

# The Existence of a First Cause

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[Spelling selectively modernized. Bible citations converted to all Arabic numerals. Footnotes moved into or near their places of citation. Notes in Latin or Greek omitted except for bibliographic citation.]

A Dissertation Upon the Argument *a priori* for proving the Existence of a First Cause:  
In a Letter to Mr. Law.

Sir,

When I last had the pleasure of your conversation, in company with one or two more ingenious friends, I remember we soon fell to asking each other, what news from the republic of letters; what fresh pamphlets stirring; what works, relating either to religion or science, had appeared lately, or were soon likely to appear. Hereupon several things were mentioned, and passed off in discourse: but what we happened more particularly to dwell upon was the consideration of some metaphysical pieces concerning the proving the existence of a Deity *a priori* (as the Schools term it), that is to say, from some supposed antecedent necessity, considered as a ground, or reason, or foundation, or internal cause, or formal cause of the Divine existence. And here, if I remember, we were inquisitive to know what those scholastic terms imported, and whether the thought contained in them was entirely new, a recent product of the eighteenth century; as also what weight or solidity there was in it: and if there were none, whether it portended any detriment to religion or science, and might be worth the opposing or confuting. Upon the debating and canvassing the particulars now mentioned, my opinion then was, and I am since more and more confirmed in the same, that those who have appeared as advocates for that argument *a priori* seem to have had no clear notion of the thing itself, or of the terms they make use of; that the thought however was not a new thought, though perhaps it might be justly called a new tenet, as having been constantly exploded for many centuries upwards, and never once maintained by metaphysicians or divines; that moreover it was absolutely untenable, yea and carried its own confutation along with it, as soon as understood; and lastly, that such principles might be prejudicial, in some measure, both to religion and science, if they should happen to prevail; and that consequently it would be doing good service to both, if due care were taken, in a proper manner, to prevent their growth.

With these sentiments (which seemed also to be pretty nearly the common sentiments of all then present) I departed from you at that time. And no sooner was I returned to my books, and had some vacant leisure on my hands, but I thought of throwing out what occurred to me on those heads into paper, digesting it into a kind of dissertation, which I here send you for your perusal, and which I leave entirely to your disposal. The method, which I have chalked out for myself; in the essay here following, is:

I. To give some historical account of what the most eminent metaphysicians and divines have taught, so far as concerns the point in question.

II. To consider the argumentative part, in order to take off the ambiguity of words, and thereby to prevent confusion of ideas.

III. To examine into the tendency of the new tenets, with respect either to religion or science.

These three heads will furnish out so many distinct sections or chapters.

## Chapter I.

Containing an Historical View of what Metaphysicians or Divines have formerly taught, so far as concerns the Argument *a priori* for the Divine existence.

I shall begin with two ancient Theists, both of the same time, or nearly, and both declaring against the possibility of demonstrating *a priori* the existence of a Deity, or first Cause. One of them was a Christian Divine, and the other an acute Pagan Philosopher.

The Christian Divine was Clemens of Alexandria, who flourished about A.D. 192. He expresses himself thus in Dr. Cudworth's translation [Cudworth Intellect. Syst. p. 716.]:

“God is the most difficult thing of all to be discoursed of: because, since the principle of everything is hard to find out, the first and most ancient principle of all, which was the cause to all other things of their being made, (and of their continuance after they were made), must needs be the hardest of all to be declared or manifested. – But neither can [God] be apprehended by any demonstrative science: for such science is from things before [in order of nature] and more knowable; whereas “nothing can exist before that which is altogether unmade [Clem. Alex. p. 696. edit. Oxon.] [or self-existent].”

The other ancient Theist is Alexander Aphrodisiensis, a celebrated Peripatetic, who flourished between A.D. 199 and 211. [See an account of him in Fabricius, Bibl. Graec. lib. iv. cap. 25. p. 62.] After he had proposed an argument for the existence of a first Cause, drawn from the consideration of motion, according to the Aristotelian principles, he proceeds to observe as follows: “This argument [or proof] is in the way of analysis only, it being not possible that there should be a [strict] demonstration of the first principle of all: wherefore we must here fetch our beginning from things that are after it, and manifest, and thence by way of analysis ascend to the proof of that first nature which was before them.” [Aphrodis. Physic. Schol. lib. i. cap. I.] So Dr. Cudworth renders the passage: and the reflection or comment, which he makes upon what has here been quoted from these two ancient Theists, is in these words: “The true meaning of those ancient Theists, who denied that there could be any demonstration of a God, was only this, that the existence of a God could not be demonstrated *a priori*, himself being the first Cause of all things.”

Such were the sentiments of metaphysicians and divines at that time, founded upon plain and cogent reason, such as must equally hold at all times, and such as seem to evince, not that the existence of a first Cause may be demonstrated *a priori*, but rather that it is really demonstrable *a priori*, if not self-evident, that no such proof can be made, being indeed contradictory and impossible, repugnant to the very nature or notion of a first Cause. But I shall speak to the argumentative part afterwards: I am now upon the historical. It is certain that the Fathers of the Church, Greek or Latin, never admitted any such proof *a priori* of the divine existence, but either directly or indirectly, either expressly or implicitly, condemned it all along. It would be tedious to enter into a particular detail of their sentiments, in relation to the proof of the existence: I shall content myself with one general observation, that they had not so much as the terms or phrases of necessary existence, or necessity of existence, but utterly rejected the very name of necessity as not applicable to the Deity at all, understanding it constantly in its ancient, proper, compulsive sense. [See my Second Defence, vol. iii. Qu. viii. p. 236, etc. Preface to Sermons, vol. ii.] Now it is very well known that the supposed proof *a priori*, lately contended for, is built in a manner entirely upon the word *necessity*, and instantly sinks without it. For, put immutable, or natural, or independent, or emphatical existence (according to the ancient way), instead of necessary existence, or necessity of existence, and then it is certain that the very medium of the whole argument drops

and vanishes, and there is not so much as any colour or appearance of the proof left. I say then, since it is undoubted fact that the Fathers all along admitted of no such terms as *necessary*, or *necessity*, in this case, but rejected them as not applicable either to the Divine existence or attributes; it is very plain that they therewith rejected any such pretended argument *a priori* as has been since raised from those terms.

To show how late it was before *necessity* gained admittance in the Church, and became, as it were, Christianized, with respect to our present subject, I may observe that Archbishop Anselm [*Anselm. Opp.* tom. iii. p. 55.] of the eleventh and twelfth century, yea and Alexander Hales [*Alex. Alens.* part. ii. p. 15. N.B. This author flourished about 1230, died 1245. Albertus Magnus, who flourished about 1260, and died in 1280, made no scruple of applying the word *necessary* or *necessity* (in a sober but new sense) to the Divine essence or existence: and it is very plain that he learned that language from Aristotle's philosophy, to which he refers for his sense of those terms. See Albert. Mag. Comment. in lib. i. Sentent. Dist. 6. *Opp.* vol. xiv. p. 121. edit. Ludg.] of the thirteenth, were yet scrupulous of making use of the term, and were very tender of applying it to the Divine acts or attributes, except it were with great caution, awe, and reserve; at the same time owning the word to be both harsh and improper. And as to applying it to the Divine existence, I do not find that they ventured upon it at all; though others frequently did it afterwards in the decline of the thirteenth century, and downwards, when Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, translated into barbarous Latin, and the Arabian philosophy (of Avicen, Averroes, and Algazel) had paved the way for it. [*Rog. Bacon*, p. 37. *Conf.* p. 45, 262, 420.]

Let us see, however, how this matter stood after those improper terms were brought in, and softened into a qualified sense; whether any Schoolmen or others (now they might seem to have some handle for it) ever attempted to draw out any such argument *a priori* for the existence of a first Cause, and to commend the same as true and solid reasoning. I would here observe by the way that the Schoolmen, though they deservedly lie under a disrepute for their excesses in many things, may yet be justly looked upon as carrying great authority with them in a point of this nature, where they had no bias to mislead them (being inclined to the side of Theism), and where a question turned upon a right understanding of technical terms or phrases, and a thorough acquaintance with logic and metaphysics; being a matter of pure abstract reasoning. They were undoubtedly great masters in that way: for "where they argued barely upon the principles of reason," as a very judicious writer observes, "they have often done exceeding well, and have improved natural reason to an uncommon height." [*Reflections upon Learning*, p. 217, 227.] And I will venture to add that if the sharpest wits of these later days shall undertake, upon their own stock, to furnish out a new scheme of school divinity, or metaphysical theology, it will be a long while, perhaps some centuries, before they arrive to such perfection in some part as many of the Schoolmen arrived to; unless they shall be content within a while to take those despised Schoolmen into consultation with them, and to extract the best things from them. This I hint by the way, in order to remove prejudices with respect to my citing (as I am now going to do) Schoolmen in this cause; though I intend not to cite them only, but other the most judicious and learned divines and metaphysicians who have come after them, and have entirely agreed in this article with them. However, as I have already intimated, the Schoolmen are most certainly proper judges within their own province, and in a point of school divinity: and this which we are now upon is very plainly such, as the pretended argument *a priori* proceeds altogether upon scholastic terms, and is managed in a scholastic way, and therefore must at length stand or fall by scholastic principles and scholastic reasonings. These things premised, I may now proceed in the historical view, according to order of time, beginning from those days when necessary existence, with other the like terms or phrases, had gotten some footing in the Christian theology.

A.D. 1260. Albertus Magnus.

Albertus, surnamed the Great, on account of his great learning and abilities, was one of the most considerable among the divines or metaphysicians of the age he lived in. He was one of the first (I mean among Christian writers) that took upon him to give God the metaphysical title of a necessary Being. Yet he presumed not to found any argument *a priori* for the existence upon it, but denied expressly, or in words equivalent, that any argument of that kind could be made. He allows that upon the foot of mere natural light, God may be known *a posteriori* by the creatures, and no otherwise [*Albert. Magn.* in lib. i. *Sentent.* dist. iii. Opp. tom. xiv. p.66.]: for he admits it as a true principle, that a philosopher can search out God no other way than by the creatures, as a cause is known from the effect. [*Ibid.* p. 55.] Which amounts to the same with saying that philosophy affords no proof *a priori*.

A.D. 1270. Thomas Aquinas.

From the master or preceptor I may next descend to the scholar, who was almost twenty years younger than Albertus, but died some years before him, namely, in the year 1274. I need say nothing of the fame or the abilities of Aquinas, surnamed (according to the fashion of those times) the Angelical Doctor. He frequently enough makes use of the phrases of necessary Being, or necessity of existing, but yet never builds any argument *a priori* for the existence upon it, but constantly maintains that every proof of the existence is *a posteriori*, from the effects. In one place he writes thus, “There are two kinds of demonstration. The first is by the cause, and has its name from shewing why the thing is, and it proceeds upon something simply prior. The second is by the effect, and has its name from shewing that the thing is, and it proceeds upon things prior with respect to us. – Now the existence of God, as it is not knowable in itself, is demonstrable to us by the effects to us known.” [*Aquin. Summ.* q. ii. art. 2. p. 14. edit. Lugd. 1588.] That is to say, the existence of God cannot be demonstrated *a priori*, but *a posteriori* only: and so the title of that article explains it, [*Aquin. Summ.* q. ii. art. 2. p. 4. edit. Paris. 1615.] in some editions of his Sum. In another work, Aquinas maintains the same thing in words somewhat different, thus: “In arguments brought to prove the existence of the Deity, it is not proper to argue from the Divine essence, or from what he is, but instead thereof to argue from the effects, like as in the demonstrations *a posteriori*: and from some such effect is the name of God taken.” [*Aquin. Summ. contr. Gentiles*, lib. i. cap. 12. p. 14. edit. Lugd. 1587.] I use a little liberty in rendering his words, to make his sense appear the clearer. It is very plain from both the passages here cited that he utterly rejected all arguments *a priori* for the proving the existence of a Deity. Yet I shall not conceal from you that he elsewhere argues from necessary existence to the eternity of the divine Being [*Aquin. contr. Gentil.* lib. i. cap. 14. p. 21.]; which may be thought to be arguing *a priori*: I will not say, that it is not arguing *a priori*: but then it is not arguing from attribute to existence, but from one attribute to another, from existence and one or more attributes before proved, to an attribute not yet proved; which is a fair and just way of reasoning, and may perhaps not improperly be called arguing *a priori*; though some would scruple the giving it that title. However, as to this by-point, I shall have occasion to say more in the sequel, and so may dismiss it for the present, and proceed in my method.

A.D. 1276. Roger Bacon.

Roger Bacon, of the order of Friars Minor, was a person of strong parts and clear judgment, and had perhaps a greater compass of erudition than any other of that age. He was styled the admirable Doctor, after the way of giving titles at that time. It will not be improper to shew what

his judgment was upon the present question, as he occasionally delivered it. “In metaphysics there can be no demonstration made but by arguing from the effect: because things spiritual are discovered by the sensible effects, and the Creator by the creature, as is manifest in that science.” [Rog. Bacon. *Opus majus*. p. 62. edit. Jebb. 1733.] From which words it is plain that he rejects all pretense to arguing *a priori* in the question of the existence, and allows of nothing in that case, but the proofs *a posteriori* only.

A.D. 1290. Richardus De Media Villa.

Richard of Middleton was a man famous in his time, dignified with the title of the solid Doctor. His determination of the question about proving the existence *a priori* is clear and full; as here follows: “There is one kind of demonstration *propter quid*, [from antecedent reason], in which what belongs to the subject is demonstrated by its cause: and there is another kind of demonstration *quia*, [from subsequent reason], in which the cause is demonstrated by the effect. In the former way of demonstration, I say, we cannot demonstrate the existence of God, because the Divine existence has no cause prior to found such proof of the existence upon: but in the latter way of proof from the effect, I assert that we can demonstrate the existence of the Deity by variety of arguments.” [Rich. de Med. Vill. in IV. Libr. Sentent. lib. i. dist. 3. q. 3. p. 41.] Here we may observe, as likewise in the three authorities before cited; that it was not through haste, oversight, or forgetfulness, that they avoided arguing *a priori* in that instance, but through deep consideration and judgment. They had all thought of the thing, and very deliberately rejected it, as amounting to a palpable absurdity, making a cause prior to the first.

