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EXAMINATION

Of the Notion of

Moral Good and Evil,

Advanced in a late Book, entitled,

The Religion of Nature delineated.

By **JOHN CLARKE,**

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EXAMINATION
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EVIL, &c.



O advance wrong Notions of Religion, is apt to have these two very ill Effects.

1. To mislead such as are imposed upon thereby in the Conduct of Life; and
2. To expose Religion to the Insults of those that being engaged in Deism or Atheism, or inclinable that way, have, notwithstanding their Folly, Sense enough

nough to perceive the Weakness of such Notions. 'Tis upon this Account I have thought it worth while to take under Examination the first Section of a late Book, entitled *The Religion of Nature delineated*, writ by one Mr. *Wollaston*, a Person of considerable Parts, who might have made a fine Book of it, had he set out upon a right Bottom : But unluckily falling upon a whimsical Notion of Morality, and perhaps too much tickled with the Novelty of it, and a Desire to support, and leave it as a Legacy to the World, has so leavened his Treatise with it, as must render it disagreeable to the most judicious Readers, and at the same time expose Morality, instead of recommending it. There is besides such a Mixture of Pedantry in almost every Page, as is very unaccountable in a Man of his Sense. The *Latin* and *Greek* Quotations are generally very little to the Purpose, unless it can be supposed to the Purpose, to express Thoughts, and those oftentimes pretty common, and to be met with in numerous Authors, in *Latin* and *Greek*, at the Bottom of the Page, which have been already as well or better expressed in the Text it self in *English*. This is stopping and disturbing his Reader to no Purpose, and preventing him from taking in the Sense of what he reads, in the most easy expeditious Manner, and to the best Advan-

Advantage. But what he could mean by his frequent Quotations from the Rabbinical Writers, especially upon such a Subject, unless it was to make a Parade of his great Reading in a sort of Authors remarkable for nothing but Stupidity and Lying, must be the Wonder of every Man of Sense that reads him. He knew very well what Kind of Character the Rabbins have amongst the Learned, and how well they deserve it, and must be sensible, tho' their Character was the reverse of what it is, how little to the Purpose of his Readers it was, to trouble them with Quotations, they would none of them, or not one in ten thousand understand. But this *en passant* only.

The Author in the first Section of his Book proposes to shew upon what Ground the Law of Nature stands, from what Principle it is to be deduced, or how it may be made out, that there is such a Law or Religion of Nature; and this in answer to the first Query of his Friend, *Is there really any such Thing as natural Religion properly and truly so called?* I shall transcribe the Substance of what he has said, to explain and vindicate his Notion, to save the Reader the Trouble of turning continually to his Book.

Page 8. We are told, *a true Proposition may be denied, or Things may be denied to be what they are, by Deeds as well as by*
express

express Words, or another Proposition.— That there are many such Acts, as constitute the Character of a Man's Conduct in Life, which have in Nature, and would be taken by any indifferent Judge, to have a Signification, and to imply some Proposition as plainly to be understood, as if it was declared in Words; and therefore, if what such Acts declare to be, is not, they must contradict Truth as much, as any false Proposition or Assertion can. This is illustrated by an Example. If a Body of Soldiers seeing another Body approach, should fire upon them, would not this Action declare, that they were Enemies, and if they were not Enemies, would not this military Language declare what was false? Again p. 13. I lay this down as a fundamental Maxim, that whoever acts as if Things were so, or not so, doth by his Acts declare that they are so, or not so, as plainly as he could with Words, and with more Reality; and if the Things are otherwise, his Acts contradict those Propositions, which assert them to be as they are. No Act (whether Word or Deed) of any Being, to whom moral Good or Evil are imputable, that interferes with any true Proposition, or denies any thing to be as it is, can be right. This Proposition the Author endeavours to support by several Reasons, which shall hereafter

after be taken notice of. P. 16. *What has been said of Actions inconsistent with Truth, may also be said of many Omissions, or Neglects to act, that is, by these also true Propositions may be denied to be true, and then those Omissions by which this is done, must be wrong.* Again p. 20. *Every Act therefore of such a Being as is before described, and all those Omissions, which interfere with Truth (i. e. deny any Proposition to be true, or suppose any thing not to be what it is, in any regard) are morally evil in some Degree or other, the forbearing such Acts, and the acting in Opposition to such Omissions, are morally good, and when any thing may be either done or not done, equally without the Violation of Truth, that Thing is indifferent. I would have it to be minded well, that when I speak of Acts inconsistent with Truth, I mean any Truth, any true Proposition whatsoever, whether containing Matter of Speculation or plain Fact. I would have every thing taken for what in Fact and Truth it is.*

From all this our Author's Notion of moral Good and Evil I think is very evident. Those Acts according to him are morally good or obligatory, the Omission whereof would amount to, or imply the Denial of some Truth, any Truth whatsoever. Those Omissions, Neglects, or Forbearances,

bearances to act are morally good and obligatory, where the Actions omitted or forborn, would, if perform'd, be a Denial of the Truth. And all Actions or Omissions whereby a Man denies Truth of any Kind whatsoever, are immoral and unlawful. I suppose this Sort of Language of denying Truth by Action, or acting a Lie, as the Author somewhere expresses himself, will be a little surprizing to the Reader. And I am afraid the Novelty surprized the Author into an Approbation of it, and a passionate Desire to make good what he thought would gain him the Character and Credit of being an Original. He takes notice, that what he has advanced concerning the Nature of moral Good and Evil, and is the prevailing Thought that runs through his Book, he never met with any where. And I hope to make it appear, before I have done with him, it would have been more for his Credit, if it had not been to be met with in his Book.

I desire the Reader to take notice, that Affirming and Denying are Actions, which in strict Propriety of Language are only applicable to Agents; so that Actions, whether Words or Deeds, can not be properly said to affirm or deny any thing; the Agent only can be properly said to affirm or deny Truth by his Actions, whether Words or Deeds. This tho' it may seem a nice Distinction

stinction, yet is not more nice than necessary ; for in order to a Person's affirming or denying the Truth, an Intention to affirm or deny is requir'd, without which he cannot be said to affirm or deny it. A Man is then, and then only, said to affirm or deny a Thing, when he conveys a Proposition in his own Mind to the Minds of others ; as expressing his own Sense, Apprehension or Persuasion of the Agreement or Disagreement of Things. It matters not, what Notions or Propositions his Words or Actions may naturally, or by Compact, excite in the Minds of those that hear the one, or see the other ; if he himself had no such Propositions in his own Mind, had no Intention of communicating any such Propositions to others, he cannot in any Propriety of Language be said to affirm or deny them. Thus for Instance, a Person that should pronounce, in the hearing of others, Words in the *Greek* Tongue, which he understands not, equivalent to this Proposition in *English*, There is no God, could not be said to deny the being of God ; and for this Reason, because he had no such Proposition in his own Mind, nor any Intention of conveying it to the Minds of others. The same may be said of Deeds, as well as Words. Let us suppose some Action should as necessarily convey the aforementioned Proposition into the Minds of such as

should see or hear of it, as Words themselves could ; yet suppose the Agent altogether insensible of it, and to have no such Intention at all, he could not be said to deny the Being of a God. Let us suppose, again, Orders given in a Nation under the Apprehension of an Invasion from an Enemy, that Beacons should be fir'd, or Lights set up in such and such Places, to give Notice of his Approach ; that Persons were appointed accordingly for the Purpose, and agreed to execute the said Orders : If they fire the Beacons, or set up the Lights, that Action would be equivalent to this Proposition, The Enemy is come ; and they might be said thereby to affirm a Truth, if the Enemy was come, and a Lie if he was not, because this was really meant and intended. But supposing other Persons ignorant of the Orders and Use of Beacons, should fire the Beacons, or set up Lights, they could not be said thereby to affirm that the Enemy was come, notwithstanding their Action would necessarily convey that Proposition to the Minds of such as, being acquainted with the Orders given, should see the Lights ; and that for this Reason only, because they had not the least Intention to affirm any such Thing. All this, I think, is plain beyond Dispute, and need not be longer insisted upon.

