

A Discourse concerning the Love of God

Damaris Masham

1696

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Occasional uses of **small bold type** are meant as aids to spotting similarities, links, etc. —The ‘Mr N’ who is the immediate target of this work is John Norris (1657–1711), an acknowledged follower of Malebranche, the ultimate target. Norris’s *Practical discourse* was published in 1693.—Damaris, Lady Masham, was a close friend of Locke’s and an epistolary link between him and Leibniz, to whom she wrote in 1704: ‘Yours of the 16th September came not to my hands till our 31 of October: the day wherein was performed the last office to one that had been my friend above half my life time. Mr. Locke I mean.’ She was a daughter of the Cambridge philosopher Ralph Cudworth. He is more famous than she has ever been, but his principal work is not presented on the website from which this version of Lady Masham’s *Discourse* came, because it is nearly 800 pages long. —In her reports on and quotations from Malebranche, she gives page numbers; these are omitted from the present version, because there is no obvious edition to tie them to.

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Glossary

beg the question: Masham uses this phrase in what was its only meaning until illiterate journalists took it up and guessed that it meant 'raise the question'. To beg the question was to argue for P from premises that include P.

being: As an abstract noun it means 'existence'; to 'rejoice in x's being' is to be very glad that x exists, to 'desire the continuation of one's being' (page 13) is to want to stay in existence.

concupiscence: It can mean 'lust' or 'greed'; but in this work it doesn't mean much more than 'desire' or 'propensity to have desires'.

efficiency: The power to act as an **efficient cause**.

efficient cause: The cause that actually makes something happen. In this work, the contrast is with **occasional cause**.

enjoy: In most of its uses here, it means 'have the use of, 'get the benefit of, or the like. Similarly 'enjoyment'.

enthusiasm: Fanaticism. Similarly 'enthusiastic'.

object of: The object of our love is the thing or person that we love; similarly object of desire.

occasional cause: According to a theory that is critically discussed in this work, x is the occasional cause of y if x doesn't itself make y happen but is the trigger for God's making y happen.

popular: Pertaining to the common people.

seeing all things in God: This often-repeated phrase encapsulates a strange doctrine of Malebranche's, namely that (for example) when you see a tree the visual 'idea' that you have is not an *idea of yours* caused by the tree or by God; rather, it is an *idea of God's*.

speculative: Having to do with matters other than morality. Similarly 'speculation'.

temporal: Pertaining to this world. That meaning comes from the idea that life after death is eternal, in some way that involves being outside time.

PREFACE

When piety and religion are removed from their true foundations, this does so much harm in disturbing or misleading the best-meaning and most serious part of mankind that any attempt to prevent mistakes about those foundations will, I hope, at least deserve to be pardoned. The following discourse is published as such an attempt. It concerns an hypothesis that was recently recommended to the world as a ground of Christianity and of morality. The discourse aims to show the unserviceableness of that hypothesis, and indeed its harmfulness to true religion and piety. I think I can safely say that neither religion nor piety ever has or ever *can* suffer as much from the arguments of their **opponents** as from those who—induced by weakness, vanity, or any other motive—have undertaken or claimed to **support** them on false grounds and through wrong reasonings. I am indeed inclined to believe (as well as hope) that the notion attacked in this discourse is in no great danger of being a very general or prevailing opinion: it is too visionary to be likely to be accepted by many intelligent persons, and too abstruse to be easily entertained by those who have no experience of scholastic theorising. Still, there are so many to whom novelty alone has sufficient charms to recommend anything, that I cannot help thinking that (if what I have written fulfills the intention it was written with) the content of the following pages deserves the few hours that I spent on them. I am confirmed in this opinion by the opinion of one of the highest dignitaries in our church, whom I was glad to hear say that it would be well done by anyone who had leisure for it to show the weakness and extravagance of such of Mr N's recent *Practical discourse* as are built on the principles of Father Malebranche. (This was after I had written my discourse.) This encouragement, added to similar

support from some other persons, has led to the printing of a discourse that was not written with such an intention.

THE DISCOURSE

Whatever reproaches have been made

- by the Roman Catholics on the one hand, of the Church of England's lack of books of devotion, or
- by the dissenters on the other, of the Church's dead and lifeless way of preaching,

I think it is safe to say that there cannot be found anywhere as good a collection of discourses on moral subjects as could be made of English sermons and other such treatises, written by the divines of our Church. These works are certainly of the greatest and most general use, and most conducive to that *good life*, which is the chief aim of Christianity; for, whatever else Christians—divided into parties—may quarrel about, they must all agree that we ought to be people zealous of good works.

Yet although nobody can deny this, and all are forced to accept that the duties of a good life ought to be practised, it is certain that this—which is so essential to religion—is degraded by some people so far that it doesn't even count as a part of it. These people distinguish a religious man from a moral one; and carry their zeal so far that they seem to lay little stress on the performance of the virtues recommended by our Saviour Christ as the way to eternal life. . . . They regard the books that have written to recommend the practice of them to the world as little more worthy of a Christian's perusal than histories or maxims of human prudence. [This seems to mean something like 'than anecdotal self-help manuals'. The ellipsis in this paragraph replaces 'which virtues have been commonly enough termed splendid vices, in those they account not true believers'.]

But there are others who do not undervalue morality in this way yet perhaps are no less injurious to it, because

they strain its duties to an impracticable pitch, or claim to ascend by it to something beyond or above it. This has been the great fault of those in the church of Rome who—having a better sense of religion than to be satisfied with one consisting of nothing but idle superstitious, and pompous shows—have undertaken what they call the ‘inward way’, or life of contemplation. There have always been many of these people in that church, known at different times by different names, which marked them off more than their opinions did. For in their opinions they all agreed in one common difference from all the rest of the Roman Catholics, though variously expressed; and (whatever their errors have been) they have nevertheless seemed more in earnest in the business of religion than any others that the Roman church can boast of.

But however excusable they may be in relation to their own church—which perhaps allows them no way of being religious except the one that leads them into these mistakes—they are certainly very harmful to Christianity in the representations they make of it. They maintain that the perfection of a Christian state consists in contemplation; and they regard the duties of social life (for which obviously mankind were intended) as low matters, fit only to exercise the young Christian who has not yet advanced into the spiritual state. When he arrives merely at the first level (for they talk of at least three) of the ascent to perfection, he then looks down on all the duties of the second table, as an inferior dispensation belonging to those of a lower class. And when he has risen to highest level, he is then hoisted above reason itself, being first melted and brought to nothing, and then lost and swallowed up in God. And these people who suppose themselves thus far advanced regard

- the use of reasoning and internal discourse, tending to fix our affections on God and expressing itself

- in perceptible devotion, and even •outward acts of obedience to God’s will

as parts of the *active* life and as less than the perfect *contemplative* state of a Christian. This can be seen in various books that discuss this matter, and particularly in Father Augustine Baker’s 1657 work *Sancta Sophia*, chapter 1, which shows well enough how dangerous it is to talk in this fashion; and to erect into a rule, or dispensation of life, something that the people in question may have been enabled—

- by an experience of some circumstances or extraordinary illuminations, that they went into for purposes that are unknown and have nothing to do with us

—to give a sober and intelligible sense of to themselves, though to others it appears to be jargon, enthusiasm [see Glossary], or even irreligion.

If books of this kind are (and they usually *are*) what the papists mean when they complain of the Church of England’s lack of ‘spiritual books’, it is well that it does lack them; since they would be likely to make many more enthusiasts than good Christians. As the Bishop of Worcester (in his vigorous treatment of the Roman Church) says very well:

- ‘Once an unintelligible form of practical religion becomes the standard of devotion, no men of sense and reason will ever set themselves about it, but will leave it to be understood by madmen and practised by fools.’

It were to be wished that this thought would come to all who may be tempted—by liking for novelty, fondness for an hypothesis, or any other better reason—to build their practical and devotional discourses on principles which not only •will not bear the test, but which •oblige them to make assertions in morality that serious and well-disposed Christians cannot understand to be practicable. There was never a more obvious case of this than the assertion that

mankind are obliged strictly, as their duty, to *love with desire* nothing but God only, every degree of desire for any creature being sin. This assertion, though not altogether new, has recently been brought into our pulpits, and been claimed to have a philosophical or natural basis, namely the thesis that God, not the creature, is the immediate, efficient cause [see Glossary] of our sensations. The people who hold this hypothesis argue from it that whatever gives us pleasure has a right to our love, but only God gives us pleasure, therefore only he has a right to our love.

Indeed, in a sermon on the subject of Matthew 22:37 [she will quote it later], the author, ·Mr N·, purports to establish his sense of the words on a double basis. **(1)** That God is the only *cause* of our love. **(2)** That he is also the only proper *object* of it [see Glossary]. With regard to **(1)**, he gets no further than proving something which (plainly expressed) cannot be contested, namely that we receive our power of *desiring* from God, after which he asks himself several questions, such as ‘Can God act for a creature?’, ‘Doesn’t God make all things for himself?’ etc. These amount only to indications of his view that God (who doubtless made all things for himself) had his own glory as his primary goal in creating all things and therefore did not have secondary and intermediate goals for which he made the creatures act on one another ·as efficient causes·. This is merely a tacit way to beg the question [see Glossary]. But he rightly admits that the stress of this business lies in the proof of **(2)**. ‘On this hinge the whole weight of the theory turns’, he says, meaning the theory that

God is the only proper object of our love, as being the only cause of all our pleasing sensations; creatures having no efficiency [see Glossary] to operate on us;

they being only occasional causes [see Glossary] of the feelings that God produces in us.

On this basis he asserts that every act which carries our desires towards a creature is sinful; an opinion which, if accepted and followed, must necessarily bring in the same unintelligible form of practical religion that the Bishop of Worcester has justly censured in the church of Rome.

But however persuaded either the author himself or the great assertor of this hypothesis ·(Father Malebranche)· are of its truth or reasonableness, there was no need to drag religion and morality into this matter; and doing so does them great harm, because what these people infer from it obviously does not follow, and is in any case not a useful or practicable doctrine. A man that had not been mighty fond of an hypothesis would never have attempted, from the pulpit, to use Scripture to support an opinion so opposite to •the tenor of Scripture as well as to •the morality that has been so excellently preached to the world by the divines of his own Church. Most if not all of the discourses of those divines are based on (or at least imply) the supposition that a lawful love of creatures *is* permissible; and because this conforms to right reason and is consequently adapted to human life, they have helped to make some opposition to that irreligion which—by looseness of manners on one hand and uncharitable zeal on the other¹—has spread itself among us in this latest age; but would doubtless have prevailed further if men had not been supplied with principles of morality more reasonable than any based on ‘seeing all things in God’ etc. [see Glossary]

If the practical duties of religion had not been better explained and enforced than they are by the so-much-

¹ [Lady Masham has already criticised the ‘zeal’ of the contemplatives who allow no place for ordinary human love; here she strikingly classifies it as a form of ‘irreligion’, along with the more obviously irreligious ‘looseness of manners’.]

boasted-of 'spiritual books' of the Roman Church, religion and virtue would by now have been disputed or ridiculed out of our world. Yet any of those books of mystical divinity will be found as well able to support religion and virtue as are some of the recent practical discourses of Mr N, or as anyone else's can be, on the principle of our being obliged to have no 'love of desire' for any creatures; which the sermon I have mentioned tries hard to make good through the great commandment of the law (Matthew 22:37) 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind'. The author claims to show in that sermon that all our love is to be so entirely centred on God that no part of it is to be allowed to creatures.

To prevent this first commandment from swallowing up the second [Matthew 22:39: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'], he contends that these two commandments do not clash at all: the love of God, and of our neighbour, (as he says) being different loves: 'For we love God with love of desire; and we love, or should love, our neighbour only with love of benevolence.' He goes into this distinction in more detail in other discourses; and seems to believe that the latter part of it is confirmed by the words 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'.

