FLINT ROBERT

THEISM

Robert Flint

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Flint R.

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Содержание

Robert Flint
Theism being the Baird Lecture of 1876

PREFATORY NOTE

The Lectures in this volume have been delivered in Glasgow, St Andrews, and Edinburgh, in connection with the Lectureship founded by the late Mr James Baird of Auchmedden and Cambusdoon. They will be followed by a volume on Antitheistic Theories, containing the Baird Lectures for 1877.

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LECTURE I

ISSUES INVOLVED IN THE QUESTION TO BE DISCUSSED – WHENCE AND HOW WE GET THE IDEA OF GOD

I

Is belief in God a reasonable belief, or is it not? Have we sufficient evidence for thinking that there is a self-existent, eternal Being, infinite in power and wisdom, and perfect in holiness and goodness, the Maker of heaven and earth, or have we not? Is theism true, or is some antagonistic, some anti-theistic theory true? This is the question which we have to discuss and to answer, and it seems desirable to state briefly at the outset what issues are involved in answering it. Obviously, the statement of these issues must not be so framed as to create prejudice for or against any particular answer. Its only legitimate purpose is to help us to realise aright our true relation to the question. We can never in any investigation see too early or too clearly the true and full significance, the general and special bearings, of the question we intend to study; but the more important and serious the question is, the more incumbent on us is it not to prejudge what must be the answer.

It is obvious, then, in the first place, that the inquiry before us is one as to whether or not religion has any reasonable ground, any basis, in truth; and if so, what that ground or basis is. Religion, in order to be reasonable, must rest on knowledge of its object. This is not to say that it is exclusively knowledge, or that knowledge is its one essential element. It is not to say that feeling and will are not as important constituents in the religious life as intellectual apprehension. Mere knowledge, however clear, profound, and comprehensive it may be, can never be religion. There can be no religion where feeling and affection are not added to knowledge. There can be no religion in any mind devoid of reverence or love, hope or fear, gratitude or desire – in any mind whose thinking is untouched, uncoloured, uninspired by some pious emotion. And religion includes more even than an apprehension of God supplemented by feeling – than the love or fear of God based on knowledge. It is unrealised and incomplete so long as there is no self-surrender of the soul to the object of its knowledge and affection – so long as the will is unmoved, the character and conduct unmodified. The importance of feeling and will in religion is thus in no respect questioned or denied when it is maintained that religion cannot be a reasonable process, a healthy condition of mind, if constituted by either feeling or volition separate from knowledge. Some have represented it as consisting essentially in the feeling of dependence, others in that of love, and others in fear; but these are all feelings which must be elicited by knowledge, and which must be proportional to knowledge in every undisordered mind. We can neither love nor fear what we know nothing about. We cannot love what we do not think worthy of love, nor fear unless we think there is reason for fear. We cannot feel our dependence upon what we do not know to exist. We cannot feel trustful and confiding dependence on what we do not suppose to have a character which merits trust and confidence. Then, however true it may be that short of the action of the will in the form of the self-surrender of the soul to the object of its worship the religious process is essentially imperfect, this self-surrender cannot be independent of reason and yet reasonable. In order to be a legitimate act it must spring out of good affections, – and these affections must be enlightened; they must rest on the knowledge of an object worthy of them, and worthy of the self-sacrifice to which they prompt. Unless there be such an object, and unless it can be known, all the feeling and willing involved in religion must be delusive – must be of a kind which reason and duty command us to resist and suppress.

But religion is certainly a very large phenomenon. It is practically coextensive, indeed, with human life and history. It is doubtful if any people, any age, has been without some religion. And religion has not only in some form existed almost wherever man has existed, but its existence has to a great extent influenced his whole existence. The religion of a people colours its entire civilisation; its action may be traced on industry, art, literature, science, and philosophy, in all their stages. And the question whether there is a God or not, whether God can be known or not, is, otherwise put, whether or not religious history, and history so far as influenced by religion, have had any root in reason, any ground in fact. If there be no God, or if it be impossible to know whether there be a God or not, history, to the whole extent of its being religious and influenced by religion, must have been unreasonable. Perhaps religion might still be conceived of, although it is difficult to see how it could be so conceived of on consistent grounds, as having done some good: and one religion might be regarded as better than another, in the sense of doing more good or less evil than another; but no religion could be conceived of as true, nor could one religion be conceived of as truer than another. If there be no God to know, or if God cannot be known, religion is merely a delusion or mental disease – its history is merely the history of a delusion or disease, and any science of it possible is merely a part of mental pathology.

Further, whether Christianity be a reasonable creed or not obviously depends on whether or not certain beliefs regarding God are reasonable. If there be no God, if there be more Gods than one, if God be not the Creator and Upholder of the world and the Father of our spirits, if God be not infinite in being and perfection, in power, wisdom, and holiness, Christianity cannot possibly be a thing to be believed. It professes to be a revelation from God, and consequently assumes that there is a God. It demands our fullest confidence, on the ground of being His word; and consequently assumes that He is "not a man that He should lie," but One whose word may be trusted to the uttermost. It professes to be a law of life, and therefore assumes the holiness of its author; to be a plan of salvation, and therefore presupposes His love; to be certain of final triumph, and so presupposes His power. It presents itself to us as the completion of a progressive process of positive revelation, and therefore presupposes a heavenly Father, Judge, and King. The books in which we have the record of this process – the books of the Old and New Testaments – therefore assume, and could not but assume, that God is, and that He is all-powerful, perfectly wise, and perfectly holy. They do not prove it, but refer us to the world and our own hearts for the means and materials of proof. They may draw away from nature, and from before the eyes of men, a veil which covers and conceals the proof; they may be a record of facts which powerfully confirm and largely supplement what proof there is in the universe without and the mind within: but they must necessarily imply, and do everywhere imply, that a real proof exists there. If what they in this respect imply be untrue, all that they profess to tell us of God, and as from God, must be rejected by us, if we are to judge and act as reasonable beings.[1]

For all men, then, who have religious beliefs, and especially for all men who have Christian beliefs, these questions, What evidence is there for God's existence? and, What is known of His nature? are of primary importance. The answers given to them must determine whether religion and Christianity ought to be received or rejected. There can be no use in discussing other religious questions so long as these fundamental questions have not been thoughtfully studied and distinctly answered. It is only through their investigation that we can establish a right to entertain any religious belief, to cherish any religious feeling, to perform any religious act. And the result to which the investigation leads us must largely decide what sort of a religious theory we shall hold, and what sort of a religious life we shall lead. Almost all religious differences of really serious import may be traced back to differences in men's thoughts about God. The idea of God is the generative and regulative idea in every great religious system and every great religious movement. It is a true feeling which has led to the inclusion of all religious doctrines whatever in a science which bears the name of theology

[1] See Appendix I.

(discourse about God, λογοσ περι του θεου), for what is believed about God determines what will be believed about everything else which is included either under natural or revealed religion.

In the second place, the moral issues depending on the inquiry before us are momentous. An erroneous result must, from the very nature of the case, be of the most serious character. If there be no God, the creeds and rites and precepts which have been imposed on humanity in His name must all be regarded as a cruel and intolerable burden. The indignation which atheists have so often expressed at the contemplation of religious history is quite intelligible – quite natural; for to them it can only appear as a long course of perversion of the conscience and affections of mankind. If religion be in its essence, and in all its forms and phases, false, the evils which have been associated with it have been as much its legitimate effects as any good which can be ascribed to it; and there can be no warrant for speaking of benefits as its proper effects, or uses and mischiefs as merely occasioned by it, or as its abuses. If in itself false, it must be credited with the evil as well as with the good which has followed it; and all the unprofitable sufferings and useless privations – all the undefined terrors and degrading rites – all the corruptions of moral sentiment, factitious antipathies, intolerance, and persecution – all the spiritual despotism of the few, and the spiritual abjectness of the many – all the aversion to improvement and opposition to science, &c., which are usually referred to false religion and to superstition, – must be attributed to religion in itself, if there be no distinction between true and false in religion – between religion and superstition. In that case, belief in God must be regarded as really the root of all these evils. It is only if we can separate between religious truth and religious error – only if we can distinguish religion itself from the perversions of religion – that we can possibly maintain that the evils which have flowed from religious error, from the perversions of religion, are not to be traced to the religious principle itself.[2]

On the other hand, if there be a God, he who denies His existence, and, in consequence, discards all religious motives, represses all religious sentiments, and despises all religious practices, assuredly goes morally far astray. If there be a God – all-mighty, all-wise, and all-holy – the want of belief in Him must be in all circumstances a great moral misfortune, and, wherever it arises from a want of desire to know Him, a serious moral fault, necessarily involving, as it does, indifference to one who deserves the highest love and deepest reverence, ingratitude to a benefactor whose bounties have been unspeakable, and the neglect of those habits of trust and prayer by which men realise the presence of infinite sympathy and implore the help of infinite strength. If there be a God, the virtue which takes no account of Him, even if it were otherwise faultless, must be most defective. The performance of personal and social duty can in that case no more compensate for the want of piety than justice can excuse intemperance or benevolence licentiousness.

Besides, if God exist – if piety, therefore, ought also to exist – it can scarcely be supposed that personal and social morality will not suffer when the claims of religion are unheeded. It has seemed to some that morality rests on religion, and cannot exist apart from it. And almost all who believe that there are religious truths which men, as reasonable beings, are bound to accept, will be found maintaining that, although morality may be independent of religion for its mere existence, a morality unsupported by religion would be insufficient to satisfy the wants of the personal and social life. Without religion, they maintain, man would not be able to resist the temptations and support the trials of his lot, and would be cut off from the source of his loftiest thoughts, his richest and purest enjoyments, and his most heroic deeds. Without it nations, they further maintain, would be unprogressive, selfish, diseased, corrupt, unworthy of life, incapable of long life. They argue that they find in human nature and in human history the most powerful reasons for thinking thus; and so much depends upon whether they are right or wrong, that they are obviously entitled to expect that these reasons, and also the grounds of religious belief, will be impartially and carefully examined and weighed.

[2] See Appendix II.

It will be denied, indeed, by no one, that religious belief influences moral practice. Both reason and history make doubt on this point impossible. The convictions of a man's heart as to the supreme object of his reverence, and as to the ways in which he ought to show his reverence thereof, necessarily affect for good or ill his entire mind and conduct. The whole moral life takes a different colour according to the religious light which falls upon it. As the valley of the Rhone presents a different aspect when seen from a summit of the Jura and from a peak of the Alps, so the course of human existence appears very different when looked at from different spiritual points of view. Atheism, polytheism, pantheism, theism, cannot regard life and death in the same way, and cannot solve in the same way the problems which they present to the intellect and the heart. These different theories naturally – yea, necessarily – yield different moral results. Now, doubt may be entertained as to whether or not we can legitimately employ the maxim, "By their fruits ye shall know them," in attempting to ascertain the truth or falsity of a theory. The endeavour to support religion by appealing to its utility has been denounced as "moral bribery and subornation of the understanding."[3] But no man, I think, however scrupulous or exacting, can doubt that when one theory bears different moral and social fruits than another, that fact is a valid and weighty reason for inquiring very carefully which of them is true and which false. He who believes, for example, that there is a God, and he who believes that there is no being in the universe higher than himself – he who believes that material force is the source of all things, and he who believes that nature originated in an intelligent, holy, and loving Will, – must look upon the world, upon history, and upon themselves so very differently – must think, feel, and act so very differently – that for every man it must be of supreme importance to know which of these beliefs he is bound in reason to accept and which to reject.

Then, in the third place, the primary question in religion is immediately and inseparably connected with the ultimate question of science. Does the world explain itself, or does it lead the mind above and beyond itself? Science cannot but suggest this question; religion is an answer to it. When the phenomena of the world have been classified, the connections between them traced, their laws ascertained, science may, probably enough, have accomplished all that it undertakes – all that it can perform; but is it certain that the mind can ascend no further? Must it rest in the recognition of order, for example, and reject the thought of an intelligence in which that order has its source? Or, is this not to represent every science as leading us into a darkness far greater than any from which it has delivered us? Granting that no religious theory of the world can be accepted which contradicts the results established by the sciences, are we not free to ask, and even bound to ask – Do these results not, both separately and collectively, imply a religious theory of the world, and the particular religious theory, it may be, which is called theism? Are these results not the expressions of a unity and order in the world which can only be explained on the supposition that material nature, organic existences, the mind and heart of man, society and its history, have originated in a power, wisdom, and goodness not their own, which still upholds them, and works in and through them? The question is one which may be answered in various ways, and to which the answer may be that it cannot be answered; but be the answer that or another – be the answer what it may – obviously the question itself is a great one, – a greater than any science has ever answered – one which all science raises, and in the answering of which all science is deeply interested.

No scientific man can be credited with much insight who does not perceive that religious theory has an intimate and influential bearing on science. There are religious theories with which science cannot consistently coexist at all. Where fetichism or polytheism prevails, you cannot have science with its pursuit of general laws. A dualistic religion must, with all the strength it possesses, oppose science in the accomplishment of its task – the proof of unity and universal order. Even when the conception of One Creative Being is reached, there are ways of thinking of His character and agency which science must challenge, since they imperil its life and retard its progress. The medieval belief

[3] By J. S. Mill, in the very essay in which he assailed religion by trying to show that the world had outgrown the need of it.

in miracles and the modern belief in law cannot be held by the same mind, and still less by the same society.