If therefore nobody can be said to affirm or deny any thing, without an Intention so to do, I doubt the greatest of Villains, will, according to Mr. *Wollaston's* Doctrine, stand discharged from the Guilt of the greatest of Crimes; since they are so far from intending the Denial of any Truth, any true Proposition whatsoever, by the Rapine and Murder they are guilty of, that they never so much as once imagine, their Actions have any such Tendency, Meaning or Signification at all. Does a Villain that demands a Man's Money upon the Road, with a Pistol at his Breast, intend thereby the Denial of any Truth, or the Truth Mr. *Wollaston* pretends is denied by such an Action, *viz.* that the Money belongs to the Traveller? Far from it! He never so much as dreams of the Denial of any such Thing, nor has his Action any such Signification, but quite the contrary. For Men do not use to claim their own in that violent manner, but Rogues frequently take that Method to deprive honest People of their own; and therefore the Thought that would naturally arise in the Mind of a Spectator upon it, that is, the natural Meaning or Signification of the Action would be, that the Money certainly belong'd to the Traveller, and not the Highwayman.

If it should be said in Defence of our Author, that tho' the Action of the Highwayman does not indeed imply a Denial of the Money to be the Traveller's, yet it may interfere with other Truths ; that I put too precise and strict a Sense upon his Words ; whereas he means no more, but that Actions or Omissions denominated immoral, have a natural Meaning or Signification, inconsistent with some Truth ; and that therefore the Immorality of any Action, or Omission, does not lie in the Intention, but in the natural Tendency or Signification of the Action or Omission to deny some Truth, in a Fitness to raise, or excite in the Minds of such as see or hear of it, Propositions contrary to the Truth. I answer, this is strange Morality indeed, and such as renders a Person that denies a Truth in Words without being sensible it is a Truth, and so consequently without any Intention to deny the Truth, equally guilty with him who denies it, though he knows it to be a Truth ; for in both Cases the Words are supposed to be the same, and consequently their Inconsistency with the Truth precisely the same ; so that if the Immorality of the Action lies there exclusive of the Intention, it is plain the Guilt must be the very same.

Take it therefore which way you will, whether an Intention to deny the Truth be
made

made necessary or not necessary to the Immorality of any Action, Mr. *Wollaston's* Doctrine cannot stand. Upon the former Supposition, the greatest of Rogues will be excusable in the vilest of Actions for want of this Intention to deny the Truth, as it is very certain they have it not. They trouble not their Heads about Truth, or the Denial of it; all they are concerned for, is to get Money to spend in Lewdness and Debauchery; and their Manner of getting it, is so far from implying such a Denial of Truth, as Mr. *Wollaston* supposes the Immorality of their Action to consist in, that the natural Signification of it lies quite the contrary way, as I have above taken notice. And upon the Supposition that an Intention to deny the Truth, is not necessary to the Immorality of an Action, but that it is sufficient to render an Action immoral, that it has a Meaning or Signification inconsistent with some Truth, tho' the Agent has not the least Intention of denying any Truth: I say upon this supposition it will be a crime, and as great a crime to deny the Truth thro' Ignorance or Mistake, as to do it wittingly and knowingly, with a perverse and malicious Intention; which to be sure is admirable Morality.

Tho' what has been said be sufficient to blast our Author's new Notion of Morality, yet I shall not leave him thus, I have not

done with him by far. Affirming or denying is neither more nor less than conveying our Sense (real or pretended) of things, their Agreement or Disagreement to others by Words. This is the primary, original, and most proper Notion of affirming and denying. But because it is possible, to some Degree, to convey our Minds or Sense of Things to others, by Actions as well as Words, where they have by Consent a Signification or Meaning apply'd to them, for that Purpose the Sense of the Words *affirm* and *deny* has perhaps been sometimes extended to Actions of that kind; and if any one has a mind to use them so, I shall not dispute the Propriety of that Use of them with him. But to extend them farther to such Actions as the Consent of Men has not attached any Meaning to at all, if it be not peculiar to Mr. *Wollaston*, is at best a violent Figure, a bold Catachresis, such as should by all means be avoided in philosophical Discourses, where the plainest Language, and the least liable to be disputed, is certainly the best. This Stretch, in point of Language, has obliged him to put forc'd and violent Meanings upon the several Instances of immoral Actions he has Occasion to take notice of, such as, I dare say, never entered into the Thoughts of any body before himself. *Does a Man break a Bargain?*

gain? this is, according to Mr. *Wollaston*, denying the Truth by Action, denying there was any Bargain: Tho' if another might take the same Freedom, or pretend to the like Skill for the finding out the Sense and Meaning of Actions, he would be apt to think it perhaps a Denial not of the Bargain, as tho' there had been none, but of the Obligation only to keep it. Another Critic in Actions would perhaps find it out to be a Denial of neither, but an Affirmation rather of this Proposition, that the Breach of the Bargain was a likely means to rook his Chapman of some Money, or at least save his own, and thereby lay the Disturbance which a covetous griping Humour at that time gave him. And if such a Critic should stand buff, in vindication of the Fellow's Action, as very innocent, and so far from implying the Denial, that it imported the Affirmation of a manifest and undeniable Truth, I see not how our Author would be able to come handsomely off with him; he would find himself in some danger, I doubt, of being fool'd at his own Weapon; it would at least, I think, be an even Wager on the Critic's side.

Again, is a rich Man regardless or negligent of the poor? according to Mr. *Wollaston*, he denies by that Neglect the Condition of the poor to be what it is, his
 own

own Condition to be what it is. Does a Man lie with his Neighbour's Wife? he by that Action impudently denies her to be his Neighbour's, and affirms her to be his own; tho' the Circumstance of Secrecy, with which that kind of Gallantry is usually carried on, visibly implies the quite contrary, *viz.* that she is not his own: Which being a Truth, some people may perhaps be thankful to our Author for the notable Argument his doctrine furnishes them with, to prove the Innocence of Adultery. Besides, this Action is the Affirmation of another Truth, *i. e.* that the Man is in love, and knows no other way so ready to make himself easy as that. And several other Meanings perhaps might be found conformable to Truth, all of them as likely and natural at least as those our Author has thought fit to assign. For these Actions are, I think, something like the Clinking of a Bell; you may, by the Help of that Freedom Mr. *Wolaston* takes with them, make them say almost what you have a mind; affirm or deny Truth just as you please. Nay, I do not know but a good ingenious Fellow, that would but apply his Parts for some reasonable Time to study the Meaning of Actions, might venture for a Wager, with any one of the Admirers of our Author's new Notion of Morality, to drop Meanings with him,

him, a Truth affirmed for a Truth denied, to Ranting, Roaring, Tearing, Swearing, Drinking, Gaming, Pimping, Whoring, or whatever Species of immoral Action he could think of besides.

Will our Author needs have it that all Vice, every immoral Action denies some Truth? let that be granted, we will for once allow him the Privilege of expressing himself in his own way: But then he must be forced to allow that every such Action or Omission does as well affirm Truth as deny it: For Instance this Truth, that the Person concern'd proposes or promises to himself some Interest or Advantage, some Pleasure or Satisfaction from his vicious and immoral Behaviour. This Meaning of his Behaviour is a certain Truth, and much more obvious in any Instance of Immorality that can be put, than any of those Mr. *Wollaston* has invented. It will avail nothing to say, that notwithstanding any vicious Action or Omission implies indeed this Truth, yet it denies some other Truth, which is sufficient to bring it under the Denomination of vicious or immoral; for I say on the other hand let the Action deny what Truth you will, yet since it affirms other Truth, that is as sufficient to bring it under the Denomination of virtuous.

