

THE SIXTH DIALOGUE.

I. Points agreed. II. Sundry pretences to revelation. III. Uncertainty of tradition. IV. Object and ground of faith. V. Some books disputed, others evidently spurious. VI. Style and composition of holy scripture. VII. Difficulties occurring therein. VIII. Obscurity not always a defect. IX. Inspiration neither impossible nor absurd. X. Objections from the form and matter of divine revelation, considered. XI. Infidelity an effect of narrowness and prejudice. XII. Articles of Christian faith not unreasonable. XIII. Guilt the natural parent of fear. XIV. Things unknown reduced to the standard of what men know. XV. Prejudices against the incarnation of the Son of God. XVI. Ignorance of the divine economy, a source of difficulties. XVII. Wisdom of God, foolishness to man. XVIII. Reason, no blind guide. XIX. Usefulness of divine revelation. XX. Prophecies, whence obscure. XXI. Eastern accounts of time older than the Mosaic. XXII. The humour of Egyptians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and other nations extending their antiquity beyond truth, accounted for. XXIII. Reasons confirming the Mosaic account. XXIV. Profane historians inconsistent. XXV. Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian. XXVI. The testimony of Josephus considered. XXVII. Attestation of Jews and Gentiles to Christianity. XXVIII. Forgeries and heresies. XXIX. Judgment and attention of minute philosophers. XXX. Faith and miracles. XXXI. Probable arguments, a sufficient ground of faith. XXXII. The Christian religion able to stand the test of rational inquiry.

I. THE following day being Sunday, our philosophers lay long in bed, while the rest of us went to church in the neighbouring town, where we dined at Euphranor's, and after evening service returned to the two philosophers, whom we found in the library. They told us, that if there was a God, he was present every where as well as at church; and that if we had been serving him one way, they did not neglect to do as much another; inasmuch as a free exercise of reason must be allowed the most acceptable service and worship, that a rational creature can offer to its Creator. However, said Alciphron, if you, gentlemen, can but solve the difficulties which I shall propose to-morrow morning, I promise to go to church next Sunday. After some general conversation of this kind, we sat down to a light supper, and the next morning assembled at the same place as the day before, where, being all seated, I observed, that the foregoing week our conferences had been carried on for a longer time, and with less interruption than I had ever known, or well could be, in town, where men's hours are so broken by visits, business, and amusements, that whoever is content to form his notions from conversation only, must needs have them very shattered and imperfect. And what have we got, replied Alciphron, by all these continued conferences? For my part, I think myself just where I was, with respect to the main point that divides us, the truth of the Christian religion. I answered, that so many points had been examined, discussed, and agreed, between him and his adversaries, that I hoped to see them come to an entire agreement in the end. For, in the first place, said I, the principles and

opinions of those who are called free-thinkers, or minute philosophers, have been pretty clearly explained. It hath been also agreed, that vice is not of that benefit to the nation which some men imagine: that virtue is highly useful to mankind: but that the beauty of virtue is not alone sufficient to engage them in the practice of it: that therefore the belief of a God and providence ought to be encouraged in the state, and tolerated in good company, as a useful notion. Further, it hath been proved that there is a God; that it is reasonable to worship him; and that the worship, faith, and principles, prescribed by the Christian religion, have a useful tendency. Admit, replied Alciphron, addressing himself to Crito, all that Dion saith to be true: yet this doth not hinder my being just where I was with respect to the main point. Since there is nothing in all this that proves the truth of the Christian religion; though each of those particulars enumerated may, perhaps, prejudice in its favour. I am therefore to suspect myself, at present, for a prejudiced person; prejudiced, I say, in favour of Christianity. This, as I am a lover of truth, puts me upon my guard against deception. I must therefore look sharp, and well consider every step I take.

II. *Cri.* You may remember, Alciphron, you proposed for the subject of our present conference, the consideration of certain difficulties and objections which you had to offer against the Christian religion. We are now ready to hear and consider whatever you shall think fit to produce of that kind. Atheism, and a wrong notion of Christianity, as of something hurtful to mankind, are great prejudices; the removal of which may dispose a man to argue with candour and submit to reasonable proof: but the removing prejudices against an opinion, is not to be reckoned prejudicing in its favour. It may be hoped, therefore, that you will be able to do justice to your cause, without being fond of it. *Alc.* O Crito! that man may thank his stars to whom nature hath given a sublime soul, who can raise himself above popular opinions, and, looking down on the herd of mankind, behold them scattered over the surface of the whole earth, divided and subdivided into numberless nations and tribes, differing in notions and tenets, as in language, manners, and dress. The man who takes a general view of the world and its inhabitants, from this lofty stand, above the reach of prejudice, seems to breathe a purer air, and to see by a clearer light: but how to impart this clear and extensive view to those who are wandering beneath, in the narrow, dark paths of error! this indeed is a hard task; but hard as it is I shall try, if by any means,

Clara tuæ possim præpendere lumina menti.—LUCRET.

Know then, that all the various casts or sects of the sons of men have each their faith, and their religious system, germinating

and sprouting forth from that common grain of enthusiasm, which is an original ingredient in the composition of human nature; they shall each tell of intercourse with the invisible world, revelations from heaven, divine oracles, and the like. All which pretensions, when I regard with an impartial eye, it is impossible I should assent to all; and I find within myself something that withholds me from assenting to any of them. For although I may be willing to follow, so far as common sense and the light of nature lead; yet the same reason that bids me yield to rational proof, forbids me to admit opinions without proof. This holds in general against all revelations whatsoever. And be this my first objection against the Christian in particular. *Cri.* As this objection supposes there is no proof or reason for believing the Christian, if good reason can be assigned for such belief, it comes to nothing. Now I presume you will grant, the authority of the reporter is a true and proper reason for believing reports; and the better this authority, the juster claim it hath to our assent: but the authority of God is on all accounts the best: whatever therefore comes from God, it is most reasonable to believe.

III. *Alc.* This I grant; but then it must be proved to come from God. *Cri.* And are not miracles, and the accomplishments of prophecies, joined with the excellency of its doctrine, a sufficient proof that the Christian religion came from God? *Alc.* Miracles, indeed, would prove something: but what proof have we of these miracles? *Cri.* Proof of the same kind that we have or can have of any facts done a great way off, and a long time ago. We have authentic accounts transmitted down to us from eye-witnesses, whom we cannot conceive tempted to impose upon us by any human motive whatsoever; inasmuch as they acted therein contrary to their interests, their prejudices, and the very principles in which they had been nursed and educated. These accounts were confirmed by the unparalleled subversion of the city of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jewish nation, which is a standing testimony to the truth of the gospel, particularly of the predictions of our blessed Saviour. These accounts, within less than a century, were spread throughout the world, and believed by great numbers of people. These same accounts were committed to writing, translated into several languages, and handed down with the same respect and consent of Christians in the most distant churches. Do you not see, said Alciphron, staring full at Crito, that all this hangs by tradition? And tradition, take my word for it, gives but a weak hold: it is a chain, whereof the first links may be stronger than steel, and yet the last weak as wax, and brittle as glass. Imagine a picture copied successively by a hundred painters, one from another; how like must the last copy be to the original! How lively and

distinct will an image be, after a hundred reflections between two parallel mirrors! Thus like, and thus lively do I think a faint, vanishing tradition, at the end of sixteen or seventeen hundred years. Some men have a false heart, others a wrong head; and where both are true, the memory may be treacherous. Hence there is still something added, something omitted, and something varied from the truth: and the sum of many such additions, deductions, and alterations, accumulated for several ages, do, at the foot of the account, make quite another thing.

Cri. Ancient facts we may know by tradition, oral or written: and this latter we may divide into two kinds, private and public, as writings are kept in the hands of particular men, or recorded in public archives. Now all these three sorts of tradition, for aught I can see, concur to attest the genuine antiquity of the gospels. And they are strengthened by collateral evidence from rites instituted, festivals observed, and monuments erected by ancient Christians, such as churches, baptisteries, and sepulchres. Now allowing your objection holds against oral tradition, singly taken, yet I can think it no such difficult thing to transcribe faithfully. And things once committed to writing, are secure from slips of memory, and may with common care be preserved entire so long as the manuscript lasts: and this, experience shows, may be above a thousand years. The Alexandrine manuscript is allowed to be above twelve hundred years old; and it is highly probable there were then extant copies four hundred years old. A tradition therefore of above sixteen hundred years old, need have only two or three links in its chain. And these links, notwithstanding that great length of time, may be very sound and entire. Since no reasonable man will deny, that an ancient manuscript may be of much the same credit now, as when it was first written. We have it on good authority, and it seems probable, that the primitive Christians were careful to transcribe copies of the gospels and epistles for their private use, and that other copies were preserved as public records, in the several churches throughout the world, and that portions thereof were constantly read in their assemblies. Can more be said to prove the writings of classic authors, or ancient records of any kind authentic? *Alciphron*, addressing his discourse to *Euphranor*, said, It is one thing to silence an adversary, and another to convince him. What do you think, *Euphranor*? *Euph.* Doubtless it is. *Alc.* But what I want is to be convinced. *Euph.* That point is not so clear. *Alc.* But if a man had ever so much mind, he cannot be convinced by probable arguments against demonstration. *Euph.* I grant he cannot.

