1 The Existence of God: Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion**

Perhaps the shortest and most elegant proof of God's existence ever devised is what has since come to be called the 'ontological argument'. Originally formulated in the eleventh century by St Anselm of Canterbury in his *Proslogion* ('Discourse'), the argument works entirely *a priori* – that is to say, it does not require any premise drawn from experience or observation of the world. Instead it focuses simply on the concept or definition of God as the utterly supreme being – or as Anselm puts it, 'that than which nothing greater can be thought'. So far, of course, nothing is assumed about whether such a being actually exists, since that would beg the question. But Anselm now proceeds to consider two possibilities: either such a being truly exists in reality, or else he exists only in the mind of the believer. Yet to exist in reality is surely greater than to exist only in someone's mind. So if God exists only in the mind, then something greater *can* be thought, which contradicts the original definition. Hence it follows, Anselm argues, that God, defined as 'that than which nothing greater can be thought', must necessarily exist not merely in the understanding but in actual reality.

The argument has fascinated and exasperated critics ever since. A contemporary of Anselm, the monk Gaunilo, objected that if we grant Anselm's premise that it is more excellent to exist in reality than to exist merely in the mind, then we would be able (absurdly) to prove that the mythical lost island of Oceanea, supposed to be superior in abundance of riches to all other lands, must indeed exist. Anselm replied that the logic of his argument applied not to such relatively perfect things but *only* to the utterly supreme reality, 'that than which a greater cannot be thought'. His general line of argument was later revived by René Descartes, who started from the definition of God as the sum of all perfections, and maintained that existence could no more be separated from such a being than the property of having its angles equal to 180 degrees could be separated from the essence of a triangle. But why should perfection or greatness imply existence? A good deal of later discussion of the argument has centred on this point; indeed, following an objection raised by Immanuel Kant, many have questioned whether existence should rightly be thought of as a predicate at all (is there not something odd in treating real existence as something that belongs to an object, alongside the other properties it has?).[1] The most serious worry for defenders of the argument seems to be this: even if we grant that Anselm has shown that whatever qualifies for the title *greatest thinkable being* must exist, is it not still an open question whether there is anything which does qualify for this title in the first place?

The mind stirred up to the contemplation of God

Come now, wretched man, escape for a moment from your preoccupations and draw back a little while from your seething thoughts. Lay aside for now your burdensome worries and put off your wearisome tasks. Empty yourself to God for a little while, and rest a short time in him. Enter the private chamber of your mind, shut out everything except God and whatever may help you to search for him; lock the door and seek him out. Speak now, my whole heart, and say to God 'I seek thy face; thy face Lord will I seek'.[2]

* Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion* [1077–8], ch. 1 (excerpts), chs 2–5. Translation from the Latin by John Cottingham.

[1] For the reference to Descartes and Kant, see Suggestions for Further Reading at the end of this Part.

[2] Psalm 27: 8 (26: 8 in the Vulgate (Latin) version).

...I acknowledge and give thanks, Lord, that you have created me in this your image, so that I may be mindful of you, and think of you and love you. But the image is so scraped and worn away by my vices, so darkened by the smoke of my sins, that it cannot do what it was created to do unless you renew and reform it. I will not attempt, Lord, to reach your height, for my understanding falls so far short of it. But I desire to understand your truth just a little, the truth that my heart believes and loves. I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but I believe in order that I may understand. For this also I believe: unless I believe, I shall not understand.

God truly exists

So, Lord, you who give understanding to those who have faith, grant me to understand, so far as you judge it fit, that you indeed exist as we believe, and that you are what we believe you to be. Now we believe that you are *something than which nothing greater can be thought.* Is there then no such being, since 'the fool hath said in his heart: there is no God'?[1] Yet surely this same fool, when he hears the very words I now speak – 'something than which nothing greater can be thought' – understands what he hears; and what he understands exists in his understanding, even if he does not understand that it actually exists. For it is one thing for an object to exist in the understanding, and another to understand that the object exists. When an artist thinks in advance of what he is about to paint, he has it in his understanding, but does not yet understand it to exist, since he has not yet painted it. But when he has painted it, then he both has it in his understanding and also understands that it exists, since he has painted it. Hence even the fool must agree that there exists, in the understanding at least, something than which nothing greater can be thought; for when he hears this expression he understands it, and whatever is understood exists in the understanding. Yet surely *that than which a greater cannot be thought* cannot exist in the understanding alone. For once granted that it exists, if only in the understanding, it can be thought of as existing in reality, and this is greater. Hence if *that than which a greater cannot be thought* exists solely in the understanding, it would follow that the very thing than which a greater *cannot* be thought turns out to be that than which a greater *can* be thought; but this is clearly impossible. Hence something than which a greater cannot be thought undoubtedly exists both in the understanding and in reality.

God cannot be thought not to exist

And certainly this entity so truly exists that it cannot be thought not to exist. For it is possible to think of a being which cannot be thought of as not existing; and this is greater than that something which can be thought of as not existing. So if *that than which a greater cannot be thought* can be thought not to exist, it would follow that the very same thing than which a greater cannot be thought is *not* that than which a

[1] Psalm 14: 1 (13: 1 in the Vulgate).

greater cannot be thought; and this is inconsistent. Hence something than which a greater cannot be thought exists so truly that it cannot even be thought not to exist.

And this being is you, O Lord our God. So truly do you exist, O Lord my God, that you cannot even be thought not to exist. And how appropriate this is. For if some mind could think of something better than you, then a created being would rise above its creator and judge its creator, which is utterly absurd. Moreover, everything there is, apart from you alone, can be thought not to exist. You alone of all things possess existence in the truest sense and to the highest degree; for whatever else there is does not exist as truly, and so possesses existence to a lesser degree. Why then is it that 'the fool hath said in his heart there is no God', since it is so obvious to the rational mind that you exist to the greatest degree of all? Why, except that he is indeed dull and foolish!

How the fool said in his heart what cannot be thought

But how did he come to say in his heart what he could not think; or how was it impossible for him to think what he said in his heart, given that saying in one's heart and thinking are one and the same? Did he really both think it, since he said it in his heart, and also not say it in his heart, because he could not think it? If this is so, indeed since it is so, then there is more than one sense in which something is 'said in one's heart' or 'thought': a thing is thought in one sense when we think of the word signifying it, but in another sense when we understand what the thing itself is. In the former sense, then, God can be thought not to exist, but not at all in the latter sense. For no one who understands what God is can think that God does not exist, even though he may say the words in his heart without any sense, or in some strange sense. For God is *that than which a greater cannot be thought*. And if someone understands this clearly, he understands that this being exists in such a way that he cannot not exist, even in thought. Hence he who understands that God exists in this way cannot think that he does not exist.

I give you thanks, good Lord, that what I formerly believed through your gift of faith, I now understand through the light which you bestow; so much so that the truth of your existence, even if I were unwilling to believe it, is now something I cannot fail to understand.

God is whatever is better to be than not to be; he alone, existing through himself, makes all other things from nothing

What are you then, lord God, you than whom nothing greater can be thought? What are you but the supreme being, the only being who exists through itself, and the one who has made all other things from nothing? For whatever falls short of this is *less* than what can be thought, and this cannot be thought true of you. So can any good thing be lacking in the supreme good, the source of every good that exists? You are therefore just, truthful, blessed and whatever is better to be than not to be; for it is better to be just than unjust, and better to be blessed than not.

2 The Five Proofs of God: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae**

By common consent, the greatest philosopher-theologian of the Middle Ages was St Thomas Aquinas (see introduction to Part IV, extract 3). In the following extract from his monumental *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas sets out no less than five proofs of the existence of God, based on Aristotelian principles. The ontological argument (see previous extract) is not among them, since Aquinas regarded its validity as suspect; instead of proceeding purely *a priori*, all the five 'ways' deployed by Aquinas depend partly on what are taken to be empirical facts about the world.[1]

In the *first* proof, Aquinas argues that since some things move, and whatever moves is caused to move by something other than itself, then either the chain of movers goes back infinitely far (which is impossible) or else there is a first, unmoved, mover, an original source of motion – and this is God. This compressed summary is perhaps easier to understand than Aquinas's own more elaborate formulation, which relies on a considerable amount of Aristotelian jargon. For example, he follows Aristotle in using 'motion' in a very broad sense, including any qualitative change which a body may undergo, and also in construing motion as the bringing of something from 'potentiality' to 'actuality'. Thus, when a piece of wood is heated, it is brought from a state of merely being potentially hot to a state of being actually hot, as a result of the action of something like fire, which is 'actually hot'. In such cases there is always a transition from potentiality to actuality: something cannot be both in actuality and potentiality in the same respect at the same time, as Aquinas puts it. It follows that something cannot both be mover (the cause of change) and moved (undergoing change) in the same respect at the same time; so 'whatever is in motion is moved by something else'. Aquinas then argues that this sequence cannot continue back *ad infinitum*, and 'hence it is necessary to arrive at a *first mover which is moved by nothing else*' – and this everyone thinks of as God. Whatever we make of the individual steps of the argument, it is doubtful that the argument succeeds in establishing that there must be a *single* prime mover; nor is it clear that there is anything impossible in the idea of a chain of movers stretching back *ad infinitum*. Similar difficulties beset the *second* way, which is very like the first in structure, but takes the fact that some things are *caused* as its premise, and reasons to the conclusion that to account for this (since the chain of causes cannot stretch back for ever)[2] we must ultimately arrive at a first (uncaused) cause, which is God.

The *third* proof (sometimes called the proof 'from the contingency of the world') starts from the fact that some things come into being and pass away, and are hence contingent (they can either be, or not be) as opposed to necessary. But if

* From *Summa Theologiae* [1266–73], Part I, question 2, article 3. Translation by John Cottingham.

[1] Arguments for God which start from a feature of the world as it is are often called 'cosmological arguments', but the use of this term in the philosophical literature is not fully consistent. Sometimes the label is reserved for the kind of proof which starts from the fact that anything exists at all (asking 'why is there something rather than nothing?'), and argues that the explanation must be sought in the existence of a being who contains the reason for existence within himself; for an example of this type of proof, see opening paragraph of extract 5, below.

[2] To support this, Aquinas reasons that 'if any one cause is taken away, the effect will also be absent. Hence if there was not a first item in the series, there will be no intermediate items.' This seems unfair as it stands, since the defender of an infinite backward chain is not, as it were, 'taking away' a first item, but simply denying that if we trace the chain backwards it would ever terminate. Elsewhere, however, Aquinas concedes that we cannot prove that the world ever had a beginning, so it seems he has no logical objection to an infinite backward chain as such. So his point here may hinge on the kind of *dependence* each effect has on its cause: for causation to operate at all, such a chain of dependent items requires an independent (uncaused) cause.

everything were like this, Aquinas argues, then at some time in the past nothing whatever would have existed (the logic of this is obscure: why should there not always be a time when at least some contingent things exist, even though each of them is capable of ceasing to be?). At all events, Aquinas proceeds to reason that to explain why there is anything at all we must eventually posit a necessary being in the strong sense of something which 'is necessary in its own right' or 'necessary of itself' (*per se necessarium*); and this is God.

The *fourth* proof starts from the degrees of perfection found in the world: in order for things to be more or less good, or have more or less being, than others, there must ultimately be a supreme entity which is the source of all being and goodness, and this is God. One might object that degrees of goodness imply only that there is something relatively or comparatively pre-eminent, not that there is a wholly supreme divine source of goodness. Here Aquinas seems to rely on a framework inherited from Plato, according to which ordinary objects which are good, or beautiful, or whatever, owe their (limited) possession of these properties to the existence of a pure form which they participate in, or reflect – a form which is itself perfectly good or beautiful (compare Part I, extract 2, and Part II, extract 1). Finally, in the *fifth* proof (often known as the 'teleological argument', from the Greek *telos*, meaning 'end' or 'goal'), Aquinas starts from the fact that even non-conscious objects often operate for the sake of some end, or tend towards some goal; such teleological behaviour could not be manifested by things which lack awareness unless they were directed by an intelligent being – 'and this we call God'. This last argument has some close similarities with the 'argument from design' which became popular in the eighteenth century, and was devastatingly criticized by Hume (see extract 6, below). Aquinas here gives no examples of the kinds of teleological action he has in mind, but elsewhere (in his other magnum opus, the *Summa Contra Gentiles*), he mentions the way the leaves in plants are shaped to protect their fruit, and how the structure of animals' teeth is suited to the functions of biting and chewing. Modern evolutionary science, of course, aims to account for such goal-adapted phenomena on purely mechanical principles;[1] supporters of Aquinas's position would argue that the *ultimate* explanation for the phenomena in question must be sought in the directive intelligence of God.

The existence of God can be proved in five ways

The first and quite obvious way is taken from a consideration of motion. It is certain and agreed on the basis of what our senses tell us that some things in this world are in motion. But whatever is in motion is moved by something else; for nothing undergoes motion except in so far as it is in a state of *potentiality* in respect of that towards which it is moved. A thing moves in the active sense, on the other hand, in so far as it is in *actuality*. For moving in this sense is simply bringing something from potentiality to actuality; but nothing can be brought into actuality except by something which is itself in actuality. For example, something which is actually hot, like fire, makes wood, which is hot in potentiality, hot in actuality, thereby moving and altering it. Now it is not possible for the same thing to be, at the same time and in the same respect, both in actuality and in potentiality (for what is actually hot cannot be at the same time potentially hot, though it may be potentially cold). So it is impossible that (in the same respect and in the same way) something should be both mover and moved, or that it should move itself. Hence whatever is in motion is moved by something else. And if this something else is itself moved, it must in turn be moved by something

[1] It is worth noting that Aquinas himself seems at one point to allow for the possibility of some kind of evolution; see *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 118, art. 2.

else, and so on. But the sequence cannot continue *ad infinitum*, since in this case there would not be any first mover, and hence nothing would move anything else, since subsequent moving things do not move unless moved by an original mover (just as a stick does not move unless moved by a hand). Hence it is necessary to arrive at a first mover which is moved by nothing else; and this everyone understands to be God.

The second way is taken from the notion of an efficient cause. In the world that we perceive around us we find an order of efficient causes, but we never find, nor is it possible that there should be, something that is the efficient cause of itself; for if there were, it would have to be prior to itself, which is impossible. But it is not possible for the series of efficient causes to go on *ad infinitum*. For in each ordered series of efficient causes, the first item is the cause of the next item, and this in turn is the cause of the final item (though there may be more than one intermediate step); and if any one cause is taken away, the effect will also be absent. Hence if there was not a first item in the series of efficient causes, there will be no intermediate or final items. But if the series of efficient causes stretches back *ad infinitum*, there will be no first efficient cause, which will mean that there will be no final effect, and no intermediate efficient causes, which is patently not the case. Hence it is necessary to posit some first efficient cause; and this everyone calls 'God'.

The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and goes as follows. We come across some things which are merely *possibles* – they can both be and not be; for example we find some things coming into being and passing away, and hence having the possibility of being and not being. But it is impossible for everything there is to be of this sort, since if something has the possibility of not being, then at some time or other it lacks being. So if all things have the possibility of not being, at some time there was nothing at all. But if this were the case, then there would still be nothing now, since what lacks being does not begin to be except through something which is. So if nothing was in being, it was impossible for anything to begin to be, and so there would still be nothing, which is patently not the case. Hence not all beings are possibles, but there must be something in the world which is necessary. Now everything which is necessary either has the cause of its necessity from elsewhere, or it does not. But it is not possible that a sequence of necessary beings having the cause of their necessity elsewhere should continue *ad infinitum* (as was proved in the case of efficient causes). So it is necessary to posit something which is necessary in its own right, and does not have the cause of its necessity from elsewhere but is itself the cause of necessity in other things; and this everyone calls 'God'.

The fourth way is taken from the gradations to be found in things. We come across some things which are more or less good, or true or noble than others, and so on. But 'more' and 'less' are terms used of different things by reference to how close they are to what is greatest of its kind (for example, something is 'hotter' if it is closer to what is hottest). Hence there is something which is truest and best and noblest, and consequently greatest in being; for things which are truest are greatest in being, as Aristotle says in Book II of his *Metaphysics*. Now what we call the greatest in any kind is the cause of everything of that kind, just as fire, which has the greatest heat, is the cause of everything hot (as Aristotle says in the same book). Hence there is something which is the cause of being and goodness and every other perfection in things; and this we call 'God'.