For if the Denial of Truth, any Truth whatever be, as Mr. *Wollaston* pretends, immoral, and for this Reason only, because it is a Denial of the Truth, without any Reference or Regard to Consequences, that may follow from Actions or Omissions, whereby Truth is denied; must not then the affirming of Truth, any Truth, whether of any Consequence or Importance, or no, be matter of Duty, or a Virtue, or at least very commendable or praise-worthy? For if Truth, all Truth without Exception, be so very sacred, as that Mankind ought to have a supreme, ultimate and terminating Regard to it in all their Conduct, in all they say or do, if Vice be Vice, therefore and only upon Account of its Opposition to, or Inconsistency with the Truth; it will puzzle, I doubt, any one even of our Author's Head-piece, to allege a solid substantial Reason, why the affirming of Truth, any Truth whatever by Word or by Deed, even in Cases, where Forbearance or Omission would not imply a Denial of Truth, should not be look'd upon as a Virtue, or meritorious; because by this means as Regard is shewn to Truth, to which the highest Regard is due, and upon Account of which alone any Regard is due to ought else, according to Mr. *Wollaston*. Does not Virtue receive all its Merit from the Regard it implies

plies to Truth? must not therefore every Action, whether Word or Deed, whereby a Regard is paid to Truth, or Truth is affirmed, be at least commendable, if not matter of strict Duty? And if so, it will then be a glorious Exercise for a Man to spend his Time in thrumming over such worthy and weighty Propositions as these, A Man's no Horse, a Horse no Cow, a Cow no Bull, nor a Bull an Ass. Every body at first Sight perceives how ridiculously trifling this would be, and may thereby judge of our Author's Doctrine, from which such silly idle Consequences visibly and manifestly flow.

If it should be further alledged in Behalf of our Author, that all immoral Actions deny more Truths than they affirm, and are upon that Account immoral. I answer, this is uncertain, and perhaps false; for I doubt not but a Man of Invention equal to that of our Author might assign to any Species of vicious Action or Omission, as many probable Meanings, affirmative of Truth, as he could for the Denial of it. But be that as it will, to put Morality upon such a Foot is visibly ridiculous, and unworthy of a serious Confutation.

That Action or Omission, or Persons by Action or Omission, cannot be properly said to affirm or deny Truth, unless where Acti-

on has by Consent a Signification applied to it; which Signification is designed to be communicated to others, has been above sufficiently shewn. The only reasonable and true Sense therefore that can be put upon Mr. *Wollaston's* general Assertion, That Men may by their Actions or Omissions deny Truth, is this, That Actions, even such as are not by Compact or Agreement made expressive of, and equivalent to Propositions, may yet convey Propositions into the Minds of such as may see, or otherwise come to the Knowledge of them, inconsistent with, or contrary to some Truth, even where a Person has no Intention by his Action or Omission of conveying any such Sense or Proposition to the Minds of others. This is all, I say, that can be allowed him, and perhaps all at bottom that he meant, tho' his improper and barbarous way of wording himself, might easily mislead his Reader into an Imagination, that he meant something further. We are now therefore to examine his Doctrine according to this Sense of his Words.

That Actions or Omissions oftentimes betray Mens Sense of Things, real Intentions or Designs, is too obvious to be denied; and therefore such Actions or Omissions may in some Sense be said to have a Signification; but yet so far from being certain

or

or determinate, generally speaking, that the same Action or Omission not only may, but frequently does convey into the Minds of different People different Notions or Propositions, and oftentimes such as are quite contrary to one another. A Man, not acquainted with the World, meets with a Sharper, that treats him with abundance of Civility and Respect, in Hopes by that means of finding an Opportunity of picking his Pocket, or rooking him of his Money at Game: The poor innocent Mortal naturally from thence conceives a good Opinion of him, and the Proposition conveyed to his Mind by the Sharper's ensnaring Carriage is this, that he's a mighty civil honest Gentleman. A Spectator, well acquainted with the World, that observes the Rogue's Air and Manner, conceives immediately a quite different Notion of him, and the Meaning or Signification of the Sharper's Action to him is, that he is a cunning designing Rascal. I desire to know which of these Meanings is the right one, or whether both these Significations may be allowed as just and proper Significations of the Rogue's Action? If only one is to be allowed it will be a hard matter, I fear, to assign a very satisfactory Reason, why one rather than the other should pass for the just and proper Meaning of the Rogue's Action; when both

seem to have an equal Title to it, as being both equally conveyed, and the one as naturally as the other. The Difficulty of making a Determination will grow with the Number of Significations the same Action may have or convey to different People. This Difficulty attending our Author's Scheme, he seems not to have been in the least aware of, tho' it lies so very obvious, and was so necessary to be taken notice of, in order to the clearing up of his Doctrine, and delivering it from an Incumbrance that seems to confound and overwhelm it all at once; for the same Action or Omission may have very different Significations, or convey very different Notions and Propositions to the Minds of different People, some of which may be conformable to Truth, and others not. Without some Criterion therefore whereby to determine which of the various Significations of the same Action or Omission are to be taken into the Account, in order to judge of the Morality or Immorality thereof; all he has said upon the Subject signifies not one Straw, and amounts to nothing. Unless his Meaning was that all Actions or Omissions that convey but to any one single Body a Sense inconsistent with the Truth, any Truth whatever, for so he words himself, are to be look'd upon as immoral. If this was his Meaning, it was a very strange one,

one, and as wild a Thought as ever enter'd into the Soul of Man: Such, in short, as may make the most innocent, and the most virtuous Actions in the World, and such as are allow'd so to be by all Mankind, immoral; because such may chance to convey (as they often have done) Notions or Apprehensions utterly inconsistent with Truth.

It would be easy to multiply Instances of Actions, very various in their Significations, some of which would be agreeable to Truth, others not; but I shall only add one more brought by himself, p. 9. *When Popillius Lænas solicited to have Cicero proscribed, and that he might find him out and be his Executioner; would not his Carriage have sufficiently signified to any one, who was ignorant of the Case, that Tully either was some very bad Man, and had deserved capital Punishment, or had some way grievously injured this Man, or at least had not saved his Life, or had not as much Reason to expect his Service and good Offices, upon Occasion, as he ever had to expect Tully's? Now all these various Significations Lænas's Action had by our Author's own Confession; but then it is worth the Reader's while to remark, that this Carriage of Lænas, he says, would only have signified one or other of these various Meanings*

Meanings to one that was ignorant of the Case. What then would that Carriage of his have signified to one that was not ignorant of the Case, but knew *Tully* to be a Person of eminent Parts, Learning, Eloquence and Virtue, that had merited highly from his Country, and particularly from *Lænas*, whose Life he had saved? why'tis as clear as the Sun can be at Noon-day, that to such a Person it would have had ne'er a one of those various Significations, but only this, that *Lænas* was what the World call an ungrateful profligate Villain. What then becomes of our Author's Denial of the Truth, implied in the Behaviour of *Lænas*, wherein precisely, according to him, the Immorality of it lay, and without which it would have been very innocent? Perhaps we shall be told in the Language and Stile of our Author, that *Lænas* by his Carriage denied *Cicero* to be a Man; a very pretty Defense! He must have been ignorant of the Case with a witness, that from the Carriage of *Lænas* could have conceived an Imagination, that *Cicero* was a Cow.

From hence then, I say, our Author's new Scheme of Morality appears clogg'd and embarass'd with insuperable Difficulty. Since the same Actions will have various Significations, with respect to those that are and those that are not ignorant of the Case, that

that is, the Condition and Circumstances of the Actor, and the Relation he stands in to the World about him, and of those various Significations, some will be agreeable to Truth and some not. In the midst of all this perplexing Variety, what Significations we are to have regard to, in forming a Judgment of the Morality or Immorality of human Actions, will, I doubt, be impossible to determine upon any solid substantial Reasons: And yet without this all our Author's Doctrine comes to nothing. For to say, what is all that is left to be said to evade that Difficulty and Perplexity, that it is sufficient to render an Action or Omission immoral, if it does but communicate or carry with it an Intimation, that interferes with any Truth, to the Mind of any Body whatever, whether ignorant or not ignorant of the Case, I say, to pretend to evade the Difficulty thus, would be downright Madness and Distraction. And therefore, tho' what our Author says up and down his Book, seems to amount to that, and any one at first Reading would be inclinable to think he meant so; yet, as that is a Meaning not to be reconcil'd with common Sense, I cannot think he would be guilty of such an Absurdity: And therefore it will lie upon the Espousers of his Notion of Morality, if any such there be,

to make up the Deficiency of his Scheme, by giving us some Criterion, whereby we may be enabled to distinguish, in the Variety of Significations the same Action or Omission may possibly have, those we are to form a Judgment upon, as to the moral Good or Evil thereof.

