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SAMUEL CLARKE

A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God
And Other Writings

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To the memory of Wilbur Knorr
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Abbreviations

CI  Clarke’s letter to Leibniz, in The Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence. With extracts from Newton’s “Principia” and “Opticks,” ed. H. G. Alexander (Manchester University Press, 1956), followed by letter number and section.


Lz  Leibniz’s letter to Clarke, in The Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence. With extracts from Newton’s “Principia” and “Opticks,” ed. H. G. Alexander (Manchester University Press, 1956), followed by letter number and section.


Introduction

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the reoccurrence in western thought of methods and procedures in the study of the natural world which had been largely forgotten or not systematically used since Archimedes. The reawakening of western science was so fast and momentous as to be truly revolutionary. Especially in physics, the new science centered on the mathematization of nature, a process which accelerated as more and more powerful mathematical tools, from analytic geometry to calculus, were developed.

The relation of modern science to traditional religion soon proved problematic. Some natural philosophers, e.g., Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), thought that the new science was incompatible with a literal reading of the Scriptures; others, for example, Benedictus de Spinoza (1632–77) and Thomas Hobbes (1588–79), believed that it was in conflict with many of the traditional tenets of natural religion, and consequently were considered, perhaps somewhat unjustly, atheists by their contemporaries. However, many of the natural philosophers involved in the scientific revolution thought that religion or, at a minimum, natural religion, and the new science could be made compatible once the philosophical ramifications of modern science were properly understood.

The first great systematic attempt to harmonize religion and modern science was carried out by René Descartes (1596–1650), who produced a metaphysical system in which a perfect God exists, the soul is immaterial and immortal, and matter, being nothing but tridimensionally extended substance, is the proper subject of mathematization. However, Descartes’ system soon ran into difficulties. Its scientific part, especially the fundamental laws of impact, proved unsatisfactory and, more importantly, many
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philosophers of different persuasion, for example, Henry More (1614–87), Clarke himself, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), and Isaac Newton (1642–1727), came to believe that, whatever Descartes' intentions had been, Cartesianism, far from securing natural religion, could be, and had been, used to subvert it.

In 1687, Newton published Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica, the book that represented the culmination of the scientific revolution. Edmond Halley (1656–1742) had written a long review of the work for the Philosophical Transactions shortly before its publication, and upon the book's appearance news of Newton's achievement spread quickly, both in Great Britain and on the Continent, not only among mathematically sophisticated scientists like David Gregory (1661–1708), Christian Huygens (1629–95), Johann Bernoulli (1667–1748), Guillaume de L'Hôpital (1661–1704) and Leibniz, but also among philosophers who, like John Locke (1632–1704), or Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), found much of the mathematics insurmountable. Newton, a very religious man with an abiding interest in theology and scriptural exegesis, viewed favorably the attempt to put his physical discoveries in the service of religion. The Boyle Lectures provided an ideal vehicle for that attempt.

The Lectures had been instituted through the will of Robert Boyle (1627–91), the great English physicist, who had left a modest sum, later increased by others, establishing a series of sermons for "proving the Christian Religion against notorious Infidels, viz., Atheists, Theists, Pagans, Jews, and Mahometans." The first lecturer had been Richard Bentley (1662–1742), the famous classical scholar. He had asked Newton's advice in the composition of his 1662 lecture, and Newton had obligingly replied, pointing out that he had composed Principia "with an eye upon such Principles as might work with considering men for the belief of a Deity & nothing can rejoice me more than to find it usefull for that purpose." Several of the lectures were given by members of the Newtonian circle, for example, Clarke, William Whiston (1667–1752), and William Derham (1657–1735), and the Boyle Lectures to a good extent became a vehicle for the dissemination of Newtonianism. In 1704, Samuel Clarke delivered that year's lecture under the title A Demonstration of the Being

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_and Attributes of God;_ it proved very successful, so that he was asked to deliver the following year's lecture, which he did with the title _A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation._

Samuel Clarke was born at Norwich on 11 October 1675. He took his B.A. degree at Cambridge in 1695 by defending Newton's views, which were still far from uncontroversial at Cambridge. His tutor apparently convinced him to provide a new Latin translation, with notes, of Rohault's _Treatise of Physics_. The translation, first published in 1697, was very successful; it went through four editions and was often used at Cambridge as a textbook. Jacques Rohault (1620–72) was a Cartesian scientist, and Clarke's notes, which became longer and more abundant as the translation went through its editions, in effect criticized Cartesian physics in favor of Newton's. In that same year, Clarke befriended Whiston, who just five years later was to be Newton's hand-picked successor to the Lucasian Chair; it was, presumably, this relation which introduced him into the Newtonian circle, of which he soon became a leading figure. His relation with Newton is somewhat unclear, in part because none of their correspondence (if there was any, since they were neighbors for many years) survives; however, in contrast to many members of the Newtonian circle, it seems that he never fell out of favor with Newton. The 1704–5 Boyle Lectures gave him great notoriety, and his connection with Newton became, as it were, official in 1706, when he translated, to Newton's satisfaction, the _Opticks_ into Latin. In the same year, Clarke attacked Henry Dodwell (1641–1711), who had claimed that the soul is naturally mortal and receives immortality by the supernatural efficacy of baptism. Clarke's criticism drew a reply from Anthony Collins (1675–1729), a materialist follower of Locke's, and the ensuing exchange on whether matter can think brought Clarke even greater notoriety. His reputation had become so great that in 1710 George Berkeley (1685–1753) sent him the first edition of the _Principles_ (Clarke declined to comment on them), and in 1713 Joseph Butler (1692–1752) consulted him on some difficulties in _A Demonstration_. In the meantime, he had been introduced to Queen Anne (1665–1714), who made him one of her chaplains in 1706, and three years later he was elevated to the rectory of St. James's, Westminster.