I may further take notice that this author has besides a whole chapter about the conceivable or notional order of the Divine attributes well worth the perusal, for the right understanding how, or in what sense, one may be said to argue *a priori* from existence to attributes, or from attribute to attribute. I shall cite some parts of that chapter for a specimen [Ricard. de Med. Vill. lib. i. dist. 2. qu. 4. p. 32, 33.]: but the whole deserves a reader’s careful notice, for the solid judgment appearing in it. The sum is that the Divine existence is considered in the first place, and after that, the attributes in their most natural order of conception. And when they are so placed or ranked, we may argue from them in that order; and such arguing may, without impropriety, be styled arguing *a priori*, as arguing from something antecedent, in natural order of conception, to something subsequent in conception to it. I know not whether the judicious author has marshalled the attributes with the utmost exactness, or has assigned to every one of them its most proper place: but he appears to have determined very right in the main point, and to have digested everything with a kind of masterly hand. Had those matters been considered always with the like care and judgment, there could have been no room for arguing *a priori* to the existence at all, nor for arguing to any attribute from anything conceived as antecedent, in order of nature, to the existence. But existence and some attributes may rationally be conceived as antecedent, in order of nature, to other attributes: and this kind of arguing *a priori*, which is reasonable, ought not to be confounded with the other, which is manifestly ὑστερον πρότερον, and palpably absurd. But I pass on.

A.D. 1301. Johannes Duns Scotus.

Johannes Duns, surnamed Scotus, and dignified with the title of *Doctor Subtilis*, was considerable enough to support a kind of rivalry against Thomas Aquinas, and to be founder of a new sect or division among the Schoolmen. However, their difference in other points makes their authority the greater as to those articles in which they agree: and it is certain that both Thomists

and Scotists do agree in condemning and rejecting all argumentation *a priori* in proof of the existence of a first Cause, as manifestly absurd. Scotus declares in express words that it is not possible for us to demonstrate as from a cause, or antecedent principle, [*propter quid*] the existence of an infinite Being, but that we may demonstrate it *a posteriori*, [*demonstratione quia*] from effects, namely from the creatures. [*Scot. in Libr. Sentent. lib. i. dist. 2. qu. 2. p. 28.*] He further observes and proves that the first Cause is absolutely uncaused, having neither external nor internal cause; neither efficient, nor final, nor material, nor formal, and consequently none at all. His reasoning is indeed wrapped up in a most wretched style, and very barbarous Latin: but it may perhaps be thrown into intelligible English, and will be found to contain excellent sense. It runs thus [*Scot. ibid. p. 30.*]: “If the first Cause is above any efficient cause, it must of consequence be absolutely uncaused, since it cannot have any other kind of cause, as final, or material, or formal. As to final cause, that it cannot have any such, is proved thus: inasmuch as it has no efficient cause, it follows of course that it can have no final: because a final cause is no more than a metaphorical cause, moving the efficient to act; nor does the existence of the thing so caused essentially depend upon it, as prior to it, in any other view. Now nothing can be justly looked upon as a cause in itself, unless the thing caused essentially depends upon it as prior to it; [which cannot be said of a final cause].

“As to the other two consequences before hinted, (that if a being has no efficient cause, it can have neither material nor formal,) they follow of course, and are proved at the same time: because whatever is without any external cause, must of consequence be without any internal one. An external cause carries with it a perfect causality, which is more than an internal cause does; for an internal cause carries imperfection along with it, as being only a part of the thing caused. Wherefore if there be no room, as in this case, for an external cause, which naturally is prior to the internal, much less can there be any for the internal cause, which presupposes the other.” I have been forced to render the passage paraphrastically, to make the sense clear, and to do justice to the argument contained in it. It amounts to a demonstration, that a first cause must be absolutely, and in every view, uncaused. And I judged it worth the noting, because it has been sometimes suggested that, though absolute necessity cannot be deemed a cause of a first cause by way of efficient cause, yet it may by way of formal cause be the ground of that existence. [See Dr. Clarke’s Answer to the Sixth Letter, p. 33. edit. 6th.] Duns Scotus has here effectually confuted or obviated any such thought by observing that every formal, every internal cause is but a part, or a partial conception of the thing itself, presupposing the thing, and therefore properly not prior in conception to it, nor the cause of it.

He has a second argument in the same place, to enforce the former, and it is to this effect: that internal or intrinsic causes owe their very nature and being as causes, or as constituent causes, to some external efficient; for they are not causes in themselves, but by the external agent which makes them such. [*Scot. ibid. p. 30.*] Therefore where there is no external efficient cause, there can be no internal cause properly so called. The force of the argument, as I understand it, lies here: that matter and form (called internal causes) are, in themselves considered, no more than constituent parts of the compound, not causes of it. It is their supposed relation to some external agency, which alone makes them carry an idea of causality along with them. If therefore we suppose all external agency or efficiency to be away (as we must in this case, respecting the divine Being which has no efficient cause), the very idea of causality, as to any internal cause, ceases and vanishes at once; it cannot be considered as a cause at all. [The argument may receive some light from a passage in Duraudus, relating to this head. Durand. lib. i. dist. 8. qu. 4. fol. 3. edit. Paris.] Wherefore,

any being that is above having any efficient cause is much more above any other kind of cause, is absolutely uncaused; which was the thing to be proved.

A.D. 1591. Gregorius De Valentia.

This writer, in his Commentaries upon Aquinas's Sum, expresses himself fully and clearly to our purpose. "The existence of God cannot be evidently shewn *a priori*: in this point all are agreed. For the existence of the Deity admits of no cause whereby it should be demonstrated *a priori*. Neither can it be demonstrated from the Divine essence, considered as prior in conception. 1. Because the existence of a being ought not to be proved by the essence of that being, since the question of the existence [whether anything is] must precede the other question concerning the essence [what it is], as Aquinas rightly observes. 2. Besides, the essence of God is not sufficiently known to us." [Gregor. de Valent. tom. i. disp. 1. qu. 2. p. 59. edit. Lugd.]

Here it is observable that this author looked upon it as a ruled point, a thing universally agreed to, that there neither was nor could be any demonstration *a priori* of the existence of God. It may be observed also by the way, that the phrase of *demonstratio a priori* was now become a more familiar phrase than formerly. The elder writers which I have cited used to call it *demonstratio propter quid*, answering to the Greek δι' ὅτι. Both signify a proof drawn from some prior cause, or from something naturally, or in the natural order of conception, antecedent to the thing demonstrated by it. [Chauvin. *Lexic.* p. 170.] *A posteriori* is just the reverse. [Chauvin. *ibid.*]

A.D. 1600. Vasquez.

Gabriel Vasquez, another eminent Schoolman of that time, declares his sentiments to the same purpose; that there can be no demonstration *a priori* of the existence of a Deity, but *a posteriori* only. [Vasq. q. ii. art. 2. p. 60.]

A.D. 1614. Suarez.

Suarez, the famous Schoolman and Jesuit, deserves a more particular consideration, because he really had a strong inclination to make out something that should look like an argument *a priori*, or however should (for ostentation sake, I suppose) be set forth with that name: for, in reality, he expressly and absolutely condemned all reasoning *a priori* to the existence of a Deity, as others before him had done; and yet by a kind of artificial turn, by interpreting the proof of the unity so as to amount to the same with the proof of a Deity, he conceived he had done the thing, only by changing of names. But let us observe how he managed the whole affair. We shall see afterwards what censures were passed upon it by the judicious, though it was mostly a difference in words. He states the main question thus: "Whether the existence of God may in some sort [or in some sense] be demonstrated *a priori*" [Suarez. *Metaphys.* tom. ii. disp. 29. sect. 3. p. 28.]: and he determines in the affirmative. The whole tenor of his reasoning is as here follows. [Suarez, *ibid.* p. 28.] "We are first to premise that, absolutely speaking, the existence of God cannot be proved *a priori*; as well because God has no cause of his existence whereby it should be proved *a priori*, as also because if he had, yet we have no such exact and perfect knowledge of God as might enable us to trace him up (if I may so speak) to his own proper principles. To which purpose Dionysius (in his seventh chapter of the *divine names*) observes, that *we cannot know God according to his proper nature*.

"But though that be so as I have here said, yet notwithstanding, after we have once demonstrated *a posteriori* something concerning God, we may go on to demonstrate *a priori* one attribute from another: as for instance, when we infer unchangeableness of place from the

omnipresence before proved.” I suppose all the while, that a notional distinction of the Divine attributes (after an human way of conception) is foundation sufficient for reasoning *a priori*.

“Now, for the resolution of the question, I proceed thus: having demonstrated *a posteriori*, that God is a necessary and self-existent Being, we may be able to prove *a priori* from this attribute, [of *necessary existence*,] that there cannot be another necessary and self-existent being besides that one; from whence it follows, that that Being is God.

“You will object that this is proving the existence of God from the essence of God before known (for it is supposed that the essence of God is that he is a necessary and self-existent Being) which is plainly repugnant, since the question what he is presupposes the other question whether he exists; as St. Thomas [Aquinas] has justly observed on this head. Part i. qu. 2. art 2.

“I answer that, strictly and properly speaking, we infer not the existence of God from his essence, considered as such (which the objection justly excepts to), but from one certain attribute (which though really identified with the essence, is yet conceived abstractedly by us as a mode of the Being uncaused) we deduce another attribute, and so we at length prove that that Being is God. Wherefore in order to prove in this way that there is a God, precisely considered as God, we suppose it proved beforehand that there is a certain Being necessary in himself; proved namely from his effects, and from the absurdity of an infinite progression. So the first thing we prove of this Being is that he exists; the next, that he is necessarily existing; then, that he is the only one existing in such a way; and so of consequence he is God. And thus, after some sort, we do first determine whether he exists, and next the other question, what he is.”

Thus far the acute and learned Suarez; of whom I have many things to observe, before I go on to other writers; 1. That he appears to have been ambitious to make out something that should be called an argument *a priori*, and was probably able to do as much in it as any one before or after him can justly be presumed to be. 2. That the method which he took for it, proving first something *a posteriori*, and then proceeding to argue *a priori* for the rest, is very like to that which others have taken since. 3. That he differs however from those later advocates for the argument *a priori* in the main thing of all, and determines expressly against their nation, that necessity can be conceived antecedent to existence. He looked upon that as flat absurdity and self-contradiction, utterly repugnant to the nature of a first Cause; and so he made no use of antecedent necessity, or internal cause, or formal reason, ground, or foundation, in proving his point: he was too knowing a logician and metaphysician, to offer anything of that kind. 4. All that he admits is that after the existence and one or more attributes have been proved *a posteriori*, we may then proceed to argue *a priori* for the rest: not from antecedent necessity, not from anything conceived as prior, in order of nature, to the existence itself; but from the existence and one attribute or more considered as before proved, and as prior in conception to all the rest. 5. One thing Suarez was very singular in, and upon that the whole stress of his cause lies, so far as concerns the making out an argument *a priori* for the existence of God: he would have it supposed that God is not proved to be God till the unity is proved; and so he suspends, as it were, the proof of a Deity upon the proof of the unity. This was an ingenious thought, but too weak to bear. For in that way there could be no room for the question whether God be one, since the very name would imply it: besides, it is universally allowed, that the proof of the existence of a Deity is both clearer and stronger than any proof of the unity, and is sufficiently determined and settled in the first place, before the consideration of the unity comes in at all. When we have proved, for instance, that there is an *intelligent, eternal, self-existent Being* (one or more) which is most easily proved from our own existence, we have then competently proved that there is a God, though we have not yet proved or considered every attribute that belongs to him. Such has been the way of

divines and metaphysicians, first to prove the existence of a Deity, under that confuse general conception; and next to proceed to the proof of the unity and other attributes in due place and order: and it is not reasonable to suggest that if a man should fail in the proof of the unity, or of some other Divine attribute (for the reason is the same in all), that he has therefore failed in his proof of a Deity. That would be going against rule, and risking the whole for a part; and, in short, resting the proof of a Deity (the plainest thing in the world) upon very obscure conditions, very unequal terms. But we shall have more of this matter in the sequel, as we take in other later writers, who have directly or indirectly passed their censures upon Suarez for his excesses on this head. 6. Upon the whole, one may observe that this pretended proof of a Deity, as drawn *a priori*, is rather a fetch, or a subtilty of that great man, than anything solid; a nominal proof, rather than a real one; or an affected manner of miscalling things by wrong names.

A. D. 1610. Christopher Gillius.

Contemporary with Suarez lived Christopher Gillius, a Spanish Divine and Jesuit, one of a subtle wit and penetrating genius. He has a pretty large chapter, [Gillii Commentationes Theologicae de Essentia et Unitate Dei, lib. i. tract. 8. c. 4. p. 391–396.] spent entirely upon our present question. He takes notice that there were not wanting some of that time who contended that the existence of a Deity might be proved *a priori*. [Ibid. p. 391.] He had Suarez in his eye, as is plain enough (though he does not name him), because a little after, he quotes the very words which Suarez had made use of in that argument. He mentions also Scotus, and some of his followers, as aiming at the like conclusion in a more farfetched and roundabout way [p. 391]; allowing, that if God should extraordinarily or supernaturally infuse some higher degrees of knowledge, then some kind of proof *a priori* (however fruitless, and superseded by such illumination) might be made from it. See how solicitous and industrious some have been in searching for every appearance of a proof *a priori*, as much as others have been in searching for the philosopher's stone, or for the squaring of the circle, or the like, and with the like success.

Our judicious author first observes that all pretenses of any formal demonstration of that kind had been utterly exploded [Gillius, *ibid.* p. 392. *conf.* p. 394.] by the judicious; particularly by Albertus Magnus, and Henricus de Gandavo, and Richardus de Media Villa, and Scotus, and Lyra, and Gasp. Casalius, and many others referred to elsewhere [Gillius, c. v. p. 400.]: so that it might be justly looked upon as a ruled point that no proper demonstration *a priori* could be made of the Divine existence; all such attempts at length resolving either into some *petitio principii*, or some equivocation of terms, or other the like fallacy, or foreign subtilty.

