

Different Species of Justice with Application to Theological Errors

By Nathaniel W. Taylor

Justice commonly classified as commutative, distributive, and general.-This erroneous-Theological errors founded upon it-In opposition to these views three propositions vindicated, viz.: 1. **Justice** in a moral governor not general benevolence; 2. Not distributive **justice**; but, & A benevolent disposition to maintain authority. -These propositions defended from a consideration of various instances of **justice**, and from the fact that it is not exposed to the theological errors specified.

THE leading inquiry before us is still, what is **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor? On this subject diversity of opinion has existed among theologians, and occasioned corresponding diversity of opinion on other topics of equal or greater moment. Differences of opinion on the subjects of atonement for sin, of justification before God, and of a future retribution, may be traced in many cases to different views of the **justice** of God as a moral ruler. To the theological student we can hardly present a theme more worthy of his attention, from its relations to other subjects which demand investigation.

Justice as the attribute of a perfect moral governor is obviously a particular kind or species of **justice**. Hence writers on the subject, both philosophers and theologians, who have professed to give precise and accurate views of it, have often attempted to classify and thus to distinguish the different kinds of **justice**. These they have commonly comprised in three classes, viz.: commutative, distributive, and general **justice**.

By commutative **justice** they mean a disposition to fulfill contracts.

By distributive **justice** they mean a disposition to confer legal rewards and inflict legal punishments, according to the personal character of the subjects of law.

By general **justice** they (erroneously) mean general benevolence, or a disposition to promote the highest happiness.

This classification I deem erroneous, inasmuch as it confounds general **justice** with general benevolence. It thus, as I claim, gives a false view of general **justice**, and wholly omits any precise and adequate view of **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor.

To present these errors in their true form, and to show the importance of correcting them and of ascertaining the exact truth, it is necessary to consider some of their theological applications.

Some prominent New England divines hold principles on this subject, which, in connection with other views also maintained by them, have been supposed to lead by direct inference to the doctrine of universal salvation. Though these divines reject this inference with abhorrence, I cannot doubt that it is fully authorized by certain premises which they furnish. Thus while they have maintained that general **justice** is the same thing as general benevolence, they have also maintained that the atonement is made for all men, and renders it consistent with general **justice**-that is, according to their definition, with general benevolence-to pardon and to save all. The proposition is unqualified, that the pardon and salvation of all are consistent with general benevolence. From these premises it follows that God will actually pardon and save all men. It would be to no purpose to say that the atonement has rendered it consistent with general benevolence to pardon and save all on condition of repentance. This is to modify, and thus to change the proposition controverted.

Besides, these divines maintain that God can bring all men to repentance. If then the atonement has rendered it consistent with general benevolence in all respects to pardon and save all, it has rendered it consistent with general benevolence to bring all to repentance. Of course as God can, he will bring all men to repentance, and all will be pardoned and saved.

I need not say that the premises thus furnished by the New England divines are adopted by at least one class of Universalists, as a sufficient basis for their peculiar doctrine.

Another large class of divines however, who charge on their New England brethren the doctrine of universal salvation as a legitimate consequence of their views of the **justice** of God and of the atonement of Christ, and who agree with them and with Universalists in maintaining that God can bring all men to repentance, not only deny a universal atonement, but also that view of **justice** in God as a moral governor which the New England divines have maintained.

What then, in the view of this class of divines, is **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor? Perhaps it would be regarded by them as a just and satisfactory answer to say that **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor is distributive **justice** as defined in the above classification. This definition however, of **justice** in the present **application** of the term, I regard as in a high degree objectionable, whether the language be understood in its proper import or according to the views of the divines referred to. In what I consider the proper meaning of the language, the definition presents only one specific meaning of the word **justice** instead of its general import; for as it may appear hereafter, a perfect moral governor may be as truly just when he forgives a transgressor through an atonement, as when executing legal sanctions according to the merit and demerit of his subjects. But this definition, as the language is explained by that class of divines to whom I have referred, is still more objectionable. They maintain that there is an inherent or intrinsic merit in obedience to law, and an inherent intrinsic demerit in disobedience to law, aside from and to the entire exclusion of any relation in either to the general good of the kingdom, or to the authority of the law or of the lawgiver, as this is the means of the general good-that on account of this inherent merit of obedience and this

