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

POSTSCRIPT.

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 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 incline to Conradas 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 Maximum. 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 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 publicly 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 Person, who makes such a bright Figure in the Common-wealth of Learning, merits no such Censure.

FINI S.