IV. *Alc.* Now it is as evident as demonstration can make it, that no divine faith can possibly be built upon tradition. Suppose an honest, credulous countryman catechised and lectured

every Sunday by his parish priest: it is plain he believes in the parson, and not in God. He knows nothing of revelations, and doctrines, and miracles, but what the priest tells him. This he believes, and his faith is purely human. If you say he has the liturgy and the bible for the foundation of his faith, the difficulty still recurs. For as to the liturgy, he pins his faith upon the civil magistrate, as well as the ecclesiastic: neither of which can pretend divine inspiration. Then for the bible, he takes both that and his prayer-book on trust from the printer, who, he believes, made true editions from true copies. You see then faith, but what faith? faith in the priest, in the magistrate, in the printer, editor, transcriber, none of which can with any pretence be called divine. I had the hint from Cratylus; it is a shaft out of his quiver, and believe me, a keen one. *Euph.* Let me take and make trial of this same shaft in my hands. Suppose then your countryman hears a magistrate declare the law from the bench, or suppose he reads it in a statute book. What think you, is the printer or the justice the true and proper object of his faith and submission? Or do you acknowledge a higher authority whereon to found those loyal acts, and in which they do really terminate? Again, suppose you read a passage in Tacitus that you believe true; would you say you assented to it on the authority of the printer or transcriber rather than the historian? *Alc.* Perhaps I would, and perhaps I would not. I do not think myself obliged to answer these points. What is this but transferring the question from one subject to another? That which we considered was neither law nor profane history, but religious tradition, and divine faith. I see plainly what you aim at, but shall never take for an answer to one difficulty, the starting of another. *Cr.* O Alciphron, there is no taking hold of you, who expect that others should (as you were pleased to express it) hold fair and stand firm, while you plucked out their prejudices: how shall he argue with you but from your concessions, and how can he know what you grant except you will be pleased to tell him? *Euph.* But to save you the trouble, for once I will suppose an answer. My question admits but of two answers; take your choice. From the one it will follow, that by a parity of reason we can easily conceive, how a man may have divine faith, though he never felt inspiration or saw a miracle: inasmuch as it is equally possible for the mind, through whatever conduit, oral or scriptural, divine revelation be derived, to carry its thought and submission up to the source, and terminate its faith, not in human, but in divine authority: not in the instrument or vessel of conveyance, but in the great origin itself, as its proper and true object. From the other answer it will follow, that you introduce a general scepticism into human knowledge, and break down the hinges on which civil government and all the affairs of the world

turn and depend: in a word, that you would destroy human faith to get rid of divine. And how this agrees with your professing that you want to be convinced I leave you to consider.

V. *Alc.* I should in earnest be glad to be convinced one way or other, and come to some conclusion. But I have so many objections in store, you are not to count much upon getting over one. Depend on it you shall find me behave like a gentleman and lover of truth. I will propose my objections briefly and plainly, and accept of reasonable answers as fast as you can give them. Come Euphranor, make the most of your tradition; you can never make that a constant and universal one, which is acknowledged to have been unknown, or at best disputed in the church for several ages: and this is the case of the canon of the New Testament. For though we have now a canon, as they call it, settled; yet every one must see and own that tradition cannot grow stronger by age; and that what was uncertain in the primitive times cannot be undoubted in the subsequent. What say you to this, Euphranor? *Euph.* I should be glad to conceive your meaning clearly before I return an answer. It seems to me this objection of yours supposeth, that where a tradition hath been constant and undisputed, such tradition may be admitted as a proof, but that where the tradition is defective, the proof must be so too. Is this your meaning? *Alc.* It is. *Euph.* Consequently the gospels and epistles of St. Paul, which were universally received in the beginning, and never since doubted of by the church, must, notwithstanding this objection, be in reason admitted for genuine. And if these books contain, as they really do, all those points that come into controversy between you and me; what need I dispute with you about the authority of some other books of the New Testament, which came later to be generally known and received in the church? If a man assents to the undisputed books he is no longer an infidel; though he should not hold the revelations, or the epistles of St. James or Jude, or the latter of St. Peter, or the two last of St. John to be canonical. The additional authority of these portions of holy scripture may have its weight in particular controversies between Christians, but can add nothing to arguments against an infidel as such. Wherefore though I believe good reasons may be assigned for receiving these books, yet these reasons seem now beside our purpose. When you are a Christian it will be then time enough to argue this point. And you will be the nearer being so, if the way be shortened by omitting it for the present. *Alc.* Not so near neither as you perhaps imagine: for, notwithstanding all the fair and plausible things you may say about tradition, when I consider the spirit of forgery which reigned in the primitive times, and reflect on the several gospels, acts, and epistles attributed to the apostles, which yet are

acknowledged to be spurious, I confess, I cannot help suspecting the whole. *Euph.* Tell me, Alciphron, do you suspect all Plato's writings for spurious, because the dialogue upon death, for instance, is allowed to be so? Or will you admit none of Tully's writings to be genuine, because Sigonius imposed a book of his own writing for Tully's treatise *De Consolatione*, and the imposture passed for some time on the world? *Alc.* Suppose I admit for the works of Tully and Plato those that commonly pass for such. What then? *Euph.* Why then I would fain know, whether it be equal and impartial in a free-thinker, to measure the credibility of profane and sacred books by a different rule. Let us know upon what foot we Christians are to argue with minute philosophers; whether we may be allowed the benefit of common maxims in logic and criticism? If we may, be pleased to assign a reason why supposititious writings, which in the style, and manner, and matter bear visible marks of imposture, and have accordingly been rejected by the church, can be made an argument against those which have been universally received, and handed down by a unanimous, constant tradition. There have been in all ages and in all great societies of men, many capricious, vain, or wicked impostors, who for different ends have abused the world by spurious writings, and created work for critics both in profane and sacred learning. And it would seem as silly to reject the true writings of profane authors for the sake of the spurious, as it would seem unreasonable to suppose, that among the heretics and several sects of Christians, there should be none capable of the like imposture.

VI. *Alc.* But, be the tradition ever so well attested, and the books ever so genuine, yet I cannot suppose them wrote by persons divinely inspired, so long as I see in them certain characters inconsistent with such a supposition. Surely the purest language, the most perfect style, the exactest method, and in a word all the excellencies of good writing, might be expected in a piece composed or dictated by the spirit of God: but books, wherein we find the reverse of all this, it were impious not to reject, but to attribute to the Divinity. *Euph.* Say, Alciphron, are the lakes, the rivers, or the ocean bounded by straight lines? Are the hills and mountains exact cones or pyramids? or the stars cast into regular figures? *Alc.* They are not. *Euph.* But in the works of insects, we may observe figures as exact as if they were drawn by the rule and compass. *Alc.* We may. *Euph.* Should it not seem therefore that a regular exactness, or scrupulous attention to what men call the rules of art, is not observed in the great productions of the author of nature? *Alc.* It should. *Euph.* And when a great prince declareth his will in laws and edicts to his subjects, is he careful about a pure style or elegant composition? Does he not leave his secretaries and clerks to

express his sense in their own words? Is not the phrase on such occasions thought proper if it conveys as much as was intended? And would not the divine strain of certain modern critics be judged affected and improper for such uses? *Alc.* It must be owned, laws, and edicts, and grants, for solecism and tautology, are very offensive to the harmonious ears of a fine writer. *Euph.* Why then should we expect in the oracles of God an exactness that would be misbecoming and beneath the dignity of an earthly monarch, and which bears no proportion or resemblance to the magnificent works of the creation? *Alc.* But granting that a nice regard to particles and critical rules is a thing too little and mean to be expected in divine revelations; and that there is more force and spirit and true greatness in a negligent, unequal style, than in the well-turned periods of a polite writer; yet what is all this to the bald and flat compositions of those you call the divine penmen? I can never be persuaded the supreme Being would pick out the poorest and meanest of scribblers for his secretaries. *Euph.* O Alciphron, if I durst follow my own judgment, I should be apt to think there are noble beauties in the style of the holy scripture: in the narrative parts a strain so simple and unaffected; in the devotional and prophetic, so animated and sublime: and in the doctrinal parts such an air of dignity and authority as seems to speak their original divine. But I shall not enter into a dispute about taste; much less set up my judgment on so nice a point against that of the wits, and men of genius, with which your sect abounds. And I have no temptation to it, inasmuch as it seems to me the oracles of God are not the less so for being delivered in a plain dress, rather than in the enticing words of man's wisdom. *Alc.* This may perhaps be an apology for some simplicity and negligence in writing.

VII. But what apology can be made for nonsense, crude nonsense? of which I could easily assign many instances, having once in my life read the scripture through with that very view. Look here, said he, opening a bible in the forty-ninth psalm, the author begins very magnificently, calling upon all the inhabitants of the earth to give ear, and assuring them his mouth shall speak of wisdom, and the meditation of his heart shall be of understanding.

Quid dignum tanto feret hic promissor hiatus?