The fifth way is taken from the manner in which things are directed or guided. We see some things that lack knowledge, namely natural bodies, working for the sake of a

goal or end. This is clear from the fact that they always or often act in the same way to pursue what is best; and this shows that they reach their goal not by chance but from directedness. But things which do not have knowledge do not tend towards a goal unless they are guided by something with knowledge and intelligence, as an arrow is by the archer. Hence there is some intelligent being by whom all natural things are directed to their goal or end; and this we call 'God'.

3 God and the Idea of Perfection: René Descartes, *Meditations**

Although philosophy is often said to have made a 'new start' in the seventeenth century, many of the great thinkers of the early modern period continued to place God at the heart of the new philosophical and scientific systems they developed. This is certainly true of Descartes, who argues in his metaphysical masterpiece the *Meditations* [1641] that without a sure demonstration of the existence of God, no reliable system of knowledge is possible (for the role of God in the resulting metaphysical system, see Part II, extract 3 above). The *Meditations* contains two purported proofs of God: in the Fifth Meditation Descartes puts forward a version of the ontological argument first developed by Anselm (see extract 1 above), while in the Third Meditation we find a different argument, reproduced below, which has come to be known as the 'Trademark argument'.

Since Descartes's 'meditator' in his search for truth has suspended his belief in all external things, applying universal doubt to the point where he is certain only of his own existence (see Part I, extract 4), he is unable to draw on evidence from the world around him in order to prove God (contrast Aquinas, extract 2, above). Instead he reflects on the *idea* of God which he finds within him. Now ideas are rather like pictures – they represent things, or as Descartes puts it, they have a certain 'objective' or representational reality (the term 'objective' in Descartes has nothing to do with whether the objects represented by our ideas actually exist: at this stage we are talking only of their representational *content*). The content of most of my ideas, reasons the meditator, is such that I could easily have thought them up myself; but the content of one idea, that of a supremely perfect, infinite being, is so great that it cannot have been produced from the resources of my own (imperfect and finite) mind, but must have been implanted in me by God, like the 'mark which a craftsman stamps on his work'.

But why cannot an imperfect being produce an idea of perfection? Descartes here relies on the causal principle that what is more perfect cannot arise from what is less perfect – a notion that many subsequent critics have questioned, especially when it is applied not to real things but to mere ideas. Descartes later clarified his argument using a comparison with a very perfect machine, the idea of which is in the mind of some engineer: 'just as the complexity belonging to the idea must have some cause, namely the knowledge of the engineer, or of someone who passed this idea on to him, so the idea of God which is in us must have God for its cause'.[1] The end of the Third Meditation sees the meditator lost in contemplation of the 'immense light' of the divine nature which almost blinds the eye of his own 'darkened intellect': the intellectual mode of rational argument here gives way to the more passionate mode of submission and adoration. Throughout Descartes's trademark argument we can discern a common tension or paradox in philosophical theology – how may the finite human mind articulate the notion of an infinite being whose greatness far exceeds the mind's power to comprehend it?

* René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* [*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, 1641], extract from the Third Meditation. Trans. J. Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[1] From the *Synopsis* published as part of the preliminary matter to the *Meditations*.

But now it occurs to me that there is another way of investigating whether some of the things of which I possess ideas exist outside me. In so far as the ideas are considered simply as modes of thought, there is no recognizable inequality among them: they all appear to come from within me in the same fashion. But in so far as different ideas are considered as images which represent different things, it is clear that they differ widely. Undoubtedly, the ideas which represent substances to me amount to something more and, so to speak, contain within themselves more *objective reality* than the ideas which merely represent modes or accidents. Again, the idea that gives me my understanding of a supreme God, eternal, infinite, immutable, omniscient, omnipotent and the creator of all things that exist apart from him, certainly has in it more objective reality than the ideas that represent finite substances.

Now it is manifest by the natural light that there must be at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause. For where, I ask, could the effect get its reality from, if not from the cause? And how could the cause give it to the effect unless it possessed it? It follows from this both that something cannot arise from nothing, and also that what is more perfect – that is, contains in itself more reality – cannot arise from what is less perfect. And this is transparently true not only in the case of effects which possess what the philosophers call actual or formal reality, but also in the case of ideas, where one is considering only what they call objective reality. A stone, for example, which previously did not exist, cannot begin to exist unless it is produced by something which contains, either formally or eminently everything to be found in the stone; similarly, heat cannot be produced in an object which was not previously hot, except by something of at least the same order of perfection as heat, and so on. But it is also true that the *idea* of heat, or of a stone, cannot exist in me unless it is put there by some cause which contains at least as much reality as I conceive to be in the heat or in the stone. For although this cause does not transfer any of its actual or formal reality to my idea, it should not on that account be supposed that it must be less real. The nature of an idea is such that of itself it requires no formal reality except what it derives from my thought, of which it is a mode. But in order for a given idea to contain such and such objective reality, it must surely derive it from some cause which contains at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the idea. For if we suppose that an idea contains something which was not in its cause, it must have got this from nothing; yet the mode of being by which a thing exists objectively or representatively in the intellect by way of an idea, imperfect though it may be, is certainly not nothing, and so it cannot come from nothing.

And although the reality which I am considering in my ideas is merely objective reality, I must not on that account suppose that the same reality need not exist formally in the causes of my ideas, but that it is enough for it to be present in them objectively. For just as the objective mode of being belongs to ideas by their very nature, so the formal mode of being belongs to the causes of ideas – or at least the first and most important ones – by *their* very nature. And although one idea may perhaps originate from another, there cannot be an infinite regress here; eventually one must reach a primary idea, the cause of which will be like an archetype which contains formally and in fact all the reality or perfection which is present only objectively or representatively in the idea. So it is clear to me, by the natural light, that the ideas in me are like pictures, or images which can easily fall short of the

perfection of the things from which they are taken, but which cannot contain anything greater or more perfect.

The longer and more carefully I examine all these points, the more clearly and distinctly I recognize their truth. But what is my conclusion to be? If the objective reality of any of my ideas turns out to be so great that I am sure the same reality does not reside in me, either formally or eminently, and hence that I myself cannot be its cause, it will necessarily follow that I am not alone in the world, but that some other thing which is the cause of this idea also exists. But if no such idea is to be found in me, I shall have no argument to convince me of the existence of anything apart from myself. For despite a most careful and comprehensive survey, this is the only argument I have so far been able to find.

Among my ideas, apart from the idea which gives me a representation of myself, which cannot present any difficulty in this context, there are ideas which variously represent God, corporeal and inanimate things, angels, animals and finally other men like myself.

As far as concerns the ideas which represent other men, or animals, or angels, I have no difficulty in understanding that they could be put together from the ideas I have of myself, of corporeal things and of God, even if the world contained no men besides me, no animals and no angels.

As to my ideas of corporeal things, I can see nothing in them which is so great or excellent as to make it seem impossible that it originated in myself. For if I scrutinize them thoroughly and examine them one by one, in the way in which I examined the idea of the wax yesterday, I notice that the things which I perceive clearly and distinctly in them are very few in number. The list comprises size, or extension in length, breadth and depth; shape, which is a function of the boundaries of this extension; position, which is a relation between various items possessing shape; and motion, or change in position; to these may be added substance, duration and number. But as for all the rest, including light and colours, sounds, smells, tastes, heat and cold and the other tactile qualities, I think of these only in a very confused and obscure way, to the extent that I do not even know whether they are true or false, that is, whether the ideas I have of them are ideas of real things or of non-things. For although, as I have noted before, falsity in the strict sense, or formal falsity, can occur only in judgements, there is another kind of falsity, material falsity, which occurs in ideas, when they represent non-things as things. For example, the ideas which I have of heat and cold contain so little clarity and distinctness that they do not enable me to tell whether cold is merely the absence of heat or vice versa, or whether both of them are real qualities, or neither is. And since there can be no ideas which are not as it were of things, if it is true that cold is nothing but the absence of heat, the idea which represents it to me as something real and positive deserves to be called false; and the same goes for other ideas of this kind.

Such ideas obviously do not require me to posit a source distinct from myself. For on the one hand, if they are false, that is, represent non-things, I know by the natural light that they arise from nothing, that is, they are in me only because of a deficiency and lack of perfection in my nature. If on the other hand they are true, then since the reality which they represent is so extremely slight that I cannot even distinguish it from a non-thing, I do not see why they cannot originate from myself.

With regard to the clear and distinct elements in my ideas of corporeal things, it appears that I could have borrowed some of these from my idea of myself, namely

substance, duration, number and anything else of this kind. For example, I think that a stone is a substance, or is a thing capable of existing independently, and I also think that I am a substance. Admittedly I conceive of myself as a thing that thinks and is not extended, whereas I conceive of the stone as a thing that is extended and does not think, so that the two conceptions differ enormously;[1] but they seem to agree with respect to the classification 'substance'. Again, I perceive that I now exist, and remember that I have existed for some time; moreover, I have various thoughts which I can count; it is in these ways that I acquire the ideas of duration and number which I can then transfer to other things. As for all the other elements which make up the ideas of corporeal things, namely extension, shape, position and movement, these are not formally contained in me, since I am nothing but a thinking thing; but since they are merely modes of a substance, and I am a substance, it seems possible that they are contained in me eminently [in a higher form].

So there remains only the idea of God; and I must consider whether there is anything in the idea which could not have originated in myself. By the word 'God' I understand a substance that is infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and which created both myself and everything else (if anything else there be) that exists. All these attributes are such that, the more carefully I concentrate on them, the less possible it seems that they could have originated from me alone. So from what has been said it must be concluded that God necessarily exists.

It is true that I have the idea of substance in me in virtue of the fact that I am a substance; but this would not account for my having the idea of an infinite substance, when I am finite, unless this idea proceeded from some substance which really was infinite.

And I must not think that, just as my conceptions of rest and darkness are arrived at by negating movement and light, so my perception of the infinite is arrived at not by means of a true idea but merely by negating the finite. On the contrary, I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one, and hence that my perception of the infinite, that is God, is in some way prior to my perception of the finite, that is myself. For how could I understand that I doubted or desired – that is, lacked something – and that I was not wholly perfect, unless there were in me some idea of a more perfect being which enabled me to recognize my own defects by comparison?

Nor can it be said that this idea of God is perhaps materially false and so could have come from nothing – which is what I observed just a moment ago in the case of the ideas of heat and cold, and so on. On the contrary it is utterly clear and distinct, and contains in itself more objective reality than any other idea; hence there is no idea which is in itself truer or less liable to be suspected of falsehood. This idea of a supremely perfect and infinite being is, I say, true in the highest degree; for although perhaps one may imagine that such a being does not exist, it cannot be supposed that the idea of such a being represents something unreal, as I said with regard to the idea of cold. The idea is, moreover, utterly clear and distinct; for whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive as being real and true, and implying any perfection, is wholly contained in it. It does not matter that I do not grasp the infinite, or that there are

[1] See above, Part IV, extract 4.

countless additional attributes of God which I cannot in any way grasp, and perhaps cannot even reach in my thought; for it is in the nature of the infinite not to be grasped by a finite being like myself. It is enough that I understand the infinite, and that I judge that all the attributes which I clearly perceive and know to imply some perfection – and perhaps countless others of which I am ignorant – are present in God either formally or eminently. This is enough to make the idea that I have of God the truest and most clear and distinct of all my ideas.

But perhaps I am something greater than I myself understand, and all the perfections which I attribute to God are somehow in me potentially, though not yet emerging or actualized. For I am now experiencing a gradual increase in my knowledge, and I see nothing to prevent its increasing more and more to infinity. Further, I see no reason why I should not be able to use this increased knowledge to acquire all the other perfections of God. And finally, if the potentiality for these perfections is already within me, why should not this be enough to generate the idea of such perfections?

But all this is impossible. First, though it is true that there is a gradual increase in my knowledge, and that I have many potentialities which are not yet actual, this is all quite irrelevant to the idea of God, which contains absolutely nothing that is potential; indeed, this gradual increase in knowledge is itself the surest sign of imperfection. What is more, even if my knowledge always increases more and more, I recognize that it will never actually be infinite, since it will never reach the point where it is not capable of a further increase; God, on the other hand, I take to be actually infinite, so that nothing can be added to his perfection. And finally, I perceive that the objective being of an idea cannot be produced merely by potential being, which strictly speaking is nothing, but only by actual or formal being...

It only remains for me to examine how I received this idea from God. For I did not acquire it from the senses; it has never come to me unexpectedly, as usually happens with the ideas of things that are perceivable by the senses, when these things present themselves to the external sense organs – or seem to do so. And it was not invented by me either; for I am plainly unable either to take away anything from it or to add anything to it. The only remaining alternative is that it is innate in me, just as the idea of myself is innate in me.

And indeed it is no surprise that God, in creating me, should have placed this idea in me to be, as it were, the mark of the craftsman stamped on his work – not that the mark need be anything distinct from the work itself. But the mere fact that God created me is a very strong basis for believing that I am somehow made in his image and likeness and that I perceive that likeness, which includes the idea of God, by the same faculty which enables me to perceive myself. That is, when I turn my mind's eye upon myself, I understand that I am a thing which is incomplete and dependent on another and which aspires without limit to ever greater and better things; but I also understand at the same time that he on whom I depend has within him all those greater things, not just indefinitely and potentially but actually and infinitely, and hence that he is God. The whole force of the argument lies in this: I recognize that it would be impossible for me to exist with the kind of nature I have – that is having within me the idea of God – were it not the case that God really existed. By 'God' I mean the very being the idea of whom is within me that is, the possessor of all the perfections which I cannot grasp, but can somehow reach in my thought, who is

subject to no defects whatsoever. It is clear enough from this that he cannot be a deceiver, since it is manifest by the natural light that all fraud and deception depend on some defect.

But before examining this point more carefully and investigating other truths which may be derived from it, I should like to pause here and spend some time in the contemplation of God; to reflect on his attributes and to gaze with wonder and adoration on the beauty of this immense light, so far as the eye of my darkened intellect can bear it. For just as we believe through faith that the supreme happiness of the next life consists solely in the contemplation of the divine majesty, so experience tells us that this same contemplation, albeit much less perfect, enables us to know the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life.

4 The Wager: Blaise Pascal, *Pensées**

The theme (found in the previous extract) of the contemplation by the finite human mind of the infinite being that is God, recurs in our next passage, from the *Pensées* ('Thoughts', published posthumously in 1670) by Descartes's distinguished contemporary Blaise Pascal. But Pascal differed profoundly from Descartes on the role of reason in religious belief. He came to think that intellectual reasoning alone could not support religion: the key was passionate commitment and faith. Towards the end of the extract we find the recommendation that we need to 'tame' (*abêtir*) the human mind by devotion and repeated religious practice, such as attending Mass; the verb *abêtir* (literally 'make dull like the beasts') suggests that salvation lies in the kind of automatic and unthinking response characteristic of the animals who lack reason altogether. But though reason alone cannot lead us to God, Pascal sets out an ingenious argument that it is rational, on prudential grounds, to behave as if God exists. Given the lack of conclusive rational grounds for belief, we are in the position of having to wager or bet on his existence. If God exists, the consequence of accepting the bet, and committing oneself to a life of piety, will be an eternal life of happiness; if he does not exist, then one will have lost nothing by accepting.

A possible criticism of this argument is one raised by Pascal himself in the mouth of an imaginary objector: 'perhaps I am betting too much'; in other words, there is a price to be paid in accepting the bet, namely forgoing the unbeliever's life of 'luxury and glory' for the sake of an afterlife that may never be realized, if death is indeed the final end. Pascal's reply here is that it would be irrational to pass up the chance of an infinite gain (eternal life of happiness) to avoid a finite loss. But he has perhaps slanted the argument by assuming that the rewards of the unbeliever's life of self-indulgence are 'tainted'. If, as the libertine might maintain, the (admittedly finite) rewards of vice are concrete and substantial, would it necessarily be irrational to forgo them in exchange for a slim chance of an infinite gain?[1]

Our soul is thrown into the body, where it finds number, time and dimensions; it then reasons about this and calls it 'nature' or 'necessity', and can believe nothing else.