inherent demerit of disobedience, viewed in this restricted and narrow sense and irrespectively of any other relations, the moral governor is disposed to reward the one and punish the other-and that this disposition is his attribute of **justice**. In explanation of these views they are careful to insist that it is right in itself to execute legal sanctions for the reasons assigned, even right in itself to inflict penal evil on a transgressor, though no good result would or could be accomplished by the infliction. In accordance with these views of merit and demerit, of desert and ill-desert or guilt, they form their peculiar views of atonement, imputation, and justification, maintaining the imputation of the sins of a believing transgressor to another as his surety or sponsor, and the imputation of the surety's righteousness to the transgressor, so that his demerit, ill-desert, or guilt is wholly removed from him and ceases to be his and becomes another's and so that he becomes as perfectly righteous as had he perfectly obeyed the law; and a just lawgiver does and must regard and treat him as being perfectly righteous, and thus **justice** requires that he be rewarded and forbids that he be punished. I need not say that these views of atonement, imputation, and justification, together with the view of **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor, on which they are founded, are regarded by another large class of divines as highly erroneous.

I have thus specified supposed errors in the foregoing classification of the different kinds of **justice**, as the language is defined and explained by different classes of theologians, and some of the more serious errors in theology which result from them. I have done this that we may better appreciate the importance of these errors of classification, and of ascertaining with precision the nature of that attribute which we call **justice** in a perfect moral governor. In opposition to the errors of the foregoing classification I now propose to show. That **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor, and which is properly called general **justice**, is not the same thing as general benevolence.

2. That **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor is not distributive **justice**, especially as defined by Borne theologians; and, 3. That, **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor, is a benevolent disposition to maintain his authority as the necessary means of the highest good of his kingdom.

a. **Justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor, and which is properly called general **justice**, is not the same thing as general benevolence.

This is evident at once from the nature of both. So different is one from the other, according to our necessary conceptions and to every proper use of language, that nothing but those confused conceptions And that improper use of terms which result from the want of due reflection, could occasion the confounding things which are so different. This I claim to have shown abundantly in what I have already said for the purpose of unfolding the nature of general benevolence and the nature of **justice**. According to what has been said, general or universal benevolence is an elective preference of the highest happiness of the sentient universe to every object that can come into competition with it. As such a preference merely, it includes no disposition or purpose to other volitions, choices, dispositions, or purposes; and therefore it is not **justice**, or a disposition or purpose to render every one his due, nor a disposition or purpose to speak truth, nor any

other specific disposition or purpose. Or if we include under general benevolence a disposition or purpose to all those subordinate specific dispositions or purposes which respect executive action, still it is not the same thing as any one of them. It is no more the same thing as a disposition to render to every one his due, than it is a disposition or purpose to speak truth, or than it is a disposition to relieve the suffering, or than it is a disposition or purpose to show favor to the guilty. In these particular subordinate purposes, the mind wills certain different kinds of executive action. But in the mere exercise of general or universal benevolence, it forms no such particular purposes. Of course, in the elective preference of the highest good of all, the purpose or disposition to render to every other his due, which is **justice** in the most generic import of the word, is not included, and therefore that particular kind of **justice** which is an attribute of a perfect moral governor cannot be included.

I proceed to say-

b. That **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor is not distributive **justice**, especially as defined by some theologians.

When we speak of **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor, the language means an attribute under this name, which is essential to and inseparable from the character of one who sustains this high relation. But distributive **justice**, that is, a disposition or will to confer legal rewards and to inflict legal punishments according to the personal character of subjects, is not in the proper meaning of the language essential to the character of a perfect moral governor. In one respect in-deed, viz., as a disposition or will to confer rewards on obedient subjects, it is essential to his character. No being can sustain the character of a perfect moral ruler who is not disposed to confer and who does not actually confer the merited reward on every perfectly obedient subject. But a disposition to inflict merited punishment on disobedient subjects is plainly not essential in all cases, e. g., in a case of an adequate atonement to the character of a perfect moral governor. If so, his character for **justice** must be forfeited by every act of pardon, even under an adequate atonement for transgression. Distributive **justice** then, properly so called, is not the attribute which in all cases is essential to, and inseparable from the character of a perfect moral governor.

Nor is this true in respect to distributive **justice**, as it is defined by the class of theologians to whom I have already referred. According to this view, **justice** in the form of distributive **justice** requires that the legal penalty be inflicted on the transgressor, though no good can be produced and no evil be prevented by the infliction; and this on the ground, as it is called, of the intrinsic demerit of transgression. How entirely unwarranted this view of the subject is, has been perhaps already sufficiently shown. It has been shown that **justice** always implies a correspondent right somewhere to some good or benefit which is the object of the right. What sort of **justice** would that be which proposed to accomplish no good to any one? And what sort of a right would that be which had no good or benefit for its object on the part of the possessor of the right? It has also been shown that the right to some good or benefit which corresponds to an act of **justice**, must either vest in both an individual and in the public, or at least in the public;

that as punishment is in no respect a good to the transgressor, it can in no respect be the object of a right on his part, and therefore cannot in this respect be an act of **justice** to him nor an act of **justice** to him in any sense, except that he by his act of transgression has created a right to his punishment on the part of the public; that if we suppose it to be in no respect a good to the public, it can in no respect be the object of a right on their part, and therefore cannot be the object of any right whatsoever. It cannot therefore in such a case be an act of **justice** in any sense whatsoever. It was further shown that such an act would be inflicting evil merely for evil's sake, which is physically impossible on the part of a voluntary and moral being, and is even beyond the capacity of infernal malice. Such a representation of **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor is in the last degree preposterous.