He hath no sooner done with his preface, but he puts this senseless question: "Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil; when the wickedness of my heels shall compass me about?" The iniquity of my heels! What nonsense after such a solemn introduction! *Euph.* For my own part, I have naturally weak

eyes, and know there are many things that I cannot see, which are nevertheless distinctly seen by others. I do not therefore conclude a thing to be absolutely invisible; because it is so to me: and since it is possible it may be with my understanding as it is with my eyes, I dare not pronounce a thing to be nonsense because I do not understand it. Of this passage many interpretations are given. The word rendered "heels" may signify fraud or supplantation: by some it is translated "past wickedness," the heel being the hinder part of the foot; by others "iniquity in the end of my days," the heel being one extremity of the body; by some, "the iniquity of my enemies that may supplant me;" by others, "my own faults or iniquities which I have passed over as light matters, and trampled under my feet." Some render it "the iniquity of my ways;" others, "my transgressions which are like slips and slidings of the heel:" and after all, might not this expression, so harsh and odd to English ears, have been very natural and obvious in the Hebrew tongue, which, as every other language, had its idioms? the force and propriety whereof may as easily be conceived lost in a long tract of time as the signification of some Hebrew words, which are not now intelligible, though nobody doubts but they had once a meaning as well as the other words of that language. Granting therefore that certain passages in the holy scriptures may not be understood, it will not thence follow that its penmen wrote nonsense? for I conceive nonsense to be one thing, and unintelligible another. *Cri.* An English gentleman of my acquaintance one day entertaining some foreigners at his house, sent his servant to know the occasion of a sudden tumult in the yard, who brought him word the horses were fallen together by the ears: his guests inquiring what the matter was, he translates it literally: *les chevaux sont tombés ensemble par les oreilles*; which made them stare; what expressed a very plain sense in the original English, being incomprehensible when rendered word for word into French: and I remember to have heard a man excuse the bulls of his countrymen, by supposing them so many literal translations. *Euph.* But not to grow tedious, I refer to the critics and commentators where you will find the use of this remark, which, clearing up several obscure passages you took for nonsense, may possibly incline you to suspect your own judgment of the rest. In this very psalm you have pitched on, the good sense and moral contained in what follows, should, methinks, make a candid reader judge favourably of the original sense of the author, in that part which he could not understand. Say, Alciphron, in reading the classics, do you forthwith conclude every passage to be nonsense, that you cannot make sense of? *Alc.* By no means; difficulties must be supposed to rise from different idioms, old customs, hints, and allusions, clear in one time or place, and obscure in another.

Euph. And why will you not judge of scripture by the same rule. Those sources of obscurity you mention are all common both to sacred and profane writings: and there is no doubt but an exacter knowledge in language and circumstances would in both cause difficulties to vanish like shades before the light of the sun. Jeremiah, to describe a furious invader, saith, "Behold, he shall come up as a lion from the swelling of Jordan against the habitation of the strong." One would be apt to think this passage odd and improper, and that it had been more reasonable to have said "a lion from the mountain or the desert." But travellers, as an ingenious man observes, who have seen the river Jordan bounded by low lands, with many reeds or thickets affording shelter to wild beasts (which being suddenly dislodged by a rapid overflowing of the river, rush into the upland country), perceive the force and propriety of the comparison; and that the difficulty proceeds, not from nonsense in the writer, but from ignorance in the reader. It is needless to amass together instances which may be found in every commentator: I only beg leave to observe that sometimes men, looking higher or deeper than they need for a profound or remote sense, overlook the natural, obvious sense, lying, if I may so say, at their feet, and so make difficulties, instead of finding them. This seems to be the case of that celebrated passage which hath created so much work in St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. "What shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" I remember to have heard this text explained by Laches, the vicar of our parish, to my neighbour Lycon, who was much perplexed about its meaning. If it had been translated, as it might very justly, "baptized for the sake of the dead," I do not see, said Laches, why people should be puzzled about the sense of this passage; for tell me, I beseech you, for whose sake do you think those Christians were baptized? For whose sake, answered Lycon, but their own? How do you mean, for their own sake in this life or the next? Doubtless in the next, for it was plain they could get nothing by it in this. They were then, replied Laches, baptized, not for the sake of themselves while living, but for the sake of themselves when dead; not for the living, but the dead. I grant it. Baptism, therefore, must have been to them a fruitless thing, if the dead rise not at all. It must. Whence Laches inferred, that St. Paul's argument was clear and pertinent for the resurrection: and Lycon allowed it to be *argumentum ad hominem* to those who had sought baptism. There is, then, concluded Laches, no necessity for supposing, that living men were in those days baptized instead of those who died without baptism, or of running into any other odd suppositions, or strained and far-fetched interpretations, to make sense of this passage. *Alc.*

Here and there a difficult passage may be cleared: but there are many which no art or wit of man can account for. What say you to those discoveries made by some of our learned writers, of false citations from the Old Testament found in the gospel? *Euph.* That some few passages are cited by the writers of the New Testament, out of the Old, and by the fathers out of the New, which are not in so many words to be found in them, is no new discovery of minute philosophers, but known and observed long before by Christian writers; who have made no scruple to grant, that some things might have been inserted by careless or mistaken transcribers into the text, from the margin, others left out, and others altered; whence so many various readings. But these are things of small moment, and that all other ancient authors have been subject to; and upon which no point of doctrine depends, which may not be proved without them. Nay, further, if it be any advantage to your cause, it hath been observed that the eighteenth psalm, as recited in the twenty-second chapter of the second book of Samuel, varies in above forty places, if you regard every little verbal or literal difference: and that a critic may now and then discover small variations, is what nobody can deny. But to make the most of these concessions, what can you infer from them more than that the design of the holy scripture was not to make us exactly knowing in circumstances? and that the Spirit did not dictate every particle and syllable, or preserve them from every minute alteration by miracle? which to believe, would look like rabbinical superstition. *Alc.* But what marks of divinity can possibly be in writings which do not reach the exactness even of human art? *Euph.* I never thought nor expected that the holy scripture should show itself divine, by a circumstantial accuracy of narration, by exactness of method, by strictly observing the rules of rhetoric, grammar, and criticism, in harmonious periods, in elegant and choice expressions, or in technical definitions and partitions. These things would look too like a human composition. Methinks there is in that simple, unaffected, artless, unequal, bold, figurative style of the holy scripture, a character singularly great and majestic, and that looks more like divine inspiration than any other composition that I know. But, as I said before, I shall not dispute a point of criticism with the gentlemen of your sect, who, it seems, are the modern standard for wit and taste. *Alc.* Well, I shall not insist on small slips, or the inaccuracy of citing or transcribing: and I freely own that repetitions, want of method, or want of exactness in circumstances, are not the things that chiefly stick with me; no more than the plain, patriarchal manners, or the peculiar usages and customs of the Jews and first Christians, so different from ours; and that to reject the scripture on such accounts would be to act like those French wits, who

censure Homer because they do not find in him the style, notions, and manners of their own age and country. Was there nothing else to divide us, I should make no great difficulty of owning, that a popular, uncorrect style might answer the general ends of revelation, as well, perhaps, as a more critical and exact one: but the obscurity still sticks with me. Methinks if the supreme Being had spoke to man, he would have spoke clearly to him, and that the word of God should not need a comment.

VIII. *Euph.* You seem, Alciphron, to think obscurity a defect; but if it should prove to be no defect, there would then be no force in this objection. *Alc.* I grant there would not. *Euph.* Pray tell me, are not speech and style instrumental to convey thoughts and notions, to beget knowledge, opinion, and assent? *Alc.* This is true. *Euph.* And is not the perfection of an instrument to be measured by the use to which it is subservient? *Alc.* It is. *Euph.* What therefore is a defect in one instrument, may be none in another. For instance, edged tools are in general designed to cut; but the uses of an axe and a razor being different, it is no defect in an axe, that it hath not the keen edge of a razor; nor in a razor, that it hath not the weight or strength of an axe. *Alc.* I acknowledge this to be true. *Euph.* And may we not say in general, that every instrument is perfect, which answers the purpose or intention of him who useth it? *Alc.* We may. *Euph.* Hence it seems to follow, that no man's speech is defective in point of clearness, though it should not be intelligible to all men, if it be sufficiently so to those who, he intended, should understand it; or though it should not in all parts be equally clear, or convey a perfect knowledge, where he intended only an imperfect hint. *Alc.* It seems so. *Euph.* Ought we not therefore to know the intention of the speaker, to be able to know whether his style be obscure through defect or design? *Alc.* We ought. *Euph.* But is it possible for man to know all the ends and purposes of God's revelations? *Alc.* It is not. *Euph.* How then can you tell, but the obscurity of some parts of scripture may well consist with the purpose which you know not, and consequently be no argument against its coming from God? The books of holy scripture were written in ancient languages, at distant times, on sundry occasions, and very different subjects: is it not therefore reasonable to imagine, that some parts or passages might have been clearly enough understood by those, for whose proper use they were principally designed, and yet seem obscure to us, who speak another language, and live in other times? Is it at all absurd or unsuitable to the notion we have of God or man, to suppose that God may reveal, and yet reveal with a reserve, upon certain remote and sublime subjects, content to give us hints and glimpses, rather than views? May we not also suppose from the reason of things, and the analogy

