

Book I

Chapter I

1. As the vulgar generally look no higher for the original of moral good and evil, just and unjust, than the codes and pandects, the tables and laws of their country and religion, so there have not wanted pretended philosophers in all ages who have asserted nothing to be good and evil, just and unjust, naturally and immutably (*φύσει καὶ ἀκινήτως*); but that all these things were positive, arbitrary, and factitious only (*θετικά, νομικά, ψηφισματώδη*). Such Plato mentions in his tenth book *De legibus* [*Laws*], who maintained,

That nothing at all was naturally just but men changing their opinions concerning them perpetually, sometimes made one thing just, sometimes another; but whatsoever is decreed and constituted that for the time is valid, being made so by arts and laws, but not by any nature of its own.¹

And again his *Theaetetus*:

As to things just and unjust, holy and unholy, not only the Protagoreans (of whom we shall treat afterward), but many other philosophers also confidently affirm, that none of these things have in nature any essence of their own, but whatsoever is decreed by the authority of the city, that

¹ *Tā [δὲ] δίκαια οὐδ' εἶναι τὸ παράπαν φύσει, ἀλλ' ἀμφισβητοῦντας διατελεῖν ἀλλήλοις καὶ μετατιθεμένους ἀεὶ ταῦτα· ἃ δ' ἂν μετάθωνται καὶ ὅταν, τότε κύρια ἕκαστα εἶναι γιγνόμενα τέχνη καὶ τοῖς νόμοις, ἀλλ' οὐδὲν τινὶ φύσει* (Plato, *Laws* 890a). The Loeb translation gives, 'as to things just they do not exist at all by nature, but men are constantly in dispute about them and continually altering them, and whatever alteration they make at any time is at that time authoritative; though it owes its exercise to art and the laws, and not in any way to nature' Plato, *Laws*, trans. R.G. Bury (London and New York, 1926).

is truly such whether it is so decreed, and for so long time, viz. just or unjust, holy or unholy.²

And Aristotle more than once takes notice of this opinion in his *Ethics*:

Things honest and just, which politics are conversant about have so great a variety and uncertainty in them, that they seem to be only by law, and not by nature.³

And afterwards, Book 5, ch. 7, after he had divided that which is politically just (*τὸ δίκαιον πολιτικόν*) into natural (*φυσικόν*), '[that] which has everywhere the same force' (*τὸ πανταχοῦ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχον δύναμιν*), and legal (*νομικόν*), 'which before there be a law made, is indifferent, but when once the law is made, is determined to be just or unjust':⁴ which legal just and unjust (as he afterwards expresses it) are 'like to wine and wheat measures, as pints and bushels',⁵ which are not everywhere of an equal bigness, being commonly lesser with those that sell and greater with those that buy: then he adds, 'some there are that think that there is no other just or unjust, but what is made by law and men, because that which is natural is immutable, and hath everywhere the same force, as fire burns alike here and in Persia; but they see that *jura* and *justa*, rights and just things are everywhere different'.⁶

2. The philosophers particularly noted for this opinion in Plato are Protagoras in his *Theaetetus*, Polus and Callicles in his *Gorgias*, Thrasymachus, and Glaucon in his *Politics*.⁷ But Diogenes Laertius tells us some others, as of Archelaus, Socrates' master, that held 'that just

² 'Ἐν τοῖς δίκαιοις καὶ ἀδίκτοις, καὶ δόσις καὶ ἀνοσίτοις, ἐθέλουσιν ἰσχυρίζεσθαι ὥς οὐκ ἐστὶ φύσει αὐτῶν οὐδὲν οὐσίαν ἑαυτοῦ ἔχον, ἀλλὰ τὸ κοινῇ δόξαν τοῦτο γίνεται ἀληθὲς τότε ὅταν δόξῃ καὶ ὅσον ἂν δοκῇ χρόνον· καὶ ὅσοι δὲ μὴ παντάπασιν τὸν Πρωταγόρου λόγον λέγουσιν ὥδε πῶς τὴν σοφίαν ἄγουσι (Plato, *Theaetetus* 172B).

³ Τὰ δὲ καλὰ καὶ τὰ δίκαια περὶ ὧν ἡ Πολιτικὴ σκοπεῖται, τοσαύτην ἔχει διαφορὰν καὶ πλάνην ὥστε δοκεῖν νόμον μόνον εἶναι, φύσει δὲ μή (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094b14–17).

⁴ ὁ ἐξ ἀρχῆς οὐδὲν διαφέρει οὕτως ἢ ἄλλως· ὅταν δὲ θῶνται διαφέρει (ibid. 1134b18–21). *EIM* (1731) refers to ch. 10.

⁵ ὁμοίαι[...]. τοῖς μέτροις[...]. οἰνηροῖς καὶ σιτηροῖς (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1135a1). The translation of the passages suggests the Greek original is a continuous passage, which it is not, in fact. *EIM* (1848) terminates the translation at 'bushels', but it should be as given here.

⁶ Δοκεῖ δὲ ἐνίοις πάντα εἶναι τοιαῦτα, ὅτι τὸ μὲν φύσει ἀκίνητον καὶ πανταχοῦ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει δύναμιν, ὥσπερ τὸ πῦρ καὶ ἐνθάδε καὶ ἐν Πέρσῃ. Τὰ δὲ δίκαια κινούμενα ὁρῶσιν (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1134b24–8. Loeb translation by H. Rackham (London, 1934): 'Some people think that all the rules of justice are merely conventional, because whereas a law of nature is immortal and has the same validity everywhere, as fire burns the same here and in Persia, rules of justice are seen to vary.')