We have no reason, however, to complain at present that our scientific men are, as a class, wanting in the insight referred to, or that the truth just indicated is imperfectly realised by them. Perhaps such complaint was never less applicable. It is not long since it was the fashion among men of science to avoid all reference to religion – to treat religious theory and scientific theory as entirely separate and unconnected. They either cared not or dared not to indicate how their scientific findings were rationally related to current religious beliefs. But within the last few years there has been a remarkable change in this respect. The attitude of indifference formerly assumed by so many of the representatives of science towards religion has been very generally exchanged for one of aggression or defence. The number of them who seem to think themselves bound to publish to the world confessions of their faith, declarations of the religious conclusions to which their scientific researches have led them, is great, perhaps, beyond example in any age. They are manifesting unmistakably the most serious interest in the inquiry into the foundation of religion, and into the relationship of religion to science. The change is certainly one for the better. It is not wholly good only because scientific men in their excursions into the domain of religion are too frequently chargeable with a one-sidedness of view and statement which their scientific education might have been hoped to make impossible – only because they too seldom give to religious truths the patient and impartial consideration to which these are entitled. But most deserving of welcome is every evidence on their part of the conviction that when science goes deep enough it cannot but raise the questions to which religion professes to be an answer; so that the mind, instead of getting free from religious reflection by advancing in scientific inquiry, finds such reflection only the more incumbent on it the farther it advances – a conviction which falls short of, indeed, but is closely allied to, the belief so aptly expressed by Lord Bacon, "that while a slight taste of philosophy may dispose the mind to indifference to religion, deeper draughts must bring it back to it; that while on the threshold of philosophy, where second causes appear to absorb the attention, some oblivion of the highest cause may ensue, when the mind penetrates deeper, and sees the dependence of causes and the works of Providence, it will easily perceive, according to the mythology of the poets, that the upper link of nature's chain is fastened to Jupiter's throne." Men of science are simply exercising a right to which they are fully entitled when they judge of religion by what they find to be ascertained in science; and no class of men is more likely than they are to open up the way to points of view whence religious truth will be seen with a clearness and comprehensiveness greater than any to which professional theologians could hope of themselves to attain. He can be no wise theologian who does not perceive that to a large extent he is dependent on the researches of men of science for his data, and who, firm in the faith that God will never be disgraced by His works, is not ready to accept all that is truly discovered about these works, in order to understand thereby God's character.

The greatest issues, then, are involved in the investigation on which we enter. Can we think what these are, or reflect on their greatness, without drawing this inference, that we ought, in conducting it, to have no other end before us than that of seeking, accepting, and communicating the truth? This is here so important that everything beside it must be insignificant and unworthy. Any polemical triumphs which could be gained either by logical or rhetorical artifices would be unspeakably paltry. Nothing can be appropriate in so serious a discussion but to state as accurately as we can the reasons for our own belief in theism, and to examine as carefully and impartially as we can the objections of those who reject that belief, and their reasons for holding an opposite belief. It can only do us harm to overrate the worth of our own convictions and arguments, or to underrate the worth of those of others. We must not dare to carry into the discussion the spirit of men who feel that they have a case to advocate at all hazards. We must not try to conceal a weakness in our argumentation by saying hard things of those who endeavour to point it out. There is no doubt that character has an influence on creed – that the state of a man's feelings determines to a considerable extent the nature of his beliefs

– that badness of heart is often the cause of perversity of judgment; but we have no right to begin any argument by assuming that this truth has its bright side – its side of promise – turned towards us, and its dark and threatening side turned towards those who differ from us. If we can begin by assuming our opponents to be wicked, why should we not assume them at once to be wrong, and so spare ourselves the trouble of arguing with them? It will be better to begin by assuming only what no one will question – namely, that it is a duty to do to others as we would have others do to us. When a man errs, it is a kindness to show him his error – and the greater the error, the greater the kindness; but error is so much its own punishment to every ingenuous nature, that to convince a person of it is all that one fallible person ought to do to another. The scoff and the sneer are out of place in all serious discussion; especially are they out of place when our minds are occupied with thoughts of Him who, if He exist, is the Father and Judge of us all, who alone possesses the full truth, and who has made us that we might love one another.[4]

II

Theism is the doctrine that the universe owes its existence, and continuance in existence, to the reason and will of a self-existent Being, who is infinitely powerful, wise, and good. It is the doctrine that nature has a Creator and Preserver, the nations a Governor, men a heavenly Father and Judge. It is a doctrine which has a long history behind it, and it is desirable that we should understand how we are related to that history.

Theism is very far from coextensive with religion. Religion is spread over the whole earth; theism only over a comparatively small portion of it. There are but three theistic religions – the Mosaic, the Christian, and the Mohammedan. They are connected historically in the closest manner – the idea of God having been transmitted to the two latter, and not independently originated by them. All other religions are polytheistic or pantheistic, or both together. Among those who have been educated in any of these heathen religions, only a few minds of rare penetration and power have been able to rise by their own exertions to a consistent theistic belief. The God of all those among us who believe in God, even of those who reject Christianity, who reject all revelation, is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. From these ancient Jewish fathers the knowledge of Him has historically descended through an unbroken succession of generations to us. We have inherited it from them. If it had not thus come down to us, if we had not been born into a society pervaded by it, there is no reason to suppose that we should have found it out for ourselves, and still less that we should merely have required to open our eyes in order to see it. Rousseau only showed how imperfectly he realised the dependence of man on man, and the extent to which tradition enters into all our thinking, when he pretended that a human being born on a desert island, and who had grown up without any acquaintance with other beings, would naturally, and without assistance, rise to the apprehension of this great thought. The Koran well expresses a view which has been widely held when it says, "Every child is born into the religion of nature; its parents make it a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian." The view is, however, not a true one. A child is born, not into the religion of nature, but into blank ignorance; and, left entirely to itself, it would probably never find out as much religious truth as the most ignorant of parents can teach it. It is doubtless better to be born into the most barbarous pagan society than it would be to be born on a desert island and abandoned to find out a religion for one's self.

The individual man left to himself is very weak. He is strong only when he can avail himself of the strength of many others, of the stores of power accumulated by generations of his predecessors, or of the combined forces of a multitude of his contemporaries. The greatest men have achieved what they have done only because they have had the faculty and skill to utilise resources vastly greater than their own. Nothing reaches far forward into the future which does not stretch far back

[4] See Appendix III.

into the past. Before a tragedy like 'Hamlet,' for example, could be written, it was requisite that humanity should have passed through ages of moral discipline, and should be in possession of vast and subtle conceptions such as could only be the growth of centuries, of the appropriate language at the appropriate epoch of its development, and of a noble style of literary workmanship. "We allow ourselves," says Mr Froude, "to think of Shakespeare, or of Raphael, or of Phidias as having accomplished their work by the power of their individual genius; but greatness like theirs is never more than the highest degree of perfection which prevails widely around it, and forms the environment in which it grows. No such single mind in single contact with the facts of nature could have created a Pallas, a Madonna, or a Lear." What the historian has thus said as to art is equally true of all other forms of thinking and doing. It is certainly true of religious thought, which has never risen without much help to the sublime conception of one God. It is, in fact, an indisputable historical truth that we owe our theism in great part to our Christianity, – that natural religion has had no real existence prior to or apart from what has claimed to be revealed religion – and that the independence which it now assumes is that of one who has grown ashamed of his origin.

It does not in the least follow that we are to regard theism as merely or even mainly a tradition – as a doctrine received simply on authority, and transmitted from age to age, from generation to generation, without investigation, without reflection. It does not follow that it is not a truth the evidence of which has been seen in some measure by every generation which has accepted it, and into the depth and comprehensiveness and reasonableness of which humanity has obtained a constantly-growing insight. There have, it is true, been a considerable number of theologians who have traced all religious beliefs to revelation, and who have assigned to reason merely the function of passively accepting, retaining, and transmitting them. They have conceived of the first man as receiving the knowledge of God by sensible converse with Him, and of the knowledge thus received as transmitted, with the confirmation of successive manifestations, to the early ancestors of all nations. The various notions of God and a future state to be found in heathen countries are, according to them, broken and scattered rays of these revelations; and all the religious rites of prayer, purification, and sacrifice which prevail among savage peoples, are faint and feeble relics of a primitive worship due to divine institution. This view was natural enough in the early ages of the Christian Church and in medieval times, when the New World was undiscovered and a very small part of either Asia or Africa was known. It was consonant also to the general estimate of tradition as a means of transmitting truth, entertained by the Roman Catholic Church; but it is not consistent with the Protestant rejection of tradition, and it is wholly untenable in the light of modern science, the geography, ethnology, comparative mythology, &c., of the present day. A man who should thus account for the phenomena of the religious history of heathen humanity must be now as far behind the scientific knowledge of his age regarding the subject on which he theorises, as a man who should still ascribe, despite all geological proofs to the contrary, the occurrence of fossils in the Silurian beds to the action of the Noachian deluge.[5]

Theism has come to us mainly through Christianity. But Christianity itself rests on theism; it presupposes theism. It could only manifest, establish, and diffuse itself in so far as theism was apprehended. The belief that there is one God, infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness, has certainly not been wrought out by each one of us for himself, but has been passed on from man to man, from parent to child: tradition, education, common consent, the social medium, have exerted great influence in determining its acceptance and prevalence; but we have no right to conceive of them as excluding the exercise of reason and reflection. We know historically that reason and reflection have not been excluded from the development of theistic belief, but have been constantly present and active therein; that by the use of his reason man has in some countries gradually risen to a belief in one God; and that where this belief existed, he has, by the use of his reason, been continuously altering,

[5] See Appendix IV.

and, it may be hoped, extending and improving his views of God's nature and operations. We know that in Greece, for example, the history of religion was not a merely passive and traditional process. We know as a historical fact that reason there undermined the polytheism which flourished when Homer sang; that it discovered the chief theistic proofs still employed, and attained in many minds nearly the same belief in God which now prevails. The experience of the ancient classical world is insufficient to prove that a purely rational philosophy can establish theism as the creed of a nation; but it is amply sufficient to prove that it can destroy polytheism, and find out all the principal arguments for theism. We know, further, that in no age of the history of the Christian Church has reason entirely neglected to occupy itself in seeking the grounds on which the belief of God can be rested. We know that reason is certainly not declining that labour in the present day. The theistic belief, although common to the whole Christian world, is one which every individual mind may study for itself, which no one is asked to accept without proof, and which multitudes have doubtless accepted only after careful consideration. It comes to us so far traditionally, but not nearly so much so as belief in the law of gravitation. For every one who has examined the evidences for belief in the law of gravitation, thousands on thousands have examined the evidences for the existence of God.

Tradition, then, does not necessarily exclude private judgment, and private judgment does not necessarily imply the rejection of tradition – that is, of transmitted belief. The one does not even necessarily confine or restrict the activity of the other. They are so far from being essentially antagonistic, that they may co-operate, may support and help each other; nay, they must do, if religious development is to be natural, easy, peaceful, and regular. This is but saying in another form that religious development, when true and normal, must combine and harmonise conservatism and progress. All development must do that, or it will be of an imperfect and injurious kind. In nature the rule of development is neither *revolution* nor *reaction*, but *evolution*– a process which is at once conservative and progressive, which brings the new out of the old by the continuous growth and elaboration of the germs of life into organic completeness. All that is essential in the old is retained and perfected, while the form is altered to accord with new circumstances and to respond to new wants. It should not be otherwise in the moral and social worlds. The only true progress there, also, is that continuous and consistent development which can only be secured through true conservatism – through retaining, applying, and utilising whatever truth and goodness the past has brought down to the present; and the only true conservatism is that which secures against stagnation and death by continuous progress. Therefore it is that, alike in matters of civil polity, of scientific research, and of religious life, wisdom lies in combining the conservative with the progressive spirit, the principle of authority with the principle of liberty, due respect to the collective reason in history with due respect to the rights of the individual reason. The man who has not humility enough to feel that he is but one among the living millions of men, and that his whole generation is but a single link in the great chain of the human race – who is arrogant enough to fancy that wisdom on any great human interest has begun with himself, and that he may consequently begin history for himself, – the man who is not conservative to the extent of possessing this humility, and shrinking from this arrogance, is no truly free man, but the slave of his own vanity, and the inheritance which his fathers have left him will be little increased by him. The man, on the other hand, who always accepts what is as what ought to be; who identifies the actual with the reasonable; who would have to-morrow exactly like to-day; who would hold fast what Providence is most clearly showing ought to pass away, or to pass into something better, – the man, in a word, who would lay an arrest on the germs of life and truth, and prevent them from sprouting and ripening – is the very opposite of genuinely conservative – is the most dangerous of destructives. There is nothing so conservative against decay and dissolution as natural growth, orderly progress.

The truth just stated is, as I have said, of universal application. But it is nowhere more applicable than in the inquiry on which we are engaged. The great idea of God – the sublimest and most important of all ideas – has come to us in a wondrous manner through the minds and hearts of countless

generations which it has exercised and sustained, which it has guided in darkness, strengthened in danger, and consoled in affliction. It has come to us by a long, unbroken tradition; and had it not come to us, we should of a certainty not have found it out for ourselves. We should have had to supply its place, to fill "the aching void" within us caused by its absence, with some far lower idea, perhaps with some wild fiction, some foul idol. Probably we cannot estimate too humbly the amount or worth of the religious knowledge which we should have acquired, supposing we acquired any, if we had been left wholly to our own unaided exertions – if we had been cut off from the general reason of our race, and from the Divine Reason, which has never ceased to speak in and to our race.

While, however, the idea of God has been brought to us, and is not independently wrought out by us, no man is asked to accept it blindly or slavishly; no man is asked to forego in the slightest degree, even before this the most venerable and general of the beliefs of humanity, the rights of his own individual reason. He is free to examine the grounds of it, and to choose according to the result of his examination. His acceptance of the idea, his acquiescence in the belief, is of worth only if it be the free acceptance of, the loving acquiescence in, what his reason, heart, and conscience testify to be true and good. Therefore, neither in this idea or belief itself, nor in the way in which it has come to us, is there any restriction or repression of our mental liberty. And the mere rejection of it is no sign, as some seem to fancy, of intellectual freedom, of an independent judgment. It is no evidence of a man's being freer from incredulity than the most superstitious of his neighbours. "To disbelieve is to believe," says Whately. "If one man believes there is a God, and another that there is no God, whichever holds the less reasonable of these two opinions is chargeable with credulity. For the only way to avoid credulity and incredulity – the two necessarily going together – is to listen to, and yield to the best evidence, and to believe and disbelieve on good grounds." These are wise words of Dr Whately. Whenever reason has been awakened to serious reflection on the subject, the vast majority of men have felt themselves unable to believe that this mighty universe, so wondrous in its adjustments and adaptations, was the product of chance, or dead matter, or blind force – that the physical, mental, and moral order which they everywhere beheld implied no Supreme Intelligence and Will; and the few who can believe it, have assuredly no right, simply on the ground of such ability, to assume that they are less credulous, freer thinkers, than others. The disbelief of the atheist must ever seem to all men but himself to require more faith, more credulity, than the beliefs of all the legends of the Talmud.[6]

[6] See Appendix V.