Unity when joined to the infinite does not increase it at all, any more than a foot when added to an infinite length. The finite annihilates itself in the presence of the

* Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* ('Thoughts') [1670]. Translation by John Cottingham. The French text may be found in the edition of L. Lafuma (Paris: Seuil, 1962), no. 418. An English version of the *Pensées* is available by A. J. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).

[1] Compare Plato's discussion of the rewards of vice and virtue: Part VIII, extract 1, below.

infinite, and becomes a pure nothing. So does our mind when confronted with God, so does our justice before divine justice. Yet the disproportion between our justice and God's is not as great as that between unity and infinity.

The justice of God must be as enormous as his mercy. The justice he shows to the damned is less enormous and should shock us less than the mercy he shows to the elect.

We know that there is an infinite, and we are ignorant of its nature. Similarly, we know it is false that the series of numbers is finite, and it is therefore true that there is an infinite number, but we do not know what it is. It is false that it is even; it is false that it is odd; for by adding a unit the infinite does not change its nature. Yet it is a number, and every number is even or odd – this may be truly understood of every finite number.

Thus we can perfectly well recognize that there is a God, without knowing what he is.

Is there not a substantial truth, seeing there are so many true things which are not truth itself?

We know the existence and the nature of the finite, since we, like it, are finite and extended.

We know the existence of the infinite and we are ignorant of its nature, since it has extension like us, but does not have limits as we do.

But we do not know either the existence or the nature of God, because he has neither extension nor limits.

But by faith we know his existence, and in glory we shall come to know his nature.

Now I have already shown that one may quite well know the existence of a thing without knowing its nature.

Let us now speak according to our natural lights.

If there is a God, he is infinitely beyond our comprehension, since having neither parts nor limits he bears no relation to us. We are thus incapable of knowing either what he is or if he is. This being so, who will dare undertake to resolve this question? Surely not we, who bear no relation to him.

Who then will blame Christians for not being able to provide reasons for their belief, since they profess a religion for which they cannot provide a rational basis? In proclaiming it to the world they declare that it is 'folly', and will you then complain that they do not prove it? If they were to prove it, they would not be keeping their word. This very lack of proof shows they do not lack sense. 'Yes; but even if this excuses those who offer their religion in this way and takes away any blame for their putting it forward without reason, it does not excuse those who *accept* it without reason.' Let us then examine this point. Let us say: either God is, or he is not. But which side shall we incline towards? Reason cannot settle anything here. There is an infinite chaos which separates us. A game is being played at the far end of this infinite distance: the coin will come down heads or tails. How will you bet? Reason will not enable you to decide either way, or rule out either alternative.

So do not blame those who have made a choice, or say they have chosen a false path, for you know nothing of the matter. 'No, but I will blame them for having made not *this* choice but *a* choice; for though the player who chooses heads is no more at fault than the other one, both of them are still at fault. The correct option is not to bet at all.'

Yes, but you must bet. It is not voluntary; you are already involved. Which will you choose then? Look: since you must choose, let us see which is the less profitable option. You have two things to lose, the true and the good, and two things to stake, your reason and your will, your knowledge and your happiness. Your nature has two things to avoid, error and wretchedness. Since a choice must necessarily be made, your reason is no more offended by choosing one rather than the other. There is one point settled. But your happiness? Let us weigh up the gain and the loss in choosing heads, that God exists. Let us figure out the two results: if you win, you win everything, and if you lose, you lose nothing. So bet that he exists, without any hesitation. 'This is splendid: yes, I must bet, but maybe I am betting too much.' Let us see. Since there is an equal chance of gain and loss, if you stood merely to gain merely two lives for one, you could still bet. But suppose you had three lives to gain?

You would have to play (since you must necessarily play), and you would be foolish, since you are forced to play, not to risk your life to gain three lives in a game where there is equal chance of losing and winning. But there is an eternity of life and happiness. This being so, in a game where there were an infinity of chances and only one in your favour, you would still be right to wager one life in order to gain two; and you would be making the wrong choice, given that you were obliged to play, if you refused to bet one life against three in a game where there were an infinity of chances and only one in your favour, if the prize were an infinity of infinitely happy life. But the prize here *is* an infinity of infinitely happy life, one chance of winning against a finite number of chances of losing, and what you are staking is finite. This leaves only one choice open, in any game that involves infinity, where there is not an infinite number of chances of losing to set against the chance of winning. There is nothing to ponder – you must stake everything. When you are forced to play, you would have to be renouncing reason if you were to hang on to life rather than risk it for an infinite gain which is just as likely to come about as a loss which is a loss of nothing.

It is no use saying that it is uncertain whether you will win and certain that you are taking a chance; or that the infinite distance between the certainty of what you are risking and the uncertainty of what you stand to gain makes the finite good which you are certainly risking as great as the infinite gain that is uncertain. This is not how things stand. Every player takes a certain risk in exchange for an uncertain gain; but it is no sin against reason for him to take a certain and finite risk for an uncertain finite gain. It is just not true that there is an infinite distance between the certainty of what is risked and the uncertainty of the gain. There is, in truth, an infinite distance between the certainty of winning and the certainty of losing; but the proportion between the uncertainty of winning and the certainty of what is being risked corresponds to the proportion between the chances of winning and losing. From this it follows that if there are as many chances on one side as on the other, the game is being played for even odds. And hence the certainty of what you are risking is equal to the uncertainty of the possible gain, so far from being infinitely distant from it. There is thus infinite force in the position I am taking, when the stakes are finite in a game where the chances of winning and losing are equal and the prize is infinite.

This result has demonstrative force, and if human beings are capable of any truth, this is it.

'I confess it, I admit it, but is there not any way at all of seeing what lies behind the game?' Yes, Holy Scripture and the rest. 'Yes, but my hands are tied and my mouth is gagged; I am being forced to wager and I am not at liberty. I cannot get free and my constitution is such that I am incapable of believing. So what do you want me to do?' What you say is true, but you must at least realize that your inability to believe comes from your passions. Since reason moves you to believe, and nevertheless you cannot, your task is not to convince yourself by adding on more proofs of God, but by reducing your passions. Your desired destination is faith, but you do not know the road. You want to cure yourself of unbelief, and you ask for remedies: learn from those who were tied like you and who now wager all they possess. These are people who know the road you would like to follow; they are cured of the malady for which you seek a cure; so follow them and begin as they did – by acting as if they believed, by taking holy water, by having masses said, and so on. In the natural course of events this in itself will make you believe, this will tame you. 'But that is just what I fear.' Why? What have you to lose? If you want to know why this is the right way, the answer is that it reduces the passions, which are the great obstacles to your progress...

Now what harm will come to you if you make this choice? You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, a doer of good works, a good friend, sincere and true. Admittedly you will not dwell amid tainted pleasures, in glory and luxury, but will you not have others?

I tell you that you will be the gainer in this life, and that on every step you take on this path you will see such certainty of gain, and such emptiness of what you hazard, that you will finally know that what you have wagered for is something certain and infinite, and what you have given in exchange is nothing.

'This discussion moves me and delights me.' If you like my discussion and find it powerful, you should know that the author is a man who knelt down before and afterwards to beg this infinite and indivisible being, to whom he submits his own entire being, to bring your being too into submission, for your own good and for his glory, praying that strength and humbleness might thus be brought together.

5 The Problem of Evil: Gottfried Leibniz, *Theodicy**

One of the greatest obstacles to belief in a supreme and perfect deity has always been what philosophers have come to call the 'problem of evil' – a problem neatly formulated by the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–271 BC): 'if God is willing to prevent evil but not able, then he is not omnipotent; if he is able but not willing, he is not benevolent; if he is both able and willing, whence comes evil?' In the following extract from the *Theodicy* ('A vindication of God's justice') published in 1710 by the German philosopher G. W. Leibniz, we find a systematic attempt to resolve the issue. Leibniz begins by introducing the concept of God as the supreme

* G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Liberty of Man and the Origin of Evil* [*Essais de théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal*, 1710], Part I, §§ 7–15, 19–26; with omissions. Trans. E. M. Huggard (London: Routledge, 1951).

and perfect necessary being who is the cause of all contingent things, and contains within himself the reason for his existence (compare the third of Aquinas's 'five ways', extract 2, above). He then argues that the universe we live in must be the best of all possible worlds: of all the worlds capable of existence, the infinitely good and wise creator must have chosen the best, or else there would be something to correct in his actions. The background to this argument is that only certain combinations of things can exist together (or are 'compossible' as Leibniz puts it elsewhere); so there are logical constraints on what even the most benevolent creator can bring into existence. To suppose that one could simply eliminate undesirable elements from creation ignores that 'the universe is all of a piece, so that if the smallest evil that comes to pass were missing, it would no longer be this world'.

One may object that this does not explain why there should be any evil in the first place. Here Leibniz makes a useful distinction between three kinds of evil, metaphysical, physical and moral. Metaphysical evil consists in 'mere imperfection': some imperfection must exist if there is to be a created universe at all, since if there was nothing but complete perfection, only God would exist. Physical evil (for example disease and natural disasters) Leibniz explains, perhaps somewhat glibly, as 'often a penalty owing to guilt, and often as a means to an end, to prevent greater evils or to obtain greater good'. Finally, in the case of moral evil (the evil wrought by human beings), Leibniz deploys a common line among religious apologists known as the 'free will defence': if men are to be free agents rather than puppets, they must be able to act badly. Since God is all-powerful, we must admit that he could prevent such evil, and hence that he *permits* it; but Leibniz argues that he wills it not *antecedently* but only *consequently*; that is, he wills it not in itself, but only as a necessary consequence of producing the best possible world (containing free human agents). This last line of reasoning involves complexities which are still the subject of debate among philosophers of religion; roughly, the issue is whether the existence of human freedom is on balance a sufficient good to make the world that contains it better than any other possible world.

God is the first reason of things: for such things as are bounded (as all that which we see and experience), are contingent and have nothing in them to render their existence necessary, it being plain that time, space and matter, united and uniform in themselves and indifferent to everything, might have received entirely other motions and shapes, and in another order. Therefore one must seek the reason for the existence of the world, which is the whole assemblage of *contingent* things, and seek it in the substance which carries with it the reason for its existence, and which in consequence is *necessary* and eternal. Moreover, this cause must be intelligent: for this existing world being contingent and an infinity of other worlds being equally possible, and holding, so to say, equal claim to existence with it, the cause of the world must needs have had regard or reference to all these possible worlds in order to fix upon one of them. This regard or relation of an existent substance to simple possibilities can be nothing other than the *understanding* which has the ideas of them, while to fix upon one of them can be nothing other than the act of the *will* which chooses. It is the *power* of this substance that renders its will efficacious. Power relates to being, wisdom or understanding to *truth*, and will to *good*. And this intelligent cause ought to be infinite in all ways, and absolutely perfect in *power*, in *wisdom* and in *goodness*, since it relates to all that which is possible. Furthermore, since all is connected together, there is no ground for admitting more than *one*. Its understanding is the source of *essences*, and its will is the origin of *existences*. There in few words is the proof of one only God with his perfections, and through him of the origin of things.

Now this supreme wisdom, united to a goodness that is no less infinite, cannot but have chosen the best. For as a lesser evil is a kind of good, even so a lesser good is a kind of evil if it stands in the way of a greater good; and there would be something to correct in the actions of God if it were possible to do better. As in mathematics, when there is no maximum nor minimum, in short nothing distinguished, everything is done equally, or when that is not possible nothing at all is done: so it may be said likewise in respect of perfect wisdom, which is no less orderly than mathematics, that if there were not the best (*optimum*) among all possible worlds, God would not have produced any. I call 'World' the whole succession and the whole agglomeration of all existent things, lest it be said that several worlds could have existed in different times and different places. For they must needs be reckoned all together as one world or, if you will, as one universe. And even though one should fill all times and all places, it still remains true that one might have filled them in innumerable ways, and that there is an infinitude of possible worlds among which God must needs have chosen the best, since he does nothing without acting in accordance with supreme reason.

Some adversary not being able to answer this argument will perchance answer the conclusion by a counter-argument, saying that the world could have been without sin and without sufferings; but I deny that then it would have been *better*. For it must be known that all things are *connected* in each one of the possible worlds: the universe, whatever it may be, is all of one piece, like an ocean: the least movement extends its effect there to any distance whatsoever, even though this effect become less perceptible in proportion to the distance. Therein God has ordered all things beforehand once for all, having foreseen prayers, good and bad actions, and all the rest; and each thing *as an idea* has contributed before its existence to the resolution that has been made upon the existence of all things; so that nothing can be changed in the universe (any more than in a number) save its essence, or, if you will, save its numerical individuality. Thus if the smallest evil that comes to pass in the world were missing in it, it would no longer be this world; which, with nothing omitted and all allowance made, was found the best by the creator who chose it.

It is true that one may imagine possible worlds without sin and without unhappiness, and one could make some such Utopian ... romances; but these same worlds again would be very inferior to ours in goodness. I cannot show you this in detail. For can I know and can I present infinities to you and compare them together? But you must judge with me from the effects, since God has chosen this world as it is. We know, moreover, that often an evil brings forth a good whereto one would not have attained without that evil ... A general sometimes makes a fortunate mistake which brings about the winning of a great battle; and do they not sing on the Eve of Easter in the churches of the Roman rite:

> *O certe necessarium Adae peccatum, quod Christi morte deletum est.*
> *O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem!*[1]

... A little acid, sharpness or bitterness is often more pleasing than sugar; shadows enhance colours; and even a dissonance in the right place gives relief to harmony. We

[1] O surely needful was the sin of Adam, which took the death of Christ to wipe it out! O blessed was that guilt which did require so strong and mighty a Redeemer's power!

wish to be terrified by rope-dancers on the point of falling and we wish that tragedies shall well-nigh cause us to weep. Do men relish health enough, or thank God enough for it, without having ever been sick? And is it not most often necessary that a little evil render the good more discernible, that is to say, greater?

But it will be said that evils are great and many in number in comparison with the good: that is erroneous. It is only want of attention that diminishes our good, and this attention must be given to us through some admixture of evils. If we were usually sick and seldom in good health, we should be wonderfully sensible of that great good and we should be less sensible of our evils. But is it not better, notwithstanding, that health should be usual and sickness the exception? Let us then by our reflection supply what is lacking in our perception, in order to make the good of health more discernible. Even if we did not have knowledge of the life to come, I believe there would be few persons who, being at the point of death, would not be content to take up life again, on condition of passing through the same amount of good and evil, provided always that it were not the same kind; one would be content with variety, without requiring a better condition than that wherein one had been...

The ancients had puny ideas on the works of God, and St Augustine, for want of knowing modern discoveries, was at a loss when there was question of explaining the prevalence of evil. It seemed to the ancients that there was only one earth inhabited, and even of that men held the antipodes in dread; the remainder of the world was, according to them, a few shining globes and a few crystalline spheres. Today, whatever bounds are given or not given to the universe, it must be acknowledged that there is an infinite number of globes, as great as and greater than ours, which have as much right as it to hold rational inhabitants, though it follows not at all that they are human. It is only one planet, that is to say one of the six principal satellites of our sun; and as all fixed stars are suns also, we see how small a thing our earth is in relation to visible things, since it is only an appendix of one amongst them. It may be that all suns are peopled only by blessed creatures... and the immense space encircling all this region may in any case be filled with happiness and glory. It can be imagined as like the Ocean, whither flow the rivers of all blessed creatures, when they shall have reached their perfection in the system of the stars. What will become of the consideration of our globe and its inhabitants? Will it not be something incomparably less than a physical point, since our earth is as a point in comparison with the distance of some fixed stars? Thus since the proportion of that part of the universe which we know is almost lost in nothingness compared with that which is unknown, and which we have yet to have cause to assume, and since all the evils that may be raised in objection before us are in this near nothingness, haply it may be that all evils are almost nothingness in comparison with the good things which are in the universe.

