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# A Refutation of Deism

**in a Dialogue**

Percy Bysshe Shelley

1814

I am willing to promise that if, after mature deliberation, the arguments which you have advanced in favour of Atheism should appear incontrovertible, I will endeavour to adopt so much of the Christian scheme as is consistent with my persuasion of the goodness, unity and majesty of God.

***FINIS.***

You will have observed, from the zeal with which I have urged[56] arguments so revolting to my genuine sentiments, and conducted to a conclusion in direct contradiction to that faith which every good man must eternally preserve, how little I am inclined to sympathize[57] with those of my religion who have pretended to prove the existence of God by the unassisted light of reason. I confess that the necessity of a revelation has been compromised by treacherous friends to Christianity, who have maintained that the sublime mysteries of the being of a God and the immortality of the soul are discoverable from other sources than itself.

I have proved, that on the principles of that philosophy to which Epicurus,[58] Lord Bacon, Newton, Locke and Hume were addicted, the existence of God is a chimera.

The Christian Religion then, alone, affords indisputable assurance that the world was created by the power, and is preserved by the Providence of an Almighty God, who, in justice has appointed a future life for the punishment of the vicious and the remuneration of the virtuous.

Now, O Theosophus, I call upon you to decide between Atheism and Christianity; to declare whether you will pursue your principles to the destruction of the bonds of civilized society, or wear the easy yoke of that Religion which proclaims "peace upon earth, good-will to all men."

**THEOSOPHUS.**

I am not prepared at present, I confess, to reply clearly to your unexpected arguments. I assure you that no considerations, however specious, should seduce me to deny the existence of my Creator.

[56] So in the Errata: in the text, used.

[57] In the original, sympathise, contrary to Shelley's practice.

[58] So in the Errata; but Epiphanes in the text.



# Contents

deserves to be considered as the effect, rather than the cause of motion. The ideas which suggest themselves too are prompted by the circumstances of our situation, these are the elements of thought, and from the various combinations of these our feelings, opinions and volitions, inevitably result.

That which is infinite necessarily includes that which is finite. The distinction therefore between the Universe, and that by which the Universe is upheld, is manifestly erroneous. To devise the word God, that you may express a certain portion of the universal system, can answer no good purpose in philosophy: In the language of reason, the words God and Universe are synonymous.[53] Omnia enim per Dei potentiam facta sunt: imo, quia naturæ potentia nulla est nisi ipsa Dei potentia, artem est nos catemus Dei potentiam non intelligere quatenus causas naturales ignoramus; adeoque stultè ad candam Dei potentiam recurritur, quando rei alicujus, causam naturalem, sive est, ipsam Dei potentiam ignoramus.[54]

Thus, from the principles of that reason to which you so rashly appealed as the ultimate arbiter of our dispute, have I shewn that the popular arguments in favour of the being of a God are totally destitute of colour. I have shewn the absurdity of attributing intelligence to the cause of those effects which we perceive in the Universe, and the fallacy which lurks[55] in the argument from design. I have shewn that order is no more than a peculiar manner of contemplating the operation of necessary agents, that mind is the effect, not the cause of motion, that power is the attribute, not the origin of Being. I have proved that we can have no evidence of the existence of a God from the principles of reason.

[53] In the original, synonimous.

[54] Shelley here adds the note, "Spinosa. Tract. Theologico-Pol. chap. I, p. 14."

[55] In the text, works; but the correction is made in the Errata.

inadmissible to deduce the being of a God from the existence of the Universe; even if this mode of reasoning did not conduct to the monstrous conclusion of an infinity of creative and created Gods, each more eminently requiring a Creator than its predecessor.

If Power[52] be an attribute of existing substance, substance could not have derived its origin from power. One thing cannot be at the same time the cause and the effect of another.—The word power expresses the capability of any thing to be or act. The human mind never hesitates to annex the idea of power to any object of its experience. To deny that power is the attribute of being, is to deny that being can be. If power be an attribute of substance, the hypothesis of a God is a superfluous and unwarrantable assumption.

Intelligence is that attribute of the Deity, which you hold to be most apparent in the Universe. Intelligence is only known to us as a mode of animal being. We cannot conceive intelligence distinct from sensation and perception, which are attributes to organized bodies. To assert that God is intelligent, is to assert that he has ideas; and Locke has proved that ideas result from sensation. Sensation can exist only in an organized body, an organized body is necessarily limited both in extent and operation. The God of the rational Theosophist is a vast and wise animal.

You have laid it down as a maxim that the power of beginning motion is an attribute of mind as much as thought and sensation.

Mind cannot create, it can only perceive. Mind is the recipient of impressions made on the organs of sense, and without the action of external objects we should not only be deprived of all knowledge of the existence of mind, but totally incapable of the knowledge of any thing. It is evident therefore that mind

[52] For a very profound disquisition on this subject, see Sir William Drummond's Academical Questions, chap. I. p. 1. [Shelley's Note.]



# PREFACE.

The object of the following Dialogue is to prove that the system of Deism is untenable. It is attempted to shew that there is no alternative between Atheism and Christianity; that the evidences of the Being of a God are to be deduced from no other principles than those of Divine Revelation.

The Author endeavours to shew how much the cause of natural and revealed Religion has suffered from the mode of defence adopted by Theosophistical Christians. How far he will accomplish what he proposed to himself, in the composition of this Dialogue, the world will finally determine.

The mode of printing this little work may appear too expensive, either for its merits or its length. However inimical this practice confessedly is, to the general diffusion of knowledge, yet it was adopted in this instance with a view of excluding the multitude from the abuse of a mode of reasoning, liable to misconstruction on account of its novelty.[1]

[1] Hogg's account of the work (Life, Vol. II, pp. 484–5) is worth appending to this Preface: it is as follows:— "The year 1814 had come upon us. In that year—and at the beginning of the year, I think—Shelley published a work entitled, 'A Refutation of Deism: in a Dialogue.' It is handsomely, expensively, and very incorrectly printed, in octavo. It was published in a legal sense, unquestionably; whether it was also published in a publisher's sense, and offered for sale, I know not, but I rather think, that it was: the preface informs us that it was intended it should be. I never heard that anybody bought a copy; the only copy I ever saw is that which my friend kindly sent to me: it is inscribed by his own hand on the title-page: 'To his friend, T. Jefferson Hogg, from P. B. S.' I never heard it mentioned any farther than this, that two or three of the author's friends told me, that it had been sent as a present. It is a short dialogue, comprised in 101 pages of large print. Eusebes and Theosophus discourse together, and dispute with each other, much as the author himself levied to dispute, when he could find an opponent; whenever Eusebes could find a Theosophus and get up an antagonistic dialogue. It is written in his powerful, energetic, contentious style, but it contains nothing new or important, and was composed and printed also, in a hurry. He never spoke of it to me, or in my presence. It attracted no attention; and doubtless Shelley himself soon discovered that it did not merit it. The subject of veg-

# EUSEBES AND THEOSOPHUS.

[2]

## EUSEBES.

O Theosophus, I have long regretted and observed the strange infatuation which has blinded your understanding. It is not without acute uneasiness that I have beheld the progress of your audacious scepticism trample on the most venerable institutions of our forefathers, until it has rejected the salvation which the only begotten Son of God deigned to proffer in person to a guilty and unbelieving world. To this excess then has the pride of the human understanding at length arrived? To measure itself with Omniscience! To scan the intentions of Inscrutability!

You can have reflected but superficially on this awful and important subject. The love of paradox, an affectation of singularity, or the pride of reason has seduced you to the barren and gloomy paths of infidelity. Surely you have hardened yourself against the truth with a spirit of coldness and cavil.

Have you been wholly inattentive to the accumulated evidence which the Deity has been pleased to attach to the revelation of his will? The antient books in which the advent of the Messiah was predicted, the miracles by which its truth has been so conspicuously confirmed, the martyrs who have undergone

etable diet is brought in, dragged in, and in a crude, undigested form. The whole matter is disposed of briefly, triumphantly, and dogmatically, in a single paragraph…" Hogg then quotes the paragraph„ and refutes its arguments more suo.