In 1712, apparently against the advice of some of Queen Anne's ministers, Clarke published _The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity_, which was, not altogether unfairly, accused of Arianism, the theological view that Christ
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is divine but created. The ensuing controversy culminated two years later in his promise to the Upper House of Convocation not to preach and not to write on the topic any longer. This act of submission did not please outspoken Arians like Whiston, who in 1710 had been expelled from Cambridge because of his heterodox views; nor did it silence the (correct) rumors that he, like many of the Newtonian circle, including Newton himself, was still an Arian. How much these suspicions of heterodoxy damaged his ecclesiastical career is unclear. However, Voltaire (1694–1778) reports that Bishop Gibson effectively prevented Clarke’s elevation to the See of Canterbury by pointing out that Clarke was indeed the most learned and honest man in the kingdom, but had one defect: he was not a Christian.

After the Hanoverian accession, Clarke developed a close relationship with Caroline of Anspach (1683–1737), the Princess of Wales and future queen. Caroline was an intelligent woman with philosophical interests who, in earlier years, had been a pupil of Leibniz. It was through her mediation that Clarke engaged Leibniz in the most famous philosophical correspondence of the eighteenth century (1715–16). The exchange dealt with many of the issues which had occupied Clarke in his Boyle Lectures, such as divine immensity and eternity, the relation of God to the world, the soul and its relation to the body, free will, space and time, and the nature of miracles. It also discussed more strictly scientific topics, such as the nature of matter, the existence of atoms and the void, the size of the universe, and the nature of motive force, which were then often given both a philosophical and a scientific treatment.

In 1717, Clarke published the correspondence with Leibniz together with an attack on a work by Collins denying the existence of free will. This was his last significant philosophical work. However, his remaining years were not spent idly. He continued to defend his theological views; in 1728 he wrote a short essay for the Philosophical Transactions trying to show, against the Leibnizians, that the proper measure of force is not mv² but mv; in 1729, by royal command, he edited and translated into Latin the first twelve books of the Iliad, showing the same skill in classical languages he had manifested in his edition of the works of Caesar seventeen years earlier. He died in 1729 after a very short illness, survived by his wife Katherine and five of his seven children.

Clarke was a polite and courtly man who, however, was vivacious with his friends and seems to have been fond of playing cards. Voltaire, who met him, was impressed by his piety and admired his logical skills so much that
he called him “a veritable thinking machine.” His philosophical interests were in theology and metaphysics; epistemology seems to have held little attraction for him. His philosophical vocabulary and some of his metaphysical ideas were influenced by Descartes, whom he followed in holding that the world contains two types of substance, mind and matter, the combination of which constitutes humans. However, he sided with Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) and Locke in denying that introspection lets us reach the substance of the soul. Indeed, like Locke and Newton he held that we just do not know the substance of things (p. 30). Furthermore, Clarke’s overall judgment of Descartes was quite critical. He told Butler that Descartes’ views that matter is infinite and eternal, that the behavior of all bodies can be explained mechanically, and that final causes ought to be expunged from physics had been deleterious to religion (p. 111).

One could, of course, debate Clarke’s exegetical accuracy. For example, although Descartes had told More that the thesis that the world is finite is contradictory, he had also claimed that the world is indefinite rather than infinite. But this objection would miss the real thrust of Clarke’s point. For he thought that natural religion was under attack by naturalism (the view that nature constitutes a self-sufficient system of which we are but a part), which had been revived by Hobbes and, especially, Spinoza. He also shared the view expressed by other philosophers, for example, More in England, and Blaise Pascal (1623–62), Bayle, and Leibniz on the Continent, that Descartes’ system could be, and had been, used to further irreligion. In particular, he believed that Descartes’ main fault was the identification of matter with extension, and therefore space, which entailed bestowing on matter the eternity and infinity of space. Cartesianism, then, opened the way for naturalism and the demise of natural religion, whose defense through philosophy and science he made his philosophical mission.

Clarke’s attack against naturalism revolved around five connected points. First, God is a necessarily existent omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, omnipresent, and supremely benevolent person. Second, nature and its laws are radically contingent. God, endowed with a libertarian will, chose to create the world and operate in it by a reasonable but uncaused fiat (pp. 45–7, 73–4). Third, although space and time are infinite, matter is spatio-temporally finite, and being endowed only with vis ineritiae it has no power of self-motion (p. 149). Fourth, God is substantially present in nature (or, better, nature is literally in God, since space and time are divine attributes) and constantly exercises his power by applying attractive and repulsive
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forces to bodies (pp. 158–9). With the exception of the law of inertia, which describes the essentially passive nature of matter, strictly speaking the laws of nature (e.g., Newton’s inverse law) do not describe the behavior of matter, which is just dead mass constantly pushed around, but modalities of operation of the divine power: as in the case of occasionalism, they prescribe the actions of the divine will rather than describe those of bodies (p. 149). Fifth, although the soul is extended and interacts with the body, it is necessarily immaterial because matter, being constituted of merely juxtaposed parts, cannot possibly think even by divine intervention; moreover, the soul has been endowed by God with a libertarian will (pp. 63–6, 153–8). The first four points guaranteed that nature is not a self-sufficient system, so much so that without direct and constant divine physical intervention planets would fly away from their orbits, atoms break into their components and the machinery of the world literally grind to a halt; the fifth guaranteed that the soul is not a part of nature. In the following, we shall see these points emerge from a consideration of Clarke’s views on God, free will, matter and the laws of nature, space and time, and the soul. Finally, we shall briefly consider the fortunes of A Demonstration.