But it is necessary also to meet the more speculative and metaphysical difficulties which have been mentioned, and which concern the cause of evil. The question is asked first of all, whence does evil come? *If there be a God, whence cometh evil; if there be not, whence cometh good?* The ancients attributed the cause of evil to matter, which they believed uncreated and independent of God; but we, who derive all being from God, where shall we find the source of evil? The answer is that it must be sought in the ideal nature of the creature, in so far as this nature is contained in the eternal truths which are in the understanding of God, independently of his will. For we must

consider that there is an *original imperfection in the creature* before sin, because the creature is limited in its essence; whence it follows that it cannot know all, and that it can deceive itself and commit other errors. Plato said in *Timaeus* that the world originated in Understanding united to Necessity. Others have united God and Nature. This can be given a reasonable meaning. God will be the Understanding; and the Necessity, that is, the essential nature of things, will be the object of the understanding, in so far as this object consists in the eternal truths. But this object is inward and abides in the divine understanding. And therein is found not only the primitive form of good, but also the origin of evil: the Region of the Eternal Truths must be substituted for matter when we are concerned with seeking out the source of things.

This region is the ideal cause of evil (as it were) as well as of good: but, properly speaking, the formal character of evil has no *efficient* cause, for it consists in privation, as we shall see, namely, in that which the efficient cause does not bring about. That is why the Schoolmen are wont to call the cause of evil *deficient*.

Evil may be taken metaphysically, physically and morally. *Metaphysical evil* consists in mere imperfection, *physical evil* in suffering, and *moral evil* in sin. Now although physical evil and moral evil be not necessary, it is enough that by virtue of the eternal verities they be possible. And as this vast Region of Truths contains all possibilities, it is necessary that there be an infinitude of possible worlds, that evil enter into some of them, and that even the best of all contain a measure thereof. Thus has God been induced to permit evil.

But someone will say to me: why do you speak to us of 'permitting'? Is it not God that does the evil and that wills it? Here it will be necessary to explain what 'permission' is, so that it may be seen how this term is not employed without reason. But before that one must explain the nature of will, which has its own degrees. Taking it in the general sense, one may say that *will* consists in the inclination to do something in proportion to the good it contains. This will is called *antecedent* when it is detached and considers each good separately in the capacity of a good. In this sense it may be said that God tends to all good, as good... and this by an antecedent will. He is earnestly disposed to sanctify and to save all men, to exclude sin, and to prevent damnation. It may even be said that this will is efficacious *of itself* (*per se*), that is, in such a way that the effect would ensue if there were not some stronger reason to prevent it: for this will does not pass into final exercise, else it would never fail to produce its full effect, God being the master of all things. Success entire and infallible belongs only to the *consequent will*, as it is called. This it is which is complete; and in regard to it this rule obtains, that one never fails to do what one wills, when one has the power. Now this consequent will, final and decisive, results from the conflict of all the antecedent wills, of those which tend towards good, as well as of those which repel evil; and from the concurrence of all these particular wills comes the total will. So in mechanics compound movement results from all the tendencies that concur in one and the same moving body, and satisfies each one equally, in so far as it is possible to do all at one time. It is as if the moving body took equal account of these tendencies ... In this sense also it may be said that the antecedent will is efficacious in a sense and even effective with success.

Thence it follows that God wills *antecedently* the good and *consequently* the best. And as for evil, God wills moral evil not at all, and physical evil or suffering he does

not will absolutely... One may say of physical evil, that God wills it often as a penalty owing to guilt, and often also as a means to an end, that is, to prevent greater evils or to obtain greater good. The penalty serves also for amendment and example. Evil often serves to make us savour good the more; sometimes too it contributes to a greater perfection in him who suffers it, as the seed that one sows is subject to a kind of corruption before it can germinate; this is a beautiful similitude, which Jesus Christ himself used.

Concerning sin or moral evil, although it happens very often that it may serve as a means of obtaining good or of preventing another evil, it is not this that renders it a sufficient object of the divine will or a legitimate object of a created will. It must only be admitted or *permitted* in so far as it is considered to be a certain consequence of an indispensable duty: as for instance if a man who was determined not to permit another's sin were to fail of his own duty, or as if an officer on guard at an important post were to leave it especially in time of danger, in order to prevent a quarrel in the town between two soldiers of the garrison who wanted to kill each other.

The rule which states that *evil may not be done that good may come about*, and which even forbids the permission of a moral evil with the end of obtaining a physical good, far from being violated, is here proved, and its source and its reason are demonstrated. One will not approve the action of a queen who, under the pretext of saving the state, commits or even permits a crime. The crime is certain and the evil for the state is open to question. Moreover, this manner of giving sanction to crimes, if it were accepted, would be worse than a disruption of some one country, which is liable enough to happen in any case, and would perchance happen all the more by reason of such means chosen to prevent it. But in relation to God nothing is open to question, nothing can be opposed to *the rule of the best*, which allows neither exception nor dispensation. It is in this sense that God permits sin: for he would fail in what he owes to himself, in what he owes to his wisdom, his goodness, his perfection, if he did not follow the grand result of all his tendencies to good, and if he did not choose that which is absolutely the best, notwithstanding the evil of guilt, which is involved therein by the supreme necessity of the eternal truths. Hence the conclusion that God wills all good *in himself antecedently*, that he wills the best *consequently* as an *end*; that he wills what is indifferent, and physical evil, sometimes as a *means*, but that he will only permit moral evil as the *sine quo non* or as a hypothetical necessity which connects it with the best. Therefore the *consequent will* of God, which has sin for its object, is only *permissive*.

It is again well to consider that moral evil is an evil so great only because it is a source of physical evils, a source existing in one of the most powerful of creatures, who is also most capable of causing those evils. For an evil will is in its department what the evil principle of the Manichaeans would be in the universe; and reason, which is an image of the Divinity, provides for evil souls great means of causing much evil. One single Caligula, one Nero, has caused more evil than an earthquake. An evil man takes pleasure in causing suffering and destruction, and for that there are only too many opportunities. But God being inclined to produce as much good as possible, and having all the knowledge and all the power necessary for that, it is impossible that in him there be fault, or guilt, or sin; and when he permits sin, it is wisdom, it is virtue.

6 The Argument from Design: David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion**

One of the most enduring and popular arguments for the existence of God is the 'argument from design'. A version of it is found in the fifth of Aquinas's 'five ways' (see extract 2, above), but it reached its heyday in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, finding its most famous expression in the comparison of the universe to a watch made by Archdeacon William Paley:

> Every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design... in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation. I mean that the contrivances of nature surpass the contrivances of art in the complexity, subtlety, and curiosity of the mechanism; and still more, if possible, do they go beyond them in number and variety; yet, in a multitude of cases, are not less evidently mechanical, not less evidently contrivances, not less evidently accommodated to their end, or suited to their office, than are the most perfect productions of human ingenuity.[1]

Some thirty years earlier, the great Scottish philosopher David Hume had produced a telling critique of theism in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, first published in 1777, the year following his death. In the passage printed below (from Part II of the *Dialogues*) Hume presents a version of the argument from design in the mouth of 'Cleanthes', and then offers his own objections to it in the person of 'Philo'.

Hume objects, first, that arguments based on analogy, as this argument is, are at best only of limited use; and in any case the analogy offered by the theist is singularly weak, since the similarity between the universe and a product of human design such as a house is very thin. Second he notes that the apparent directedness of natural phenomena (the 'order, arrangement or adjustment of final causes') is not in itself any proof of design: matter itself, for all we know, may contain the source or spring of order within itself. Why fasten on rational design as the only possible cause of the order we find: 'what peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the brain which we call *thought* that we must make it the model of the whole universe?' And finally he points out that all reasoning concerning cause and effect must be based on past instances, yet in the case of the universe we are by definition dealing with something unique – 'singular, individual, without parallel or specific resemblance'. In the century following Hume, Charles Darwin in his *The Origin of Species* (1859) was to offer a purely naturalistic explanation for goal-adaptive phenomena, namely random mutation plus 'natural selection' in the struggle for survival; these were entirely 'blind' mechanisms not requiring any guiding intelligence. If Hume's arguments are correct, however, the argument from design is in any case inconclusive, irrespective of whether an alternative explanation is available for the 'adaptation of means to ends' which we find in the natural world.

> Not to lose any time in circumlocutions, said Cleanthes, ... I shall briefly explain how I conceive this matter. Look round the world, contemplate the whole and every part of it: you will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy which

* David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* [published posthumously, 1777], Part II; abridged and with modified punctuation. The full text may be found in *The Philosophical Works of David Hume* (Edinburgh: Black & Tait, 1876), vol. II; many other editions available.

[1] From W. Paley, *Natural Theology* [1802].

ravishes into admiration all men who have ever contemplated them. The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly though it much exceeds the productions of human contrivance, of human designing, thought, wisdom and intelligence. Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble, and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man, though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work which he has executed. By this argument *a posteriori*, and by this alone, do we prove at once the existence of a Deity and his similarity to human mind and intelligence...

[Philo] That a stone will fall, that fire will burn, that the earth has solidity, we have observed a thousand and a thousand times; and when any new instance of this nature is presented, we draw without hesitation the accustomed inference. The exact similarity of the cases gives us a perfect assurance of a similar event and a stronger evidence is never desired nor sought after. But wherever you depart, in the least, from the similarity of the cases, you diminish proportionately the evidence and may at last bring it to a very *weak analogy* which is confessedly liable to error and uncertainty. After having observed the circulation of the blood in human creatures, we make no doubt that it takes place in Titius and Maevius; but from its circulation in frogs and fishes it is only a presumption, though a strong one, from analogy that it takes place in men and other animals. The analogical reasoning is much weaker when we infer the circulation of the sap in vegetables from our experience that the blood circulates in animals; and those who hastily followed that imperfect analogy are found, by more accurate experiments, to have been mistaken.

If we see a house, Cleanthes, we conclude, with the greatest certainty, that it had an architect or builder; because this is precisely that species of effect which we have experienced to proceed from that species of cause. But surely you will not affirm that the universe bears such a resemblance to a house, that we can with the same certainty infer a similar cause, or that the analogy is here entire and perfect. The dissimilitude is so striking, that the utmost you can here pretend to is a guess, a conjecture, a presumption concerning a similar cause; and how that pretension will be received in the world, I leave you to consider.

It would surely be very ill received, replied Cleanthes, and I should be deservedly blamed and detested, did I allow that the proofs of a Deity amounted to no more than a guess or conjecture. But is the whole adjustment of means to ends in a house and in the universe so slight a resemblance? The economy of final causes? The order, proportion and arrangement of every part? Steps of a stair are plainly contrived that human legs may use them in mounting; and this inference is certain and infallible. Human legs are also contrived for walking and mounting, and this inference, I allow is not altogether so certain, because of the similarity which you remark, but does it therefore deserve the name only of presumption or conjecture?...

[Philo] Were a man to abstract from everything which he knows or has seen, he would be altogether incapable, merely from his own ideas, to determine what kind of scene the universe must be, or to give the preference to one state or situation of things above another. For as nothing which he clearly conceives could be esteemed impossible or implying a contradiction, every chimera of his fancy would be upon an equal footing; nor could he assign any just reason why he adheres to one idea or system, and rejects the others which are equally possible.

Again; after he opens his eyes, and contemplates the world as it really is, it would be impossible for him at first to assign the cause of any one event, much less of the whole of things, or of the universe. He might set his fancy a rambling; and she might bring him in an infinite variety of reports and representations. These would all be possible; but being all equally possible, he would never of himself give a satisfactory account for his preferring one of them to the rest. Experience alone can point out to him the true cause of any phenomenon.

Now, according to this method of reasoning . . . it follows that order, arrangement, or the adjustment of final causes, is not of itself any proof of design; but only so far as it has been experienced to proceed from that principle. For aught we can know *a priori*, matter may contain the source or spring of order originally within itself, as well as mind does; and there is no more difficulty in conceiving that the several elements, from an internal unknown cause, may fall into the most exquisite arrangement, than to conceive that their ideas, in the great universal mind, from a like internal unknown cause, fall into that arrangement. The equal possibility of both these suppositions is allowed. But, by experience, we find (according to Cleanthes) that there is a difference between them. Throw several pieces of steel together, without shape or form; they will never arrange themselves so as to compose a watch. Stone, and mortar, and wood, without an architect, never erect a house. But the ideas in a human mind, we see, by an unknown, inexplicable economy, arrange themselves so as to form the plan of a watch or house. Experience, therefore, proves that there is an original principle of order in mind, not in matter. From similar effects we infer similar causes. The adjustment of means to ends is alike in the universe, as in a machine of human contrivance. The causes, therefore, must be resembling . . .

That all inferences, Cleanthes, concerning fact, are founded on experience, and that all experimental reasonings are founded on the supposition that similar causes prove similar effects, and similar effects similar causes, I shall not at present much dispute with you. But observe, I entreat you, with what extreme caution all just reasoners proceed in the transferring of experiments to similar cases. Unless the cases be exactly similar, they repose no perfect confidence in applying their past observation to any particular phenomenon. Every alteration of circumstances occasions a doubt concerning the event; and it requires new experiments to prove certainly that the new circumstances are of no moment or importance. A change in bulk, situation, arrangement, age, disposition of the air, or surrounding bodies – any of these particulars may be attended with the most unexpected consequences. And unless the objects be quite familiar to us, it is the highest temerity to expect with assurance, after any of these changes, an event similar to that which before fell under our observation. The slow and deliberate steps of philosophers here, if anywhere, are distinguished from the precipitate march of the vulgar, who, hurried on by the smallest similitude, are incapable of all discernment or consideration.

But can you think, Cleanthes, that your usual phlegm and philosophy have been preserved in so wide a step as you have taken, when you compared to the universe houses, ships, furniture, machines, and, from their similarity in some circumstances, inferred a similarity in their causes? Thought, design, intelligence, such as we discover in men and other animals, is no more than one of the springs and principles of the universe, as well as heat or cold, attraction or repulsion, and a hundred others, which fall under daily observation. It is an active cause, by which some particular parts of

nature, we find, produce alterations on other parts. But can a conclusion, with any propriety, be transferred from parts to the whole? Does not the great disproportion bar all comparison and inference? From observing the growth of a hair, can we learn anything concerning the generation of a man? Would the manner of a leaf's blowing, even though perfectly known, afford us any instruction concerning the vegetation of a tree?

But, allowing that we were to take the operations of one part of nature upon another for the foundation of our judgement concerning the *origin* of the whole (which never can be admitted), yet why select so minute, so weak, so bounded a principle, as the reason and design of animals is found to be upon this planet? What peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the brain which we call *thought*, that we must thus make it the model of the whole universe? Our partiality in our own favour does indeed present it on all occasions; but sound philosophy ought carefully to guard against so natural an illusion.

So far from admitting, continued Philo, that the operations of a part can afford us any just conclusion concerning the origin of the whole, I will not allow any one part to form a rule for another part, if the latter be very remote from the former. Is there any reasonable ground to conclude that the inhabitants of other planets possess thought, intelligence, reason, or anything similar to these faculties in men? When nature has so extremely diversified her manner of operation in this small globe, can we imagine that she incessantly copies herself throughout so immense a universe? And if thought, as we may well suppose, be confined merely to this narrow corner, and has even there so limited a sphere of action, with what propriety can we assign it for the original cause of all things? The narrow views of a peasant, who makes his domestic economy the rule for the government of kingdoms, is in comparison a pardonable sophism.

But were we ever so much assured that a thought and reason, resembling the human, were to be found throughout the whole universe, and were its activity elsewhere vastly greater and more commanding than it appears in this globe; yet I cannot see why the operations of a world constituted, arranged, adjusted, can with any propriety be extended to a world which is in its embryo-state, and is advancing towards that constitution and arrangement. By observation, we know somewhat of the economy, action and nourishment of a finished animal; but we must transfer with great caution that observation to the growth of a foetus in the womb, and still more to the formation of an animalcule in the loins of its male parent. Nature, we find, even from our limited experience, possesses an infinite number of springs and principles, which incessantly discover themselves on every change of her position and situation. And what new and unknown principles would actuate her in so new and unknown a situation as that of the formation of a universe, we cannot, without the utmost temerity, pretend to determine.

A very small part of this great system, during a very short time, is very imperfectly discovered to us; and do we thence pronounce decisively concerning the origin of the whole?

Admirable conclusion! Stone, wood, brick, iron, brass, have not, at this time, in this minute globe of earth, an order or arrangement without human art and contrivance; therefore the universe could not originally attain its order and arrangement without something similar to human art! But is a part of nature a rule for another part very wide of the former? Is it a rule for the whole? Is a very small part a rule for

the universe? Is nature in one situation a certain rule for nature in another situation vastly different from the former?