LECTURE II

GENERAL IDEA OF RELIGION – COMPARISON OF POLYTHEISM AND PANTHEISM WITH THEISM – THE THREE GREAT THEISTIC RELIGIONS COMPARED – NO RELIGIOUS PROGRESS BEYOND THEISM

I

There are three great theistic religions. All of them can scarcely be supposed to be perfect. It is most unlikely that they should all be equal in rank and value. But to determine the position and worth of a religion, whether theistic or non-theistic, it is indispensable that we have some notion of what religion is in itself.

It is very difficult to give a correct definition or accurate description of religion. And the reason is that religion is so wide and diversified a thing. It has spread over the whole earth, and it has assumed an almost countless variety of forms. Some sense of an invisible power or powers ruling his destiny is manifested by man alike in the lowest stages of barbarism and in the highest stages of civilisation, but the rude savage and the cultured thinker conceive very differently of the powers which they adore. The aspects of religion are, in fact, numerous as the phases of human life and the steps of human progress. It extends its sway over all lands, ages, and peoples, and yet it is the same in no two countries, no two generations, no two men even. There is, accordingly, of necessity a great difficulty in finding an expression which will comprehend and suit the vast variety of forms assumed by the religious life. Instead of trying to find an expression of the kind, many, I might almost say most, theologians are content silently to substitute for religion the phases of it with which they are most familiar, and instead of a definition of religion, to give us, say, a definition of theism, or even of Christianity. It is the rule and not the exception to find the same theologians who define religion as the communion of man with God, or the self-surrender of the soul to God, arguing that religion is common to all races and peoples. Of course, this is self-contradictory. Their definitions identify religion with monotheism, and their arguments assume it to include pantheism, polytheism, fetichism, &c. Belief in the one God and the worship of Him are very far from being universal even at the present day. If there be no other religion – if nothing short of that be religion – there are still vast continents and populous nations where religion is unknown.

A definition of religion must completely circumscribe religion; it must not be applicable merely to one religion, or at the most to several out of the vast host of religions which are spread over the earth; it must draw a boundary line which includes all religions, the lowest as well as the highest, and which excludes all things else.[7] A definition thus extensive cannot be, in logical language, very comprehensive; to include all religions, it must not tell us much about what any religion is; in significance it can be neither rich nor definite. Perhaps if we say that religion is man's belief in a being or beings, mightier than himself and inaccessible to his senses, but not indifferent to his sentiments and actions, with the feelings and practices which flow from such belief, we have a definition of the kind required. I fear at least that any definition less abstract and vague will be found to apply only to particular forms or special developments of religion. Religion is man's communion, then, with what he believes to be a god or gods; his sense of relationship to, and dependence on, a higher and mysterious agency, with all the thoughts, emotions, and actions which proceed therefrom. The communion may

[7] See Appendix VI.

be dark and gross, and find expression in impure and bloody rites, or it may be in spirit and in truth, and expressed in ways which educate and elevate both mind and heart. The belief may rest on wild delusions, on authority blindly accepted, or on rational grounds. The god may be some personified power of nature, some monstrous phantom of the brain, some imaginary demon of lust or cruelty; or it may be He in whom all truth, wisdom, goodness, and holiness have their source. But whatever be the form or character which religion presents, it always and everywhere involves belief in a god or object of worship, and feelings and actions corresponding to that belief. It is always and everywhere a consciousness of relationship to a worshipped being.

Is there any truth which can be affirmed to belong universally to this consciousness? If there be, it will hold good universally of religion, and the recognition of it will advance us a step in the knowledge of the nature of religion. One such truth at least, it appears to me, there is – viz., that the religious consciousness, or the frame and condition of spiritual life distinctive and essential in religion, is not peculiar to some one province of human nature, but extends into all its provinces. This truth has been often contradicted in appearance, seldom in reality. The seat of religion, as I indicated in last lecture, has been placed by some in the intellect, by others in the affections, and by others still in the will. It has been represented as knowing, or feeling, or doing. When we examine, however, the multitude of, at first glance, apparently very conflicting views which have originated in thus fixing upon some single mental faculty as the religious faculty, the organ and seat of religion, we soon find that they are not so discordant and antagonistic as they seem to be.

Those who represent religion as essentially knowledge or belief, do not really mean to affirm that anything entitled to be called religion is ever mere knowledge or mere belief; on the contrary, they proceed on the supposition that feeling and volition will correspond to the knowledge or belief. They define religion as knowledge or belief, and not as affection or volition, because, regarding religious knowledge or belief as the ground of religious feeling and willing, they think they may treat the two latter, not as constituents, but as consequences of religion. Then, although a few of those who have defined religion as feeling have written as if they supposed that the feeling rested upon no sort of apprehension or conviction, they have been very few, and they have never been able to explain what they meant. In presence of the Power which is manifested in the universe, or of the moral order of the world, they have felt an awe or joy, it may be, irresistibly raising them above themselves, above the hampering details of earth, and "giving fulness and tone to their existence;" and being unaccustomed to analyse states of consciousness, although familiar with the mechanics and chemistry of matter, they have overlooked the obvious fact, that but for an intellectual perception of the presence of an all-pervading Power, and all-embracing order, the awe and joy could never have been excited. Mere feeling cannot tell us anything about what is out of ourselves, and cannot take us out of ourselves. Mere feeling is, in fact, mere absurdity. It is but what we should expect, therefore, that all those capable of reflecting in any measure on mental processes who have placed the essence of religion in feeling, have always admitted that the religious feeling could not be wholly separated either from the power of cognition on the one hand, or the exertion of will on the other. Men like Schleiermacher and Opzoomer argue strenuously that religion is feeling and not knowledge or practice; but it is expressly on the ground that, as there can be what is called religious knowledge and practice without piety, the knowledge is a mere antecedent, and the practice a mere consequent. Those, again, who make religion consist essentially in an act of will, in the self-surrender of the soul to the object of its worship, do so, they tell us, because pious feeling, even though based on knowledge, is only religiousness, not religion – the capacity of being religious, not actually being so; and religion only exists as a reality, a completed thing, when the will of man submits itself to the Divine Will. But this is to acknowledge, you observe, that both thought and feeling are present and presupposed wherever religion exists.

Now, if the facts be as I have just stated, obviously the controversy as to whether religion is essentially knowing, feeling, or willing, is mainly verbal. It turns on an undefined use of the term essential. Thought, feeling, and will – knowledge, affection, and self-surrender – are admitted to be

indissolubly united, inseparably present, in religion, even by those who will not admit them to be all its equally essential constituents. But in these circumstances, they should carefully explain what they mean by essential and non-essential, and tell us how we are to distinguish among inseparable states those which are essential from those which are non-essential. This they never do; this they cannot do. All facts which always go together, and are always equally found in any state or process, are its equally essential components. When we always find certain elements together, and can neither discover nor imagine them apart, we have no right to represent some of them as essential to the compound into which they enter, and others as non-essential. They are all essential.

The conclusion to which we are thus brought is, that religion belongs exclusively to no one part or province, no one disposition or faculty of the soul, but embraces the whole mind, the whole man. Its seat is the centre of human nature, and its circumference is the utmost limit of all the energies and capacities of that nature. At the lowest it has something alike of intellect, affection, and practical obedience in it. At its best it should include all the highest exercises of reason, all the purest and deepest emotions and affections, and the noblest kind of conduct. It responds to its own true nature only in the measure that it fills the whole intellect with light, satisfies the reverence and love of the most capacious heart, and provides an ideal and law for practical life in all its breadth. There is, then, a general notion of religion which includes all religions, and that notion both suggests to us that the various religions of the world are of very different values, and points us to a standard by which we may determine their respective rank, and estimate their worth. The definition of religion, in other words, though not to be confounded with the type or ideal of religion, is connected with it, and indicates what it is. The type is the normal and full development of what is expressed in the definition. It is the type, of course, and not the definition, which is the standard – the medium and measure of comparison. And the type or ideal of religion is the complete surrender of the heart, and strength, and soul, and mind of man to Deity. Only a religion which admits of a full communion of the reason, affection, and will of the worshipper with the object of his worship – only a religion which presents an object of worship capable of eliciting the entire devotion of the worshipper's nature, and at the same time of ennobling, enlarging, refining, and satisfying that nature – fully realises the idea of religion, or, in other words, can claim to be a perfect religion.[8]

II

Applying the very general idea of religion which has now been reached, it soon becomes apparent that no religion can possibly claim to conform to it which does not present to man as the true and supreme object of his adoration, love, and obedience, the One Infinite Personal God – almighty, all-wise, and all-holy; or, in other words, that it is only in a theistic religion that whatever in religion is fitted to satisfy the reason and affections of man, and to strengthen and guide his will, can find its proper development.

Look at polytheism – the worship of more gods than one. Clearly religion can only be very imperfectly realised in any polytheistic form; and still more clearly are most of the forms which polytheism has actually assumed unspeakably degrading. Think for a moment of a human being worshipping a stock or a stone, a plant or a tree, a fish or serpent, an ox or tiger – of the negro of Guinea beating his gods when he does not get what he wishes, or the New Zealander trying to frighten them by threatening to kill and eat them – of the car of Juggernaut, the fires of Moloch, the sacrifices to the Mexican war-god, the abominations ascribed to Jupiter, the licentious orgies so widely practised by the heathen in honour of their deities. Reflect on such a scene as is brought before us in the forty-fourth chapter of Isaiah. The language of the prophet is so graphic that one almost seems to see the man whom he depicts choosing his tree in the forest and hewing it down – to see

[8] See Appendix VII.

the smith working at it with his tongs among the coals, and hear the ring of his hammer – to see the carpenter with adze and line and compass shape it into an ugly monstrous shape, bearing faint resemblance to the human – to see the workman with one part of the tree kindling a fire, and baking bread, and roasting roast, and eating it, and then going up to the ugly, wooden, human shape that he has fashioned out of another part of the same tree, prostrating himself before it, feeling awed in its presence, and praying, "Deliver me; for thou art my god." The prophet obviously painted from the life, and his picture is still true to the life where polytheism prevails. But what could be more calculated to inspire both horror and pity? How awful is it that man should be able so to delude and degrade himself! As a rule, the gods of polytheists are such that, even under the delusion that they are gods, little improving communion with them is possible. As a rule, the religion of polytheists consists of vague, dark, wild imaginations, instead of true and reasoned convictions – of coarse, selfish desires, fear and suspicion, instead of love, and trust, and joy – and of arbitrary or even immoral rites and practices, instead of spiritual worship, and the conformity of the will to a righteous law.

Then, at the very best, polytheism must be far from good, – at its highest, it must be low. Were it much better than it has ever been – had it all the merits of Greek polytheism, without any of its faults, save those which are inherent in the very nature of polytheism – it would still be but a poor religion, for its essential and irremediable defects are such as to render it altogether incapable of truly satisfying the nature of man. It is a belief in more gods than one. This of itself is what reason cannot rest in – what reason is constantly finding out more clearly to be false. The more the universe is examined and understood, the more apparent does it become that it is a single, self-consistent whole – a vast unity in which nothing is isolated or independent. The very notion, therefore, of separate and independent deities, and still more, of course, of discordant or hostile deities, ruling over different departments of nature, is opposed to the strivings and findings of reason. The heart will no less vainly seek satisfaction in the belief of many gods. Its spiritual affections need a single Divine object. To distribute them among many objects is to dissipate and destroy them. The reverence, love, and trust which religion demands are a whole-hearted, absolute, unlimited reverence, love, and trust, such as can only be felt towards one God, with no other beside Him. The will of man in like manner requires to be under not a number of independent wills, but a single, all-comprehensive, perfectly consistent, and perfectly righteous will. It cannot serve many masters; it can only reasonably and rightly serve one. It can only yield itself up unreservedly to be guided by One Supreme Will. If there be no such will in the universe, but only a multitude of independent and co-ordinate wills, that full surrender of the will of the worshipper to the object of his worship, in which religion should find its consummation, is impossible.

Further, polytheism is not only the belief in more gods than one, but in gods all of which are finite. There can be no true recognition of the infinity of God where there is no true recognition of His unity. But the mind of man, although finite itself, cannot be satisfied with any object of worship which it perceives to be finite. It craves an infinite object; it desires to offer a boundless devotion; it seeks an absolute blessedness. The aim of the religious life is the communion of the finite with the infinite; and every religion, however otherwise excellent, which suppresses the infinite, and presents to the finite only the finite, is a failure.

Religion can no more attain to its proper development in pantheism than in polytheism. For pantheism denies that the One Infinite Being is a person – is a free, holy, and loving intelligence. It denies even that we ourselves are truly persons. It represents our consciousness of freedom and sense of responsibility as illusions. God, according to pantheism, alone is. All individual existences are merely His manifestations, – all our deeds, whether good or bad, are His actions; and yet, while all is God and God is all, there is no God who can hear us or understand us – no God to love us or care for us – no God able or willing to help us. Such a view of the universe may have its attractions for the poet and the philosopher in certain moods of mind, but it assuredly affords little foundation for religion, if religion be the communion of the worshipper and the worshipped. What communion

of reason can a man have with a being which does not understand him, or of affection with a being which has no love, or of will with a being which has no choice or freedom, and is the necessary cause both of good and evil? Pantheism represents absorption in Deity, the losing of self in God, as the highest good of humanity; but this is a mere caricature of that idea of communion with God in which religion must find its realisation, as pantheism leaves neither a self to surrender, nor a personal God to whom to surrender it. The absorption of the finite in the infinite which pantheism preaches is as different from that surrender of the self to God, which is the condition of God dwelling in us and we in God, as night is from day, as death is from life.