God

The proof of the necessary existence and attributes of God occupies most of A Demonstration, and it is beyond the scope of this introduction to discuss it in detail. If we are to believe Whiston’s testimony, Clarke preferred the argument from design to the cosmological argument. Indeed, he held that the former argument is more easily understood, and therefore more apt for unphilosophical minds than the latter, and at times he claimed that the reasons behind his use of the cosmological argument were essentially occasional and strategic: *a priori* atheistical arguments required *a priori* answers (p. 119). However, he also noted that the argument from design, in contrast to the cosmological argument, cannot prove the immensity and infinity of God, and therefore we may assume that Clarke’s use of the argument *a priori*, as he called it, was not merely occasioned by his adversaries’ modes of argumentation (p. 119). The main lines of the argument are as follows. Since something exists now, something has existed from eternity, otherwise nothing would exist now because from nothing nothing comes.

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What has existed from eternity can only be either an independent being, i.e., one having in itself the reason of its existence, or an infinite series of dependent beings. However, such a series cannot be the being which has existed from eternity because, by hypothesis, it can have no external cause, and no internal cause, i.e., no dependent being in it, can cause the whole series. Hence, an independent being exists (pp. 8–12). As a side argument, Clarke also argued that since space and time cannot be thought of as nonexistent and they are obviously not self-subsistent, the substance on which they depend, God, must exist necessarily as well (pp. 13, 108). Clarke identified self-existence with necessary-existence, and embarked on obscure considerations about the necessity of the self-existing being in which, at times, this necessity seems to be some sort of entity antecedent in nature to God as the reason for God’s existence (pp. 12–13, 113, 118–19). This was an unfortunate move which generated a good deal of controversy that continued after Clarke’s death. Finally, teleological considerations show that the independent being, God, is necessarily endowed with intelligence and wisdom (pp. 38, 79). In addition, God is endowed, though not with metaphysical necessity, with all the moral perfections (p. 83).

Clarke said little about the divine nature, perhaps because he held that the manner of divine existence infinitely transcends that of creatures, and that consequently we cannot have an adequate notion of the divine being and attributes. However, he rejected not only Spinoza’s view that a word can refer both to human and divine properties only equivocally, but also Aquinas’ position that it can do so only analogically. Instead, he adopted the Latitudinarian view that human and divine attributes, especially the moral ones, have the same nature, although God’s are infinite (pp. 8, 144–5).

Clarke’s most characteristic and controversial views about God concerned divine eternity and immensity. According to traditional Christian theology, God is eternal and immense (omnipresent). The claim that God is eternal can be taken to mean two different things. In one sense it means that God is a timeless being whose duration is not successive, with no before or after; past, present, and future are all timelessly present to God. In another sense, it means that God is sempiternal, i.e., a being existing throughout time but whose duration is successive and for whom there is a before and an after.3

3 For the first view, see S. Boethius, De Consolatione Philosophiae, v, St. Anselm, Monologion, chs. 20–2; St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Ia Iae, Q. 10. For an account of the second view, R. Sorabji, Time, Creation and the Continuum (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1983), ch. 16.
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Similarly, divine immensity or omnipresence can be understood in different ways. God can be taken to be present everywhere by operation but not by situation; i.e., God is present by being in a place not as a human would be, but by acting there. God fills a room by causing it and its contents in a way remotely analogous to that in which I can fill a glass by pouring water in it. By contrast, one could claim that divine operational presence requires situational presence, and hold that the divine substance is, in some sense to be specified, coextensive with what it fills. However, divine extension can itself be taken in two ways. It can be understood in terms of local extension; God, then, would be extended like, say, a stone or perhaps space are, with the proviso that God, unlike a stone, could penetrate all other extended things. Or, it can be understood in non-local terms, in accordance with what More dubbed “holenism”; the divine substance, then, would be whole in the whole of space and whole in each and every place, in a way analogous to the presence in space of an instant of time. Clarke rejected the view of God as substantially removed from space and time. Divine eternity involves both necessary existence and a “Duration of inexhaustible and never failing permanency,” which, however, could not be identified with the traditional notion of the eternal present (nunc stans) according to which God exists in an unchanging permanent present without any successive duration (pp. 32–3). Like Newton, Clarke considered such a view unintelligible at best and contradictory at worst (pp. 32–3, 138). The attribution of successive duration to God might suggest that God, like us, is in time but, unlike us, does not change. However, this was not Clarke’s view. For one thing, he made clear in his exchanges with Butler that God is not in space and time (p. 105). Moreover, he attributed distinct and successive thoughts to God, otherwise God could not “vary his will, nor diversify his works, nor act successively, nor govern the world, nor indeed have any power to will or do anything at all” (pp. 159–60). Hence, God is

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immutable with respect to his will and his general and particular decrees only in the sense that he does not change his mind (pp. 138–9).