[2] In place of the title, A Refutation of Deism, this first page bears in Shelley's edition the heading Eusebes and Theosophus; and, as those words are uniformly adopted for the head-lines, the other name appearing nowhere but in the title-page, it seems not unlikely either that it was originally intended to call the work Eusebes and Theosophus, or that Deism was to have been refuted in a Series of Dialogues, each denominated by the names of the interlocutors.



Infinity, Immutability, Incomprehensibility, and Immateriality, are all words which designate properties and powers peculiar to organized beings, with the addition of negations, by which the idea of limitation is excluded.[49]

That the frequency of a belief in God (for it is not Universal) should be any argument in its favour, none to whom the innumerable mistakes of men are familiar, will assert. It is among men of genius and science that Atheism alone is found, but among these alone is cherished an hostility to those errors, with which the illiterate and vulgar are infected.

How small is the proportion of those who really believe in God, to the thousands who are prevented by their occupations from ever bestowing a serious thought upon the subject, and the millions who worship butterflies, bones, feathers, monkeys, calabashes and serpents. The word God, like other abstractions, signifies the agreement of certain propositions, rather than the presence of any idea. If we found our belief in the existence of God on the universal consent of mankind, we are duped by the most palpable of sophisms. The word God cannot mean at the same time an ape, a snake, a bone, a calabash, a Trinity and a Unity: Nor can that belief be accounted universal against which men of powerful intellect and spotless virtue have in every age protested. Non pudet igitur physicum, id est speculatorem venatoremque naturæ, ex[50] animis consuetudine imbutis petere testimonium veritatis?

Hume has shewn, to the satisfaction of all philosophers, that the only idea which we can form of causation is derivable[51] from the constant conjunction of objects, and the consequent inference of one from the other. We denominate that phenomenon the cause of another which we observe with the fewest exceptions to precede its occurrence. Hence it would be

[49] See Le Système de la Nature: this book is one of the most eloquent vindications of Atheism. [Shelley's Note.]

[50] In the text, et; but ex is substituted in the Errata.

[51] In the original, deniable,—clearly a misprint.

tain that it is from the evidence of revelation alone that this belief derives the slightest countenance.

That credulity should be gross in proportion to the ignorance of the mind which it enslaves, is in strict consistency with the principles of human nature. The idiot, the child and the savage, agree in attributing their own passions and propensities[47] to the inanimate substances by which they are either benefited or injured. The former become Gods and the latter Demons; hence prayers and sacrifices, by the means of which the rude Theologian imagines that he may confirm the benevolence of the one, or mitigate the malignity of the other. He has averted the wrath of a powerful enemy by supplications and submission; he has secured the assistance of his neighbour by offerings; he has felt his own anger subside before the entreaties of a vanquished foe, and has cherished gratitude for the kindness of another. Therefore does he believe that the elements will listen to his vows. He is capable of love and hatred towards his fellow beings, and is variously impelled by those principles to benefit or injure them. The source of his error is sufficiently obvious. When the winds, the waves and the atmosphere, act in such a manner as to thwart or forward his designs, he attributes to them the same propensities of whose existence within himself he is conscious when he is instigated by benefits to kindness, or by injuries to revenge. The bigot of the woods can form no conception of beings possessed of[48] properties differing from his own: it requires, indeed, a mind considerably tinctured with science, and enlarged by cultivation to contemplate itself, not as the centre and model of the Universe, but as one of the infinitely various multitude of beings of which it is actually composed.

There is no attribute of God which is not either borrowed from the passions and powers of the human mind, or which is not a negation. Omniscience, Omnipotence, Omnipresence,

[47] See Southey's History of Brazil, p. 255. [Shelley's Note.]

[48] So in the Errata; but by in the text.



every variety of torment in attestation of its veracity? You seem to require mathematical demonstration in a case which admits of no more than strong moral probability. Surely the merit of that faith which we are required to repose in our Redeemer would be thus entirely done away. Where is the difficulty of according credit to that which is perfectly plain and evident? How is he entitled to a recompense who believes what he cannot disbelieve?

When there is satisfactory evidence that the witnesses of the Christian miracles passed their lives in labours, dangers and sufferings, and consented severally to be racked, burned and strangled, in testimony of the truth of their account, will it be asserted that they were actuated by a disinterested desire of deceiving others? That they were hypocrites for no end but to teach the purest doctrine that ever enlightened the world, and martyrs without any prospect of emolument or fame? The sophist who gravely advances an opinion thus absurd, certainly sins with gratuitous and indefensible pertinacity.

The history of Christianity is itself the most indisputable proof of those miracles by which its origin was sanctioned to the world. It is itself one great miracle. A few humble men established it in the face of an opposing universe. In less than fifty years an astonishing multitude was converted, as Suetonius,[3] Pliny,[4] Tacitus[5] and Lucian attest; and shortly afterwards thou-

[3] Judæi, impulsore Chresto, turbantes, facile comprimuntur.—Suet. in Tib. Affecti suppliciis Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novæ et maleficæ. — Id. in Neron. [Shelley's Note.]

[4] Multi omnis ætatis utriusque sexus etiam; neque enim civitates tantum, sed vicos etiam et agros superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est. Plin. Epist. [Shelley's Note.]

[5] Ergo abolendo rumori Nero subdidit reos et quæsitissimis pœnis adfecit, quos, suo flagitio invisos, vulgus "Christianos" appellabat. Auctor nominis ejus Christus, Tiberio imperitante, per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat. Repressaque in præsens exitiabilis superstitio rursus erumpebat, non modo per Judæam, originem ejus mali, sed per urbem etiam, quò cuncta, undique atrocia aut pudenda, confluunt concelebranturque. Ig-

sands who had boldly overturned the altars, slain the priests and burned the temples of Paganism, were loud in demanding the recompense of martyrdom from the hands of the infuriated Heathens. Not until three centuries after the coming of the Messiah did his[6] holy religion incorporate itself with the institutions of the Roman Empire, and derive support from the visible arm of fleshly strength. Thus long without any assistance but that of its Omnipotent author, Christianity prevailed in defiance of incredible persecutions, and drew fresh vigour from circumstances the most desperate and unpromising. By what process of sophistry can a rational being persuade himself to reject a religion, the original propagation of which is an event wholly unparalleled in the sphere of human experience?

The morality of the Christian religion is as original and sublime, as its miracles and mysteries are unlike all other portents. A patient acquiescence in injuries and violence; a passive submission to the will of sovereigns; a disregard of those ties by which the feelings of humanity have ever been bound to this unimportant world; humility and faith, are doctrines neither similar nor comparable to those of any other system.[7] Friendship, patriotism and magnanimity; the heart that is quick in sensibility, the hand that is inflexible in execution; genius, learning and courage, are qualities which have engaged the ad-

itur primo correpti, qui fatebantur; deinde indicio eorum multitudo ingens haud perinde in crimine incendii, quam odio humani generis convicti sunt, et pereuntibus addita ludibria, ut, ferarum tergis contecti, Ianiatu canum interirent, aut crucibus affixi, aut flammandi, atque ubi defecisset dies, in usum nocturni luminis urerentur. Hortos suos ei spectaculo Nero obtulerat, et Circense ludibrium edebat, habitu aurigæ permixtus plebi, vel curriculo insistens. Unde quanquam adversus sontes, et novissima exempla meritos, miseratio oriebatur, tanquam non utilitate publicâ, sed in sævitiam unius absumerentur. Tacitus Annal, L. XV, Sect. XLV. [Shelley's Note.]

[6] Omitted in the text and supplied in the Errata.

[7] See the Internal Evidence of Christianity; see also Paley's Evidences, Vol. II, p. 27. [Shelley's Note.]



sider any failure in these remorseless enterprises as a defect in the system of things. The criteria of order and disorder are as various as those beings from whose opinions and feelings they result.