He proceeds to examine the question with the utmost strictness and nicety, traversing it through all its mazes, and unravelling every ambiguity and subtle intricacy, whereby some had endeavoured to support what they would call a demonstration *a priori* in that case; and showing that none of them sufficiently answered the purpose, or came up to the point. [Gillius, p. 396.] From whence we may remark that Suarez's attempts that way were not approved by the most judicious Divines of his own time, but were condemned by the generality, and even by those of his own order (for Gillius was a Jesuit), and that soon after: for as his *Metaphysics* had first appeared in 1600, so this censure of Gillius was finished and licensed in 1606, though not published before 1610.

A. D. 1615. Estius.

At the same time with Gillius lived the learned Estius, who delivered his sentiments of the present question in the manner here following. [*Estius in Libr. Sentent. Comm.* tom. i. p. 4. So Cardinal

Lugo also, a little later in the same age. Gillius. Lug. lib. i. disp. 14. c. 2. s. 8.] “As there are, among logicians, two kinds of demonstration, one demonstrating the effect from the causes, and the other, the cause from the effects; it is manifest, that the existence of a Deity cannot be proved in the former way of demonstration, since no cause in any kind can be assigned either of God, or of his existing. But it may be demonstrated in the latter way, as St. Thomas [Aquinas] rightly judges, (I. q. 2. art. 2, 3.) and as the Schoolmen upon this distinction do universally teach.”

A. D. 1627. Johannes Puteanus.

This writer expresses his judgment in the terms here following [*Joan. Putean. Opp. tom. i. part. 1. qu. 3. p. 24.*]:

“Though the existence of a Deity cannot be demonstrated *a priori*, yet it must be allowed that as to some of the Divine *attributes*, they may be demonstrated *a priori*.

“1. As to the first particular, it is plain from hence that every proof *a priori* proceeds by causes either real or virtual, or, which comes to the same, by some prior reason; but of the Divine existence there are no causes real or virtual, nor any prior reason: for existence is included in the formal conception of the Divine essence, insomuch that it is impossible to conceive the Divine essence but as existing. The Divine essence is being simply necessary. Now it is contradictory to the notion of being simply necessary, not to have existence, for it is usually defined, as that which so exists that it cannot but exist.

2. As to the second particular, it is manifest from hence, “that *eternity* is demonstrated from *immutability* in this manner: Everything immutable is eternal: God is immutable: therefore God is eternal. In like manner, the Divine *ubiquity* is commonly proved from the *immensity*. And so in many other cases.”

The author here well distinguishes between arguing *a priori* from existence and attributes already proved, to other attributes, and arguing *a priori* from attributes, or from anything else, to the existence itself. The one he allows as just and rational, the other he rejects as manifestly absurd: and so far he is certainly right. Some indeed may scruple to call it arguing *a priori*, when a man argues from attribute to attribute; conceiving that it should rather be styled arguing *ex absurdo*, and that nothing short of a *real* (as opposed to *notional*) priority is sufficient to denominate or constitute an argument *a priori*. But that I take to be a fruitless nicety, and such is not worth the insisting upon; for at last it will terminate in a dispute about words. It is sufficient, that there is nothing prior to the *existence*, no not so much as in order of nature, or notion, or conception; and so all arguing *a priori*, as to that case, is forever excluded. But as to the other case, the manner of arguing is undoubtedly right, whatever name we give to it: and there seems to be no just objection against calling it *a priori*, so long as the existence is looked upon as always first in conception, and that the most natural order of conception be followed in arguing from attribute to attribute, and the process be not made too arbitrary. [Richardus de Media Villa, in a chapter before referred to, observes well to this purpose, that the order of the attributes ought not to be settled in an arbitrary manner, but as reason requires. *Ricard. de Med. Vill. lib. i. p. 32.*]

A. D. 1642. Rodericus De Arriaga.

This acute metaphysician and divine delivers his sentiments as follows: “The *being* or *existence* of God cannot be demonstrated *a priori*. So St. Thomas, Albertus, Durandus; and of our order (of Jesuits) Valentin, Molina, Suarez, and Vasquez, whom Tanner mentions and follows.” [*Roderic. de Arriag. tom. i. p. 30.*] After this, he enters minutely into the merits of the question, assigning his reasons why the existence cannot be proved *a priori*: which being much the same with those before mentioned, I choose, for brevity sake, to omit them, and proceed.

Only, I may observe that here are three authors, Durandus, Molina, and Tanner, beyond what I have quoted upon the question: and it is further observable that he takes in Suarez amongst them, as one that had declared against the argument *a priori*; as indeed he *really* had, though *verbally* he might seem to differ, as I have before hinted. So *universal* hitherto had been the agreement of metaphysicians and divines in this article.

A. D. 1644. Dionysius Petavius.

The very learned Petavius is but short upon this question, mentioning it transiently, as it came in his way: but he is too considerable a person to be omitted in this recital. He takes notice that the existence of a Deity is not to be proved from anything prior or antecedent, but from *effects* only, and *a posteriori*; and from the absurdities which lie against the contrary persuasion. [*Petav. Dogm. Theolog. tom. i. lib. 1. c. 1. p. 2, 3.*]

A. D. 1652. Nathanael Culverwell.

I shall now mention a Protestant writer of our own, of some note in his time. He was Fellow of Emanuel College in Cambridge. In his book, entitled *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature*, he occasionally drops a few words to our purpose: "There can be no demonstration of him [God] *a priori*; for he is the *first Cause*: and all demonstrations fetched from such effects as flow from him, they do only show you that he is; they do not open and display the Divine essence," etc. [*Culverwell, p. 212.*]

A. D. 1658. Bishop Barlow.

A more considerable writer of our own, so far as concerns the present question, was Thomas Barlow, then Fellow of Queen's College, Oxon. and afterwards (A. D. 1675) Bishop of Lincoln. He published some *Metaphysical Exercises* wherein he discovers great learning, and no less acuteness. The edition of 1658, which I follow, is the second edition. I shall produce his sentiments at large, because he entered deep into the question, viewed it on every side, and withal passed his censure (though rather too severe) upon the learned Suarez.

He writes thus: "Our knowledge of God, arising from the light of nature, is not *a priori*, and  $\delta\iota' \acute{o}\tau\iota$ . The reason is because then God could not be *eternal* if there were any principle *prior* to God: for *eternity*, in the very notion of it, excludes any prior principle. Consequently, if God be eternal, there cannot be any prior principle whereby he may be known *a priori*. – Were there any principle by which God might be known *a priori*, then, 1. God would not be the *first* Original and *first Cause*, as having by the supposition another *cause prior* to him. – 2. That supposed *antecedent* principle, by which the existence of God should be proved, must be either *external* (of the *final* or *efficient* kind), or else *internal*, of the *material* or *formal* kind. Now it cannot be of the final kind, because God is the chief end, and there cannot be any higher final cause, whereby to demonstrate *a priori* the existence of God. It cannot be of the efficient kind; because if God had any antecedent efficient cause, then God would be an effect, etc. – Neither can it be said that such prior cause is either material or formal: for the perfect simplicity of the Divine nature admits not of any such causes, as is self-evident: consequently there is no room for any cause whereby to demonstrate *a priori* the existence of a Deity." [*Barlow, Exercit. Metaph. iv. p. 28.*]

Our learned author here enters into the heart of the question, and reasons his way through, like a knowing and judicious man. Only he seems rather too short as to what concerns the two internal causes, called *material* and *formal*: but that brevity of his may be competently supplied

from what has been said above under Duns Scotus. I proceed to observe how he animadverts upon Suarez.

“I am aware that Suarez is of opinion that we may, in some sort, demonstrate *a priori* the existence of a Deity: not by the essence of God as such, but by some certain attribute which is really the essence of God, only considered by us, in an abstract way, as a mode of the uncaused Being. But, to say the truth, I approve not this bold assertion of the learned Jesuit. Because it is a manifest contradiction to say that the “existence of God can be proved *a priori* from any attribute whatever, when every attribute, as such, in the very notion of it, denotes something posterior to the essence of which it is the attribute. For if the attribute be really distinct [from the essence], then it is really subsequent to it: or if it be only notionally distinct (which is the case in the divine Being), then it is likewise notionally subsequent to the essence, whose attribute it is conceived to be. It is not possible so much as to imagine any attribute but what presupposes some essence whose attribute it is. Consequently our knowledge of God’s existence is *a posteriori* only: and of that kind are all the demonstrations brought by metaphysicians and schoolmen.” [Barlow, *ibid.* p. 129, 130. *conf.* p. 165, 186.] The learned author here argues the point against Suarez with great strength and acuteness: only he seems to fix an opinion upon Suarez which never was his: for Suarez himself plainly disowned any such arguing *a priori* for the existence, in that crude and gross sense which Barlow appears to take it in, while he is disputing against it. All that Suarez really meant, as I have before hinted, was, that the *unity* might be proved *a priori*, after having proved the existence *a posteriori*: and such proof of the unity he improperly called, or erroneously conceived to be, proving the existence of God *a priori*, inasmuch as God should not be deemed to be God, till proved to be one. Our author afterwards very well confutes that peculiar fancy, which Suarez and some few others had countenanced in that article: I say, our author well confutes that notion by observing, that the existence of a Deity is sufficiently proved, as soon as an *infinite, eternal, untreated, independent* (he should have added *intelligent*) *Being* is proved; and that the question of the unity comes not properly in till afterwards. [Barlow, *Exercit. iv.* p. 161.] Valentia had effectually obviated that pretense of Suarez some time before, in what he had said against Cajetan, who had been beforehand with Suarez in that piece of subtilty. [Greg. de Valent. tom. i. p. 64.]

One thing further I would observe of Barlow, before I dismiss him, that he was very scrupulous as to admitting that any of the Divine *attributes* might be demonstrated *a priori*. For though he allowed the way of arguing from one attribute before proved, to another not proved, and makes use of it himself more than once; yet considering that the attributes are in reality (however notionally distinguished) identified with the essence, he apprehended such reasoning could not justly be accounted reasoning *a priori*, [Barlow, *Exercit. v.* p. 187.] since the Divine essence could not be conceived prior to itself. There is certainly weight in the suggestion. But the point is not worth the contesting, as I have before intimated, since it will terminate only in a dispute about words or names. That it is reasonable and right to argue from existence and attributes proved, to other attributes not proved, is agreed on all hands: and whether such arguing shall be called reasoning *ab absurdo*, or *a priori*, is not very material. I have hinted above, under what restrictions or cautions I conceive it may be justly termed reasoning *a priori*. But whatever way this by-point, of slight consideration in the main, be determined, the other more material question concerning the arguing *a priori* for the existence, (or for any of the attributes from anything considered as *antecedent* to the *existence*) is no way affected by it. For such kind of arguing will undoubtedly be still condemned as wrong, in every view, and in every construction, and upon every the most favourable supposition that can with any colour of reason be made for it.

A. D. 1662. Franciscus Bonae Spei.

This author likewise declares his judgment that there can be no demonstration *a priori* of the *existence* of God, and further testifies that it was then a settled point amongst *all*, about which there was no dispute. [*Franc. Bon. Sp. Disp. i. dub. 2.*]

A. D. 1678. Dr. Cudworth.

Dr. Cudworth's judgment in this article cannot but be of great weight, as he was a person of eminent learning and abilities, a Protestant writer, and therefore the less apt to take anything implicitly from the Popish Schoolmen; extremely desirous besides, to draw together every plausible argument that could with any show of reason be urged for the existence of a Deity, and to make the utmost improvement of them. Notwithstanding all which he frankly declares in his preface to his great work, his judgment against the argument *a priori*, in these remarkable words: "We do therein also demonstrate the absolute impossibility of all Atheism, and the actual existence of a God: we say, demonstrate; not *a priori*, which is impossible and contradictory, but by necessary inference from principles altogether undeniable." [Cudworth's *Intellect. Syst.* preface.]

In the book itself he has a great deal more to the same purpose, part of which has been cited above; and for the rest I am content to refer the reader to the pages where he will find it. [Cudworth, book i. ch. iv. p. 715, 716.]

A. D. 1683. Le Blanc.

Le Blanc is another Protestant writer of great learning and judgment who freely declares his sentiments against the possibility of demonstrating *a priori* the existence of God. He does it nearly in the same words [Le Blanc, *Thes.* p. 91.] with Estius above cited; though without taking notice from whom he borrowed them.

A. D. 1690. Archbishop Tillotson.

This great and good Prelate seems to have thought that neither the *existence* nor the *attributes* of God could be demonstrated *a priori*, falling in with the sentiments of Bishop Barlow, mentioned above. He expresses himself in these words, speaking of the Divine *spirituality*: "This is not to be proved by way of *demonstration* (for there is nothing *before* God, or which can be a *cause* of him), but by way of conviction, by showing the absurdity of the contrary." [Tillotson, vol. ii. serm. 100. p. 671. fourth edit.]

Again, speaking of the Divine *immensity*, he says, "I have told you formerly, there being nothing *before* God, nor any cause of his being, his perfections cannot be proved by way of *demonstration*, but of *conviction*, by showing the absurdity of the contrary." [Tillotson, vol. ii. serm. 101. p. 678. fourth edit.] He repeats the same observation afterwards, applying it to the Divine *eternity*. [Ibid. serm. 102. p. 683.] In a popular discourse, he avoided the Latin and scholastic phrase *a priori*. But it is very plain from his manner of expressing himself that he meant the same as to say there could be no demonstration *a priori*, either of the existence or attributes of the Deity: and that as to the attributes in particular, the way of reasoning by a *reductio ad absurdum* was the best we could have, the utmost we could come up to. Indeed, the reducing the contrary persuasion to a flat absurdity is a kind of demonstration, and such as the mathematicians themselves frequently make use of: but then it must be owned that it is the lowest kind of demonstration (as not directly and immediately inferring the thing to be proved [See Ditton on the

Resurrection of Christ, p. 135.]), and comes not up to the perfection of the direct ostensive demonstration *a posteriori*, much less to the demonstration *a priori*. It is a good and sufficient proof, but not the highest kind of proof; sufficient for conviction, but not amounting to demonstration emphatically so called: which is what our judicious Prelate had an eye to, in the distinction which he thrice made use of.