⁷ Protagoras, Polus, Callicles, Thrasymachus, Glaucon are, respectively, the interlocutors of Socrates in the dialogues named.

and dishonest are not so by nature but by law',⁸ and (as I conceive) Democritus,⁹ for after he had set down his opinion concerning happiness, or the chief end, he adds this as part of the Democritical philosophy, *ποιητὰ νομιμὰ εἶναι*, which I understand thus, that things accounted just or unjust are all factitious or artificial things, not natural; nothing being real or natural but atoms and vacuum, as the following words are, *φύσει δὲ ἄτομα καὶ κενόν*.¹⁰ The same is noted by Diogenes¹¹ also concerning Aristippus, Plato's contemporary, that he asserted 'that nothing was good or evil otherwise than by law or custom'.¹² And Plutarch in the *Life of Alexander*, tells us of Anaxarchus, that was Aristotle's equal, that when Alexander, repenting, sadly lamented the death of Clitus, whom he had rashly slain, he read this lecture in philosophy to him to comfort him, 'that whatsoever is done by the supreme power is *ipso facto* just'.¹³ And Pyrrho, the Eliensic philosopher, and father of the Sceptics, that was Anaxarchus' scholar, seems to have been dogmatical in nothing else but this 'that there is nothing good or shameful, just or unjust, and so likewise as to all things, that there is nothing so in truth, but that men do all things according to law and custom'.¹⁴

3. After these succeeded Epicurus,¹⁵ the reviver of the Democritical

⁸ *Τὸ δίκαιον εἶναι καὶ τὸ αἰσχρὸν οὐ φύσει ἀλλὰ νόμῳ* (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* II.16. Loeb translation by R.D. Hicks (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1934): 'that what is just and what is base depends not upon nature but upon convention'. Archelaus (fl. fifth century BC), was a pupil of Anaxagoras and is said to have taught Socrates.

⁹ Democritus of Abdera (b. 460–457 BC) was a pupil of Leucippus and of Anaxagoras, and a proponent of an atomic theory of matter.

¹⁰ Diogenes Laertius IX.45. Cudworth's two Greek quotations render Diogenes, *ποιότητος δὲ νόμῳ εἶναι, φύσει δ' ἄτομα καὶ κενόν*. Loeb translation: 'The qualities of all things exist merely by convention; in nature there is nothing but atoms and void space.'

¹¹ Diogenes Laertius X.45.

¹² *μηδὲν [τέ] εἶναι φύσει δίκαιον ἢ καλὸν ἢ αἰσχρὸν ἀλλὰ νόμῳ καὶ ἔθει* (Diogenes Laertius II.93). Aristippus of Cyrene, proponent of Epicureanism and founder of Cyrenaic school which taught that the immediate end of action is pleasure.

¹³ *πάν το πραχθὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ κρατούντος, δίκαιον εἶναι* (Plutarch, 'Alexander', in Plutarch, *Lives*, trans. B. Perrin (London and New York, 1919), vol. 7, 52.4. Original reads *θεμιτὸν ἢ καὶ δίκαιον* for *δίκαιον εἶναι*. Anaxarchus of Abdera (fl. fourth century BC), was a follower of Democritus and teacher of Pyrrho.

¹⁴ *οὔτε καλὸν οὔτε αἰσχρὸν, [οὔτε δίκαιον] οὔτε ἄδικον, καὶ ὁμοίως ἐπὶ πάντων μηδὲν εἶναι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, νόμῳ δὲ καὶ ἔθει πάντα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους πράττειν* (Diogenes Laertius, IX.61). Loeb translation: '[He denied] that anything was honourable or dishonourable, just or unjust. And so universally, he held that there is nothing really existent, but custom and convention govern human action.' Pyrrho (c. 365/360–c.275/270 BC) was the father of Greek scepticism.

¹⁵ Epicurus (c. 341–270 BC) was a proponent of Democritean atomism, whose philosophy, known in the Renaissance via Diogenes Laertius, was promoted by Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) and

philosophy, the frame of whose principles must needs lead him to deny justice and injustice to be natural things. And therefore he determines that they arise wholly from mutual pacts and covenants of men made for their own convenience and utility, and laws resulting from thence.

Those living creatures that could not make mutual covenants together not to hurt, nor to be hurt by one another, could not for this cause have any such thing as just or unjust amongst them. And there is the same reason for those nations that either will not, or cannot make such mutual compacts not to hurt one another. For there is no such thing as justice by itself, but only in the mutual congresses of men, wheresoever they have entered together into covenant not to hurt one another.¹⁶

The late compiler of the Epicurean system expresses this philosopher's meaning after this manner:

There are some that think that those things that are just [*justa*], are just according to their proper unvaried nature, and that the laws do not make them just, but only prescribe according to that nature which they have. But the thing is not so.¹⁷

After Epicurus, Carneades, the author of the New Academy as Lactantius testifieth, was also a zealous assertor of the same doctrine.¹⁸

4. And since in this latter age the physiological hypotheses of Democritus and Epicurus have been revived, and successfully applied to the solving of some of the phenomena of the visible world, there have not wanted those that have endeavoured to vent also those other paradoxes of the same philosophers, viz. 'That there is no incorporeal

Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655). Epicurus' denial of providence and his assertion that the world came about by chance rendered his philosophy suspect to Christians.

