

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 æternum, infinitum, absolute perfectum, sed Ens utcunq; perfectum sine 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*

destituatur? 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* ἡ τῶν ὅλων ἰδέσθαι ὡς τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστίν. 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 Leg. Allegor. l. 1. 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 *Infinitem 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 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
* Ὁ Θεὸς Ἄγαθότητός ἐστι τοῦ αἰτίου ὄνομα. Philo. Leg. Alleg. lib. 2.

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 Perfon, 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.