Moses, in Leviticus 19, repeating to the children of Israel various laws, including several special duties towards their neighbour, concludes the last of them (verse 18) 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'. This conclusion includes all the laws that preceded it and any that had been omitted; and in a short rule—seven words—it teaches the extent of what we owe to our neighbour better than could be taught by any enumeration of particulars. This duty is indeed so fully expressed here that we cannot conceive how anything could be added to the perfection of this precept by our blessed Saviour, who came to teach us the whole

will of the Father, and to give us the most perfect rule of life that had yet been delivered to mankind; and accordingly (Luke 10:25) being asked 'Master what shall I do to inherit eternal life?', he said 'How readest thou in the law?'. When his questioner answered 'Thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbour as thyself', he replied: 'Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live.' He had answered rightly in joining together these two commandments in the law, 'on which all the rest of the law and prophets did depend' (Matthew 22:40). And our Saviour assures him that neither part of the law had anything missing from it or was defective 'in any other way', for he says 'This do, and thou shalt live'. We are here taught that the love of God and of our neighbour comprises the whole of our duty; and accordingly we are told elsewhere that 'Love is the fulfilling of the law'. So its regulation is certainly of the utmost importance to us; and the measures of it are that we love •God with all our heart, with all our souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength; and •our neighbour as ourselves.

These precepts are joined together in the Gospel, and there is a very close affinity between them. But the way they are joined in the law from which they are cited does not imply that the love of God and the love of their neighbour are distinct affections, differing in kind; nor does it seem that those to whom the precepts were given did or *could* understand them in that way. But this—namely that this is the correct way to understand them—is affirmed by Mr N, who, in pursuance of a notion that is at best useless, would take from a great part of mankind their only sure retreat when they are bewildered in the maze of opinions endlessly quarrelled over by men who are skilled in disputation. He has done as much to perplex •the plain duties of morality

as others have done to perplex •the speculative [see Glossary] parts of religion. But there scriptural text appears to give no support to the view that the command of loving their neighbour as themselves, was (as he says it was) ‘not an absolute measure, but a relative character put in on purpose to distinguish it from their love of God’ (*Philosophical and Divine Letters*, p.165).¹ If Mr N says that the scriptural words necessarily imply so much, this is to assume the conclusion he is arguing for, not to prove it.

Moses, speaking as a law-giver to a multitude that did not much refine in their speculations or distinguish things with philosophical precision, seems very plainly by this text (as the preceding ones make evident) to mean only to tell them how far the love of their neighbour ought to extend. That it should include not only •not doing any injury (specified in various instances) but also •not bearing grudges, and (he finally says) •‘thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. That is, do him as little harm and as much good as you want to be done to yourself. This precept does not determine whether your neighbour should be the object of *desire*, except to the extent that love naturally draws desire after it. But against the lawfulness of any creature’s being desired by us, Mr N says that just as

- ‘we cannot love God with a love of benevolence, because he lacks nothing in his perfection and happiness, so also
- we ought not to love creatures with a love of desire, because they are not able to make any part of our happiness.’

What we cannot do, we certainly shall not do; and we do not need to be warned not to desire what is not desirable—or (which is here equivalent) what is not pleasing to us. But

although

men may (given their ignorance about their own being and the constitution of other things, and about the relations among these) mistake what can make them **finally** happy,

none can be supposed not to know what **at the present** pleases them, which is the happiness or pleasure here intended. Mr N’s doctrine is supposed to rely on the thesis that perceptible objects are not the efficient causes of our pleasing sensations, but only occasional causes of them; I shall soon consider that. But if when we use the word ‘love’ we think about what *we* mean by it, we will perhaps be more enlightened than by Mr N’s definition of it, and will learn not to confuse things by calling different passions by the same name, or confusing love with whatever goes along with it.

When I say that I love my child or my friend, I find that my meaning is that they are things I am delighted in; their being [see Glossary] is a pleasure to me.

When I say that I love God above all, I find that I mean to say that he is my chiefest good, and I delight in him above all things.

Again, when I say that I love myself, I likewise mean that my being is dear and pleasing to me. To say one loves a thing, and that it is what one has pleasure in, is just the same. ‘Love’ is only a name given to the disposition, or the act of the mind, that we find in ourselves towards anything we are pleased with; and in so far as it is simply love it consists barely in that, and can’t be distinguished into different acts of *wishing well* and *desiring*, which are other acts of the mind resulting from love according to the nature of the object. To thinking beings that we love, our love is followed by acts of benevolence (or wishing-well) to the being

¹ [The original has ‘not only an absolute measure’ etc.; but either this was a typo or it didn’t mean what we would mean by it today.]

and happiness of the thing that helps to make us happy; and by a desire to enjoy [see Glossary] whatever it is in them that delights us. Our love of inanimate things is followed by benevolence and well-wishing to their being, if it can be continued with their enjoyment [meaning: 'with our enjoyment of them'], and by desire to enjoy them. But because

- benevolence appears most in wishing happiness to beings that are capable of it, and
- the use of most inanimate things that we love and desire to enjoy destroys them in the enjoyment,

learned men have talked as if there were two sorts of love; whereas love is but one simple act of the mind, always accompanied by desire, and by benevolence too where the object is capable of it. Mr N has told us that love is 'that original weight, bent on endeavour, whereby the soul stands inclined to, and is moved forwards to, good in general or happiness'; which makes a worse job of telling us what love is than •our own hearts do when we consult them; so perhaps an examination of •them will acquaint us with the nature of our passions, and direct us to ways of governing them, doing both of these better than they can be done by notions deduced from the consequences of an hypothesis.

Let us therefore consider more particularly, how by the different objects of our love our hearts are affected.

When we say that we love ourselves, do we have then only a simple perception of pleasure in our being? or is anything else annexed to that pleasure as a necessary accompaniment or consequence of it? Mr N says (*Letters philosophical and divine*, p. 165.) that 'our love of ourselves is not love of desire, but love of benevolence most undoubtedly'. Most undoubtedly these words very much clash with what he affirms in another place (*Theory and regulation of love*, pp. 14, 15), where, after having reduced love to concupiscence [see Glossary] and benevolence, he explicitly tells us that 'There is

no desire without benevolence, and no benevolence without desire'. In this he conflicts not only with himself but also with the truth, because the desire for the continuation of our being is truly a desire for something for ourselves that we do not already have; just as someone who has light and warmth enough of the sun and desires its continuation, desires more of the sun than he has already. The continuation of our being is necessary to our happiness in the beatific vision; and if we desire more of that happiness by only desiring the continuation of it, we certainly desire more for ourselves by desiring the continuation of our being.

Let us further observe how our hearts are affected in our love of other things. We find that our being stands in need of other beings for its support and happiness, because it is not sufficient on its own for either; and therefore we find necessarily annexed to the pleasure we have in our own being a wish for 'the continuance of' whatever we conceive may either continue or improve it.

As for God himself, whom Mr N makes the sole object of our desire; I wish Mr N had explained a little more what he means by our desiring God. For the perfection and superlativeness of his nature makes him the object of our love, desire and benevolence in a quite different way from 'our love, desire and benevolence towards' created beings. We love God for those excellences of his nature in which he infinitely surpasses all that is good or desirable in creatures. When we are said to desire him, I think we mean 'that we desire' a communication of his goodness in which he bestows on us any degree of happiness; and in this sense we shall to eternity desire more and more of him.

But because he is both necessary and perfect, we cannot wish any good to him that he does not already have, because we cannot conceive any addition of good that can be made to him. [This, it seems, completes Masham's reason for saying that Norris

'conflicts with the truth' when he says that 'there is no desire without benevolence'.] Our benevolence is limited by his perfect nature, only to acts of joy and pleasure in his perfections, which is all we can do; but the doing of that declares that if anything *could* be added to his perfection and happiness, we should wish it. and therefore, as an expression of that benevolence, it is made our duty to give him praise, and do as much as we can to glorify him.

Again, when we say that we love our children or our friends, it is evident—from the nature of the object—that we not only wish for them (as for ourselves) whatever we think may tend to continue or improve their being; but also that *desire for them* necessarily accompanies our love. We would enjoy them more if they were present with us, which they sometimes are not; and it is impossible to love the presence or kindness of anything without desiring to *possess* it. Now, if anyone says that we ought not to be so pleased, they are denying that we ought to love; for we can love only what we are pleased with. Of course everyone may apply words as he thinks fit; but then others ought to take care not to be deceived by this. If anyone

- tells us that we love things in which we find no pleasure, or
- says that when we are pleased with a thing, we do not yet love it, or
- calls different passions by the same name, or
- implies in the word 'love' the complex of other passions that are inseparable from love, but vary according to the objects of it,

we ought to *examine* what they say before we accept their dictates as measures for the regulation of a passion on the right regulation of which our present and future happiness depend.

Love is just one simple act of the mind; what *follows*

that act—whether our **a** desiring what we love, or only our **b** benevolently wishing well to it, or both—is determined solely by the nature of the loved object. For if that object is capable of both **a** being a good to us and of **b** receiving good from us or from anything else, it is then certain that we wish both; if it is capable of only one of the two, and we know it to be so, it is then certain that we can wish only one. The distinction that is made between 'love of **b** benevolence' and 'love of **a** concupiscence' is nothing but the misapplication of the word 'love' to different acts that result from love but are distinct from it.

But it is said that no *creature* is capable of being a good to us. This cannot in the least tend to promote piety; because everyone's experience confutes it every day, and would do so even if the theory on which these men base it were true. It is certain that our love for God above all things ought to be (and actually is) based on the evidently true belief that we receive all our good from his hand. But the thesis that we receive all our good from the hand of God is consistent with each of these:

- (i) creatures receive an efficiency [see Glossary] from God to arouse pleasing sensations in us;
- (ii) God is himself the immediate author of those pleasing sensations, which ·in each case· he causes in us—showing us part of his essence—at the presence of the creature ·that we think of as the cause·.

Of these, (ii) is the hypothesis proposed as the basis of our love of God.

But as no truth is ever advantaged by falsehood, so also it seems that such an important (and so evident) a duty as the love of God deserves the respect of not being based on any doubtful, unintelligible, or precarious hypothesis, whatever claims of piety it carries with it.

Pompous rhapsodies about the soul's debasing herself

when she descends to base the least part of her affections on anything but her Creator—however well-meant they may be—plainly do nothing but *compliment God by contempt for his works*, the works by which we are the most effectively led to know, love, and worship him. Outpourings like these—which convey an absolute abhorrence or contempt of enjoyments that are entirely lawful—seem to be permissible only as unpremeditated raptures of devout minds, not as the productions of philosophical inquiry; and won't affect those who are truly pious unless they carry a show of some truth in the heart of the speaker that the hearers strictly don't have in themselves. For a lively remorse may very well turn the stream of some men's affections away from all felt pleasures, and give them such a strong disgust for them that the very memories and ideas of those pleasures, even where they are allowable, may become unpleasant. Just as men often hate to see or hear of previously dear places in which, or persons by whom, they have suffered much.¹ When the passions are strong, they argue by a logic of their own; not by reason's logic, which they often (and significantly enough) invert to serve their own purpose. And when religion is involved (which too many people are convinced that reason has little to do with), they can easily carry this so far as to parade an entire system that is intelligible only by feeling and not by reason; of which some of the mystical divines may be examples. But whatever extreme lengths this is carried to, it should not convince anyone that he who requires the service of the whole man rejects the passions from doing their part. We should not allow them—the people I am attacking—to impose on ourselves or on others, getting us to accept wrong

notions that are prejudicial to true religion. And it is likely that many people with weak understandings owe most of their religion to their passions; for it is certain that some men would have exceeding little religion if they were confined to what they could get from rational inquiry.

But when someone claims to prescribe rules of duty that are not suited to a popular [see Glossary] audience but require the strictest attention and scrutiny of reason, he ought not to use any metaphor or hyperbole [= 'rhetorical exaggeration']. For anything will deservedly be suspected of some defect if it is introduced with or accompanied by ·rhetorical· flights that are not only •out of the reach of common sense but are •in conflict with the experience of mankind. This includes all that rest on the view that *creatures are incapable doing us any good*. We seldom if ever encounter a creature that does not or could not contribute to our good or ill; but they are not allowed to play this role by those who deny them to be efficient causes. As regards us and what makes us desire things, it makes no difference whether they are efficient causes or occasional causes of our pleasing sensations. Given their ignorance of any other way to explain the nature of our ideas and perceptions, they —the people I am arguing against— can hardly feel the force of their own arguments unless they have a great opinion of their own abilities or a very small one of the power and wisdom of God! And they must also be very clear-sighted if they can see how this hypothesis of 'seeing all things in God' gives us the least help in advancing our knowledge of our ideas and perceptions, though this is what it was initially claimed to be designed for. Those who advance this notion merely go in a circle,

¹ [Lady Masham may here be echoing this, by her friend Locke: 'A friend of mine knew one perfectly cured of madness by a very harsh and offensive operation. The gentleman, who was thus recovered, with great sense of gratitude and acknowledgment, owned the cure all his life after, as the greatest obligation he could have received; but. . . he could never bear the sight of the operator.' (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II.xxxiii.14)]

returning to where they started from, without gaining any advantage from disparaging God's wisdom by presenting his creatures as being like the idols of the heathen, that have eyes and see not, ears and hear not, etc.