¹⁶ "Ὅσα τῶν ζώων μὴ ἡδύνατο συνθήκας ποιῆσθαι τὰς ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ βλάπτειν, ἀλλὰ μὴδὲ βλάπτεσθαι, πρὸς ταῦτα οὐθὲν ἔστι οὐδὲ δίκαιον οὐδὲ ἄδικον. ὥσαύτως δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν ὅσα μὴ ἡδύνατο ἢ ἐβούλετο τὰς συνθήκας ποιῆσθαι τὰς ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ βλάπτειν μὴδὲ βλάπτεσθαι· οὐκ ἦν τι καθ' ἑαυτὸ δικαιοσύνη, ἀλλὰ ἐν ταῖς μετὰ ἀλλήλων συντροφαῖς, καθ' ὁμηλικούς· ὅθι ποτε αἰεὶ τόπους συνθήκη τις ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ βλάπτειν ἢ βλάπτεσθαι (Diogenes Laertius, x. 150, who here quotes from Epicurus *Κόριαι Δόξαι*, of 'Sovran Maxims', sects. 32 and 33).

¹⁷ 'Ac sunt quidam, qui existimant ea, quae justa sunt, esse secundum propriam invariataque naturam justa, et leges non ista facere sed duntaxat praescribere juxta eam quam habent naturam verum res non ita se habet' (Gassendi, *Philosophiae Epicuri syntagma continens canonicam, physicam et ethicam* (London, 1668), p. 267). Pierre Gassendi promoted a Christianized version of Epicurus' philosophy as an alternative to Aristotelianism.

¹⁸ Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* v.14. Carneades (214/213–129/128 BC) was a sceptical philosopher and founder, as Cudworth notes, of the New Academy. Lactantius (c. AD 240–320), was a Christian apologist.

substance, nor any natural difference of good and evil, just and unjust',¹⁹ and to recommend the same under a show of wisdom, as the deep and profound mysteries of the atomical or corpuscular philosophy. As if senseless matter and atoms were the original of all things, according to that song of old Silenus in the poet:

He sung the secret seeds of nature's frame;
How seas, and earth, and air, and active flame,
Fell through the mighty void, and in their fall
Were blindly gathered in this goodly ball.²⁰

Of this sort is that late writer of ethics and politics, who asserts,

that there are no authentic doctrines concerning just and unjust, good and evil, except the laws which are established in every city: and that it concerns none to inquire whether an action shall be reputed just or unjust, good or evil, except such only whom the community have appointed to be the interpreters of their laws.²¹

And again, 'Even a Christian government hath power to determine what is righteous, and what is the transgression of it.'²² And he gives the same over again in English 'In the state of nature nothing can be unjust; the notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have no place; where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no transgression.' 'No law can be unjust'.²³ Nay, temperance is no more natural (*φύσει*), according to this civil (or rather uncivil) philosopher, than justice. 'Sensuality in that sense in which it is condemned, hath no place till there be laws'.²⁴

¹⁹ Not a quotation, but a summary of the principles of all materialists and relativists. Mention of a denial of incorporeal substance alludes to Thomas Hobbes.

²⁰ Namque canebat uti magnum per inane coacta
Semina terrarumque marisque fuissent,
Et liquidi simul ignis; ut his exordia primis
Omnia, et ipse tener mundi concreverit orbis.

(Virgil, *Eclogue* vi)

²¹ 'Doctrinas de justo et injusto, bono et malo, praeter leges in unaquaque civitate constitutas, authenticas esse nullas; et utrum aliqua actio justa vel injusta, bona vel mala futura sit, a nemine inquirendum esse, praeterquam ab iis, ad quos legum suarum interpretationem [civitas] demandaverit' (Hobbes, *Elementorum philosophiae sectio tertia, de cive*, in *Thomae Hobbes Malmesburiensis opera philosophica quae latine scripsit omnia*, ed. W. Molesworth, 5 vols. (London, 1839–45), vol. II, p. 145). Cudworth interpolates 'civitas'.

²² 'Ad civitatem pertinere etiam Christianam, quid sit justitia, quid injustitia, sive peccatum contra justitiam, determinare' (ibid., p. 387). See also *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. W. Molesworth, 11 vols. (London, 1839–45), vol. III, p. 267.

²³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Book I, ch. 13, in Hobbes, *English Works*, vol. III, p. 113.

²⁴ ibid., p. 42.

5. But whatsoever was the true meaning of these philosophers, that affirm justice and injustice to be only by law, and not by nature (of which I shall discourse afterwards),²⁵ certain it is that divers modern theologers do not only seriously, but zealously, contend in like manner, that there is nothing absolutely, intrinsically, and naturally good and evil, just and unjust, antecedently to any positive command or prohibition of God; but that the arbitrary will and pleasure of God (that is, an omnipotent Being devoid of all essential and natural justice), by its commands and prohibitions, is the first and only rule and measure thereof.²⁶ Whence it follows unavoidably that nothing can be imagined so grossly wicked, or so foully unjust or dishonest, but if it were supposed to be commanded by this omnipotent Deity, must needs upon that hypothesis forthwith become holy, just, and righteous. For though the ancient fathers of the Christian church were very abhorrent from this doctrine (as shall be showed hereafter),²⁷ yet it crept up afterward in the scholastic age, Ockham being among the first that maintained *nullum actum malum esse nisi quatenus a Deo prohibitum, et qui non possit fieri bonus, si a Deo praecipitur; et e converso*, 'that there is no act evil but as it is prohibited by God, and which cannot be made good if it be commanded by God. And so on the other hand as to good.'²⁸ And herein Petrus Alliacus and Andreas de Novo Castro, with others, quickly followed him.²⁹

But this doctrine hath been since chiefly promoted and advanced by such as think nothing so essential to the Deity as uncontrollable power and arbitrary will, and therefore that God could not be God if there should be anything evil in its own nature which he could not do; and who impute such dark counsels and dismal actions unto God, as cannot be justified otherwise than by saying that whatsoever God can be

²⁵ See below, Book II. ²⁶ Cf. *TIS*, Preface.