of nature, that some points, which might otherwise have been more clearly explained, were left obscure merely to encourage our diligence and modesty? Two virtues, which, if it might not seem disrespectful to such great men, I would recommend to the minute philosophers. Lysicles replied, This indeed is excellent: you expect that men of sense and spirit should in great humility put out their eyes, and blindly swallow all the absurdities and nonsense that shall be offered to them for divine revelation. *Euph.* On the contrary, I would have them open their eyes, look sharply, and try the spirit, whether it is of God; and not supinely and ignorantly condemn in the gross, all religions together, piety with superstition, truth for the sake of error, matters of fact for the sake of fictions: a conduct, which at first sight would seem absurd in history, physic, or any other branch of human inquiry: but to compare the Christian system, or holy scriptures, with other pretences to divine revelation, to consider impartially the doctrines, precepts, and events therein contained; weigh them in the balance with any other religions, natural, moral, or historical accounts; and diligently to examine all those proofs, internal and external, that for so many ages have been able to influence and persuade so many wise, learned, and inquisitive men: perhaps they might find in it certain peculiar characters, which sufficiently distinguish it from all other religions and pretended revelations, whereon to ground a reasonable faith. In which case I leave them to consider, whether it would be right to reject with peremptory scorn a revelation so distinguished and attested, upon account of obscurity in some parts of it? and whether it would seem beneath men of their sense and spirit to acknowledge, that, for aught they know, a light inadequate to things, may yet be adequate to the purpose of Providence? and whether it might be unbecoming their sagacity and critical skill to own, that literal translations from books in an ancient oriental tongue, wherein there are so many peculiarities, as to the manner of writing, the figures of speech, and structure of the phrase, so remote from all our modern idioms, and in which we have no other coeval writings extant, might well be obscure in many places, especially such as treat of subjects sublime and difficult in their own nature, or allude to things, customs, or events, very distant from our knowledge? And lastly, whether it might not become their character, as impartial and unprejudiced men, to consider the bible in the same light they would profane authors? They are apt to make great allowance for transpositions, omissions, and literal errors of transcribers in other ancient books, and very great for the difference of style and manner, especially in eastern writings, such as the remains of Zoroaster and Confucius, and why not in the prophets? In reading Horace or Persius, to make out the sense, they will be at

the pains to discover a hidden drama, and why not in Solomon or St. Paul? I hear there are certain ingenious men who despise king David's poetry, and yet propose to admire Homer and Pindar. If there be no prejudice or affectation in this, let them but make a literal version from those authors into English prose, and they will then be better able to judge of the psalms. *Alc.* You may discourse and expatiate: but notwithstanding all you have said or shall say, it is a clear point that a revelation which doth not reveal, can be no better than a contradiction in terms. *Euph.* Tell me, Alciphron, do you not acknowledge the light of the sun to be the most glorious production of Providence in this natural world? *Alc.* Suppose I do. *Euph.* This light, nevertheless, which you cannot deny to be of God's making, shines only on the surface of things, shines not at all in the night, shines imperfectly in the twilight, is often interrupted, refracted, and obscured, represents distant things and small things dubiously, imperfectly, or not at all. Is this true or no? *Alc.* It is. *Euph.* Should it not follow therefore, that to expect in this world a light from God without any mixture of shade or mystery, would be departing from the rule and analogy of the creation? and that consequently it is no argument the light of revelation is not divine, because it may not be so clear and full as you expect. *Alc.* As I profess myself candid and indifferent throughout this debate, I must needs own you say some plausible things, as a man of argument will never fail to do in vindication of his prejudices.

IX. But, to deal plainly, I must tell you once for all, that you may question and answer, illustrate and enlarge for ever, without being able to convince me that the Christian is of divine revelation. I have said several things, and have many more to say, which, believe me, have weight not only with myself, but with many great men my very good friends, and will have weight whatever Euphranor can say to the contrary. *Euph.* O Alciphron, I envy you the happiness of such acquaintance. But, as my lot fallen in this remote corner deprives me of that advantage, I am obliged to make the most of this opportunity, which you and Lysicles have put into my hands. I consider you as two able chirurgeons, and you were pleased to consider me as a patient, whose cure you have generously undertaken. Now a patient must have full liberty to explain his case, and tell all his symptoms, the concealing or palliating of which might prevent a perfect cure. You will be pleased therefore to understand me, not as objecting to, or arguing against, either your skill or medicines, but only as setting forth my own case and the effects they have upon me. Say, Alciphron, did you not give me to understand that you would extirpate my prejudices? *Alc.* It is true: a good physician eradicates every fibre of the disease. Come, you

shall have a patient hearing. *Euph.* Pray, was it not the opinion of Plato, that God inspired particular men, as organs or trumpets, to proclaim and sound forth his oracles to the world?* And was not the same opinion also embraced by others the greatest writers of antiquity? *Cri.* Socrates seems to have thought that all true poets spoke by inspiration; and Tully, that there was no extraordinary genius without it. This hath made some of our affected free-thinkers attempt to pass themselves upon the world for enthusiasts. *Alc.* What would you infer from all this? *Euph.* I would infer that inspiration should seem nothing impossible or absurd, but rather agreeable to the light of reason and the notions of mankind. And this, I suppose, you will acknowledge, having made it an objection against a particular revelation, that there are so many pretences to it throughout the world. *Alc.* O Euphranor, he who looks into the bottom of things, and resolves them into their first principles, is not easily amused with words. The word *inspiration* sounds indeed big, but let us, if you please, take an original view of the thing signified by it. To *inspire* is a word borrowed from the Latin, and strictly taken means no more than to breathe or blow in; nothing therefore can be inspired but what can be blown or breathed, and nothing can be so but wind or vapour, which indeed may fill or puff up men with fanatical and hypochondriacal ravings. This sort of inspiration I very readily admit. *Euph.* What you say is subtle, and I know not what effect it might have upon me, if your profound discourse did not hinder its own operation. *Alc.* How so? *Euph.* Tell me, Alciphron, do you discourse or do you not? To me it seems that you discourse admirably. *Alc.* Be that as it will, it is certain I discourse. *Euph.* But when I endeavour to look into the bottom of things, behold! a scruple riseth in my mind how this can be; for to *discourse* is a word of Latin derivation, which originally signifies to *run about*; and a man cannot run about, but he must change place and move his legs; so long therefore as you sit on this bench, you cannot be said to discourse. Solve me this difficulty, and then perhaps I may be able to solve yours. *Alc.* You are to know, that *discourse* is a word borrowed from sensible things to express an invisible action of the mind, reasoning or inferring one thing from another; and in this translated sense, we may be said to discourse, though we sit still. *Euph.* And may we not as well conceive, that the term *inspiration* might be borrowed from sensible things to denote an action of God, in an extraordinary manner, influencing, exciting, and enlightening the mind of a prophet or an apostle? who, in this secondary, figurative, and translated sense, may truly be said to be inspired, though there should be nothing in the case of that wind or vapour implied in the original sense of the word. It seems to me, that we may, by looking into our own minds, plainly

* Plato in *Ione*.

perceive certain instincts, impulses, and tendencies, which at proper periods and occasions spring up unaccountably in the soul of man. We observe very visible signs of the same in all other animals. And these things being ordinary and natural, what hinders, but we may conceive it possible for the human mind, upon an extraordinary account, to be moved in an extraordinary manner, and its faculties stirred up and actuated by supernatural power? That there are, and have been, and are likely to be wild visions and hypochondriacal ravings, nobody can deny; but to infer from thence that there are no true inspirations, would be too like concluding, that some men are not in their senses, because other men are fools. And though I am no prophet, and consequently cannot pretend to a clear notion of this matter; yet I shall not therefore take upon me to deny, but a true prophet, or inspired person, might have had as certain means of discerning between divine inspiration and hypochondriacal fancy, as you can between sleeping and waking, till you have proved the contrary. You may meet in the book of Jeremiah with this passage: "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream: and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully: what is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord? Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"* You see here a distinction made between wheat and chaff, true and spurious, with the mighty force and power of the former. But I beg pardon for quoting scripture to you; I make my appeal to the general sense of mankind, and the opinion of the wisest heathens, which seems sufficient to conclude divine inspiration possible, if not probable, at least till you prove the contrary.