Clarke’s criticism of the Scholastic view of divine immensity or omnipresence was analogous to that of eternity: the claim that “the immensity of God is a point, as his eternity . . . is an instant” was, he held, unintelligible (p. 35). However, while, for Clarke, God’s temporal presence is analogous to ours by involving temporal succession, his views about God’s spatial presence were somewhat less clear because he did not explicitly state whether he adopted holenmerism or not. Nevertheless, there are good reasons for holding he did not. Clarke vigorously denied Leibniz’ charge that extension is incompatible with divine simplicity because it introduces parts in God without making any reference to holenmerism, and this intimates that he thought of divine omnipresence in terms of local extension and dimensionality. Nor did he attempt any defense of holenmerism from More’s famous critique, and in addition there is some indirect contemporary evidence that Clarke took God to be literally dimensional.6

For Clarke, divine eternity and immensity are to be identified with space and time. This identification, however, was fraught with difficulties, in part because Clarke’s position was not clear. Usually, he held that space and time are just divine properties (p. 31; Cl v, 36–48, note). However, he also told Leibniz that, in addition, they are necessary effects of God’s existence and necessary requirements for divine eternity and ubiquity, without supplying any argument to show that these different accounts are equivalent or even compatible (Cl iv, 10). At other times, as in the letter to Daniel Waterland (1683–1740) and in the Avertissement to Pierre Des Maizeaux (1666–1745), in the latter of which Newton had more than a hand, he held that they are not, strictly speaking, properties (p. 122–3).7

Moreover, as Leibniz and an anonymous correspondent (almost certainly Waterland) readily noted, the identification of divine immensity with

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7 P. Des Maizeaux, Recueil de diverses pièces . . . par Mrs. Leibniz, Clarke, Newton, & autres auteurs célèbres (Amsterdam, 1720), tome 1, p. v. Koyré and Cohen have shown that the Avertissement was written by Newton by publishing the several drafts by his own hand. However, as they themselves point out, there is no reason to doubt that Clarke contributed to it. See their “Newton & the Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence,” Archives Internationales d’Histoire des Sciences, 15 (1962), 63–126, especially 95.
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space endangers the simplicity of the divine being because space has parts, albeit not separable ones. The objection, though formidable, was not new; Bayle had chided the Newtonians for identifying space with divine immensity in order to solve the ontological problem created by the positing of an infinite space and had compared this solution to Malebranche’s placement of “intelligible extension” in God, a solution which, he claimed, Antoine Arnauld (1612–94) had shown to lead to the destruction of divine simplicity.8

Clarke’s solution was to claim parity between spatial and temporal extendedness: since the former is compatible with the simplicity of what “stretches” temporally, the latter is compatible with the simplicity of what stretches spatially (pp. 115–16). But the parity between space and time, were it to be granted, rather than showing that spatial extendedness is not detrimental to a thing’s simplicity because temporal extendedness is not, could be taken to show that the latter is detrimental to a thing’s simplicity because the former is. Moreover, the objection could be reinforced by noting that time, as space, is subject to the category of quantity, traditionally taken to be incompatible with the divine essence.

The same critic also argued that extension is incompatible with divine “spirituality,” as Clarke put it, namely with the claim that God thinks. This, too, aimed at showing that Clarke’s God is not a unity. For, according to Clarke, only an essentially simple substance can think, and consequently matter, being a compound, cannot possibly be the subject of consciousness (pp. 153–8). While unfortunately we do not have the letter of Clarke’s critic, presumably the objection was that if the divine consciousness were extended, then it would be possible to consider a spatial part of it as being itself conscious. But this possibility shows that an extended consciousness is not a unity because if a spatial part of consciousness were a consciousness, then the whole consciousness would be a multitude of consciousnesses. And this would not only be incompatible with divine simplicity, but with Clarke’s point that consciousness is a unity in the sense of not being composed by several consciousnesses (p. 157).

As before, Clarke’s reply invoked the symmetry between space and time. He started by pointing out, as Newton had done in the General Scholium to book III of Principia, that an instant of time is the same everywhere. But, Clarke thought, the spatial extension of one instant of time does not affect

8 P. Bayle, Dictionnaire historique et critique (Paris, Editions sociales, 1974), s.v. Leucippus, remark G.

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its unity and does not justify the claim that it stretches for, say, one mile. The evidence for this conclusion, Clarke seemed to hold, is given by the fact that one does not think, or talk, about time in terms of miles. Similarly, he concluded, from the fact that the divine consciousness is extended, one should not infer that it is proper to talk about it in terms of its spatial parts (p. 116). However, Clarke’s point seems hardly compelling: if one assumes that an instant of time is infinitely extended, one is implicitly assuming that it is extended for at least one mile.

Free will

Clarke attached great importance to the issue of free will (p. 63). Like many philosophers, he held that the highest form of freedom involves willing as one should, namely, having one’s will in step with one’s right values. He also believed that freedom of the will, or liberty, involves a libertarian power of self-determination and that it is a necessary condition both for that higher form of freedom and for religion. Hobbes’s and Spinoza’s views that everything happens deterministically or necessarily, he thought, destroy it. However, Spinoza, Hobbes, and their followers could be defeated by noticing that the very causal version of the principle of sufficient reason, customarily used to show that no self-determining will is possible because each of its determinations is the effect of previous causes, in reality entails that God has a self-determining free will. The reason is that the causal version of the principle of sufficient reason in the cosmological argument shows that the necessary being on which the contingent world depends must have in itself “a principle of acting . . . which is the idea of liberty” (pp. 53–4).

Clarke’s argument is disconcerting. At most, the cosmological argument shows that the first cause cannot be acted upon by any other cause and consequently must be an original causal principle. Spinoza knew this, and pointed out that God is self-existent and self-determined, i.e., a free cause in his sense, and that its essence is power. But whether the divine power operates in accordance with metaphysically necessary laws themselves arising from the divine nature or not, is left open by the causal version of the principle of sufficient reason. Clarke thought he had an answer to this sort of objection by showing that the notion of a necessary agent is contradictory because agency involves the libertarian capacity of suspending action (pp. 46, 74–5, 132–5). Therefore, since God must be an agent, he cannot
operate necessarily, and, since being an agent and being free are the same thing, God is free as well (p. 75). Of course, the identification of agency with the capacity to choose provided further evidence against the view that Spinoza’s god is an agent, as Clarke did not fail to point out (W 11, 586). But Clarke failed to justify his libertarian view of agency, and finally could not explain why the first cause ought to be an agent in his sense rather than just a Spinozistic cause which produces all that can be produced without choosing. Ultimately, the causal version of the principle of sufficient reason cannot yield the conclusion Clarke wanted.