Again: these divines would do well to ask what they mean by the intrinsic demerit of sin or transgression. Every one who reflects at all on this subject must know that the ideas denoted by the terms merit and demerit, whether applied to a being or his acts, are relative ideas. Hence what may be called the absolute nature of obedience, or of disobedience to law, aside from all relation to some being or thing, or rather to both, is neither good nor evil, deserving nor ill-deserving. That in transgression or sin, which we call its demerit, is not its nature considered as absolute, or positive, and so aside from and exclusive of any relation to any thing else, but it is its absolute or positive nature conceived as related to something else. Particularly it is that relation of transgression to the penalty of law which renders its infliction on the transgressor, under a merely legal system, the fit and necessary means of upholding the authority of the lawgiver, and of thus securing the public good. Hence, if we separate this conception of the relation of sin or transgression from our conception of its nature, and so conceive of its nature as absolute, without being thus related to punishment, there can be nothing in our conception of that nature, which can be conceived to be or which can be called its demerit. It is to no purpose to say that, transgression or sin is evil in itself, and therefore a fit object of the expression of abhorrence from a moral governor. There are only two possible senses in which sin or transgression, or any thing else, can be properly said to be evil in itself, viz., either as unhappiness or suffering is evil in itself, or as that which is the means or cause of unhappiness or suffering is evil in itself. But transgression cannot be truly said to be evil in itself in the first sense. If therefore it is not evil in itself, in the second sense, as now supposed, it is in no sense evil in itself. To talk therefore of the demerit of transgression as an evil in itself and exclusive of all relation to evil as its consequence, is to talk without ideas. Plainly, sin is an evil only as in its nature it is related to evil consequences. The annihilation of this relation would be the annihilation of all that which constitutes its evil nature; all that on account of which it deserves punishment or which can be called its demerit. What kind of **justice** would that be which should inflict punishment for transgression, to which pertains no ill-desert or demerit, or which inflicts punishment when no good can be produced and no evil prevented by its infliction? Who will on due reflection ascribe this kind of **justice** to a perfect moral governor? I now propose to show-

3. That **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor is a benevolent disposition to maintain by the requisite means, his authority as the necessary condition of the highest good of his kingdom.

What has been said in our previous discussions concerning the relation of a perfect moral governor to his kingdom, is sufficient to show that as a perfectly benevolent being he must be benevolently disposed to maintain his authority, as the necessary means of the highest good of his kingdom. This benevolent disposition or particular form of benevolence is not only an essential condition of his right to reign, but to accomplish its end or object-to maintain his authority by the various means which in the varying circumstances of individual subjects and of his kingdom may be demanded or dictated by perfect benevolence, is the grand, peculiar, sole function of his office.

All that he does as a moral governor he does for the purpose of maintaining his authority, and all that depends on his relation as a moral governor, depends on the maintenance of his authority. This maintained all his responsibilities as a moral governor are fulfilled. Otherwise he betrays his trust and forfeits his throne. Otherwise he defeats the end of his administration, and all that depends on his rightful moral dominion is sacrificed and lost.

Now it is claimed that this benevolent disposition on the part of a moral governor to maintain his authority as the necessary means of the highest happiness of his kingdom, is what is truly and properly called his **justice**. Or thus, I maintain that in the generic import of the word, when applied to denote the attribute of a perfect moral governor.

Justice is a benevolent disposition on his part to maintain by the requisite means his authority as the necessary condition of the highest happiness of his kingdom.

This I shall attempt to show-

In the first place, from a comprehensive classification of the different kinds of **justice**. I recur then to the summum genus, that is, to the most generic or general meaning of the word **justice**, as already defined, viz.

Justice is a benevolent disposition or purpose of mind to render or to do to every one what ought to be rendered or done to him, the obligation to which arises from some peculiar relation of the object of the act, that creates or implies a right corresponding to such obligation.