But our present concern is to ask what use this opinion is *in morality*, that anyone should be zealous in asserting it on that account.

Creatures, they say, are 'occasional causes' of our pleasing sensations. So they *are* causes of them. And they don't deny that they are causes which are always accompanied by the effect, and without which the effect is not produced. Then don't we consider them as goods to us, just as if they were efficient causes? Or must we think that a beautiful flower does not have the same appearance if

•God has lodged in the flower a power to arouse *in us* the idea of its colour

as it has if

•he himself exhibits the idea of its colour when the flower is present. [see Glossary entry on 'seeing all things in God']

If the flower is equally pleasing either way (as certainly it is), then it is also equally desirable either way. But the wisdom of God can't be equally admired because it is not equally conspicuous. If God immediately exhibits to me all my ideas, and I do not truly see with my eyes and hear with my ears, then all that wonderful exactness and precise workmanship in designing the organs of sense seems superfluous and pointless; which is no small reflection on infinite wisdom!

We are also told that •the whole of our duty and happiness consists in making God the sole object of our desires, 'the least spark of which sacred fire cannot light on creatures without to that extent defrauding him'; and that •the reason for this duty is that creatures are not the efficient causes of our sensations. If this is so, it seems to cast a dim light on the

wisdom and goodness of God, who has laid the foundation of our duty in a reason that he has concealed from us. For this great cause why we should love him alone—namely that creatures are not the efficient causes of our sensations—is so hidden from us by all the art and contrivance observable in nature that if •it were purposely designed to be concealed, and •we were purposely intended to be misled, it could not be more so. For [she is saying this sarcastically] it was not discovered until recent years, or only very sparingly; and even now (it seems) only heads cast in metaphysical moulds are capable of ·seeing· it. This, I repeat, reflects badly on the divine wisdom; yet what is claimed is no less than this. The whole of our duty is said to consist in

(1) a right regulation of our love;

the whole of that regulation is said to consist in

(2) making God the sole object of our desires; and having only charity or benevolence for his creatures.

And this distribution is not founded on any clear text of scriptures, or on any other foundation of reason except the thesis that

(3) creatures are not the efficient causes of our pleasing sensations.

The severity of some precepts of morality may well be thought to have been a hindrance to the discovery of their truth; and this precept—of centring all our affections on God, and not permitting the least part of our desires to run out after perceptible goods—has a superficial appearance of being of that kind. And no doubt it did lead to **great austerities** on the part of many plain, well-meaning people who did not understand the metaphysical ground of it, but tried to practise it without claiming to prove it. Sometimes these austerities may have been useful; but most commonly they were superstitious and harmful to true religion. A recent teacher of this doctrine [we are back to Mr N], though

he has advanced the theory, is more favourable in the practical part than to use the theory to recommend any such popish **mortifications and severities**; and he seems to believe, reasonably, that the good things of this world were given to be enjoyed by us. He does say that no creature can be loved or desired without 'defrauding God' and even 'committing the sin of idolatry' (*Practical discourse*, vol. 3, pp. 62, 67); so that no sin can be more hateful to the Almighty than (when feeling cold or hunger) to desire fire or food as a good to us. But he tells us at the same time that though the things that satisfy these natural cravings are by no means to be desired as goods, 'yet they may be securely sought for as such, and enjoyed' (pp. 73, 74). [The sarcasm noted earlier is even more intense in the rest of this paragraph.] Someone whose head is cast in a metaphysical mould may have associated privileges of nature that are denied to ordinary mortals. Although ordinary folk can conceive a thing to be loved without being sought, or to be sought without being loved; yet—because of the frailty of their constitutions—they will hardly ever be persuaded **(i)** that they and this author, being thoroughly cold, seek for fire on different motives, or **(ii)** that he, being truly hungry, seeks food only on a prudential account and not out of any *desire* for meat; however much he insists that the mind of man, conscious of its own dignity and innate nobleness, ought not to debase itself to such low affections as love for any creature, 'the creatures being no more capable to please any faculty than to create it; and therefore have no pretence to the least interest in our love' (p.59). Nor will it be easy for him to persuade them **(iii)** that he does not in this doctrine vilify the wisdom of his creator and reproach God for not having made him as he ought to have done. He will have little success in convincing ordinary folk of any of those three, because men are very seldom talked out of their senses. And if they are charitable enough to believe

him sincere, they will be very ready to infer from his taking his own extraordinary and metaphysical constitution to be a basis for judging what the constitutions of others are like that he is unacquainted with the world and human nature,

But he says that the words of the text Matthew 22:37, 'Thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind', admit of no good interpretation except that *only* God is to be loved; since 'in no tolerable sense can someone be said to love God with all his soul and all his mind if he loves him above other things, allowing other things a share in his love' (p. 10). The highest sense that is generally put on these words, he thinks, amounts to no more than this:

'God is to be the prime and principal object of our love and delight; we are to love him in a superlative way above *all* other things, so as to lose any good or suffer any evil rather than commit the least sin against him; we are always to prefer him in our love, choosing to obey him rather than man, and to please him rather than satisfy our own will, and to enjoy him rather than any worldly or carnal pleasure.' (pp. 5-6.

But he thinks that this interpretation 'does not capture the whole sense of the commandment; since no logic or grammar can bear to call *the part*—though the larger part—*the whole*' (p.10). But the question is not •whether logic or grammar will bear calling the part the whole, but •whether every text in Scripture is to be interpreted by his logic and grammar, or whether Scripture does not sometimes accommodate itself to the figurative ways of speaking usual among men, •turns of speech• which, when rightly (not literally) understood, are not contrary to logic and grammar. It is obvious that divines and other learned men hold that Scripture does so accommodate itself, because they have interpreted this text, and not this alone but others also, in such a sense [i.e. in the sense of the

indented passage above]. So if Mr N wants to rest any weight on this argument, he must first show that those who think that Scripture often speaks figuratively and popularly [see Glossary] are mistaken. Their view is so widely accepted that to oppose it as he does. . . . without giving any reason here for doing so seems to indicate arrogance more than impartiality in the search of truth. Now, if Scripture does sometimes accommodate itself to the ordinary ways of speaking among men, why should it not be thought to do so in this text? The common sense of mankind takes as the only possible meaning for it the one that is familiar to us. For it cannot be denied that in every language nothing is more ordinary than to say we love a person 'entirely' or 'with all our hearts' when we love them *very much* or (better) love them *above all others*. And just as we mean no more than one of those two things by these expressions, so also we expect the expressions not to be understood otherwise; and this is so well known that we are never mistaken in them. [The ellipsis in this paragraph replaces '(or else says nothing to the purpose)'.]

But it is even more obvious that this text is to be understood in the familiar sense of the words, if we remember that they are the injunction of a law-maker (Deuteronomy 6:4, from which our Saviour cites them) to a rough and illiterate people. Now Mr N himself admits that the duty laid down by these words cannot be carried higher than the interpreters have carried it (namely to love God supremely, and above all things) without building in the air, unless his hypothesis is accepted. So unless he says that Moses also delivered that hypothesis to the Israelites, he makes him [she is now speaking very sarcastically] an *admirable* lawgiver, to deliver to his people the most essential of all his laws in a form in which not one in a hundred could understand it. For I suppose it will not be denied by Mr N that even if by the fertility of his own mind he very early came upon this notion, and was not (as the world

imagines he was) indebted to Father Malebranche for it, the Israelites generally were not as speculative [see Glossary] and philosophical as he in their natural cast of mind, and still less did they

- cultivate any such speculations at the time of Moses.
- or
- have any tradition or received opinion among them that creatures were not efficient but occasional causes of their pleasing sensations.

That is what might have enabled them to understand this command about loving God not in the familiar and conceivable sense of the words but in Mr N's 'logical' and 'grammatical' though otherwise inconceivable sense of them.

Even apart from the fact that lawgivers always give their laws in the most familiar manner they can, the inconceivableness also of Mr N's sense of the words as a moral rule is in itself sufficient reason why Moses should not be understood according to his explanation, which gives the command a meaning that is apparently and obviously impracticable. It says that God is to be loved so wholly that it is 'defrauding' him to give the least degree of our love to creatures; and that therefore, though they may be *sought and enjoyed* by us as goods, they cannot be *desired* by us as such, without sin. The inconceivableness of any other sense that could (by Moses' hearers at least) be put on his words would surely in any other case plead Moses's excuse to Mr N himself for having thus broken the rules of logic and grammar by expressing himself in a way that may well be supposed to have been as familiar and usual then as it is now.

The next half-sentence: It is to be hoped that to many others he will not need excuse in this, wherein, (with what has a Natural Connexion, and is accordingly, out of *Moses*, joined to it by our Saviour) he has so well comprehended the Duty of Mankind, that Christ says—

What she is getting at here: Lady Masham has said that—given Moses' need to get through to his actual audience—even Mr N should excuse him for meaning by his law what she thinks he meant by it, even if this (she said mockingly) involved errors of 'logic and grammar'. She is now expressing the hope that people in general won't think that Moses needs to be *excused* for having understood the duty of mankind, understanding it so well that Moses' law naturally hooks up with what Christ says, namely

'This do, and thou shalt live': that is, *Love the lord thy God with all thy soul, with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: and thy neighbour as thyself.*

These commands are not obscure or hard to understand, if we have honest hearts and heads not possessed by an hypothesis which everything must be made to fit with. For to love anything 'with all our hearts' is in its known and usual meaning to love it ardently. Moses joins to loving God with all our hearts loving him also with all our souls and all our minds; that is, with all the faculties of our reasonable nature [i.e. with all our capacities as beings that can think]. And by this we are taught to love him not only very ardently but above all other things, as being our creator and great benefactor, on whom we depend at every moment, and from whom we receive all the good that we enjoy, and from whose bounty we expect all that we hope for; as also as being in every way in himself infinitely (beyond all degrees of comparison) a most lovely being. Foolish men (too frequent experience shows) often love ardently without considering whether the object of their love is worthy of it. But to love with the mind and the soul, as well as the heart, is not to love in that 'foolish' way, but to love with the understanding, rationally, as well as passionately. And we cannot love God with our souls and with our mind—that is, with the application of our understandings—and with a *reasonable* love without loving

him above all his creatures; because he is infinitely more lovely than any of them, and everyone's reason, when he consults it, must always agree that he is so.

The duty that we are taught, then, is plainly what reason requires, namely that we love the most lovely being above all others, and that all the powers and faculties of our mind consent in this preference for him. that we think of him (as well as we are able) as he is; and pay to him the highest tribute of affection and adoration that our natures are capable of. This is also plainly practicable, and we can know whether we are performing it or not by asking ourselves whether we are willing to part with any other good for the sake of this one (e.g. father, mother, husband, wife, children, etc.). Our Saviour tells us that whoever is not ready to part with these for his sake is not worthy of him, but that whoever parts with any of these for the Gospel's sake will be greatly rewarded, both in this life and in the world to come. Now, if none of these were allowed to be *desirable* to us but to be only objects of our charity or benevolence (as Mr N says they ought to be), why should we deserve such a great reward for forsaking of them for God's sake? And why should our Saviour confirm the desirableness of these things to us, as he clearly does, if they are not in some degree allowed to be desired?

But, Mr N says, we are commanded to love our neighbour as ourselves; and because it is clear that we do not love ourselves with a love of desire, it is clear that we ought not to love our neighbour so.