However, Clarke had other arguments against the view that divine operations are necessary. If God operated necessarily, things could not be different from how they are. But the number of planets, their orbits, indeed, the law of gravitation itself, could have been different, as any reasonable person (but not Spinoza) could plainly see. Further, the obvious fact, despite Spinoza and Descartes, that final causes are at play in the world, indicates that divine activity follows, not necessary, but architectonic, patterns (p. 51).

Clarke did not content himself with attacking necessitarianism and determinism with arguments drawn from general metaphysical considerations; he also criticized the specific theories of volition which determinists and necessitarians had put forth, in particular the view that volition is caused by, or even identical with, the last evaluative judgment. He did not identify whom he had in mind, but certainly the targets were Spinoza and Hobbes. Spinoza had argued that every act of volition is an act of affirmation and vice versa. Presumably, what he had in mind is that every volition is identical with a value judgment: to will to do X is to judge that X is the best thing to do. Hobbes had not identified the volition with the evaluative judgment, but had told John Bramhall (1594–1666) that the latter was the final and decisive cause of the former, since the last judgment of the understanding “may be said to produce the effect necessarily, in such manner as the last feather may be said to break a horse’s back, when there were so many laid on before as there wanted but that one to do it.”

Clarke was ready to grant that the understanding is fully determined to assent to a proposition which is perceived to be true in the same way in

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which an open eye is fully determined to see objects. In this sense, the
assent is necessary (p. 125). However, the necessity of the last evaluative
judgment is totally immaterial to the issue of freedom. His opponents,
Clarke thought, were guilty of basic philosophical errors. If they main-
tained that the content of the evaluation, the evaluative proposition, is
identical with the volition or causes it, then they were confusing reasons
with causes or, as he put it, “moral motives with physical efficiencies” (pp. 54,
73). The understanding presents the agent with a value judgment, e.g.,
“doing X is better than doing Y,” which the agent has the power to follow
or not. The reason, Clarke explained to Collins, is that the motive, e.g., the
proposition “doing X is better than doing Y,” cannot cause anything
because it is an abstract entity. Holding the contrary is taking an abstract
entity for a substance (pp. 134, 136).

On the other hand, if Clarke’s opponents maintained that, not the evalu-
ative proposition, but one’s perceiving, judging, or otherwise believing it,
is identical with, or a partial cause of, volition, then they were falling foul
of a basic causal principle. Against Descartes, Clarke insisted that judging,
i.e., assenting to what appears true and dissenting from what appears false,
is not an action but a passion. But what is passive cannot cause anything
which is active (p. 134). So, there is no causal link between evaluation and
volition or, as Clarke put it, “approbation and action” (p. 126). Nor is there
any causal link between previous non-volitional mental states and any
volition. What causes the volition is the principle of action itself, which
Clarke identified with the agent, that is, the spiritual substance.

Having shown that God is necessarily endowed with liberty, Clarke tried
to show that we are as well. His argument was based both on metaphysics
and experience. It is clear that liberty is a communicable power because it
does not entail such incommunicable qualities as total causal independence
and self-existence (p. 61). We do not know how the power of action can be
transmitted, but considerations drawn from experience assure us that it
has been, since our actions seem to us to be free, exactly as they would do
on the supposition that we are really free agents (p. 62). Of course, this does
not amount to a strict demonstration; but denying that we have free will
is on a par with denying the existence of the external world, a coherent but
unreasonable option. The burden of proof is not on the supporter of
liberty, but on its denier.

In addition to providing evidence for the libertarian position, Clarke
also endeavored to answer arguments against it. Against the claim that
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divine foreknowledge is incompatible with free will, Clarke objected that
since knowledge does not affect the thing known, our free choices are
unaffected by divine omniscience (pp. 140–3). He also addressed the
Hobbesian argument that, since thought is a mode of matter and matter
has no self-moving power, there cannot be any freedom of the will. Against
this, he advanced two objections (p. 64). One is a complex argument, which
we discuss later, for the claim that thought cannot possibly inhere either
naturally or supernaturally in matter. The other consists in the claim that
Hobbes and his followers were guilty of sliding from meaning by “matter”
“extended solid substance” (which of course would not have free will even
if it were to think per impossibile) to meaning “substantial substratum or sub-
ject of inherence” (to which any previous conclusion regarding free will
based on solidity and extension need not apply) (p. 71).

Another objection Clarke considered is that a free agent cannot choose
whether to have a will or not; “but (the two contradictories of acting or not
acting being always necessarily before him) he must of necessity, and essen-
tially to his being a free agent, perpetually will one of these two things,
either to act or to forbear acting” (p. 74). This fact, Clarke continued,
induced even “some considerate persons” to entertain “great doubts con-
cerning the possibility of liberty.” Clarke did not identify the philosophers
he had in mind, but probably one of his targets was Locke, who, at Essay
II, 21, 23–4, seemed to move from the claim that an action can take place
or not only if the agent wills it or not and the claim that necessarily an
action must take place or not, to the conclusion that the will of the agent
is determined. Clarke pointed out that the argument was guilty of con-
fusing de dicto and de re necessity. It might be true that if I think about
doing A, then it is necessary that either I will to do A or will not to do A.
However, from this it does not follow that if I think about doing A, then
necessarily I will to do A. Nor does it follow that if I think about doing A,
then necessarily I will not to do A (pp. 74–5).