We find ample historical confirmation of what has just been said in the very instructive fact, that widespread as pantheism is, it has never in itself been the religion of any people. It has never been more than the philosophy of certain speculative individuals. India is no exception, for even there, in order to gain and retain the people, pantheism has had to combine with polytheism. It is the personal gods of Hindu polytheism and not the impersonal principle of Hindu pantheism that the Hindu people worship. The Sankhya and Vedanta systems are no more religions than the systems of Spinoza, Schelling, or Hegel. They are merely philosophies. Buddhism has laid hold of the hearts of men to a wonderful extent; not, however, in virtue of the pantheism, scarcely dis-tinguishable from atheism, which underlies it, but because of the attractiveness of the character and teaching of the Buddha Sakyamuni himself, of the man-god who came to save men. The human heart cries out for a living personal God to worship, and pantheism fails miserably as a religion because it wholly disregards, yea, despises that cry.

We are compelled to pass onwards, then, to theism. And here, applying the same view of religion as before, it soon becomes obvious that of the three great theistic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism – the last is far inferior to the other two, and the first is a transition to and preparation for the second. Although the latest of the three to arise, Mohammedanism is manifestly the least developed, the least matured. Instead of evolving and extending the theistic idea which it borrowed, it has marred and mutilated it. Instead of representing God as possessed of all spiritual fulness and perfection, it exhibits Him as devoid of the divinest spiritual attributes. Although the Suras of the Koran are all, with one exception, prefaced by the formula, "In the name of Allah, the God of mercy, the merciful," there is extremely little in them of the spirit of mercy, while they superabound in a fierce intolerance. Allah is set before us with clearness, with force, with intense sincerity, as endowed with the natural attributes which we ascribe to God, but only so as to exhibit very imperfectly and erroneously His moral attributes. He is set before us as God alone, beside whom there is none other; as the first and the last, the seen and the hidden; as eternal and unchanging; as omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient; as the Creator, the Preserver, and the Judge of all; – but He is not set before us as truly righteous or even as truly reasonable, and still less as Love. He is set before us as an infinite and absolute arbitrary Will, the acts of which are right simply because they cannot be wrong, and which ordains its creatures and instruments to honour or dishonour, heaven or hell, without love or hate, without interest or sympathy, and on no grounds of fitness or justice.

His infinite exaltation above His creatures is recognised, but not His relationship to and interest in His creatures. His almighty power is vividly apprehended, but His infinite love is overlooked, or only seen dimly and in stray and fitful glimpses. His character is thus most imperfectly unveiled, and even seriously defaced; and, in consequence, a whole-hearted communion with Him is impossible. As an unlimited arbitrary Will He leaves man with no true will to surrender to Him. Inaccessible, without sympathy, jealous, and egoistic, His appropriate worship is servile obedience, blind submission – not the enlightened reverence and loving affection of the true piety in which mind and heart fully accord; unquestioning belief, passionless resignation, outward observances, mere external works – not the free use of reason, not the loving dependence of a child on its father, not an internal life of holiness springing from a divine indwelling source. God and man thus remain in this system, theistic although it be, infinitely separate from each other. Man is not made to feel that his whole spiritual being should

live and rejoice in God; on the contrary, he is made to feel that he has scarcely any other relation to God than an inert instrument has to the hand which uses it. Submission to the will of God, whatever it may be, without recognition of its being the will of a Father who seeks in all things the good of His children, is the Mussulman's highest conception either of religion or duty, and consequently he ignores the central principle of religious communion and the strongest motive to moral action.

The theism of the Old Testament is incomparably superior to that of the Koran. It possesses every truth contained in Mohammedanism, while it gives due prominence to those aspects of the Divine character which Mohammedanism obscures and distorts. The unity and eternity of God, His omniscience, omnipresence, and inscrutable perfections, the wonders of His creative power, His glory in the heavens and on the earth, are described by Moses and the author of the Book of Job, by the psalmists and the prophets, in language so magnificent that all the intervening centuries have been unable to surpass it. And yet far greater stress is justly laid by them on the moral glory of God, which is reflected in so dim and broken and disproportionate a way through the visions of Mohammed. It is impossible to take a comprehensive view of the Old Testament dispensation without perceiving that its main aim, alike in its ceremonial observances, moral precepts, and prophetic teaching, was to open and deepen the sense of sin, to give reality and intensity to the recognition of moral law, to make known especially that aspect of God's character which we call His righteousness, His holiness. At the same time God is set forth as merciful, long-suffering, and gracious; as healing our diseases, redeeming our life, and crowning us with loving-kindnesses; as creating in us clean hearts, and desiring not sacrifice but a broken spirit.

Before the close of the Old Testament dispensation, a view of God's character had been attained as complete as could be reached through mere spiritual vision and expressed through mere words. The character of God was so disclosed that His people longed with their whole hearts for the blessedness of true spiritual communion with Him, and worthily apprehended what that communion ought to be. But with the widening of their views and the deepening of their longings as to this the supreme good, they realised the more how far they were from the attainment of it. From the beginning Judaism looked beyond itself and confessed its own preparatory and transitional character. And this consciousness grew with its growth. In the days of the later prophets men knew far better what spiritual communion with God ought to be than in the days of the patriarchs, but they did not actually enjoy even the same measure of childlike communion with Him. The law had done its work; it had made men feel more than ever the need of being in communion with God, but it had made them realise also the distance between God and them, and especially the awful width of the gulf between them caused by sin.

That gulf no mere spiritual vision of man could see across, and no mere declarations of love and mercy even from God Himself could bridge over. The reason of man could only be enlightened – the heart of man could only be satisfied – as to how God would deal with sin and sinners, by an actual self-manifestation of God in humiliation, suffering, and sacrifice, which would leave men in no doubt that high and holy as God was, He was also in the deepest and truest sense their Father, and that they were His ransomed and redeemed children. It was only when this was accomplished that religion and theism were alike perfected. Then the character of God was unveiled, the heart of God disclosed, and in such a manner that the most childlike confidence in Him could be combined with the profoundest sense of His greatness and righteousness. Perfect communion with Him in trustful love no longer supposed, as it did in earlier times, an imperfect knowledge, on the part of the worshipper, either of God's character or of his own. It required no overlooking of the evil of sin, for it rested on the certainty that sin had been overcome. Only the life hid with God in Christ can completely realise the idea of religion, for only in Christ can the heart of sinful man be sincerely and unreservedly yielded to a holy God. "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me," are words of the Lord Jesus which can only be denied by those who do not understand what they mean – what the truth and the life are, what fatherhood signifies, and what is involved in coming to a Father.

Christian theism alone gives us a perfect representation of God. It precedes and surpasses reason, especially in the disclosure of the depths of fatherly love which are in the heart of the infinite Jehovah; but it nowhere contradicts reason – nay, it incorporates all the findings of reason. It presents as one great and brilliant light all the scattered sparks of truth which scintillated amidst the darkness of heathendom; it combines into a living unity all the separate elements of positive truth which are to be found in systems like pantheism, deism, rationalism; it excludes all that is false in views lower than or contrary to its own. Whenever it maintains a truth regarding God, reason finds that it is defending a principle of Christian theism; whenever it refutes an error regarding Him, it finds itself assailing some one of the many enemies of Christian theism.

III

Theism, I argued in last lecture, can never be reasonably rejected in the name of religious liberty. I may now, I think, maintain that it can never be reasonably thrown off in the name of religious progress. It can never be an onward step in the spiritual life to pass away from the belief which is distinctive and characteristic of theism. The highest possible form of religion must be a theistic religion – a religion in which the one personal and perfect God is the object of worship. Fetichism, nature-worship, humanitarian polytheism, and pantheism, are all very much lower forms of religion, and therefore to abandon theism for any of them is not to advance but to retrograde, is not to rise but to fall. We can turn towards any of them only by turning our back on the spiritual goal towards which humanity has been slowly but continuously moving through so many ages. There is no hope or possibility of advance on the side of any of the old forms of heathendom.

Shall we try, then, to get out of and beyond theism on that other side to which some moderns beckon us? Shall we suppose that as men have given up the lower for the higher forms of polytheism, and then abandoned polytheism for theism, so they may now surrender theism itself for systems like the positivism of Comte or the new faith of Strauss? No. And for two reasons. First, so far as there is any religion in these systems there is no advance on theism in them but the reverse. Comte strives to represent humanity, and Strauss to represent the universe, as a god, by imaginatively investing them with attributes which do not inherently and properly belong to them; but with all their efforts they can only make of them fetich gods; and Europeans, it is to be hoped, will never fall down and worship fetiches, however big these fetiches may be, and whoever may be willing to serve them as prophets or priests. Humanity must be blind to its follies and sins, insensible to its weakness and miseries, and given over to the madness of a boundless vanity, before it can raise an altar and burn incense to its own self. "Man," says an eloquent author, "is great is sublime, with immortal hope in his heart and the divine aureole around his brow; but that he may preserve his greatness let us leave him in his proper place. Let us leave to him the struggles which make his glory, that condemnation of his own miseries which does him honour, the tears shed over his faults which are the most unexceptionable testimony to his dignity. Let us leave him tears, repentance, conflict, and hope; but let us not deify him; for no sooner shall he have said, 'I am God,' than, deprived that instant of all his blessings, he shall find himself naked and spoiled."[9] Man, I may add, if his eyes be open and capable of vision, can still less worship the universe than he can worship himself. Mind can never bow down to matter except under the influence of delusion. Man is greater than anything he can see or touch; and those who believe only in what they can see and touch, who have what Strauss calls a feeling for the universe, but no true feeling for what is spiritual and divine, must either worship humanity or something even less worthy of their adoration. There is thus no advance on this side either, even if the systems which we are invited to adopt could be properly regarded as religious. But, secondly, we may safely say that so far as they are theories based on science, there is no religion in them; and that, consequently,

[9] E. Naville, 'The Heavenly Father,' pp. 283, 284.

to give up a religion for them would be to give up not one form of religion for another, a lower for a higher, but would be to give up religion for what is not religion, or, in other words, would be to cast off religion altogether. And to cease to be religious can surely never be to advance in religion. Positivism and materialism are not stages beyond theism, for they are not on the same road. They are not phases in the development of religion; they are forms of the denial of religion. The grossest fetichism has more of religion in it than either of them can consistently claim on scientific grounds. There is nothing in science, properly so called, which justifies the exaltation either of matter or man to the rank of gods even of the lowest fetich order.

It is only, then, by keeping within the limits of theism that further religious progress is possible. If we would advance in religion, it must be, not by getting rid of our belief in God, but by getting deeper and wider views of His character and operations, and by conforming our hearts and lives more sincerely and faithfully to our knowledge. There is still ample room for religious progress of this kind. I do not say, I do not believe indeed, that we shall find out any absolutely new truth about God. Were a man to tell me that he had discovered a Divine attribute which had never previously been thought of, I should listen to him with the same incredulous pity as if he were to tell me that he had discovered a human virtue which had escaped the notice of all other men. In a real and important sense, the revelation of God made in Scripture, and more particularly and especially the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, is most justly to be regarded as complete, and incapable of addition. But there may be no limits to the growth of our apprehension and realisation of the idea of God there set before us perfectly as regards general features. To perceive the mere general outline and general aspect of a truth is one thing, and to know it thoroughly, to realise it exhaustively – which is the only way thoroughly to know it – is another and very different thing; and centuries, yea, millenniums without number, may elapse between the former and the latter of these two stages, between the beginning and the end of this process. Thousands of years ago there were men who said as plainly as could be done or desired that God was omnipotent; but surely every one who believes in God will acknowledge, that the discoveries of modern astronomy give more overwhelming impressions of Divine power than either heathen sage or Hebrew psalmist can be imagined as possessing. It is ages since men ascribed perfect wisdom to God; but all the discoveries of science which help us to understand how the earth is related to other worlds – how it has been brought into its present condition – how it has been stocked, adorned, and enriched with its varied tribes of plants and animals – and how these have been developed, distributed, and provided for, – must be accepted by every intelligent theist as enlarging and correcting human views as to God's ways of working, and consequently as to His wisdom. The righteousness of God has been the trust and support of men in all generations; but history is a continuous unveiling of the mysteries of this attribute: through the discipline of Providence individuals and nations are ever being more thoroughly instructed in the knowledge of it. I have, indeed, heard men say – I have heard even teachers of theology say – that the knowledge of God is unlike all other knowledge, in being unchanging and unprogressive. To me it seems that of all knowledge the knowledge of God is, or at least ought to be, the most progressive. And that for this simple reason, that every increase of other knowledge, – be it the knowledge of outward nature, or of the human soul, or of history – be it the knowledge of truth, or beauty, or goodness, – ought also to increase our knowledge of Him. If it do not, it has not been used aright; and the reason why it has not been so used must be that we have looked upon God as if He were only one among many things, instead of looking upon Him as the One Being of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and that we have, in consequence, kept our knowledge of Him wholly apart from our other knowledge, instead of centring all our knowledge in it, because we feel it to be "the light of all our seeing," as well as "a lamp to our feet." In other words, our knowledge of God is in this case not a living, all-diffusive knowledge. Only a dead knowledge of Him is an unprogressive knowledge. That, I admit, is unprogressive. It may fade away and be effaced, but it does not grow, does not absorb and assimilate, and thereby transmute and glorify all our other knowledge.