Moses, in Leviticus 19, from which the above-cited text is taken, after going through various other laws, comes to tell the people what they owe to their neighbour, which he does in verses 13 to 18, ending with: 'Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people. But thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' The sense of these words

could not be mistaken by anyone who was not obsessed with an hypothesis that he was willing to support from scriptural authority. For Moses, having told the people that

- they should not defraud their neighbour, that
- they should not mock his infirmities, that
- they should not oppress him, but judge in righteousness, not respecting the person of the poor or the rich, that
- they should not only not stand against the blood of their neighbour, but also not hate him in their heart, and further that
- they should take care not only of his temporal [see Glossary] welfare but also of his spiritual welfare, by rebuking him when he sins; and likewise that
- they should be so far from avenging themselves when injured by him that they should not so much as bear a grudge against him,

he ends by saying something that ought to be the spring from which all these good offices to our neighbour proceed, something that (in short) fully teaches us the extent of our duty to our neighbour: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' This clearly means that just as we love ourselves, and from that principle of love do good to ourselves, so also we should love our neighbour, and from that principle of love to him do him all the good we can; not merely performing the outward acts of the duties that are here enjoined, or of any others, but performing them on the same principles of delight and pleasure in his well-being that we have in our own; without which all our conduct will be defective. [This sentence uses 'principle' three times, and the next paragraph uses it once, in an old sense in which it means something like 'source', 'cause', or 'drive'.]

We must here consider whether Moses is speaking as a law-giver or as a philosopher. If as a law-giver, then without

doubt he must be thought to have spoken in such a way that his hearers could mostly easily understand him. And the whole scope of his discourse makes the above-mentioned sense of his words plainly the most obvious meaning of them, namely: just as people love themselves and on that principle of love do good to themselves, so also it is their duty to love their neighbour, without which they cannot discharge what they owe to him. No other sense could be put on Moses' words 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' without the learned distinction between love of benevolence and love of desire; which it is hard to believe that Mr N or anyone else can think that many, if *any*, of the Israelites were acquainted with. And if he could suppose they had known that distinction and that Moses himself had been relying on it and had also philosophised as badly as the people did, I am surprised that Mr N didn't see that this would do nothing to support his case. Why? Because Moses is not here telling the people all that they *lawfully may* do but all that they *necessarily must* do not to fail in their duty.

But if Mr N holds that Moses should be considered here to be speaking as a philosopher, •instructing the people in the true nature of things as well as •laying down precepts for them to obey, it is then even more evident that Moses' words not only *don't fit* the sense he puts on them but are *opposite to* it. For Moses says 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself': that is, thou shalt take the same pleasure in the being and well-being of thy neighbour as in thine own. Now, it is manifestly impossible—a contradiction—that we should rejoice and take pleasure in something that is in no way desirable to us, or that we should not desire something that we rejoice and take pleasure in. So the being and well-being of our neighbour must necessarily be desirable to us; if it were not, we could not love him as ourselves. For it is certain •that our own being and well-being are desirable to us (who

is there who does not desire the continuation of them?), and therefore •that there is no love without desire, any more than there is love without benevolence, so far as the objects of our love admits of both. Our love of God does not admit of benevolence.

But love simply, as I have said, is the disposition or act of the mind that we find in ourselves towards anything we are pleased with; and that disposition or act is all there is to it. It doesn't divide into different acts of •wishing well or benevolence and •desiring; which are *other* acts of the mind, exerted according to the different objects of our love. We desire to enjoy in everything whatever it is in them that delights us, and we wish well to the being of everything that helps to make us happy. If their being can be continued with our enjoyment of them, that enjoyment is also necessarily desired by us; for it is impossible for any creatures not to desire whatever appears to them to make a part of their happiness.

But now what is the source of •the wars and violences that set men against one another throughout the world; or of •the tumults and perturbations that too frequently arise *within* a man when everything around him is serene, peaceable, and quiet? All these mischiefs come from *desire*, which is the inexhaustible fountain of folly, sin, and misery.

Is it not, therefore, worthy of every effort we can make to free ourselves from such dangerous evils? Without doubt it is so. and this has always been the care of the wise, because present as well as future happiness is at stake in it:

qui cupit aut metuit, juvat
illum sic domus aut res;
ut lippam pictæ tabulæ fomenta
podagram,
auriculas citharæ collecta
sorde dolentes

[By the Latin poet Horace. It means, roughly: 'If someone desires or fears, his house or estate does him as much good as paintings do for a person with sore eyes, as poultices do for gout, or as music does for ears that are plugged with wax.']

Our question is: what remedy does religion give us for this disease? Surely there can be no remedy other than the one reason prescribes, which is to *proportion our desires to the worth of things*; for when they go beyond that, we are certain to be disappointed, whether or not we get what we desire. But so far as the real worth of things enables our enjoyment of them to match our desires, to that extent we are really happy; and if we always achieve this with all our desires, we will—according to our capacity—be perfectly happy.

We cannot conceive any being except God to be without desires. Nor can we conceive it to be a fault for any creature to act suitably to its nature, desiring things that can be enjoyed and will contribute to its happiness. I am sure that Holy Writ allows us this; for the apostle tell us that 'God has given us all things richly to enjoy' [1 Timothy 6:17]. And Moses himself, (whatever metaphysical notions Mr N puts into him) tells the people of Israel 'Thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the lord thy God has given to thee; thou and the Levite, and the stranger that is amongst you' (Deuteronomy 26:11); which was entirely suitable to the land of promise, flowing with milk and honey, proposed to the desire of that whole people. And I think we may say that not one of the six hundred thousand would have marched through the wilderness if Moses had not allowed them to desire the good things of Canaan, telling them that they must not desire anything from creatures! But our error and unhappiness is that we do not regulate our desires properly. They are not governed and directed by our reason and judgment, but lead these away captive with them in their endless chase after whatever strikes our imaginations with some pleasing idea.

The best remedy for this that reason can prescribe is what religion has prescribed for us, namely *an ardent love of God above all things*. For not only will our desires placed on this object never be disappointed, but also the love of God above all other things will secure us from any *immoderate* love of any of his creatures; because the contrariety between such a love of God and any sinful or inordinate love of a creature makes them inconsistent. if therefore the love of God, and the interests of another life, were constantly our ruling and predominant passion; if in this sense (low as it seems to Mr N) we did love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength, we would not only be sure of doing our duty but would also make the best provision we could for our happiness even here in this world. For the disappointments we might meet with in the love of anything else would never endanger the foundations of our satisfaction, which, like a house built on a rock, could not be moved by any storms or tempests of bad luck; and we might say, with Dr Henry More [quoting from his poem *Resolution*]:

What's plague and prison? Loss of friends?
War, dearth, and death that all things ends?
Mere bugbears for the childish mind;
Pure panic terrors of the blind.

Even if this looks to some people like a religious rant, we may find it to be verified in other instances by our own experience. For even in the love of the things of this world, it very often happens that one affection or desire has possession of a man's heart so strongly that the success or failure of all his other desires (however naturally they come to him) affect him only very weakly and superficially. This cannot be denied by

any man who is very ambitious, very greedy, very much in love, or strongly gripped by any other passion.

So the love of God as we are capable of loving him—that is, chiefly, not solely—does effectively secure our happiness, and consequently our duty. For all that he desires of us is to be as happy as he has made us capable of being; he has laid no traps or snares to make us miserable; nor does he require impossible performances from us. But it is true •that our constant interactions with some perceptible objects are apt to engage our affections too far, and •that therefore the regulation of our desires demands our greatest care and watchfulness; and it's impossible to over-state the necessity of this duty, which in general consists in *desiring each thing according to its worth*. And the objects of our desires are either things of temporal concern only, or things that are also of eternal concern; these are in themselves incomparable, so we ought not to compare them in our estimation.

Temporal things that are the objects of our desires are desired either from wants of nature or from wants of our own making. For it is certain •that custom and education (to which we owe most of the troubles we undergo, usually blaming nature for them) have given us very many wants that nature did not intend us to have, and that accordingly vary in different countries and at different times; and •that—especially in what we call the 'civilised' nations—there are very many more of these wants than there are wants of nature,¹ viz.

queis humana sibi doleat
natura negatis.

[By the Latin poet Horace. The quoted lines correspond roughly to the last dozen words of this: 'Are you ignorant of what value money has,

¹ [In her five uses of 'wants' in this remarkable passage, Lady Masham is referring to what she usually calls 'desires'. But she sometimes uses 'want' to mean 'lack'; where the present version has her speaking of the 'lack of spiritual books' (page 2), she wrote 'want of spiritual books'. It may be that want = lack is hovering over the current discussion, suggesting how urgently the desires under discussion are *felt*.]

what use it can afford? Bread, herbs, a bottle of wine may be purchased; to which necessaries add such others as, being withheld, human nature would be uneasy with itself.] Those who try to contract their desires to the last are wise; but anyone who says that the denial of what nature requires ought not to be regarded as an unhappiness talks like a disciple of Chrysippus and not of Jesus Christ, whose followers are so often urged to do good to all men, of which a chief part (at least) consists in removing the pains and miseries men suffer from their natural wants and necessities. And this great part of charity must be performed according to the rule of the apostle, Hebrews 13:16: 'Do good and do not forget to communicate, for with such sacrifice God is well pleased.'

And although when the want of¹ those things that nature requires comes into competition with any good that has eternal significance, nature's requirements may well be thought to be light, and be slighted in that comparison; but this ought not to happen. Our Master himself thought so; 'for the joy that was set before him endured the cross' etc. [Hebrews 12:2] But though it is a great part of wisdom to contract our desires to what nature requires, yet just as we must not seek the satisfaction of our natural appetites if this would interfere with some duty that ought at that time to be preferred, so also the gratification of appetites that are not properly natural and have come to us from custom and education is not always sinful. Although custom (which may have been none of our fault) is often as strong as nature in us, those acquired appetites are often in no way prejudicial to what we owe to God or to our neighbour; and when they are not so, their gratification cannot be sinful. Our Saviour, who said 'This do, and thou shalt live', assures us that he who heartily loves God, and his neighbour as himself, can

make no mistake in his duty dangerous to his salvation; and the mistakes we make in pursuit of happy living while here are sufficiently punished in the disappointment they bring with them. So it is not hard for a sincere man to know when his desires are being rightly regulated; and he will need no moral adviser besides himself to tell him what, and how far, he may lawfully love or desire; and what or how far he may not do so. If he loves anything in the world at the expense of his love of God or of his neighbour, that is sinful. If he does not do so, there is no sin. To deny this would be to contradict those words of our Saviour. And indeed these two great duties—love of God, and love of our neighbour—imply or include one another. The apostle says

- 'If a man says "I love God" and hateth his brother, he is a liar' (1 John 4:20);
- 'If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and the love of God is perfected in us' (:12);
- 'Let us love one another, every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God' (:6);
- 'He that loves not, knoweth not God' (:7);
- 'But who so has this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? (3:17)

God is an invisible being: we are led *by his works* to know him and to love him. They lead us to their invisible author. If we did not love creatures, it is not conceivable how we should love God; or at least how he could have been loved by those who, without having the law, did *by nature* the things contained in the law. And this (despite what some tell us to the contrary) seems to be what is meant by the above-named apostle when he says 'He that loveth not his brother whom

¹ lack of? desire for? This is the last occasion in the work where that question arises.

he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?' (1 John 4:20). And I would ask everyone:

If you could suppose yourself or anyone else never to have loved any creature, what do you think that you or the other person would love?

I suppose the reply would have to go like this:

It would be someone whom—as he was not the author of his own being, and I saw clearly that he could not be produced by nothing—I had to acknowledge as a superior being [= thing] to whom I was indebted for my own ·being· [= existence], so that I was obliged to love him.

But being (or existence) considered just in itself is so far from being a good that those who are in the state of the damned must surely believe it to be an intolerable misery. And even in this world many people are so unhappy that they would much rather go out of existence than be eternally continued in the state they are in. So the author of our existence doesn't merit our love unless he has given us an existence that we can love. Now, if none of the objects that every way surround us were pleasing to us, how could our existence—in which we continually interact with these objects and depend on them—be pleasing to us?