Assuming on the ground of proof already given, the correctness of this definition of **justice** in the most general import of the word, I proceed to say that **justice** may be divided into two kinds, viz.:

Justice as it pertains to the high relation, or is an attribute of a moral governor, which is general **justice** properly so called; and,

Justice as it pertains to moral beings in other relations than that of a moral governor.

This second kind of **justice**, it is obvious, includes very many kinds or forms of **justice**; so many, that to frame subdivisions which should include the whole and accurately distinguish them would be difficult, and on this account has not often been attempted. What has been called commutative **justice** is one prominent and very comprehensive subdivision under this kind of **justice**.

It is manifest however, that in the most comprehensive import given to the language, it cannot with propriety be so extended as to include all the subordinate kinds which belong to this general class, e. g., so as to include the **justice** on the part of parents to afford care, protection, and support to children, &c. Without therefore attempting any further classification of this kind of **justice** than merely to say, that commutative **justice** is one prominent subordinate kind of it, I recur to the first of the two subordinate kinds above specified, viz.:

Justice as the attribute of a perfect moral governor, which may be properly called general **justice**.

That what I have now defined **justice** to be, as an attribute of a perfect moral governor, is one kind or species of **justice**, is at once manifest by comparing its definition with that before given of **justice** in the most generic import of the word. Thus **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor, according to the present definition as given in somewhat general terms, may be defined thus, viz.: a benevolent disposition to do what ought to be done by a moral governor to his kingdom, in the specific form of maintaining by the requisite means, his authority as the necessary condition of the highest happiness of his kingdom, the obligation to which arises from the peculiar relation of his kingdom to him as depending on him thus to guard and secure its highest happiness, which relation implies a right on the part of his kingdom corresponding to such obligation on his part. That such a disposition on the part of a moral governor is properly and truly called **justice**, I cannot suppose will be denied or doubted by any one who has ever reflected on the import of the word **justice**, in its present **application**. What less or what more can the word denote, according to usage?

Should a moral governor refuse that protection and security to the highest happiness of his kingdom which he owes them, by upholding his authority as the ruler and guardian of all-should he suffer all that can be called the authority of law, or government, or his own authority, to be utterly subverted-should he thus utterly annihilate this peculiar and essential influence on the subjects of his dominion, what shadow of that which is called **justice** on his part could remain? What would such an act on his part be, and what would it or could it be called, but an act of the grossest injustice? On the other hand, what more is or can be necessary to the absolute perfection of this attribute on his part, than a perfectly benevolent disposition to uphold, and the actual upholding of his authority as the necessary means of the highest happiness of his kingdom? As a moral governor, he is not bound either to secure the obedience or to prevent the disobedience of his subjects; but simply and only to maintain his own authority as the requisite means Of securing as far as may be the one, and preventing the other. Whatever acts benevolence on his part may dictate in other relations-whatever acts of kindness, or of commutative **justice**, or

other kinds of **justice** it may dictate or demand, they can never conflict with or set aside his obligation to maintain his authority as a moral governor, nor abrogate the right of his kingdom, which corresponds to that obligation. To maintain his authority is the entire function of his office. Whatever else is supposed which is supposable in the case, the necessity is absolute and immutable, that as a perfect moral governor he maintains his authority. On this the highest happiness of his kingdom depends. To this every thing else supposable must yield.

This can be yielded to nothing. **Justice**, then, as the attribute of a perfect moral governor, is nothing more and nothing less than a benevolent disposition on his part to maintain, by the requisite means, his authority as the necessary condition of the highest happiness of his kingdom.

Again: this will still further appear if we pursue our classification, as we may, into the particular kinds of **justice** as the attribute of a moral governor. **Justice** then as the attribute of a perfect moral governor is not only one kind or species of **justice**; it also includes particular kinds of **justice** under itself.

(1.) Distributive **justice**; or **justice** as the attribute of a moral governor, which involves the particular disposition to maintain his authority by means of legal sanctions.

(2.) Atoning **justice**; or **justice** as the attribute of a moral governor, which involves the particular disposition to maintain in his authority by means of an atonement.

In both these cases it is evident that the generic import of the word **justice**, as the attribute of a perfect moral governor is preserved, viz., a benevolent disposition to maintain, by the requisite means, his authority as the necessary condition of the highest happiness of his kingdom. In both cases also, there is a further meaning. In the one, it is a benevolent disposition to maintain his authority by legal sanctions; in the other, by an atonement.