Populous cities are destroyed by earthquakes, and desolated by pestilence. Ambition is every where devoting its millions to incalculable calamity. Superstition, in a thousand shapes, is employed in brutalizing and degrading the human species, and fitting it to endure without a murmur the oppression of its innumerable tyrants. All this is abstractedly neither good nor evil because good and evil are words employed to designate that peculiar state of our own perceptions, resulting from the encounter of any object calculated to produce pleasure or pain. Exclude the idea of relation, and the words good and evil are deprived of import.

Earthquakes are injurious to the cities which they destroy, beneficial to those whose commerce was injured by their prosperity, and indifferent to others which are too remote to be affected by their influence. Famine is good to the corn-merchant, evil to the poor, and indifferent to those whose fortunes can at all times command a superfluity. Ambition is evil to the restless bosom it inhabits, to the innumerable victims who are dragged by its ruthless thirst for infamy, to expire in every variety of anguish, to the inhabitants of the country it depopulates, and to the human race whose improvement it retards; it is indifferent with regard to the system of the Universe, and is good only to the vultures and the jackalls that track the conqueror's career, and to the worms who feast in security on the desolation of his progress. It is manifest that we cannot reason with respect to the universal system from that which only exists in relation to our own perceptions.

You allege some considerations in favor of a Deity from the universality of a belief in his existence.

The superstitions of the savage, and the religion of civilized Europe appear to you to conspire to prove a first cause. I main-

ophy of Newton, and an useless excrescence on the inductive logic of Bacon.

What then is this harmony, this order which you maintain to have required for its establishment, what it needs not for its maintenance, the agency of a supernatural intelligence? Inasmuch as the order visible in the Universe requires one cause, so does the disorder whose operation is not less clearly apparent, demand another. Order and disorder are no more than modifications of our own perceptions of the relations which subsist between ourselves and external objects, and if we are justified in inferring the operation of a benevolent power from the advantages attendant on the former, the evils of the latter bear equal testimony to the activity of a malignant principle, no less pertinacious in inducing evil out of good, than the other is unremitting in procuring good from evil.

If we permit our imagination to traverse the obscure regions of possibility, we may doubtless imagine, according to the complexion of our minds, that disorder may have a relative tendency to unmingled good, or order be relatively replete with exquisite and subtile evil. To neither of these conclusions, which are equally presumptuous and unfounded, will it become the philosopher to assent. Order and disorder are expressions denoting our perceptions of what is injurious or beneficial to ourselves, or to the beings in whose welfare we are compelled to sympathize by the similarity of their conformation to our own.[46]

A beautiful antelope panting under the fangs of a tiger, a defenceless ox, groaning beneath the butcher's axe, is a spectacle which instantly awakens compassion in a virtuous and unvitiated breast. Many there are, however, sufficiently hardened to the rebukes of justice and the precepts of humanity, as to regard the deliberate butchery of thousands of their species, as a theme of exultation and a source of honour, and to con-

[46] See Godwin's Political Justice, Vol. I. p. 449. [Shelley's Note.]



miration of mankind, but which we are taught by Christianity to consider as splendid and delusive vices.

I know not why a Theist should feel himself more inclined to distrust the historians of Jesus Christ, than those of Alexander the Great. What do the tidings of redemption contain which render them peculiarly obnoxious to discredit? It will not be disputed that a revelation of the Divine will is a benefit to mankind.[8] It will not be asserted that even under the Christian revelation, we have too clear a solution of the vast enigma of the Universe, too satisfactory a justification of the attributes of God. When we call to mind the profound ignorance in which, with the exception of the Jews, the philosophers of antiquity were plunged; when we recollect that men eminent for dazzling talents and fallacious virtues, Epicurus, Democritus, Pliny, Lucretius, Euripides,[9] and innumerable others, dared publicly to avow their faith in Atheism with impunity, and that the Theists, Anaxagoras, Pythagoras and

[8] Paley's Evidences, Vol. I, p. 3. [Shelley's Note.]

[9] Imperfectæ verò in homine naturæ præcipua solatia ne Deum quidem posse omnia. Namque nec sibi potest mortem consiscere, si velit, quod homini dedit optimum in tantis vitæ pœnis; nec mortales æternitate donare, ant revocare defunctos; nec facere ut qui vixit non vixerit, qui honores gessit non gesserit, nullumque habere in præteritum jus præterquam oblivdonis, atque ut facetis quoque argumentis societas hæc cum Deo copuletur ut bis dena viginti non sint, et multa similiter efficere non posse. Per quæ, declaratur haud dubiè, naturæ potentiam id quoque esse, quod Deum vocamus. Plin. Nat. His. Cap. de Deo. Φησιν τις, ειναι δητ'εν ϐρανῳ Θεϐς ; Ουκ εισιν, ουκ εισ' .ει τις ανθρωπων λεγει, Μη τῳ ϖαλαιῳ μωρος ων χρησθω λογῳ. Σκεψασθε δ'αυτα, μη'πι τοις εμοις λογοις Γνωμην εχοντες. Φημ' εγω, τυρννιδα Κτεινειν τε πολλϐς, κτηματων τ'αϖοστερειν, Ορκϐστε παραβαινοντας εκϖορθειν ϖολεις Και ταυτα δρωντες μαλλον εισ' ευδαιμονες Των ευσεϐϐντων ήσυχῃ κάθ' ήμεραν. Πολειστε μικρας οιδα τιμϐσας Θεϐς, Αι μειζονων κλυϐσι δυσσεϐεστερον Λογχης αριθμῳ ϖλειονος κρατϐμεναι. Οιμαι δ'αν υμας, ει τις αργος ων Θεοις Ευχοιτο, και μη χειρι συλλεγοι βιον· * * * Euripides Belerophon. Frag. XXV. Hunc igitur terrorem animi, tenebrasque necesse est Non radii solis, neque lucida tela diei Discutient, sed naturæ species ratioque: Principium hinc cujus nobis exordia sumet, Nullam Rem nihilo gigni divinitus unquam. Luc. de Rer. Nat. Lib. I. [Shelley's Note.]

Plato, vainly endeavoured by that human reason, which is truly incommensurate to so vast a purpose, to establish among philosophers the belief in one Almighty God, the creator and preserver of the world; when we recollect that the multitude were grossly and ridiculously idolatrous, and that the magistrates, if not Atheists, regarded the being of a God in the light of an abstruse and uninteresting speculation;[10] when we add to these considerations a remembrance of the wars and the oppressions, which about the time of the advent of the Messiah, desolated the human race, is it not more credible that the Deity actually interposed to check the rapid progress of human deterioration, than that he permitted a specious and pestilent imposture to seduce mankind into the labyrinth of a deadlier superstition? Surely the Deity has not created man immortal, and left him for ever in ignorance of his glorious destination. If the Christian Religion is false, I see not upon what foundation our belief in a moral governor of the universe, or our hopes of immortality can rest.

Thus then the plain reason of the case, and the suffrage of the civilized world conspire with the more indisputable suggestions of faith, to render impregnable that system which has been so vainly and so wantonly assailed. Suppose, however, it were admitted that the conclusions of human reason and the lessons of worldly virtue should be found, in the detail, incongruous with Divine Revelation; by the dictates of which would it become us to abide? Not by that which errs whenever it is employed, but by that which is incapable of error: not by the ephemeral systems of vain philosophy, but by the word of God, which shall endure for ever.

Reflect, O Theosophus, that if the religion you reject be true, you are justly excluded from the benefits which result from a belief in its efficiency to salvation. Be not regardless, therefore, I entreat you, of the curses so emphatically heaped upon infi-

[10] See Cicero de Natura Deorum. [Shelley's Note.]



mation[44] of the latter, as is manifest to the most superficial student of comparative anatomy classes him with those animals who feed on fruits and vegetables.[45]

The means by which the existence of an animal is sustained, requires a designer in no greater degree than the existence itself of the animal. If it exists, there must be means to support its existence. In a world where omne mutatur nihil interit, no organized being can exist without a continual separation of that substance which is incessantly exhausted, nor can this separation take place otherwise, than by the invariable laws which result from the relations of matter. We are incapacitated only by our ignorance from referring every phenomenon, however unusual, minute or complex, to the laws of motion and the properties of matter; and it is an egregious offence against the first principles of reason, to suppose an immaterial creator of the world, in quo omnia moventur sed sine mutuâ passione; which is equally a superfluous hypothesis in the mechanical philos-

[44] In the original, confirmation.