And can you blame me, Cleanthes, if I here imitate the prudent reserve of Simonides, who, according to the noted story, being asked by Hero, *What God was?* desired a day to think of it, and then two days more; and after that manner continually prolonged the term, without ever bringing in his definition or description? Could you ever blame me, if I had answered at first, *that I did not know,* and was sensible that this subject lay vastly beyond the reach of my faculties? You might cry out sceptic and rallier,[1] as much as you pleased; but having found, in so many other subjects much more familiar, the imperfections and even contradictions of human reason, I never should expect any success from its feeble conjectures, in a subject so sublime, and so remote from the sphere of our observation. When two *species* of objects have always been observed to be conjoined together, I can *infer,* by custom, the existence of one wherever I *see* the existence of the other; and this I call an argument from experience. But how this argument can have place, where the objects, as in the present case, are single, individual, without parallel, or specific resemblance, may be difficult to explain. And will any man tell me with a serious countenance, that an orderly universe must arise from some thought and art like the human, because we have experience of it? To ascertain this reasoning, it were requisite that we had experience of the origin of worlds; and it is not sufficient, surely, that we have seen ships and cities arise from human art and contrivance.

Philo was proceeding in this vehement manner, somewhat between jest and earnest, as it appeared to me, when he observed some signs of impatience in Cleanthes, and then immediately stopped short. What I had to suggest, said Cleanthes, is only that you would not abuse terms, or make use of popular expressions to subvert philosophical reasonings. You know that the vulgar often distinguish reason from experience, even where the question relates only to matter of fact and existence; though it is found, where that *reason* is properly analysed, that it is nothing but a species of experience. To prove by experience the origin of the universe from mind is not more contrary to common speech than to prove the motion of the earth from the same principle. And a caviller might raise all the same objections to the Copernican system, which you have urged against my reasonings. Have you other earths, might he say, which you have seen to move? Have...

Yes! cried Philo, interrupting him, we have other earths. Is not the moon another earth, which we see to turn round its centre? Is not Venus another earth, where we observe the same phenomenon? Are not the revolutions of the sun also a confirmation, from analogy, of the same theory? All the planets, are they not earths, which revolve about the sun? Are not the satellites moons, which move round Jupiter and Saturn, and along with these primary planets round the sun? These analogies and resemblances, with others which I have not mentioned, are the sole proofs of the Copernican system; and to you it belongs to consider whether you have any analogies of the same kind to support your theory.

In reality, Cleanthes, continued he, the modern system of astronomy is now so much received by all inquirers, and has become so essential a part even of our earliest education, that we are not commonly very scrupulous in examining the reasons upon

[1] To rally: to joke or banter.

which it is founded. It is now become a matter of mere curiosity to study the first writers on that subject, who had the full force of prejudice to encounter, and were obliged to turn their arguments on every side in order to render them popular and convincing. But if we peruse Galileo's famous dialogues concerning the system of the world, we shall find that that great genius, one of the sublimest that ever existed, first bent all his endeavours to prove that there was no foundation for the distinction commonly made between elementary and celestial substances. The Schools, proceeding from the illusions of sense, had carried this distinction very far; and had established the latter substances to be ingenerable, incorruptible, inalterable, impassible; and had assigned all the opposite qualities to the former. But Galileo, beginning with the moon, proved its similarity in every particular to the earth; its convex figure, its natural darkness when not illuminated, its density, its distinction into solid and liquid, the variations of its phases, the mutual illuminations of the earth and moon, their mutual eclipses, the inequalities of the lunar surface, &c. After many instances of this kind, with regard to all the planets, men plainly saw that these bodies became proper objects of experience; and that the similarity of their nature enabled us to extend the same arguments and phenomena from one to the other.

In this cautious proceeding of the astronomers, you may read your own condemnation, Cleanthes; or rather may see, that the subject in which you are engaged exceeds all human reason and inquiry. Can you pretend to show any such similarity between the fabric of a house, and the generation of a universe? Have you ever seen nature in any such situation as resembles the first arrangement of the elements? Have worlds ever been formed under your eye; and have you had leisure to observe the whole progress of the phenomenon, from the first appearance of order to its final consummation? If you have, then cite your experience, and deliver your theory.

7 Against Miracles: David Hume, *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding**

Though philosophy of religion has traditionally been most concerned with attempts to establish the existence of God by rational means (several examples of which occur in the extracts provided so far), many theists would say that the principal source of their belief is not *reason* but *revelation* – the way God has manifested himself to humanity through the Scriptures and through miraculous supernatural interventions of one kind or another; the Christian doctrines of the incarnation and the resurrection purport to provide prime examples of this. David Hume, who in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (see previous extract) attacked the alleged rational basis for theism, also mounted a strong attack on belief in miracles in his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748), from which our next extract is taken.

Though Hume readily concedes that evidence derived from eye-witnesses and spectators is most 'useful and even necessary to human life', he points out that the value of such testimony diminishes in force as the alleged fact is more unusual. And since a miracle is a violation of the

* David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* [1748], section X; with omissions and modifications of punctuation and spelling. A useful edition, with introduction and notes, is that by T. L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

usual pattern of events established by normal observation, in so far as uniform experience amounts to a proof 'there is here a direct and full *proof*, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle'. His powerful and elegantly phrased conclusion is that 'no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish'. Hume goes on to supplement his argument by observing certain facts about human nature – the gullibility of mankind, its tendency to swallow eagerly whatever is most 'extraordinary and marvellous'. He adds that reports of miracles tend to be accepted most among 'ignorant and barbarous nations', and finally that a host of incompatible religions, with incompatible views of the deity, all claim to support their faith by miraculous evidence. In closing this section of the *Enquiry* (a few paragraphs after the extract printed below), he presents the reader with a heavily ironic and challenging conclusion: 'that the Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one'.

Though experience be our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact, it must be acknowledged that this guide is not altogether infallible, but in some cases is apt to lead us into errors. One who in our climate should expect better weather in any week of June than in one of December would reason justly, and conformably to experience; but it is certain that he may happen, in the event, to find himself mistaken. However, we may observe, that, in such a case, he would have no cause to complain of experience; because it commonly informs us beforehand of the uncertainty, by that contrariety of events which we may learn from a diligent observation. All effects follow not with like certainty from their supposed causes. Some events are found, in all countries and all ages, to have been constantly conjoined together; others are found to have been more variable, and sometimes to disappoint our expectations; so that, in our reasonings concerning matter of fact, there are all imaginable degrees of assurance, from the highest certainty to the lowest species of moral evidence.

A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence. In such conclusions as are founded on an infallible experience, he expects the event with the last degree of assurance, and regards his past experience as a full *proof* of the future existence of that event. In other cases, he proceeds with more caution. He weighs the opposite experiments. He considers which side is supported by the greater number of experiments. To that side he inclines, with doubt and hesitation; and when at last he fixes his judgement, the evidence exceeds not what we properly call *probability*. All probability, then, supposes an opposition of experiments and observations, where the one side is found to overbalance the other, and to produce a degree of evidence proportioned to the superiority. A hundred instances or experiments on one side, and fifty on another, afford a doubtful expectation of any event; though a hundred uniform experiments, with only one that is contradictory, reasonably beget a pretty strong degree of assurance. In all cases, we must balance the opposite experiments, where they are opposite, and deduct the smaller number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the superior evidence.

To apply these principles to a particular instance, we may observe that there is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that which is derived from the testimony of men, and the reports of eyewitnesses and spectators. This species of reasoning, perhaps, one may deny to be founded on the relation of cause and effect. I shall not dispute about a word. It will be

sufficient to observe that our assurance in any argument of this kind is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses. It being a general maxim that no objects have any discoverable connection together, and that all the inferences which we can draw from one to another are founded merely on our experience of their constant and regular conjunction, it is evident that we ought not to make an exception to this maxim in favour of human testimony, whose connection with any event seems, in itself, as little necessary as any other. Were not the memory tenacious to a certain degree; had not men commonly an inclination to truth and a principle of probity; were they not sensible to shame when detected in a falsehood – were not these, I say, discovered by *experience* to be qualities inherent in human nature, we should never repose the least confidence in human testimony. A man delirious, or noted for falsehood and villainy, has no manner of authority with us.

And as the evidence derived from witnesses and human testimony is founded on past experience, so it varies with the experience, and is regarded either as a *proof* or a *probability*, according as the conjunction between any particular kind of report and any kind of object has been found to be constant or variable. There are a number of circumstances to be taken into consideration in all judgements of this kind; and the ultimate standard, by which we determine all disputes that may arise concerning them, is always derived from experience and observation. Where this experience is not entirely uniform on any side, it is attended with an unavoidable contrariety in our judgements, and with the same opposition and mutual destruction of argument as in every other kind of evidence. We frequently hesitate concerning the reports of others. We balance the opposite circumstances, which cause any doubt or uncertainty; and when we discover a superiority on any side, we incline to it; but still with a diminution of assurance, in proportion to the force of its antagonist.

This contrariety of evidence, in the present case, may be derived from several different causes; from the opposition of contrary testimony; from the character or number of the witnesses; from the manner of their delivering their testimony, or from the union of all these circumstances. We entertain a suspicion concerning any matter of fact, when the witnesses contradict each other; when they are but few, or of a doubtful character; when they have an interest in what they affirm; when they deliver their testimony with hesitation, or on the contrary, with too violent asseverations. There are many other particulars of the same kind, which may diminish or destroy the force of any argument derived from human testimony.

Suppose, for instance, that the fact, which the testimony endeavours to establish, partakes of the extraordinary and the marvellous: in that case, the evidence resulting from the testimony admits of a diminution, greater or less in proportion as the fact is more or less unusual. The reason why we place any credit in witnesses and historians is not derived from any connection which we perceive *a priori* between testimony and reality, but because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them. But when the fact attested is such a one as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences; of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force which remains. The very same principle of experience, which gives us a certain degree of assurance in the testimony of witnesses, gives us also, in this case, another degree of assurance against the fact which they endeavour to establish;

from which contradiction there necessarily arises a counterpoise, and mutual destruction of belief and authority...

But in order to increase the probability against the testimony of witnesses, let us suppose that the fact which they affirm, instead of being only marvellous, is really miraculous; and suppose also that the testimony, considered apart and in itself, amounts to an entire proof; in that case, there is proof against proof, of which the strongest must prevail, but still with a diminution of its force, in proportion to that of its antagonist.

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. Why is it more than probable that all men must die; that lead cannot, of itself, remain suspended in the air; that fire consumes wood, and is extinguished by water; unless it be that these events are found agreeable to the laws of nature, and there is required a violation of these laws, or in other words a miracle, to prevent them? Nothing is esteemed a miracle if it ever happen in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden; because such a kind of death, thought more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed, in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as an uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full *proof*, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof, which is superior.

The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention) 'That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish. And even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force which remains, after deducting the inferior.' When anyone tells me that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself whether it be more probable that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous than the event which he relates, then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion.

In the foregoing reasoning we have supposed that the testimony upon which a miracle is founded may possibly amount to an entire proof, and that the falsehood of that testimony would be a real prodigy. But it is easy to see that we have been a great deal too liberal in our concession, and that there never was a miraculous event established on so full an evidence.

For *first*, there is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good-sense, education and learning as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and

reputation in the eyes of mankind as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time, attesting facts, performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable. All which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men.

Secondly. We may observe in human nature a principle which, if strictly examined, will be found to diminish extremely the assurance which we might, from human testimony, have in any kind of prodigy. The maxim by which we commonly conduct ourselves in our reasonings is that the objects of which we have no experience resemble those of which we have; that what we have found to be most usual is always most probable; and that where there is an opposition of arguments, we ought to give the preference to such as are founded on the greatest number of past observations. But though, in proceeding by this rule, we readily reject any fact which is unusual and incredible in an ordinary degree, yet in advancing farther, the mind observes not always the same rule; but when anything is affirmed utterly absurd and miraculous, it rather the more readily admits of such a fact, upon account of that very circumstance, which ought to destroy all its authority. The passion of *surprise* and *wonder*, arising from miracles, being an agreeable emotion, gives a sensible tendency towards the belief of those events from which it is derived. And this goes so far, that even those who cannot enjoy this pleasure immediately, nor can believe those miraculous events of which they are informed, yet love to partake of the satisfaction at second-hand or by rebound, and place a pride and delight in exciting the admiration of others.

With what greediness are the miraculous accounts of travellers received, their descriptions of sea and land monsters, their relations of wonderful adventures, strange men, and uncouth manners? But if the spirit of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense; and human testimony, in these circumstances, loses all pretensions to authority. A religionist may be an enthusiast, and imagine he sees what has no reality. He may know his narrative to be false, and yet persevere in it, with the best intentions in the world, for the sake of promoting so holy a cause. Or even where this delusion has not place, vanity, excited by so strong a temptation, operates on him more powerfully than on the rest of mankind in any other circumstances; and self-interest with equal force. His auditors may not have, and commonly have not, sufficient *judgement* to canvass his evidence. What judgement they have, they renounce by principle, in these sublime and mysterious subjects. Or if they were ever so willing to employ it, passion and a heated imagination disturb the regularity of its operations. Their credulity increases his impudence: and his impudence overpowers their credulity... The many instances of forged miracles, and prophesies of supernatural events, which in all ages have either been detected by contrary evidence, or which detect themselves by their absurdity, prove sufficiently the strong propensity of mankind to the extraordinary and the marvellous, and ought reasonably to beget a suspicion against all relations of this kind...

Thirdly. It forms a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations; or if a civilized people has ever given admission to any of them, that people will be found to have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors, who transmitted them with that inviolable sanction and authority which always attend received opinions. When we peruse the first histories of all nations, we are apt to

imagine ourselves transported into some new world; where the whole frame of nature is disjointed, and every element performs its operations in a different manner from what it does at present. Battles, revolutions, pestilence, famine and death, are never the effect of those natural causes which we experience. Prodigies, omens, oracles, judgements, quite obscure the few natural events that are intermingled with them. But as the former grow thinner every page, in proportion as we advance nearer the enlightened ages, we soon learn that there is nothing mysterious or supernatural in the case, but that all proceeds from the usual propensity of mankind towards the marvellous, and that, though this inclination may at intervals receive a check from sense and learning, it can never be thoroughly extirpated from human nature . . .

I may add as a *fourth* reason, which diminishes the authority of prodigies, that there is no testimony for any, even those which have not been expressly detected, that is not opposed by an infinite number of witnesses; so that not only the miracle destroys the credit of testimony, but the testimony destroys itself. To make this the better understood, let us consider that, in matters of religion, whatever is different is contrary; and that it is impossible the religions of ancient Rome, of Turkey, of Siam, and of China should all of them be established on any solid foundation. Every miracle, therefore, pretended to have been wrought in any of these religions (and all of them abound in miracles), as its direct scope is to establish the particular system to which it is attributed, so has it the same force, though more indirectly, to overthrow every other system. In destroying a rival system, it likewise destroys the credit of those miracles on which that system was established; so that all the prodigies of different religions are to be regarded as contrary facts, and the evidences of these prodigies, whether weak or strong, as opposite to each other. According to this method of reasoning, when we believe any miracle of Mahomet or his successors, we have for our warrant the testimony of a few barbarous Arabians. And on the other hand, we are to regard the authority of Titus Livius, Plutarch, Tacitus and, in short, of all the authors and witnesses, Grecian, Chinese and Roman Catholic, who have related any miracle in their particular religion; I say, we are to regard their testimony in the same light as if they had mentioned that Mahometan miracle, and had in express terms contradicted it, with the same certainty as they have for the miracle they relate. This argument may appear over subtle and refined; but is not in reality different from the reasoning of a judge, who supposes that the credit of two witnesses, maintaining a crime against any one, is destroyed by the testimony of two others, who affirm him to have been two hundred leagues distant, at the same instant when the crime is said to have been committed . . .