²⁷ Cudworth does not discuss the opinion of the Fathers in *EIM*. He does draw significantly on the opinions of Origen in *Freewill*. See below, pp. 155, 161–3, 175, 188.

²⁸ William of Ockham (c. 1285–1347/9), Franciscan theologian, who, like Duns Scotus before him, stressed the primacy of the divine will and the absolute freedom of God. Positions such as those cited by Cudworth are to be found in his *Super quatuor libros sententiarum subtilissimae quaestiones*, e.g. 1 *Sent.*, d. 43 q. 1 art. 4C, II *Sent.*, q. 19 art. 30. For Ockham see P. Boehner, *Ockham. Philosophical Writings* (Edinburgh and London, 1957).

²⁹ Petrus Alliacus (Pierre d'Ailly) (1350–1420/1), Andreas de Novo Castro (André de Neufchâteau) (fl. c. 1360), Cudworth's mention of these figures and of Ockham supports the view that the early seventeenth century saw a revival of scholasticism in England. See C.B. Schmitt, *John Case and Aristotelianism in Renaissance England* (Kingston and Montreal, 1983), pp. 61–8.

supposed to do or will, will be for that reason good or just, because he wills it.

Now the necessary and unavoidable consequences of this opinion are such as these:

That to love God is by nature an indifferent thing, and is morally good only, because it is commanded by God; that to prohibit the love of God, or command the hatred of God, is not inconsistent with the nature of God, but only with his free will; that it is not inconsistent with the natural equity of God to command blasphemy, perjury, lying, &c. That God may command what is contrary, as to all the precepts of the Decalogue, so especially to the first, second, third; that holiness is not a conformity with the nature of God; that God may oblige man to what is impossible; that God hath no natural inclination to the good of the creatures; that God can justly doom an innocent creature to eternal torment.³⁰

All which propositions, with others of like kind, are word for word asserted by some late authors. Though I think not fit to mention the name of any of them in this place, excepting only one, Joannes Szydlowius, who in a book published at Franeker,³¹ hath professedly avowed and maintained the grossest of them. And yet neither he, nor the rest, are to be thought any more blameworthy herein than many others, that holding the same premisses have either dissembled or disowned those conclusions which unavoidably follow therefrom: but rather to be commended for their openness, simplicity, and ingenuity, in representing their opinion nakedly to the world, such as indeed it is, without any veil or mask.

Wherefore since there are so many, both philosophers and theologers,

³⁰ 'Amare Deum φύσει esse ἀδιάφορον et moraliter bonum solummodo, quia a Deo jubetur: prohibere Dei amorem vel praecipere Dei odium, non pugnare cum Dei natura, sed tantum cum voluntate libera. Non repugnare juri divino naturali praecipere peccata. Deum posse imperare blasphemiam, perjurium, mendacium, &c. Deum posse praecipere contrarium, ut omnibus praeceptis decalogi, ita potissimum primo, secundo, tertio. Sanctitatem non esse conformitatem cum natura Dei; Deum posse hominem obligare ad impossibile; Deum nullam habere naturalem inclinationem in bonum creaturarum; Deum jure posse creaturam insontem aeternis cruciatibus damnare.' This is a summary of the positions argued in Szydlowius (see next note). There is further discussion of Divine will in Cudworth's manuscript treatises on free will.

³¹ Jan Szydlowski (Joannes Szydlowius), *Vindiciae quaestionum aliquot difficultum et controversarum in theologia oppositae illustri cuidam...viro, tum et theologi cujusdam absurdae opinioni de Christo mediatore et potestate Dei in creaturas a Johanne Szydlowio* (Franeker, 1643). A Pole resident in the Netherlands, Szydlowski cites extreme predestinarians Johannes Maccovius, William Twisse and Piscator.

that seemingly and verbally acknowledge such things as moral good and evil, just and unjust, that contend notwithstanding that these are not by nature (*φύσει*), but institution (*θέσει*), and that there is nothing naturally or immutably just or unjust; I shall from hence fetch the rise of this ethical discourse or enquiry concerning things good and evil, just and unjust, laudable and shameful *περὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν, δικάων καὶ ἀδίκων* (for so I find these words frequently used as synonymous in Plato and other ancient authors): demonstrating in the first place, that if there be anything at all good or evil, just or unjust, there must of necessity be something naturally and immutably good and just (*δίκαιον φυσικὸν καὶ ἀκίνητον*). And from thence I shall proceed afterward to show what this natural, immutable, and eternal justice is, *δίκαιον φυσικὸν, ἀκίνητον, καὶ αἰώνιον*, with the branches and species of it.

Chapter II

1. Wherefore in the first place, it is a thing which we shall very easily demonstrate, that moral good and evil, just and unjust, honest and dishonest (if they be not mere names without any signification, or names for nothing else but willed and commanded, but have a reality in respect of the persons obliged to do and avoid them) cannot possibly be arbitrary things, made by will without nature; because it is universally true, that things are what they are, not by will but by nature. As for example, things are white by whiteness, and black by blackness, triangular by triangularity, and round by rotundity, like by likeness, and equal by equality, that is, by such certain natures of their own. Neither can Omnipotence itself (to speak with reverence) by mere will make a thing white or black without whiteness or blackness; that is, without such certain natures, whether we consider them as qualities in the objects without us according to the Peripatetical philosophy, or as certain dispositions of parts in respect of magnitude, figure, site, and motion, which beget those sensations or phantasms of white and black in us.³² Or, to instance in geometrical figures, omnipotence itself cannot by mere will make a body triangular without having the nature and

³² See, for example, Descartes, *Principia philosophiae* II. Also IV.19off.