[45] See Cuvier Leçons d'Anat. Comp. tom. iii. p. 169, 373, 448, 465, 480.—Rees's[^] Cyclopædia, Art. Man. Ουκ αιδεισθε τȣ̀ς ἡμερȣ̀ς καρωους ἁιματι και φονῳ μιγνυοντες ; αλλα δρακοντας αγριȣ̀ς καλειτε, και ωαρδαλεις και λεοντας, αυτοι δε μιαιφονειτε εις ωμοτητα καταλιωοντες εκεινοις ȣ̀δεν. Εκεινοις μεν ὁ φονος τροφη, ὑμιν δε οψον εστιν. Ὁτι γαρ ουκ εστιν ανθρωπῳ κατα φυσιν το σαρκοφαγειν, ωρωτον μεν αѿο των σωματων δηλȣ̀ται της κατασκευης. Ουδενι γαρ εοικε το ανθρωѿȣ̀ σωμα των αѿο σαρκοφαγιᾳ γεγονοτων. Ȣ̀ γρυѿοτης χειλȣ̀ς, ουκ οξυτης ονυχος, Ȣ̀ τραχυτης οδοντων ωροσεστιν, Ȣ̀ κοιλιας ευτονια και πνευματος θερμοτης τρεψαι και κατεργασασθαι το βαρυ και κρεωδες. Αλλ' αυτοθεν ἡ φυσις τῃ λειοτητι των οδοντων, και τῃ σμικροτητι τȣ̀ σωματος, και τῃ μαλακοτητι της γλωσσης, καὶ τῃ ωρος ωεψιν αμβλυτητι τȣ̀ πνευματος, εξομνυται την σαρκοφαγιαν. Ει δε λεγεις ωεφυκεναι σεαυτον εѿι τοιαυτην εδωδην, ὁ βȣ̀λει φαγειν, ωρωτον αυτος αποκτεινον, αλλ' αυτος δια σεαυτȣ̀, μη χρησαμενος κοѿιδι. μηδε τυμѿανῳ τινι, μηδε πελεκει' αλλα ὡς λυκοι και αρκτοι και λεοντες αυτοι ὡς εσθιȣ̀σι φονευȣ̀σις, ανελε δηγματι βȣ̀ν, η σωματι συν, η αρνα η λαγωον διαῤῥηξΟν, και φαγε ωροσπεσων ετι ζωντος, ὡς εκεινα˙ Ηλουτ. υιερι Σαρκοφαγ. Λογ. β. [Shelley's Note.] [^] In the original, Ree's, but Rees's in the same note as given in Queen Mab and A Vindication of Natural Diet.

Doubtless no disposition of inert matter, or matter deprived of qualities, could ever have composed an animal, a tree, or even a stone. But matter deprived of qualities, is an abstraction, concerning which it is impossible to form an idea. Matter, such as we behold it is not inert. It is infinitely active and subtile. Light, electricity and magnetism are fluids not surpassed by thought itself in tenuity and activity: like thought they are sometimes the cause and sometimes the effect of motion; and, distinct as they are from every other class of substances, with which we are acquainted, seem to possess equal claims with thought to the unmeaning distinction of immateriality.

The laws of motion and the properties of matter suffice to account for every phenomenon, or combination of phenomena exhibited in the Universe. That certain animals exist in certain climates, results from the consentaneity of their frames to the circumstances of their situation: let these circumstances be altered to a sufficient degree, and the elements of their composition, must exist in some new combination no less resulting than the former from those inevitable laws by which the Universe is governed.

It is the necessary consequence of the organization of man, that his stomach should digest his food: it inevitably results also from his gluttonous and unnatural appetite for the flesh of animals that his frame be diseased and his vigour impaired; but in neither of these cases is adaptation of means to end to be perceived. Unnatural diet, and the habits consequent upon its use are the means, and every complication of frightful disease is the end, but to assert that these means were adapted to this end by the Creator of the world, or that human caprice can avail to traverse the precautions of Omnipotence, is absurd. These are the consequences of the properties of organized matter; and it is a strange perversion of the understanding to argue that a certain sheep was created to be butchered and devoured by a certain individual of the human species, when the confor-



dels by the inspired organs of the will of God: the fire which is never quenched, the worm that never dies. I dare not think that the God in whom I trust for salvation would terrify his creatures with menaces of punishment, which he does not intend to inflict. The ingratitude of incredulity is, perhaps, the only sin to which the Almighty cannot extend his mercy without compromising his justice. How can the human heart endure, without despair, the mere conception of so tremendous an alternative? Return, I entreat you, to that tower of strength which securely overlooks the chaos of the conflicting opinions of men. Return to that God who is your creator and preserver, by whom alone you are defended from the ceaseless wiles of your eternal enemy. Are human institutions so faultless that the principle upon which they are founded may strive with the voice of God? Know that faith is superior to reason, in as much as the creature is surpassed by the Creator; and that whensoever they are incompatible, the suggestions of the latter, not those of the former, are to be questioned.

Permit me to exhibit in their genuine deformity the errors which are seducing you to destruction. State to me, with candour the train of sophisms by which the evil spirit has deluded your understanding. Confess the secret motives of your disbelief; suffer me to administer a remedy to your intellectual disease. I fear not the contagion of such revolting sentiments: I fear only lest patience should desert me before you have finished the detail of your presumptuous credulity.

## THEOSOPHUS.

I am not only prepared to confess, but to vindicate my sentiments. I cannot refrain, however, from premising, that in this controversey I labour under a disadvantage from which you are exempt. You believe that incredulity is immoral, and regard him as an object of suspicion and distrust whose creed is incongruous with your own. But truth is the perception of the agree-

ment or disagreement of ideas. I can no more conceive that a man who perceives the disagreement of any ideas, should be persuaded of their agreement, than that he should overcome a physical impossibility. The reasonableness or the folly of the articles of our creed is therefore no legitimate object of merit or demerit; our opinions depend not on the will, but on the understanding.

If I am in error (and the wisest of us may not presume to deem himself secure from all illusion) that error is the consequence of the prejudices by which I am prevented, of the ignorance by which I am incapacitated from forming a correct estimation of the subject. Remove those prejudices, dispel that ignorance, make truth apparent, and fear not the obstacles that remain to be encountered. But do not repeat to me those terrible and frequent curses, by whose intolerance and cruelty I have so often been disgusted in the perusal of your sacred books. Do not tell me that the All-Merciful will punish me for the conclusions of that reason by which he has thought fit to distinguish me from the beasts that perish. Above all, refrain from urging considerations drawn from reason, to degrade that which you are thereby compelled to acknowledge as the ultimate arbiter of the dispute. Answer my objections as I engage to answer your assertions, point by point, word by word.

You believe that the only and ever-present God begot a Son whom he sent to reform the world, and to propitiate its sins; you believe that a book, called the Bible, contains a true account of this event, together with an infinity of miracles and prophecies which preceded it from the creation of the world. Your opinion that these circumstances really happened appears to me, from some considerations which I will proceed to state, destitute of rational foundation.

To expose all the inconsistency, immorality and false pretensions which I perceive in the Bible, demands a minuteness of criticism at least as voluminous as itself. I shall confine myself, therefore, to the confronting of your tenets with those prim-



by that gravitation by which they are caused. The illustrious Laplace, has shewn, that the approach of the Moon to the Earth and the Earth to the Sun, is only a secular equation of a very long period, which has its maximum and minimum. The system of the Universe then is upheld solely by physical powers. The necessity of matter is the ruler of the world. It is vain philosophy which supposes more causes than are exactly adequate to explain the phenomena of things. Hypotheses non fingo: quicquid enim ex phœnomenis non deducitur, hypothesis vocanda est; et hypotheses vel metaphysicæ, vel physicæ, vel qualitatiem occultarem, seu mechanicæ, in philosophiá locum non habent.