X. *Alc.* The possibility of inspirations and revelations I do not think it necessary to deny. Make the best you can of this concession. *Euph.* Now what is allowed possible we may suppose in fact. *Alc.* We may. *Euph.* Let us then suppose, that God had been pleased to make a revelation to men; and that he inspired some as a means to instruct others. Having supposed this, can you deny that their inspired discourses and revelations might have been committed to writing, or that being written, after a long tract of time they might become in several places obscure; that some of them might even originally have been less clear than others, or that they might suffer some alteration by frequent transcribing, as other writings are known to have done? Is it not even very probable that all these things would happen? *Alc.* I grant it. *Euph.* And granting this, with what pretence can you reject the holy scriptures as not being divine, upon the account of such signs or marks, as you acknowledge would probably attend a divine revelation transmitted down to us through so many ages? *Alc.* But allowing all that in reason you can

* Jer. xxiii. 28, 29.

desire, and granting that this may account for some obscurity, may reconcile some small differences, or satisfy us how some difficulties might arise by inserting, omitting, or changing here and there a letter, a word, or perhaps a sentence: yet these are but small matters, in respect of the much more considerable and weighty objections I could produce, against the confessed doctrines, or subject matter of those writings. Let us see what is contained in these sacred books, and then judge whether it is probable or possible, such revelations should ever have been made by God? Now I defy the wit of man to contrive any thing more extravagant, than the accounts we there find of apparitions, devils, miracles, God manifest in the flesh, regeneration, grace, self-denial, resurrection of the dead, and such like *ægrî somnia*: things so odd, unaccountable, and remote from the apprehension of mankind, you may as soon wash a blackamore white, as clear them of absurdity. No critical skill can justify them, no tradition recommend them, I will not say for divine revelations, but even for the inventions of men of sense. *Euph.* I had always a great opinion of your sagacity, but now, Alciphron, I consider you as something more than man; else how should it be possible for you to know what, or how far, it may be proper for God to reveal? Methinks it may consist with all due deference to the greatest of human understandings, to suppose them ignorant of many things, which are not suited to their faculties, or lie out of their reach. Even the counsels of princes lie often beyond the ken of their subjects, who can only know so much as is revealed by those at the helm; and are often unqualified to judge of the usefulness and tendency even of that, till, in due time, the scheme unfolds, and is accounted for by succeeding events. That many points contained in holy scripture are remote from the common apprehensions of mankind, cannot be denied. But I do not see that it follows from thence they are not of divine revelation. On the contrary, should it not seem reasonable to suppose, that a revelation from God should contain something different in kind, or more excellent in degree, than what lay open to the common sense of men, or could even be discovered by the most sagacious philosopher? Accounts of separate spirits, good or bad, prophecies, miracles, and such things, are undoubtedly strange; but I would fain see how you can prove them impossible or absurd. *Alc.* Some things there are so evidently absurd, that it would be almost as silly to disprove them as to believe them; and I take these to be of that class.

XI. *Euph.* But is it not possible, some men may show as much prejudice and narrowness in rejecting all such accounts, as others might easiness and credulity in admitting them? I never durst make my own observation or experience the rule

and measure of things spiritual, supernatural, or relating to another world, because I should think it a very bad one, even for the visible and natural things of this; it would be judging like the Siamese, who was positive it did not freeze in Holland, because he had never known such a thing as hard water or ice in his own country. I cannot comprehend why any one, who admits the union of the soul and body, should pronounce it impossible for the human nature to be united to the divine, in a manner ineffable and incomprehensible by reason. Neither can I see any absurdity in admitting, that sinful man may become regenerate or a new creature, by the grace of God reclaiming him from a carnal life to a spiritual life of virtue and holiness. And since the being governed by sense and appetite is contrary to the happiness and perfection of a rational creature, I do not at all wonder that we are prescribed self-denial. As for the resurrection of the dead, I do not conceive it so very contrary to the analogy of nature, when I behold vegetables left to rot in the earth, rise up again with new life and vigour, or a worm, to all appearance dead, change its nature, and that, which in its first being crawled on the earth, become a new species, and fly abroad with wings. And, indeed, when I consider that the soul and body are things so very different and heterogeneous, I can see no reason to be positive, that the one must necessarily be extinguished upon the dissolution of the other; especially since I find in myself a strong, natural desire of immortality; and I have not observed that natural appetites are wont to be given in vain, or merely to be frustrated. Upon the whole, those points which you account extravagant and absurd, I dare not pronounce to be so till I see good reason for it.

XII. *Cri.* No, Alciphron, your positive airs must not pass for proofs; nor will it suffice to say, things are contrary to common sense, to make us think they are so: by common sense I suppose should be meant either the general sense of mankind, or the improved reason of thinking men. Now I believe that all those articles you have with so much capacity and fire at once summoned up and exploded, may be shown to be not disagreeable, much less contrary to common sense in one or other of these acceptations. That the gods might appear and converse among men, and that the divinity might inhabit human nature, were points allowed by the heathens: and for this I appeal to their poets and philosophers, whose testimonies are so numerous and clear, that it would be an affront to repeat them to a man of any education. And though the notion of a devil may not be so obvious, or so fully described, yet there appear plain traces of it, either from reason or tradition. The latter Platonists, as Porphyry and Iamblichus, are very clear in the point, allowing that evil demons delude and tempt, hurt and possess mankind. That

the ancient Greeks, Chaldeans, and Egyptians, believed both good and bad angels, may be plainly collected from Plato, Plutarch, and the Chaldean oracles. Origen observes, that almost all the gentiles, who held the being of demons, allowed there were bad ones.* There is even something as early as Homer, that is thought by the learned cardinal Bessarion† to allude to the fall of Satan, in the account of Ate, whom the poet represents as cast down from heaven by Jove, and then wandering about the earth, doing mischief to mankind. This same Ate is said by Hesiod to be the daughter of Discord; and by Euripides, in his Hippolitus, is mentioned as a tempter to evil. And it is very remarkable, that Plutarch in his book, *De Vitando Ære Alieno*, speaks after Empedocles, of certain demons that fell from heaven, and were banished by God, *Δαίμονες θεήλατοι καὶ οὐρανοπέσεις*. Nor is that less remarkable which is observed by Ficinus from Pherecydes Syrus, that there had been a downfall of demons who revolted from God; and that Ophioneus (the old serpent) was head of that rebellious crew.‡ Then as to other articles, let any one consider what the Pythagoreans taught of the purgation and λύσις, or deliverance of the soul: what most philosophers, but especially the Stoics, of subduing our passions: what Plato and Hierocles have said of forgiving injuries: what the acute and sagacious Aristotle writes, in his Ethics, to Nicomachus, of the spiritual and divine life, that life which, according to him, is too excellent to be thought human; insomuch as man, so far forth as man, cannot attain to it, but only so far forth as he hath something divine in him: and particularly, let him reflect on what Socrates taught, to wit, that virtue is not to be learned from men, that it is the gift of God, and that good men are not good by virtue of human care or diligence, *οὐκ εἶναι ἀνθρωπίνην ἐπιμέλειαν ἢ ἀγαθοὶ ἀγαθοὶ γίγνονται*.§ Let any man who really thinks, but consider what other thinking men have thought, who cannot be supposed prejudiced in favour of revealed religion; and he will see cause, if not to think with reverence of the Christian doctrines of grace, self-denial, regeneration, sanctification, and the rest, even the most mysterious, at least to judge more modestly and warily, than those who shall, with a confident air, pronounce them absurd, and repugnant to the reason of mankind. And in regard to a future state, the common sense of the gentile world, modern or ancient, and the opinions of the wisest men of antiquity, are things so well known, that I need say nothing about them. To me it seems, the minute philosophers, when they appeal to reason and common sense, mean only the sense of their own party: a coin, how current soever among themselves, that other men will bring to the touchstone, and pass

* Origen, lib. vii. contra Celsum.

† Vide Argum. in Phedrum Platonis.

‡ In Calumniat. Platonis, lib. iii. c. 7.

§ Vide Plat. in Protag. et alibi passim.

for no more than it is worth. *Lys.* Be those notions agreeable to what or whose sense they may, they are not agreeable to mine. And if I am thought ignorant for this, I pity those who think me so.

XIII. I enjoy myself, and follow my own courses, without remorse or fear: which I should not do, if my head were filled with enthusiasm; whether gentile or Christian, philosophical or revealed, it is all one to me. Let others know or believe what they can, and make the best of it, I, for my part, am happy and safe in my ignorance. *Cri.* Perhaps not so safe neither. *Lys.* Why, surely you will not pretend that ignorance is criminal? *Cri.* Ignorance alone is not a crime. But that wilful ignorance, affected ignorance, ignorance from sloth, or conceited ignorance, is a fault, might easily be proved by the testimony of heathen writers; and it needs no proof to show, that if ignorance be our fault, we cannot be secure in it as an excuse. *Lys.* Honest Crito seems to hint, that a man should take care to inform himself, while alive, lest his neglect be punished when he is dead. Nothing is so pusillanimous and unbecoming a gentleman, as fear: nor could you take a likelier course to fix and rivet a man of honour in guilt, than by attempting to frighten him out of it. This is the stale, absurd stratagem of priests, and that which makes them, and their religion, more odious and contemptible to me than all the other articles put together. *Cri.* I would fain know why it may not be reasonable for a man of honour, or any man who has done amiss, to fear? Guilt is the natural parent of fear; and nature is not used to make them fear where there is no occasion. That impious and profane men should expect divine punishment, doth not seem so absurd to conceive: and that under this expectation they should be uneasy and even afraid, how consistent soever it may or may not be with honour, I am sure consists with reason. *Lys.* That thing of hell and eternal punishment is the most absurd, as well as the most disagreeable thought that ever entered into the head of mortal man. *Cri.* But you must own that it is not an absurdity peculiar to Christians, since Socrates, that great free-thinker of Athens, thought it probable there may be such a thing as impious men for ever punished in hell.* It is recorded of this same Socrates, that he has been often known to think for four and twenty hours together, fixed in the same posture, and wrapt up in meditation. *Lys.* Our modern free-thinkers are a more lively sort of men. Those old philosophers were most of them whimsical. They had, in my judgment, a dry, narrow, timorous way of thinking, which by no means came up to the frank humour of our times. *Cri.* But I appeal to your own judgment, if a man,

* Vide Platon. in Gorgiu.

who knows not the nature of the soul, can be assured by the light of reason, whether it is mortal or immortal?