But if the objects that surround us do please us—i.e. if we do love them—then obviously they must be the *first* objects of our love, which makes it also obvious that their pleasingness to us •gives us the idea of love and •leads us to the discovery of the author of the existence that brings lovely things to us. And just as our own existence and that of other beings has assured us of the existence of some cause **more powerful** than these effects, so also the loveliness of his works assures us that that cause or author is even **more lovely** than they are, and is consequently the most worthy object of our love. But if none of the things around us moved

our love, we would be ignorant of the nature of both the author of all things and of love itself. For what would then exert it, rather than letting it lie for ever dormant? And how could we (in that state) get the idea of love or loveliness? All that we would know of God, considered solely as a creator, is that he is powerful; and this makes him an object only of admiration—and not of love any more than of hate or fear. So it seems clear that if any could be without love for creatures, they would be without love for God also; for just as it is by the existence of creatures that we come to know that there is a creator, so also it is by their loveliness that we come to know the loveliness of their author, and to love him.

It may be said here •that we have pleasing sensations as soon as ·we have any· perception (and that is true), but •that we get them not from the beings that surround us but from God. I ask: Can we know this before we know that there is a God? Or will they say that we know there is a God as soon as we have perception? Suppose it to be true that creatures have not received any efficiency [see Glossary] from God to arouse pleasing sensations in us, and are only the occasional causes of the sensations we feel, does a child in the cradle know this? Or is this apparent as soon as it is that the fire pleases us when we are cold or that meat pleases us when we are hungry? No! And at no time is it a self-evident truth. We must know many other truths before we come to know this ·supposed truth·, which is a proposition containing many complex ideas—one that we cannot even *formulate* until we have had a long experience of pleasing sensations. It is certain that until we can make this discovery, we shall in the meantime necessarily love whatever *appears* to us to be the cause of our pleasure, as much as if it really were so; for we can't help taking them to be the same thing. God himself forces us into this, which Mr N says is really idolatry; for our passions are moved not

by the reality of things but by their appearance. And even if this notion [she means the thesis that creatures are only occasional causes] were true, and were accepted among men as true, it could be of no use at all in preventing this 'idolatry' or teaching people not to ascend to the love of God through the love of creatures. That is because it can't be of use to anyone until he is convinced of it, and no-one can be convinced of it until perceptible objects (by appearing to be the causes of his pleasing sensations) have taken possession of his love, and have assured him that God is the object the most worthy of his love as soon as they have assured him of God's existence. It is true that when in our infancy we feel pleasing sensations, we are no more capable of being taught by them

a that there is a superior invisible being who made these things to affect us thus, and who therefore ought supremely to be loved

than of being taught by them

b that this invisible being, when these objects are present to us, exhibits to us a part of his own essence by which these pleasing sensations are aroused on the occasion of those objects outside us, and that therefore he and he alone is to be loved.

[In that, the crucial term in **a** is 'affect' (see Glossary entry on 'efficient cause'), and the crucial term in **b** is 'occasion' (see Glossary entry on 'occasional cause').] But though we are equally incapable of both these when first we cry for the fire or the sucking-bottle, it is certain that by **a** the former way we are safe, throughout the time of our ignorance, from the sin of idolatry and the fatal commitment to a sinful affection, and also our love of God on that ground is easier to derive and graspable earlier ·in life· than it is by **b** the latter. As soon as we begin to leave off judging by appearances, and are capable of being convinced that the diameter of the sun exceeds that of a bushel, we are capable

also of understanding that there is a superior invisible being who is the author of the things that provide us with pleasing sensations and who is therefore supremely to be loved. But if we cannot escape idolatry unless we

love God alone, because he immediately exhibits to us a part of his essence, by which all pleasing sensations are caused in us,

I fear that all mankind (before now) lived and died idolaters, and the greatest part for the future will do so; since I guess that not one in a thousand will be able to grasp and be convinced of this new hypothesis of 'seeing all things in God' [see Glossary]. My position on this cannot be denied (I think), and it is more suitable to God's wisdom and goodness that it should be true. For the happiness and welfare of mankind would be poorly taken care of if they depended on an item of knowledge that few are likely *ever* to have and that comes too late ·in the individual's lifetime· for much use to be made of it by anyone. For when sensible ideas have taken possession of us for twelve or twenty years, it is not possible for them to be *immediately* dislodged by a ·rival· notion, even a true one, and not likely that this should *ever* happen. Anyone who thinks otherwise must be very ignorant of the constitution of human nature.

Mr N is not so kind as to provide us with any remedy for this. But the person from whom he is supposed to have received this hypothesis—Father Malebranche—tries to help us out of this difficulty about the goodness and wisdom of God in this matter, by making this principle of our being obliged to have no love for creatures to be the very ground on which Christianity stands. Here, in short, is how he does it:

We must not desire or love creatures, because they cannot be our good. Yet we *do* love and desire them, though reason assures us of this [that is, presumably, of the status of creatures], and our doing this is the original

sin that we bring into the world with us: which makes us children of wrath, and liable to damnation; unable to please God except through a mediator, both God and man, who alone could •satisfy the justice of God by the excellence of his sacrifice, •intercede with God by the dignity of his priesthood, and •send us the Holy Ghost by the quality of his person.

But this ground of Christianity has a weak foundation, namely creatures being only occasional causes of our pleasing sensations (which isn't proved and wouldn't support the superstructure that is raised on it, if it could be proved); so it is to be hoped that we may still be good Christians if we reject something that so few have accepted or even thought of. And those who lay the great stress of their proof of the existence of God on the hypothesis of seeing all things in God seem to considerably endanger Christianity and perhaps also deism [i.e. the belief that there is a god, but not one that intervenes in the world]. For their whole argument for both (by which atheists or sceptics are supposed to be won over to deism or Christianity) ultimately rests on that hypothesis, that is, on the *Conversations Chrétiennes* of M. Malebranche, which was recently translated into English so as to introduce among us that 'unintelligible way of practical religion' referred to above [page 2]. I don't doubt that if it were generally accepted and preached by our divines that this opinion of seeing all things in God was the basis on which Christianity was built, scepticism would be so far from being cured by it that it would spread itself much further among us than it has yet done; and that many people who find Christianity a very reasonable religion in the scriptures would think it a very unaccountable one in a system that has that hypothesis for its foundation and also adds that our desire for creatures is not the institution of nature but the punishment of sin, because this concupiscence [see Glossary] is transmitted to us

from our first parent.

[Lady Masham quotes this from Malebranche:] '*Qui voyait clairement Dieu en toutes choses: il sait avec évidence, que les corps ne pouvaient être son bien, ni le rendre par eux-mêmes heureux ou malheureux en aucune manière: il était convaincu de l'opération continuelle de Dieu sur lui; mais sa conviction n'était pas sensible. Il le connaissait sans le sentir. Au contraire il sentait que les corps agissaient sur lui, quoiqu'il ne le connût pas. Il est vrai qu'étant raisonnable, il devait suivre sa lumière, et non pas son sentiment; et qu'il pouvait facilement suivre sa lumière contre son sentiment, sa connaissance claire contre sa sensation confuse, parce qu'il arrêtrait sans peine ses sentimens, lorsqu'il le voulait, à cause qu'il était sans concupiscence. Cependant s'arrêtant trop à ses sens, se laissant aller peu-à-peu à les écouter plus volontiers que Dieu même, à cause que les sens parlent toujours agréablement, et que Dieu ne le portait pas à l'écouter par des plaisirs prévenans qui auraient diminué sa liberté; vous concevez bien comment il a pu s'éloigner de Dieu jusqu'à le perdre de vue, pour s'unir de volonté à une créature.'*

[Translation of that passage, adapted from Masham:] '... Who •clearly saw God in all things, and evidently •knew that bodies could not be his true good or (unaided) make him in the least happy or unhappy, and •was fully convinced of God's continual operation on him. He had no sensible conviction; he knew all this, but without feeling it. On the contrary, he could feel that bodies acted on him, though he could not know it; yet having reason, he should have followed his light, not his feeling; and could have done it, since he could stop his feeling whenever he wanted to, being free from concupiscence. However, deferring to his senses, and letting himself listen to them more willingly than to God—because the senses always speak pleasingly, and God did not get him to listen by a commitment to pleasures that might have

lessened his freedom—it is easy to conceive how he came to remove himself so far from God as to lose sight of him, and to join himself to the creature.’

The same author also gives us an account of how Adam’s posterity came to be infected (which it seems was not from Adam, as is commonly taught, but from Eve): *à cause de l’union que les enfants ont avec leur mère*, ‘by reason of the union that children have with their mother’. *Il n’y a point de femme qui n’ait dans le cerveau quelque trace et quelque mouvement d’esprits, qui la fasse penser, et qui la porte à quelque chose de sensible. Or quand l’enfant est dans le sein de sa mère, il a les mêmes traces et les mêmes émotions d’esprits que sa mère; donc en cet état il connaît et aime les corps.* ‘And there is no woman that has not some traces in her brain and motions of her spirits that carry her to something sensible. Now, when the child is in the womb of its mother, it has the same traces, and the same motion of the spirits, as its mother; therefore in this estate it knows and loves bodies, and consequently is born a sinner.¹ And ‘no holiness of the mother can hinder this’, since *‘L’amour de Dieu ne se communique pas comme l’amour des corps. Dont la raison est, que Dieu n’est pas sensible, et qu’il n’y a point de traces dans le cerveau, qui par l’institution de la nature représentent Dieu, ni aucune des choses qui sont purement intelligibles. Une femme peut bien se représenter Dieu sous la forme d’un vénérable vieillard: mais lorsqu’elle pensera à Dieu, son enfant pensera à un vieillard: lorsque elle aimera Dieu, son enfant aura de l’amour pour les vieillards.’*

The love of God does not communicate itself like the love of bodies, because God is not sensible, and there are no vestiges in the brain which by the institution of nature represent God or anything that is purely intelligible. So that the

children of women who represent God to themselves in the form of a reverend old man will love old men; and whenever the mothers think of God and love God, the children will think of old men and love old men.’ And so from this original corruption arises the necessity for a mediator, who must be both God and man, etc.

•Some things in this hypothesis seem to be quite unintelligible, and •it would be intolerable to admit some of its consequences. But even if neither of these were the case, there would still be enough reason not to embrace it, because the hypothesis is nowhere either revealed or proved, the support for it being merely a chain of inferences (such as they are) from the supposition of our ‘seeing all things in God’. For the desire we have for creatures is said to be the punishment of sin, not something built into us by nature, because—this being a strange reason!—

•the desire for creatures is sinful

(so they say), because

•creatures are not the efficient causes of our pleasing sensations.

And the proof offered for this is that

•we see all things in God.

But this thesis, which is the foundation of the whole argument, remains yet to be proved; for neither Father Malebranche nor anyone else has proved it, and I suspect that no-one can. Something that might alone give just grounds for this suspicion is the fact that this hypothesis is apt to shake and unsettle the *known* grounds of true piety; though he and a recent follower of his purport to establish piety on this new and previously *unknown* foundation.

The absurdities that this new conception would run us into in morality are sufficient reasons for rejecting it; but

¹ The last six words go beyond the quoted French, but are in the spirit of this work of Malebranche’s.

setting them aside, I am sure there are some people who, if they took the trouble to examine it philosophically, might be able to demonstrate its weakness and inconsistency on grounds other than those of morality. But whether or not anyone will think that such work is worth their while, this hypothesis seems to matter enough to be inquired into as far as these pages have undertaken; because, however unserviceable or injurious it really is to piety, it has been seriously and zealously claimed to be of great use to religion; and that not only by

a a young writer, whose judgment may be thought biased by a liking for novelty,

but has also been made the very ground of Christianity by

b a man of an established character in the world for philosophical knowledge.