properties of a triangle in it; that is, without having three angles equal to two right ones nor circular without the nature of a circle; that is, without having a circumference equidistant every where from the centre or middle point. Or lastly, to instance in things relative only: omnipotent will cannot make things like or equal one to another, without the natures of likeness and equality. The reason whereof is plain, because all these things imply a manifest contradiction: that things should be what they are not. And this is a truth fundamentally necessary to all knowledge, that contradictories cannot be true; for otherwise nothing would be certainly true or false. Now things may as well be made white or black by mere will, without whiteness or blackness, equal and unequal, without equality and inequality, as morally good and evil, just and unjust, honest and dishonest (*debita* and *illicita*), by mere will, without any nature of goodness, justice, honesty. For though the will of God be the supreme efficient cause of all things, and can produce into being or existence, or reduce into nothing what it pleaseth, yet it is not the formal cause of any thing besides itself, as the schoolmen have determined, in these words, 'That God himself cannot supply the place of a formal cause' (*Deum ipsum non posse supplere locum causae formalis*); and therefore it cannot supply the formal cause, or nature of justice or injustice, honesty or dishonesty. Now all that we have hitherto said amounts to no more than this, that it is impossible any thing should be by will only, that is without a nature or entity, or that the nature and essence of any thing should be arbitrary.

2. And since a thing cannot be made any thing by mere will without a being or nature, every thing must be necessarily and immutably determined by its own nature, and the nature of things be that which it is, and nothing else. For though the will and power of God have an absolute, infinite, and unlimited command upon the existences of all created things to make them to be, or not to be at pleasure; yet when things exist, they are what they are, this or that, absolutely or relatively, not by will or arbitrary command, but by the necessity of their own nature. There is no such thing as an arbitrary essence, mode, or relation, that may be made indifferently any thing at pleasure. For an arbitrary essence is a being without a nature, a contradiction, and therefore a nonentity. Wherefore the natures of justice and injustice cannot be arbitrary things, that may be applicable by will indifferently to any actions or dispositions whatsoever. For the modes of all

subsistent beings, and the relations of things to one another, are immutable and necessarily what they are, and not arbitrary, being not by will but by nature.

3. Now the necessary consequence of that which we have hitherto said is this, that it is so far from being true that all moral good and evil, just and unjust are mere arbitrary and factitious things, that are created wholly by will, that (if we should speak properly) we must needs say that nothing is morally good or evil, just or unjust by mere will without nature, because everything is what it is by nature, and not by will. For though it will be objected here, that when God, or civil powers command a thing to be done, that was not before obligatory or unlawful, (*debitum* or *illicitum*), the thing willed or commanded doth forthwith become obligatory (*δέον* or *debitum*), that which ought to be done by creatures and subjects respectively; in which the nature of moral good or evil is commonly conceived to consist. And therefore if all good and evil, just and unjust be not the creatures of mere will (as many assert) yet at least positive things must needs owe all their morality, their good and evil, to mere will without nature. Yet notwithstanding, if we well consider it, we shall find that even in positive commands themselves, mere will doth not make the thing commanded just or obligatory, or beget and create any obligation to obedience; but that it is natural justice or equity which gives to one the right or authority of commanding, and begets in another duty and obligation to obedience. Therefore it is observable, that laws and commands do not run thus to will that this or that thing shall become just or unjust, obligatory or unlawful, or that men shall be obliged or bound to obey; but only to require that something be done or not done, or otherwise to menace punishment to the transgressors thereof. For it was never heard of that any one founded all his authority of commanding others, and others' obligation or duty to obey his commands, in a law of his own making, that men should be required, obliged, or bound to obey him. Wherefore since the thing willed in all laws is not that we should be obliged to obey, this thing cannot be the product of the mere will of the commander, but it must proceed from something else, namely the right or authority of the commander, which is founded in natural justice and equity, and an antecedent obligation to obedience in the subjects. Which things are not made by laws, but presupposed before all laws to make them valid. And if it should be imagined that anyone should make a positive law to

require that others should be obliged or bound to obey him, everyone would think such a law ridiculous and absurd. For if they were obliged before, then this law would be in vain and to no purpose. And if they were not before obliged, then they could not be obliged by any positive law, because they were not previously bound to obey such a person's commands. So that obligation to obey all positive laws is older than all laws, and previous or antecedent to them. Neither is it a thing that is arbitrarily made by will, or can be the object of command, but that which either is or is not by nature. And if this were not morally good and just in its own nature before any positive command of God that God should be obeyed by his creatures, the bare will of God himself could not beget an obligation upon any to do what he willed and commanded, because the natures of things do not depend upon will, being not things that are arbitrarily made (*γιννόμενα*) but things that are (*ὄντα*). To conclude therefore, even in positive laws and commands it is not mere will that obligeth, but the natures of good and evil, just and unjust, really existing in the world.

4. Wherefore that common distinction betwixt things naturally and positively good and evil, or (as others express it) betwixt things that are therefore commanded because they are good and just, and things that are therefore good and just,³³ because they are commanded, stands in need of a right explication, that we be not led into a mistake thereby, as if the obligation to do those thetical and positive things did arise wholly from will without nature. Whereas it is not the mere will and pleasure of him that commandeth that obligeth to do positive things commanded, but the intellectual nature of him that is commanded. Wherefore the difference of these things lies wholly in this, that there are some things which the intellectual nature obligeth to of itself (*per se*) and directly, absolutely, and perpetually, and these things are called naturally good and evil. Other things there are which the same intellectual nature obligeth to by accident only, and hypothetically, upon condition of some voluntary action either of our own or some other person's, by means whereof those things which were in their own nature indifferent, falling under something that is absolutely good or evil, and thereby acquiring a new relation to the intellectual nature, do for the time become such things as ought to be done or omitted (*debita or illicita*), being made