An simul interest nobiscum morte perempta,
An tenebras orci visat vastasque lacunas?

Lys. But what if I know the nature of the soul? What if I have been taught that whole secret by a modern free-thinker? a man of science who discovered it not by a tiresome introversion of his faculties, not by amusing himself in a labyrinth of notions, or stupidly thinking for whole days and nights together, but by looking into things and observing the analogy of nature.

XIV. This great man is a philosopher by fire, who has made many processes upon vegetables. It is his opinion that men and vegetables are really of the same species: that animals are moving vegetables, and vegetables fixed animals; that the mouths of the one and the roots of the other serve to the same use, differing only in position; that blossoms and flowers answer to the most indecent and concealed parts in the human body; that vegetable and animal bodies are both alike organized, and that in both there is life or a certain motion and circulation of juices through proper tubes or vessels. I shall never forget this able man's unfolding the nature of the soul in the following manner. The soul, said he, is that specific form or principle from whence proceed the distinct qualities or properties of things. Now, as vegetables are a more simple and less perfect compound, and consequently more easily analyzed than animals, we will begin with the contemplation of the souls of vegetables. Know then, that the soul of any plant, rosemary for instance, is neither more nor less than its essential oil. Upon this depends its peculiar fragrance, taste, and medicinal virtues, or in other words its life and operations. Separate or extract this essential oil by chemic art, and you get the soul of the plant: what remains being a dead carcase, without any one property or virtue of the plant, which is preserved entirely in the oil, a drachm whereof goes further than several pounds of the plant. Now this same essential oil is itself a composition of sulphur and salt, or of a gross, unctuous substance, and a fine subtile principle or volatile salt imprisoned therein. This volatile salt is properly the essence of the soul of the plant, containing all its virtue, and the oil is the vehicle of this most subtile part of the soul, or that which fixes and individuates it. And as, upon separation of this oil from the plant, the plant died, so a second death or death of the soul ensues upon the resolution of this essential oil into its principles; as appears by leaving it exposed for some time to the open air, so that the volatile salt or spirit may fly off: after which the oil remains dead and insipid, but without any sensible diminution of its weight, by the loss of that volatile essence of the soul, that ethereal aura, that spark of

entity, which returns and mixes with the solar light, the universal soul of the world, and only source of life, whether vegetable, animal, or intellectual: which differ only according to the grossness or fineness of the vehicles, and the different textures of the natural alembics, or in other words, the organized bodies, where the above-mentioned volatile essence inhabits and is elaborated, where it acts and is acted upon. This chemical system lets you at once into the nature of the soul, and accounts for all its phenomena. In that compound which is called man, the soul or essential oil is what commonly goes by the name of animal spirit: for you must know, it is a point agreed by chemists, that spirits are nothing but the more subtile oils. Now in proportion as the essential oil of man is more subtile than that of other creatures, the volatile salt that impregnates it is more at liberty to act, which accounts for those specific properties and actions of human kind, which distinguish them above other creatures. Hence you may learn why, among the wise ancients, salt was another name for wit, and in our times a dull man is said to be insipid or insulse. Aromatic oils, maturated by great length of time, turn to salts: this shows why human kind grow wiser by age. And what I have said of the twofold death or dissolution, first of the compound, by separating the soul from the organical body, and secondly of the soul itself, by dividing the volatile salt from the oil, illustrates and explains that notion of certain ancient philosophers: that as the man was a compound of soul and body, so the soul was compounded of the mind or intellect, and its ethereal vehicle; and that the separation of soul and body, or death of the man, is, after a long tract of time, succeeded by a second death of the soul itself, to wit, the separation or deliverance of the intellect from its vehicle, and reunion with the sun. *Euph.* O Lysicles, your ingenious friend has opened a new scene, and explained the most obscure and difficult points in the clearest and easiest manner. *Lys.* I must own this account of things struck my fancy. I am no great lover of creeds or systems: but when a notion is reasonable and grounded on experience I know how to value it. *Cri.* In good earnest, Lysicles, do you believe this account to be true? *Lys.* Why then in good earnest I do not know whether I do or no. But I can assure you the ingenious artist himself has not the least doubt about it. And to believe an artist in his art is a just maxim and short way to science. *Cri.* But what relation hath the soul of man to chemic art? The same reason, that bids me trust a skilful artist in his art, inclines me to suspect him out of his art. Men are too apt to reduce unknown things to the standard of what they know, and bring a prejudice or tincture from things they have been conversant in, to judge thereby of things in which they have not been conversant. I have known a fiddler gravely teach that the soul was harmony; a geo-

metrician very positive that the soul must be extended; and a physician, who having pickled half a dozen embryos and dissected as many rats and frogs, grew conceited, and affirmed there was no soul at all, and that it was a vulgar error. *Lys.* My notions sit easy. I shall not engage in pedantic disputes about them. They who do not like them may leave them. *Euph.* This, I suppose, is said much like a gentleman.

XV. But pray, *Lysicles*, tell me whether the clergy come within that general rule of yours—that an artist may be trusted in his art? *Lys.* By no means. *Euph.* Why so? *Lys.* Because I take myself to know as much of those matters as they do. *Euph.* But you allow, that in any other profession, one who hath spent much time and pains may attain more knowledge than a man of equal or better parts, who never made it his particular business. *Lys.* I do. *Euph.* And nevertheless in things religious and divine you think all men equally knowing. *Lys.* I do not say all men. But I think all men of sense competent judges. *Euph.* What! are the divine attributes and dispensations to mankind, the true end and happiness of rational creatures, with the means of improving and perfecting their beings, more easy and obvious points than those which make the subject of every common profession? *Lys.* Perhaps not: but one thing I know, some things are so manifestly absurd, that no authority shall make me give in to them. For instance, if all mankind should pretend to persuade me that the Son of God was born upon earth in a poor family, was spit upon, buffeted, and crucified, lived like a beggar and died like a thief, I should never believe one syllable of it. Common sense shows every one, what figure it would be decent for an earthly prince or ambassador to make; and the Son of God, upon an embassy from heaven, must needs have made an appearance beyond all others of great *éclat*, and in all respects the very reverse of that which *Jesus Christ* is reported to have made, even by his own historians. *Euph.* O *Lysicles*, though I had ever so much mind to approve and applaud your ingenious reasoning, yet I dare not assent to this for fear of *Crito*. *Lys.* Why so? *Euph.* Because he observed just now, that men judge of things they do not know, by prejudices from things they do know. And I fear he would object that you, who have been conversant in the *grand monde*, having your head filled with a notion of attendants and equipage and liveries, the familiar badges of human grandeur, are less able to judge of that which is truly divine; and that one who had seen less, and thought more, would be apt to imagine a pompous parade of worldly greatness, not the most becoming the author of a spiritual religion, that was designed to wean men from the world, and raise them above it. *Cri.* Do you think, *Lysicles*, if a man should make his entrance into London in a rich suit of clothes, with a hundred gilt coaches, and a thousand

laced footmen ; that this would be a more divine appearance, and have more of true grandeur in it, than if he had power with a word to heal all manner of diseases, to raise the dead to life, and still the raging of the winds and sea? *Lys.* Without all doubt it must be very agreeable to common sense to suppose, that he could restore others to life who could not save his own. You tell us, indeed, that he rose again from the dead : but what occasion was there for him to die, the just for the unjust, the Son of God for wicked men? And why in that individual place? Why at that very time above all others? Why did he not make his appearance earlier, and preach in all parts of the world, that the benefit might have been more extensive? Account for all these points and reconcile them, if you can, to the common notions and plain sense of mankind. *Cri.* And what if those, as well as many other points, should lie out of the road that we are acquainted with; must we therefore explode them, and make it a rule to condemn every proceeding as senseless, that doth not square with the vulgar sense of man; if the precepts and certain primary tenets of religion appear in the eye of reason good and useful; and if they are also found to be so by their effects; we may, for the sake of them, admit certain other points or doctrines recommended with them, to have a good tendency, to be right and true; although we cannot discern their goodness or truth by the mere light of human reason, which may well be supposed an insufficient judge of the proceedings, counsels, and designs of Providence, and this sufficeth to make our conviction reasonable.