You assert that the construction of the animal machine, the fitness of certain animals to certain situations, the connexion between the organs of perception and that which is perceived; the relation between every thing which exists, and that which tends to preserve it in its existence, imply design. It is manifest that if the eye could not see, nor the stomach digest, the human frame could not preserve its present mode of existence. It is equally certain, however, that the elements of its composition, if they did not exist in one form, must exist in another; and that the combinations which they would[43] form, must so long as they endured, derive support for their peculiar mode of being from their fitness to the circumstances of their situation.

It by no means follows, that because a being exists, performing certain functions, he was fitted by another being to the performance of these functions. So rash a conclusion would conduct, as I have before shewn, to an absurdity; and it becomes infinitely more unwarrantable from the consideration that the known laws of matter and motion, suffice to unravel, even in the present imperfect state of moral and physical science, the majority of those difficulties which the hypothesis of a Deity was invented to explain.

[43] So in the Errata; but could in the text.

is outraged by conclusions which contradict each other so glaringly.

The greatest, equally with the smallest motions of the Universe, are subjected to the rigid necessity of inevitable laws. These laws are the unknown causes of the known effects perceivable in the Universe. Their effects are the boundaries of our knowledge, their names the expressions of our ignorance. To suppose some existence beyond, or above them, is to invent a second and superfluous hypothesis to account for what has already been accounted for by the laws of motion and the properties of matter. I admit that the nature of these laws is incomprehensible, but the hypothesis of a Deity adds a gratuitous difficulty, which so far from alleviating those which it is adduced to explain, requires new hypotheses[41] for the elucidation of its own inherent contradictions.

The laws of attraction and repulsion, desire and aversion, suffice to account for every phenomenon of the moral and physical world. A precise knowledge of the properties of any object, is alone requisite to determine its manner of action. Let the mathematician be acquainted with the weight and volume of a cannon ball, together with the degree of velocity and inclination with which it is impelled, and he will accurately delineate the course it must describe, and determine the force with which it will strike an object at a given distance. Let the influencing motive, present to the mind of any person be given, and the knowledge of his consequent conduct will result. Let the bulk and velocity of a comet be discovered, and the astronomer, by the accurate estimation of the equal and contrary actions of the centripetal and centrifugal forces, will justly predict the period of its return.

The anomalous motions of the heavenly bodies, their unequal velocities and frequent aberrations, are corrected[42]

[41] In the text, hypothesis: in the Errata, hypotheses.

[42] In the text, connected; but corrected in the Errata.



itive and general principles which are the basis of all moral reasoning.

In creating the Universe, God certainly proposed to himself the happiness of his creatures. It is just, therefore, to conclude that he left no means unemployed, which did not involve an impossibility to accomplish this design. In fixing a residence for this image of his own Majesty, he was doubtless careful that every occasion of detriment, every opportunity of evil should be removed. He was aware of the extent of his powers, he foresaw the consequences of his conduct, and doubtless modelled his being consentaneously with the world of which he was to be the inhabitant, and the circumstances which were destined to surround him.

The account given by the Bible has but a faint concordance with the surmises of reason concerning this event.

According to this book, God created Satan, who instigated by the impulses of his nature contended with the Omnipotent for the throne of Heaven. After a contest, for the empire, in which God was victorious, Satan was thrust into a pit of burning sulphur. On man's creation God placed within his reach a tree whose fruit he forbade him to taste, on pain of death; permitting Satan at the same time, to employ all his artifice to persuade this innocent and wondering creature to transgress the fatal prohibition.

The first man yielded to this temptation; and to satisfy Divine Justice the whole of his posterity must have been eternally burned in hell, if God had not sent his only Son on Earth, to save those few whose salvation had been foreseen and determined before the creation of the world.

God is here represented as creating man with certain passions and powers, surrounding him with certain circumstances, and then condemning him to everlasting torments because he acted as omniscience had foreseen, and was such as omnipotence had made him. For to assert that the Creator is the author of all good, and the creature the author of all evil, is to assert

that one man makes a straight line and a crooked one, and that another makes the incongruity.[11]

Barbarous and uncivilized nations have uniformly adored, under various names, a God of which themselves were the model; revengeful, blood-thirsty, groveling and capricious. The idol of a savage is a demon that delights in carnage. The steam of slaughter, the dissonance of groans, the flames of a desolated land, are the offerings which he deems acceptable, and his innumerable votaries throughout the world have made it a point of duty to worship him to his taste.[12] The Phenicians, the Druids and the Mexicans have immolated hundreds at the shrines of their divinity, and the high and holy name of God has been in all ages the watch word of the most unsparing massacres, the sanction of the most atrocious perfidies.

But I appeal to your candour, O Eusebes, if there exist a record of such groveling absurdities and enormities so atrocious, a picture of the Deity so characteristic of a demon as that which the sacred writings of the Jews contain. I demand of you, whether as a conscientious Theist you can reconcile the conduct which is attributed to the God of the Jews with your conceptions of the purity and benevolence of the divine nature.

The loathsome and minute obscenities to which the inspired writers perpetually descend, the filthy observances which God is described as personally instituting,[13] the total disregard of truth and contempt of the first principles of morality, manifested on the most public occasions by the chosen favourites of Heaven, might corrupt, were they not so flagitious as to disgust.

[11] Hobbes. [Shelley's Note.]

[12] See Preface to Le Bon Sens. [Shelley's Note.]

[13] See Hosea, Chap. I. Chap. IX. Ezekiel, Chap. IV. Chap. XVI. Chap. XXIII. Heynë, speaking of the opinions entertained of the Jews by antient poets and philosophers, says: Meminit quidem superstitionis Judaicæ Horatius, verum ut eam risu exploderet. Heyn. ad. Verg. Poll, in Arg. [Shelley's Note.]



which you have stated. The assumption that the Universe is a design, leads to a conclusion that there are infinity of creative and created Gods, which is absurd. It is impossible indeed to prescribe limits to learned error, when Philosophy relinquishes experience and feeling for speculation.

Until it is clearly proved that the Universe was created, we may reasonably suppose that it has endured from all eternity. In a case where two propositions are diametrically opposite, the mind believes that which is less incomprehensible: it is easier to suppose that the Universe has existed, from all eternity, than to conceive an eternal being capable of creating it. If the mind sinks beneath the weight of one, is it an alleviation to encrease the intolerability of the burthen?

A man knows, not only that he now is, but that there was a time when he did not exist; consequently there must have been a cause. But we can only infer, from effects, causes exactly adequate to those effects. There certainly is a generative power which is effected by particular instruments; we cannot prove that it is inherent in these instruments, nor is the contrary hypothesis capable of demonstration. We admit that the generative power is incomprehensible, but to suppose that the same effects are produced by an eternal Omnipotent and Omniscient Being, leaves the cause in the same obscurity, but renders it more incomprehensible.

We can only infer from effects causes exactly adequate to those effects.—An infinite number of effects demand an infinite number of causes, nor is the philosopher justified in supposing a greater connection or unity in the latter, than is perceptible in the former. The same energy cannot be at once the cause of the serpent and the sheep; of the blight by which the harvest is destroyed, and the sunshine by which it is matured; of the ferocious propensities by which man becomes a victim to himself, and of the accurate judgment by which his institutions are improved. The spirit of our accurate and exact philosophy

fitness for the production of certain effects, that wonderful consent of all its parts, that universal harmony by whose changeless laws innumerable systems of worlds perform their stated revolutions, and the blood is driven through the veins of the minutest animalcule that sports in the corruption of an insect's[39] lymph: on this account did the Universe require an intelligent Creator, because it exists producing invariable effects, and inasmuch as it is admirably organized[40] for the production of these effects, so the more did it require a creative intelligence.