[These are presumably a Mr N, John Norris, who was 39 years old when Lady Masham wrote this, and of course b Malebranche.] But just as Christianity is a rational religion (whatever some believe to the contrary), and needs no inventions of men to support it, so also it gets no advantage from this hypothesis that it does not get from the orthodox and commonly accepted doctrine of original sin. That doctrine serves all the purposes that this hypothesis is brought in for, and does this equally well; so there is no need for the hypothesis. Unless it is claimed that the opinion of ‘seeing all things in God’ etc. is needed to throw light on and make intelligible the commonly accepted doctrine of original sin; which is to accuse this doctrine of having lacked—until this ·Malebranchean· discovery was made—the evidentness that was necessary for it to be the foundation of Christian religion. (i) This will surely not be accepted by those who have given the doctrine of original sin that foundational role. (ii) And those who have not done so will not be impressed by the light that is claimed to be thrown on it, because the thing itself—the doctrine

of original sin—is no more proved by this explanation of the manner of it than it was before. Whether for one of these two reasons or some other, Mr N has not declared this opinion of *creatures not being efficient causes of our sensation, etc.* to be the ground and basis of Christianity. His subject obliged him—especially when preaching to a country congregation—if not •to account for the goodness of God in making us without any fault of ours the subjects of his wrath, then at least •to show how we are to be brought out of that state, and by what means, after we have come to the knowledge of the truth, we are to be made obedient to it. For if he believes (as it is to be hoped he does) that God winks at our sins in the time of our ignorance, before we are capable of understanding that creatures are only occasional causes of our pleasing sensations, he must suppose that when men are convinced of that truth, they are called on not only to repentance but amendment. And if loving creatures in such a way as to be willing readily to part with them all •for the love of God, or •to avoid offending in anything that we know to be our duty (which is the highest love of God that most people can conceive themselves capable of)—if *that* does not prevent us from being truly idolaters and sacrilegious, given that when hungry or cold we desire food or fire; and if we cannot love our children or our friends without looking on them as goods desirable to us; I think he should tell us

- by what means we can get rid of appetites and affections that are so offensive to God and destructive to our soul’s happiness; and
- whether he thinks we can do this by our own natural abilities, or whether Christ has purchased the ability to do it for those who believe in him; and
- how we are to conduct ourselves, and conceive of ourselves, in such a deplorable estate.

He says indeed: ‘Could we but see how God alone acts in

us, and causes all our sensations, while the creatures stand mute and silent like so many ciphers in his presence, having not the least activity or operation on us, we would quickly dismiss the whole creation from our hearts, and be wholly swallowed up by the love of God.’ But as the case is, he gives us no remedy at all. As for his confidence that ‘it is thus in heaven.—i.e. that the inhabitants of heaven will be swallowed up etc.—and that this is the measure of divine love *there*’, this is so far from helping us that even if he could prove it to be right it doesn’t imply that this ought to be the measure of divine love *on earth*. We don’t need him to tell us that we don’t know what we will be there, and so cannot tell what may be added to or changed in our present faculties; and as for those of angels—and archangels, which he mentions—we are even less acquainted with them. And even those who agree with Mr N’s supposition concerning angels will not all be convinced that it would be more reasonable for us to propose or pray to **a** be like them while we are here on earth than it would be for fishes (if they could) to propose or pray to God to **b** be able to fly in the air like birds or ride post-horses as men do. For it may be our earthly element no more admits of **a** the former than theirs does of **b** the latter. And those who will venture to ask God for their sakes to change the order of nature that he has established must be very inconsiderate or frivolous in their prayers!

It is certain that if we had no desire except towards God, the various societies of mankind could not hold together for long, nor could mankind itself be continued; for few people would give themselves care and sorrow in the pursuit of possessions that were not desirable.

But Mr N claims that his opinion is supported other

passages in Scripture, besides that of his text. Reason can safely refer itself to scriptural authority; but it were to be wished that it were appealed to with more care and consideration than it often is; and that men would not, because perhaps they are convinced their opinions are right, back them with any text of Scripture they can get to harmonise with them, even if it is little if at all relevant—as the offenders would often see if only they would take account of the scope of the discourse or read to the end of it.

The first text Mr N brings his purpose is Matthew 6:24: ‘No man can serve two masters; for either he will either hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other; you cannot serve God and mammon.’ Here, Mr N says,

‘we are plainly told that we cannot divide between God and the creature, not only because our capacities are too narrow and scanty to be employed on two such vastly different objects, but also because we cannot love either of them except on a principle that must utterly exclude the love of the other.¹ For we must not love anything except what is our true good, what can both deserve and reward our love; and there can be only one thing that is so, and that must either be God or the creature. So if the creature is our good, let us love that, and that only, and not God; but if God is our true good (as most certainly he is) then let us love only God, and not the creature: for it is a most inconsistent and impracticable thing to talk of carving out our love between both—you cannot serve God and mammon.’ (*Practical discourse*, pp. 64, 65)

I don’t think that *mammon* was, before this, ever understood

¹ [This uses ‘principle’ in an old sense in which it means something like ‘source’, ‘cause’, or ‘drive’. That sense is at work, of course, whenever (three times) this doctrine of Mr N’s is quoted by Lady Masham.]

to be anything but riches or the things for which riches are desired; and our Saviour tells us here that we must not set our hearts on these things or make ourselves slaves or servants to them; that is, the desire for them must not command us; if we command it and make it obedient to reason, it is then certain that it does not command us and consequently that we are not servants to it. Clearly this says only that our desires for riches etc. must not be beyond their worth, so that we forget that

they are perishable and uncertain goods, such as moth and rust corrupt and the violence and injustice of men may deprive us of; of value (at best) for no longer than our short abode in this world.¹

For if we do otherwise, our reason is subjugated and we become truly servants, the servants of mammon, and cannot be the servants of God, because we cannot serve two so opposite and differing masters. The reason why we cannot serve both God and mammon is •the contrariety of their commands, and not •the littleness of our minds or capacities; for neither little nor great can obey two masters who command contraries. . . .² But our minds, little as they are, can love God and creatures when the love of creatures is subordinate; and I don't think that Mr N or anyone else will deny that many people sincerely love God yet also love something in creatures; and whether or not their love is sinful, it is evident their capacities are not too little to love both. It is also evident that our reason is not subjugated by—and we thereby enslaved by or made servants of—everything that we love. And our Saviour here says nothing at all about any degree of love other than the one that makes us the servants

of what we love. So it is no more true that •we are here forbidden by our Saviour to love anything but God than that •our capacities are too little to love any two different objects. For when Mr N says, that 'our capacities are too narrow and scanty to be employed on two such vastly different objects', if he means 'be employed on' to mean anything but 'love', then the statement is not to his purpose. But if he does use 'be employed on' to mean 'love', then what he is saying is not true in **a** his own sense of 'love' or in **b** that of the ·scriptural·text. For it is not true that our capacities are too narrow to love any two different objects

a loving them even in the smallest degree, or

b loving in such a way as to become their servants (if there is no contrariety in their commands).

So his **first** reason why we cannot divide our love—namely, the scantiness of our capacities—is utterly false, because our capacities are obviously not too narrow to love any two different objects, or even to love every object that appears to us to be lovely. And if we love in some degree the creatures that are occasions of pleasure to us (and we necessarily *do* love whatever is accompanied by pleasure), there is no reason why this love of the creature should exclude the love of God; any more than why the love of cherries should exclude the love of our friend who gives them us. Still less does our love of God exclude our love of his creatures; for we love them then not only for the pleasure that they occasion us but also for the sake of their Author; and the more we love God, the more we shall love his creatures.

Mr N's **second** reason why we cannot divide our love between God and creatures is that 'we cannot love either

¹ [She is echoing here Matthew 6:19: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.']

² [This ellipsis replaces 'and that is true of the Apostle, *His servants ye are, to whom you obey*']

of them except on a principle that must utterly exclude the love of the other'. He offers to defend this thus: 'We must not love anything except what is our true good; there can be only one thing that is so; and that must be either God or the creature.'

What is our true good, he tells us, is that which can both 'deserve and reward' our love. But certainly whatever is a good to us is the true good, because whatever pleases us pleases us. And our love, which he says is to be 'deserved and rewarded', is nothing but the disposition of mind that we find in ourselves towards anything we are pleased with. So that to tell us that we must not love anything but what is our true good¹ is as much as to say, that we must not be pleased with anything except what pleases us; which it is likely we are not in danger of! As for what is added about deserving and rewarding our love, this is put in as a synonymous expression to explain to us what is meant by our 'true good', so the latter phrase tells us what is meant by 'deserving and rewarding our love', because they both signify one and the same thing. So all we can make of this notable principle that *we must not love anything except what is our true good*, that is, *what can both deserve and reward our love* is that we must not be pleased with anything except what pleases us, or reflect on the pleasure caused in us by something that never did cause us any pleasure.

This, without doubt, carries much information with it [this is said sarcastically]; but the word 'true' (otherwise quite irrelevant here) serves in a tricky way to insinuate that which should be proved, namely that the creatures are not the efficient causes [see Glossary] of our pleasing sensations. And in the lines following, Mr N has no scruples about begging

the question [see Glossary] more openly, when he says 'There can be only one thing that is so', namely 'our true good', and goes on to say:

'and that must be either God or the creature. But if God is our true good (as most certainly he is) then let us love only God, and not the creature: for it is a most inconsistent and impracticable thing to carve² out our love between both: you cannot serve God and mammon.'

Thus, having needlessly told us that **(i)** we must not love anything except our true good, i.e. what pleases us, he next tells us that **(ii)** this can only be one thing, namely 'our true good'. The falsity of this is even more obvious than the irrelevance of **(i)**. And yet, as though it were as evidently true as it is manifestly false, he offers *nothing* in support of **(ii)**, as though his mere assertion of it seemed to him sufficient to bring it against the daily sense and experience of all mankind. If by 'our true good' he did mean our chief good, then it is true that there is only one such good, namely God alone, who is also the author and donor of all our other goods; but taken in this sense it is nothing to his purpose. To conclude his demonstration that **(iv)** we cannot love God or the creature 'except on a principle that must utterly exclude the love of the other'; having said that **(i)** we must love nothing but our true good, and that **(ii)** this can be only one thing, he tells us lastly that **(iii)** this one thing 'must be either God or the creature'. It may be convenient for him to explain this conclusion **(iii)** a little better after he has proved his previous assertion **(ii)** that only one thing can be our good; but until **(ii)** is proved, this last assertion **(iii)** serves only to make it even more evident that he has all along said nothing to the

¹ The original has 'our true God', evidently a typo.

² Look back and you'll see that he said 'talk of carving'.

purpose. For his affirmation that **(iv)** we cannot love either God or the creature 'except on a principle that must utterly exclude the love of the other' was of as much authority to us as his assertion that **(ii)** only one thing can be a good to us: and there is no more proof offered by him for the one than for the other.

According to Mr N's own principles, it ought to be the case that every man in the world either loves God and God only, or the creature only and God not at all. I believe that his own observation and experience has often offered him evidence that this is not the case. But he appeals to the admonition of Saint John, which he says is somewhat more explicitly to his purpose than our Saviour's admonition was: 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' (1 John 2:15) Here again Mr N acknowledges that according to the common interpretation this is talking about the *immoderate* love of the world. But he says that people interpreted it that way 'because they lacked principles on which to raise a higher sense. It is clear that the words import more, namely that we are not to love the world at all—that all love of it is immoderate.' And by his former measures (before laid down) it appears how and why this is supposed to be so. But I believe Saint John will be found to explain himself much better than Mr N explains him. Saint John says 'Love not the world, nor the things of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' Now, the question is:

- Is Mr N right in understanding by 'love' every least degree of love? or
- Are the other interpreters right in thinking that 'love' here means immoderate love?

To satisfy us that the others are right, I don't think anything more is needed than Mr N's own concession that without his

hypothesis this scriptural passage could not be understood differently from how those 'other interpreters' understand it; so that the other interpreters he mentions should be thought to be in the right unless •Saint John wrote not to be understood by those he wrote to, or •the Christians to whom he wrote had Mr N's hypothesis! He believes that Saint John, who so strongly presses love to others, had himself so little love to mankind that he left the strongest enforcement of their greatest duty in obscurity. We will see whether there is any appearance that he did so, and whether Mr N's hypothesis serves to **illustrate** this Scripture.

It is apparently admitted that his hypothesis could not be **learned from** Scripture; because the hypothesis must be known (as Mr N himself admits) before the scriptural 'proof' of it can be understood. So my earlier argument against this hypothesis from the goodness and wisdom of God, who would not permit such obscurity in a doctrine as important as this is claimed to be, still stands good, despite this fresh claim to scriptural proof.

