

John Edwards' comments on and translation from Newton's General Scholium in *Some remarks on Clarke's last papers* (1714)

P O S T S C R I P T.

I HAD observ'd before, that 'twas Dr. *Clarke's* Notion, that [God] *is a Relative Word, and a Word of Dominion and Power*. I have since found, that this is borrow'd from *Crellius, De Deo ejusq; Attributis*, cap. xiii. who uses the like *Instances* to prove it that the Dr. doth. In the same Place, *Crellius* affirms, *Dei vox Potestatis imprimis & Imperij nomen est*. But further, I have found, that our Celebrated Philosopher and Mathematician, Sir *Isaac Newton*, hath taken, up these odd Notions at the end of his *Philosoph. Nat. Princip. Mathemat. Edit. ult.* pag. 482. *Deus est vox Relativa: — Deitas est Dominatio Dei*, saith he. It is remarkable, that these Words and what follows were not in the first Edition; but Sir *Isaac* and Dr. *Clarke*, having lately conferr'd Notes together (as it is thought) they have added them in the new Edition, tho' they are brought in there over Head and Shoulders: However, it seems it was agreed upon, that Sir *Isaac* should appear in favour of those Notions which Dr. *Clarke* had publish'd.

Because it will be some Satisfaction to the inquisitive Reader, to see the whole Passage set before him, to which the forecited Words belong, I will present him with it both in *Latin* and *English*. *[Deus] est vox relativa, & ad servos refertur; & [Deitas] est Dominatio Dei, non in corpus proprium, [37] sed in servos. [Deus Summus] est Ens aeternum, infinitum, absolute perfectum, sed Ens utcunq; perfectum fine Dominio, non est [Dominus Deus]. — Dominatio Entis Spiritualis Deum constituit: vera, verum; summa, summum; ficta, fictum.* That is, 'God is a *Relative Word*, and hath Reference to *Servants*: And the *Deity* is the *Dominion* of God, not 'on his own Body, but on *Servants*. The *Supreme God* is an *Eternal, Infinite, and absolutely Perfect Being*; 'but a *Being* tho' never so *Perfect*, without *Dominion*, is not *Lord God* — It is the *Dominion* of a *Spiritual Being* that makes *a God*. If this *Dominion* be true, it makes a *True God*; if *Supreme*, it makes a *Supreme God*, if *False and Counterfeit*, it makes a *False God*.

Who wou'd have thought, that such wild Jargon as this, could come from the Pen of so great a Man, and of so subact a Judgment as Sir *Isaac Newton*, who hath justly merited the Applause of the learned World, for his admirable Efforts in *Natural Philosophy* and *Mathematics*? I could not apprehend what he meant by those Words, *The Deity is the Dominion of God, not on his own Body, but on Servants*, and therefore I consulted some of the Learned about the meaning of them; but I found that they could not resolve me, and especially they could not tell what Sir *Isaac* means, by *God's Dominion not on his own Body*. It is plain here, that he attributes to God *a Body*, and *a proper Body*; but how is this consistent with what he saith of God in the very next Page, *Corpore omni & figura corporea destituitur*? If God hath no Body, nor bodily Shape, why then doth this learned Writer talk of *proprium corpus*, and say that God hath not Dominion over this his own Body?

We are not to account for Contradictions and Inconsistencies in the Writings of those

† Ἡ τῶν ὄλων
ψυχὴ Θεός ἐστι.
Leg. Allegor. l. 1.

Persons, [38] who have espoused unaccountable Paradoxes; but I will try to give some light to the Reader about this strange Language of our learned Kt. One might think he hath a fancy for *Philo's Opinion*, † *That God is the Soul of the World*, and accordingly the World is God's Body: But then how can it be said by our Author, that God *hath not Dominion* over this Body, when as he doth not deny the Providence of God, and his Sovereignty in the World? May he not be thought to encline to *Conradus Vorstius's Opinion*, who attributed to God a *Corporeal Substance*? *De Deo & Attrib.* Or doth not Sr. *Isaac* seem to approach to *Spinoza's* Conceit concerning God, who mixes him with *Matter*, and sometimes scarcely distinguishes him from the *Body of the Universe*? Or may we not think that our Author's Notion is a kin to that of Mr. *Raphson*, That the *Infinite Extension* is *God*? which seems to have been also the Apprehension of Dr. *H. More*, who in his *Enchiridion Metaphys.* gives this *Extension* all the chief Attributes that belong to *God*. Perhaps this is related to the *Infinitum Sensorium*, which Sir *Isaac* saith belongs to *God*, and *in which he moves all Bodies as he pleases, as the Soul that is in Man moves the Members of his Body*. *Optic. p. 346.* and so he holds, that *Organs of Sense and Motion* belong to *God*, as well as to *Man*. After all these Conjectures, this is certain and unquestionable, that he holds *God to have a Body*, which is Unphilosophical enough, as well as Untheological.

