

For instance they make the supposition of man being so constituted, that with a moral nature utterly the reverse of his present one, his moral judgments should be altogether opposite to those which he now passes on the virtues and vices of the human character. It is possible to conceive, and alike possible to argue on such a thing—on our species being so organized that what we now honour as righteous and incumbent moralities, we should then execrate as crimes, and what we now feel to be moral abominations, we should then revere as the best habits or accomplishments of humanity. The supposition however violent can certainly be made, that honour and generosity and truth should be proscribed by a race of beings so differently cast and moulded from ourselves as to associate blame or culpability with these observations; and, on the other hand, that deceit and murder and licentiousness should be canonized as so many virtues in the hearts of a thus regenerated species. We are all aware of the question whether virtue have a substantive and independent character of its own, or is a mere thing of arbitrary will and appointment on the part of Him who framed us—and it is in the management of this question, that the hypothesis which we now advert to has sometimes been put. Now of whatever avail it may be for determining an abstract question about the nature of virtue, it at least supplies us with an obvious argument for determining the moral character of God. Let the imagination be formed of a superior being, the creator of a planet which he peopled with creatures of his own making—