A. D. 1712. Mr. Humphrey Ditton.

I shall close this historical account with a very good writer and close reasoner, Mr. Humphrey Ditton, who appeared after the time that the *new* tenet of an argument *a priori* had been offered to the world. He either knew not of it, or was not aware of its force: for he determines as the whole stream of metaphysicians and divines had before done, “that our demonstrations of the existence of a God are *all of them* ὄτι, and *a posteriori*, as proceeding from the effects.” [See Ditton on the Resurrection of Christ, p. 134.]

Now, to sum up the amount of this Historical View, it appears at length that as to the point of demonstrating *a priori* the existence of a Deity, it is no new thought, but very ancient, and what has been turned and tried every way, and very maturely considered time after time, and as often rejected and thrown aside as contradictory and absurd; by men of the brightest parts and coolest judgment, and men no way prejudiced against it, but sincerely disposed to accept it, and make use of it, if it had been capable of serving. It has been frequently and seriously considered by persons of different times and tempers, parties and professions; by ancients and moderns, by philosophers and divines, by Pagans and Christians, by Fathers and Schoolmen, by Realists and Nominalists, by Thomists and Scotists, by Romanists and Reformed; and by all of them, as it were, with one voice, condemned and exploded. One shall scarce meet with so clear and so universal an agreement for the reception of any article, as there appears to have been for the non-reception of this, among persons every way well qualified to judge of it, and fitly disposed for judging right, and having all the light before them which any one can now have, or which ever could be necessary for determining the point, to the entire satisfaction of the common reason of mankind. Besides those whom I have mentioned (to which many more of like kind might be added) as expressly rejecting all demonstration *a priori* in respect of the Divine existence, great numbers might be further mentioned who tacitly disregarded it, and made no use of it in proving the existence when occasion offered: and they also may be justly looked upon, for the most part, as witnesses against it, since they could not well be totally ignorant of it, nor unwilling to take it in and make the best of it, were it really of any force. For what man of discernment would not prefer an ostensive demonstration, where it can be had, before any other of a less perfect kind? Or who would not choose an argument *a priori* to come at his conclusion by, rather than be content to work his way by *effects* only, which in comparison is feeling in the dark? Yet such is the method that the ablest and wisest men have taken, aiming no higher: Bishop Ward for instance, in his treatise of the existence and attributes, and Bishop Wilkins in his, and Bishop Pearson on the same subject, and Dr. Barrow, and Mr. Locke, and Mr. Wollaston; besides a great many more: men that could not have failed to take in the argument *a priori*, had they not been persuaded that there was no soundness, no solidity in it.

If now it should be asked, of what use or service this Historical View can be, in a point of pure reasoning, and not depending at all upon *authorities*. I answer that it may be serviceable for several good ends and purposes.

1. As it is not merely historical, but in part argumentative also; as discovering the reasons upon which wise men before us have proceeded in forming their judgment upon the question in

hand: and possibly those reasons may meet with the more favourable attention and reception, on account of the hands they come from. For demonstration itself must often be content to borrow all its relative force from the instrument of conveyance.

2. It is of use in all questions which have before passed through many hands, and have been often and carefully considered, to look back to what others have thought and determined upon them. For it may reasonably be presumed in such cases that the point has been carried to as great perfection as it is capable of, since the extent of *human reason*, in all ages where the light is equal, is very nearly the same. Besides, it seldom happens that a single person, who takes upon him to go on *proprio Marte*, without consulting others, will be able at once to view the argument on all sides, or to be aware of every difficulty which may occur in it. *Plus vident oculi quam oculus: In a multitude of counsellors there is safety.* I am aware that sometimes attending too much to others may forestall a man's own better judgment, or cramp a good invention. But then, on the other hand, the following one's own thoughts too much, disregarding what others have said or written, is often a means to make a man self-conceited and superficial. The way therefore to avoid both extremes is to try first, how far we can go with our own unassisted inquiries, upon any question of pure abstract reasoning; and afterwards to compare what we have done, with what others have done in the same kind before us.

3. To such as choose to be led by authority and great names, in points of an abstruse nature (which they have neither inclination nor leisure to inquire closely into), it is of use to know on what side the authority and the great names really are, ancient and modern. And it may reasonably be presumed that truth is with them; unless some fair account can be given, how it came to pass that so many wise and great man, so well prepared to make a true judgment, and so fitly disposed for it, should notwithstanding widely mistake in it.

However, I mention these things not as if any authority ought to prevail over clear and cogent reason, or as if the question now in hand wanted any authority at all to decide or determine it. The same reasons which obtained formerly are of equal force now, and are never the worse for the wearing, as time can never alter eternal truths. I proceed therefore to examine this question over again (as if it had never been debated or considered before), and to see how it will now stand at the bar of sober and impartial reason.

## Chapter 2.

Considering the Merits of the Debate about the Argument *a priori*.

Here it will be proper to show, but as briefly as may be, 1. That the supposed argument *a priori* is very loose and precarious, having nothing in a manner to stand upon, except it be an ill use made of *equivocal* terms or phrases. 2. That it is, moreover, when fully understood, palpably wrong and absurd. 3. That the several *pleas* or *excuses* invented for it, are fallacious, and of no real weight.

1. I would observe, that the supposed argument *a priori* is at the best very loose and precarious, having nothing to stand upon, but an abuse of equivocal terms or phrases. The whole seems to amount to little more than the ringing of changes upon the word *necessity*, as shall be seen presently. But because that word is capable of many senses, and consequently apt to usher in many fallacies, it will be proper here to note the various acceptations of that instrument of delusion.

*Necessity* is but of modern date (comparatively speaking) in our language. It comes from the Latin *necessitas*, which, though otherwise ancient enough, yet seems to have been brought but late into our present subject. [See above.] I know not what good the Schools did by introducing

it, or by substituting the improper and ambiguous phrases of *necessary existence*, or *necessity of existence*, instead of the more ancient and more proper expressions; such as *natural existence*, or *emphatical existence*; or such as *eternal*, *immutable*, *unmade*, *independent*, *permanent*, and the like. The new word *necessity*, as here applied, and as opposed to *precarious* or *contingent*, affords no *new* idea beyond the other, but is apt to excite false conceptions, and to promote false reasoning. But since the mischief is already done, as to the *introducing* this improper Pagan term into Christian theology, and it is now too late to undo it; the only way left to provide against the misapprehensions arising from it is to distinguish, as carefully as we can, the several senses which have been commonly affixed to the words *necessary* or *necessity*. The most comprehensive division of *necessity* is into four kinds; *logical*, *moral*, *physical*, and *metaphysical*. Let us take those kinds singly in their order, and minutely examine what they mean.

(1) *Logical necessity* is where it is an express contradiction to say the contrary. [Chauvin. P. 435.] Which resolves into this, that the same idea, under different terms, or expressions, is still the same idea, and necessarily agrees with itself. Thus there is a necessity that man should be rational, as rationality is implied in the general idea of man. Not that there is any physical necessity that this or that man should be so (for he may cease to be rational, or to exist at all), but there is a logical necessity that the definition should agree to the thing defined, and that the idea expressed by the word man should be what it is, while supposed to be so. This kind of *necessity* is otherwise called *necessity of predication*; importing an ideal and undeniable connection between subject and predicate. [Chauvin. p. 435.] As if man is said to be *rational*, or to be an *animal*. To the head of *logical necessity* is to be referred what the Schools call *necessitas consequentis*, and likewise *necessitas consequentiae*, expressing the indissoluble connection between premises and conclusion [See Chauvin. *ibid.*]; that is, again, between one idea and another, or between proposition and proposition, or one part of a proposition and another part. In short, *logical necessity* is nothing else but a name for the supposed inviolable connection between idea and idea, or between proposition and proposition, or between subject and predicate.

(2) *Moral necessity* imports a connection, but not so constant and invariable, between *end* and *means*. [Chauvin. *ibid.*] As when we say, there is a necessity of temperance to preserve health; or if it be said that man is under a *moral* necessity of doing his duty, as it is a means to happiness, his chief end. It is called *moral*, in opposition to *physical*, which comes next to be mentioned. If any man is violently forced or compelled to anything, he is then under a *physical* necessity, and so far ceases to be a *moral* agent.

(3) *Physical necessity* imports an inviolable *connection* between natural *causes* and *effects*. [Chauvin. *ibid.*] This is often called *absolute* necessity, in opposition to moral, which is not absolute, but conditional, or hypothetical, or liable to some exceptions or limitations. It is called *causal* necessity, when intended to express what influence the cause will have in producing the effect: as there is a *causal* necessity for the appearing of light when the sun is risen. An *antecedent* necessity, or a necessity *a priori*, denotes the same thing. But a necessity *a posteriori* is a name intended to express what reference the *effect* has to some cause or causes: as if there are things made, there is a necessity of a maker. There cannot be motion without a mover, nor external light without a luminous substance.

(4) The fourth kind of necessity is *metaphysical*, and imports *immutable* existence proper to God only. [Chauvin. *ibid.* p. 435.] It is opposed to mutable, precarious, contingent, dependent existence. It is the same with what Dr. Cudworth somewhere calls a *necessary schesis* to existence, expressing the inseparable *connection* between the *existence* and the *subject* of it, between *existence* and *essence*. Creatures are considered as coming from non-existence; and as

being liable to lose the existence which they enjoy. Therefore their existence is precarious and perishable. But the Deity never wanted existence, never can cease to exist; therefore his existence is immutable, unperishable, firm, stable, and enduring (independently) from everlasting to everlasting. This permanency of being is considered as a mode of existence, presupposing existence, as *modal* being always supposes *pure* being. [Chauvin. p. 434. *Bradwardin. de Causa Dei*, p. 678.] It may be called *modal* necessity, as expressing that perfect *manner* of existence proper to the Deity: God's *manner* of existing is above all chance, change, or failure. This modal necessity, or self-sufficiency, ought to be carefully distinguished from causal before mentioned, metaphysical from physical. Causal necessity is antecedent, elective, operative; modal is *posterior* and *subsequent*, in order of nature and conception, to the existence or existing subject, whereof it is the *mode*, and to which it is referred up as to its source or center, its *substratum* or support.

Having thus competently explained the several kinds of necessity, I have one thing to observe of them, that the idea of some sort of firm *connection* runs through them *all*; and that is the proper general import of the name *necessity*. Connection of *mental* or *verbal* propositions, or of their respective parts, makes up the idea of logical necessity. Connection of *end* and *means* makes up the idea of *moral* necessity. Connection of *causes* and *effects* is *physical*. And connection of *existence* and *essence* is *metaphysical* necessity. This last is what our present argument is solely concerned in. It has been sometimes styled *simple* or *absolute* necessity, as opposed to *relative*. For though physical necessity may also be called absolute, as opposed to limited or conditional (as before hinted), it is not absolute as opposed to relative; because it stands in the relation between causes and effects. But *metaphysical* necessity has no relation to anything extraneous to the subject of it. It subsists only in the Divine essence, considered as inseparably connected with its own existence. This is that pure, simple, absolute, transcendental necessity, which the later schoolmen and metaphysicians speak of.

These things premised, I may now proceed to inquire what the argument *a priori* (as it is called) has to stand upon, or how it is supported. The way of coming at it is first to prove *a posteriori* the *existence* of an *independent* Being, thus: *Something now is, therefore something has existed from all eternity*; therefore some one *unchangeable* and *independent* Being, one at least; therefore there is someone *self-existent* or *necessarily existing* Being. [See Dr. Clarke's Demonstration, etc. prop. 1, 2, 3.] Thus far is right and well, for the coming at necessary existence in the way of arguing *a posteriori*. Call it necessity of existence, and then that necessity imports a mode of the existence before proved, subsequent, in order of nature and conception, to the existence, and referred up to the subject of it. This modal necessity is a property of the independent Being, denoting his immutable permanency, his infinite stability. But it happens, that the word *necessity* often stands for causal and physical necessity (very different from modal and metaphysical), and so here begins the first double. The subsequent necessity is soon after dropped, and antecedent necessity is slipped upon us in its room. Under the cover of an ambiguous name, the idea which we began with is first changed for another, altogether new and foreign, and then enters the argument *a priori* with all its train. There is now conceived I know not what antecedent necessity, and internal cause, and prior reason, ground, and foundation of the independent Being; and all built upon nothing but the equivocation of a word, or a quick transition made from necessity, considered in the modal and proper sense, to necessity taken in a causal and foreign meaning. This "necessity," it is said, must be "antecedent, in the natural order of our ideas, to our supposition of its being." [Clarke, *ibid.* p. 14. sixth edit.] Why must it be antecedent? No necessity had been proved before, but what was conceived subsequent (in the

natural order of our ideas) to the existence of the independent Being, being a mode of it, and referred up to it. Why then must it be antecedent? There is no reason at all for it; unless it be that an argument *a priori* required such an antecedence, and would drop without it. The supposed antecedence in this case appears to be all fancy and fiction, not collected from what went before, by any regular deduction, but arbitrarily fetched in, under the umbrage and protection of an equivocal name. Put but immutability of existence, or independence, or durability, instead of necessity of existence (which really signifies no more than the other), and then it will be presently seen how the notion of antecedence drops and disappears: which makes it plain that the notion is here false and foreign, not deducible from any regular train of ideas, but brought in, at all adventures, only because the technical term necessity admits of two senses, and is a serviceable word for the sinking one idea and bringing up another.

But to favour this new notion of antecedence (so arbitrarily introduced) it is added, "This necessity must antecedently force itself upon us whether we will or no, even while we are endeavouring to suppose that no such being exists. For example, when we are endeavouring to suppose that there is no being in the universe that exists necessarily, we always find in our minds (besides the foregoing demonstration of something being self-existent, from the impossibility of every thing's being dependent), we always find in our minds, I say, some ideas, as of infinity and eternity; which to remove, that is, to suppose no being, no substance in the universe, to which these "attributes, or modes of existence, are necessarily inherent, is a contradiction in the very terms. For modes and attributes exist only by the existence of the substance to which they belong t." [Clarke, *ibid.* p. 15.]