Saint John says: 'Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him'. That he is talking about the sinful pleasure of the world, or the immoderate and consequently sinful love of pleasures that are in themselves not sinful, what words can make plainer than the immediately following ones in which he gives the reasons why we should not love the world nor the things of the world? 'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world' (verse 16). That is, it comes not from God but from the passions, vanities, and follies of corrupt and sinful men. And we should not set our hearts on a the world, even on the allowable pleasures of it, because 'The world passes

away' (verse 17), and therefore ought not to be considered as the ultimate good of **b** a being of a more enduring nature. How remote the two are from one another corresponds to the difference between the little duration of **a** the and the endless duration of **b** the other. [The whole of verse 17: 'And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'] That is what Saint John says; and it seems too plain to need any explanation beyond the one that he himself has given. But as if every text in Scripture were a distinct aphorism—something standing on its own as a pithy saying or slogan—people often enough quote it without any regard for what goes before or what comes after. With how much sincerity they do this cannot be said, but certainly their doing it causes those oracles of truth to be regarded as negligible.

But whatever led Mr N to omit these reasons of Saint John's for our not loving the world and the things of it, and substituting for them his doctrine that *creatures are not efficient but occasional causes of our pleasing sensations*, he does say that without the knowledge of this hypothesis of his, we cannot know •that every degree of love of creatures is sinful, and thus •that Saint John's reasons for enforcing the duty he urges were defective. But Saint John does not tell us that every degree of love of creatures is sinful. Rather, he says 'If we love not our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen?' [1 John 4:20]

So there is no more need for Mr N's opinion to enforce what Saint John teaches than there is use for what Saint John teaches to confirm Mr N's opinion. That Saint John did not mean by 'love' every degree of love is evident, both •because if he did, he would contradict himself, and also

•from the reason he gives why we should not love the world and the things of the world, namely that everything in the world 'is not of the Father' and 'passes away quickly'. For •if he had thought we should not have any degree of love for the world• he would either have given us the true reason for this, or—stopping where Mr N did in his citation of him—not have misled us by giving us reasons which not only •don't get to the heart of the matter, but also •serve to point us to another sense of his words. For, just as short-lived flowers, though they ought not to employ the continual care of our whole lives, may yet reasonably enough be found in our gardens and delight us in their seasons, so also the fading good things of this life, though (for that reason) they are not to be fixed on as the ultimate good of eternal beings, yet there is no reason why we may not rejoice in them as the good gifts of God, and find all the delight that he has joined with the lawful use of them.

But Saint John says 'Love not', therefore Mr N says, we must not love them at all. Our Saviour (in chapter 6 of Matthew) says 'Seek not', but Mr N does not say in the same way *seek not at all*. On the contrary, he tells us very explicitly that we may seek the good things of this world, provided that we do not love them. Now, if he knows a reason why one of these places must be taken strictly according to the letter, and not the other, he was doubtless obliged to tell it to us; especially having been so indulgent to *seeking* as to have given no rules of restriction to it. But our Saviour says 'Seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or with what you shall be clothed, for after these do the gentiles seek.'¹ Mr N must doubtless say to this that our Saviour meant by 'seek not' that we should not seek immoderately

¹ Lady Masham has here conflated •Matthew 6:31–32: 'Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek' with •Luke 12:29: 'Seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink'.

and solicitously. And so say others regarding Saint John's 'love not', the meaning of each phrase being determined by the sense of the passage in which it occurs. And until Mr N tells us why 'seek' must be understood in this sense, and 'love' not so, he surely cannot disallow of it if we (following his example with 'seek') understand Saint John to be saying that we should not love *immoderately*; that is, beyond the worth of what we love. And thus Saint John's admonition is no more helpful to Mr N's purpose than was our Saviour's admonition in the gospel of Matthew. I am sure the reason with which Saint John enforces his admonition is downright contrary to the reason with which Mr N enforces *his* interpretation of it. Saint John says:

Love not the world, etc. For all that is in the world, namely the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.

But Mr N says:

Love not the world, etc. For all that is in the world, namely all those pleasures that worldly-minded men so greedily hunt after—such as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life—are not of the world, but of the Father.

This not only opposes Saint John but also sounds very harsh and offensive to many pious persons, who are apt to think it unworthy of and unsuitable to the majesty of the great God, *who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*,¹ to be as it were at the beck of his sinful creatures, to arouse in them feelings of delight and pleasure whenever they are disposed to transgress against his laws, though in the most gross and erroneous instances.

But the author of his hypothesis tells us that this is indeed what makes sin to be so exceeding sinful, namely

that we oblige God—in virtue of that first immutable law or order that he has established (of arousing feelings of pleasure in us when bodies operate on us in certain ways)—to reward our transgressions against him with pleasure and delight. It is strange that we cannot seem sinful enough without having the power to force God to be a partner in our wickedness! But this is a consequence of an hypothesis whose uselessness and lack of proof are alone sufficient reasons to reject it. And if we set aside what reason and revelation evidently and plainly tell us, and try to build our religion on the foundation of uncertain opinions, where must we stop? Every man, indeed, cannot construct his system as handsomely as Father Malebranche has, but every man has as much authority as Father Malebranche to impose his own system on others, or to be believed without proof. It is clear that the foregoing account of sin is supported only by being a consequence of our *seeing all things in God*: being the sole efficient cause of our pleasurable sensations, he must necessarily be the sole efficient cause of sinful pleasures as well as innocent ones. But no pleasure, simply as pleasure, being evil, God is not supposed in this by Father Malebranche to be the author of sin, but only man himself, who, he says, *étant pecheurs et par conséquent indigne d'être récompensé par des sentiments agréables, oblige dieu en conséquence de ses volontés immuables, de lui faire sentir du plaisir dans le temps même qu'il l'offense*. 'We being sinners, and by consequence unworthy to be recompensed by agreeable feelings, oblige God in consequence of his immutable will to make us feel pleasure at the time when we are offending him', that is, whenever we love or delight in any creature. But our seeing all things in God, which is the basis for this notion of sin or original corruption, and of the following account

¹ Quoting Habakkuk 1:13: 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.'

of Christianity, needs to be better proved before we adopt it—such an unintelligible fancy—in preference to •what is evident and plain, •what can satisfy the wise, and •what the weak can easily comprehend—the weak who are doubtless as much concerned for their souls as anyone else, their souls being of as much value.

We know for sure that God has made us reasonable creatures; and it is also evident that by virtue of our being such we are obliged to live by the law of reason. Whenever we transgress against that, we must necessarily offend against God, because we are inverting the order that he has established, making obey that which ought to command, and making command that which ought to obey. Experience shows that we are very prone to offend against this law of reason, and this is because of unruliness of our affections. They are strong in us (while reason is weak and unable to direct them); they take up with the first alluring objects, the impressions of which make settled habits in us; and it is not easy for reason to remove these, even when it does discover how bad they are and sets us to struggle against them. This situation is made worse by loose education and bad habits; for there is hardly any vice we are capable of that is not instilled into us (or at least the seed of it) in our very childhood, by the foolish people who usually have the direction of it. For it is obvious that there are few children who are not •taught by their nurses to be proud, angry, covetous, and vengeful, and •driven by those vices even before they have language enough to talk of them.¹ But God made Adam a man, and not a child; so his reason was in its full strength as early as his appetites, and he did not have the unfortunate biases that others receive. So he himself—and his posterity, one would have thought—ran no

very great risk of losing the advantages that his obedience would have procured for them.

We are plainly told in Scripture that mankind lost by Adam what they are restored to by Jesus Christ. But that by his (or Eve's) misconduct any one single soul should be doomed to eternal misery, or to any condition worse than non-existence—whether

- as an automatic consequence of Adam's sin (as some hold) or
- by putting them into a state in which they will inevitably be caused to sin

—does not square with the goodness of God and is not revealed anywhere in Scripture.

Father Malebranche's hypothesis maintains the second of these opinions, though he accounts for it differently from others. Children, he explicitly tells us, become (through their union with their mothers) sinners; and are in a state of damnation before they are born into the world. Both the apostle and reason assure us that where there is no law, there is no transgression; but Father Malebranche opposes this, giving no reason for doing so except that his conclusion that *children are born sinners* is a necessary consequence of our seeing all things in God. God alone causes us pleasure, so he only has a right to our love, and all love of creatures is sinful. But 'a child (by virtue of its union with the mother) does while in her womb know and love bodies; so the child is a sinner and will be necessarily damned.' (Though indeed in a note on the word 'damned' he mitigates the sense of it to being eternally deprived of the possession of God.) That we come into the world utterly unable to please God (as he explicitly says we do) is not through any fault of ours but through Eve's. Yet Scripture makes no mention at all of Eve's

¹ Lady Masham had one child, but her household presumably included some of her husband's eight offspring by his first marriage.

transgression's having any effect on her posterity.

Although Father Malebranche makes this principle the foundation of Christianity, it is certain that the New Testament tells us nothing of it; and that is surely where we ought to look for the Christian religion. What we are told there is this:

- 'As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive' (1 Corinthians 15:22).
- 'He came to abolish death, and to bring life and immortality to light' (2 Timothy 1:10).
- 'We shall be justified by faith, without the works of the law' (Romans 3:28).
- 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:15).
- 'Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid! yea, we establish the law' (Romans 3:31).

But the wisdom of God in Christ Jesus is manifest in the fact that this most effectively •gets us trying to 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling' [Philippians 2:12]; and also •keeps us from despairing over our being able to conform to the law that Adam (in his more advantageous circumstances) transgressed against, thereby forfeiting bliss and immortality. •What keeps us from despair is our • having not only a promise that we shall receive from God whatever (asking as we ought) we ask in his Son's name, and also •what we ask • of his spirit to help our infirmities, but to complete all, that for the sake of Christ, our sincere though imperfect obedience will be accepted, its defects being made up for by faith in him.

This is what the Scripture tells us about God's dispen-

sation to mankind, in the Gospel of his Son. It is so visibly suitable to—and worthy of—the divine wisdom and goodness that no inventions of man can add anything to it to make it appear more so. Yet if our view were widened so as to take in more than our little globe, they would probably provide us with still more to admire. That this spot of ours is the only habitable part of the creation is too limited and narrow a thought for women and children now to be kept in.¹ But

without understanding the system of the world, or considering what mathematicians and natural scientists offer to convince us that •so many regions fit for inhabitants are not empty deserts, and that •such countless orbs of light are more significant than mere farthing candles,

we read in the Scripture of ranks of intelligent beings besides ourselves; and we don't know what relation there may be between them and us, though it would be presumptuous to affirm anything beyond what is revealed. The Scripture plainly indicates that •great numbers of them, superior to us in the dignity of their creation, have (as man has) fallen through disobedience from a happier state; and also that •they are enemies to us, though we don't know whether this is out of envy for what Jesus Christ undertook for our redemption, or for other reasons. But the small account we have of them seems to show that they have set up themselves in opposition to their Maker, thinking themselves sufficient to carve out their own happiness, and will find full reward for their folly and rebellion when the judgment of the great day meets them.

But on man, who after his transgression saw his nakedness and was ashamed, the Father of Mercies has had

¹ Women and children but not men? Her thought is that women and children don't have access to the male province of science and mathematics, but do have access to Scripture.

compassion, and has found a way to restore him. It is a way that may well 'humble these proud ones in the imagination of their hearts',¹ and that leaves no room to us for boasting. For it is certain that 'by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified' (Romans 3:20). Faith, which would have preserved Adam in the state of innocence, is the only thing that will justify his posterity. And though the wisdom of God has made *faith in his Son* the requirement for salvation in **those to whom he is revealed**, we are told that **the just in all ages** have lived by faith; which is necessarily the immutable basis of all true religion. For unless we believe not only in the existence of God but also in his veracity—believe that he exists and that he rewards those who diligently seek him—we could not possibly love him with all our hearts, with all our souls etc., which contains the whole moral law. The obligations it sets are not upshots of human choices but arise from the nature of things, so they must necessarily be the same under every dispensation; and Christ tells us in so many words that he came 'not to destroy this law, but to fulfil it' [Matthew 5:17]. He came

- to give us a clearer and fairer transcript of it;
- to enforce it by his authority and example;
- a** to assure us of our own existence after death, which reason could not; and
- b** to assure use of the great love of God to mankind, in accepting faith to make up for the defects in our sincere obedience.