Upon the whole, then, it appears that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof; and that, even supposing it amounted to a proof, it would be opposed by another proof, derived from the very nature of the fact which it would endeavour to establish. It is experience only which gives authority to human testimony; and it is the same experience, which assures us of the laws of nature. When, therefore, these two kinds of experience are contrary, we have nothing to do but subtract the one from the other, and embrace an opinion, either on one side or the other, with that assurance which arises from the remainder. But according to the principle here explained, this subtraction, with regard to all popular religions, amounts to an entire annihilation; and therefore we may establish it as a maxim that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion.

8 Faith and Subjectivity: Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript**

Challenges to established religion of the kind mounted by Hume (see the two previous extracts) led some philosophical supporters of theism in the nineteenth century to seek radically new ways of defending their beliefs. Our next extract is by the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, often regarded as one of the founders of the movement known as existentialism (see Part II, extract 9, and Part V, extract 10). Kierkegaard rejects the whole idea of scientific objectivity as a guide to how we should believe and act in matters that concern our personal lives. In a famous slogan he declares that 'Truth is subjectivity'. Even if the most thoroughgoing scientific evidence for the truth of the Scriptures were forthcoming, Kierkegaard maintains, this would not alter the human predicament one wit, any more than it would if the results of scholarly and scientific research were to point conclusively in the opposite direction. For 'all essential decisiveness is rooted in subjectivity'. What matters is not a set of scientific results, or a body of objective doctrine, but the deep personal commitment of an individual who takes the leap of faith. This stress on the primacy of faith corresponds to a long-standing tradition in religious thought: Anselm (see extract 1 above) had coined the slogan 'I believe in order to understand', and Pascal too (see extract 4) had exalted faith and devotion above rational proof. But Kierkegaard adds to this a striking paradox, namely that it is precisely the lack of objective certainty that generates the 'risk' which is the essential precondition for true faith: 'if I am capable of grasping God objectively I do not believe; but precisely because I cannot do this, I must believe'.

Let us assume that the critics have succeeded in proving about the Bible everything that any learned theologian in his happiest moments has ever wished to prove about the Bible. These books and no other belong to the canon; they are authentic; they are integral; their authors are trustworthy – one could say that it is as if every letter were inspired . . . Well, everything being assumed to be in order with respect to the Scriptures, what follows? Has anyone who previously did not have faith been brought a step nearer to its acquisition? No, not a single step. Faith does not result simply from a scientific inquiry; it does not come directly at all. On the contrary, in this objectivity one tends to lose the infinite personal interestedness in passion which is the condition of faith, the 'everywhere and nowhere' in which faith can come into being. Has anyone who previously had faith gained anything with respect to its strength and power? No, not in the least. Rather is it the case that in this voluminous knowledge, this certainty that lurks at the door of faith and threatens to devour it, he is in so dangerous a situation that he will need to put forth much effort in great fear and trembling, lest he fall victim to the temptation to confuse knowledge with faith. While faith has hitherto had a profitable schoolmaster in the existing uncertainty, it would have in the new certainty its most dangerous enemy. For if passion is eliminated, faith no longer exists, and certainty and passion do not go together. Whoever believes that there is a God, and an over-ruling providence, finds it easier to preserve his faith, easier to acquire something that definitely is faith and not an illusion, in an imperfect world where

* S. Kierkegaard, *Afsluttende Uvidenskabelig Efterskrift* [1846]. Trans. D. F. Swensen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), extracts from pp. 26–35 and 177–82; with minor modifications.

passion is kept alive, than in an absolutely perfect world. In such a world faith is in fact unthinkable. Hence also the teaching that faith is abolished in eternity.

How fortunate then that this wishful hypothesis, this beautiful dream of critical theology, is an impossibility, because even the most perfect realization would still remain an approximation. And again how fortunate for the critics that the fault is by no means in them! If all the angels in heaven were to put their heads together, they could still bring to pass only an approximation, because an approximation is the only certainty attainable for historical knowledge – but also an inadequate basis for an eternal happiness.

I assume now the opposite, that the opponents have succeeded in proving what they desire about the Scriptures, with a certainty transcending the most ardent wish of the most passionate hostility – what then? Have the opponents thereby abolished Christianity? By no means. Has the believer been harmed? By no means, not in the least. Has the opponent made good a right to be relieved of responsibility for not being a believer? By no means. Because these books are not written by these authors, are not authentic, are not in an integral condition, are not inspired (though this cannot be disproved since it is an object of faith), it does not follow that these authors have not existed; and above all it does not follow that Christ has not existed. As far as all this goes the believer is equally free to assume it – equally free (let us note this well) since if he had assumed it by virtue of any proof he would have been on the verge of giving up his faith. If matters ever come to this pass, the believer will have some share of guilt, in so far as he has himself invited this procedure, and begun to play into the hands of unbelief by proposing to provide a proof.

Here is the crux of the matter, and I come back to the case of learned theology. For whose sake is it that the proof is sought? Faith does not need it; indeed, it must even regard the proof as its enemy. But when faith begins to feel embarrassed and ashamed like a young woman for whom her love is no longer sufficient, but secretly feels ashamed of her lover and must therefore have it established that there is something remarkable about him – when faith thus begins to lose its passion, when faith begins to cease to be faith, then a proof becomes necessary so as to command respect from the side of unbelief . . .

When the question is treated in an objective manner it becomes impossible for the subject to face the decision with passion, least of all with an infinitely interested passion if at all. It is a self-contradiction, and therefore comical, to be infinitely interested in that which in its maximum still always remains an approximation. If, in spite of this, passion is nevertheless imported, we get fanaticism. For an infinitely interested passion every iota will be of infinite value. The fault is not in the infinitely interested passion, but in the fact that its object has become an approximation-object.

The objective mode of approach to the problem persists from generation to generation precisely because the individuals, the contemplative individuals, become more and more objective, less and less possessed by an infinite passionate interest. Supposing that we continue in this manner to prove and seek the proof of Christianity, the remarkable phenomenon would finally emerge that just when the proof for its truth had become completely realized, it would have ceased to exist as a present fact. It would then have become so completely an historical phenomenon as to be something entirely past, whose truth, i.e. whose historical truth, had finally been brought to a satisfactory determination. In this way perhaps the anxious prophecy

of Luke 18: 8 might be fulfilled: 'Nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?'

The more objective the contemplative enquirer, the less he bases an eternal happiness, i.e. his eternal happiness, upon his relationship to the enquiry; for there can be no question of an eternal happiness except for the passionately and infinitely interested subject. Objectively, the contemplative enquirer, whether learned scholar or dilettante member of the laity, understands himself in the following farewell words as he faces the final end: 'When I was a young man, such and such books were in doubt; now their genuineness has been demonstrated, but then again a doubt has recently been raised about certain books which have never before been under suspicion. But there will doubtless soon arise a scholar who will . . .' and so forth.

The accommodating and objective subject holds himself aloof, displaying an applauded heroism. He is completely at your service, and ready to accept the truth as soon as it is brought to light. But the goal toward which he strives is far distant – undeniably so since an approximation can continue indefinitely; and while the grass grows under his feet the enquirer dies, his mind at rest, for he was objective. It is not without reason that you have been praised, O wonderful Objectivity, for you can do all things; not even the firmest believer was ever so certain of his eternal happiness and above all of not losing it, as the objective subject! Unless this objective and accommodating temper should perhaps be in the wrong place, so that it is possibly unchristian; in that case, it would naturally be a little dubious to have arrived at the truth of Christianity in this manner. Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity is essential passion, and in its maximum an infinite, personal, passionate interest in one's eternal happiness.

As soon as subjectivity is eliminated, and passion eliminated from subjectivity, and the infinite interest eliminated from passion, there is in general no decision at all, either in this problem or in any other. All decisiveness, all essential decisiveness, is rooted in subjectivity. A contemplative spirit, and this is what the objective subject is, feels nowhere any infinite need of a decision, and sees no decision anywhere. This is the falsity that is inherent in all objectivity; and this is the significance of mediation as the mode of transition in the continuous process where nothing is fixed and nothing is infinitely decided. For the movement turns back upon itself and again turns back, so that the movement is chimerical, and the philosopher is wise only after the event. But there is no decisive result anywhere. This is quite as it should be, since decisiveness adheres in subjectivity alone, essentially in its passion, and maximally in the personal passion which is infinitely interested in an eternal happiness . . .

In an attempt to make clear the difference of way that exists between an objective and subjective reflection, I shall now proceed to show how a subjective reflection makes its way inwardly in inwardness. Inwardness in an existing subject culminates in passion; corresponding to passion in the subject, the truth becomes a paradox; and the fact that the truth becomes a paradox is rooted precisely in its having a relationship to an existing subject. Thus the one corresponds to the other. By forgetting that one is an existing subject, passion goes by the board, and the truth is no longer a paradox; the knowing subject becomes a fantastic entity rather than a human being, and the truth becomes a fantastic object for the knowledge of this fantastic entity.

When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focused upon the relationship, however, but upon the question of whether it is the truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship: if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth, even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true. Let us take as an example the knowledge of God. Objectively, reflection is directed to the problem of whether this object is the true God; subjectively, reflection is directed to the question whether the individual is related to a something *in such a manner* that his relation is in truth a Godrelationship. On which side is the truth now to be found? May we not here resort to a mediation, and say 'it is on neither side, but in the mediation of both'? Excellently well said, provided we could have it explained how an existing individual manages to be in a state of mediation. For to be in a state of mediation is to be finished, while to exist is to become. Nor can an existing individual be in two places at the same time – he cannot be an identity of subject and object. When he is nearest to being in two places at the same time, he is in passion; but passion is momentary, and passion is also the highest expression of subjectivity.

The existing individual who chooses to pursue the objective way enters upon the entire approximation-process by which it is proposed to bring God to light objectively. But this is in all eternity impossible, because God is a subject, and therefore exists only for subjectivity in inwardness. The existing individual who chooses the subjective way apprehends instantly the entire dialectical difficulty involved in having to use some time, perhaps a long time, in finding God objectively; and he feels this dialectical difficulty, in all its painfulness, because every moment is wasted in which he does not have God. That very instant he has God, not by virtue of any objective deliberation, but by virtue of the infinite passion of inwardness. The objective inquirer, on the other hand, is not embarrassed by such dialectical difficulties as are involved in devoting an entire period of investigation to finding God, since it is possible that the inquirer may die tomorrow; and if he lives he can scarcely regard God as something to be taken along if convenient, since God is precisely that which one takes *à tout prix*,[1] which in the understanding of passion constitutes the true inward relationship to God.

It is at this point, so difficult dialectically, that the way swings off for everyone who knows what it means to think and to think existentially; this is something very different from sitting at a desk and writing about what one has never done, something very different from writing *de omnibus dubitandum*,[2] and at the same time being as credulous existentially as the most sensuous of men. Here is where the way swings off, and the change is marked by the fact that while objective knowledge rambles comfortably on by way of the long road of approximation without being impelled by the urge of passion, subjective knowledge counts every delay a deadly peril, and the decision so infinitely important and so instantly pressing that it is as if the opportunity has already passed.

[1] 'At any price'.
[2] 'One should doubt everything'.

Now when the problem is to reckon up on which side there is most truth, whether on the side of one who seeks the true God objectively, and pursues the approximate truth of the God-idea, or on the side of one who, driven by the infinite passion of his need of God, feels an infinite concern for his own relationship to God in truth . . . the answer cannot be in doubt for anyone who has not been demoralized with the aid of science. If one who lives in the midst of Christendom goes up to the house of God, the house of the true God, with the true conception of God in his knowledge, and prays, but prays in a false spirit; and if he who lives in an idolatrous community prays with the passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol: where is the most truth? The one prays in truth to God though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol.

When one man investigates objectively the problem of immortality, and another embraces an uncertainty with the passion of the infinite, where is there most truth and who has the greater certainty? The one has entered upon a never-ending approximation, for the certainty of immortality lies precisely in the subjectivity of the individual; the other is immortal, and fights for this immortality by struggling with the uncertainty. Let us consider Socrates. Nowadays everyone dabbles in a few proofs; some have several such proofs, others fewer. But Socrates! He puts the question objectively in a problematic manner: *if* there is immortality. Must he therefore be accounted a doubter in comparison with one of our modern thinkers with their 'three proofs'? By no means. On this 'if' he risks his entire life; he has the courage to meet death; and he has with the passion of the infinite so determined the pattern of his life that it must be found acceptable – *if* there is immortality. Is any better proof capable of being given for the immortality of the soul? But those who have the three proofs do not at all determine their lives in conformity with them; if there is immortality it must feel disgust over the manner of their lives. Can any better refutation be given of the three proofs? The fact that Socrates had a bit of uncertainty helped him because he himself contributed the passion of the infinite; the three proofs that the others had do not profit them at all, because they are dead to spirit and enthusiasm. And their three proofs, instead of proving anything else, prove just this. A young girl may enjoy all the sweetness of love on the basis of what is merely a weak hope that she is beloved, because she rests everything on this weak hope. But many a wedded matron, more than once subjected to the strongest expressions of love, has to this extent indeed had proofs, but strangely enough has not enjoyed *quod erat demonstrandum*.[1] The Socratic ignorance, which Socrates held fast with the entire passion of his inwardness, was thus an expression of the principle that eternal truth is related to an existing individual and that this truth must therefore be a paradox for him as long as he exists; and yet it is possible that there was more truth in the Socratic ignorance, as it was in him, than in the entire objective truth of the System, which flirts with what the times demand, and accommodates itself to the university lecturers.

The objective accent falls on WHAT is said, the subjective accent on HOW it is said. This distinction holds even in the aesthetic realm, and receives definite expression in the principle that what is in itself true may in the mouth of such and such a person become untrue. In these times this distinction is particularly worthy of notice, for if we wish to

[1] '[that] which was to be demonstrated' (the phrase is used in Euclid's geometry after each theorem has been proved).

express in a single sentence the difference between ancient times and our own, we should doubtless have to say: 'In ancient times only an individual here and there knew the truth; now all know it, except that the inwardness of its appropriation stands in an inverse relationship to the extent of its dissemination.' Aesthetically, the contradiction that truth becomes untruth, in this or that person's mouth, is best construed comically: in the ethico-religious sphere, the accent is again on the 'how'. But this is not to be understood as referring to demeanour, expression or the like; rather it refers to the relationship sustained by the existing individual, in his own existence, to the content of his utterance. Objectively, the interest is focused merely on the thought-content, subjectively on the inwardness. At its maximum, this inward 'how' is the passion of the infinite, and the passion of the infinite is the truth. But the passion of the infinite is precisely subjectivity, and thus subjectivity becomes the truth. Objectively, there is no infinite decisiveness, and hence it is objectively appropriate to annul the difference between good and evil, together with the principle of contradiction and therewith also the infinite difference between the true and the false. Only in subjectivity is there decisiveness; to seek objectivity is to be in error. It is the passion of the infinite that is the decisive factor, and not its content, for its content is precisely itself. In this manner, subjectivity and the subjective 'how' constitute the truth.

But the 'how' which is thus subjectively accentuated precisely because the subject is an existing individual, is also subject to a dialectic with respect to time. In the passionate movement of decision, where the road swings away from objective knowledge, it seems as if the infinite decision were thereby realized. But in the same moment, the existing individual finds himself in the temporal order, and the subjective 'how' is transformed into a striving, a striving which receives indeed its impulse and repeated renewal from the decisive passion of the infinite, but is nevertheless a striving.

When subjectivity is the truth, the conceptual determination of the truth must include an expression for the antithesis to objectivity, a memento of a fork in the road where the way swings off; this expression will at the same time serve as an indication of the subjective inwardness. Here is such a definition of truth: *an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth* – the highest truth attainable for an *existing* individual. At the point where the way swings off (and where this is cannot be specified objectively, since it is a matter of subjectivity) there objective knowledge is placed in abeyance. Thus the subject merely has, objectively, the uncertainty; but it is this which precisely increases the tension of that infinite passion which constitutes his inwardness. The truth is precisely the venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite. I contemplate the order of nature in the hope of finding God, and I see omnipotence and wisdom; but I also see much else that disturbs my mind and excites anxiety. The sum of all this is an objective uncertainty. But it is for this very reason that the inwardness becomes as intense as it is, for it embraces this objective uncertainty with the entire passion of the infinite. In the case of a mathematical proposition, the objectivity is given, but for this reason the truth of such a proposition is also an indifferent truth.