³³ This is the fundamental question posed in Plato's *Euthyphro* 10A. Cudworth poses the same question in his *Sermon Preached before the House of Commons* (1647). See *TIS* II, part 2, p. 48.

such not by will but by nature. As for example, to keep faith and perform covenants is that which natural justice obligeth to absolutely. Therefore, upon supposition (*ex hypothesi*) that any one maketh a promise, which is a voluntary act of his own, to do something which he was not before obliged to by natural justice, upon the intervention of this voluntary act of his own, that indifferent thing promised falling now under something absolutely good and becoming the matter of promise and covenant, standeth for the present in a new relation to the rational nature of the promiser, and becometh for the time a thing which ought to be done by him, or which he is obliged to do. Not as if the mere will or words and breath of him that covenanteth had any power to change the moral natures of things, or any ethical virtue of obliging, but because natural justice and equity obligeth to keep faith and perform covenants. In like manner natural justice, that is the rational or intellectual nature, obligeth not only to obey God, but also civil powers, that have lawful authority of commanding, and to observe political order amongst men. And therefore if God or civil powers command any thing to be done that is not unlawful in itself, upon the intervention of this voluntary act of theirs, those things that were before indifferent become by accident for the time obligatory, such things as ought to be done by us, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of that which natural justice absolutely obligeth to.

And these are the things that are commonly called *positively* good and evil, just or unjust, such as though they are adiaphorous or indifferent in themselves, yet natural justice obligeth to accidentally, on supposition (*ex hypothesi*) of the voluntary action of some other person rightly qualified in commanding, whereby they fall into something absolutely good. Which things are not made good or *due* by the mere will of the commander, but that natural justice which gives him right and authority of commanding, and obligeth others to obey him, without which natural justice, neither covenants nor commands, could possibly oblige any one. For the will of another doth no more oblige in commands, than our own will in promises and covenants. To conclude, therefore, things called naturally good and due are such things as the intellectual nature obliges to immediately, absolutely, and perpetually, and upon no condition of any voluntary action that may be done or omitted intervening. But those things that are called positively good and due are such as natural justice or the intellectual nature obligeth to accidentally and hypothetically,

upon condition of some voluntary act of another person invested with lawful authority in commanding.

And that it is not the mere will of the commander that makes these positive things to oblige or become due but the nature of things appears evidently from hence because it is not the volition of every one that obligeth, but of a person rightly qualified and invested with lawful authority. And because the liberty of commanding is circumscribed within certain bounds and limits, so that if any commander go beyond the sphere and bounds that nature sets him, which are indifferent things, his commands will not at all oblige.

5. But if we would speak yet more accurately and precisely, we might rather say, that no positive commands whatsoever do make any thing morally good and evil, just and unjust, which nature had not made such before. For indifferent things commanded, considered materially in themselves, remain still what they were before in their own nature, that is indifferent, because, as Aristotle speaks, 'will cannot change nature' (*τὸ φύσει ἀκίνητον*). And those things that are by nature indifferent (*φύσει ἀδιάφορα*), must needs be as immutably so as those things that are by nature just or unjust (*φύσει δίκαια* or *ἄδικοι*), honest or shameful (*καλά* or *αἰσχρά*). But all the moral goodness, justice, and virtue, that is exercised in obeying positive commands and doing such things as are *positive* only, and to be done for no other cause but because they are commanded, or in respect to political order, consisteth not in the materiality of the actions themselves, but in that formality of yielding obedience to the commands of lawful authority in them. Just as when a man covenanteth or promiseth to do an indifferent thing which by natural justice he was not bound to do, the virtue of doing it consisteth not in the materiality of the action promised, but in the formality of keeping faith and performing covenants. Wherefore in positive commands, the will of the commander doth not create any new moral entity, but only diversely modifies and determines that general duty or obligation of natural justice to obey lawful authority and keep oaths and covenants, as our own will in promising doth but produce several modifications of keeping faith. And therefore there are no new things just or due made by either of them, besides what was always by *nature* such, to keep our own promises, and obey the lawful commands of others.

6. We see then that it is so far from being true that all moral good and

evil, just and unjust (if they be any thing) are made by mere will and arbitrary commands (as many conceive), that it is not possible that any command of God or man should oblige otherwise than by virtue of that which is naturally just (*φύσει δίκαιον*). And though particular promises and commands be made by will yet it is not will but nature that obligeth to the doing of things promised and commanded, or makes them such things as ought to be done (*debita*). For mere will cannot change the moral nature of actions, nor the nature of intellectual beings. And therefore, if there were no natural justice, that is, if the rational or intellectual nature in itself were indeterminated and unobliged to any thing, and so destitute of all morality, it were not possible that any thing should be made morally good or evil, obligatory or unlawful (*debitum* or *illicitum*), or that any moral obligation should be begotten by any will or command whatsoever.