Thus have we arrived at the substance of your assertion. "That whatever exists, producing certain effects, stands in need of a Creator, and the more conspicuous is its fitness for the production of these effects, the more certain will be our conclusion that it would not have existed from eternity, but must have derived its origin from an intelligent creator."

In what respect then do these arguments apply to the Universe, and not apply to God? From the fitness of the Universe to its end you infer the necessity of an intelligent Creator. But if the fitness of the Universe, to produce certain effects, be thus conspicuous and evident, how much more exquisite fitness to his end must exist in the Author of this Universe? If we find great difficulty from its admirable arrangement, in conceiving that the Universe has existed from all eternity, and to resolve this difficulty suppose a Creator, how much more clearly must we perceive the necessity of this very Creator's creation whose perfections comprehend an arrangement far more accurate and just.

The belief of an infinity of creative and created Gods, each more eminently requiring an intelligent author of his being than the foregoing, is a direct consequence of the premises

[39] In the original inserts, without the apostrophe,—a common lapsus of Shelley's in writing hastily.

[40] In the original organised.



When the chief of this obscure and brutal horde of assassins asserts that the God of the Universe was enclosed in a box of shittim wood[14] "two feet long and three feet wide,[15]" and brought home in a new cart, I smile at the impertinence of so shallow an imposture. But it is blasphemy of a more hideous and unexampled nature to maintain that the Almighty God expressly commanded Moses to invade an unoffending nation, and on account of the difference of their worship utterly to destroy every human being it contained, to murder every infant and unarmed man in cold blood, to massacre the captives, to rip up the matrons, and to retain the maidens alone for concubinage and violation.[16] At the very time that philosophers of the

[14] I Sam. Chap. V. v. 8. [Shelley's Note.]

[15] Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads. [Shelley's Note.]

[16] When Moses stood in the gate of the court and said—Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses, and there fell of the people on that day twenty three thousand men. Exodus, Chap. XXXII, v. 26. And they warred against the Midianites as the Lord commanded Moses, and they slew all the males; and the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods. And they burned all their huts wherein they dwelt and all their goodly castles with fire. And Moses and Eleazer the priest, and all the princes of the congregation came forth to meet them without the camp. And Moses was wroth with the officers of the post, with the captains over hundreds and captains over thousands that came from the battle. And Moses said unto them—Have ye saved all the women alive?—Behold these caused the children of Israel through the counsel of Balaam to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord. Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. And all the women-children that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves. Numbers, Chap. XXXI. And we utterly destroyed them, as we did unto Sihon King of Heshbon utterly destroying the men, women and children of every city. Deut. Chap. Ill, v. 6. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city both

most enterprising benevolence were founding in Greece those institutions which have rendered it the wonder and luminary of the world, am I required to believe that the weak and wicked king of an obscure and barbarous nation, a murderer, a traitor and a tyrant was the man after God's own heart? A wretch, at the thought of whose unparalleled enormities the sternest soul must sicken in dismay! An unnatural monster who sawed his fellow beings in sunder, harrowed them to fragments under harrows of iron, chopped them to pieces with axes and burned them in brick-kilns, because they bowed before a different, and less bloody idol than his own. It is surely no perverse conclusion of an infatuated understanding that the God of the Jews is not the benevolent author of this beautiful world.

The conduct of the Deity in the promulgation of the Gospel, appears not to the eye of reason more compatible with His immutability and omnipotence than the history of his actions under the law accords with his benevolence.

You assert that the human race merited eternal reprobation because their common father had transgressed the divine command, and that the crucifixion of the Son of God was the only sacrifice of sufficient efficacy to satisfy eternal justice. But it is no less inconsistent with justice and subversive of morality that millions should be responsible for a crime which they had no share in committing; than that, if they had really committed it, the crucifixion of an innocent being could absolve them from moral turpitude. Ferretne ulla civitas latorem istiusmodi legis, ut condemnaretur filius, aut nepos, si pater aut avas del-

man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and ass with the edge of the sword. Joshua. So Joshua fought against Debir, and utterly destroyed all the souls that were therein, he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel commanded. Joshua, Chap. X. And David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah and took it, and he brought forth the people therein, and put them under saws and under harrows of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln. This did he also unto all the children of Ammon. II Sam. Chap. XII, v. 29. [Shelley's Note.]



**EUSEBES.**

Design must be proved before a designer can be inferred. The matter in controversy is the existence of design in the Universe, and it is not permitted to assume the contested premises and thence infer the matter in dispute. Insidiously to employ the words contrivance, design and adaptation before these circumstances are made apparent in the Universe, thence justly inferring[38] a contriver, is a popular sophism against which it behoves us to be watchful.

To assert that motion is an attribute of mind, that matter is inert, that every combination is the result of intelligence is also an assumption of the matter in dispute.

Why do we admit design in any machine of human contrivance? Simply, because innumerable instances of machines having been contrived by human art are present to our mind, because we are acquainted with persons who could construct such machines; but if, having no previous knowledge of any artificial contrivance, we had accidentally found a watch upon the ground, we should have been justified in concluding that it was a thing of Nature, that it was a combination of matter with whose cause we were unacquainted, and that any attempt to account for the origin of its existence would be equally presumptuous and unsatisfactory.

The analogy which you attempt to establish between the contrivances of human art, and the various existences of the Universe, is inadmissible. We attribute these effects to human intelligence, because we know before hand that human intelligence is capable of producing them. Take away this knowledge, and the grounds of our reasoning will be destroyed. Our entire ignorance, therefore, of the Divine Nature leaves this analogy defective in its most essential point of comparison.

What consideration remains to be urged in support of the creation of the Universe by a supreme Being? Its admirable

[38] In the original, infering.

tion of certain animals to certain climates, the relations borne to each other by animals and vegetables, and by different tribes of animals;[35] the relation lastly, between man and the circumstances of his external situation are so many demonstrations of Deity.

All is order, design and harmony, so far as we can descry the tendency of things, and every new enlargement of our views, every new[36] display of the material world, affords a new illustration of the power, the wisdom and the benevolence of God.

The existence of God has never been the topic of popular dispute. There is a tendency to devotion, a thirst for reliance on supernatural aid inherent in the human mind. Scarcely any people, however barbarous, have been discovered, who do not acknowledge with reverence and awe the supernatural causes of the natural effects which they experience. They worship, it is true, the vilest and most inanimate substances, but they firmly confide in the holiness and power of these symbols, and thus own their connexion with what they can neither see nor perceive.

If there is motion in the Universe, there is a God.[37] The power of beginning motion is no less an attribute of mind than sensation or thought. Wherever motion exists it is evident that mind has operated. The phenomena of the Universe indicate the agency of powers which cannot belong to inert matter.

Every thing which begins to exist must have a cause: every combination, conspiring to an end, implies intelligence.

[35] In the original this semi-colon is misplaced after relation in the same line.

[36] In the text, open; but new in the Errata.

[37] See Dugald Stewart's outlines of Moral Philosophy and Paley's Natural Theology. [Shelley's Note.]



iquisset? Certainly this is a mode of legislation peculiar to a state of savageness and anarchy; this is the irrefragable logic of tyranny and imposture.

The supposition that God has ever supernaturally revealed his will to man at any other period than the original creation of the human race, necessarily involves a compromise of his benevolence. It assumes that he withheld from mankind a benefit which it was in his power to confer. That he suffered his creatures to remain in ignorance of truths essential to their happiness and salvation. That during the lapse of innumerable ages every individual of the human race had perished without redemption from an universal stain which the Deity at length descended in person to erase. That the good and wise of all ages, involved in one common fate with the ignorant and wicked, have been tainted by involuntary and inevitable error which torments infinite in duration may not avail to expiate.