Of these, **a** frees us from the terrors of an offended deity, and **b** gives us hope of being made heirs of a glad immortality; co-heirs with Christ, the author and finisher of our salvation, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross and despised the shame, and has obtained for himself a

kingdom of which all true believers are the subjects. We are restored by him to a more assured happiness than that from which Adam fell, by not believing that on the day he ate the forbidden fruit he would surely die, attending too little to the light of his reason (which would have taught him not to question God's veracity), and having, so far, no experience to bring against the urges of his appetite. And perhaps what God does by this distribution of his providence in our salvation—

in this restoration of mankind by Jesus Christ, who 'took not on him the nature of angels' [Hebrews 2:16], having in this 'put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted those of low degree' [Luke 1:52]

—is to teach all the orders of thinking beings whom he has made free agents (as well as man) that just as he cannot make a being independent of himself for its happiness, so the most enlightened reason is safe and secure only while it feels its weakness and dependency. And if we are, as we ought to be, thoroughly aware of that, we shall necessarily *love God with all our hearts, with all our souls, etc.*

Mr N says that these words mean that we must *love nothing but God alone*. And to confirm his understanding of them, he brings two more scriptural passages. The **first passage** is this:

'Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.' (James 4:4)

He tells us here, that in Saint James's account

'our heart is so much God's personal property, and ought to be devoted so entirely to him, that it is a kind of spiritual adultery to admit any creature into a

¹ She may be (mis)quoting Luke 1:51: 'He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.'

partnership with him in our love.’

These are certainly not Saint James’s words, and we have only Mr N’s assertion that this is his meaning. His asserting without any proof that all love of creatures is here condemned and said to be a kind of spiritual adultery needs no answer except a bare denial of it; and it would be enough ·of a refutation of it· to say without any proof that only the *inordinate* love of creatures is being called ‘adultery’ and condemned. But the context provides more, by showing clearly that that *is* what Saint James means here by ‘friendship of the world’. And let me add a further point: adultery does not wholly exclude all other love of any other person, but only a love that competes with or invades the love that properly belongs to the husband. For a woman may love her brother or her child without being an adulteress, because this is not the love that is due to her husband.

The **second passage** that Mr N cites to prove that love of creatures is sinful is this from Saint Paul: ‘The world is crucified to me, and I unto the world’ (Galatians 5:14). Mr N says that these last words

‘at once comprise Saint Paul’s present conclusion that the creature is not to be (in any degree) the object of our love, with the very same ground and bottom on which he has built it. For the apostle here first of all supposes the world to be crucified, that is to be a dead, unactive, silent, and quiescent thing, in respect of himself, as not being able to operate on him or affect his soul with any sentiment as an efficient cause; and then in consequence of that declares himself to be also crucified to the world.’

Mr N’s explanation of this as *being insensible to all the world’s charms* is correct; but it does not square with his position. For, according to his explanation, Saint Paul knew very well that the world had no charms. But anyone who

reads this whole passage in Saint Paul will see clearly that it amounts to this: that some men preached Christ in such a way as to have regard for the favour and good liking of men, and so as to avoid persecution from some and gain glory from others. But Saint Paul in his preaching of the Gospel had so entirely given himself up to it that he cared about nothing but the preaching of the Gospel; going on in that work, without any regard either to persecution or vainglory. And thus the world was crucified to him, and he to the world: they were as dead things, and in this respect had no operation. Saint Paul’s words are:

‘As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.’ [verses 12–14]

It very often happens that a piece of a discourse—or, as here, even a piece of a verse—serves for a quotation much better than the whole would do. This is so obvious in this case that it requires some charity to think that when someone is writing in such a way ·as Mr N does here·, he is earnestly searching after truth, or believes what he is saying.

But because Mr N’s reputation ought to be a warrant for his sincerity, we must conclude that he does think Saint Paul tells the Galatians that

some would have them circumcised only so that they might avoid persecution, and might glory in their flesh. But God forbid that he should glory in anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which *creatures are only the occasional and not the efficient causes of*

his pleasing sensations; and he dead to them.

Mr N seems to think that this was the meaning of what Saint Paul said, but I think common sense will sufficiently satisfy us that it was not, without consulting interpreters about it.

These are the texts brought by Mr N to support an opinion based on an hypothesis that •is perhaps demonstrably false and •obviously has no support except the poor argument from our ignorance. That ignorance is not at all helped by this hypothesis, which is (therefore) plainly useless ·in theology· as well as for the goals of morality. Any effort to advance our knowledge might be forgiven these defects, if it did not claim to influence our religion, and not only that but to be the very basis and **foundation of Christianity**, as it is made to be by ·Father Malebranche·, the first ingenious inventor of it. Mr N has not indeed said that so directly, but with a great deal more confidence making it **the ground of morality**, he falls as little short of it as is possible. And because his discourses on this subject are of a more popular [see Glossary] kind, they are more likely to do harm. For certainly to persuade men that God requires them to do something that they find impossible to perform and opposite to their very constitution and being in this world, is •to make religion and the teachers of it ridiculous to some people, and •to drive other people—weaker but better-minded ones—into despair, by leading them to think that they do not love God as they ought. Such effects, I fear, may be the consequences of Mr N's doctrine, who teaches that we do not love God as we ought while we love any creature at all; and particularly in the above-cited sermon [page 3], he positively says that creatures are no more our goods than our Gods, and that we may as well worship them as love them.

These opinions of Mr N seem also to be likely to introduce,

especially among those whose imaginations are stronger than their reason, a devout way of talking which—having no sober and intelligible sense under it—will either

- gradually lead to an insensibility to religion in those who use it as well as others, by thus accustoming them to handle holy things without fear, or else
- generate as wild a fanaticism as any that has been yet seen, which can end in nothing but monasteries and hermitages, with all those stupid and wicked superstitions that have accompanied them wherever they have been in use.

And the author of the *Christian Conversations* foresaw very well that this must be the consequence. Perhaps, in line with his religion and profession, he planned to reach this conclusion, so as to justify those ·monkish· things by this hypothesis of his, which makes them not only permissible but obligatory. But be that as it may, he concludes his discourse about our being obliged to have no love for any creature by sincerely admitting that if this is true (which he has concluded it is), we absolutely *must* renounce the world and go to live in woods and deserts; for it is impossible to live in the daily commerce and conversation of the world while also loving God as we ought to do. And accordingly he makes his young men, introduced to be converts to religion on these principles, bid adieu to the world, even to their dearest friends and relations.

For Father Malebranche, it seems, was not acquainted with the distinction that Mr N says 'ought to be made between movements of the soul and movements of the body'. Otherwise he might have assured his Aristarchus¹ that he was very mistaken in believing that the principles earlier laid down obliged him to any retreat from the world or

¹ The person who in the 'Christian conversations' is being introduced to Malebranchean theology.

renunciation of the enjoyments [see Glossary] of it; because ‘the movements of the body’ (Mr N tells us) ‘may be determined by the objects that surround it; and by those movements’ Aristarchus ‘might have united himself to the things that were the natural or occasional causes of his pleasure’. (See Mr N’s *Letters philosophical and divine*, p. 75.) But Father Malebranche, designing his notions to be of some use to the world, followed them to wherever they led by sound inferences; and if he sought for any contrivance to make them insignificant, this was only to show how fertile he was. He therefore (reasonably from his principles) insists that the retreat from the world is *best for all* and *necessary for most* who plan to lead a Christian life; ‘the space between ‘all’ and ‘most’ being filled by people who are much to be pitied because God calls them to live in the world for the conversion of others.

This cannot seem strange in a papist, and a member of a Roman Catholic religious order. But there can be no greater disparagement to the Christian religion, than to say •that it *unfits men for society*, •that we must not only become literally ‘fools for Christ’s sake’, but also cease to be men. Can any rational man who hasn’t been bred up in the bigotry of popery ever persuade himself that such a religion can be from God? Is there any appearance throughout the whole New Testament of its being so? John ‘the Baptist’, with no power of miracles and no voice from heaven to authorise his mission, drew attention to himself by the remarkable austerity of his life; but he neither preached austerity nor proposed his own austerity as an example to others. What he did was—by something extraordinary, though without miracles—to attract hearers whom he could prepare to receive the Messiah. But our Saviour’s example as well

as his precepts show that living in a desert and bidding adieu to society were not necessary to religion. He came eating and drinking, conversing in the world like other men; and he assures us that he came ‘not to destroy but to fulfil the law’, i.e. the law of reason, which ‘will endure longer than heaven and earth’,¹ and which legibly sets out those duties of an active and social life that have so much recommended and perpetuated the memories of many •men of ancient times—philosophers, lawgivers, and other great men. If mankind were convinced that Christianity was opposed to and inconsistent with the beneficial virtues that support and profit society—virtues that were admired back then—they would be apt to think they had reason to want a return of the •pagan• religion of those •men.

Nothing is more obvious than the fact that mankind is *designed* for a sociable life. To say that religion unfits us for such a life is •to express the highest possible criticism of the wisdom of God •for his bad *design*•, and •to represent religion as the most mischievous thing in the world, dissolving societies. And there could not be a greater trick of the devil or of wicked men to bring Christianity into contempt than this. But it is to be hoped that where the scriptures are allowed to be read this can never prevail; and that those who are not in danger of being led into it by the superstitions of priestcraft will not have it foisted on them by empty philosophy. And there can’t be any stronger evidence of the falsity of the **premise** that *the love of God should be grounded on his being the immediate cause of all our sensations* than the fact that it destroys all the duties and obligations of social life. This •destruction of social life• is not indeed Mr N’s conclusion from that **premise**, but it is the conclusion of his oracle Father Malebranche, and that of reason. [She means that even

¹ Loosely quoted from Matthew 5:17–18; not all the looseness is due to Lady Masham.

if Mr N doesn't infer it from his premise, it *does* follow from it.] And it is hard to believe in the sincerity of someone who

- says that he can daily see and enjoy creatures as goods without *desiring* them as goods, or who
- denies that if it is our duty not to desire any creature, it rigorously follows that it is also our duty (as Father Malebranche explicitly says it is) to have as little interaction with them as is possible and to go and live in deserts.

Perhaps Mr N has no inclination for that mode of life, and that disinclination is what led to his happy discovery that we can seek and enjoy the good things of the world without loving them; or perhaps he thinks that we *are* obliged to renounce the world and live in forests, but was afraid that if he said this aloud he would be suspected of favouring popish superstitions. Anyway, he can hardly be thought not to *see* that this inevitably follows from the hypothesis he has embraced. But however injurious this consequence is to religion, in rejecting it we should not deny something that Father Malebranche insists on at length, namely that retirement ·from society· is, if not necessary to a Christian life, sometimes useful to it. Those who live always in the hurry of the world and the calls of worldly business hardly ever give themselves time and seclusion to *reflect*, and are no doubt very likely to enter too much into the spirit of it [i.e. of worldly business]. When we are constantly engaged in something, we gradually give ourselves up to it, unite our hearts with it, and apply ourselves to it with delight. But if to avoid this anyone ran to the other extreme—

retreating wholly from all interaction and conversation with men, and giving themselves the happiness Father Malebranche speaks of, of attending eternity [she means: waiting for the after-life] in deserts

—it is to be feared that they would not mend the matter. For whatever vices they might part with by this course of action, it will necessarily make them wholly useless to others, thereby flouting one great purpose that they were sent into the world for, namely *doing good*. Also, by such a renunciation of all interactions with men such a person would be more likely to •grow wild than to •make any improvements ·in himself· in

good will, charity, and usefulness to others, these being the great virtue of Christianity and ornament of human nature.

As for monasteries and religious houses (as they are called): all who are acquainted with them know that they are all that they are claimed to be, and serve only to offer an imaginary happiness to draw in discontented, devout people. For there is constantly as much pride, malice, and faction within those walls as outside them; and (if we may believe what is said and has been backed by evidence) very often as much licentiousness.

In short, our natures are so suited to a middle course in all things that we cannot exceed in any way with complete safety. We cannot bear to be always busy in the affairs of the world, or always shut away from them; *always company* and *always solitude* are both dangerous; and so are any other extremes.