But to go to the Bottom of this Business of the Signification of Actions at once.

The free and voluntary Actions of Men may have various Significations, according to the various Sense and Discernment, the different Knowledge of Mankind, particularly of the Condition and Circumstances of the Person acting, and those his Action has any Relation to, in different Observers. This is evident beyond all Dispute, that different Persons may have different Senses, Notions, Apprehensions or Propositions conveyed to them by the same Action. And accordingly we find that Persons well acquainted with the World, such as have studied Mankind, will penetrate strangely into other Men, and discover by their way and manner of Action their Notions, Humours, Inclinations, passions, real Designs and Intentions, where others of less Discernment will be altogether at a loss, or have very different Conceptions. I shall endeavour to illustrate what I say by another Instance fetch'd from our Author *p.* 10. *If A should enter*

enter into Compact with B, by which he promises and engages never to do some certain Thing; and after this he does that Thing; in this Case it must be granted that his Act interferes with his Promise, and is contrary to it.

Now it cannot interfere with his Promise but it must also interfere with the Truth of that Proposition, which says there was such a Promise made, or that there is such a Compact subsisting. If this Proposition be true, A made such a certain Agreement with B, it would be denied by this, A never made any Agreement with B; why? because the Truth of this latter is inconsistent with the Agreement asserted in the former. The Formality of the Denial, or that which makes it to be a Denial, is this Inconsistence: If then the Behaviour of A be inconsistent with the Agreement mentioned in the former Proposition, that Proposition is as much denied by A's Behaviour, as it can be by the latter or any other Proposition.

I observe in the first Place that what our Author says, that A's Act cannot interfere with his Promise, but it must interfere with the Truth of that Proposition, which says there was such a Promise made, is false. For let us suppose A comes to B, sometime after the Promise made, and makes a Declaration in these Words; I will do what I promised you I would not: 'Tis plain this Declaration interferes with, or is

contrary to the Promise, and yet is so far from denying that it acknowledges it. Why then may not the Action, which is but the Declaration in fact, or put in Execution, interfere, or be inconsistent with the Promise, without necessarily implying a Denial of it. Let us suppose again *C* a Stranger to both *A* and *B*; but accidentally present at the making of the Promise. The Action of *A*, contrary to his Promise, could never suggest to him that there had been no Promise, when he knew the contrary. 'Tis very evident the Action of *A*'s could have no such Intimation or Meaning with respect to *C*; but it might raise several other Thoughts or Imaginations in his Mind; as for Instance, this, perhaps *B* has releas'd *A* from the Obligation: Or this, perhaps *A* has made *B* Satisfaction some other ways: Or this, perhaps *B* has done some great Injury to *A*, and by that means cancel'd the Obligation: Or this, perhaps there was some Condition implied to be performed by *B*, which being not perform'd, *A* was at Liberty: Or this, *A* had forgot his Promise; or perhaps *B* is dead, and *A* by that means discharged from the Obligation: Or perhaps somebody told *A* so, and by that means occasioned his acting contrary to his Promise: Or perhaps he was commanded to do the Thing by some that had Authority so

to command him: Or finally *A* is, what the World call a Knave.

These are all possible Meanings of *A*'s Action to *C*, because it might very easily suggest or convey, one or more of these several Propositions, to his Mind. But our Author's pretended Meaning, it is utterly impossible *A*'s Action should suggest to *C*, who knew there had been such a Promise made: That Knowledge of his would effectually exclude the least Thought or Imagination, that there had been no Promise given. Now if we suppose *C*, very well acquainted with *A*, and *B*, then some of these Meanings may vanish, and of the rest different Significations become attached to the Action of *A*, according to the different Characters of *A*, and *B*. If *A* have a very good Name for Honesty, whilst *B* passes in the World for a Trickster, the Significations of *A*'s Action will be in his Favour, and Vice versa.

Now suppose any one of the first nine Significations to be true, the rest with the Tenth would be all false, and yet the Action of *A* very Innocent; whereas if the Morality of it was to be judged of, and determin'd by the plain obvious Meaning of our Author's Rule of Morality, that no Act that interferes with any true Proposition can be right, *i. e.* innocent or lawful, it ought

to

to be condemn'd as immoral, because it has so many various Meanings, all inconsistent with the Truth. As for Instance suppose *B* to have frankly released *A* from the Obligation of his Promise, unknown to *C*; *A*'s Action contrary to the Promise given, would be indisputably very harmless, innocent, and lawful: And yet all the other Meanings or Significations of his Action, would interfere with the Truth of that Proposition, that *B* had frankly released *A* from the Obligation of his Promise, and so by our Author's Rule, *A*'s Action would be immoral, and unlawful.

I suppose the Reader by this Time sees pretty plainly, how little the World is obliged to Mr. *Wollaston* for his new Notion, or Rule of Morality. I shall but take Notice of one Instance more of his Weakness upon this Head, of the Denial of Truth by immoral or vicious Actions. He tells us, p. 28. *that a Debtor, who refuses to pay his Creditor, directly denies the Money which is the Creditor's to be the Creditor's.* I Answer, tho' it should be never so true, upon the Supposal of Property amongst men, that the Debtor's Refusal did deny the Creditor's Property: Yet our Author is not at Liberty to suppose, there is such a Thing as Property in the World, or that any Man can be truly said to have a Property in any Thing:

Thing: Because such a Supposition, is taking the Thing for granted, which it is the Design of this first Section of his Book to prove. The Reader must remember, that what our Author proposes in this first Section, is to make out in general, that there is a Religion, or Law of Nature; now Property is founded in the Law of Nature, and is, without that, nothing but an empty Name: So that to suppose Property, is to suppose there is a Law of Nature, the very Thing in Question, and which it is the Business and Design of this Section to prove. That Property is grounded upon the Law of Nature, is evident, because it is nothing but a Power to enjoy or dispose of a Thing, agreeably to the good Pleasure of God, allowed, and granted, by the Law of Nature. Thus an honest man is said to have a Property in his Life, or a Right to his Life, that is, a Power or Licence from the Law of God, to enjoy it; so that whoever goes about to take it from him, or disturb him, in the peaceable Enjoyment of it, becomes thereby liable to the Displeasure of God, and his Vengeance. Thus too a Man is said to have a Property in Lands or Goods, that is, Allowance or Licence, from the Law of God, to use, and dispose of them, that is, give, sell, or barter them; and therefore whoever goes about, by Fraud, or by Force,

to molest, disturb, let, or hinder him, in the Use of his Property, contrary to the Intention of the Law, becomes thereby exposed to the Resentment of the Almighty, as acting contrary to his Pleasure, declared by the Voice of Nature. This is, I think, what every Body means by Property, that have any meaning at all in the Use of that Word, which I am afraid our Author had not, by his weak Way of talking about it. And from hence it appears very manifestly, a plain Begging of the Question to suppose any such Thing as Property, in an Attempt to prove, that there is a Law of Nature, because it is supposing the very Thing to be proved.

In other Instances of immoral Action or Omission, wherein Property is not concerned, our Author does, I think, keep pretty clear of the Supposition of moral Truth, and rather chooses to put strange kind of uncouth far-fetched Meanings, upon immoral Actions or Omissions, than to take Notice of one Meaning, they might be supposed to have a thousand Times more obvious than those of his own coining; that is, of their implying the Denial of moral Truth, or the supposed Obligation from the Law of God, with Respect to those Actions, or Omissions. And herein he acted very right, for these two very obvious Reasons. One is, that

that the Founding the Immorality or Viciousness of any action or Omission, in the Denial of moral Truth, or the Obligation from the Law of Nature, respecting that Action, or Omission, would have been visibly supposing the Thing he was to prove, that there is moral Truth, a Law or Religion of Nature ; for these are all the same. The other is, that a meaning assign'd to immoral Actions implying a Denial of moral Truth, would be in Effect setting aside the other pretended Meaning, implying a denial of Things to be what they are.