Growth in the knowledge of God is a kind of progress which can have absolutely no end, for the truth to be realised is infinite truth; truth unlimited by time or space; truth involved in all actual existence, and containing the fulness of inexhaustible possibilities. It is, I shall conclude by adding, a kind of progress which underlies and determines all other progress. Whenever our views of truth, of righteousness, of love, of happiness rise above experience; whenever we have ideals of existence and conduct which transcend the actual world and actual life; whenever we have longings for a perfection and blessedness which finite things and finite persons cannot confer upon us, – our minds and hearts are really, although it may be unconsciously, feeling after God, if haply they may find Him. It is only in and through God that there is anything to correspond to these ideals and longings. If man be himself the highest and best of beings, how comes it that all the noblest of his race should be haunted and possessed as they are by aspirations after what is higher and better than themselves – by visions of a truth, beauty, and holiness which they have not yet attained – by desires for a blessedness which neither earth nor humanity can bestow? Must not, in that case, his ideals be mere dreams – his longings mere delusions? Pessimists like Schopenhauer and Hartmann and their followers, openly avow that they believe them to be so; that the history of the world is but the series of illusions through which these ideals and longings have impelled humanity; that our ideals never have been and never will be realised; that our longings never have been and never will be satisfied, for, "behold, all is vanity." I believe them to be quite logical in thinking so, seeing that they have ceased to believe in God, who is the ideal which alone gives meaning to all true ideals, who can alone satisfy the deeper spiritual longings of the heart, and likeness to whom is the goal of all mental, moral, and religious progress. Of course, if the pessimists can persuade mankind that the sources of progress are not the truths and affections by which Infinite Goodness is drawing men to itself, but mere fictions of their own brains and flatteries of their own hearts, progress must soon cease. When a delusion is seen through, the power of it is gone. But the pessimists will not, we may trust, succeed. They will mislead for a time, as they are now misleading, certain unstable minds; but the main result of their activity must be just the opposite of what they anticipate. It must be that men will prize more the doctrines the most opposite to the dreary view of life and history which they propagate. Pessimism must send the philosophical few back with deepened reverence and quickened insight to Plato, in order to master more thoroughly, and take to heart more seriously, his great message to the world, that the actual and the ideal meet and harmonise in God, who is at once the First and the Final Cause, the Absolute Idea, the Highest Good; and it must increase the gratitude of the many, whether learned or unlearned, for the Gospel which has taught them that to glorify God is an end in which there is no illusion, and to enjoy Him a good which never disappoints. God, as the presupposition of all elevating ideals, and the object of all ennobling desires, is the primary source and the ultimate explanation of all progress.[10]

[10] See Appendix VIII.

LECTURE III

THE NATURE, CONDITIONS, AND LIMITS OF THEISTIC PROOF

I

If we believe that there is one God – the Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of all finite beings – we ought to have reasons or grounds for this belief. We can have no right to believe it simply because we wish or will to believe it. The grounds or reasons which we have for our belief must be to us proofs of God's existence. Those who affirm that God exists, and yet deny that His existence can be proved, must either maintain a position obviously erroneous, or use the term proof in some extraordinary sense, fitted only to perplex and mislead. True and weighty, therefore, seem to me these words of one of the most distinguished of living German philosophers: "The proofs for the existence of God, after having long played a great part in philosophy and theology, have in recent times, especially since Kant's famous critique, fallen into disrepute. Since then, the opinion has been widely spread, both among believers and unbelievers, that the existence of God does not admit of being proved. Even theologians readily assent to this opinion, deride the vain attempts, and imagine that in so doing they are serving the faith which they preach. But the proofs for the existence of God coincide with the grounds for the belief in God; they are simply the real grounds of the belief established and expounded in a scientific manner. If there be no such proofs, there are also no such grounds; and a belief which has no ground, if possible at all, can be no proper belief, but an arbitrary, self-made, subjective opinion. Yes, religious belief must sink to the level of the mere illusion or fixed idea of a mind which is insane, if contradicted by all reality, all facts scientifically established, and the theory of the universe which such facts support and justify."[11]

The proofs of God's existence must be, in fact, simply His own manifestations; the ways in which He makes Himself known; the phenomena on which His power and character are imprinted. They can neither be, properly speaking, our reasonings, nor our analyses of the principles involved in our reasonings. Our reasonings are worth nothing except in so far as they are expositions of God's modes of manifestation; and even when our reasonings are correct, our analyses of them, supposing we attempt to analyse them, may be erroneous. The facts, – the works and ways of God – which are the real evidences of His existence and the true indications of His character, – may raise countless minds to God which can give no general description of the process by which they are thus elevated, and are still less capable of resolving it into its principles. It is late in the history both of the individual mind and of the collective mind before they can so reflect on their own acts, so distinguish them one from another, and so discern the characteristics of each, as to be able even to give a clear and correct account of them; and it is much later before they can detect their conditions and laws. The minds of multitudes may therefore readily be supposed to rise legitimately from perception of the visible universe to apprehension of the invisible personal Creator, although either wholly unconscious or only dimly and inaccurately aware of the nature of the transition, and although, if called on to indicate the conclusion at which they had arrived, they would employ far weaker reasons in words than those by which they were actually convinced in thought. The principles of the theistic inference may be very badly determined, and yet the theistic inference itself may be perfectly valid.

[11] Ulrici, Gott und die Natur, i.

If the real proofs of God's existence are all those facts which cannot be reasonably conceived of as other than the manifestations of God – His glory in the heavens, His handiwork on the earth, His operations in the soul, His ways among the nations – and if the task of the theist is to trace out these facts, and to show that they cannot reasonably be denied to be marks or impressions of Divine agency, then must a theist, when seeking or expounding the reasons for his belief, feel that his mind is conversant not with mere thoughts of his own, but with the manifested thoughts or acts of God Himself. He must carry into his inquiry the consciousness that he is not simply engaged in an intellectual process, but is trying to apprehend and actually apprehending the Divine Being. To him, therefore, the inquiry as to the ultimate source and reason of things must be an essentially solemn and awe-inspired one. To the atheist it must, of course, be much less so; but even he ought to feel it to be not only a most important inquiry, but one which carries him into the presence of a vast, eternal, and mysterious power – a power in darkness shrouded, yet on which hang all life and death, all joy and woe.

According to the view just stated, the evidences or proofs of God's existence are countless. They are to be found in all the forces, laws, and arrangements of nature – in every material object, every organism, every intellect and heart. At the same time, they concur and coalesce into a single all-comprehensive argument, which is just the sum of the indications of God given by the physical universe, the minds of men, and human history. Nothing short of that is the full proof. There may be points in space and instants in time where creative and sustaining power appear to our narrow and superficial intellects to have been strangely limited, but surely we ought not so to concentrate our attention on any such points or instants as to be unable to take in a general impression of the immeasurable power displayed throughout the realms of space and the ages of time. It may be possible to show that many things which have been regarded as evidences of intelligence or wisdom are not really so, and yet the universe may teem with the manifestations of these attributes. Faith in the righteousness and moral government of God must be able to look over and to look beyond many things calculated to produce doubt and disbelief. No man can judge fairly as to whether or not there is a God, who makes the question turn on what is the significance of a few particular facts, who is incapable of gathering up into one general finding the results of innumerable indications. A true religious view of the world must be a wide, a comprehensive view of it, such as demands an eye for the whole and not merely for a part – the faculties which harmonise and unify, and not merely those which divide and analyse. A part, a point, the eye of an insect, the seed of a fruit, may indeed be looked at religiously, but it must be in the light of the universe as a whole, in the light of eternity and infinity.

"Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies;
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower – but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is."

In another respect the theistic proof is exceedingly complex and comprehensive. It takes up into itself, as it were, the entire wealth of human nature. The mind can only rise to the apprehension of God by a process which involves all that is most essential in its own constitution. Thus the will is presupposed. Theistic inference clearly involves the principle of causality. God can only be thought of in the properly theistic sense as the cause of which the universe is the effect. But to think of God as a cause – to apprehend the universe as an effect, – we must have some immediate and direct experience of causation. And such experience we have only in the consciousness of volition. When the soul wills, it knows itself as an agent, as a cause. This is the first knowledge of causation which the mind requires, and the most perfect knowledge thereof which it ever requires. It is a knowledge which

sheds light over all the regions of experience subsequently brought under the principle of causality, which accompanies the reason in its upward search until it rests in the cognition of an ultimate cause, and which enables us to think of that cause as the primary, all-originating will. If we did not know ourselves as causes, we could not know God as a cause; and we know ourselves as causes only in so far as we know ourselves as wills.

But the principle of causality alone or by itself is quite insufficient to lead the mind up to the apprehension of Deity; and an immediate and direct consciousness of far more within us than will is required to make that apprehension possible. The evidences of intelligence must be combined with the evidences of power before we can be warranted to infer more from the facts of the universe than the existence of an ultimate force; and no mere force, however great or wonderful, is worthy to be called God. God is not only the ultimate Cause, but the Supreme Intelligence; and as it is only in virtue of the direct consciousness of our volitions that we can think of God as a cause, so is it only in virtue of the direct consciousness of our intellectual operations that we can think of Him as an intelligence. It is not from the mere occurrence of a change, or the mere existence of a derivative phenomenon, that we infer the change or phenomenon to be due to an intelligent cause, but from the mode of the occurrence or the character of the phenomenon being such that any cause but an intelligent cause must be deemed an insufficient cause. The inference supposes, however, that we already have some knowledge of what an intelligent cause is – that we have enough of knowledge of the nature of intelligence to convince us that it alone can fully account for order, law, and adjustment. Whence do we get this knowledge? We have not far to seek it; it is inherent in self-consciousness. We know ourselves as intelligences, as beings that foresee and contrive, that can discover and apply principles, that can originate order and adjustment. It is only through this knowledge of the nature of intelligence that we can infer our fellow-men to be intelligent beings; and not less is it an indispensable condition of our inferring God to be an intelligence.

Then, causality and design, and the will and intelligence within us through which they are interpreted, cannot, even when combined, enable us to think of the Creative Reason as righteous; although obviously, until so thought of, that reason is by no means to be identified with God. The greatest conceivable power and intelligence, if united with hatred of righteousness and love of wickedness, can yield us only the idea of a devil; and if separated from all moral principle and character, good or bad, only that of a being far lower than man, which might have reason for worshipping man, but which man cannot worship without degrading himself. The existence, however, of a moral principle within us, of a conscience which witnesses against sin and on behalf of holiness, is of itself evidence that God must be a moral being, one who hates sin and loves holiness; and the light of this, "the candle of the Lord," in the soul, enables us to discover many other reasons for the same conclusion in the constitution of society and the course of history. But if we had no moral perceptions on the contemplation of our own voluntary acts, we certainly would not, and could not, invest the Divine Being with moral perfections because of His acts.

There is still another step to be taken in order to obtain an apprehension of God; and it is one where the outward universe fails us, where we are thrown entirely, or nearly so, on our internal resources. The universe, interpreted by the human mind in the manner which has been indicated, may warrant belief in a Being whose power is immense, whose wisdom is inexpressibly wonderful, and whose righteousness is to be held in profoundest admiration and reverence, notwithstanding all the clouds and darkness which may in part conceal it from our view; but not in a Being whose existence is absolute, whose power is infinite, whose wisdom and goodness are perfect. We cannot infer that the author of a universe which is finite, imperfect, and relative, and all the phenomena of which are finite, imperfect, and relative, must be, in the true and strict sense of the terms, infinite, perfect, and absolute. We cannot deduce the infinite from the finite, the perfect from the imperfect, the absolute from the relative. And yet it is only in the recognition of an absolute Being of infinite power, who works with perfect wisdom towards the accomplishment of perfectly holy ends, that we reach a true

knowledge of God, or, which is much the same thing, a knowledge of the true God. Is there, then, any warrant in our own nature for thinking of God as infinite, absolute, and perfect, since there seems to be little or none in outward nature? Yes, there are within us necessary conditions of thought and feeling and ineradicable aspirations which force on us ideas of absolute existence, infinity, and perfection, and will neither permit us to deny these perfections to God nor to ascribe them to any other being.

Thus the mental process in virtue of which we have the idea of God comprehends and concentrates all that is most essential in human nature. It is through bearing the image of God that we are alone able to apprehend God. Take any essential feature of that image out of a human soul, and to apprehend God is made thereby impossible to it. All that is divine in us meets, unites, co-operates, to lay hold of what is divine without us. Hence the fuller and clearer the divine image is in any man, the fuller and clearer will be his perception of the divine original. Hence what is more or less true everywhere, is especially and emphatically true in religion, that "the eye sees only what it brings with it the power of seeing." Where the will, for example, is without energy – where rest is longed for as the highest good, and labour deemed the greatest evil – where extinction is preferred to exertion, – the mind of a nation may be highly cultured, and subtle and profound in speculation, and yet may manifest a marked inability to think of God as a cause or will, with a consequently inveterate tendency to pantheism. The Hindu mind, and the systems of religion and philosophy to which it has given birth, may serve as illustration and proof. Where the animal nature of man is strong, and his moral and spiritual nature still undeveloped, as is the case among all rude and undisciplined races, he worships not the pure and perfect supreme Spirit, whose goodness, truth, and righteousness are as infinite as His power and knowledge, but gods endowed in his imagination chiefly with physical and animal qualities. "Recognition of Nature," says Mr Carlyle, "one finds to be the chief element of Paganism; recognition of Man and his Moral Duty – though this, too, is not wanting – comes to be the chief element only in purer forms of religion. Here, indeed, is a great distinction and epoch in Human Beliefs; a great landmark in the religious development of Mankind. Man first puts himself in relation with Nature and her Powers, wonders and worships over those; not till a later epoch does he discern that all Power is Moral, that the grand point is the distinction for him of Good and Evil, of *Thou shalt, and thou shalt not*." The explanation of the historical truth thus stated by Mr Carlyle is just that man is vividly alive to the wants and claims of his body and merely natural life during long ages in which he is almost dead to the wants and claims of his spirit or true self and the moral life. So the ordinary mind is prone, even at present, in the most civilised countries of the world, to think of God after the likeness of man, or, in other words, as a vastly magnified man. Why? Because the ordinary mind is always very feebly and dimly conscious of those principles of reason which demand in God the existence of attributes neither to be found in the physical universe nor in itself. Some exercise in speculation, some training in philosophy, is needed to make us reflect on them; and until we reflect on them we cannot be expected to do them justice in the formation of our religious convictions. Those who have never thought on what infinite and unconditioned mean, and who have never in their lives grappled with a metaphysical problem, will infer quite as readily as if they had spent their days in philosophical speculation that all the power and order in the universe, and all the wisdom and goodness in humanity, are the reflections of a far higher power, wisdom, and goodness in their source – the Divine Mind; but they must realise much less correctly in what respects God cannot be imaged in His works: they may do equal or even fuller justice to what is true in anthropomorphism, but they cannot perceive as distinctly where anthropomorphism is false. It is only through the activity of the speculative reason that religion is prevented from becoming a degrading anthropomorphism, that the mind is compelled to think of God not merely as a Father, King, and Judge, but as the Absolute and Infinite Being. This is, perhaps, the chief service which philosophy renders to religion; and it ought not to be undervalued, notwithstanding that philosophy has often, in checking one error, fallen into another as great, or even greater, denying that there is any likeness between God and man.