One of these particular kinds of **justice** as the attribute of a moral governor is, according to usage, called distributive **justice**. For the other, it occurs so rarely as an actual existence or fact, that usage has furnished no name. I know not why it should not be called, as I have called it, atoning **justice**. It is really a disposition to maintain the authority of the moral governor in the circumstances in which an atonement is provided, as is that disposition to do the same thing in other circumstances, by executing the legal penalty. The act of providing an atonement is as really the act of the moral governor, done for the purpose of manifesting his **justice**, as the act of inflicting the legal penalty on transgressors. [This is evidently the view which the apostle gives of the great propitiation in Rom. iii 26.] His **justice**, that is, his disposition to maintain his authority, is seen not less clearly through an atonement than it would be in the infliction of the legal penalty.

Further: distributive **justice** may be subdivided into two subordinate kinds, viz., a benevolent disposition to maintain authority by a legal reward to obedience, and a benevolent disposition to maintain authority by a legal penalty for disobedience.

The difference between these two subordinate kinds of distributive **justice** needs to be more fully unfolded. In respect to the former, viz., a benevolent disposition to maintain necessary authority by a legal reward to obedience, there is a twofold obligation and a twofold right. There is an obligation both to the obedient subject and also to the public to reward him, arising from his relation as an obedient subject; and there is a reciprocal right on the part of the subject, and also on the part of the public, that he should be rewarded. In respect to the latter, viz., a benevolent disposition to maintain necessary authority by a legal penalty for disobedience, there is but one obligation and one right. There is an obligation to the public to inflict the penalty on the disobedient subject, but none to the subject himself; and there is a reciprocal right on the part of the public to its infliction, but none on the part of the Subject himself. The importance of this difference between the two subordinate kinds of distributive **justice**, as showing how distributive **justice** toward an obedient subject can in no case be dispensed with, and how distributive **justice** toward a disobedient subject can in a certain case be dispensed with, will more fully appear hereafter.

I have thus attempted to classify the different kinds of **justice** as a morally right state of mind, for the purpose of clearly distinguishing from all other kinds, that kind which constitutes **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor. If this classification comprises all the different kinds of **justice** as a morally right state of mind, and if it correctly exhibits the genus and the species of **justice** which in different circumstances and cases can be predicated of a perfect moral governor, then it is evident that **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor, in all circumstances and cases, is what I have defined it to be, viz., a benevolent disposition on the part of a perfect moral governor to maintain by the requisite means his authority as the necessary condition of the highest happiness of his kingdom, the obligation to which arises from the peculiar relation of his kingdom, and implies a right on the part of his kingdom corresponding to such obligation on his part.

It will not be pretended that what is thus defined as the attribute of **justice** which is peculiar to a perfect moral governor, is not properly and truly called **justice** on his part. What is now claimed is, that nothing different from this, either less or more, can in all cases and circumstances constitute this attribute. It cannot, as we have seen, be synonymous with general benevolence, since general benevolence is concerned for, and committed to secure the highest happiness of his kingdom in all respects, or in respect to every thing on which this happiness depends; while **justice** as the peculiar attribute of a perfect moral governor is concerned for and committed to secure the highest happiness of his kingdom in only one respect, or in respect to only one thing on which this happiness depends, the support of his authority. His authority must be maintained or all is lost.

Again: **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor, being one particular form of benevolence, cannot include other particular forms of benevolence, as veracity,

compassion, mercy. Nor can it include various other particular forms of **justice** which arise from other relations of moral beings; such, for example, as commutative **justice**; for then it could not be that kind of **justice** which is peculiar to the relation of a moral governor. Nor can it include in all cases the particular kinds of **justice** as the general attribute of a moral governor, either distributive **justice**, or what I have called atoning **justice**. In giving forth the law of his government with its requisite sanctions, and prior to all acts of obedience and disobedience, the moral governor makes a full and decisive manifestation of his **justice**. But this is not the manifestation of a disposition, will, or purpose actually to reward an obedient subject; for as yet there is no obedient subject. If the moral governor is omniscient, then he may know that there never will be a perfectly obedient subject to be rewarded. Nevertheless he may be perfectly just, and most decisively prove his perfect **justice**, without an absolute will or purpose to reward an obedient subject by proving his will or purpose to maintain his authority. So likewise, in the case now supposed, there is no decisive manifestation of an unqualified absolute will or purpose to punish a disobedient subject, and this for two reasons, one is, that there is no decisive proof that there will be a disobedient subject to be punished, or that he as an omniscient ruler does not know that there will not be; and the other is, that if there should be a disobedient subject, there is no decisive proof that he will not be pardoned through an atonement to be provided.

Even in case of universal disobedience on the part of subjects, and under a perfect atonement, it is possible that the moral governor should be perfectly just and wholly dispense with distributive **justice** by the forgiveness of all. Nor can **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor in all cases include what I have called atoning **justice**; for it is quite possible that, in case of transgression, the moral governor should be perfectly just and provide no atonement, either by rewarding the obedient and punishing the disobedient, or by rewarding all if all are obedient, or punishing all if all are disobedient. I am not saying that the hypothetical proposition, that if there should be a perfectly obedient subject **justice** would not reward him, is not true. It is most undeniably true that he would.