The Application of this to an Instance, will perhaps better let the Reader into my Meaning. *A Man of Ability*, he tells us, p. 17. *that should never give any thing to the Poor, would certainly deny the Condition of the poor, to be what it is, and his own to be what it is.* Now this appears at first Sight, to any indifferent Reader, a very violent, forc'd Sense, put upon the rich Man's Neglect, and such a Meaning, as, I dare say, never any one dreamt of, before our Author. The Condition of both, is oftentimes so very glaring, and evident to the World, that neither can the rich Man intend any such thing by his Neglect of the Poor, as to deny their Circumstances, and his own, to be what they are; that would be too stupid and ridiculous, for any one

in his Wits to intend ; and for that Reason his Omission cannot naturally carry any such Intimation, or Signification, along with it, but this rather, as vastly more obvious, and natural, that he did not look upon himself as obliged by any Law of God, to relieve them ; and so his Neglect of them would be a Denial, not of their Circumstances, and Condition, to be what they are, but only of his Obligation to regard or relieve them. Now this Meaning of the rich Man's Omission or Neglect, *viz.* the Denial of all Obligation to relieve the Poor, infinitely more obvious, and natural, than that of his own, he takes no Notice of, and so far he was undoubtedly right : Because that was visibly nothing to his Purpose, but inconsistent with it ; for to pretend to prove the rich Man's Neglect of the Poor immoral, because it implies a Denial of this Truth, that the Rich are obliged to relieve the Poor, is so palpably proving the Thing by itself, that no Man of our Author's Sense, or indeed but common Sense, could well be guilty of it. But having no clear distinct Notion of Property, he has, in Cases, where that is concern'd, unluckily blunder'd upon that manner of Proof, commonly called *petitio principii*. The Denial of Property in the Owner did not so visibly imply the Supposition of a Law of Nature, as the Denial of Obligation did. And

And then if our Author had taken Notice of, and insisted upon this Meaning of the rich Man's Inhumanity to the Poor, the Denial of all Obligation to relieve them, that would have effectually set aside the other, the Denial of his own, and the Poor's Circumstances, to be what they are, as being plainly inconsistent therewith; for if the natural Meaning of the rich Man's want of Charity, be a Denial of his Obligation to relieve the Poor, it is grounded upon the Supposition that their Circumstances and his own are what they are, and by consequence cannot stand with the contrary Supposition. There could, it's manifest, be no Foundation for any one to conceive, from the rich Man's Neglect of his poor Neighbours, any Imagination that he denied, or did not look upon himself to be obliged to relieve them, but upon the Supposition, that his Circumstances and his poor Neighbours are what they are, that is, that he was Rich, and they Poor. So that it is as plain as any thing can be, that those two Meanings are utterly incompatible and inconsistent with one another.

But supposing Actions or Omissions rightly denominated immoral, did really imply a Denial of the Truth, such as our Author contends for, a Denial of Things to be what they are; yet how will it follow from such

a Denial, that those Actions therefore are truly and properly immoral, that is, contrary to the Will and good Pleasure of God, declared by the Voice of Reason, or the Light of Nature? For this our Author gives several Reasons, which I come now, in the next Place, to examine. We are told, p. 13. *No Act (whether Word or Deed) of any Being to whom moral Good or Evil are imputable, that interferes with any true Proposition, or denies any thing to be as it is, can be right.* That is, if our Author means any thing to the Purpose, agreeable to the Will and Mind of God; and therefore what he says, must amount to this, that every such Action must be immoral, or contrary to some Law or Rule, which God has prescribed to the Actions, and Conduct of Men. For right and wrong must be here tantamount to moral and immoral, commanded and forbidden, agreeable and disagreeable to the divine Law; for if he means any thing else by right and wrong, it is visibly nothing to the Purpose.

His first Proof runs thus. *If that Proposition which is false be wrong, that Act which implies such a Proposition, or is founded in it cannot be right, because it is the very Proposition in Practice.* Here I fear the Word *wrong* stands for nothing, or what is the same as nothing, to our Author's

rhor's Purpose. The Terms of Right and Wrong are not applicable to Propositions at all, in any moral Sense, or Signification of them, nor to any thing else, but the Actions, or Omissions of reasonable Beings. What? You'll say perhaps, is not a false Proposition visibly wrong? Yes to be sure, if by wrong you mean false, a false Proposition is certainly false. Right and Wrong are Denominations given to things, upon account of their Agreement or Disagreement with some Rule, to which they are referred, and by which they are judged of. Now the only Rule to which Propositions, considered as true or false, are referred, and by which they are judg'd of, is the Nature and Existence of things, or matter of Fact. Such Propositions as are conformable thereto, may be, and are properly called right, those that are not, wrong; that is, true or false, and in no other Sense can Propositions be denominated right or wrong. These Terms in their Application to Propositions, signify neither more nor less, than true or false. For Instance, this Proposition, that the Diagonal of a Square is commensurable to the Side thereof, cannot be said to be wrong, in any other Sense, than as it is not agreeable to the Nature of those Lines, or the Nature of a Square; so that to say that Proposition is wrong, is but the very same, as to say it is false.

And

And I desire any one, that can dispute a Thing so very evident, to inform me how the Term *wrong*, in the moral Sense of it, can be applied to that or any other false Proposition whatsoever. Propositions considered in themselves, are never called, nor can properly be called moral or immoral. The affirming or denying Propositions may come under those Denominations, but the Propositions themselves cannot. If any Teacher of the Mathematicks should go about to mislead, and impose upon his Scholar, by affirming, and pretending to demonstrate the foresaid Proposition, that, I grant, would be wrong in the moral Sense of the Word, that is, it would be vicious or immoral, because forbid by the Law of God; but it is Nonsense to say the Proposition itself is so. This is so very plain, as not to admit of a Dispute. If therefore the Word *wrong* here signifies false, which is all the Sense it can have, when applied to Propositions; then what our Author says, will be this, *if that Proposition which is false be false, that Act which implies such a Proposition, or is founded in it cannot be true, or declarative of the Truth, contrary to that false Proposition*; which is to be sure very true, but at the same Time very trifling, and nothing at all to the Purpose; for the Thing to be proved was, not that Actions
 which

which imply a Denial of the Truth, cannot be declarative of the Truth they deny, which is self-evident, and needs no Proof, but that such Actions are immoral, or forbidden by God.

Our Author's second Proof, is but the same over again in different Words, to wit, *that nothing can interfere with any Proposition, that is true, but it must likewise interfere with Nature—and consequently be unnatural or wrong in Nature; for I desire any one to tell me, what interfering with Nature, unnatural or wrong in Nature, can possibly here signify, but false, or declarative of what is false.* So that our Author's Way of proving Actions, or Omissions, that deny Truth, to be immoral, or contrary to the Will of God, is but affirming over and over again in darker Language, that Actions or Omissions that deny Truth deny Truth: A wonderful Demonstration, to be sure, of their being immoral!

His third Proof, is the same again exactly, with a Variation of the Phrase only. He tells us, p. 14. *that to own things to be as they are, is to own what God causes, or at least permits, to be thus caused, or permitted, and this is to take things as he gives them, to go into his Constitution of the World, and to submit to his Will, revealed in the Books of Nature; to do this therefore must*
be

be agreeable to his Will, and if so the contrary must be disagreeable. Now the Phrases, *to take things as God gives them, to go into his Constitution of the World,* are but different Ways of wording the same Sense, of owning things to be as they are, by Actions or Omissions. If any one thinks otherwise, I desire him to make out how and wherein they differ; as likewise to shew how owning *Socrates* to have been a Person of admirable Virtue, and *Julius Caesar* a great Rogue, is *taking things as God gives them, and going into his Constitution of the World, submitting to his Will, revealed in the Books of Nature:* If any more is meant by that Language, than to own things to have been as they were or to be as they are. Perhaps I shall be told, that by owning things to be as they are, our Author means only owning them so to be, in Instances of Action or Omission, where a contrary Behaviour would imply a Denial of things to be as they are. To which I say, if he meant so, he should have said so; whereas his Proposition is general without restriction: However we shall apply his Language to an Instance, not liable to be disputed as improper. It is doubted whether a Man of Ability is obliged to relieve the Poor by any Law of Nature. Yes, says our Author, he is: Not to do it, would be to deny

deny his own Condition and that of the Poor to be what they are, and to relieve them will be *taking things as God has given them, and going into his Constitution of the World, submitting to his Will revealed in the Book of Nature*; so that *taking things as God has given them*, is here, it seems, altering things that God has caused or permitted to be; and *coming into his Constitution of the World*, is altering that Constitution, which he himself has appointed or permitted to be: A very strange Way of taking things as he has given them, and coming into his Constitution of the World. This Language, one would think, is rather more justly applicable to the quite contrary Conduct, a Neglect of the Poor; because by that things are left in the Condition he has caused or permitted them to be, and his Constitution of things suffered to remain unaltered. It is by this Time, I suppose, pretty evident to the Reader that this Language of Mr. *Wollaston's* amounts to nothing, but a dark mystical Way of Expressing, what in other Words he calls, owning things to be what they are, and is very far from being any Proof of what he proposed.