While the mental process which has been described – the theistic inference – is capable of analysis, it is in itself synthetic. The principles on which it depends are so connected that the mind can embrace them all in a single act, and must include and apply them all in the apprehension of God. Will, intelligence, conscience, reason, and the ideas which they supply; cause, design, goodness, infinity, with the arguments which rest on these ideas, – all coalesce into this one grand issue. The inferences are as inseparable as the principles from which they spring. A very large number of the objections to theism arise wholly from inattention to this truth. Men argue as if each principle involved in the knowledge of God were to be kept strictly by itself, as if each argument brought forward as leading to a theistic conclusion were to be jealously isolated; and then, if the last result of the principle, the conclusion of the argument, be not an adequate knowledge of God, they pronounce the principle altogether inapplicable, and the argument altogether fallacious. It is strange that this procedure should not be universally seen to be sophistical in the extreme – a kind of reasoning which, if generally adopted, would at once arrest all science and all business; but obviously anti-theists think differently, for they habitually have recourse to it. If you argue, for example, that the universe is an event or effect which must have an adequate cause, they will question your right to refer to the order which is in the universe as a proof that it is an event or effect, because order implies another principle, and is the ground of another argument. They overlook that you are not making an abstract use of the principle of causality, and that you are not arguing from the mere terms universe and event, but from the universe itself; and that in order to know whether it be an event or not – an effect or not – you must study it as it is, and take everything into account which bears on the question. They reason as if they supposed that a cause and an intelligence must be two different things, and that a cause cannot be an intelligence, nor an intelligence a cause. Similarly, the arguments from the power, order, and goodness displayed in nature have often been objected to altogether, have often been pronounced worthless, because they do not in themselves prove God to be *infinitely* powerful, wise, and good. They are brought forward to show that the Author of the universe must have the power, wisdom, and goodness required to create and govern it; and forthwith many oppose them by declaring that they do not show Him to be infinite. Now, no man who did not imagine nature to be infinite ever adduced them to prove God infinite. Their not proving that, is therefore no reason for denying them to prove what they profess to prove. No argument can stand if we may reject it because it does not prove more than it undertakes to prove.

It is clear that the evidences of design, instead of being wholly distinct from the evidences of power, and independent of the principle of causality, are evidences of a kind of power and manifestations of a kind of causality – intelligent power and causality. In like manner the evidences of goodness are also evidences of design, for goodness is a form of design – morally, beneficent design. Although causality does not involve design, nor design goodness, design involves causality, and goodness both causality and design. The proofs of intelligence are also proofs of power; the proofs of goodness are proofs both of intelligence and power. The principles of reason which compel us to think of the Supreme Moral Intelligence as a self-existent, eternal, infinite, and unchangeable Being, supplement the proofs from other sources, and give self-consistency and completeness to the doctrine of theism. The various theistic arguments are, in a word, but stages in a single rational process, but parts of one comprehensive argument. They are naturally, and, as it were, organically related – they support and strengthen one another. It is therefore an arbitrary and illegitimate procedure to separate them any farther than may be necessary for the purpose of clear and orderly exposition. It is sophistry to attempt to destroy them separately by assailing each as if it had no connection with the other, and as if each isolated fragmentary argument were bound to yield as large a conclusion as all the arguments combined. A man quite unable to break a bundle of rods firmly bound together may be strong enough to break each rod separately. But before proceeding to deal with the bundle in that

way, he may be required to establish his right to untie it, and to decline putting forth his strength upon it as it is presented to him.[12]

II

The theistic inference, although a complex process, is not a difficult one. It looks, indeed, long and formidable when analysed in books of evidences, and elaborated with perverse ingenuity into series of syllogisms. But numerous processes, very simple and easy in themselves, are toilsome and troublesome to analyse, or describe, or comprehend. Vision and digestion are, in general, not difficult bodily functions, but they have been the subjects of a great many very large treatises; and doubtless physiologists have not even yet found out all that is to be known about them. As a rule, the theistic process is as simple and easy an operation for the mind as vision or digestion for the body. The multitude of books which have been written in explanation and illustration of it, and the subtle and abstruse character of the researches and speculations contained in many of these books, are not the slightest indications of its being other than simple and natural in itself. The inferences which it involves are, in fact, like those which Weber, Helmholtz, and Zöllner have shown to be implied in the perceptions of sense, involuntary and unconscious. If not perfectly instantaneous, they are so rapid and spontaneous as to have seemed to many intuitive. And in a loose sense, perhaps, they may be considered so. Not, however, strictly and properly, since the idea of Deity is no simple idea, but the most complex of ideas, comprehending all that is great and good in nature and man, along with perfections which belong to neither nature nor man; and since the presence of Deity is not seen without the intervention of any media – face to face, eye to eye – but only as "through a glass darkly." The contemplation of nature, and mind, and history is an indispensable stage towards the knowledge of Him. Physical and mental facts and laws are the materials or data of reason in its quest of religious truth. There is a rational transition from the natural to the supernatural, wherever the latter is reached.

Our knowledge of God is obtained as simply and naturally as our knowledge of our fellow-men. It is obtained, in fact, mainly in the same way. In both cases we refer certain manifestations of will, intelligence, and goodness – qualities which are known to us by consciousness – to these qualities as their causes. We have no direct or immediate knowledge – no intuitive or *a priori* knowledge – of the intelligence of our fellow-creatures, any more than we have of the intelligence of our Creator; but we have a direct personal consciousness of intelligence in ourselves which enables us confidently to infer that the works both of God and of men can only have originated in intelligences. We grow up into knowledge of the mind of God as we grow in acquaintance with the minds of men through familiarity with their acts. The Father in heaven is known just as a father on earth is known. The latter is as unseen as the former. No human being has really ever seen another. No sense has will, or wisdom, or goodness for its object. Man must infer the existence of his fellow-men, for he can have no immediate perception of it; he must become acquainted with their characters through the use of his intelligence, because character cannot be heard with the ear, or looked upon with the eye, or touched with the finger. Yet a child is not long in learning to know that a spirit is near it. As soon as it knows itself, it easily detects a spirit like its own, yet other than itself, when the signs of a spirit's activity are presented to it. The process of inference by which it ascends from the works of man to the spirit which originates them is not more legitimate, more simple, or more natural, than that by which it rises from nature to nature's God.

In saying this, I refer merely to the process of inference in itself. That is identical in the two cases. In other respects there are obvious differences, of which one important consequence is, that while the scepticism which denies the existence of God is not unfrequently to be met with, a scepticism which denies the existence of human beings is unknown. The facts which prove that

[12] See Appendix IX.

there are men, are grouped together within limits of space and of time which allow of their being so easily surveyed, and they are in themselves so simple and familiar, that all sane minds draw from them their natural inference. The facts which prove that there is a God need, in order to be rightly interpreted, more attention and reflection, more comprehensiveness, impartiality, and elevation of mind. Countless as they are, they can be overlooked, and often have been overlooked. Clear and conspicuous as they are, worldliness and prejudice and sin may blind the soul to their significance. True, the existence and possibility of atheism have often been denied, but the testimony of history to the reality of atheism cannot be set aside. Although many have been called atheists unjustly and calumniously, and although a few who have professed themselves to be atheists may have really possessed a religious belief which they overlooked or were averse to acknowledge, we cannot reasonably refuse to take at their own word the majority of those who have inculcated a naked and undisguised atheism, and claimed and gloried in the name of atheist. Incredible as it may seem that any intelligent being, conscious of human wants and weaknesses, should be able to look upon the wonders of the heavens and of the earth, of the soul within him and of society around him, and yet say that there is no God, men have done so, and we have no alternative but to accept the fact as we find it. It is a fact which involves nothing inconsistent with the truth that the process by which the mind attains to a belief in God is of the same natural and direct, yet inferential, character as the process by which it attains to belief in the existence of finite minds closely akin to itself.

Our entire spiritual being is constituted for the apprehension of God in and through His works. All the essential principles of mental action, when applied to the meditative consideration of finite things, lead up from them to Infinite Creative Wisdom. The whole of nature external to us is a revelation of God; the whole nature within us has been made for the reception and interpretation of that revelation. What more would we have? Strange as it may seem, there are many theists at the present day who represent it as insufficient, or as even worthless, and who join with atheists in denying that God's existence can be proved, and in affirming that all the arguments for His existence are inconclusive and sophistical. I confess I deem this a most erroneous and dangerous procedure. Such theists seem to me not only the best allies of atheists, but even more effective labourers in the cause of unbelief than atheists themselves. They shake men's confidence to a far greater extent in the reasonable grounds of faith in God's existence, and substitute for these grounds others as weak and arbitrary as any atheist could possibly wish. They pronounce illegitimate and invalid the arguments from effect to cause, from order and arrangement to intelligence, from history to providence, from conscience to a moral governor, – an assertion which, if true, infallibly implies that the heavens do not declare the glory of God, and that the earth does not show forth His handiworks – that the course of human events discloses no trace of His wisdom, goodness, or justice – and that the moral nature of man is wholly dissociated from a Divine law and a Divine lawgiver. Then, in place of a universe revealing God, and a soul made in His image, and a humanity overruled and guided by Him, they present to us as something stronger and surer – an intuition or a feeling or an exercise of mere faith. For it is a noticeable and certainly not a promising circumstance, that there is no general agreement as to what that state of mind is on which the weight of the entire edifice of theism is proposed to be rested even among those who profess to possess it. An intuition, a feeling, and a belief are very different things; and not much dependence is to be put on the psychology which is unable to distinguish between them.

Man, say some, knows God by immediate intuition; he needs no argument for His existence, because he perceives Him directly – face to face – without any medium. It is easy to assert this, but obviously the assertion is the merest dogmatism. Not one man in a thousand who understands what he is affirming will dare to claim to have an immediate vision of God, and nothing can be more likely than that the man who makes such a claim is self-deluded. It is not difficult to see how he may be deluded. There is so much that is intuitive involved in the apprehension of God that the apprehension itself may readily be imagined to be intuitive. The intuitive nature of the

conditions which it implies may arrest the attention, and the fact that they are simply conditions may be overlooked. The possibility, however, of analysing the apprehension into simpler elements – of showing that it is a complex act, and presupposes conditions that can be indicated – is a conclusive proof that it is no intuition, that our idea of God is no more or otherwise intuitive than our idea of a fellow-man. Besides, what seem intuitions are often really inferences, and not unfrequently erroneous inferences; what seem the immediate dictates of pure reason, or the direct and unclouded perceptions of a special spiritual faculty, may be the conceits of fancy or the products of habit and association, or the reflections of strong feeling. A man must prove to himself, and he must prove to others, that what he takes to be an intuition is an intuition. Is that proof in this case likely to be easier or more conclusive than the proof of the Divine existence? The so-called immediate perception of God must be shown to be a perception and to be immediate; it must be vindicated and verified: and how this is to be done, especially if there be no other reasons for believing in God than itself, it is difficult to conceive. The history of religion, which is what ought to yield the clearest confirmation of the alleged intuition, appears to be from beginning to end a conspicuous contradiction of it. If all men have the spiritual power of directly beholding their Creator – have an immediate vision of God – how happens it that whole nations believe in the most absurd and monstrous gods? that millions of men are ignorant whether there be one god or thousands? that even a people like the Greeks could suppose the highest of their deities to have been born, to have a body, and to have committed the vilest actions? A true power of intuition is little susceptible of growth, and its testimonies vary within narrow limits; any development of which it admits is only slightly due to external conditions, and mainly the necessary consequence of internal activity, of inherent expansibility. It is thus, for example, with the senses of sight and hearing, in so far as they are intuitive. But it is manifestly very different with the religious nature. Its growth is mainly dependent, not on the organic evolution of a particular faculty, but on the general state of the soul, on the one hand; and on the influence of external circumstances – education, example, law, &c. – on the other hand. It is this difference in the character of their development which explains why the deliverances of the senses are so uniform and nearly infallible, while the most cursory survey of the religious world shows us the greatest want of uniformity and truthfulness in religious judgments. The various phases of polytheism and pantheism are inexplicable, if an intuition of God be universally inherent in human nature. Theism is perfectly explicable without intuition, as the evidences for it are numerous, obvious, and strong.

