

DE OFFICIO HOMINIS ET CIVIS
JUXTA LEGEM NATURALEM
LIBRI DUO

BY

SAMUEL VON PUFENDORF

VOLUME TWO

THE TRANSLATION

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- VOL. I. A Photographic Reproduction of the Edition of 1682, with an Introduction by Walther Schücking and a List of Errata.
- VOL. II. A Translation of the Text, by Frank Gardner Moore, with a Translation (by Herbert F. Wright) of the Introduction by Walther Schücking, and an Index by Herbert F. Wright.

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CHAPTER IV

On the Duty of Man toward God, or Natural Religion

1. The duty of man toward God, so far as it can be investigated by the natural reason, reduces itself to two heads: that we have right views of God, and secondly that we order our acts in conformity with His will. Hence natural religion consists of propositions both theoretical and practical.

2. Among the views which every man must hold of God, he should first of all be persuaded that He exists, that is, that there really is some highest and first Being, upon whom this universe depends. The philosophers have most clearly demonstrated this by the subordination of causes, which demand their ultimate resting in a First; also by motion and by contemplation of the machinery of the universe, and similar arguments. And if any man shall deny that he can understand these, he does not on that account find excuse for his atheism. For as the whole human race has been in perpetual possession of that belief, it would be necessary, if anyone wished to attack it, not only to destroy utterly all the arguments by which the existence of God is proved, but also to produce more plausible reasons for his assertion. Likewise since it has been hitherto believed that
25 the welfare of the human race depends upon that conviction, the man would have further to show that the race is better served by atheism than by retaining a sane cult of the Deity. This being impossible, the impiety of those who venture to attack that belief in any way is detestable and to be most severely punished.

3. The second truth is that God is founder of this universe. For since reason makes it clear that all those things did not exist of themselves, it must be that they have some first cause. And this is just what we call God. Consequently they are deceived who from time to time noisily talk of Nature as the ultimate cause of all things and all effects. For if by that term we understand that power of effecting and acting which is seen in things, that in itself certainly is an argument for its author, namely God: so impossible is it for Nature's power to enable us to deny God. If however by Nature is meant the ultimate cause of everything, it is a kind of profane fastidiousness to avoid the plain and received term, God. They too are in error who believe that God is some one of the things which

impinge upon our senses, and especially the stars. For their very substance declares that all of these are no first thing, but sprung from another. Not less unworthy is their view of God who call Him the soul of the world. For whatever the soul of the world may be, it denotes a part of the world, and how could part of a thing have been its cause, that is, an antecedent? But if by soul of the world we mean that first invisible being upon which depends the force and motion of all things, then in place of a clear term we are substituting one that is obscure and figurative. Hence also it is evident that the world is not eternal; for that is incompatible with the nature of that which has a cause. And he who asserts the eternity of the world, denies it any possible cause, and thus denies God Himself.

4. The third maxim is that God rules over the whole world, and over the human race. This is perfectly clear from the wonderful and constant order seen in this universe. But so far as the moral effect is concerned, it is immaterial whether one denies that God exists, or that he governs the affairs of men, since either view completely destroys all religion. For it is vain to fear or venerate him who, though in himself preeminent, is not touched by any care for us, and will not, or cannot, bring us any good or ill. 26

5. The fourth principle is that no attribute involving any imperfection applies to God. For as He is the cause and origin of all things, it would be absurd for some creature of His to have the power to conceive of a perfection which God lacked. More than that, His perfection being infinitely beyond the capacity of so petty a creature, it will be proper to express it in negative rather than in positive terms. Hence we must by no means apply to God those terms which connote something finite or determinate, since the finite can always be matched by a greater. And every determination and figure involves boundaries and a delimitation. In fact we are not to say that He is distinctly and plainly comprehended or conceived by our imagination, or any other faculty of our soul, since whatever we are able to conceive distinctly and fully, is finite. Nor do we hold in mind a complete concept of God, because we call Him infinite, inasmuch as infinite does not properly denote anything in the thing itself, but powerlessness in our mind, just as if we should say that we do not understand the magnitude of His being. Hence one cannot say either that God has parts, or is a whole, since these are the attributes of the finite; nor that He is contained in some place, for this implies bounds and limits to His greatness; nor that He moves, or is at rest, for both of these suppose being in a place. So also we cannot properly attribute to God anything which indicates a pain or a passion, for instance anger, repentance, pity. I

say *properly*, for where we read of such attributes of God, it stands for the effect, in terms of man's feelings, not for the passion itself. The same is true of all that indicates the need and absence of some good thing, for example, craving, hope, concupiscence, sensual love. For these involve want, and so imperfection, since we could not understand craving, hoping, and desiring, except in relation to things one needs or lacks. So too when one ascribes to God intellect, will, knowledge, and acts of sense, as seeing or hearing, these are to be understood as on a far higher plane than are the same things in ourselves. For will is the appetite of the reason; but an appetite presupposes absence and need of the corresponding thing. And intellect and sensation in man involve passion, impressed by objects upon the organs of the body and the powers of the soul; which is a proof of a power dependent upon another, and hence not the most perfect. Finally this also is inconsistent with divine perfection, to say that there are more gods than one. For aside from the fact that the marvelous harmony of the world proves that it has but a single ruler, God would also be limited, if there were several of equal power, not dependent upon Himself. Just so the existence of a number of infinities would involve a contradiction. Such being the case, it is most in harmony with reason, in expressing as best we may the attributes of God, to use words that are either negative, as infinite, incomprehensible, immense, eternal, viz., lacking end and beginning; or superlative, as best, greatest, most powerful, wisest, etc.; or else indefinite, as good, just, Creator, King, Lord, etc., with the understanding that we wish not so much to tell distinctly what He is, as to declare our wonder and obedience by some sort of an expression. And this is the sign of a mind that is humble, and honors to the best of its ability.