In vain will you assure me with amiable inconsistency that the mercy of God will be extended to the virtuous, and that the vicious will alone be punished. The foundation of the Christian Religion is manifestly compromised by a concession of this nature. A subterfuge thus palpable plainly annihilates the necessity of the incarnation of God for the redemption of the human race, and represents the descent of the Messiah as a gratuitous display of Deity, solely adapted to perplex, to terrify and to embroil mankind.

It is sufficiently evident that an omniscient being never conceived the design of reforming the world by Christianity. Omniscience would surely have foreseen the inefficacy of that system, which experience demonstrates not only to have been utterly impotent in restraining, but to have been most active in exhaling the malevolent propensities of men. During the period which elapsed between the removal of the seat of empire to Constantinople in 328, and its capture by the Turks in 1453, what salutary influence did Christianity exercise upon that world which it was intended to enlighten? Never before

was Europe the theatre of such ceaseless and sanguinary wars; never were the people so brutalized by ignorance and debased by slavery.

I will admit that one prediction of Jesus Christ has been indisputably fulfilled. I come not to bring peace upon earth, but a sword. Christianity indeed has equalled Judaism in the atrocities, and exceeded it[17] in the extent of its desolation. Eleven millions of men, women and children have been killed in battle, butchered in their sleep, burned to death at public festivals of sacrifice, poisoned, tortured, assassinated and pillaged in the spirit of the Religion of Peace, and for the glory of the most merciful God.

In vain will you tell me that these terrible effects flow not from Christianity, but from the abuse of it. No such excuse will avail to palliate the enormities of a religion pretended to be divine. A limited intelligence is only so far responsible for the effects of its agency as it foresaw, or might have foreseen them; but Omniscience is manifestly chargeable with all the consequences of its conduct. Christianity itself declares that the worth of the tree is to be determined by the quality of its fruit. The extermination of infidels; the mutual persecutions of hostile sects; the midnight massacres and slow burning of thousands because their creed contained either more or less than the orthodox standard, of which Christianity has been the immediate occasion; and the invariable opposition which philosophy has ever encountered from the spirit of revealed religion, plainly show that a very slight portion of sagacity was sufficient to have estimated at its true value the advantages of that belief to which some Theists are unaccountably attached.

You lay great stress upon the originality of the Christian system of morals. If this claim be just, either your religion must be false, or the Deity has willed that opposite modes of con-

[17] So in the Errata, but them in the text.



**EUSEBES.**

Let me request you then to state, concisely, the grounds of your belief in the being of a God. In my reply I shall endeavour to controvert your reasoning, and shall hold myself acquitted by my zeal for the Christian religion, of the blasphemies which I must utter in the progress of my discourse.

**THEOSOPHUS.**

I will readily state tlie grounds of my belief in the being of a God. You can only have remained ignorant of the obvious proofs of this important truth, from a superstitious reliance upon the evidence afforded by a revealed religion. The reasoning lies within an extremely narrow compass: quicquid enim nos vel meliores vel beatiores facturum est, aut in aperto, aut in proximo posuit natura.

From every design[34] we justly infer a designer. If we examine the structure of a watch, we shall readily confess the existence of a watch-maker. No work of man could possibly have existed from all eternity. From the contemplation of any product of human art, we conclude that there was an artificer who arranged its several parts. In like manner, from the marks of design and contrivance exhibited in the Universe, we are necessitated to infer a designer, a contriver. If the parts of the Universe have been designed, contrived and adapted, the existence of a God is manifest.

But design is sufficiently apparent. The wonderful adaptation of substances which act to those which are acted upon; of the eye to light, and of light to the eye; of the ear to sound, and of sound to the ear; of every object of sensation to the sense which it impresses prove that neither blind chance, nor undistinguishing necessity has brought them into being. The adapta-

[34] There is a curious mistake in the original here: the paragraph opens thus: Design—every design. The correction is from the Errata.

inclined to pity, the man who in his zeal to escape this gloomy faith, should plunge into the most abject superstition.

The Atheist is a monster among men. Inducements, which are Omnipotent over the conduct of others, are impotent for him. His private judgment is his criterion of right and wrong. He dreads no judge but his own conscience, he fears no hell but the loss of his self esteem. He is not to be restrained by punishments, for death is divested of its terror, and whatever enters into his heart, to conceive, that will he not scruple to execute. Ide non timet omnia providentem et cogitantem, et animadvertentem, et omnia ad se pertinere putantem, curiosum et plenum negotii Deum.

This dark and terrible doctrine was surely the abortion of some blind speculator's brain: some strange and hideous perversion of intellect, some portentous distortion of reason. There can surely be no metaphysician sufficiently bigotted to his own system to look upon this harmonious world, and dispute the necessity of intelligence; to contemplate the design and deny the designer[33]; to enjoy the spectacle of this beautiful Universe and not feel himself instinctively persuaded to gratitude and adoration. What arguments of the slightest plausibility can be adduced to support a doctrine rejected alike by the instinct of the savage and the reason of the sage?

I readily engage, with you, to reject reason as a faithless guide, if you can demonstrate that it conducts to Atheism. So little however do I mistrust the dictates of reason, concerning a supreme Being, that I promise, in the event of your success, to subscribe the wildest and most monstrous creed which you can devise. I will call credulity, faith; reason, impiety; the dictates of the understanding shall be the temptations of the Devil, and the wildest dreams of the imagination, the infallible inspirations of Grace.

[33] In the text, designers: in the Errata, designer.



duct should be pursued by mankind at different times, under the same circumstances; which is absurd.

The doctrine of acquiescing in the most insolent despotism; of praying for and loving[18] our enemies; of faith and humility, appears to fix the perfection of the human character in that abjectness and credulity which priests and tyrants of all ages have found sufficiently convenient for their purposes. It is evident that a whole nation of Christians (could such an anomaly maintain itself a day) would become, like cattle, the property of the first occupier. It is evident that ten highwaymen would suffice to subjugate the world if it were composed of slaves who dared not to resist oppression.

The apathy to love and friendship, recommended by your creed, would, if attainable, not be less pernicious. This enthusiasm of anti-social misanthropy if it were an actual rule of conduct, and not the speculation of a few interested persons, would speedily annihilate the human race. A total abstinence from sexual[19] intercourse is not perhaps enjoined, but is strenuously recommended,[20] and was actually practised to a frightful extent by the primitive Christians.[21]

The penalties inflicted by that monster Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, on the pleasures of unlicenced love, are so iniquitously severe, that no modern legislator could have affixed them to the most atrocious crimes.[22] This cold-blooded and hypocritical ruffian cut his son's throat, strangled his wife, murdered his father-in-law and his brother-in-law, and maintained at his court a set of blood-thirsty and bigoted Christian

[18] So in the Errata, but loveing in the text.

[19] In the text, social; but sexual in the Errata.

[20] Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote to me. It is good for a man not to touch a woman. I say, therefore, to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I; but if they cannot contain, let them marry; it is better to marry than burn. I Corinthians, Chap. VII. [Shelley's Note.]

[21] See Gibbon's Decline and Fall, Vol. II, p. 210. [Shelley's Note.]

[22] See Gibbon's Decline and Fall, Vol. II, p. 269. [Shelley's Note.]

Priests, one of whom was sufficient to excite the one half of the world to massacre the other.

I am willing to admit that some few axioms of morality, which Christianity has borrowed from the philosophers of Greece and India, dictate, in an unconnected state, rules of conduct worthy of regard; but the purest and most elevated lessons of morality must remain nugatory, the most probable inducements to virtue must fail of their effect, so long as the slightest weight is attached to that dogma which is the vital essence of revealed religion.

Belief is set up as the criterion of merit or demerit; a man is to be judged not by the purity of his intentions but by the orthodoxy of his creed; an assent to certain propositions, is to outweigh in the balance of Christianity the most generous and elevated virtue.[23]

But the intensity of belief, like that of every other passion, is precisely proportionate to the degrees of excitement. A graduated scale, on which should be marked the capabilities of propositions to approach to the test of the senses, would be a just measure of the belief which ought to be attached to them: and but for the influence of prejudice or ignorance this invariably is the measure of belief. That is believed which is apprehended to be true, nor can the mind by any exertion avoid attaching credit to an opinion attended with overwhelming evidence. Belief is not an act of volition, nor can it be regulated by the mind: it is manifestly incapable therefore of either merit or criminality. The system which assumes a false criterion of moral virtue, must be as pernicious as it is absurd. Above all, it cannot be divine, as it is impossible that the Creator of the human mind should be ignorant of its primary powers.