His next Proof is much of a piece with the former. *Things cannot be denied*, he says, *to be what they are without contradicting*

dicting Axioms and Truths eternal — that have always subsisted in the divine Mind — and cannot be denied, but the Truth of the divine Knowledge must be denied too. All this is but saying again in other Words, that the Denial of Truth is the Denial of Truth, and proves nothing. The Denial of any Truth is the Denial of that to be true which God knows to be true, because he knows all Truth; but cannot be called a Denial of the Truth or Certainty of the divine Knowledge, unless it was to be denied under that Consideration precisely, of its being Truth known to the divine Being. But be that as it will; let it be granted, that the Denial of any Truth is the Denial of the Truth of the divine Knowledge, it is a gross Absurdity, a Contradiction in Terms: But that it is an Immorality, should not here have been supposed but proved. Those that deny that God has given any Law to Men, do thereby deny that he has laid them under any Restraint, with respect to their Conduct towards him, or demands any Reverence or Regard from them: And therefore our Author, who undertook to prove that there is a Religion or Law of Nature, should not have taken the Thing for granted, as he here does. To deny Truth, says he, is to deny the Truth of the divine Knowledge: Well,

Well, what then? says the *Epicurean*, how does that prove it to be immoral or contrary to the divine Will? God's Happiness is not effected by the Behaviour of Men; and therefore he regards it not, but has left them to act as they please. So that to prove Actions or Omissions contrary to the Will of God, it is not sufficient to alledge that they imply a Denial of the Truth of the divine Knowledge, because such a Denial is no Immorality, but upon the Supposition of a Law that requires Honour and Worship to be paid to God; which is the very thing to be proved, and therefore not to be supposed. Our Author says indeed that it's contrary to the Government and Sovereignty of God; but saying is not proving. To suppose God to be a Governor, as our Author here does, without proving it, is to suppose he has given Laws to the World (for a Governor, a sovereign Governor, without Law, is a Contradiction in Terms) the very thing he should have proved.

It is a little surprizing to see how our Author presents his Reader, with the very self same Stuff, under different Disguises, over and over again. It brings to mind a Story, I have read, of a *Roman* General, that was entertain'd with a vast Variety, as he imagined, of several sorts of Venison,

very good, and at a time too when Veni-
 son was not much in Season. Upon ex-
 pressing his Wonder at it, he was still the
 more surpris'd to find it was only Swine's
 Flesh, disguised by various ways of Cookery ;
 just thus does our Author deal with his
 Readers: Whilst they imagine themselves
 entertain'd with a curious Variety of Veni-
 son, his Feast is all made up entirely of reasty
 Bacon. Instead of several solid substantial
 Reasons for his Doctrine, which a careless
 Perusal might dispose his Readers to ima-
 gine themselves regal'd with, there is in-
 deed nothing but the same Thought, that
 the Denial of Truth is the Denial of Truth,
 dressed up in a Variety of Phrase, with a
 Supposition all along of the Immorality of
 it, under that Disguise. But to return ; we
 are told in the fifth Place, *that to treat*
Things as not being what they are, is to
put bitter for sweet (that is, to deny Truth)
Darkness for Light (deny Truth again)
crooked for strait (denying Truth again)
Occidit miseros Crambe repetita. This is
 the old Song over again ; the Denial of
 Truth is the Denial of Truth. *Ohe ! jam*
satis est. Ah ! but here's worse behind
 still : It's to subvert all Science, renounce
 all Sense of Truth, flatly to deny the Ex-
 istence of any Thing. Wonderful ! who
 cou'd have thought it, if our Author had
 not

not told us so? or who besides himself cou'd have found out, for Instance, that to commit Fornication, is to deny that there is so much as one Woman in the World; and to get drunk, is to deny that there is one Drop of Liquor, strong or small, for a Man to quench his Thirst with, upon the Face of the whole Earth: Nay to deny that there is any Earth, any World, any Man, or ought else? How has poor Science done to subsist in the World, under such terrible and furious Assaults, from the Vices and Follies of Men? Nay, what is far more wonderful, how comes it so many vicious Men attain to so great a Degree of Perfection in the several Sciences? whilst they poor Fellows are, it seems, without knowing any thing of the Matter, or meaning any the least Harm of that kind, daily subverting all Science, renouncing all Sense of Truth, and falsely denying the Existence of any one Thing. I dare not be answerable for it, that the Reader shall not suspect our Author, from his way of talking, to have renounced all Sense of Truth. But I dare say he will think this Proof of his too extravagant to deserve a serious Confutation.

The last Reason for his Doctrine is, that *to deny things to be what they are, is a Transgression of the great Law of our Nature, the Law of Reason.* He was to prove there

there is a Law of Nature, a Law of Reason, and that Actions or Omissions, denying Truth, are contrary to that Law; and this is here done at last for a finishing Stroke, by a solemn Affirmation, without so much as the least Offer made for any thing of Proof.

Thus I have gone through all Mr. *Wolaston* has advanced, for the Support of his singular Notion of Morality; and having, I hope, sufficiently destroyed his fundamental Maxim, I judge it needless to pursue him in the Application of it to the several Branches of Morality. I shall only add a few Reflections, by which perhaps, the Reader may be enabled to discern the Weakness of his Doctrine, still the more clearly, and in a better Light.

He every where speaks of owning Things to be as they are, as in it self a matter of the highest Importance, as the *ne plus ultra*, beyond which no Man needs or ought to go in his Enquiries or Consultations, what is fit or proper to be done or not. This is the Principle in which the Mind is finally to rest and acquiesce, as if that alone was a Thing desirable in and for itself, and every thing else with a View to that only; which is a Contradiction to the common Sense and Experience of Mankind: For a little Reflection may quickly satisfy any one, that
nothing

nothing but Pleasure or Happiness is or can be desirable upon its own Account, without Reference to any thing else: And that other Things are desirable and pursued by us, only so far as they are conceived or apprehended to be the Means of attaining Pleasure or Happiness. Nothing again is or can be the Object of Hatred or Aversion in it self, or upon its own Account, but Pain or Misery. Other Things we have a Hatred or Aversion for, not for themselves, but for the Pain or Misery that is supposed to attend or follow from them. Happiness, in short, is the ultimate End of all our Aims and Designs, all our Wishes and Desires. This, either present or future, we constantly and steadily pursue. Nor can it be otherwise: And for the Truth of this I appeal to the inward Feeling and Experience of all Mankind, not excepting our Author himself, who has something very like it, *p. 35.* where he tells us *Pain, considered in itself, is a real Evil; Pleasure a real Good — Pleasure is in itself desirable, Pain to be avoided:* Which is more than can be said of owning and denying things to be what they are, I am sure: The former is not desirable in and for itself alone, without Regard to any thing further; that is the Privilege of Happiness alone; consequently owning things to be as they are is

no further desirable than as it is a Means, more or less conducive to the End of all our Wishes and Desires, Happiness.

