suppose the one, is saying
5 absolutely that something is, at the same time that it is not; to suppose the other, is to say that infinite knowledge can act ignorantly, infinite power weakly, or that infinite wisdom and goodness can do things not good or wise to be done: All which are equally great and equally manifest absurdities. This, I conceive, is a very intelligible account of
10 the moral attributes of God, satisfactory to the mind, and without perplexity and confusion of ideas: I might have said it at once, (as the truth most certainly is,) that justice, goodness, and all the other moral attributes of God, are as essential to the divine nature as the natural attributes of eternity, infinity, and the like. But because all atheistical
15 persons, after they are fully convinced that there must needs be in the universe some one eternal, necessary, infinite, and all-powerful being, will still, with unreasonable obstinacy, contend that they can by no means see any necessary connexion of goodness, justice, or any other moral attribute, with these natural perfections; therefore, I chose to
20 endeavour to demonstrate the moral attributes by a particular deduction, in the manner I have now done.

2dly. Of the necessity of God's doing always what is best and fittest in the whole. From hence it follows, that though God is a most perfectly free agent, yet he cannot but do always what is best and wisest in
25 the whole. The reason is evident; because perfect wisdom and goodness are as steady and certain principles of action as necessity itself. And an infinitely wise and good being, indued 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
30 which it is acted: it being 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 of producing its necessary effect. There was indeed no necessity in nature, that God should at first create such be-
35 ings as he has created, or indeed any beings at all; because he is in himself infinitely happy and all-sufficient. There was also no necessity in nature that he should preserve and continue things in being after they were created; because he would be as self-sufficient without their

continuance, as he was before their creation. But it was fit, and wise, and good, that infinite wisdom should manifest, and infinite goodness communicate itself. And therefore it was necessary (in the sense of necessity I am now speaking of,) that things should be made at
5 such time, and continued so long, and indued with various perfections in such degrees, as infinite wisdom and goodness saw it wisest and best that they should. And when and whilst things are in being, the same moral perfections make it necessary that they should be disposed and governed according to the exactest and most unchangeable laws of eternal justice, goodness, and truth; because, while things
10 and their several relations are, they cannot but be what they are; and an infinitely wise being cannot but know them to be what they are, and judge always rightly concerning the several fitnesses or unfitnesses of them; and an infinitely good being cannot but choose to act
15 always according to this knowledge of the respective fitness of things; it being as truly impossible for such a free agent, who is absolutely incapable of being deceived or depraved, to choose by acting contrary to these laws, to destroy its own perfections, as for necessary existence to be able to destroy its own being.

20 3dly. Of the impossibility of his doing evil. From hence it follows, that, though God is both perfectly free, and also infinitely powerful, yet he cannot possibly do any thing that is evil. The reason of this also is evident. Because, as it is manifest infinite power cannot extend to natural contradictions, which imply a destruction of that very power
25 by which they must be supposed to be effected; so neither can it extend to moral contradictions, which imply a destruction of some other attributes as necessarily belonging to the divine nature as power. I have already shown that justice, goodness, and truth, are necessarily in God; even as necessarily as power, and understanding, and knowledge of the nature of things. It is therefore as impossible
30 and contradictory to suppose his will should choose to do any thing contrary to justice, goodness, or truth, as that his power should be able to do any thing inconsistent with power. It is no diminution of power not to be able to do things which are no object of power: and it
35 is in like manner no diminution either of power or liberty to have such a perfect and unalterable rectitude of will as never possibly to choose to do any thing inconsistent with that rectitude.