I am not saying that the hypothetical proposition, that if there should be a disobedient subject, there is not good and sufficient reason to believe, under a merely legal system, that he will be punished.

There is such evidence. But I am saying that neither of these particular forms of distributive **justice** is essentially involved in the attribute of **justice** as an attribute of a perfect moral governor, and that, as the case may be, he can be perfectly just, though this attribute does not include either of these particular forms of **justice**, or any other particular form of general or public **justice**, as distinguished from another particular form. A benevolent moral governor, in promulgating the best law with its requisite sanctions, fully evinces, prior to all obedience or disobedience on the part of his subjects, his perfect **justice**. But what is this perfect **justice** which he evinces by the supposed act? Not the perfect **justice** of a perfect moral governor in any one of its specific forms or kinds before specified.

He rewards no one, he punishes no one; nor from the nature of his attribute of perfect **justice** merely, can it be inferred that he actually willed or purposed to do either in distinction from the other; or rather the nature of this attribute does not imply an absolute disposition or purpose to adopt any one particular mode of maintaining his authority, either by rewarding an actually obedient subject, or by punishing an actually disobedient subject, or by preferring an atonement to the adoption of another particular mode. There is however decisive proof; even all the case admits of, of an unqualified determination or purpose to maintain, by the requisite means, his authority as the necessary means of the highest happiness of his kingdom. It is obvious therefore, that the only sense in which **justice** can be conceived to be a permanent immutable disposition or attribute of a perfect moral governor in all cases, is that in which this attribute has now been defined. In every case it must be all that which is included in the definition, and in every case is perfect **justice** though it include nothing more. The only sense therefore in which the word **justice** can be defined as applicable to all these cases, or as denoting that which is common to them all, is a benevolent disposition of the moral governor to maintain by the requisite means his authority as the necessary condition of the highest happiness of his kingdom.

I proceed to say-In the second place, that the view now maintained of **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor, is strongly confirmed by the consideration that it is exempt from important errors which pertain to other views of the subject, and is consistent with other great and acknowledged truths.

1. It specifies one essential kind or form of **justice** on the part of a perfect moral governor, which in the view maintained by a prominent class of divines, is entirely omitted.

Justice as now defined-**justice** as a disposition to maintain the authority of a perfect moral governor-is surely one kind of **justice** on his part. Indeed, if what has been said be true, it is the only kind of **justice** which is peculiar to this relation. But this kind of **justice**, in that classification of all kinds of **justice** into commutative, distributive, and general **justice**, is entirely omitted and unknown.

Thus the class of divines now referred to, fail to recognize the existence of that attribute of **justice** which is peculiar to a perfect moral governor in all cases, and which he alike possesses and manifests, whether prior to all action on the part of subjects he simply gives the best law with the requisite sanctions, whether subsequent to action on the part of subjects he rewards the obedient or punishes the disobedient, or whether he pardons the latter on the ground of the atonement.

2. The view now maintained avoids the error of confounding general or public **justice** with general benevolence.

This is done, as we have seen, in one mode of classifying the different kinds of **justice**.

According to what has been said, general benevolence is concerned for, and is committed to pro-mote the public good in all respects, and is of course concerned for, and committed to the securing and employing all the necessary means of the public good. Among these necessary means of the public good, one is the maintenance of the moral governor's authority, and general benevolence as committed to secure this is general **justice**. General benevolence and general **justice** differ, as general benevolence is-concerned for, and committed to secure the public good in all respects and by all the necessary means, and as general **justice** is concerned for, and committed to secure the public good in one respect and by one necessary means, viz., the maintenance of the moral governor's authority. General or public **justice-justice** as the peculiar attribute of a perfect moral governor-stands as the guardian, not of the public good, as this depends on every necessary means necessary to it, but as it depends on one means of it-the authority of the moral governor.

3. This view of **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor, which is now maintained, avoids the error of those who represent an atonement as rendering pardon consistent with general benevolence.