To insist therefore with so much Stress upon the treating of Things, as what they are; to make such a mighty Pother, so huge a Din and Bustle up and down his Book, as he does, about owning Things by Action or Omission, to be what they are, a Man to be a Man, Men's Circumstances to be what they are, Happiness to be Happiness, Misery to be Misery, &c. as if this was something desirable in and for it self without Regard to Consequences, nay even preferable to Happiness it self; for some Cases put by him are so solved, and his way of talking now and then such as seem to imply as much; I say to insist upon this Owning of Things to be what they are, in such a way, is talking like one that was a Stranger to human Nature. Happiness with him seems but to be Matter of a secondary Consideration to abet the Practice of Truth; as if Happiness had been appointed by the Author of Nature only to encourage the Practice of Truth, or owning Things to be what they are, and the Regard due to Truth not instituted or commanded, as it is purely and solely with a View to the Well-being and Happiness of Mankind. In all the Instances of Im-

morality

morality of the most dismal Consequence to the World, in representing the Nature of the Crime, the great Stress is laid upon their implying a Denial of the Truth, the Denial of things to be what they are, whilst the dreadful Consequences are overlook'd, or but slightly touch'd upon; as if God was more concern'd to have Things own'd for what they are, than to see his Creatures contribute mutually to one another's Happiness, which is representing him as an odd kind of a capricious Being (with Reverence be it spoken) whose Satisfaction consists in something, for which it is impossible the rational Part of the Creation should have any real Reverence or Veneration for him. And how his Doctrine can be reconciled with that of the divine Goodness, I leave to the Consideration and Judgment of the Reader. For, according to his Representation of Things, God seems not to take any Satisfaction in the Happiness of Mankind, further than their Happiness by being connected with the Practice of Truth, becomes a Means of inducing them to own by Action or Omission Things to be what in Fact and Truth they are. This seems with him to be the great and ultimate End of the great Creator, and that wherein all the Views, Aims, and Designs of Men are to terminate. Happiness indeed he does allow

us to pursue, and says we are obliged so to do: But then his Notion of Morality, and his Application of it up and down his Book, seems to imply, that we are not to pursue it as our main End, but only for the sake of practising Truth, or owning Things to be what they are; and because if we did not we should deny Happiness to be Happiness, a thing of infinitely more Weight and Consideration it seems than Misery; tho' if the Fear of the latter will not oblige Men to a Pursuit of Happiness, the insipid Consideration of denying Happiness to be Happiness will hardly effect it I should think. It was this aukward way of thinking, so disagreeable to Nature, that obliged him in Spight of all his good Sense, and contrary to the Streams of all the best Writers upon Morality, to that odd Determination of the two Cases put by him *p.* 29, where he maintains that a Man in extreme Danger of perishing by Hunger, and not reduc'd to that Extremity by any Fault but Misfortune only, may not steal from the Rich to save his Life. As likewise, where a Man has it in his Power to save the Life of an innocent Man from a Ruffian in pursuit of him, by a harmless Untruth, an Untruth that can hurt no body, he ought not to do it, but suffer the poor Innocent to perish, and perish himself likewise, rather than utter an Untruth, tho'

of

of no ill Consequence in the World to any Body. They must take it as their Fate, Truth will be Truth, and must retain the Character of its Force, let the Case be what it will: A very weighty and a very worthy Reason to be sure, but more likely I should think to move the Scorn or Indignation of the Reader than gain his Assent.

Mankind neither are, nor can be concerned for any thing but Happiness and the Means of attaining it. He that is compleatly happy, in a State of the highest Enjoyment, he either is, or conceives him capable of, has all he could wish for, and is by Consequence entirely free from all Desire of, or Concern for any thing else. Owning things therefore to be what they are, or a Conduct conformable to Truth, can signify nothing to Mankind any further than it is a Means to promote their Happiness; and by Consequence to urge the Practice of Truth, upon such a Being as Man, as desirable in and for itself, which nothing but Happiness can be, from which yet Mr. *Wolaston* himself allows it to be different, is doing nothing. If the Practice of Truth, or a Conduct conformable to Truth, be recommended, not indeed as a Thing desirable in and for itself, without reference to ought else, but only as a Means for the at-

taining of Happiness, something is said that may deserve the Attention of Mankind, but something that evidently overturns our Author's whole Scheme. For if this Conformity to Truth is pleaded for only upon the Score of its being the Way to procure Pleasure or Happiness, that is visibly to give the Preference to Happiness before Truth and the Practice thereof, since the latter is only valuable, it seems, so far as it proves a Means of attaining the former: And by Consequence a Regard to Truth will cease to be a Duty in all Cases, where it has not a Tendency to promote the Good and Happiness of Mankind; and human Actions or Omissions must be morally Good or Evil, according as they have in their Nature a Tendency to advance the Happiness or Misery of Mankind: And so our Author's general Idea or Notion of Morality is quite out of Doors.

This is so natural, that our Author could not help hitting upon it, and coming into it tho' it be so visibly inconsistent with his own Doctrine. He tells us, p. 21. *That neither all evil nor all good Actions are equal. Those Truths which they respect, may comprise matters of very different Importance—If A steals a Book from B, which was pleasing and useful to him, it is true A is guilty of a Crime, in not treating the*

Book as being what it is, the Book of B, who is the Proprietor of it, and one whose Happiness partly depends upon it. But still if A should deprive B of a good Estate, he would be guilty of a much greater Crime — Tho' the Convenience and innocent Pleasure that B found in the Use of the Book, was a Degree of Happiness, yet the Happiness accruing to him from the Estate, by which he was supplied not only with Necessaries, but with many other Comforts and harmless Enjoyments, vastly exceeded it. And therefore the Truth violated in the former Case, was, B had a Property in that: which gave him such a Degree of Happiness, that violated in the latter, B had a Property in that, which gave him a Happiness vastly superior to the other. The Violation therefore in the latter Case is, UPON THIS ACCOUNT, a vastly greater Violation than in the former. We are told again too p. 31. That tho' to act against Truth in any Case is wrong, yet the Degrees of Guilt varying with the Importance of things, in some Cases the Importance one Way or other may be so little as to render the Crime evanescent or almost nothing. All Truths then by Mr. Wolkaf-ton's own Confession are not of equal Importance, and their Importance is different, just in the same Proportion as they con-
duce

duce to the Happiness of Mankind; or, to speak more properly, according as a Conformity thereto in Practice, or the Conduct of Life, contributes more or less to that great End. Now if this be so, as it certainly is, and the Force of Truth obliges our Author to confess, why all this Bustle and Stir about the Practice of Truth, or owning by our Conduct things to be as they are, as if that in itself, without all further Reference, was of the utmost Importance, and the supreme and ultimate End, to which all our Behaviour ought to be directed? When after all there is a further End to be regarded, and this Conformity to Truth is only valuable, and to be regarded, just so much or so far as it is a Means to promote that End, the Happiness of Mankind. Truth, or a Conformity to Truth, rather receives its Value, its Importance from Happiness, or the Relation it has thereto as a Means to attain it. Why then did our Author stop short, and lay the Stress upon the Means instead of the End? Does not his own Account of the different Importance of different Truths visibly imply, that the great End, the sole End aimed at in all the Laws of Nature, is Happiness; since he acknowledges in express Terms, that the owning of Truth by our Conduct has more or less of moral Goodness in it,

as it contributes more or less to that End ; and the Disagreement of our Conduct with Truth has more or less of moral Evil in it, as it has more or less a Tendency to the Contrary, Unhappiness or Misery? The moral Good and Evil therefore of the Conduct of Men is to be judged of and determined by that Tendency, and nothing else : And the general Notion of Morality to be stated accordingly, and applied to the several Branches of the Law of Nature.

Here then we may fix with the utmost Assurance ; for we are as certain, that what has, in its Nature, a Tendency to promote the Well-being and Happiness of Mankind, is morally Good, and what has a contrary Tendency, morally Evil, as we are, that God is a good and gracious Being, truly concerned for the Happiness of his Creatures ; and a greater Certainty than this, we cannot have, because moral Good and Evil depend entirely upon the Supposition of the divine Goodness ; take away that, and moral Good and Evil vanish at the same Time. What we call the Laws of Nature would indeed, upon the contrary Supposition, be pretty good Rules of Convenience, generally speaking, but not properly Laws, or fit to be observed at all Times and in all Cases.