6. The practical propositions of natural religion have to do partly with the internal and partly with the external cult of God. The inward cult of God consists in honoring Him. And honor is the idea one has of another's power and goodness combined. On considering God's power and goodness, man must naturally conceive the utmost possible veneration of Him. Whence flows the obligation to love Him, as the author and giver of every good; to hope in Him, upon whom we believe that all our happiness, for the future too, depends; to rest content with His will, who in His goodness does all things well, and gives us what is most expedient for us; to fear Him, as most powerful, to offend whom is to incur the greatest punishment; finally in all things most humbly to obey Him, as Creator, Lord, and best and greatest Ruler.

7. The external cult of God consists especially in these things: returning thanks to God for so many blessings received from

Him; expressing His will in one's acts, so far as possible, in other words, obeying Him; admiring and celebrating His greatness; offering prayers to Him, to obtain blessings and avert evils, since prayers are signs of hope, and hope the recognition of divine goodness and power. Further, swearing, if the occasion arises, by God alone, and observing one's oath most religiously, since this is required by God's omniscience and power. Also speaking of God with reserve, since that is a sign of fear, and fear a confession of power. It follows that we must not use the name of God rashly and in vain, both of which are unreserved; and that we must not swear where there is no need, as that is to no purpose; also that we should not argue curiously and impertinently in regard to the nature and government of God, for the only inference is that we wish to measure God by the standard of our reason. Another [duty of the external cult is] taking care that whatever is rendered to God be the best of its kind, and fitted to express the honor paid Him; another, worshiping God not only in private, but also openly and publicly in the sight of men. For concealing an act is as it were blushing to do it. On the other hand the public cult, besides testifying to our devotion, encourages others by our example. Finally, one should use every effort to keep the natural laws. For as holding God's authority in low esteem is worse than any insult, so conversely obedience is more acceptable than any sacrifice.

8. So much is indeed certain, that the effect of this natural religion, precisely considered, and with regard to man's present condition, is limited to the sphere of this life, and is of no avail to secure eternal salvation. For human reason, if left to itself, does not know that the depravity which is seen in man's faculties and inclinations came through human sin, and deserves the anger of God and eternal destruction. Hence too the necessity of a Saviour is hidden from the reason, as also His service and merit, likewise the promises of God, given to the human race, and whatever else depends upon these,—the things through which alone eternal salvation is gained for men, as is known from the Scriptures. 29

9. Moreover it will be worth while to estimate a little more clearly the advantage which religion contributes to human life, that we may establish the fact that it is in truth the ultimate and strongest bond of human society. For in the natural liberty, if you take away the fear of the Deity, as soon as a man has confidence in his own powers, he will at his own caprice undertake anything against the weaker, and will consider honor, shame, good faith, as empty words, and will not be forced to do right except by a sense of his own weakness. Again, remove religion, and the internal stability of states would always be uncertain, and fear of temporal punishment,

a promise given to superiors, the glory to be gained by keeping the same, gratitude because men have been rescued from the miseries of the natural state by the help of the government,—none of these would suffice to hold citizens to their duty. For to that situation we could in truth apply the saying: “He who knows how to die, can never be forced.”¹ For those who fear not God can fear nothing more than death. If one should have the hardihood to despise the latter, he could attempt anything against the rulers. And a reason for such a desire would scarcely be lacking; for example, in order to avoid the inconveniences which seem to fall upon one from the rule of another; or to gain for one’s self those advantages which attend the possessor of powers; especially since one may easily think he is right in doing so, either because the man now in power seems to misgovern the state, or because the other hopes he will himself rule far better. And then an opportunity for such attempts might easily present itself, when the king fails to hedge his life about with sufficient caution (and in such a situation “who is to guard the guards themselves?”²); or when many conspire, or when in the midst of a foreign war enemies are made accomplices. Furthermore, citizens would be very prone to injure each other. For, as in the civil court
 30 judgment is rendered according to acts and things proved, all crimes and outrages from which profit is likely to be derived, would be regarded as cleverness, to be viewed with complaisance, if they could be done in secret and without witnesses. Also no one would do the works of pity or of friendship, except with the assurance of fame or emolument. Another consequence would be that, so long as no one could place any firm confidence in the integrity of another, were the divine punishments removed, individuals would live a life of perpetual anxiety and suspicion, fearing to be deceived or injured by others. Moreover rulers as well as subjects would be little inclined to do noble and glorious acts. For the rulers, fettered by no bonds of conscience, would treat all offices and Justice herself as venal, and seek in all things their personal advantage, involving the oppression of the citizens. They would also fear a rebellion on the part of the latter, and would accordingly understand their own safety to depend entirely upon weakening them as far as possible. Conversely, the citizens, fearing oppression from their rulers, would be always casting about for an opportunity to rebel, and yet would be no less mutually distrustful and fearful of each other. Even husbands and wives, if a trifling quarrel occurred, would mutually suspect that they were to be killed by poison, or some other secret method. An equal danger from one’s household would impend. For since, without religion, there would also be no conscience, it

¹ [Cf. SENECA, *Hercules Furens*, 426.]

² [JUVENAL, VI, 347.]

would be difficult to detect such crimes, as these are usually disclosed through a restless conscience, and the terror which is revealed in external signs. Hence it is clear how much it is to the advantage of the human race to block all the ways of atheism, that it may not grow strong; also how great madness pursues those who assert that it is of service in winning a reputation for civic wisdom, if they appear inclined to impiety.