But *he hath not Dominion on his own Body, but on Servants*; so that we learn from Sir *Isaac*, that *God's Body* is *Free* and not *Servile*. A very precious Discovery, if any *Man* could understand it. [39]

He tells us next, That the *Supreme God* (which is the Epithet that all the *Arians* and *Socinians* use, to distinguish the Father from the Son, who they hold to be an *Inferior God*) is *Lord God*, because of his *Dominion*, for 'tis this *Dominion that makes him a God*. But why is this *Attribute* chosen out before all the rest, to constitute a *Deity*? One wou'd think, that *Goodness, Holiness, Mercifulness and Benignity*, should have had the Precedence. Even among the *Pagans*, *Optimus* was placed before *Maximus*. Besides, this Author should take heed, how he urges this Notion of *Dominion*, as absolutely necessary to constitute the *Deity*, lest he deny the *Eternity* of *God*, for *God* cannot properly be said to have had *Dominion*, when there was nothing to possess, or to claim *Propriety* to, for *Possession* and *Propriety* belong to *Dominion*, as *Law* and *Reason* rightly determine. This being certainly true, it follows, that *Deus* and *Dominus* were not always convertible: *God* had not *Dominion*, when there were none to have *Dominion* over. *He was no Lord, when he had no Servants.*

Further, what considering Person wou'd place the Essence of the *Deity* in *Dominion*, and baulk his other Excellencies, when the Plea of *Dominion* or *Lordship* hath been of little Account, even among Men? Whence it was, that *Dominus* was a Name that was not in Credit at *Rome*, in the Days of the first Emperors. *Augustus* and *Tiberius* refused to be called *Lords*, as *Suetonius* in their Lives tells us. The Title was rejected by *Alexander Severus*, as *Lampridius* in his Life

* ὁ Θεὸς Ἀγαθότητος ἐστι τοῦ αἰτίου ὄντος.
Philo. Leg. Alleg. lib. 2.

acquaints us. For Despotic and Sovereign Power, was generally attended with *Tyranny*, and those that were subject to it were *Slaves*. *Dominion* then is not so fit a Word (if you must needs have but one Word) to be made choice of to express [40] the *Deity*, as * *Holiness* or *Goodness*, which are not capable of being misinterpreted: And when 'tis said by this Writer, That *Dominion makes God*, some may think, it may more properly be applied to him, who is stiled *the God of this World*, who is *Tyrannical, Imperious and Despotic*, than to the *TRUE GOD*.

Our learned Author proceeds, and distinguishes between *true Dominion*, and *false Dominion*: But it will puzzle any Man of good Sense, to render this Distinction pertinent or intelligible, after this Writer had said, *The Deity is God's Dominion*, and *Dominion makes a God*; for here 'tis plain, he means the True God and True Dominion; how comes he then in this Place, to bring in a *False God* and a *False Dominion*? But this is of a piece with those strange Words in the same Place, *If the Dominion be Supreme, it makes a Supreme GOD*, where this learned *Knight* seems to me to lay open his Heart and Mind, and to tell the World what Cause he espouses at this Day, *viz.* The very same which Dr. *Clarke* and Mr. *Whiston* have publickly asserted. If I am not mistaken (and I should be loth to be so, when I am interpreting the Words of so renowned a Writer) He lets us know here, that 'tis his Opinion, that there is a *Supreme GOD*, (*Summus Deus*, which he mentions more than once) and he is made so by the Supremacy of his Dominion, whilst there are other Gods that are *Inferior* and *Subordinate*, they having a lesser Dominion and Power. Who doubts that he means God the Father, by the *Supreme God*, and that the Son and Holy Ghost are implied as *Inferior God's*? Thus I have set these, and the other Words of the Author in a true Light, as I conceive, so that we may without help from his *Optics*, clearly see what he drives at in this Conclusion of his Book, and what Communication he holds with the Author of *The Scripture Doctrine of the TRINITY*, and how ready he is to back his Opinions, tho' they run counter to the Determination of the *Catholic Church*, and of our own Excellent Church in particular. I shall be infinitely glad to be convinced, that a Perfom, who makes such a bright Figure in the Common-wealth of Learning, merits no such Censure.

F I N I S.



Bibliographical details

John Edwards, *Some brief critical remarks on Dr. Clarke's last papers; which are his reply to Mr. Nelson, and an anonymous writer, and the author of some considerations, &c. Shewing that the doctor is as deficient in the critic art, as he is in theology*. By John Edwards, D.D. London: Printed; and sold by Ferdinando Burleigh in Amen-Corner, 1714, pp. 36–40.

Commentary

John Edwards (1637–1716) was an Anglican divine of strong Calvinist leanings. He was an opponent of Samuel Clarke, whose *Scripture-doctrine of the Trinity* (1712) was deemed unorthodox by many churchmen.