XVI. It is an allowed point that no man can judge of this or that part of a machine taken by itself, without knowing the whole, the mutual relation or dependence of its parts, and the end for which it was made. And, as this is a point acknowledged in corporeal and natural things, ought we not by a parity of reason to suspend our judgment of a single unaccountable part of the divine economy, till we are more fully acquainted with the moral system or world of spirits, and are let into the designs of God's providence, and have an extensive view of his dispensations past, present, and future? Alas! *Lysicles*, what do you know even of yourself, whence you come, what you are, or whither you are going? To me it seems, that a minute philosopher is like a conceited spectator, who never looked behind the scenes, and yet would judge of the machinery: who from a transient glimpse of a part only of some one scene, would take upon him to censure the plot of a play. *Lys.* As to the plot I will not say; but in half a scene a man may judge of an absurd actor. With what colour or pretext can you justify the vindictive, froward, whimsical behaviour of some inspired teachers or prophets? Particulars that serve neither for profit nor pleasure I make a shift to forget; but in general the truth of this charge I do very

well remember. *Cri.* You need be at no pains to prove a point I shall neither justify nor deny. That there have been human passions, infirmities, and defects in persons inspired by God, I freely own; nay, that very wicked men have been inspired, as Balaam for instance, and Caiaphas, cannot be denied. But what will you infer from thence? Can you prove it impossible, that a weak or sinful man should become an instrument to the Spirit of God, for conveying his purpose to other sinners? Or that divine light may not, as well as the light of the sun, shine on a foul vessel without polluting its rays? *Lys.* To make short work, the right way would be to put out our eyes, and not judge at all. *Cri.* I do not say so, but I think it would be right, if some sanguine persons upon certain points suspected their own judgment. *Alc.* But the very things said to be inspired, taken by themselves and in their own nature, are sometimes so wrong, to say no worse, that a man may pronounce them not to be divine at first sight; without troubling his head about the system of providence or connexion of events: as one may say that grass is green, without knowing or considering how it grows, what uses it is subservient to, or how it is connected with the mundane system. Thus for instance, the spoiling of the Egyptians, and the extirpation of the Canaanites, every one at first glance sees to be cruel and unjust, and may therefore without deliberating pronounce them unworthy of God. *Cri.* But Alciphron, to judge rightly of these things, may it not be proper to consider how long the Israelites had wrought under those severe task-masters of Egypt, what injuries and hardships they had sustained from them, what crimes and abominations the Canaanites had been guilty of, what right God hath to dispose of the things of this world, to punish delinquents, and to appoint both the manner and the instruments of his justice? Man, who has not such right over his fellow-creatures, who is himself a fellow-sinner with them, who is liable to error as well as passion, whose views are imperfect, who is governed more by prejudice than the truth of things, may not improbably deceive himself, when he sets up for a judge of the proceedings of the holy, omniscient, impassive creator and governor of all things.

XVII. *Alc.* Believe me, Crito, men are never so industrious to deceive themselves, as when they engage to defend their prejudices. You would fain reason us out of all use of our reason: can any thing be more irrational? To forbid us to reason on the divine dispensations, is to suppose, they will not bear the test of reason; or, in other words, that God acts without reason, which ought not to be admitted, no, not in any single instance: for if in one, why not in another? Whoever therefore allows a God, must allow that he always acts reasonably. I will not therefore attribute to him actions and proceedings that are unreasonable.

He hath given me reason to judge withal; and I will judge by that unerring light, lighted from the universal lamp of nature. *Cri.* O Alciphron! as I frankly own the common remark to be true, that when a man is against reason, it is a shrewd sign that reason is against him: so I should never go about to dissuade any one, much less one who so well knew the value of it, from using that noble talent. On the contrary, upon all subjects of moment, in my opinion, a man ought to use his reason; but then, whether it may not be reasonable to use it with some deference to superior reason, it will not, perhaps, be amiss to consider.

Alc. It must surely derogate from the wisdom of God, to suppose his conduct cannot bear being inspected, not even by the twilight of human reason. *Euph.* You allow, then, God to be wise? *Alc.* I do. *Euph.* What! infinitely wise? *Alc.* Even infinitely. *Euph.* His wisdom, then, far exceeds that of man.

Alc. Vastly. *Euph.* Probably more than the wisdom of man, that of a child. *Alc.* Without all question. *Euph.* What think you, Alciphron, must not the conduct of a parent seem very unaccountable to a child, when its inclinations are thwarted, when it is put to learn the letters, when it is obliged to swallow bitter physic, to part with what it likes, and to suffer, and do, and see many things done contrary to its own judgment, however reasonable or agreeable to that of others? *Alc.* This I grant.

Euph. Will it not therefore follow from hence, by a parity of reason, that the little child, man, when it takes upon it to judge of the schemes of parental providence, and a thing of yesterday to criticize the economy of the Ancient of days;—will it not follow, I say, that such a judge, of such matters, must be apt to make very erroneous judgments? esteeming those things in themselves unaccountable, which he cannot account for; and concluding of some certain points, from an appearance of arbitrary carriage towards him, which is suited to his infancy and ignorance, that they are in themselves capricious or absurd, and cannot proceed from a wise, just, and benevolent God. This single consideration, if duly attended to, would, I verily think, put an end to many conceited reasonings against revealed religion.

Alc. You would have us then conclude, that things to our wisdom unaccountable, may nevertheless proceed from an abyss of wisdom which our line cannot fathom; and that prospects viewed but in part, and by the broken, tinged light of our intellects, though to us they may seem disproportionate and monstrous, may nevertheless appear quite otherwise to another eye, and in a different situation: in a word, that as human wisdom is but childish folly, in respect of the divine, so the wisdom of God may sometimes seem foolishness to men.

XVIII. *Euph.* I would not have you make the conclusions, unless in reason you ought to make them: but if they are rea-

sonable, why should you not make them? *Alc.* Some things may seem reasonable at one time, and not at another: and I take this very apology you make for credulity and superstition, to be one of those things. When I view it in its principles, it seems naturally to follow from just concessions; but when I consider its consequences, I cannot agree to it. A man had as good abdicate his nature, as disclaim the use of reason. A doctrine is unaccountable, therefore it must be divine! *Euph.* Credulity and superstition are qualities so disagreeable and degrading to human nature, so surely an effect of weakness, and so frequently a cause of wickedness, that I should be very much surprised to find a just course of reasoning lead to them. I can never think that reason is a blind guide to folly, or that there is any connexion between truth and falsehood, no more than I can think a thing's being unaccountable a proof that it is divine: though at the same time I cannot help acknowledging, it follows from your own avowed principles, that a thing's being unaccountable, or incomprehensible to our reason, is no sure argument to conclude it is not divine; especially when there are collateral proofs of its being so. A child is influenced by the many sensible effects it hath felt, of paternal love and care and superior wisdom, to believe and do several things with an implicit faith and obedience: and if we in the same manner, from the truth and reasonableness which we plainly see in so many points within our cognizance, and the advantages which we experience from the seed of the gospel sown in good ground, were disposed to an implicit belief of certain other points, relating to schemes we do not know, or subjects to which our talents are perhaps disproportionate, I am tempted to think it might become our duty without dishonouring our reason; which is never so much dishonoured as when it is foiled, and never in more danger of being foiled, than by judging where it hath neither means nor right to judge. *Lys.* I would give a good deal, to see that ingenious gamester Glaucus have the handling of Euphranor one night at our club. I own he is a peg too high for me in some of his notions: but then he is admirable at vindicating human reason against the impositions of priest-craft.

XIX. *Alc.* He would undertake to make it as clear as daylight, that there was nothing worth a straw in Christianity, but what every one knew, or might know, as well without as with it, before as since Jesus Christ. *Cri.* That great man, it seems, teacheth, that common sense alone is the pole-star by which mankind ought to steer; and that what is called revelation must be ridiculous, because it is unnecessary and useless, the natural talents of every man being sufficient to make him happy, good, and wise, without any further correspondence with heaven either for light or aid. *Euph.* I have already acknowledged how sen-

sible I am, that my situation in this obscure corner of the country deprives me of many advantages, to be had from the conversation of ingenious men in town. To make myself some amends I am obliged to converse with the dead and my own thoughts, which last I know are of little weight against the authority of Glaucus, or such like great men in the minute philosophy. But what shall we say to Socrates, for he too was of an opinion very different from that ascribed to Glaucus? *Alc.* For the present we need not insist on authorities, ancient or modern, or inquire which was the greater man, Socrates or Glaucus. Though, methinks, for so much as authority can signify, the present times, gray and hoary with age and experience, have a manifest advantage over those that are falsely called ancient. But not to dwell on authorities, I tell you in plain English, Euphranor, we do not want your revelations; and that for this plain reason, those that are clear every body knew before, and those that are obscure nobody is the better for. *Euph.* Whether it was possible for mankind to have known all parts of the Christian religion, besides mysteries and positive institutions, is not the question between us; and that they actually did not know them is too plain to be denied. This, perhaps, was for want of making a due use of reason. But as to the usefulness of revelation, it seems much the same thing whether they could not know, or would not be at the pains to know, the doctrines revealed. And as for those doctrines which were too obscure to penetrate, or too sublime to reach, by natural reason; how far mankind may be the better for them is more, I had almost said, than even you or Glaucus can tell.