Dr. Edwards and others maintain that the atonement of Christ satisfies **justice** in the sense of general benevolence that it not only supports the authority, of law, but renders it consistent with the glory of God and the good of the whole system to pardon the sinner. [Vide Dr. Edwards on the Necessity of Atonement, pp. 95, 98] We have already shown that from this view of the subject, in connection with the doctrine of universal atonement and other views of a large class of divines, the doctrine of universal salvation follows as an unavoidable consequence. According however to the view now maintained, an atonement does not render the pardon of the transgressor consistent with **justice** in the sense of general benevolence, which Dr. Edwards admits to be an improper sense of **justice**, [According to this view of Dr. Edwards, when the apostle teaches the consistency of pardon with **justice**, he means **justice** in an improper sense of the word, which is incredible.] but with **justice** as the peculiar attribute of a moral governor, properly so called, viz., with **justice** as committed to uphold the authority of the moral governor as one indispensable means of the public good. Now it is obvious that many things besides an atonement may be necessary to render the pardon of the transgressor consistent with general benevolence. For example, to render the pardon of a transgressor consistent with general benevolence, it may be necessary that he should return to obedience by faith and repentance, since otherwise the act of pardon might produce more evil than good. But such an inconsistency between pardon and general benevolence can be removed, not by an atonement but only by faith and repentance on the part of the transgressor. So we may suppose that to pardon a transgressor under an atonement on condition of his faith and repentance, might be followed with his apostasy or occasion the revolt of other subjects, and so be inconsistent with benevolence. In neither case can pardon be rendered consistent with benevolence simply by an atonement. If we suppose the facts so changed in these cases that pardon shall be consistent with general benevolence, still such consistency in no respect depends on an atonement, but solely on the conduct of the subjects. It is plain therefore that an atonement cannot render the pardon of a transgressor consistent with general benevolence in all respects. On the contrary, while it must be conceded that an atonement can render it consistent with general benevolence in one

respect to pardon the transgressor, viz., as general benevolence in the form of general **justice** is committed to uphold the authority of the moral governor, it is obvious that this is all that it can do to render pardon consistent with general benevolence.

If the pardon of the transgressor on condition of repentance would be consistent with general benevolence in all respects under an atonement, then he could be pardoned without an atonement, were it not for the inconsistency of his pardon with maintaining the authority of the moral governor. Without an atonement, this inconsistency would be indeed an insurmountable but still the only obstacle. To remove this inconsistency, that is, to render it consistent with benevolence, in one respect to pardon such a transgressor, viz., as benevolence is committed to uphold the authority of the moral governor, is therefore the only and the whole effect which need be or can be produced by an atonement. In other words, the only and the whole effect of an atonement is to render the pardon of a transgressor consistent with general or public **justice-justice** as the peculiar attribute of a perfect moral governor.

Should it here be said that the act of requiring faith and repentance as the condition of pardon is as truly necessary to uphold the authority of the moral governor as an atonement, this may in some respect be admitted. The act of the moral governor in requiring repentance and faith, may be indirectly necessary to the maintenance of his authority as is every other act of benevolence, viz., as the proof of his benevolence, or as the want of it would prove his want of benevolence, and thus indirectly necessary to evince his right to reign, that is, his authority. But this requirement has no direct tendency in its own nature to uphold the authority in pardoning a transgressor. For if the requirement and compliance with it be supposed, the act of pardon without an atonement would involve the subversion of authority as absolutely as it would without such requirement; while were it consistent with the public good in other respects than that of supporting authority to pardon without repentance, an atonement would fully support authority. The requirement of repentance may be necessary to manifest the moral governor's benevolence in some respect, so far as this may depend on the reformation of the pardoned transgressor; but it cannot manifest his benevolence in another respect, viz., as absolutely committed to uphold his authority as the indispensable means of the public good. This is the exclusive effect of an atonement.

What has been said to show that an atonement does not render it consistent with general benevolence, but only with general or public **justice** to pardon the transgressor, may be illustrated by a supposable instance of commutative **justice**. Suppose that A owes B a sum of money, and that the obstacle to B's remitting the debt is, that commutative **justice** requires, as the dictate of general benevolence, that A makes the payment. But C becomes A's sponsor, giving ample security for the payment of the debt to B, if he will consent to exempt A from the payment; and thus, so far as commutative **justice** is concerned, B may relinquish his demand on A. Now it does not follow from this that B can do this consistently with general benevolence. For it may be true that to relinquish his demand on A, while it will in no respect be inconsistent with commutative **justice**, will only encourage an idleness and profligacy, and conduct him and many others to irretrievable ruin. So a moral governor may by an atonement remove every obstacle to

the pardon of the transgressor arising from the attribute of **justice**, or from benevolence as committed to uphold his authority, and yet there may be other reasons why general benevolence requires that he withhold pardon and punish the transgressor.

4. The view of the attribute of **justice** in a perfect moral governor now maintained, shows the error of supposing that an atonement renders pardon consistent with distributive **justice**.