In answer to this paragraph, I may observe briefly, 1. That there is no arguing from ideal to real existence; unless it could first be shown that such ideas must have their objective realities, and cannot be accounted for, as they pass within, except it be by supposing such and such real existence, *ad extra*, to answer them. 2. Allowing that we find such ideas in our minds, and that they antecedently force themselves upon us, this proves no more than kind of order of antecedence in our conceptions, but does not prove any real antecedence with respect to the Divine existence, as if that were preceded by something prior in order of nature to it. 3. Whatever necessity we may find ourselves under as to conceiving or imagining thus or thus; yet we are under no antecedent necessity of believing that these conceptions or imaginations do infer the existence of a Deity, till it be regularly proved to us, or till it can be clearly shown what certain connection there is between ideas and realities, between thoughts and things. 4. If such certain connection could be proved, yet such proof would not amount to a demonstration *a priori*, being that the process of such an argument is altogether *a posteriori*, from effects to causes, from things posterior to something antecedent. For the process runs thus: we have such and such ideas, which ideas must have objective realities as their cause or ground; and those objective realities, or real attributes, must have their subject, as all modes and attributes have: and thus at length by this analysis, or in the way of ascent, we come up to a first Cause, which is antecedent, in order of nature, to every mode and attribute supposed to inhere in it, and to belong to it. So that, even in this way, we can never arrive to anything which can be justly conceived prior or antecedent, in order of nature, to the existence of a first Cause. It appears then that antecedent necessity is very arbitrarily introduced into this subject, having no regular chain of reasoning, no proper connection of ideas, nor indeed anything, but an equivocation upon the word necessity, to support or countenance it.

I would next take notice, that the use made afterwards of this antecedent necessity is altogether as arbitrary and fanciful as the introducing it. The uses it is made to serve are, to prove

the eternity, [Demonstrat. p. 39.] omnipresence, [Ibid. p. 41.] and unity [Ibid. p. 44.] of the self-existent Being. And here it is observable, that necessity is furnished with epithets (all in the arbitrary way) just as the occasion requires; epithets suitable to the points to be proved. When it is to prove the *eternity*, then it is to be styled “absolute, not depending on anything external, always unalterably the same.” [Demonstrat. p. 39.] When it is to prove the *infinity*, or the *omnipresence*, then it is characterized as being again *absolute* in itself, and “not depending on any outward cause”; and now it must be *everywhere*, as well as *always*, unalterably the same; having no relation to time, or place, or anything else. [Ibid. p. 41.] But when it is to serve for proof of the unity, then it is to be simple, and uniform, and universal, without any possible difference, deformity, or variety whatsoever. [Ibid. p. 44.] That is to say, it shall be what the demonstrator pleases to make it, that he may adapt it variously to the various purposes he intended by it. The neater and shorter way would have been to have denominated it at once an *absolute, omnimodous, all-perfect* necessity; and then not only eternity, and omnipresence, and unity, but infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, and every perfection whatever might have been instantly inferred from it. For it might have been pleaded, that such necessity had no relation to one perfection more than to another, being uniform and universal, extending equally to all, and operating [See Letters, p. 19, 34.] as much with respect to every perfection, as to any, having nothing to limit it, nothing to control it. This reasoning appears equally clear and forcible with the other: and both are alike weak and precarious, having no solid foundation of reason to rest upon; nothing but an obscure unintelligible principle, floating in the mind, and managed at pleasure, to make some appearance of demonstration in a way wherein none can be had, or to cover a *petitio principii*, which yet betrays itself immediately in every instance.

I have hitherto been observing that the pretended antecedent necessity is arbitrarily introduced, and then as arbitrarily carried on: and now I am only to remark further that it is, at length, as arbitrarily dismissed. For indeed there is as much reason for going on with it *in infinitum*, as for taking it in at all: and there is no more reason for stopping at one fresh antecedent necessity than for stopping at five hundred; nor any more reason for stopping there than for going on infinitely. If everything that exists, and every circumstance of it, must have a reason *a priori*, why it is, rather than not [Ibid. p. 33.] (a supposition which the argument *a priori* is built upon), then the antecedent necessity itself must have a reason *a priori* to fix and determine it, and that another, and so on infinitely. Wherefore if we admit but one antecedent necessity as prior, in order of nature, to the first Cause, there is no reason at all for stopping at the first remove, or for dismissing the notion of an antecedent necessity so soon, or at all. The same thought, the same suggestion, will come over again at every new advance higher in the series of antecedent necessities: for every one of them will want a new ground, a new internal cause, a new antecedent necessity, to determine its being; and all for the same reason as the first Cause was supposed to want one. Therefore, I say, it is perfectly arbitrary and unaccountable to make a full pause at one single antecedent necessity, and not to continue and carry on necessities higher and higher, without number and without end. Thus much may suffice for exposing the precarious and fanciful nature of the pretended proof *a priori*.

2. But I proceed further to observe that it is not only precarious, but manifestly absurd. It is demonstrable *a priori*, that there neither is nor can be any proof *a priori* of the existence of a first Cause, because there is no cause prior to the first. [Gillius, p. 386.] But, to be a little more distinct and particular, imagine something prior or antecedent, in order of nature or conception, to the first Cause, what must that something be? There are but three possible suppositions, and all of them flatly contradictory and absurd. Suppose either the substance itself, or some property

of that substance, or something extrinsic to both, to be that antecedent ground, reason, or foundation, prior in conception to the first Cause: they are every one of them incapable and incompetent for it.

(1.) To begin with the last of them, a *principle extrinsic*. One would think by the turn of the argument, in several passages where it is handled, that the antecedent necessity were considered as something extrinsic to the first Cause: particularly where it is represented as operating [Letters, p. 19, 34.] everywhere, and always, so as to make the divine Being eternal and omnipresent, or the like. And indeed if the words carry any idea at all in them, and any force of argument, they must be so understood; just as we understand them of any external cause producing its effect. But, as an extrinsic principle is absurd in itself, and is besides expressly rejected [Letters, p. 32.] by the advocates for the proof *a priori*, I need not here say a word more of it.

(2.) Take we then next the *substance* itself, and consider whether that can be conceived as prior or antecedent to itself. It is very plain that it cannot: and so much also is confessed on all hands, [Letters, p. 33, 40. Demonstration, etc. p. 21.] and therefore we may dismiss this article and proceed.

(3.) The only remaining supposition is that some *attribute* or *property* of the self-existent Being may be conceived *antecedent*, in order of nature, to the same Being. But that is, if possible, still more absurd than the last preceding. An attribute is attributed to its subject as its ground and support, and a property, in the very notion of it, is *proper* to the substance whereunto it belongs, and *subsequent* in order of nature and conception to it. An *antecedent* attribute, or property, is as great a solecism, and almost as flat a contradiction, as an antecedent subsequence, or a subsequent antecedence, understood in the same sense, and same respect. Every property or attribute, as such, presupposes its subject, and cannot be understood otherwise. To make the property antecedent is inverting the natural order, and confounding the idea; and, in short, is denying it to be what it is. The truth of what is here said is so glaring and forcible that it sometimes extorts the assent even of those who upon other occasions affect to gainsay it. It is confessed that “the scholastic way of proving the existence of the self-existent Being from the absolute perfection of his nature, is ὕστερον πρότερον for, [N.B.] all or any perfections presuppose existence; which is *petitio principii*.” [Letters, p. 33.] If therefore properties, modes, or attributes in God, be considered as perfections (and it is certain they must), then by this account they must all or any of them presuppose existence. Indeed, it is immediately added, in the same place, “that bare necessity of existence does not presuppose, but infer, existence.” That is to say, if such necessity be supposed to be a principle extrinsic: but if it be a mode or property, it must presuppose the existence of its subject, as certainly and as evidently as it is a mode or a property. It might perhaps *a posteriori* infer the existence of its subject, as effects may infer a cause: but to infer in the other way *a priori*, is altogether as impossible as that a triangle should be a square; which is joining repugnant ideas together.

In another place it is observed by the fame learned author “that the idea of *space* (as also of *time* or *duration*) is an idea of a certain quality or relation, which not being itself a substance, [N. B.] necessarily presupposes a substance, without which it could not exist” [Letters, p. 25.]. Now if the necessity spoken of be a property or mode, and not a substance, it must, for the very same reason, necessarily presuppose a substance without which it could not exist. So true it is that a mode, or property, cannot be conceived antecedent in order of nature to its subject, without running into a flat absurdity, and the greatest confusion of ideas imaginable.

The sum then is that, to make out an argument *a priori*, there must be a cause, or however a priority or antecedence, brought in to argue upon, and to draw an inference from, to the existence of a Deity: and yet no sooner is the idea of cause, or priority, or antecedence (though in conception only) introduced, but we immediately subvert the idea of a property, and of a first Cause. It is a vain thing to insist one while upon the antecedence, for the sake of the pretended demonstration, and then presently to drop it, by retreating to the idea of a property, for the sake of warding off insuperable objections. Either there is no antecedence in this case at all to form the argument upon; or, if there be, the antecedent principle is no property, but a principle extrinsic. So then either the antecedence must drop, and the argument *a priori* drop with it: or if the antecedence be kept up, the idea of a property is destroyed instantly, and we are yet to seek for a first Cause. Turn we the thing which way we will, the presumed argument *a priori* is all over contradictory and absurd. It is not merely abstruse or unintelligible, but plainly and clearly repugnant to reason, and to itself. It is tacking together disjointed and incompatible ideas, which can never stand together, but must inevitably clash and destroy one another. However, as there is no cause whatever so defenseless and destitute, but that something or ether may be pleaded for it, and a skillful advocate may lay colours upon any thing: so it is here. A very ingenious defense has been drawn up for the argument *a priori*, in which we have the spirit and quintessence of what the cause can afford. [Answer to the Seventh Letter, p. 40, etc.] A just reply was made to it some time after, [Dr. Gretton's Review of the Argument *a priori*. Printed for B. Lintel, A. D. 1726. See also *Concio ad Clerum*, upon the same subject, and by the same author. *Cantabrigiae*, 1732.] by a very good hand, which might save me the labour of saying anything more to it. But perhaps it may be of service to have the same things represented in different lights; or if it be only abridging what has been said before more at large, even that perhaps may not be altogether without its use. I proceed then,

3. To examine the several *pleas* or *excuses* invented for the support of the argument *a priori*, in order to show that they are none of them sufficient for the purposes intended. I shall break the discourse into so many distinct parts, or *pleas*, for the distinct and methodical conception of the subject.

#### Plea I.

“Though it is indeed most evident, that no *thing*, no *being* can be *prior* to that Being which is the *first Cause* and original of all things. Yet there must be in nature a ground or reason, a permanent ground or reason, of the existence of the first Cause. Otherwise its existence would be owing to, and depend upon, mere chance.” [Answer to the Seventh Letter, p. 40.] To which I answer,

(1.) If by *ground* or *reason* be meant a *cause*, the idea of it is repugnant to the notion of a *first Cause*, which must be absolutely uncaused, both with respect to itself and to everything else. But if by *ground* or *reason* be meant only a ground or reason for asserting such existence, that we may readily admit, as meaning only that there is a reason *a posteriori* whereby we prove the truth of the thing that so it is. *Reason* and *ground* are softer names in this case than *cause* is, and may sometimes serve to hide the absurdity which appears at once upon the naming of a cause prior to the first. It may, or rather must be allowed, that there is a reason for every existence, a reason of one kind or other, either *a priori* or else *a posteriori*. But it is nevertheless certain that there is not a reason *a priori* for everything, because there must be a first in the ascending line; as also, on the other hand, there is not a reason *a posteriori* for everything, because there must be a last in the order of descent. [*Rodeic. de Arriag. Curs. Philos.* p. 222.]

(2.) Though the uncaused Being has neither ground nor cause to determine its existence, yet it is not owing to, or dependent upon, mere chance, because it is not owing or dependent at

all, but entirely underived and independent. If the force of the objection lies in this, that unless the existence be dependent on something, it cannot be firm and stable this amounts to saying, that a first cause, or an independent existence, is a contradictory notion in itself. It is certain, that if the existence be dependent on anything, it is not the firmer, but may be the more precarious for being so. The highest possible stability is to be absolutely independent, absolutely uncaused. This is the strongest security against all possible chances or failures: and therefore it never can be allowed that assigning it a cause, a ground, or foundation, is fusing the existence; when the supposing it to have no cause, no ground, etc. nor to need any, is really the top perfection of being, the very highest and best thing that we can either say or conceive of it.

(3.) But supposing that there might yet remain some difficulty in our scheme (as difficulties there must be in conceiving eternity, and in searching the mysterious nature and existence of the unsearchable Being), yet if the difficulty be rather shifted than taken away, by the expedient here proposed, or if absurdities be brought in instead of difficulties, how then are we at all relieved by it, or the better for it? That such is the case here, is plain at first sight. For what if we go on to assign a cause, a ground, or a foundation for the first Cause, it is but going one step further, and there the same difficulty occurs as before, besides several new ones. That cause, that ground, that foundation, that antecedent necessity (or whatever else we call it) will still want another cause, another ground, another foundation, another antecedent necessity to fix and support it; or else, by the same reasoning, its existence will be owing to, and dependent upon, mere chance. [See Dr. Gretton's Review, p. 15.] If we still go higher up, to a second or a third remove, or to as many more as we can think on, the same difficulty will haunt us all the way in the wandering progress, and we shall never find rest for the sole of our foot, till we return to the place where we first stepped aside, till we come back to the first Cause of all things, and there terminate our inquiries. They that attempt to move but one step higher, are sure to involve themselves in inextricable mazes, and are doubly to blame: first, for inventing a cause prior to the first, or a reason higher than the highest; and next, for making that newly invented support (according to their own argument) owe its existence to mere chance. Let the discerning readers therefore judge upon the whole, who it is that makes the Divine existence contingent and precarious, they or we.

## Plea II.

“The existence of the first Cause is *necessary*, necessary absolutely and in itself; and therefore that necessity is *a priori*, and, in order of nature, the ground or reason of its existence.” [Answer to Seventh Letter, p. 41.] To which I reply,

(1.) It is allowed that the existence of the first Cause is necessary, not contingent: and because that necessity is only a mode of the presupposed existence, therefore it is not *a priori*, or, in order of nature, an antecedent ground or reason, but it is subsequent and posterior, in order of nature and conception, to that whereof it is the mode: for all modes, as such, are subsequent to their subject, which is the ground and support of them.