But the above definition of truth is an equivalent expression for faith. Without risk there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty. If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe; but precisely because I cannot do this, I must believe.

If I wish to preserve myself in faith, I must constantly be intent on holding fast the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving my faith.

9 Reason, Passion and the Religious Hypothesis: William James, *The Will to Believe**

In the course of assessing the value of supposed miracles as support for religious belief, David Hume had enunciated a principle which many philosophers would find self-evidently sound and sensible: 'a wise man proportions his belief to the strength of the evidence' (see extract 7, above). This implies it is foolish to believe a proposition for which the evidence is weak or inconclusive; one could go further and say that belief in such cases is irresponsible and wrong. In the following extract from an address given to the Philosophical Clubs of Yale and Brown Universities at the end of the nineteenth century, the celebrated American philosopher William James strongly rejects this argument. There are, he concedes, many cases where our belief is determined by the facts: we cannot just *decide* whether or not to believe, for example, that Abraham Lincoln existed. But where we are faced with a genuine option that cannot be decided on intellectual grounds, James argues that our 'passional nature not only lawfully may but must decide'. Both moral and religious questions provide examples of questions where our will need not, and indeed should not wait on the evidence. The sceptic may claim to remain aloof and suspend judgement, but James argues that this is just as much a matter of passion, of exalting our fear of being in error above our hope that the religious hypothesis may be true.

James goes on to argue that an act of will or faith may itself bring benefits that cannot be achieved any other way; friendship, for example, would be impossible if everything were assessed by the standards of 'snarling logicality' and 'pure intellectualism'. The extolling of passionate commitment over austere rational objectivity seems in some respects reminiscent of Kierkegaard (see preceding extract). But James adds a dimension drawn from his pragmatist theory of belief, according to which the content of a belief is intimately bound up with the difference it makes to the way we behave: 'belief', as he puts it in the penultimate footnote of the extract, 'is measured by action'. He ends with a resounding quotation comparing the human predicament with that of a traveller on a mountain pass in the midst of whirling snow and blinding mist; if we stand still, we shall be frozen to death. Accepting the religious hypothesis, for James, enables us to act with courage and integrity. That is indeed a signal benefit; the question his critics may be inclined to press is why such benefits should be beyond the reach of the resolute and sincere atheist or the agnostic.

In the recently published Life by Leslie Stephen of his brother, Fitz-James, there is an account of a school to which the latter went when he was a boy. The teacher, a certain Mr Guest, used to converse with his pupils in this wise: 'Gurney, what is the difference between justification and sanctification?'; 'Stephen, prove the omnipotence of God!' etc. In this midst of our Harvard freethinking and indifference we are prone to

* William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans Green, 1897), ch. 1; abridged.

imagine that here at your good old orthodox College conversation continues to be somewhat upon this order; and to show you that we at Harvard have not lost all interest in these vital subjects, I have brought with me tonight something like a sermon on justification by faith to read to you, – I mean an essay in justification *of* faith, a defence of our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, in spite of the fact that our merely logical intellect may not have been coerced. 'The Will to Believe', accordingly, is the title of my paper...

...The thesis I defend is, briefly stated, this: *Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, 'Do not decide, but leave the question open', is itself a passional decision – just like deciding yes or no, and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth...*

...'Le cœur a ses raisons', as Pascal says, 'que la raison ne connaît pas';[1] and however indifferent to all but the bare rules of the game the umpire, the abstract intellect, may be, the concrete players who furnish him the materials to judge of are usually each one of them, in love with some pet 'live hypothesis' of his own. Let us agree, however, that wherever there is no forced option, the dispassionately judicial intellect with no pet hypothesis, saving us, as it does from dupery at any rate, ought to be our ideal.

The question next arises: Are there not somewhere forced options in our speculative questions, and can we (as men who may be interested at least as much in positively gaining truth as in merely escaping dupery) always wait with impunity till the coercive evidence shall have arrived? It seems *a priori* improbable that the truth should be so nicely adjusted to our needs and powers as that. In the great boarding-house of nature, the cakes and the butter and syrup seldom come out so even and leave the plates so clean. Indeed, we should view them with scientific suspicion if they did.

Moral questions immediately present themselves as questions whose solution cannot wait for sensible proof. A moral question is a question not of what sensibly exists, but of what is good, or would be good if it did exist. Science can tell us what exists; but to compare the *worths*, both of what exists and what does not exist, we must consult not science, but what Pascal calls our heart...

Turn now from these wide questions of good to a certain class of questions of fact, questions concerning personal relations, states of mind between one man and another. *Do you like me or not?* – for example. Whether you do or not depends, in countless instances, of whether I meet you half way, am willing to assume that you must like me, and show you trust and expectation. The previous faith on my part in your liking's existence is in such cases what makes your liking come. But if I stand aloof, and refuse to budge an inch until I have objective evidence, until you shall have done something apt, as the absolutists say, *ad extorquendum assensum meum* [to compel my assent], ten to one your liking never comes. How many women's hearts are vanquished by the mere sanguine insistence of some man that they *must* love him! He will not consent to the hypothesis that they cannot. The desire for a certain kind of truth here brings about that special truth's existence; and so it is in innumerable cases

[1] 'The heart has its reasons, of which reason is unaware.'

of other sorts. Who gains promotions, boons, appointments, but the man in whose life they are seen to play the part of live hypotheses, who discounts them, sacrifices other things for their sake before they have come, and takes risks for them in advance? His faith acts on the powers above him as a claim, and creates its own verification.

A social organism of any sort whatever, large or small, is what it is because each member proceeds to his own duty with a trust that the other members will simultaneously do theirs. Wherever a desired result is achieved by the cooperation of many independent persons, its existence as a fact is a pure consequence of the precursive faith of one another of those immediately concerned. A government, an army, a commercial system, a ship, a college, an athletic team, all exist on this condition, without which not only is nothing achieved, but nothing is even attempted. A whole train of passengers (individually brave enough) will be looted by a few highwaymen, simply because the latter can count on one another, while each passenger fears that if he makes a movement of resistance, he will be shot before any one else backs him up. If we believed that the whole car-full would rise at once with us, we should each severally rise, and train-robbing would never even be attempted. There are, then, cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming. *And where faith in a fact can help create the fact*, that would be an insane logic, which should say that faith running ahead of scientific evidence is the 'lowest kind of immorality' onto which a thinking being can fall. Yet such is the logic by which our scientific absolutists pretend to run their lives!

In truths dependent on our personal action, then, faith based on desire is certainly a lawful and possibly an indispensable thing.

But now, it will be said, these are all childish human cases, and have nothing to do with great cosmical matters, like the question of religious faith. Let us then pass on to that. Religions differ so much in their accidents that in discussing the religious question we must make it very generic and broad. What then do we now mean by the religious hypothesis? Science says things are; morality says some things are better than other things; and religion says essentially two things.

First, she says that the best things are the more eternal things, the overlapping things, the things in the universe that throw the last stone, so to speak, and say the last word. 'Perfection is eternal,' – this phrase of Charles Secrétan seems a good way of putting this first affirmation of religion, an affirmation which obviously cannot yet be verified scientifically at all.

The second affirmation of religion is that we are better off even now if we believe her first affirmation to be true.

Now let us consider what the logical elements of this situation are *in case the religious hypothesis in both its branches be really true.* (Of course, we must admit that possibility at the outset. If we are to discuss the question at all, it must involve a living option. If for any of you religion be a hypothesis that cannot by any living possibility be true, then you need go no farther. I speak to the 'saving remnant' alone.) So proceeding, we see, first, that religion offers itself as a *momentous* option. We are supposed to gain, even now, by our belief, and to lose by our nonbelief, a certain vital good. Secondly, religion is a *forced* option, so far as that good goes. We cannot escape the issue by remaining sceptical and waiting for more light, because, although we do avoid error in that way *if religion be untrue*, we lose the good, *if it be true*, just as certainly as if we positively choose to disbelieve. It is as if a man should hesitate

indefinitely to ask a certain woman to marry him because he was not perfectly sure that she would prove an angel after he brought her home. Would he not cut himself off from that particular angel-possibility as decisively as if he went and married someone else? Scepticism, then, is not avoidance of option; it is option of a certain particular kind of risk. *Better risk loss of truth than chance of error,* – that is your faith-vetoer's exact position. He is actively playing his stake as much as the believer is; he is backing the field against the religious hypothesis, just as the believer is backing the religious hypothesis against the field. To preach scepticism to us as a duty until 'sufficient evidence' for religion be found, is tantamount therefore to telling us, when in presence of the religious hypothesis, that to yield to our fear of its being error is wiser and better than to yield to our hope that it may be true. It is not intellect against all passions, then; it is only intellect with one passion laying down its law. And by what, forsooth, is the supreme wisdom of this passion warranted? Dupery for dupery, what proof is there that dupery through hope is so much worse than dupery through fear? I, for one, can see no proof; and I simply refuse obedience to the scientist's command to imitate his kind of option, in a case where my own stake is important enough to give me the right to choose my own form of risk. If religion be true and the evidence for it be still insufficient, I do not wish, by putting your extinguisher upon my nature (which feels to me as if it had after all some business in this matter) to forfeit my sole chance in life of getting on the winning side, – that chance depending, of course, on my willingness to run the risk of acting as if my passional need of taking the world religiously might be prophetic and right.

All this is on the supposition that it really may be prophetic and right, and that, even to us who are discussing the matter, religion is a live hypothesis which may be true. Now to most of us religion comes in a still further way that makes a veto on our active faith even more illogical. The more perfect and more eternal aspect of the universe is represented in our religions as having personal form. The universe is no longer a mere *It* to us, but a *Thou,* if we are religious; and any relation that may be possible from person to person might be possible here. For instance, although in one sense we are passive portions of the universe, in another we show a curious autonomy, as if we were small active centres on our own account. We feel, too, as if the appeal of religion to us were made to our own active goodwill, as if evidence might be forever withheld from us unless we met the hypothesis half way. To take a trivial illustration: just as a man who in a company of gentlemen made no advances, asked a warrant for every concession, and believed no one's word without proof, would cut himself off by such churlishness from all the social rewards that a more trusting spirit would earn, so here, one who should shut himself up in snarling logicality and try to make the gods extort his recognition willy-nilly, or not get it at all, might cut himself off forever from his only opportunity of making the gods' acquaintance. This feeling, forced on us we know not whence, that by obstinately believing that there are gods (although not to do so would be so easy both for our logic and our life) we are doing the universe the deepest service we can, seems part of the living essence of the religious hypothesis. If the hypothesis *were* true in all its parts, including this one, then pure intellectualism, with its veto on our making willing advances, would be an absurdity; and some participation of our sympathetic nature would be logically required. I, therefore, for one, cannot see my way to accepting the agnostic rules for truth-seeking, or wilfully agree to keep my willing nature out of the game. I cannot do so for this plain reason,

that *a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule.* That for me is the long and short of the formal logic of the situation, no matter what the kinds of truth might materially be.

I confess I do not see how this logic could be escaped. But sad experience makes me fear that some of you may still shrink from radically saying with me, *in abstracto,* that we have the right to believe at our own risk any hypothesis that is live enough to tempt our will. I suspect, however, that if this is so, it is because you have got away from the abstract logical point of view altogether, and are thinking (perhaps without realizing it) of some particular religious hypothesis which for you is dead. The freedom to 'believe what we will' you apply to the case of some patent superstition; and the faith you think of is the faith defined by the schoolboy when he said 'Faith is when you believe something that you know ain't true.' I can only repeat that this is misapprehension. *In concreto,* the freedom to believe can only cover living options which the intellect of the individual cannot by itself resolve; and living options never seem absurdities to him who has them to consider. When I look at the religious question as it really puts itself to concrete men, and when I think of all the possibilities which both practically and theoretically it involves, then this command that we shall put a stopper on our heart, instincts, and courage, and wait – acting of course meanwhile more or less as if religion were *not* true[1] – till doomsday, or till such time as our intellect and senses working together may have taken in evidence enough, – this command, I say, seems to me the queerest idol ever manufactured in the philosophical cave. Were we scholastic absolutists, there might be more excuse. If we had an infallible intellect with its objective certitudes, we might feel ourselves disloyal to such a perfect organ of knowledge in not trusting to it exclusively, in not waiting for its releasing word. But if we are empiricists, if we believe that no bell in us tolls to let us know for certain when truth is in our grasp, then it seems a piece of idle fantasticality to preach so solemnly our duty of waiting for the bell. Indeed we *may* wait if we will, – I hope you do not think that I am denying that, – but if we do so, we do so at our peril as much as if we believed. In either case we *act,* taking our life in our hands. No one of us ought to issue vetoes to the other, nor should we bandy words of abuse. We ought, on the contrary, delicately and profoundly to respect one another's mental freedom: then only shall we bring about the intellectual republic; then only shall we have that spirit of inner tolerance without which all our outer tolerance is soulless, and which is empiricism's glory; then only shall we live and let live, in speculative as well as practical things.

I began by a reference to Fitz-James Stephen; let me end by a quotation from him. 'What do you think of yourself? What do you think of the world? . . . These are questions with which all must deal as it seems good to them. They are riddles of

[1] *Since belief is measured by action, he who forbids us to believe religion to be true, necessarily also forbids us to act as we should if we did believe it to be true. The whole defence of religious faith hinges upon action. If the action required or inspired by the religious hypothesis is in no way different from that dictated by the naturalistic hypothesis, then religious faith is a pure superfluity, better pruned away, and controversy about its legitimacy is a piece of idle trifling, unworthy of serious minds. I myself believe, of course, that the religious hypothesis gives to the words an expression which specifically determines our reactions, and makes them in a large part unlike what they might be on a purely naturalistic scheme of belief.

the Sphinx and in some way or other we must deal with them . . . In all important transactions of life we have to take a leap in the dark . . . If we decide to leave the riddles unanswered, that is a choice; if we waver in our answer, that, too, is a choice but whatever choice we make, we make it at our peril. If a man chooses to turn his back altogether on God and the future, no one can prevent him; no one can show beyond reasonable doubt that he is mistaken. If a man thinks otherwise and acts as he thinks, I do not see that anyone can prove that *he* is mistaken. Each must act as he thinks best; and if he is wrong, so much the worse for him. We stand on a mountain pass in the midst of whirling snow, and blinding mist, through which we get glimpses now and then of paths which may be deceptive. If we stand still we shall be frozen to death. If we take the wrong road we shall be dashed to pieces. We do not certainly know whether there is any right one. What must we do? "Be strong and of a good courage." Act for the best, hope for the best, and take what comes . . . If death ends all, we cannot meet death better.'[1]

10 The Meaning of Religious Language: John Wisdom, *Gods**

A study of our previous extracts shows there are two very different ways of approaching the claims of religion: logical analysis and the scrutiny of evidence on the one hand, and, on the other, an emphasis on faith, passion and the will to believe. Philosophy of religion in the twentieth century has further explored these two paths, with, on the one hand, debates on the verifiability of religious doctrines and the rational justification for belief in God, and, on the other hand, attempts to understand religious theory and practice as an entirely different enterprise from what is done in the objective world of scientific theory. Particularly influential in connection with the latter route has been the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein which emphasizes the importance of religion not as a set of quasi-scientific doctrines, but as a *form of life*. The following extract, from the Cambridge philosopher John Wisdom, takes a similar line in arguing that religious claims should not be construed as referring to experimental issues, but should be assessed in terms of the differences they make to the life of the believer.

Wisdom likens religious disputes to the conflicts that arise in aesthetic appreciation, when two people differ as to the beauty of a work of art. In another comparison (much discussed since) he describes two people returning to a long-neglected garden: one expresses his appreciation for the beauty and order found there by talking of an invisible gardener who tends it, while the other rejects such talk. Although nothing experimental can settle the issue, 'with [the] difference in what they say about the gardener goes a difference in how they feel towards the garden, in spite of the fact that neither expects anything of it which the other does not expect'. Towards the end of the paper Wisdom refers to Freudian theory, with its suggestion that religious talk is merely a projection of internal feelings and infantile fantasies. But the issue ultimately hinges on more than merely subjective feelings. Ancient talk of gods, of mysterious presences outside us, may have been ways of expressing truths about the good that can inform and enrich our lives. The great artists, says Wisdom, do not speak to us only of 'fairylands'

[1] *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (2nd edn, London, 1874), p. 353.