Chapter III

1. But some there are that will still contend, that though it should be granted that moral good and evil, just and unjust, do not depend upon any created will, yet notwithstanding they must needs depend upon the arbitrary will of God, because the nature and essences of all things, and consequently all verities and falsities depend upon the same. For if the natures and essences of things should not depend upon the will of God, it would follow from hence that something that was not God was independent upon God.³⁴

2. And this is plainly asserted by that ingenious philosopher Renatus Descartes, who in his answer to the Sixth Objector against his Metaphysical Meditations, writes thus:

It is a contradiction to say that the will of God was not from eternity indifferent to all things which are or ever shall be done; because no good or evil, nothing to be believed, or done, or omitted, can be fixed upon, the idea whereof was in the divine intellect before that his will determined itself to effect that such a thing should be. Neither do I speak this concerning the priority of time, but even there was nothing prior in

³⁴ 'Independent upon', i.e. 'independent of'.

order or by nature, or by reason as they call it, so as that idea of good inclined God to choose one thing rather than another. As for example's sake he would therefore create the world in time, because that he saw that it would be better so than if he had created it from eternity; neither willed he that the three angles of a triangle should be equal to two right angles, because he knew that it could not be otherwise. But on the contrary, because he would create the world in time, therefore it is better than if he had created it from eternity; and because he would that the three angles of a triangle should necessarily be equal to two right angles, therefore this is true and no otherwise; [...] and so of other things. And thus the greatest indifference in God is the greatest argument of his omnipotence.³⁵

And again afterward:

To him that considers the immensity of God it is manifest that there can be nothing at all which doth not depend upon him, not only nothing subsisting, but also no order, no law, no reason of truth and goodness.³⁶

And when he was again urged by the Sixth Objector,

Could not God cause that the nature of a triangle should not be such and how, I pray thee, could he from eternity cause that it should not be true, that twice four are eight?³⁷

He confesseth ingenuously that those things were not intelligible to us;

³⁵ 'Repugnat Dei voluntatem non fuisse ab aeterno indifferentem ad omnia, quae facta sunt aut unquam fient, quia nullum bonum vel verum, nullum credendum vel faciendum vel omittendum fingi potest, cujus idea in intellectu divino prius fuerit, quam ejus voluntas se determinarit ad efficiendum ut id tale esset. Neque hic loquor de prioritate temporis, sed ne quidem prius fuit ordine, vel natura, vel ratione ratiocinata ut vocant, ita scilicet ut ista boni idea impulerit Deum ad unum potius quam aliud eligendum. Nempe exempli causa, non ideo voluit creare mundum in tempore, quia vidit sic melius fore, quam si creasset ab aeterno, nec voluit tres angulos trianguli aequales esse duobus rectis, quia cognovit aliter fieri non posse, &c. Sed contra, quia voluit mundum creare in tempore, ideo sic melius est, quam si creatus fuisset ab aeterno; et quia voluit tres angulos trianguli necessario aequales esse duobus rectis, idcirco jam hoc verum est, et fieri aliter non potest; atque ita de reliquis [...]. Et ita summa indifferentia in Deo summum est ejus omnipotentiae argumentum' (Descartes, *Meditationes de prima philosophia...hic adjunctae sunt variae objectiones...cum responsionibus auctoris* (Amsterdam, 1678), sect. 6, p. 291. *AT* vii, 431–2). For a modern English translation, see CSM ii, 291ff. The sixth set of Objections to Descartes' *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (*Meditations on First Philosophy*) came from various anonymous hands and were compiled by Marin Mersenne.

³⁶ 'Attendenti ad Dei immensitatem manifestum est, nihil omnino esse posse, quod ab ipso non pendeat, non modo nihil subsistens, sed etiam nullum ordinem, nullam legem, nullamve rationem veri et boni' (Descartes, *Meditations*, sect. 8, *AT* vii, 435. CSM ii, 281).

³⁷ 'Numquid ergo [Deus] potuit efficere, ut natura trianguli non fuerit? Et qua ratione, amabo, potuisset ab aeterno facere, ut non fuisset verum bis quatuor esse octo?' (Descartes, *Meditations, Sixth Set of Replies*, *AT* vii, 418. CSM ii, 294).

but notwithstanding they must be so because, 'Nothing in any sort of being can be, which doth not depend upon God.'³⁸ Which doctrine of Cartesius is greedily swallowed down by some servile followers of his that have lately written of the old philosophy (*de prima philosophia*).³⁹

3. Perhaps some may make a question for all this, whether Cartesius were any more in earnest in this, than when he elsewhere goes about to defend the doctrine of transubstantiation by the principles of his new philosophy because, in his *Meditations* upon the old philosophy [*Meditations*] (where it is probable he would set down the genuine sense of his own mind more undisguisedly, before he was assaulted by these objectors, and thereby forced to turn himself into several shapes) he affirmeth that the essences of things were eternal and immutable. But afterward urged by Gassendus with this inconvenience, that then something would be eternal and immutable besides God, and so independent upon God, he doth in a manner unsay it again, and betakes himself to this pitiful evasion,

As the poets feign that the fates were indeed fixed by Jupiter, but that when they were fixed, he had obliged himself to the preserving of them, so I do not think that the essences of things, and those mathematical truths which can be known of them, are independent on God. But I think nevertheless, that because God so willed and so ordered, therefore they are immutable and eternal.⁴⁰

Which is plainly to make them in their own nature mutable. But whether Cartesius were in jest or earnest in this business, it matters not, for his bare authority ought to be no more valued by us than the

³⁸ 'Nihil in ullo genere entis esse potest, quod a Deo non pendeat' (Descartes, *Meditations AT VII*, 436. CSM, II, 261). The objections by Pierre Gassendi were printed as the fifth set of Objections in 1647. After reading Descartes' reply, Gassendi composed a further set of criticisms which were published with his original set of objections in *Disquisitio metaphysica sive dubitationes et instantiae* (Amsterdam, 1644).

³⁹ 'De prima philosophia', in the title of the *Meditations*, is normally given in modern editions as *Meditations on First Philosophy*, metaphysics being the 'first' philosophy, in the sense of the fundamentals of philosophy. Cudworth, however, translates 'prima' as 'old', i.e. 'original' philosophy. This is consistent with his view that the essentials of philosophy are contained in a *philosophia perennis* or perennial philosophy, dating back to earliest times. Cudworth regarded Cartesianism as reviving theories originally enunciated in ancient times. See below, pp. 38 and 151.