Matter and the laws of nature

Clarke’s views on matter are best seen in connection with his ideas about
miracles. Like Joseph Glanville (1636–80), Thomas Sprat (1635–1713),
Boyle, and Locke, he belonged to that group of English intellectuals asso-
ciated with the Royal Society who thought that miracles could be used as
evidence for the claim that Christianity is the true religion. According to
Clarke, a miracle is a “work effected in a manner unusual . . . by the inter-
position either of God himself, or of some intelligent agent superior to 
man, for the proof or evidence of some particular doctrine, or in attest-
atation to the authority of some particular person” (W II, 701).

However, Clarke claimed, “Modern Deists,” noticing that nature is 
regular and constant and that certain causes produce certain effects accord-
ing to fixed laws, have come to the conclusion that “there are in matter 
certain laws or powers the result of which is . . . the course of nature; which 
they think is impossible to be changed or altered, and consequently that 
there can be no such things as miracles” (p. 150). Prima facie, it is difficult 
to see why Clarke worried about this allegedly deist view. Certainly, even 
in a physical world ruled by metaphysically necessary laws, events can have 
unusual causes, e.g., by being brought about by invisible agents. Presumably 
then, when Clarke claimed that miracles are “effected in manner unusual, 
or different from the common and regular method of providence,” he 
meant that the causes of a miracle are not subsumable under the laws of 
nature; consequently, if the natural laws are unbreakable and all pervasive, 
as the deists and Spinoza claim, then miracles are impossible.

The deistic view, Clarke argued, is completely wrong because “all things 
done in the world, are done either immediately by God himself, or by 
created intelligent beings: matter being evidently not at all capable of any 
laws or powers whatsoever” except for the negative power of inertia. 
Consequently, the so-called “effects of the natural powers of matter, and 
laws of motion; of gravitation, attraction, or the like” properly speaking 
are but the “effects of God’s acting upon matter continually and every 
moment, either immediately by himself, or mediately by some created 
intelligent beings.” The course of nature is “nothing else but the will of 
God producing certain effects in a continued, regular, constant and uniform 
manner which . . . being in every moment perfectly arbitrary, is as easy to 
be altered at any time, as to be preserved” (p. 149). So, the possibility of 
miracles, and ultimately the strongest evidence for the divine commission 
of Christ, for Clarke depends upon a form of theological voluntarism and 
the denial of the activity of matter.

Clarke’s theological voluntarism was moderate if compared with the 
extreme views of Descartes. For him, moral laws are independent of the 
divine will, and even the absolute power of God (potentia dei absoluta) is 
limited to what is logically possible. Nor is the divine will inscrutable, if 
that entails that divine attributes and powers are absolutely different from
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the human ones, since, as we saw above, they have the same nature and differ only in degree. Moreover, the “arbitrariness” of God’s will is not to be construed as irrationality; rather, the divine will infallibly follows his necessarily correct judgment, and consequently God always acts on the basis of rules of “uniformity and proportion.” However, true to his libertarian position, Clarke held that the will, in God as in us, is not causally determined by the understanding, and therefore the rules governing the ordinary power of God (potentia dei ordinata), a subset of which are the laws of nature, are freely self-imposed, and not the result of the necessarily correct divine understanding: they are a manifestation of God’s moral, and therefore free, attributes, not of God’s metaphysical, and therefore necessary, ones.

Clarke steadfastly maintained that matter has neither an essential nor an accidental power of self-motion. The first claim was very common among early modern philosophers, and held not only a fortiori by an occasionalist like Malebranche, but also by thinkers of different persuasions like Descartes, Locke, and Boyle. In fact, even Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), who had upheld the notion of an active matter by claiming that atoms have an internal corporeal principle of action, had fallen short of claiming that they possess it essentially.\(^\text{10}\)

Clarke’s second claim, however, was more controversial. For, although most early modern mechanists programmatically tried to substitute a nature made of inert particles for the living nature of Renaissance philosophy, the attempt soon ran into great difficulties. Strict mechanism proved inadequate to explain phenomena like exothermic reactions (where does the explosive motion of gunpowder come from?) or the spring of the air (why does a deflated closed balloon expand in a vacuum tube?). In order to explain such phenomena, mechanism was altered by philosopher-scientists like Boyle, Walter Charlton (1619–1707), William Petty (1623–87), and Newton to include particles variously endowed with powers of motion, attraction, and repulsion.

Clarke’s position on the issue was radical: the various non-mechanical powers of particles are the result of direct divine or spiritual activity. He could not bring himself to accept active matter because he thought of it as a prelude to atheism, for, as we noticed above, Clarke believed that deny-

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ing God's continuous direct intervention in nature in effect amounts to eliminating him, as John Toland (1670–1722) had done by endowing matter with essential "autokinesis" (pp. 19, 120–30). Clarke's views, however, had their own problems. A God who is actually extended and constantly operates physically on matter looked suspiciously like the soul of the world, as Leibniz charged using Newton's identification (in the Opticks) of space as the sensorium of God. Similarly, the placement of gravitational forces within the purview of ordinary divine activity which Clarke openly accepted, in contrast with Newton's officially agnostic position, drew from Leibniz the accusation of obscuringism.