* John Wisdom, 'Gods', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 45 [1944–5], 185–206; considerably abridged.

but of how it is possible to achieve 'exhilaration without anxiety, peace without boredom'. This is not only a different approach to religious language from that taken in the intellectual debates featured in many of our previous readings; it is also striking that the tone of the discussion itself, the way of philosophizing about religion, has undergone a marked shift. The aim is to engage the reader by poetic and persuasive language, by literary allusion, by direct appeal to a cultural tradition which continues to influence our lives, even though we can no longer construe it as making verifiable claims about the world.

To its opponents, there appears a risk that this kind of approach involves abandoning that linguistic and logical precision that is the essence of sound philosophy. To its supporters, the appeal to the manifold richness and complexity of our ways of describing the human predicament need not necessarily imply an abandonment of rational debate; as Wisdom himself puts it, 'if we say... that... a difference as to the existence of a God is not... experimental and therefore not as to the facts, we must not forthwith assume that there is no right and wrong about it, no rationality or irrationality, no appropriateness or inappropriateness, no procedure which tends to settle it.'

The existence of God is not an experimental issue in the way it was. An atheist or agnostic might say to a theist 'You still think there are spirits in the trees, nymphs in the streams, a God of the world.' He might say this because he noticed the theist in time of drought pray for rain and make a sacrifice and in the morning look for rain. But disagreement about whether there are gods is now less of this experimental or betting sort than it used to be. This is due in part, if not wholly, to our better knowledge of why things happen as they do.

It is true that even in these days it is seldom that one who believes in God has no hopes or fears which an atheist has not. Few believers now expect prayer to still the waves, but some think it makes a difference to people and not merely in ways the atheist would admit. Of course with people, as opposed to waves and machines, one never knows what they won't do next, so that expecting prayer to make a difference to them is not so definite a thing as believing in its mechanical efficacy. Still, just as primitive people pray in a business-like way for rain, so some people still pray for others with a real feeling of doing something to help. However, in spite of this persistence of an experimental element in some theistic belief, it remains true that Elijah's method on Mount Carmel of settling the matter of what god or gods exist would be far less appropriate today than it was then.

Belief in gods is not merely a matter of expectation of a world to come. Someone may say 'The fact that a theist no more than an atheist expects prayer to bring down fire from heaven or cure the sick does not mean that there is no difference between them as to the facts; it does not mean that the theist has no expectations different from the atheist. For very often those who believe in God believe in another world and believe that God is there and that we shall go to that world when we die.'

This is true, but I do not want to consider here expectations as to what one will see and feel after death nor what sort of reasons these logically unique expectations could have. So I want to consider those theists who do not believe in a future life, or rather, I want to consider the differences between atheists and theists in so far as these differences are not a matter of belief in a future life.

What are these differences? And is it that theists are superstitious or that atheists are blind? A child may wish to sit a while with his father and he may, when he has done what his father dislikes, fear punishment and feel distress at causing vexation, and while his father is alive he may feel sure of help when danger threatens and feel that there is sympathy for him when disaster has come. When his father is dead he will no longer expect punishment or help. Maybe for a moment an old fear will come or a cry for help escape him, but he will at once remember that this is no good now. He may feel that his father is no more until perhaps someone says to him that his father is still alive though he lives now in another world and one so far away that there is no hope of seeing him or hearing his voice again. The child may be told that nevertheless his father can see him and hear all he says. When he has been told this the child will still fear no punishment nor expect any sign of his father, but now, even more than he did when his father was alive, he will feel that his father sees him all the time and will dread distressing him and when he has done something wrong he will feel separated from his father until he has felt sorry for what he has done. Maybe when he himself comes to die he will be like a man who expects to find a friend in the strange country where he is going, but even when this is so, it is by no means all of what makes the difference between a child who believes that his father lives still in another world and one who does not.

Likewise one who believes in God may face death differently from one who does not, but there is another difference between them besides this. This other difference may still be described as belief in another world, only this belief is not a matter of expecting one thing rather than another here or hereafter, it is not a matter of a world to come but of a world that now is thought beyond our senses.

We are at once reminded of those other unseen worlds which some philosophers 'believe in' and others 'deny', while non-philosophers unconsciously 'accept' them by using them as models with which to 'get the hang of' the patterns in the flux of experience. We recall the timeless entities whose changeless connections we seek to represent in symbols, and the values which stand firm amidst our flickering satisfaction and remorse, and the physical things which, though not beyond the corruption of moth and rust, are yet more permanent than the shadows they throw upon the screen before our minds. We recall, too, our talk of souls and of what lies in their depths and is manifested to us partially and intermittently in our own feelings and the behaviour of others. The hypothesis of mind, of other human minds and of animal minds, is reasonable because it explains for each of us why certain things behave so cunningly all by themselves unlike even the most ingenious machines. Is the hypothesis of minds in flowers and trees reasonable for like reasons? Is the hypothesis of a world mind reasonable for like reasons – someone who adjusts the blossom to the bees, someone whose presence may at times be felt – in a garden in high summer, in the hills when clouds are gathering, but not, perhaps, in a cholera epidemic? . . .

Let us now approach these same points by a different road. How it is that an explanatory hypothesis, such as the existence of God, may start by being experimental and gradually become something quite different can be seen from the following story:

Two people return to their long-neglected garden and find among the weeds a few of the old plants surprisingly vigorous. One says to the other 'It must be that a gardener has been coming and doing something about these plants.' Upon inquiry

they find that no neighbour has ever seen anyone at work in their garden. The first man says to the other 'He must have worked while people slept.' The other says 'No, someone would have heard him and besides, anybody who cared about the plants would have kept down these weeds.' The first man says 'Look at the way these are arranged. There is purpose and a feeling for beauty here. I believe that someone comes, someone invisible to mortal eyes. I believe that the more carefully we look the more we shall find confirmation of this.' They examine the garden ever so carefully and sometimes they come on new things suggesting that a gardener comes and sometimes they come on new things suggesting the contrary and even that a malicious person has been at work. Besides examining the garden carefully they also study what happens to gardens left without attention. Each learns all the other learns about this and about the garden. Consequently, when after all this, one says 'I still believe a gardener comes' while the other says 'I don't', their different words now reflect no difference as to what they have found in the garden, no difference as to what they would find in the garden if they looked further and no difference about how fast untended gardens fall into disorder. At this stage, in this context, the gardener hypothesis has ceased to be experimental, the difference between one who accepts and one who rejects it is now not a matter of the one expecting something the other does not expect. What is the difference between them? The one says 'A gardener comes unseen and unheard. He is manifested only in his works with which we are all familiar', the other says 'There is no gardener', and with this difference in what they say about the gardener goes a difference in how they feel towards the garden, in spite of the fact that neither expects anything of it which the other does not expect.

But is this the whole difference between them – that the one calls the garden by one name and feels one way towards it, while the other calls it by another name and feels in another way towards it? And if this is what the difference has become then is it any longer appropriate to ask 'Which is right?' or 'Which is reasonable?'

And yet surely such questions *are* appropriate when one person says to another 'You still think the world's a garden and not a wilderness, and that the gardener has not forsaken it' or 'You still think there are nymphs of the streams, a presence in the hills, a spirit of the world.' Perhaps when a man sings 'God's in His heaven' we need not take this as more than an expression of how he feels. But when Bishop Gore or Dr Joad write about belief in God and young men read them in order to settle their religious doubts the impression is not simply that of persons choosing exclamations with which to face nature and the 'changes and chances of this mortal life'. The disputants speak as if they are concerned with a matter of scientific fact, or of trans-sensual, trans-scientific and metaphysical fact, but still of fact and still a matter about which reasons for and against may be offered, although no scientific reasons in the sense of field surveys for fossils or experiments on delinquents are to the point…

Suppose two people are looking at a picture or natural scene. One says 'Excellent' or 'Beautiful' or 'Divine', the other says 'I don't see it'. He means he doesn't see the beauty. And this reminds us of how we felt the theist accuse the atheist of blindness and the atheist accuse the theist of seeing what isn't there. And yet surely each sees what the other sees. It isn't that one can see part of the picture which the other can't see. So the difference is in a sense not one as to the facts. And so it cannot be removed by the one disputant discovering to the other what so far he hasn't seen. It isn't that

the one sees the picture in a different light and so, as we might say, sees a different picture. Consequently the difference between them cannot be resolved by putting the picture in a different light. And yet surely this is just what can be done in such a case – not by moving the picture but by talk perhaps. To settle a dispute as to whether a piece of music is good or better than another we listen again, with a picture we look again. Someone perhaps points to emphasize certain features and we see it in a different light. Shall we call this 'field work' and 'the last of observation' or shall we call it 'reviewing the premises' and 'the beginning of deduction . . .'?

And if we say as we did at the beginning that when a difference as to the existence of a God is not one as to future happenings then it is not experimental and therefore not as to the facts, we must not forthwith assume that there is no right and wrong about it, no rationality or irrationality, no appropriateness or inappropriateness, no procedure which tends to settle it, *nor even that this procedure is in no sense a discovery of new facts.* After all even in science this is not so. Our two gardeners even when they had reached the stage when neither expected any experimental result which the other did not, might yet have continued the dispute, each presenting and representing the features of the garden favouring his hypothesis, that is, fitting his model for describing the accepted fact; each emphasizing the pattern he wishes to emphasize. True, in science, there is seldom or never a pure instance of this sort of dispute, for nearly always with difference of hypothesis goes some difference of expectation as to the facts. But scientists argue about rival hypotheses with a vigour which is not exactly proportioned to difference in expectations of experimental results.

The difference as to whether a God exists involves our feelings more than most scientific disputes and in this respect is more like a difference as to whether there is beauty in a thing.

The Connecting Technique. Let us consider again the technique used in revealing or proving beauty, in removing a blindness, in inducing an attitude which is lacking, in reducing a reaction that is inappropriate . . . Imagine that a man picks up some flowers that lie half withered on a table and gently puts them in water. Another man says to him 'You believe flowers feel'. He says this although he knows that the man who helps the flowers doesn't expect anything of them which he himself doesn't expect; for he himself expects the flowers to be 'refreshed' and to be easily hurt, injured, I mean, by rough handling, while the man who puts them in water does not expect them to whisper 'Thank you'. The Sceptic says 'You believe flowers feel' because something about the way the other man lifts the flowers and puts them in water suggests an attitude to the flowers which he feels inappropriate although perhaps he would not feel it inappropriate to butterflies. He feels that this attitude to flowers is somewhat crazy *just as it is sometimes felt that a lover's attitude is somewhat crazy even when this is not a matter of his having false hopes about how the person he is in love with will act.* It is often said in such cases that reasoning is useless. But the very person who says this feels that the lover's attitude is crazy, is inappropriate like some dreads and hatreds, such as some horrors of enclosed places. And often one who says 'It is useless to reason' proceeds at once to reason with the lover, nor is this reasoning always quite without effect. We may draw the lover's attention to certain things done by her he is in love with and trace for him a path to these from things done by others at other times

which have disgusted and infuriated him. And by this means we may weaken his admiration and confidence, make him feel it unjustified and arouse his suspicion and contempt and make him feel our suspicion and contempt reasonable. It is possible, of course, that he has already noticed the analogies, the connections, we point out and that he has accepted them – that is, he has not denied them nor passed them off. He has recognized them and they have altered his attitude, altered his love, but he still loves. We then feel that perhaps it is we who are blind and cannot see what he can see.

What happens, what should happen, when we inquire in this way into the reasonableness, the propriety of belief in the Gods?... What are the stories of the gods? What are our feelings when we believe in God? They are feelings of awe before power, dread of the thunderbolts of Zeus, confidence in the everlasting arms, unease beneath the all-seeing eye. They are feelings of guilt and inescapable vengeance, of smothered hate and of a security we can hardly do without. We have only to remind ourselves of these feelings and the stories of the gods and goddesses and heroes in which these feelings find expression, to be reminded of how we felt as children to our parents and the big people of our childhood. Writing of a first telephone call from his grandmother, Proust says: '... it was rather that this isolation of the voice was like a symbol, a presentation, a direct consequence of another isolation, that of my grandmother, separated for the first time in my life, from myself. The orders or prohibitions which she addressed to me at every moment in the ordinary course of my life, the tedium of obedience or the fire of rebellion which neutralized the affection that I felt for her were at this moment eliminated... "Granny!" I cried to her... but I had beside me only that voice, a phantom, as unpalpable as that which would come to revisit me when my grandmother was dead. "Speak to me!" but then it happened that, left more solitary still, I ceased to catch the sound of her voice. My grandmother could no longer hear me... I continued to call her, sounding the empty night, in which I felt that her appeals also must be straying. I was shaken by the same anguish which, in the distant past, I had felt once before, one day when, a little child, in a crowd, I had lost her.'...

When a man's father fails him by death or weakness, how much he needs another father, one in the heavens with whom is 'no variableness nor shadow of turning'... Freud says: 'The ordinary man cannot imagine this Providence in any other form but that of a greatly exalted father, for only such a one could understand the needs of the sons of men, or be softened by their prayers and be placated by the signs of their remorse. The whole thing is so patently infantile, so incongruous with reality...' 'So incongruous with reality'! It cannot be denied.

But here a new aspect of the matter may strike us. For the very facts which make us feel that now we can recognize systems of superhuman, subhuman, elusive, beings for what they are – the persistent projections of infantile phantasies – include facts which make these systems less fantastic. What are these facts? They are patterns in human reactions which are well described by saying that we are as if there were hidden within us powers, persons, not ourselves and stronger than ourselves. That this is so may perhaps be said to have been common knowledge yielded by ordinary observation of people, but we did not know the degree in which this is so until recent study of extraordinary cases in extraordinary conditions had revealed it. I refer, of course, to the study of multiple personalities and the wider studies of psycho-analysts. Even

when the results of this work are reported to us, that is not the same as tracing the patterns in the details of the cases on which the results are based; and even that is not the same as taking part in the studies oneself. One thing not sufficiently realized is that some of the things shut within us are not bad but good.

Now the gods, good and evil and mixed, have always been mysterious powers outside us rather than within. But they have also been within. It is not a modern theory but an old saying that in each of us a devil sleeps. Eve said: 'The serpent beguiled me.' Helen says to Menelaus:

> ...And yet how strange it is!
> I ask not thee; I ask my own sad thought,
> What was there in my heart, that I forgot
> My home and land and all I loved, to fly
> With a strange man? Surely it was not I,
> But Cypris there![1]

Elijah found that God was not in the wind, nor in the thunder, but in a still small voice. The kingdom of Heaven is within us, Christ insisted, though usually about the size of a grain of mustard seed, and he prayed that we should become one with the Father in Heaven.

New knowledge made it necessary either to give up saying 'The sun is sinking' or to give the words a new meaning. In many contexts we preferred to stick to the old words and give them a new meaning which was not entirely new, but, on the contrary, *practically* the same as the old. The Greeks did not speak of the dangers of repressing instincts, but they did speak of the dangers of thwarting Dionysos, of neglecting Cypris for Diana, of forgetting Poseidon for Athena. We have eaten of the fruit of a garden we cannot forget, though we were never there, a garden we still look for though we can never find it...

The artists who do most for us don't tell us only of fairylands. Proust, Manet, Breugel, even Botticelli and Vermeer, show us reality. And yet they give us for a moment exhilaration without anxiety, peace without boredom. And those who, like Freud, work in a different way against that which too often comes over us and forces us into deadness or despair,[2] also deserve critical, patient and courageous attention. For they too work to release us from human bondage into human freedom.

Many have tried to find ways of salvation. The reports they bring back are always incomplete and apt to mislead even when they are not in words but in music or paint. But they are by no means useless; and not the worst of them are those which speak of oneness with God. But in so far as we become one with Him He becomes one with us. St John says he is in us as we love one another.

This love, I suppose, is not benevolence but something that comes of the oneness with one another of which Christ spoke.[3] Sometimes it momentarily gains strength.[4] Hate and the Devil do too. And what is oneness without otherness?

[1] *Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, trans. Gilbert Murray.
[2] Matthew Arnold, *Summer Night*.
[3] *St John 16: 21.
[4] *'The Harvesters', in Kenneth Grahame, *The Golden Age*.