[23] Shelley's recurrence to this line of thought is very remarkable. Compare this passage with the Queen Mab note on the subject (Poetical Works, Vol. IV, pp. 491 et seq.), and also with the corresponding passages in The Necessity of Atheism and A Letter to Lord Ellenborough.



according to human judgment might well have been dispensed with in arranging the economy of the globe.

Is this the reasoning which the Theist will choose to employ? Will he impose limitations on that Deity whom he professes to regard with so profound a veneration? Will he place his God between the horns of a logical dilemma which shall restrict the fulness either of his power or his bounty?

Certainly he will prefer to resign his objections to Christianity, than pursue the reasoning upon which they are found, to the dreadful conclusions of cold and dreary Atheism.

I confess, that Christianity appears not unattended with difficulty to the understanding which approaches it with a determination to judge its mysteries by reason. I will even[30] confess that the discourse, which you have just delivered, ought to unsettle any candid mind engaged in a similar attempt. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.

But, if I succeed in convincing you that reason conducts to conclusions destructive of morality, happiness, and the hope of futurity,[31] and inconsistent with the very existence of human society, I trust that you will no longer confide in a director so dangerous and faithless.

I require you to declare, O Theosophus, whether you would embrace Christianity or Atheism, if no other systems of belief shall be found to stand the touchstone of enquiry,

**THEOSOPHUS.**

I do not hesitate to prefer the Christian system, or indeed any system of religion, however rude and gross, to Atheism.—Here we truly sympathize[32]; nor do I blame, however I may feel

[30] In the original edition ever, an obvious misprint, looking at the context.

[31] In the text fraternity; but futurity in the Errata.

[32] In the original sympathise, contrary to Shelley's practice.

out devils was far from being either an original or an unusual occupation in Judea. Do not recite these stale absurdities as proofs of the Divine origin of Christianity.

If the Almighty has spoken, would not the Universe have been convinced? If he had judged the knowledge of his will to have been more important than any other science to mankind, would he not have rendered it more evident and more clear?

Now, O Eusebes, have I enumerated the general grounds of my disbelief of the Christian Religion.—I could have collated its Sacred Writings with the Brahminical record of the early ages of the world, and identified its institutions with the antient worship of the Sun. I might have entered into an elaborate comparison of the innumerable discordances which exist between the inspired historians of the same event. Enough however has been said to vindicate me from the charge of groundless and infatuated scepticism. I trust therefore to your candour for the consideration, and to your logic for the refutation, of my arguments.

**EUSEBES.**

I will not dissemble, O Theosophus, the difficulty of solving your general objections to Christianity, on the grounds of human reason. I did not assist at the councils of the Almighty when he determined to extend his mercy to mankind, nor can I venture to affirm that it exceeded the limits of his power to have afforded a more conspicuous or universal manifestation of his will.

But this is a difficulty which attends Christianity in common with the belief in the being and attributes of God. This whole scheme of things might have been, according to our partial conceptions, infinitely more admirable and perfect. Poisons, earthquakes, disease, war, famine and venomous serpents; slavery and persecution are the consequences of certain causes, which



The degree of evidence afforded by miracles and prophecies in favour of the Christian Religion is lastly to be considered.

Evidence of a more imposing and irresistible nature is required in proportion to the remoteness of any event from the sphere of our experience. Every case of miracles is a contest of opposite improbabilities, whether it is more contrary to experience that a miracle should be true, or that the story on which it is supported should be false: whether the immutable[24] laws of this harmonious world should have undergone violation, or that some obscure Greeks and Jews should have conspired to fabricate a tale of wonder.

The actual appearance of a departed spirit would be a circumstance truly unusual and portentous; but the accumulated testimony of twelve old women that a spirit had appeared is neither unprecedented nor miraculous.

It seems less credible that the God whose immensity is uncircumscribed by space, should have committed adultery with a carpenter's wife, than that some bold knaves or insane dupes had deceived the credulous multitude.[25] We have perpetual and mournful experience of the latter: the former is yet under dispute. History affords us innumerable examples of the possibility of the one: Philosophy has in all ages protested against the probability of the other.

Every superstition can produce its dupes, its miracles and its mysteries; each is prepared to justify its peculiar tenets by an equal assemblage of portents, prophecies and martyrdoms.

Prophecies, however circumstantial, are liable to the same objection as direct miracles: it is more agreeable to experience that the historical evidence of the prediction really having preceded the event pretended to be foretold should be false, or that a lucky conjuncture of events should have justified the conjecture of the prophet, than that God should communicate to a

[24] So in the Errata, but in the text inimitable.

[25] See Paley's Evidences, Vol, I. Chap. I. [Shelley's Note.]

man the discernment of future events.[26] I defy you to produce more than one instance of prophecy in the Bible, wherein the inspired writer speaks so as to be understood, wherein his prediction has not been so unintelligible and obscure as to have been itself the subject of controversy among Christians.

That one prediction which I except is certainly most explicit and circumstantial. It is the only one of this nature which the Bible contains. Jesus himself here predicts his own arrival in the clouds to consummate a period of supernatural desolation, before the generation which he addressed should pass away.[27] Eighteen hundred years have past, and no such event is pretended to have happened. This single plain prophecy, thus conspicuously false, may serve as a criterion of those which are more vague and indirect, and which apply in an hundred senses to an hundred things.

Either the pretended predictions in the Bible were meant to be understood, or they were not. If they were, why is there any dispute concerning them: if they were not, wherefore were they written at all? But the God of Christianity spoke to mankind in parables, that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

The Gospels contain internal evidence that they were not written by eye-witnesses of the event which they pretend to record. The Gospel of St. Matthew was plainly not written un-

[26] See the Controversy of Bishop Watson and Thomas Paine. — Paine's Criticism on the XIXth Chapter of Isaiah. [Shelley's Note.]

[27] Immediately after the tribulation of these days, shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from Heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the son of man in Heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the Earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great Glory: and he shall send his Angel with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to the other. Verity I say unto you: This generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled. Matthew, Chap. XXIV. [Shelley's Note.]



til some time after the taking of Jerusalem, that is, at least forty years after the execution of Jesus Christ: for he makes Jesus say that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias whom ye slew between the altar and the temple.[28] Now Zacharias son of Barachias was assassinated between the altar and the temple by a faction of zealots, during the siege of Jerusalem.[29]

You assert that the design of the instances of supernatural interposition which the Gospel records was to convince mankind that Jesus Christ was truly the expected Redeemer. But it is as impossible that any human sophistry should frustrate the manifestation of Omnipotence, as that Omniscience should fail to select the most efficient means of accomplishing its design. Eighteen centuries have passed and the tenth part of the human race have a blind and mechanical belief in that Redeemer, without a complete reliance on the merits of whom, their lot is fixed in everlasting misery: surely if the Christian system be thus dreadfully important its Omnipotent author would have rendered it incapable of those abuses from which it has never been exempt, and to which it is subject in common with all human institutions, he would not have left it a matter of ceaseless cavil or complete indifference to the immense majority of mankind. Surely some more conspicuous evidences of its authenticity would have been afforded than driving out devils, drowning pigs, curing blind men, animating a dead body, and turning water into wine. Some theatre worthier of the transcendent event, than Judea, would have been chosen, some historians more adapted by their accomplishments and their genius to record the incarnation of the immutable God. The humane society restores drowned persons; every empiric can cure every disease; drowning pigs is no very difficult matter, and driving

[28] See Matthew, Chap. XXIII, v. 35. [Shelley's Note.]

[29] Josephus. [Shelley's Note.]