The opinion that man has an intuition or immediate perception of God is untenable; the opinion that he has an immediate feeling of God is absurd. A man feels only in so far as he perceives and knows. Feeling is in consciousness essentially dependent on, and necessarily subsequent to, knowing. Mere feeling – feeling without knowing – is an utterly inconceivable and impossible experience. Admit, however, not only that there may be a mere feeling, but that there is a mere feeling of God. What worth can it have? By supposition – by definition – no knowledge of God underlies and explains it. But in that case, how can any man pretend to get a knowledge of God out of it? What right can any one have to represent it as a source of knowledge of God? I am not aware that these questions have ever been answered except by the merest verbal jugglery. The very men who tell us that we cannot know God, but that we feel Him, tell us also that the feeling of Him is an immediate consciousness of Him, and that immediate consciousness is its own self-evidence, is absolute certainty, or, in other words, the highest and surest knowledge. We do not know God, but we feel Him; however, to feel Him is to know Him, – such is their answer more or less distinctly expressed, or, I should rather say, more or less skilfully concealed. It is at once a Yes and a No, the affirmation of what is denied and the denial of what is affirmed. And it is this because it cannot be anything else – because mere feeling is an impossible experience – and because feeling, so far as it is uncaused and unenlightened by knowledge, testifies only to the folly or insanity of the being which feels. If theism have no other basis than feeling, it is a house which foolish men have built upon the sand. The first storm will cast it down, and no wise man will regret its fall. Whatever is founded on mere emotion – on emotion which

is not itself explained and justified by reason – stands but by sufferance; has no right to stand; ought to be cast down and swept from the earth. But the storms which have already in the course of the ages spent their force against theism with no other effect than to make its strength more conspicuous, and to carry away what would have weakened or deformed it, are sufficient to show us that it has been built on eternal truth by the finite human reasons which have been enlightened by Infinite and Divine Reason.

The strangest of all theories as to the foundation of our belief in God is, that it has no foundation at all – that it is a belief which rests upon itself, an act of faith which is its own warrant. We are told that we can neither know that God is nor what God is, but that we can nevertheless believe in God, and ought to believe in Him, and can and ought to act as if we knew His existence and character. But surely belief without a reason must be arbitrary belief, and either to believe or act as if we knew what we do not know, can never be conduct to be justified, much less commended. Faith which is not rational is faith which ought to be rejected. We cannot believe what we do not know or think that we know. We have no right to believe more than we know. I know, for example, that the grass grows, and consequently I believe, and am justified in believing, that it grows. I do not know how the grass grows, and I do not believe how it grows; I can justify my believing about its growth nothing beyond what I know to be true. This law of belief is as binding for the highest as for the lowliest objects. If I have no reason for believing that there is a God, I have no right to believe that there is a God. If I do not know that God is infinite, I am bound not to believe that He is infinite. Belief is inseparable from knowledge, and ought to be precisely coextensive with knowledge. Those who deny this fundamental truth will always be found employing the words knowledge and belief in a capricious and misleading way.[13]

III

When man apprehends God as powerful, wise, and good – as possessed of will, reason, and righteousness – obviously he thinks of Him as bearing some likeness to himself, as having in an infinite or perfect measure qualities which human creatures have in a finite and imperfect measure. This can be no stumbling-block to any one who believes that God made man in His image, after His likeness. If man be in some respects like God, God must, of course, be in some respects like man. Power and freedom, knowledge and wisdom, love, goodness, and justice, are, according to this view, finitely in man, because they are infinitely in God. But it is a view which excites in certain minds deep aversion. There are men who protest, in the name of religion, in the name of God, against this anthropomorphic theism, as they call it. According to them, to attribute to God any human qualities, even the highest and best, is to limit and degrade Him – is contrary to reason and contrary to piety – is idolatrous and profane. The Psalmist represents the Lord as reproaching the wicked for supposing that He was like them in their wickedness – "altogether such an one as themselves;" but the modern philosophers to whom I am referring are horrified at the thought that the most righteous man, even in his righteousness, has any likeness to God. According to them, to think of God as wise is to dishonour Him, and to declare Him holy is to calumniate Him. To think of Him as foolish, and to pronounce Him wicked, are, in their eyes, only a little more irreverent and no more irrational.

"We must not fall down and worship," writes one of these philosophers, "as the source of our life and virtue, the image which our own minds have set up. Why is such idolatry any better than that of the old wood and stone? If we worship the creations of our minds, why not also those of our hands? The one is, indeed, a more refined self-adoration than the other; but the radical error remains the same in both. The old idolaters were wrong, not because they worshipped themselves, but because they worshipped their creation as if it were their creator; and how can any anthropomorphic

[13] See Appendix X.

theory 'escape the same condemnation'?"[14] The writer does not see that God can only be thought of as wise and righteous and free because the mind of man is His creation, so that His being thus thought of can be no proof that He is *its* creation. The fact that we can think of God as wise and righteous and free is no evidence that He is an image which our own minds have set up. The man who draws such an inference from such a premiss can be no dispassionate reasoner. And certainly the fact that we can think of God as possessed of intellectual and moral perfections is no reason for our not falling down and worshipping Him, and no evidence that our doing so is idolatry. To fall down and worship any being whom we do not know to possess these characteristics is what would clearly be idolatry. And this idolatry is what the philosophers to whom I refer are manifestly chargeable with encouraging. When they have rejected the living, personal, righteous, loving God, in whom humanity has so long trusted, they can only suggest as a substitute for Him a mysterious Power which is wholly unknown, and even unknowable. Great is their simplicity if they fancy that they can persuade men to receive any such god as that, or if they fancy that men would be any better for a faith so vague and empty. To believe in we know not what, is directly contrary to reason; to worship it would be "an idolatry no better than that of the old wood and stone." What we know is often not the creation of our minds: the unknowable is in itself nothing at all to us, and, as a thought, is always the mere creation of our minds; it is different for each creature, each mind; it is the mere result and reflection of our finiteness. There can be no unknown or unknowable to an infinite mind. To worship what is unknowable would be, therefore, simply to worship our own ignorance – one of the creations of our minds least worthy, perhaps, of being worshipped. There is, at least, no kind of worship less entitled "to escape condemnation," even as anthropomorphic idolatry, than the worship of the Unknowable, – the god proposed to us by some as the alone true God, belief in whom – perhaps I should rather say, belief in which – is to be the final and perfect reconciliation of science and religion.

All true theism implies a certain likeness between God and man. It holds that God is not merely an all-pervading and all-sustaining Power, but an omniscient Mind and perfectly holy Will. It refuses to think of Him merely according to the analogies of the physical world, as if human reason and human love were less worthy expressions of His perfections than mechanical or brute force. It refers to Him not only "all the majesty of nature, but all the humanity of man." This truth – that there is a likeness between God and man – must, however, be combined with two other truths, otherwise it will lead to the gravest errors.

The first is, that while God and man are both like each other, in that both possess certain excellences, they are utterly unlike, in that God possesses these excellences in all their perfection and in an infinite measure, while man possesses them in a very small degree and violated with many flaws and faults. The highest glory which a man can hope for is, that he should be made wholly into the image of God; but never can God be rightly thought of as mainly, and still less as merely, in the image of man. It was the great error of classic heathendom that it thus conceived of the Divine. "Men," says Heraclitus, "are mortal gods, and the gods immortal men." And the gods of Greece, as represented by her poets and adored by her people, were simply magnified and immortal men – a race closely akin to their worshippers in weaknesses and vices no less than in powers and virtues. They were supposed to be born as men are, to have voice and figure, parts and passions, and even at times to cheat and rail and lie. They reflected all the tendencies of the Greek mind, both good and evil.

Worshippers of the one God can scarcely fall into the same extravagance of error in this respect as the Greeks and Romans did, as all polytheists do; but they can, and often do, fall into the error, and think of God as subject to limits and defects, which are only in themselves. For instance, what is called deism, as distinguished from theism, rests wholly on the conception that the presence and power of God are limited, and that He acts in the manner to which man as a finite creature is restricted. The deist thinks of God as outside of and away from the universe; he thinks of the universe as a mechanism

[14] Barrett's Physical Ethics, p. 225.

which God has contrived, and which He has endowed with certain powers, in virtue of which it is able to sustain itself in existence, and to perform its work so as to save God, as it were, all further trouble and labour concerning it. It is a great gain for us to have a machine doing what we desire without our needing to pay any attention to it or even to be present where it is, because we cannot give our attention to more than one object at one and the same instant of time, and cannot be present at the same time in more places than one; but those who liken God to man in this respect, divest Him of His omnipresence and omnipotence, and represent Him as characterised in some measure by their own impotency. There is a truth which Pantheism often claims as peculiarly and distinctively its own, – the truth that in God we and all things live, and move, and have our being – that of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things, – but which theism must sincerely and fully appropriate as one of its simplest and most certain elements, otherwise the charge against it of being a false and presumptuous likening of God to man will be warranted. We must not think of Him as "an absentee God, sitting idle ever since the first Sabbath, at the outside of His universe, and 'seeing it go'" – as a God at hand but not afar off, or afar off but not at hand – as here, not there, or there, not here; but we must think of Him as everywhere present, everywhere active – as at once the source of all order, the spring of all life, and the ground of all affection and thought.

We need to be still more on our guard against limiting His wisdom or righteousness or love, as it is what we are still more prone to do. These attributes of God are often thought of in the meanest and most unworthy ways; and doubtless it has to a large extent been horror at the consequent degradation of the idea of God which has made some men refuse to assign to Him any of the properties of humanity, saying, with Xenophanes, that if the animals could think, they would imagine the Deity to be in their likeness – and with Spinoza, that if a circle could think, it would suppose His essence to be circularity. But this is to flee from one extreme to another extreme, from one error to a still more terrible error, through utterly failing to distinguish between perfection and imperfection, between what ought and what ought not to be ascribed to God. Circularity, animal forms and dispositions, human limitations – these are imperfections, and we must not refer them to God; but intelligence, righteousness, love – these are so little in their own nature imperfections that an intelligent being, however feeble, would be more excellent than an omnipotent and omnipresent being destitute of intelligence; and righteousness and love are as much superior to mere intelligence as it is to mere power and magnitude. To ascribe these to God, if we only ascribe them to Him in infinite perfection, is no presumption, no error; not to ascribe them to Him is the greatest presumption, the most lamentable error.

The second truth necessary to be borne in mind, whenever we affirm the likeness of God to man, is, that in whatever measure and to whatever extent God may be known, our knowledge of Him is, and always must be, very inadequate. In these latter days of science we are proud of our knowledge of the universe; and yet, although we do know a little of far-away stars and systems, what is this, after all, but, as Carlyle says, the knowledge which a minnow in its native creek has of the outlying ocean? And our knowledge of God must fall unspeakably farther short of being coextensive with its object. To illustrate the disproportion there, no comparison can be appropriate. "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? Deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." Our idea of God may contain nothing which is not true of God, and may omit nothing which it is essential for our spiritual welfare that we should know regarding Him; but it is impossible that it should be a complete and exhaustive idea of Him. We have scarcely a complete and exhaustive idea of anything, and least of all can we have such an idea of the infinite and inexhaustible source of all being. God alone can have a complete and exhaustive idea of Himself. There must be infinitely more in God than we have any idea of. There must be many qualities, powers, excellences, in Divine nature, which are wholly unknown to men, or even wholly unknowable by them, owing to their want of any faculties for their apprehension. And even as to what we do know of God, our knowledge is

but partial and inadequate. We know that God knows, that He feels, that He acts; but as to how He knows, feels, and acts, as to what is distinctive and characteristic of His knowing, feeling, and acting, we have little or no notion. We can *apprehend* certain attributes of God, but we can *comprehend*, or fully grasp, or definitely image, not one of them. If we could find out God unto perfection in any respect, then, either we must be infinite or God must be finite in that respect. The finite mind can never stretch itself out in any direction until it is coextensive with the Infinite Mind. Man is made in the image of God, but he is not the measure of God.

LECTURE IV

NATURE IS BUT THE NAME FOR AN EFFECT WHOSE CAUSE IS GOD

I

We have now to consider the principle of causality so far as it is implied in the theistic inference, and the theistic inference so far as it is conditioned by the principle of causality. It is not necessary to discuss the nature of the principle of causality in itself or for its own sake; it is even expedient, I believe, not to attempt to penetrate farther into its metaphysics and psychology than the work on hand imperatively requires. We must of course go as far as those have gone who have maintained on metaphysical or psychological grounds that the principle of causality warrants no theistic inference; we must show that their metaphysics and psychology are irrelevant when true, and false when relevant; but we may be content to stop when we have reached this result. The truth of theism has been very generally represented, both by those who admit and by those who deny the validity of the theistic inference, as much more dependent than it really is on the truth or falsity of some one or other of the many views which have been entertained as to the nature of causation, and the origin of the causal judgment. We are constantly being warned by theists that unless we accept this or that particular notion of causation, and account for it in this or that particular manner, we cannot reasonably believe in the existence of God; we are constantly being assured by anti-theists that belief in God is irrational, because it assumes some erroneous view of causation, or some erroneous explanation of the process by which causation is apprehended. But it will be found that representations of this kind seldom prove more than one-sidedness and immaturity of thought in those who make them. An accurate and comprehensive view of the nature of causation, and of our apprehension of it, will, it is true, have here as elsewhere great advantages over an erroneous and narrow one, but hardly any of the theories which have been held on these points can be consistently argued by those who hold them to invalidate theistic belief. Even utterly inadequate statements and explanations of the principle of causality – as, for example, those of Hume and J. S. Mill – are not more incompatible with the theistic inference than they are with any other inference which is a real extension of knowledge. Unless they are understood and applied more rigidly than by those who propound them, they allow us to draw the theistic inference; if understood and applied so as to forbid our drawing it, they logically disallow all scientific inference except such as is purely formal and deductive. In a word, if compatible with science they are compatible with theism, and if incompatible with theism they are incompatible with science.