If therefore it be evident beyond all Question, that the moral Good or Evil of human Actions consists in a Tendency to promote the Welfare and Happiness of Mankind, or the contrary, Mr. *Wollaston's* general Idea of moral Good and Evil cannot be just, as not expressing that Tendency, wherein precisely the moral Good or Evil of human Actions consists; and besides, is so far from coinciding with it, that it's hardly applicable to any Species of human Action, except those of affirming or denying Truth by Words; and even there, in some extraordinary Cases, it will mislead us if followed, as it did him in the Case above mentioned: And with regard to other Actions, if his general Notion of Morality is to be applied to them, in the plain obvious Meaning of the Words, the most innocent, virtuous and commendable Actions in the World, must be frequently liable to be condemned as Immoralities, because as certainly interfering with Truth, as any confess'd Immorality can do: In the only Sense that Expression can possibly have in our Author's Use of it. And if his general Notion of Morality is not to be understood in the plain obvious Meaning of the Words, it has none at all that we can come at, and the Application of it can only lead us to endless Perplexity, by reason of the various

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rious Significations the same Action or Omission may have, some conformable to Truth, and others not. And a great many good or bad Actions will be found upon Enquiry hardly to have any Meaning at all, besides that universal one, that the Agent proposes to himself some Degree of Pleasure, Satisfaction, or Advantage, more or less, such as our Author has found out for various kinds of immoral Action, are the most unnatural and forced that could be thought of. To pretend that Cruelty and Injustice is denying a Man to be a Man, is nothing but mere Rant, to be wondered at in a Man of our Author's Sense; and borrowed from an hyperbolical Way of aggravating the Absurdity of such Behaviour, without ever strictly meaning what is said. And is such a loose Way of talking upon violent Acts of Injustice or Humanity, proper to be introduced into a philosophical Discourse upon the Law of Nature, to be made the Standard of Morality, a Criterion, whereby to judge of the moral Rectitude or Pravity of human Actions? Another of his Meanings too, applied to Actions of Inhumanity or Injustice, is the Denial of Happiness to be what it is, Misery to be what it is; a Meaning that I dare say Mr. *Wollaston* himself did not believe, any mortal Man from the Days of *Adam* to his own, ever imagined to be im-

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plied or signified by such Actions. How strangely unaccountable then is it in a Man of his Parts to lay a Stress upon such kind of Trumpery?

But supposing every immoral Action or Omission, and none but such, did interfere with, or imply a Denial of Truth, and in our Author's own Sense of that Expression (if he had any clear and determinate Meaning annexed to it, which is very much to be questioned) then indeed the interfering with or denying Truth would be a certain Criterion, whereby to distinguish immoral Action or Omission from what is not so; but still the Nature of Immorality, the Idea or formal Ratio of it, to borrow our Author's own Expression, would not consist in that Denial, but something else; for if it did, the Degrees too of moral Evil would depend upon that only: Actions or Omissions would be more or less immoral, more or less criminal, according as they denied more or less Truth; and such as denied equal Truths, or the same Truth, would be equally immoral or criminal. But here we have our Author himself falling in with us, for the confounding and confuting his own Doctrine; for he durst not pretend to measure the Degrees of Immorality by the Number of Truths violated alone, which he ought to have done, did Immorality
 consist

consist barely and precisely in the Violation of Truth as he affirms, p. 138. where he tells us, that the Idea and formal Ratio of moral Evil consists in acting a Lie. He has thought fit to take in the Importance of Truths violated as well as Number, p. 22. where he says, *the Degrees of Evil or Guilt are as the Importance and Number of Truths violated.* Which is a visible Contradiction to his own Doctrine, that the Idea or formal Ratio of moral Evil consists in acting a Lie. For if that be a just Representation of the Nature of moral Evil, then the more Truth is contradicted or violated, by any Action the wickeder it is: No, says our Author, the Importance of the Truths violated is to be taken into Account, for the Degrees of moral Evil or Guilt are as the Importance and Number of Truths violated. Then, I say, this should have been expressed in the Definition of moral Evil, wherein he pretends to give us the Idea or formal Ratio thereof; and it should have been made to consist in acting Lies of Importance, or contradicting Truths of Importance: If it should be said for our Author, that was needless, because all Truth is of Importance. I Answer, by his own Confession, that Importance in some Cases is so little as to be evanescent, or almost nothing: Why may we not suppose then there may

be Cases, where the Importance of Truth is absolutely nothing, as in that of an innocent Man pursued by a Ruffian? How can that Truth be of any good Importance, which, if declared, will be the Ruin of an innocent Man; if denied, will save his Life, and hurt no body else? Are we not to understand by the Importance of Truth, the natural Tendency, which the Conformity of our Conduct thereto has to promote the Happiness of Mankind? And if so, I desire to know how the Discovery of the poor Man to one that intends to murder him, which is declaring the Truth, tends either to his Benefit or any body's else; and if it does not, in what Sense can it be called a Truth of Importance, and therefore sacred and inviolable?

All Denial of Truth, any Truth whatever, is, according to Mr. *Wollaston*, immoral. This Notion has been battled with such plausible Reasons at least, by some of the finest and most judicious Writers upon the Law of Nature, that something more than a bare Affirmation to the contrary was necessary to set them aside. According to him all Feints in War, all false Reports spread to impose upon the Enemy, tho' they have no Tendency to hurt any body but him, whom we here suppose to be an unjust Aggressor, are utterly unlawful; and
why?

why? because they are inconsistent with Truth; A weighty Consideration indeed to be put in the Balance against the Defense and Security of Millions of innocent People, whose Defense and Security oftentimes depend upon the Practice of those Arts! Innocent Nations, it seems, must be exposed to the utmost Ravage and Desolation rather than the least Truth be violated, tho' the Violation thereof tends only to the Prejudice of those who have forfeited their Lives by being Aggressors in an unlawful War, and not only may, but ought to be destroy'd in Defense of the Innocent.

A Man that falls into the Hands of Robbers or Pirates may not make use of the least false Pretence to get out of their Clutches; tho' by such Pretences he be so far from doing any Injury to the Innocent he does none to the Rogues themselves.

A Man must not disguise or conceal his Actions, Thoughts, or Intentions, by Word or by Deed, that may carry any the least Intimation that they are not what they are; even where others have no Interest depending, or any Right to pry into or discover them, and where such a Discovery might be highly prejudicial to a Man in the Management of his own honest Business, or the carrying on of useful and laudable Projects.

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And finally, if no Act can be right that interferes with any true Proposition, or denies any thing to be as it is, then none of the most innocent harmless Actions of Life may be performed, where such Action may have a Tendency to convey a Mistake to the Minds of others, tho' attended with no ill Consequence in the World. A Man for Instance ought not to present a Fowling-piece at a Bird, unless he designs to shoot, for fear that Action should convey to the By-standers this dreadful Mistake, that he designs to shoot when he does not. The two first of these Corollaries, from our Author's Notion of Immorality, every Body will allow to be agreeable to his Sentiments; and the two latter follow as evidently from it, in the only Sense the Phrase of denying Truth by Action or Omission seems capable of, explained above, which yet makes his Doctrine at first Sight appear so very gross, that I fear he used that Expression without any clear determinate Meaning at all.

I have now done with Mr. *Wollaston*, whom I own to have been a very ingenious Man, and capable enough of writing very finely upon the Subject, had he not been misled by the unhappy Mistake I have been all this while confuting. I did propose indeed when I first took up the Design of examining him, to have premised a Dissertation
upon

upon the Foundation of Morality, in order to erect a new Building of my own at the same time I demolished his ; but finding that Work was likely to run out to a greater Length than I at first imagined, I have chosen to publish this Examination of Mr. *Wollaston* by itself : If it makes its way in the World to my liking, the other intended Part may perhaps follow after, as fast as the cumberfom Employment I have upon my Hands will allow.

F I N I S.





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