(2.) Necessity absolute (in the metaphysical sense, as here used) is a contradiction to the notion of antecedent ground, or cause, having no relation [See above.] to anything of that kind. It imports an inviolable connection between the essence and the existence in a being uncaused and independent. To make connection the ground and reason of the existence, either means that the essence is the ground of itself, or means nothing, amounting only to so many words of amusement.

### Plea III.

“That which exists necessarily (or in the idea of which existence and necessity are inseparably and necessarily connected) must either therefore be necessary because it exists, or else it must therefore exist, because its existence is necessary.” [Answer to Seventh Letter, p. 41.] I answer,

(1.) It is improper to say that existence and necessity are connected: for since necessity, as here applied, imports nothing but connection, it amounts to saying that existence and connection are so connected; whereas, in truth and propriety, the existence and the essence are what are here supposed to be connected. But all the confusion arises from want of distinguishing between causal and modal, between physical and metaphysical necessity.

(2.) We do not say that the first Cause is therefore necessary because it exists (for then everything existing would be necessary), but rather, because it exists in such a manner, exists independently. Not that independence is properly the cause of necessary existence, or *vice versa* (for both are but names or expressions for one and the same property or perfection), but all resolves into this, that God is what he is, and such as we prove him, *a posteriori*, to be. We can go no higher than to say that his nature is such, that he exists independently, immutably, necessarily, as opposed to contingency. It is wrong to ask for a *wherefore* in this case: it is supposing no first Cause at all. The plea sets out upon a false principle, that a *therefore* must be given in every instance assignable, or a reason *a priori* admitted. We have done with reasons *a priori*, as soon as we are arrived to the top of all existence. For as in abstract necessary truths, the highest pitch we can come up to is that the same idea is the same idea, or every idea is what it is. So in our running up to the top of real existence (as opposed to ideal), the highest pinnacle of all is that the same being is the same being, or is what it is. Such then is the nature or perfection of the Deity, that he exists independently. To assign a cause for that existence is to make it less. It is to suppose it dependent on something else. It is destroying with one hand what we build with the other. We pretend not therefore to give a reason *a priori* why God exists necessarily (for if such reason could be given, it would sink the idea of necessary instead of raising it), but we assign reasons *a posteriori* why we believe and maintain it; which is giving the  $\tau\omicron\ \acute{\omicron}\tau\iota$ , not the  $\tau\omicron\ \delta\iota\acute{\omicron}\tau\iota$ , and is all that can be or ought to be given in this case, as is self-evident.

(3.) But suppose we should attempt to go higher up beyond the first Cause, to something conceived prior or antecedent to it, will not the same difficulty recur in every stage of the progression? The same dilemma is applicable to the next higher cause, and to every other, *in infinitum*. For it may still be pleaded that such antecedent ground must either be necessary because it exists, or else must therefore exist because its existence is necessary; and so the mind is again set afloat, without stay or anchor, in an endless pursuit after more and more antecedent absolute necessities.

### Plea IV.

“The eternity of God can no otherwise be proved, than by considering *a priori* the nature of a necessary or self-existent Cause. – That the first Cause has existed from eternity, and shall exist to eternity, cannot be proved from the temporary phenomena, but must be demonstrated from the intrinsic nature of necessary existence.” I answer,

(1.) The question here is not by what other ways the eternity can be proved, but whether it can be proved in this. Be the other proofs, which proceed *a posteriori*, ever so lame or insufficient, their defects will be of no service for the healing the absurdities of this. So the plea

is foreign, and wide of the purpose, unless the design were to plead for the usefulness of a proof, which cannot be shown to be a proof.

(2.) The suggestion here offered is not true, especially as to God's existing from eternity. The natural, regular, and indeed the common way, has been to prove the eternity before the necessary existence, and that is the very way which the author himself took to come at necessary existence [Demonstration, prop. ii. p. 11.]: and no one has better answered this plea than himself hath done in another place. ["Not to philosophers only, but even to the meanest capacities, are there obvious arguments in reason, to prove clearly the necessity of this Divine perfection [eternity], and to set it before them in a practical and useful light. For since it is in some degree a perfection to be, and a greater degree of that perfection to continue in being, it is evident, when we conceive of God the most perfect Being, we must conceive him to be infinite in this perfection also, as well as in others.

"Again: it is evident even to the meanest capacity, which considers things at all, that he who first gave being to all other things, could not possibly have any beginning himself, and must therefore necessarily have existed from all eternity: and that he who hath already existed from all eternity, independently, and of himself, cannot possibly be liable to be deprived of his being, and must therefore necessarily exist for an eternity to come." *Clarke's Posthumous Sermons*, vol. i. p. 80.]

(3.) If anyone were first to prove the existence and an attribute or two more, and then proceed to demonstrate the eternity from the existence, etc. before proved, such a method of arguing *a priori* we should not except to, neither do we condemn it. [The Schoolmen have often taken that method of proving the eternity, understanding it to be arguing *a priori*: and it seems that it may properly enough be so styled; though some would scruple to give it that name, because there is no real order among the attributes. (See Bp. Barlow on this head, Exercit. iv. p. 183, etc.) But if there may be an order of conception, it suffices: and that there may appear very plainly. See Richard. de Media Vill. who handles this question at large, lib. i. distinct. 2. quaest. iv. p. 32. And Gillius, lib. ii. tr. 2. c. 9. p. 538.] All that we object to is the imagining any ground, cause, or necessity, (or whatever it be called,) antecedent, in order of nature, to the existence. One attribute may perhaps rationally be considered as prior in conception to another, and existence as prior to all [*Bradwardin. in Causa Dei*, lib. i. cap. 12. p. 201.]: therefore the way of arguing *a priori* from existence and attributes before proved, to other attributes not yet proved, we may allow of as a rational and just procedure. We distinguish here between arguing *a priori* to attributes, and arguing in like manner to existence.

(4.) It is self-evident that nothing can be proved by a repugnant notion of antecedent necessity, conceived prior to the existence: and therefore eternity, both *a partes ante* and *a parte post*, must either be proved some other way, or not at all. That it may be proved in another way, and without the help of antecedent necessity (proved, I say, *a posteriori*, yea, and perhaps *a priori* also), is abundantly manifest from the many excellent treatises which have handled that point at large. And St. Paul himself has testified the same thing, namely, that the temporary phenomena are sufficient to make men clearly see the eternal power and Godhead of their Creator, and to render them inexcusable in their disbelief of it, or disregard to it. [Rom. 1:20.]

#### Plea V.

"If the first Cause exists absolutely without any ground or reason of existence, it might as possibly in times past, without any reason, have not existed; and may as possibly in times to come, without any reason, cease to exist. Can it be proved *a posteriori* that the first Cause of all things will exist tomorrow? Or can it be proved any otherwise than by showing that necessity is a certain ground of future, as well as of present existences?" [Answer to Seventh Letter, p. 42.] I answer,

(1.) By asking, what must be the certain ground of that necessity's existing? Or how will it be proved that that prior necessity will exist tomorrow, unless it be by assigning another

necessity, and so on infinitely? [See Dr. Gretton's Review, p 74.] This kind of reasoning, if it proves anything, proves that there neither is nor can be a first Cause: and so it is choosing to admit a manifest absurdity, only to avoid an appearing difficulty.

(2.) To answer more directly, it is not possible in the nature of things to have any higher or stronger security as to the first Cause's existing tomorrow than this; that he never had any cause, ground, or support of his existence, never needed any, being independent and self-sufficient, [Gillius, p. 1032.] the prop and stay, the ground and foundation of all existences. If indeed he himself were to have any ground, foundation, or cause of his being, we might then have some handle for doubting whether his relation to that ground might continue, or how long it might subsist. But when he is above and beyond all grounds and causes, we have all the reason in the world to believe that he is infinitely secure from change, is independently the same "yesterday, today, and forever". It is very odd to think of ascertaining his existence by assigning him a prior cause, which is the only way to unsettle it, and to make it less certain than it is. But it is a great confirmation of the truth of our doctrine in this particular, that every argument formed against it is at length found to stand on its side, and to make for it.

#### Plea VI.

"When atheistic writers affirm that the material universe, and every existing substance in particular, was eternal, absolutely without any ground or reason of existence, can this assertion be confuted by him who shall himself affirm that God was eternal absolutely, without any ground or reason of existence?" [Answer to a Seventh Letter, p. 43.]

*Answer.* Yes, very easily, by showing that what those men foolishly ascribe to the material universe (subject to innumerable changes and imperfections [See Wollaston, p. 76.]) does and can belong only to some unchangeable, independent Being, whose existence we can demonstrate *a posteriori*. It is his privilege, and his only, to be above all ground or antecedent reason of existence, to be absolutely uncaused, being indeed the first Cause. But those atheistic writers, most certainly, never can be solidly confuted by one that shall assert a cause prior to the first: because it is, in effect, denying any first Cause at all, and maintaining an endless progression; which is what every atheist would readily cone into: not to mention how easy it were for them to play with antecedent necessity (an arbitrary principle), adapting the same to their own schemes. [See Dr. Gretton, p. 21–23, etc.]

#### Plea VII.

"The *infinity*, or *immensity*, or *omnipresence* of God can no otherwise be proved than by considering *a priori* the nature of a necessary or self-existent Cause. – That this Author of nature is himself absolutely immense or infinite, cannot be proved from the finite phenomena, but must be demonstrated from the intrinsic nature of a necessary existence." [Answer to the Seventh Letter, p. 43.] To which I rejoin;

(1.) From antecedent necessity, or from anything prior to a first Cause (a notion self-contradictory and palpably absurd), nothing at all can be proved. So then whatever becomes of other proofs for the immensity, it is certain and manifest that nothing can be done with this, which is no proof at all.

(2.) As to necessary existence, soberly and justly understood in the modal sense, and as subsequent in order of nature to its subject (amounting to the same with independent, immutable, or infinitely durable existence), we have nothing to object against arguing from it, so far as it may carry us, or against calling it arguing *a priori*, as it is inferring one or more attributes from

existence and some attribute or attributes before proved. This is quite another thing from the argument *a priori* contended for, and ought to be carefully distinguished from it: we find no fault with anyone's arguing from attribute to attribute; but what we blame is the arguing from a supposed ground, foundation, or internal cause of existence, to either existence or attribute.

(3.) As to immensity, or omnipresence, if the finite phenomena are sufficient to prove that it extends to all *real* existence, it suffices. No one, after that, will scruple to admit as large an infinity as can be desired, though the proof be not drawn out in mood and figure. Mischief is often done by pretending to strict and rigorous demonstrations, where we have no occasion for them, and where the subject is too sublime to go far in, with clear and distinct ideas. Such attempts serve only to make that become matter of question, which before was unquestionable, while standing only on reasonable presumption or moral proof.

#### Plea VIII.

“If the first Cause exists, absolutely without any ground or reason of existence, it may as possibly be finite as infinite; it may as possibly be limited as immense.” [Answer to the Seventh Letter, p. 43.] I answer,

This is repetition of the same argument a little diversified, and so has been sufficiently answered in the articles preceding. But I may briefly observe that the supposed ground or reason is so far from securing us that the first Cause shall not be finite or limited, that it seems to endanger it the more by making it dependent upon a ground, and subject to a prior causality. Besides, what shall secure that ground itself from being finite and limited? Must it be another ground, and then another, and so on infinitely? Such reasoning destroys itself. [See the plea strongly retorted in Gretton's Review, p. 80.] And how are we at all the wiser for being told that the absolute necessity must be everywhere, or that it must operate everywhere alike? [Letters, p. 13. Demonstrat. p. 41.] If a *petitio principii* were allowable, it were better to say (and it is as easily said) that the independent first Cause must be everywhere, and in all places alike. For this is sense at least, if it does not amount to a proof: while the other is as much a *petitio principii* (for who knows how or where such imaginary cause must operate?), and besides is talking either without ideas, or with contradictory ideas, as has been often shown. To be short, our physical, moral, or scriptural proofs of the omnipresence are clear enough, and full enough, to answer all intents and purposes, and to satisfy every reasonable mind [See Bp. Barlow, Exercitat. vi. p. 283, etc. Bp. Wilkins, Nat. Relig. p. 117, etc.]; as the author allows elsewhere. [“It cannot but be evident, even to the meanest capacity, upon careful consideration, that he who made all things, as he could not but be before the things that he made, so it is not possible but he must be present also with the things that he made and governs. For things could not be made without the actual presence of the power that made them; nor can things ever be governed with any certainty, unless the wisdom that governs them be present with them. Whatever arguments therefore prove the being of God, and his unerring providence, must all be understood to prove equally likewise his actual omnipresence.” *Clarke, Posth. Sermons*, vol. i. Sermon 8. p. 173.]

#### Plea IX.

The *unity* of God (which, I think, has always been allowed to be a principle of natural religion: otherwise St. Paul could not justly have blamed the heathen as inexcusable in that they did not retain God in their knowledge, etc.) the unity of God, I say, can no otherwise be demonstrated, than by considering *a priori* the nature of a necessary or self-existent Cause. – That “this supreme Author and Governor of this nature, or of these phenomena, is the Supreme Author and Governor of universal nature cannot be proved by us from our partial and imperfect knowledge of a few phenomena, in that small part of the universe which comes within the reach

of our senses, but must be demonstrated from the intrinsic nature of necessary existence.” [Answer to a Seventh Letter, p. 44.] To all which I reply distinctly, as follows.

(1.) It looks not well to make the unity a principle of natural religion, and at the same time to declare that there is no proof of it from natural reason, excepting only this pretended proof *a priori*; which, by the confession of its greatest advocates, is not capable of being understood but by a few, and those very attentive minds, never to be made obvious to the generality of men [Answer to a Sixth Letter, p. 32.]; which moreover has been as universally rejected by the learned who have thought of it, as it has been totally unknown to the vulgar in all past ages; and which, lastly, is not only an inconclusive argument for the unity, or for anything else, but demonstrably absurd. If natural religion affords no other argument of the unity but this now mentioned, it is evident that the unity is no principle of it.