⁴⁰ 'Quemadmodum poetae fingunt a Jove quidem fata fuisse condita, sed postquam condita fuere ipsum se iis servandis obstrinxisse; ita ego non puto essentias rerum, mathematicasque illas veritates, quae de ipsis cognosci possunt, esse independentes a Deo; sed puto nihilominus, quia Deus sic voluit, quia sic disposuit, ipsas esse immutabiles et aeternas' (*AT VII*, 380). CSM II, 261.

authority of Aristotle and other ancient philosophers was by him, whom he so freely dissents from.

4. For though the names of things may be changed by any one at pleasure, as that a square may be called a circle, or a cube a sphere, yet that the nature of a square should not be necessarily what it is, but be arbitrarily convertible into the nature of a circle, and so the essence of a circle into the essence of a sphere, or that the self same body, which is perfectly cubical without any physical alteration made in it, should by this metaphysical way of transformation of essences, by mere will and command be made spherical or cylindrical; this doth most plainly imply a contradiction, and the compossibility of contradictions destroys all knowledge and the definite natures (*rationes*) or notions of things. Nay, that which implies a contradiction is a nonentity and therefore cannot be the object of divine power. And the reason is the same for all other things, as just and unjust; for every thing is what it is immutably by the necessity of its own nature. Neither is it any derogation at all from the power of God to say, that he cannot make a thing to be that which it is not. Then there might be no such thing as knowledge in God himself. God might will that there should be no such thing as knowledge.

5. And as to the being or not being of particular essences, as that God might, if he pleased, have willed that there should be no such thing as a triangle or circle, and therefore nothing demonstrable or knowable of either of them. Which is likewise asserted by Cartesius, and those that make the essences of things dependent upon an arbitrary will in God. This is all one as if one should say that God could have willed, if he had pleased, that neither his own power nor knowledge should be infinite.

6. Now it is certain that if the natures and essences of all things, as to their being such or such, do depend upon a will of God that is essentially arbitrary, there can be no such thing as science or demonstration, nor the truth of any mathematical or metaphysical proposition be known by any otherwise, than by a certain enthusiastic or fanatic faith and persuasion thereupon, that God would have such a thing to be true or false at such a time or for so long. And so nothing would be true or false naturally (*φύσει*), but positively (*θέσει*) only, all truth and science being mere arbitrary things. Truth and falsehood would be only names. Neither would there be any more certainty in the knowledge of God himself, since it must wholly depend upon the mutability of a will in him essentially indifferent and undetermined. And if we would speak

properly according to this hypothesis, God himself would not know or be wise by knowledge or by wisdom, but by will.⁴¹

7. Wherefore as for that argument, that unless the essences of things and all verities and falsities depend upon the arbitrary will of God, there would be something that was not God, independent upon God. If it will be well considered, it will prove a mere mormo, bugbear, and nothing so terrible and formidable as Cartesius seemed to think it.⁴² For there is no other genuine consequence deducible from this assertion, that the essences and verities of things are independent upon the will of God, but that there is an eternal and immutable wisdom in the mind of God, and thence participated by created beings independent upon the will of God. Now the wisdom of God is as much God as the will of God. And whether⁴³ of these two things in God, that is, will or wisdom, should depend upon the other, will be best determined from the several natures of them. For wisdom in itself hath the nature of a rule and measure, it being a most determinate and inflexible thing. But will being not only a blind and dark thing as considered in itself, but also indefinite and indeterminate, hath therefore the nature of a thing regulable and measurable. Wherefore it is the perfection of will, as such, to be guided and determined by wisdom and truth. But to make wisdom, knowledge, and truth to be arbitrarily determined by will, and to be regulated by such a plumbean and flexible rule (*κανὼν μολύβδινος*) as that is, is quite to destroy the nature of it. For science or knowledge is the comprehension of that which necessarily is (*κατάλληψις τοῦ ὄντος*), and there can be nothing more contradictory than truth and falsehood arbitrary. Now all the knowledge and wisdom that is in creatures, whether angels or men, is nothing else but a participation of that one eternal, immutable, and increated wisdom of God, or several signatures of that one archetypal seal, or like so many multiplied reflections of one and the same face, made in several glasses, whereof some are clearer, some obscurer, some standing nearer, some further off.

8. Moreover, it was the opinion of the wisest philosophers (as we shall show afterward) that there is also in the scale of being a nature of goodness superior to wisdom, which therefore measures and determines the wisdom of God, as his wisdom measures and determines his will, and which the ancient cabalists were wont to call כתר crown, as being

⁴¹ Compare *TIS*, p. 646.

⁴² *AT* vii, 380; *CSM* ii, 261. Cf. *CSM* iii, 23.

⁴³ i.e. which.

the top or crown of the Deity, of which more afterward. Wherefore although some novelists⁴⁴ make a contracted idea of God consisting of nothing else but will and power, yet his nature is better expressed by some in this mystical or enigmatical representation of an infinite circle, whose inmost centre is simple goodness, the radii [or] rays and expanded area (plat) thereof all comprehending and immutable wisdom, the exterior periphery or interminate circumference, omnipotent will or activity by which every thing without God is brought forth into existence. Wherefore the will and power of God having no command inwardly (*imperium ad intra*) either upon the wisdom and knowledge of God, or upon the ethical and moral disposition of his nature which is his essential goodness, but the sphere of its activity is without God (*extra Deum*), where it hath an absolute command upon the existences of things, and is always free, though not always indifferent, since it is its greatest perfection to be determined by infinite wisdom and infinite goodness. But this is to anticipate what according to the laws of method should follow afterward in another place.

⁴⁴ i.e. innovators or recent writers.