Space and time

According to Clarke, the ideas of space and time are the two "first and most obvious simple Ideas, that every man has in his mind" (p. 114). Like many of the philosophers who investigated the nature of space and time, he tended to produce arguments with regard to space, leaving the reader to infer that parallel arguments could be drawn with respect to time. While matter can be thought of as non-existing, space exists necessarily because "to suppose any part of space removed, is to suppose it removed from and out of itself; and to suppose the whole to be taken away, is supposing it to be taken away from itself, that is, to be taken away while it still remains: which is a contradiction in terms" (p. 13).

Although space is not sensible, Clarke rejected its identification with nothingness because nothing has no properties, while space has some, e.g., quantity and dimensions (pp. 13, 114–15, 152). One might add other properties which he accepted, such as homogeneity, immutability, continuity, and probably impenetrability. Space, then, is an entity in which things are, and not the mere absence of matter, as at least some of the ancient atomists seem to have thought. Space is also not an aggregate of its parts, but presumably an essential whole preceding all its parts, a view motivated at least in part by theological considerations (Cl IV, 11–12).

Like Newton, Clarke adopted the view that space is necessarily infinite because "to set bounds to space, is to suppose it bounded by something

11 Clarke's views were similar to Newton's. See NP I, definition 8, scholiwm, pp. 46–8; in addition, see Newton's early De Gravitatis causa for the claim that space cannot be thought as non-existent, in Unpublished Scientific Papers of Isaac Newton, eds. and trans. A. R. Hall and M. B. Hall (Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 104.
which itself takes up space” or else that “this bounded by nothing, and then the idea of that nothing will still be space,” and both suppositions are contradictory (p. 115). What Clarke had in mind here is rather unclear. He seemed to think that what has a boundary must be bounded by something else. If so, the argument was not well taken because a sphere, for example, has a boundary which stems from its own nature, not by the presence of something external bounding it: one need not think of space by analogy with a gas kept in place by the walls of a vessel. Perhaps, however, he had in mind Archytas’s powerfully intuitive argument, which Locke had recently repeated, that one could, in principle, stretch one’s hand out of any edge allegedly bounding space, and therefore that space is infinite. If so, the argument counters the objection that one cannot, in principle, stretch anything into nothing by stating, albeit without argument, that the alleged nothing bounding space in reality is more space.12

Since absolute space has an essential and invariable structure which is independent of the bodies in it and which is not altered by their presence, any possible world must conform to it, as creatures must be in space and God cannot alter essences because his power is limited to the metaphysically possible. The same is true of time, which “flows equably” independently of anything in it. Creatures occupy an absolute position in space and time which we may or may not be able to establish because we have no direct access to absolute space and time. Such a position is privileged in the sense that the true spatio-temporal relations among creatures are completely parasitic upon the spatio-temporal relations of the spatio-temporal locations they occupy.

The introduction of absolute space, allegedly demanded by Newtonian physics, offered Clarke an immediate philosophical advantage in the fight against Spinoza, for it showed that the Cartesian identification of extension with matter, which had made possible Spinoza’s excesses, was wrong, a consequence which was not lost on Bayle and insisted upon by Colin Maclaurin (1698–1746).13 Of course, the existence of absolute space introduced the new difficulty of its relation to God, but, as we saw, Clarke thought he had solved it by claiming that space and time are attributes of God or the result of divine existence.

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The soul

In 1706, Henry Dodwell published a book in which he defended conditional immortality: our souls are naturally mortal and upon the death of the body can be kept in existence only by divine supernatural intervention. Clarke wrote an open letter to Dodwell complaining that he had opened wide the floodgates to libertinism by providing an excuse for the wicked not to fear eternal punishment. He then argued that the soul, being immaterial, is naturally immortal and gave his own version of the traditional argument for the immateriality of the soul from the alleged unity of consciousness, insisting that not even God could endow matter with consciousness.

Clarke’s argument was very ambitious, as one can see by comparison with Locke’s argument from consciousness to immateriality. Locke agreed that matter on its own cannot possibly produce thought either in itself or in anything else. He concluded, from the fact that we think, that our maker must be immaterial. However, Locke was ready to admit that God could superadd thought to matter and, consequently, that we could not exclude with metaphysical certainty that our minds are material.14 By contrast, Clarke’s argument attempted to prove, not merely that matter cannot possibly produce thought, but also that it is metaphysically impossible for matter to be the subject of inherence of thought. Not only is it impossible for matter to think on its own, but not even God could make it think (p. 72).

Clarke’s argument failed to convince Anthony Collins, who made no bones about his materialist leanings and whose intervention in defense of Dodwell started a protracted controversy. Clarke told Collins that if thinking in humans were a mode of matter, then “it [would] be but too natural a consequence, to conceive that it may be only the same thing in all other rational beings likewise; and even in God himself. And what a notion of God this would give us, is not difficult to imagine” (W III, 851). For then, Clarke continued, every thinking being, including God, would be governed by “absolute necessity, such as the motion of a clock or a watch is determined by.” The result would be the destruction of every possibility of self-determination and the undermining of the very foundations of religion.

In the course of the exchange with Collins, it became clear that Clarke’s argument for the immateriality of the soul revolved around three basic claims, namely:

14 J. Locke, An Essay, iv, 10, 16; iv, 3, 6.
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1. Necessarily consciousness is an individual power.
2. An individual power cannot result from, or inhere in, a divisible substance; or, alternatively, an individual power can only be produced by, or inhere in, an individual being.
3. Matter is not, and cannot possibly be, an individual being.

The conclusion is that consciousness cannot possibly be the product of, or inhere in, matter.

The first premise, Clarke explained, must be understood as expressing the obvious truth that consciousness is “truly one undivided consciousness, and not a multitude of distinct consciousnesses added together” (IV iii, 784). Collins accepted Clarke’s first premise, and was also ready to accept the third premise, not with respect to matter per se, but with respect to systems of matter such as the brain. However, he disagreed with Clarke’s claim that an individual power such as consciousness can inhere only in an individual subject, namely a being which, as Clarke put it, is “essentially one,” i.e., such that any division in it destroys its essence (pp. 152–3).