(2.) It looks still worse to plead St. Paul’s authority in this case, who if he thought of the unity at all in the texts cited or referred to, yet certainly had no view to this argument *a priori* as rendering the heathen inexcusable. For how could they be inexcusable for not seeing what none but a few, and not without very attentive minds, can see, what can never be obvious to the generality, what the wisest and most thoughtful men have constantly rejected as absurd, and what plainly and inevitably is so! If St. Paul had any view at all to the proofs of the unity in that place (which is questionable [See Dr. Gretton, p. 84.]), it was to such only as may be drawn *a posteriori* (from the few phenomena in our system, or from tradition). which the plea rejects as no proofs”.\* Therefore St. Paul’s authority is very improperly alleged to give shelter or countenance to the argument *a priori*.

\*[But the learned author elsewhere allows them to be sufficient, and so in effect has obviated or answered this plea himself. His words are: “The plain connection of one thing upon another, through the whole material universe, through all parts of the earth, and in the visible heavens; the disposition of the air, and sea, and winds; the motions of the sun, moon, and stars; and the useful vicissitudes of seasons, for the regular production of the various fruits of the earth; have always been sufficient to make it evidently appear, even to mean capacities (had they not been perpetually prejudiced by wrong instruction), that all things are under the direction of one power, under the dominion of one God, to whom the whole universe is uniformly subject. And in fact, – the wisest and best men in all heathen nations have ever seen, and in good measure maintained, this great truth. – But it is with greater clearness from all appearance of doubt, and with greater assurance of authority, confirming the dictate of reason, that the Scripture sets forth to us this first principle of religion.” *Clarke, Posth. Serm.* vol. i. Serm. 2. p. 29–30.]

(3.) Men may be very blamable for not admitting the unity, though it be supposed that they have only moral presumption or traditional proofs of it; because the greater probability ought to determine their judgment, and because it is unquestionable matter of duty, in dubious cases, to take the safer side. There was plain reason for receiving and worshipping one God, while there was no apparent reason at all for worshipping many, but rather the contrary. Therefore the heathen were blamable in admitting a plurality; and yet much more so for admitting such a plurality as they did; which St. Paul chiefly alludes to, condemning their creature worship [Rom. 1:23–25; compare Gal. 4:8.] as altogether inexcusable.

(4.) A distinction should have been made, as in some former articles, between the different ways of arguing *a priori*. It is not amiss to argue for the unity from the existence, and some one attribute or attributes (as omnipotence, immensity, independence, etc.) before proved. Nor should we scruple the propriety of calling it an argument *a priori*: but as to any arguing from antecedent necessity, or from any ground, cause, or reason, considered as prior to the existence (which is the way of arguing now contended for) that is what we can never admit of. Such antecedent absolute necessity carries no more idea with it than antecedent absolute nonentity; unless it means a cause prior to the first, which is infinitely absurd.

(5.) Allowing that the natural proofs of the unity are probable only, not demonstrative, and that upon the foot of mere reason it is a tenet rather to be reckoned among the *pia credibilia* than as a demonstrated truth. This is saying no more than what several very wise and good men have made no scruple to confess [The learned John Gerhard, and John Vossius, cite Gabriel Biel to this purpose, adding their own reflections upon what Biel had said. Biel. Sant. dist. 2. qu. 10. art. 3. *Gerhard. Loc. Comm.* tom. i. p. 106. *Voss. De Idololatr.* lib. i. cap. 2. p. 6. Note: There were several other Schoolmen, besides Biel, who would not allow that the unity could be demonstrated: see them numbered up in Gillius, lib. ii. tract. 3. cap. 7. p. 575.]. And if such be really the case, we are the more obliged to Scripture for ascertaining to us that great truth, as well as for placing it in a clear and just light. Demonstrations (strictly so called) are very good things where they are to be had; but when we cannot come at them, strong probabilities may properly supply their place. It is certain that the bulk of mankind are not fitted for metaphysical or mathematical demonstrations, nor was it ever intended that moral or theological matters should be governed by them. Blessed are they who, having neither had ocular nor other demonstration, but moral probabilities only, have yet believed. Such conduct is justly accounted rational in secular affairs of greatest moment, and it ought to be so accounted in religious also. The adversaries may have a crafty design in requiring more than is necessary, and perhaps more than our faculties can reach to; and it may often be exposing a good cause, and giving the common enemies a needless advantage, to enter the lists with them upon such unequal terms. But this I hint by the way only, and pass on.

#### Plea X.

“If the first Cause exists absolutely without any ground or reason of existence, it is altogether as possible, and as probable, and as reasonable to suppose, that there may, without any reason, exist numberless finite, independent, coexistent first Causes – in different parts of the immense universe, as that there should, without any reason, exist one only, infinite, immense, omnipresent first Cause, Author and Governor of the “ whole.” [Answer to Seventh Letter, p. 44–45.] To which it may be replied:

(1.) That this amounts to saying that unless there be a cause prior to the first (for a reason *a priori* means a cause), there may as well be numberless first Causes as one: which is directly arguing, as usual, against the very name and notion of a first Cause. But though a first Cause may or must be allowed to be mysterious and incomprehensible, yet it should not be thus constantly treated as an impossible or contradictory idea. If there is any such thing as a first Cause, it must be uncaused, and can have no reason *a priori* for it. Therefore to what purpose is it to dispute how many first Causes there might be, when if this way of reasoning be just and conclusive, there could not be so much as one?

(2.) The question about the number of first Causes can never be determined by taking in antecedent necessity, because the same difficulty will always recur, *toties quoties*, about the number of antecedent necessities. For if every one of them, in the long progression, has not another to fix and determine it, there will still be the like danger of numberless antecedent necessities [See Gretton’s Review, p. 90.], or reasons *a priori*, at every remove higher, *in infinitum*.

(3.) Scripture has very plainly and fully determined the question, and both tradition and reason are on the same side. For though there is not perhaps strict demonstration, yet there are fair probabilities (as before hinted) both in the moral and metaphysical way, well known to Divines; and there is no colour of reason for the contrary side. These are sufficient to build a rational belief upon, and with these we ought to rest content.

### Plea XI.

“To argue *a priori* concerning the existence and attributes of the first Cause is no absurdity: for, though no thing, no being can indeed be prior to the first Cause, yet arguments may and must be drawn from the nature and consequences of that necessity by which the first Cause exists.”

[Answer to the Seventh Letter, p. 45.]

Answer. It is allowed that arguments may or must be drawn from the nature and consequences of that necessity by which the first Cause exists, but not from the nature and consequences of that necessity by which the first Cause does not exist. Now the first Cause (if it be proper to say it exists by any necessity) exists by a modal, not a causal necessity; by a metaphysical necessity, not a physical; by a necessity subsequent in order of nature to the existence (whereof it is the mode), not by any antecedent necessity. Therefore let us keep to the idea of modal necessity (meaning permanency, stability, non-contingency, independency, immutability, and the like). I say, let us keep closely to that idea of modal necessity, without changing it into causal; and then, if any arguments can be justly drawn from the nature and consequences of it, let them be admitted. But it is very certain and self-evident that no arguments can be drawn *a priori* to the existence, from a mode of the same existence, subsequent and posterior, in conception, to it.

### Plea XII.

“Mathematical necessary truths are usually demonstrated *a priori*, and yet nothing is prior to truths eternally necessary. To confine therefore the use of the term to argumentations about such things only as have other things prior to them in time is only quibbling about the signification of words.”

Answer. No one goes about to confine the notion of priority to priority in time only. It is allowed that there is a priority of order, or of nature, or of conception, where there is no priority in time. But it is insisted upon that there is nothing at all prior to the existence of the first Cause, in any sense of priority whatever; nothing prior to it so much as in conception, or order of nature; and therefore there is no arguing *a priori* at all in that case. The insisting upon this is not quibbling about words, but reasoning justly and soberly about things, and things of the greatest consequence. The fundamental doctrine of a first Cause is directly concerned in it, and several other very important articles hang upon it.

(2.) As to mathematical necessary truths, they may be demonstrated *a priori*, as long as there is any other truth prior in conception, or order of nature, to them. But when once we ascend up to first principles or axioms, which have no truths prior in conception, there is then no more arguing *a priori*, no ascending up higher in the scale of ideas, or in the chain of truths. [See Dr. Gretton's Review, p. 95.] In like manner, as to real existences there is a first, which is at the top of that scale; and we can go no higher than to the highest. There all reasoning *a priori* ceases, or ought to do so; because there is no existence prior, in order of nature or of conception, to argue from; no possible causality, no imaginable antecedence to build such reasoning upon. There all our searches must terminate; there our aspiring and wearied thoughts take rest. And though an uncaused Being is an unfathomable abyss, and we can scarce forbear asking childishly, how and why, or for what reason it exists, and must exist? yet our recollected thoughts must tell us, that such questions are improper and impertinent, and resolve only into a fond conception or contradictory notion of something still higher than the highest, and prior to the first.

### Plea XIII.

“To the objection, that an attribute cannot be the ground or reason of the existence of the substance itself (which is always, on “the contrary, the support of the attributes), I answer, that in strictness of speech, necessity of existence is not an attribute in the sense that attributes are properly so styled; but it is (*sui generis*) the ground or foundation of existence both of the substance and of all the attributes.” [Answer to Seventh Letter, p. 46.]

Answer. The sum of this evasive plea is that necessity of existence (since it is absurd to make an attribute antecedent) must be a kind of attribute which is no attribute properly speaking; an attribute *sui generis*, a privileged attribute, not subject to the ordinary rules and laws to which all attributes, as such, must be subject: a *postulatum* too large and too arbitrary to be granted by any man that will not be content to take sound for sense, or words and syllables for ideas. Either let this admired necessity be called an attribute, and acknowledged to be subsequent to its subject, and then there is an end of the argument a priori: or if it must be antecedent, for the sake of the argument, let it be called (what it is supposed confusely to be) a principle extrinsic, and so it will import a cause prior to the first. One of these titles it must wear: for there is no breaking the horns of the dilemma; that the said necessity must either be subsequent as an attribute, or else a principle extrinsic, if it be supposed antecedent. The truth is, strictly speaking, necessity in this case is not the attribute, but necessary existence is; and the necessity considered abstractedly, or by itself, is the mode of such existence, expressing the manner or perfection of it. Now certainly, if every attribute, in the very notion of it, is subsequent to the substance whereby it is supported; a mode, which is still one remove further off, and so much the more subsequent, in order of nature and conception, can never be looked upon as antecedent in any view whatever.

### Plea XIV.

“Thus, in other instances, immensity is not an attribute in the sense that wisdom, power, and the like, are strictly so called, but it is (*sui generis*) a mode of existence both of the substance and of all the attributes. In like manner, eternity is not an attribute or property in the sense that other attributes, inhering in the substance, and supported by it, are properly so called, but it is (*sui generis*) the duration of the existence both of the substance and of all the attributes.”

(1.) The design of this plea is to intimate that attributes may be distinguished into several kinds; which is not disputed. Nevertheless all attributes agree in that which makes or denominates them to be attributes; namely, in being attributed to some subject considered as their support, and of course antecedent in conception to them.

(2.) As to immensity and eternity, considered either as attributes of the Divine Being, or as modes to other attributes, they are under one conception subsequent to the substance, and under the other conception subsequent both to the substance and attributes; that is to say, still more subsequent. And such also is the case of necessity, as abstracted from existence, it is a mode of existence, and so it is doubly subsequent under that formality; which the author himself seems to have been sensible of, and therefore was afraid of calling it a mode of existence, though he allows it of the other two.

### Plea XV.

“Attributes or properties, strictly so called, cannot be predicated one of another: wisdom cannot be properly said to be powerful, or power to be wise. But immensity is a mode of existence both of the Divine substance and of all the attributes. And necessity is the ground, or reason, or

foundation of existence, both of the Divine substance, and of all the attributes.” [Answer to Seventh Letter, p. 46.]

Answer. Existence being common to whatever is, no doubt but it may be predicated both of the substance and the attributes. And as necessity in this case is a mode of the existence, and ought to have been called so as well as immensity, and is predicated even of existence, it must of course be predicated of every Divine attribute, because the existence which it goes along with, and adheres to, is so predicated. But to infer from thence that necessity, a mode of being, is a ground, or reason, or foundation of being, is jumping to a conclusion without any premises; yea and against the premises; because a mode of existence presupposes existence. To be short, all those words, ground, reason, foundation, internal cause, and the like, are only so much foreign language, fetched from another subject, and improperly brought in here; sounds and syllables only, if they do not mean a cause prior to the first; flat contradiction and palpable absurdity, if they do. But the word *necessity* seems to carry a kind of a charm in it to deceive the eye or to beguile the fancy, while by a subtle sort of legerdemain it steals away the true idea entrusted with it, and returns you a counterfeit for it.

### Chapter 3.

Briefly intimating the hurtful Tendency of insisting so much upon the pretended Argument *a priori*, both With regard to Religion and Science.

It would not be worth the time or the pains to confute any false notion, were there no harm in it, or if it no way tended, directly or indirectly, to the prejudice of the world. But whatever hurts religion or science hurts the public of course, and that these new principles are of ill tendency, in that respect, will appear from diverse considerations, which come now to be mentioned.