When we assume the principle of causality in the argument for the existence of God, what precisely is it that we assume? Only this: that whatever has begun to be, must have had an antecedent, or ground, or cause which accounts for it. We do not assume that every existence must have had a cause. We have no right, indeed, to assume that any existence has had a cause until we have found reason to regard it as not an eternal existence, but one which has had an origin. Whatever we believe, however, to have had an origin, we at once believe also to have had a cause. The theistic argument assumes that this belief is true. It assumes that every existence, once new, every event or occurrence or change, must have a cause. This is certainly no very large assumption: on the contrary, if any assumption can claim to be self-evident, it surely may. Thought implies the truth of it every moment. Sensation only gives rise to thought in virtue of it. Unless it were true there could be no such thing as thought. To deny that the principle of causality, understood as has been indicated, is true, would be to

deny that reason is reason; it would be equivalent to affirming that to seek for a reason is always and essentially an unreasonable process. And, in fact, so understood, the principle never has been denied. Hume even did not venture to deny it, although he ought in consistency to have denied it, and obviously desired to be able to deny it. He did not, however, deny that every object which begins to exist must have a cause, – he did not venture to do more than deny that this is either intuitively or demonstratively certain, and that any bond or tie can be perceived between what is called a cause and what is called an effect. The inquiry which he instituted was not whether we pronounce it necessary that everything whose existence has a beginning should also have a cause or not, but for what reason we pronounce it necessary. He assumed that we pronounce it necessary, and his elaborate investigation into the nature of causation was undertaken expressly and entirely to discover why we do so. The conclusion to which he came – viz., that the causal judgment is an "offspring of experience engendered upon custom" – was not only a very inadequate and erroneous one in itself, but inconsistent with the reality of what it professed to explain: still the admission which has been mentioned was what was professed to be explained.

Now, if it be true at all that every event, whether it be a new existence or a change in an old existence, presupposes an explanatory antecedent or cause, there can of course be no accepting in all its breadth one of the propositions which Hume urges most strenuously – viz., that the mere study of an event can tell us nothing about its cause. We may grant that it can tell us very little, – that Hume performed an immense service in showing how extremely little we can know of the particular causes of particular events apart from the study of both in connection, apart from observation, experiment, and induction, – but we cannot grant that the event itself teaches us absolutely nothing. If every event must have a cause, every event must have a sufficient cause. For these two statements, although verbally different, are really identical. The second seems to mean, but does not actually mean, more than the first. The whole cause of the elevation of a weight of ten pounds a foot high cannot be also the whole cause of the elevation of twenty pounds to the same height, for the simple reason that in the latter case the elevation of ten pounds – of half the weight – would be an event which had no cause at all. And this is universally true. If every event have not a sufficient cause, some events have no cause at all. This, then, I say, we necessarily know that the efficient cause of every event is a sufficient cause, however vague may be our knowledge of efficiency and sufficiency.

If every event – using this term as convenient to denote either a new existence or a change in some existence – must have a cause, to prove that the universe must have had a cause we require to prove it to have been an event – to have had a commencement. Can this be done? That is *the* question in the theistic argument from causality. Compared therewith, all other questions which have been introduced into or associated with the argument are of very subordinate importance. Now there is only one way of reasonably answering the question, and that is by examining the universe, in order to determine whether or not it bears the marks of being an event – whether or not it has the character of an effect. We have no right to *assume* it to be an event, or to have had a beginning. The entire argument for the Divine existence, which is at present under consideration, can be no stronger than the strength of the proof which we can adduce in favour of its having had a beginning, and the only valid proof of that which reason can hope to find must be derived from the examination of the universe itself.

What, then, is the result of such an examination? An absolute certainty that all the things which are seen are temporal, – that every object in the universe which presents itself to the senses has had a beginning, – that the most powerful, penetrating, and delicate instruments devised to assist our senses reach no cause which is not obviously also an effect. The progress of science has not more convincingly and completely disproved the once prevalent notion that the universe was created about six thousand years ago, than it has convincingly and completely established that everything of which our senses inform us has had a commencement in time, and is of a compound, derivative, and dependent nature. It is not long since men had no means of proving that the rocks, for example, were not as old as the earth itself – no direct means of proving even that they were not eternal; but science

is now able to tell us with confidence under what conditions, in what order, and in what epochs of geological time they were formed. We have probably a more satisfactory knowledge of the formation of the coal-measures than of the establishment of the feudal system. We know that the Alps, although they look as if they might have stood for ever, are not even old, as geologists count age. The morning and night, the origin and disappearance of the countless species of living things which have peopled the earth from the enormously remote times when the rocks of the Laurentian period were deposited down to the births and deaths of contemporaneous animals, have been again brought into the light of day by the power of science. The limits of research are not even there reached, and with bold flight science passes beyond the confines of discovered life – beyond the epochs of formation even of the oldest rocks – to a time when there was no distinction of earth and sea and atmosphere, as all were mingled together in nebulous matter, in some sort of fluid or mist or steam; yea, onwards to a time when our earth had no separate existence, and suns, moons, and stars were not yet divided and arranged into systems. If we seek, then, after what is eternal, science tells us that it is not the earth nor anything which it contains, not the sea nor the living things within it, not the moving air, not the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars. These things when interrogated all tell us to look above and beyond them, for although they may have begun to be in times far remote, yet it was within times to which the thoughts of finite beings can reach back.

There is no denying, then, that the universe is to a great extent an effect, an event, something which has begun to be, a process of becoming. Science is, day by day, year by year, finding out more and more that it is an effect. The growth of science is in great part merely the extension of the proof that the universe is an effect. But the scientific proof of the non-eternity of matter is as yet far from a complete one. It leaves it possible for the mind to refer the phases through which the universe has passed, and the forms which it has assumed, to an underlying eternal source in nature itself, and, therefore, not to God. And this is by far the most plausible and forcible way of combating the argument we are employing. It meets it with a direct counter-argument, which every person must acknowledge to be relevant, and which, if sufficiently made out, is obviously decisive. That counter-argument we are bound, therefore, to dispose of. It has been thus stated by Mr J. S. Mill: "There is in nature a permanent element, and also a changeable: the changes are always the effects of previous changes; the permanent existences, so far as we know, are not effects at all. It is true we are accustomed to say not only of events, but of objects, that they are produced by causes, as water by the union of hydrogen and oxygen. But by this we only mean that when they begin to exist, their beginning is the effect of a cause. But their beginning to exist is not an object, it is an event. If it be objected that the cause of a thing's beginning to exist may be said with propriety to be the cause of the thing itself, I shall not quarrel with the expression. But that which in an object begins to exist, is that in it which belongs to the changeable element in nature; the outward form and the properties depending on mechanical or chemical combinations of its component parts. There is in every object another and a permanent element – viz., the specific elementary substance or substances of which it consists and their inherent properties. These are not known to us as beginning to exist: within the range of human knowledge they had no beginning, and consequently no cause; though they themselves are causes or non-causes of everything that takes place. Experience, therefore, affords no evidences, not even analogies, to justify our extending to the apparently immutable, a generalisation grounded only on our observation of the changeable."[15]

On this I would remark, first, that mere experience does not take us to anything which we are entitled to call even apparently immutable. It only takes us, even when extended to the utmost by scientific instruments and processes, to elements which we call simple because we have hitherto failed to analyse them into simpler elements. It is a perfectly legitimate scientific hypothesis that all the substances recognised by chemists as elementary and intransmutable, are in reality the modifications

[15] Three Essays on Religion, pp. 142, 143.

or syntheses of a single material element, which have been produced under conditions that render them incapable of being affected by any tests or agencies which the analyst in his laboratory can bring to bear upon them. Indeed, unless this hypothesis be true, the theory of development, so generally accepted at present, can hardly be supposed to be of any very wide application, seeing that at its very outset it has to affirm the existence of no fewer than sixty-four true untransformable species. But suppose the so-called elementary substances of chemistry to be simple, no one can reasonably suppose them as known to us to be ultimate. In oxygen there may be no atoms which are not atoms of oxygen, but we know by experience only oxygen, not atoms of oxygen. No man has ever been able to put himself in sensible contact with what alone can be immutable in oxygen, if there be anything immutable in it, its ultimate atoms. No man has seen, heard, touched, or tasted an ultimate atom of any kind of matter. We know nothing of atoms – nothing of what is permanent in nature – from direct experience. We must pass beyond such experience – beyond all testimony of the senses – when we believe in anything permanent in nature, not less than when we believe in something beyond and above nature. The atomic theory in chemistry demands a faith which transcends experience, not less than the theistic theory in religion.

Then, secondly, although we grant that there is a permanent element in the physical universe, something in matter itself which is self-existent and eternal, we still need, in order to account for the universe which we know, an Eternal Intelligence. The universe, regarded even only so far as it is admitted by all materialists no less than by theists and pantheists to be an effect, cannot be explained, as materialists think, merely physically. The atoms of matter are, it is said, eternal and immutable. Grant them to be so. There are, however, countless millions of them, and manifestly the universe is one, is a single, magnificent, and complicated system, is characterised by a marvellous unity in variety. We must be informed how the universe came to be a universe, – how it came to have the unity which underlies its diversity, – if it resulted from a countless multitude of ultimate causes. Did the atoms take counsel together and devise a common plan and work it out? That hypothesis is unspeakably absurd, yet it is rational in comparison with the notion that these atoms combined by mere chance, and by chance produced such a universe as that in which we live. Grant all the atoms of matter to be eternal, grant all the properties and forces which with the smallest degree of plausibility can be claimed for them to be eternal and immutable, and it is still beyond all expression improbable that these atoms with these forces, if unarranged, uncombined, ununified, unutilised by a presiding mind, would give rise to anything entitled to be called a universe. It is millions to one that they would never produce the simplest of the regular arrangements which we comprehend under the designation of course of nature, or the lowest of vegetable or animal organisms; millions of millions to one that they would never produce a solar system, the earth, the animal kingdom, or human history. No number of material atoms, although eternal and endowed with mechanical force, can explain the unity and order of the universe, and therefore the supposition of their existence does not free us from the necessity of believing in a single intelligent cause – a Supreme Mind – to move and mould, combine and adjust, the ultimate atoms of matter into a single orderly system. There at once rises the question, Is it really necessary to believe both matter and mind to be eternal? No, must be our answer. The law of parsimony of causes directly forbids the belief, unless we can show that one cause is insufficient to explain the universe. And that we cannot do. We can show that matter is insufficient, – that it cannot account of itself even for the physical universe, – but not that mind is insufficient, not that mind cannot account for anything that is in matter. On what grounds can it be shown that a mind possessed of sufficient power to originate the universe, the ultimate elements of matter being given, could not also have created these elements? that the Supreme Intelligence, which gave to each sun, and planet, and satellite its size, and shape, and position, and motion, could not have summoned into being their constituent particles? On none whatever. We may not understand how they could be created, but we have no reason for thinking that they could not be created; and it is surely far easier and far more reasonable to believe that they were created, than that a countless number of inconceivably small

indivisible particles of matter, lying far beyond the range of any of our senses, but extending through immeasurable fields of space, should all, inconceivably minute although they be, be self-existent and eternal. The man who asks us to accept the latter supposition, asks us, it seems to me, to believe what is not only as mysterious as the self-existence of Deity, but millions of millions of times more mysterious. I should require strong reasons for assigning infinitely great attributes to excessively little things, and to an inconceivable number of them; but I can in this instance find no reasons at all.

Then, in the third place, any plausible conceptions we can form of the ultimate nature of matter lead to the belief that even that is an event or effect, a something derivative and caused. It must be admitted that the most plausible of these conceptions are vague and conjectural. We have a practical and relative knowledge of matter which is both exact and trustworthy, – a knowledge of its properties from which we can mathematically deduce a multitude of remote consequences of an extremely precise character – but we are hardly entitled to characterise as knowledge at all any of the views which have been propounded as to what it is in itself. It is only the unreflecting who fancy that matter in itself is something very clear and obvious, which they may apprehend by merely opening their eyes and stretching out their hands. Those who have never reasoned on the subject are apt to imagine that the nature of matter is of all things the easiest to understand, and they unhesitatingly invest it with their own sensations and perceptions. That is the so-called commonsense view of matter; but the slightest inquiry proves it to be delusive and nonsensical. Colour, for example, is just what is seen, and sound just what is heard; they are not qualities inherent in objects independent of the eye and ear: the matter which is supposed to cause by its motions on our senses these and other perceptions of the material world, we cannot see, hear, or apprehend by any sense. Change our senses and the universe will be thereby changed, everything in it becoming something other than it was before, green perhaps red, the bitter sweet, the loudest noise a gentle whisper, the hardest substance soft. As soon, then, as we thoughtfully ask ourselves, What is matter? we begin to discover that it is in itself something utterly mysterious. The collection of phenomena which we call its properties are quite unlike the phenomena of mind in this most important respect, that whatever they may be they are not what they appear to be. A state of mind is what we feel it to be; a state of matter is certainly not what we seem to ourselves to perceive it to be. No one, of course, knew all this better than Mr Mill. He, as a philosopher, had asked himself what matter is; he had formed a theory in answer to the question. And what is his theory? Just this, – that we cannot find a permanent element in matter; that we have no right to suppose that there is a permanent real existence or actual substance in matter; that all that we are warranted to affirm about the ultimate nature of matter is that it is a permanent possibility, – the permanent possibility of sensations. That was the conclusion which he arrived at when he theorised on matter without any theological aim. But he appears to have forgotten it when he came to criticise the argument for a first cause. He could not otherwise have written as if it were quite certain that there was in matter "a permanent element," not an underlying possibility but an inherent real substance. Had he remembered what his own theory as to the nature of matter was, he would have avoided as utterly untrue and misleading every expression which could suggest the notion of there being a permanent element in matter, and would have admitted that very probably the permanent possibilities of sensation, the causes of all material phenomena, lay in the Divine will, since he had been unable to find anything else permanent in which they could be supposed to subsist. That is a view which many profound thinkers have adopted. They have been led to hold that matter is essentially force, and nothing but force; that the whole material world is ultimately resolvable into forces; and that all its forces are but manifestations or outgoings of will-force. If so, the whole material world is not only dependent on, but *is*

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