Distributive **justice** is a disposition to treat, and in overt action does treat, subjects according to their personal deserts. But surely an atonement does not, and cannot render pardon consistent with treating the transgressor according to his personal deserts. In whatever form of **justice** pardon is rendered consistent with **justice** by an atonement, it cannot be that particular form of **justice** which is properly called distributive **justice**. This is to say, that to pardon the transgressor is consistent with treating him according to his personal desert; that is, that pardon and punishment are consistent-that is, a subject may be both pardoned and punished, which is absurd. All atonement cannot render the pardon of the transgressor either consistent or inconsistent with distributive **justice**. An atonement can render pardon consistent with general or public **justice**. But pardon and distributive **justice**-pardon and punishment at the same time-are necessarily in their own nature palpably inconsistent, and therefore cannot be rendered either consistent or inconsistent with each other by an atonement or by any thing else.

And yet palpable as is this absurdity, many divines have maintained that an atonement renders the pardon of the transgressor consistent with distributive **justice**. The expedient by which this conclusion has been obtained, is the theory or doctrine of imputation-a theory which seems to have had its foundation in the assumption, that **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor is distributive **justice**, and that of course an atonement in rendering pardon consistent with **justice**, must render it consistent with distributive **justice**. Hence the theory or doctrine of imputation, as we have already described it, was evidently adopted as furnishing the only possible method of explaining what obviously needed explanation-how a transgressor could be pardoned, and at the same time be treated according to his personal deserts-that is, how he could be both pardoned and punished at the same time. My object here is not to examine a theory which I deem palpably pre-posterous as well as unscriptural; but rather to trace it to its origin and to show how one error leads to another, or rather to many others, and especially how wise and good men, when they have combined error with truth, will, for the sake of the truth, not only maintain the error, but in order to vindicate it plausibly, will do the most palpable violence to reason and common sense.

The class of divines now referred to, evidently saw and felt bound to maintain the truth, that an atonement must render pardon consistent with **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor. But their error, their first error, was, that **justice** as the attribute of a perfect moral governor is in the case of transgression necessarily distributive **justice**, and thus obliges to a retributive punishment, or the infliction of the legal penalty according to personal demerit. Hence the imputation of sin to the sinner's substitute, with the supposed corresponding result of pardon, and full and exact retribution according to personal

demerit. Now this theory with its connections and results vanishes at once, not merely as absurd and impossible in the nature of things, but as founded in nothing but a false view of the **justice** of the perfect moral governor. This is not as we have seen in all cases, nor in the case now under consideration, necessarily distributive **justice**. It is simply a benevolent disposition to uphold the authority of the moral governor by the requisite means; and this, whether in the present case by the infliction of penalty on the transgressor or by an atonement. If this be not so-if **justice** require in the absolute sense the infliction of penalty in the case of transgression-then an atonement and pardon on the ground of it would be impossible. All that **justice** requires is, that the authority of the moral governor be maintained; and since this can be done by means of an atonement as well as by inflicting the legal penalty, pardon through an atonement is consistent with **justice**. Without distributive **justice**, and without imputation and its palpable and manifold absurdities, and with all immense diminution of misery and a vast increase of happiness in the universe, the throne of **justice** stands in all its majesty-for mercy and truth are met together-righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Thus an atonement, while it renders pardon consistent with general or public **justice**, does not and cannot render it consistent with distributive **justice**. Pardon under an atonement is consistent with the full authority of the lawgiver, this being sustained by the atonement, and also with the public good so far as this depends on the support of this authority. The transgressor may be pardoned without the sacrifice of one item of the influence which is peculiar to the law or authority of the moral governor, and without the least violation of his obligation to the public to maintain, or the least infringement of their right that he should maintain that authority unimpaired. But pardon under an atonement is not consistent with distributive **justice**, for it is not consistent with treating the transgressor according to his personal deserts. The atonement does not remove his personal ill desert.

If it did, then pardon or forgiveness would be an absurdity and a solecism, for there would be nothing to be forgiven. On the contrary, his personal ill-desert remains under an atonement, and though the public good as this depends on the support of the lawgiver's authority, does not demand the punishment of the transgressor as it would without an atonement-that is, his being treated according to his deserts-yet if the public good demands in any other respect or for any other reason that he be so treated, there is nothing in the nature of an atonement nor in any thing else to prevent his being so treated-that is, to prevent his punishment. The **justice**-of the lawgiver is fully manifested, for his authority is fully maintained by an atonement. By this provision he is neither obliged to pardon nor to punish, but is free to pardon or to punish, as the public good shall require, without violating the right of the public or any right of the transgressor. If we suppose an atonement for all, then not only might all be pardoned so far as safety to the authority of the law or of the lawgiver is concerned, but all who will believe may be pardoned, with safety to every other interest of the kingdom.