1. It may be of ill consequence to rest any important and unquestionable truth upon precarious principles, too weak to support it. It tends to expose, rather than to serve the cause so pleaded; to render it suspected, rather than to bring credit to it; and to give the adversaries a handle for ridicule or triumph. One would not indeed altogether discourage any religious and well-meant endeavours to strike new light into an important subject, and to confirm established truths by additional topics, or supplemental reinforcements. Were it not for the attempts of that kind, made by lively and enterprising geniuses, time after time, we should, no doubt, have wanted many considerable improvements both in philosophy and theology, which we rejoice in at this day. And were there not scope given for essays or trials which may happen to fail (as all cannot hit), we should scarce have field large enough for those that might be approved, and stand. Nevertheless in truths which have already passed through an infinite number of hands (such as is the existence of a Deity) there is the less occasion for looking after new topics. Probably there are no new ones now to be thought on, after the utmost stretch of human faculties has been long exercised upon the subject; but those that appear new will be commonly found no other than old exploded speculations. Thus it happened to Des Cartes, who seems to have valued himself for the inventing a new argument for the existence; and he had several admirers and followers, for a time, of considerable name and figure, who closed in with it, conceiving it to be firm and solid. But within a while it was suspected to be no better than a paralogism; and not only so, but was found to have been of ancient date too, as early as Anselm, and confuted afterwards by Thomas Aquinas, [Vid. Parker, Disputat. de Deo, p. 567. Conf. Gillius, lib. i. tract. 8. c. 33. p. 385, etc. In Gillius may be seen a list of those Schoolmen who adhered to Anselm in that argument; as also a recital of others who appeared against it, and confuted it.] and others, and at length dropped by all, because it had been weighed in

the balance, and proved wanting. So it will rarely happen that any new thought can be offered upon a subject so trite and well-nigh exhausted: or, if there should be any new topic invented, it will probably be found much short in value and efficacy of the more common ones, which have been of long standing. The commonest arguments, in such cases, may be justly looked upon as the best, because they have been proved and tried, and have survived many others of inferior note, by reason of their known weight and significance above the rest. *Opinionum commenta delet dies, naturae judicia confirmat.* For the maintaining of doctrines, which have been universally received in all places and times, there is more need of judgment than invention, in making choice of the best proofs that had been before offered, rather than offering new ones; which will not come up to the other, but are likely to fail upon trial, however they may please for a while by their novelty. The more important a cause is, the more need of caution: because there is a particular reverence due to such a cause, and the risk is the greater, if it be made to lean on quirk and subtilty, upon weak and sandy foundations. Now there cannot be a more important cause than the cause of Theism; neither can we anywhere more dangerously give a loose to fancy, than upon that head.

2. It is still worse to rest such a cause upon principles which are not only too weak to bear it, but which also in their obvious natural tendency threaten to overturn it. Such is really the case with respect to the argument *a priori*, which is so far from establishing the existence of a first Cause (the point aimed at) that it proceeds upon such premises as admit no first Cause at all. The pleas made for it directly strike at the very notion of a first Cause, proving (if they proved anything) that there can be no such thing as a being uncaused. This has been observed over and over in the preceding chapter, and so I need only refer back thither for the proof of what I here say. Such an argument therefore, however piously intended, and offered with very upright views, yet cannot but be looked upon as an argument of pernicious tendency: and every true lover of *Theism*, who perceives where such reasoning terminates, cannot be too jealous of it. When Des Cartes proposed a new argument (as it was thought) for the existence of a Deity, all the hurt of it was that it fell short of the point, and disserved the cause, only by resting it upon what would not bear. But this other argument, besides its being inconclusive for the purpose aimed at, is attended with this further inconvenience, that it proceeds upon principles, which run directly cross to it, and which make it impracticable to prove any first Cause at all. For if every Cause must have a cause (which is the maxim it sets out with, and proceeds upon all the way), the consequence is inevitable, that there can be no first Cause. It is highly proper to declare against so pernicious a maxim, which can tend only to undermine the proofs of a Deity, instead of improving them.

3. There is another circumstance in this matter which deserves consideration, namely, that this pretended demonstration is not only offered as a proof, but is zealously insisted on, and highly magnified above the many solid and standing demonstrations which have hitherto been received and approved by the common reason of mankind; as if it were not sufficient to give us a paralogism for demonstration, but every other demonstration (justly and properly so called) must be undervalued and slighted in comparison. For instance, it is alleged that the arguments *a posteriori* (though the best that we have) for the Divine eternity and omnipresence are short of proof: which is not true, even in the strictest sense of demonstrative proof. And if it were true, yet so long as there is other sufficient proof (such as every reasonable man must readily acquiesce in), it should not be slightly spoken of; neither should it be suggested that those attributes cannot be proved. The moral proofs, after all, if not so strictly demonstrative as the metaphysical, are yet better suited to common capacities, and more apt to persuade the bulk of mankind [“The proof *a posteriori* is level to all men’s capacities: because there is an endless gradation of wise and useful phenomena of nature, from the most obvious to the most abstruse; which afford (at least a moral and reasonable) proof of the

being of God, to the several capacities of all unprejudiced men, who have any probity of mind. And this is what, I suppose, God expects (as a moral Governor) that moral agents should be determined by." Answer to Sixth Letter, p. 31, 32. "The proof *a priori* is ... capable of being understood by only a few attentive minds; because it is of use only against learned and metaphysical difficulties." Ibid.]; and are therefore of more extensive use, and consequently of more intrinsic value than the other. However that be, it is certainly of ill consequence to depreciate the solidest arguments hitherto urged in proof of the existence, for the sake only of magnifying a flight of fancy. When an imaginary proof is thus advanced as a real one, and not only so, but superior to all others, it then becomes more and more dangerous, as doing great disservice to the cause of God and religion. [What Mr. Locke says, in relation to another sophistical argument for the existence, once contended for by the Cartesians, is very applicable in this case: "It is an ill way of establishing this truth, and silencing Atheists, to lay the whole stress of so important a point upon that sole foundation ... and out of an over fondness of that darling invention cashier, or at least endeavour to invalidate, all other arguments, and forbid us to hearken to those proofs, as being weak or fallacious, which our own existence and the sensible parts of the universe offer so clearly and cogently to our thoughts, that I deem it impossible for a considering man to withstand them." *Locke, Hum. Understand.* book iv. chap. 10. sect. 7. Letter i. to Stillingfleet, p. 112.]

4. I must further remark, that this argument *a priori*, or some appendages of it, look not very favourably towards revealed religion, particularly as to the article of the Trinity; as hath been observed at large by a learned hand, [Dr. Gretton's Preface to his Review, p. 5, 6, etc.] and need not here be repeated. This is an additional evidence of the mischievous tendency of those false metaphysics, which as they do in one view sap the first and fundamental article of natural religion, by destroying the notion of a First Cause; so do they, in another view, strike at some of the prime fundamentals of the Gospel.

5. Add to this, the mischief done to true philosophy, by adopting one absurd principle, which may probably draw after it many other (as one error leads to more), or may introduce a fallacious way of reasoning, such as may affect science in general. For example: in order to maintain antecedent necessity, the ideas of infinity and eternity are fetched in as antecedently forcing themselves upon us [Demonstration, p. 15.]; and it is supposed to be intuitively evident, [Demonstration, p. 15. Letters, p. 34.] that those ideas have their objective realities *ad extra*. Then space and time are advanced, as amounting to the same with infinity and eternity, and are supposed really to exist *ad extra*, and as certainly as that twice two makes four: whereupon they are exalted into modes, or attributes, or properties of the Divine substance, [Demonstration, p. 15. Letters, p. 15, 16, 20, 35.] and God himself is imagined to be the substratum of both. [Letters, p. 20, 24.] Besides all which, the idea of a necessarily existing Being is made to be the idea of a Being, the supposition of whose not existing is an express contradiction: and necessity is interpreted a plain impossibility, or implying a contradiction, to suppose the contrary, like the relation of equality between twice two and four. [Demonstration, p. 16, 18, 19.] Nay it is further said, "If I have in my mind an idea of a thing, and cannot 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, the certainty of the existence of that thing is the same, and stands on the same foundation as the certainty of the other relation." [Ibid. p. 20.] It is said further, "that absolute necessity (that is, antecedent) is the cause of the unalterable proportion between twice two and four." [Letters, p. 33.] Now it is more than probable that this whole train of suppositions, or assertions, brought in as part of the retinue to wait upon the argument *a priori*, is little else but a train of error and false reasoning. It would be tedious to enter into a large examination of every particular, but I shall make a few strictures upon each.

1. As to the ideas of infinity and eternity, considered as antecedently forcing themselves upon us, there is no truth in it, if it means forcing themselves upon our reason, and extorting

assent. Perhaps they may in some sense force themselves upon the imagination (like many other fancies, or waking dreams), but as to believing that the ideas of infinity and eternity have objective realities *ad extra*, we are not forced to it, antecedently or otherwise, till rational conviction shall render us certain of it.

2. As to the ideas of *space* and *time*, they are not the same ideas with these of immensity and eternity, but are constantly thought of and spoken of in a very different manner. *Immensity* and *eternity* are considered as attributes of something, and spoken of accordingly: whereas space and time are conceived and spoken after the manner of substances; as several other abstract general ideas (nature, fortune, death, etc.) are. Immense immensity is an improper expression, is blunder and solecism: but immense space carries no impropriety in the expression; which shows that the ideas are different. So again, eternal eternity is mere solecism, but time eternal (in the large sense of time) is a proper expression. Space and time are considered not as being themselves properties, but as being invested with properties; that is, they are considered after the manner of substances, as many other abstract ideas are. And because it is certain that they are not substances (much less can they be attributes), they are, most probably, nothing else but general abstract ideas, common measures and receptacles formed by the mind, for the better lodgment, arrangement, and adjustment of our other ideas.

3. As to existence *ad extra*, it is not to be proved by strength of imagination, but by reasons proper to the case. So it cannot be justly pretended that we have intuitive evidence. We know and feel our own existence, and from thence can demonstrate the existence of God. I say, demonstrate: for our knowledge of God here is demonstrative only, not intuitive, as will be shown hereafter. We neither see nor feel space or time as existing *ad extra*. We contemplate nothing but our own ideas: and from ideas within, to realities without, there is no immediate consequence to be drawn. But whatever we may draw justly, must be worked out by deduction and inference, and perhaps a long chain of reasoning, before we can come at certainty as to real external existence.

4. To pretend that our ideas within are as necessarily connected with actual existence without, as the ideas of twice two and four, is mistaking imagination for reason, and association of ideas for connection. That twice two is equal to four is as certain as that the same idea is the same idea: and the connection of the idea of equality is plain and certain. This is only pronouncing upon the relations of ideas with each other, and so far we cannot be mistaken, having a clear and distinct perception of such relations. But ideal existence is not necessarily connected with real existence, like as idea with idea, and therefore the comparison here made is wide and foreign. There is no resemblance between the two cases, but they are as different as possible from each other, as much as fancy and fiction from truth and reason.

5. To make God the substratum of space and time (which really are not attributes or properties, nor ever spoken of as such) is mere solecism and impropriety of expression; a certain mark of as great an error in thought. Not to mention many other just objections which lie against the gross notion of an extended or expanded Deity.

6. Necessary existence is inaccurately and preposterously explained by impossibility of non-existence: for the affirmative is in order of nature prior to the negative [*Gillius*, lib. i. tract. 8. cap. 4. p. 396.]; and, strictly speaking, the existence is not necessary, because non-existence is impossible; but on the reverse, non-existence is impossible, because existence, in that instance, is necessary, or infinitely permanent. [*Bradwardine*, *De Causa Dei*, p. 204.] The negative truth in this case resolves into its correspondent affirmative, as into its principle, from which it is deduced.

7. In the making the idea of a necessarily existing Being to be the idea of one whose non-existence is an express contradiction, there appears to be a twofold confusion; one between physical and logical necessity; another between a contradiction *a priori* and a contradiction *a posteriori*. There is in a necessarily existing Being a physical impossibility of non-existence: which is not the same thing with a logical repugnancy, referring to our ideas as contradictory and repugnant. Those two things are distinct, and ought not to have been confounded. [See Dr. Gretton upon the distinction between *logical* and *physical* reason. Review, p. 69.]

A contradiction *a priori* is, when we perceive from the idea of such a cause, that it is a contradiction for that cause not to produce such an effect. There is no such contradiction as this comes to in the supposition of the non-existence of a Deity: for we see not *a priori* why he must be; we see no cause of it; but, on the contrary, we perceive that he is absolutely uncaused.

But *a posteriori* we find it resolve at length into a contradiction, to suppose that no First Cause exists. It is a contradiction to our ideas of cause and effect, for effects must have a cause. And if something now exists, something always existed, something independent; for from nothing could arise nothing. This kind of contradiction *a posteriori* we admit; not the other *a priori*, which is fiction only, though much has been built upon it.

8. As to absolute (antecedent) necessity's being the cause of the unalterable proportion between twice two and four, it is all a mistake. There is no antecedency in the case. First principles and axioms shine by their own light, have nothing antecedent to demonstrate them by, are perceived by intuition, not demonstration; and resolve only into this, that everything is what it is, or the same idea is the same idea. The idea of equality is the idea of equality, and the idea of twice two is the idea of twice two, and the idea of four the idea of four. And, as soon as ever the terms expressing those ideas are understood, the proposition is admitted of course, requiring no antecedent necessity to ascertain it, no cause to fix it. It is above all causes, being intuitively, not demonstrably discerned. But enough has been said to show how the erroneous notion of the argument *a priori* has served to usher in a great deal of confusion and false reasoning in other articles hanging upon it, or ministering to it: so that the letting in that one false principle cannot but tend to the detriment of science in general; which I undertook to show.

And now, to look back to what has been observed in these papers concerning the pretended demonstration *a priori*, the sum is as follows: that the thought is in some sense old enough, having been suggested, considered, and rejected by the judicious fifteen hundred years ago: that it has been frequently taken notice of since by the schoolmen and others; and drawn out into public light, but always like a criminal, in order to be condemned: that though attempts have been made in favour of something under the name of an argument *a priori*, yet as to the gross sense of it, in which it is now contended for (*viz*, as an antecedent ground, reason, foundation, internal cause of the Deity), it appears not to have met with any professed patrons before the eighteenth century; when probably what former ages had been doing was not remembered, or not duly attended to: that the new countenance given to a notion that had been so long and universally exploded, brought it into some degree of credit and repute, before it was understood: that as soon as it came to be more minutely looked into, it began presently to decline, and to sink as it formerly used to do: that it is now found to carry in it such insuperable absurdities, as must of course be a bar to its reception in an inquisitive and discerning age: that, lastly, it seems to promise no good to religion or science, while sapping the fundamental articles of one, and crossing the established principles of the other.

This appears to me to be a true report and fair account of what concerns the argument *a priori*, after the most attentive and impartial inquiries I have hitherto been able to make into it.