Consequently, he disagreed with Clarke’s contention that only an individual substance like an immaterial soul can be the subject of consciousness. Clarke’s attempts to meet Collins’ objections are too complex to be considered here; the interested reader should look at their full exchange.

For Clarke, although the soul is necessarily immaterial, it can causally affect the body because material qualities such as figure and mobility are “negative qualities, deficiencies or imperfections” which can be effected by consciousness, which is a positive quality (p. 41). One can appreciate the theological, moral, and broadly philosophical motivations for such a position. He clearly wanted to leave the door open for arguing that God, the maker of matter, is immaterial, and the claim that a thinking immaterial substance can produce material modifications is an essential component of his argument. Moreover, for Clarke the capacity of the soul to affect the body causally is a consequence of our being endowed with liberty (IV iv, 32, 33; V, 92, 93–5). In addition, Clarke was convinced that we experience the causal power by which we move our body (p. 62). However, his position on whether the body causally affects the soul was less than clear. At times, he leaned towards the view that is does, and at others that it does not (pp. 116, 41).

Collins not only rejected Clarke’s argument from the unitary nature of
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consciousness to the immateriality of its subject, but also wondered how an immaterial substance like the soul can be indivisible if one assumes, as Clarke had obliquely intimated, that it is extended. To Collins's apparent surprise, instead of rejecting the view that the soul is extended, Clarke replied that whether the soul is extended was immaterial to the issue at hand (p. 151). Moreover, “as the parts of space or expansion itself can demonstrably be proved to be absolutely indiscernible, so it ought not to be reckoned an insuperable difficulty to imagine that all immaterial thinking substances (upon supposition that expansion is not excluded out of their idea) may be so likewise” (W III, 703). The point is that, for Clarke, space is extended and yet indivisible because of the interdependence of its parts (p. 152). All one has to do is to think of the soul as a substance whose parts depend on each other, like those of space (p. 152).

One can sympathize with Clarke's guarded reply. On the one hand, he understood the problems involved in the claim that the soul is extended and is also the individual, essentially indivisible, immaterial subject of consciousness and, consequently, tried to separate the issue of immateriality from that of extension. On the other hand, Clarke did indeed maintain that the soul is extended. He held that while God is not in space, everything else is (p. 105). As he eventually told Leibniz, not only is the soul in space, but it is in a particular place, the sensorium, which is a part of the brain occupies (CIV, 37). Clarke inferred the presence of the soul in the sensorium through an argument which employed two independent premises: first, that something can act only where it is substantially, and, secondly, that the soul interacts with the body. The conclusion is that the soul is substantially present where (at least) a part of the body is (CIV III, 11–12).

Saying that the soul must be substantially present where a part of the brain is does not fully determine how the soul is present. It certainly rules out mere Cartesian operational presence, but it fails to determine whether the soul's presence is to be understood in terms of holenmerism or in terms of mere extension. However, there is cumulative evidence that for Clarke the soul is merely coextended with a part of the brain. Clarke used an analogy with space, which he took to be both extended and indivisible, to explain how the soul could be extended and indivisible; but certainly holenmerism does not apply to space. He did not address More's critique of holenmerism, as one would expect him to do had he adopted it. He did not address Leibniz' accusation that the extension of the soul destroys its unity by appealing to holenmerism; rather, he defended the
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claim that, as he put it, the soul “fills the sensorium” (Cl v, 98). In sum, Clarke’s views on freedom, with their ties to morality and religion, together with his views on causality, pushed him towards the thesis that the soul is extended.

The fortunes of A Demonstration

Given Clarke’s position in the Newtonian circle, the influence of A Demonstration was strongest in England during the first half of the eighteenth century. Since its publication, it was subjected to intense criticism, e.g., by Butler and Waterland, to which Clarke himself occasionally replied. It is also reasonable to assume that, in section 117 of the Principles, Berkeley had Clarke in mind when he attacked the “divines” who make space divine because of the difficulties of conceiving its limits or annihilation. By and large, the criticisms revolved around three issues: the soundness of the proof itself; the problematic relation between antecedent necessity and the divine substance; and the nature of space and time and their relation to God. Clarke’s replies, especially to the last one in the letter to Waterland and in the exchange with Butler, as we saw, did contribute some degree of clarification of his views. After Clarke’s death, his views were defended by his brother, John Clarke (1682–1757), and by John Jackson (1686–1763) and criticized by, among others, Joseph Clarke (d. 1749) and William Law (1686–1761). An account of their controversies can be found in chapter 3 of Ferguson’s The Philosophy of Dr. Samuel Clarke and its Critics.

After the middle of the century, interest in Clarke’s book diminished, in large part because the cosmological argument fell out of fashion, being replaced by the argument from design. Certainly, if one makes the reasonable assumption that Demea presents Clarke’s argument (the text is similar to Clarke’s account in the letter to Waterland), David Hume (1711–76) still felt the need to criticize it in the Dialogues on Natural Religion. However, the criticism occurred in but a few pages within a work discussing at length the argument from design. The waning of the fortunes of A Demonstration at the end of the century was mostly due to the anti-metaphysical tenor of the eighteenth century. As we saw, Clarke himself was the first to admit that the argument from design (which is briefly but adequately presented in A Demonstration) is easier to understand; but he also believed, correctly, that only a metaphysical argument proving the necessity of God’s existence could meet metaphysical attacks on natural