XX. *Alc.* But whatever may be pretended as to obscure doctrines and dispensations, all this hath nothing to do with prophecies, which, being altogether relative to mankind, and the events of this world, to which our faculties are surely well enough proportioned, one might expect should be very clear, and such as might inform instead of puzzling us. *Euph.* And yet it must be allowed that, as some prophecies are clear, there are others very obscure; but left to myself, I doubt I should never have inferred from thence that they were not divine. In my own way of thinking I should have been apt to conclude that the prophecies we understand are a proof for inspiration; but that those we do not understand are no proof against it. Inasmuch as for the latter our ignorance or the reserve of the Holy Spirit may account, but for the other nothing, for aught that I see, can account, but inspiration. *Alc.* Now I know several sagacious men, who conclude very differently from you, to wit, that the one sort of prophecies are nonsense, and the other contrived after the events. Behold the difference between a man of free thought and one of narrow principles! *Euph.* It seems then they reject the Revela-

tions because they are obscure, and Daniel's prophecies because they are clear. *Alc.* Either way a man of sense sees cause to suspect there has been foul play. *Euph.* Your men of sense are, it seems, hard to please. *Alc.* Our philosophers are men of piercing eyes. *Euph.* I suppose such men never make transient judgments from transient views; but always establish fixed conclusions upon a thorough inspection of things. For my own part I dare not engage with a man who has examined those points so nicely, as it may be presumed you have done: but I could name some eminent writers of our own, now living, whose books on the subject of prophecy have given great satisfaction to gentlemen who pass for men of sense and learning, here in the country. *Alc.* You must know, Euphranor, I am not at leisure to peruse the learned writings of divines, on a subject which a man may see through with half an eye. To me it is sufficient, that the point itself is odd and out of the road of nature. For the rest I leave them to dispute and settle among themselves where to fix the precise time when the sceptre departed from Judah; or whether in Daniel's prophecy of the Messiah we should compute by the Chaldean or the Julian year. My only conclusion concerning all such matters is, that I will never trouble myself about them. *Euph.* To an extraordinary genius, who sees things with half an eye, I know not what to say: but for the rest of mankind, one would think it should be very rash in them to conclude, without much and exact inquiry, on the unsafe side of a question which concerns their chief interest. *Alc.* Mark it well: a true genius in pursuit of truth makes swift advances on the wings of general maxims, while little minds creep and grovel amidst mean particularities. I lay it down for a certain truth, that, by the fallacious arts of logic and criticism, straining and forcing, palliating, patching, and distinguishing, a man may justify or make out any thing; and this remark, with one or two about prejudice, saves me a world of trouble. *Euph.* You, Alciphron, who soar sublime on strong and free pinions, vouchsafe to lend a helping hand to those whom you behold entangled in the birdlime of prejudice. For my part, I find it very possible to suppose prophecy may be divine, although there should be some obscurity at this distance, with respect to dates of time or kinds of years. You yourself own revelation possible; and allowing this I can very easily conceive it may be odd, and out of the road of nature. I can without amazement meet in holy scripture divers prophecies, whereof I do not see the completion, divers texts I do not understand, divers mysteries above my comprehension, and ways of God to me unaccountable. Why may not some prophecies relate to parts of history I am not well enough acquainted with, or to events not yet come to pass? It seems to me that prophecies unfathomed by the hearer, or even

the speaker himself, have been afterward verified and understood in the event; and it is one of my maxims, that what hath been may be. Though I rub my eyes, and do my utmost to extricate myself from prejudice, yet it still seems very possible to me, that what I do not, a more acute, more attentive, or more learned man may understand: at least thus much is plain; the difficulty of some points or passages doth not hinder the clearness of others, and those parts of scripture which we cannot interpret we are not bound to know the sense of. What evil or what inconvenience, if we cannot comprehend what we are not obliged to comprehend, or if we cannot account for those things which it doth not belong to us to account for? Scriptures not understood at one time, or by one person, may be understood at another time, or by other persons. May we not perceive, by retrospect on what is past, a certain progress from darker to lighter, in the series of the divine economy towards man? And may not future events clear up such points as at present exercise the faith of believers? Now I cannot help thinking (such is the force either of truth or prejudice) that in all this there is nothing strained or forced, or which is not reasonable or natural to suppose.

XXI. *Alc.* Well, Euphranor, I will lend you a helping hand, since you desire it, but think fit to alter my method: for you must know, the main points of Christian belief have been infused so early, and inculcated so often, by nurses, pedagogues, and priests, that, be the proofs ever so plain, it is a hard matter to convince a mind, thus tinctured and stained, by arguing against revealed religion from its internal characters. I shall therefore set myself to consider things in another light, and examine your religion by certain external characters or circumstantials, comparing the system of revelation with collateral accounts of ancient heathen writers, and showing how ill it consists with them. Know then, that the Christian revelation supposing the Jewish, it follows, that if the Jewish be destroyed the Christian must of course fall to the ground. Now, to make short work, I shall attack this Jewish revelation in its head. Tell me, are we not obliged, if we believe the Mosaic account of things, to hold the world was created not quite six thousand years ago? *Euph.* I grant we are. *Alc.* What will you say now, if other ancient records carry up the history of the world many thousand years beyond this period? What if the Egyptians and Chinese have accounts extending to thirty or forty thousand years? What if the former of these nations have observed twelve hundred eclipses, during the space of forty-eight thousand years, before the time of Alexander the Great? What if the Chinese have also many observations antecedent to the Jewish account of the creation? What if the Chaldeans had been observing the stars for above four hundred thousand years? And what shall we say if we have succes-

sions of kings and their reigns, marked for several thousand years before the beginning of the world, assigned by Moses? Shall we reject the accounts and records of all nations, the most famous, ancient, and learned in the world, and preserve a blind reverence for the legislator of the Jews? *Euph.* And pray if they deserve to be rejected, why should we not reject them? What if those monstrous chronologies contain nothing but names without actions and manifest fables? What if those pretended observations of Egyptians and Chaldeans were unknown or unregarded by ancient astronomers? What if the Jesuits have shown the inconsistency of the like Chinese pretensions with the truth of the ephemerides? What if the most ancient Chinese observations allowed to be authentic, are those of two fixed stars, one in the winter solstice, the other in the vernal equinox, in the reign of their king Yao, which was since the flood? * *Alc.* You must give me leave to observe, the Romish missionaries are of small credit in this point. *Euph.* But what knowledge have we, or can we have, of those Chinese affairs, but by their means? The same persons that tell us of these accounts refute them; if we reject their authority in one case, what right have we to build upon it in another? *Alc.* When I consider that the Chinese have annals of more than forty thousand years, and that they are a learned, ingenious, and acute people, very curious, and addicted to arts and sciences, I profess I cannot help paying some regard to their accounts of time. *Euph.* Whatever advantage their situation and political maxims may have given them, it doth not appear they are so learned, or so acute in point of science as the Europeans. The general character of the Chinese, if we may believe Trigaltius and other writers, is, that they are men of a trifling and credulous curiosity, addicted to search after the philosopher's stone, and a medicine to make men immortal, to astrology, fortune-telling, and presages of all kinds. Their ignorance in nature and mathematics is evident, from the great hand the Jesuits make of that kind of knowledge among them. But what shall we think of those extraordinary annals, if the very Chinese themselves give no credit to them for more than three thousand years before Jesus Christ? If they do not pretend to have begun to write history above four thousand years ago? And if the oldest books they have now extant in an intelligible character, are not above two thousand years old? One would think a man of your sagacity, so apt to suspect every thing out of the common road of nature, should not without the clearest proof admit those annals for authentic, which record such strange things as the sun's not setting for ten days, and gold raining three days together. Tell me, Alciphron, can you really believe these things without inquiring by what means the tradition was pre-

* Bianchini *Histor. Univers.* c. 17.

served, through what hands it passed, or what reception it met with, or who first committed it to writing? *Alc.* To omit the Chinese and their story, it will serve my purpose as well to build on the authority of Manetho, that learned Egyptian priest, who had such opportunities of searching into the most ancient accounts of time, and copying into his dynasties the most venerable and authentic records inscribed on the pillars of Hermes. *Euph.* Pray, Alciphron, where were those chronological pillars to be seen? *Alc.* In the Seriadical land. *Euph.* And where is that country? *Alc.* I do not know. *Euph.* How were those records preserved for so many ages down to the time of this Hermes, who is said to have been the first inventor of letters? *Alc.* I do not know. *Euph.* Did any other writers, before or since Manetho, pretend to have seen, or transcribed, or known any thing about these pillars? *Alc.* Not that I know. *Euph.* Or about the place where they are said to have been. *Alc.* If they did, it is more than I know. *Euph.* Do the Greek authors that went into Egypt, and consulted the Egyptian priests, agree with these accounts of Manetho? *Alc.* Suppose they do not. *Euph.* Doth Diodorus, who lived since Manetho, follow, cite, or so much as mention this same Manetho? *Alc.* What will you infer from all this? *Euph.* If I did not know you and your principles, and how vigilantly you guard against imposture, I should infer that you were a very credulous man. For what can we call it but credulity to believe most incredible things on most slender authority, such as fragments of an obscure writer, disagreeing with all other historians, supported by an obscure authority of Hermes' pillars, for which you must take his word, and which contain things so improbable as successions of gods and demigods, for many thousand years, Vulcan alone having reigned nine thousand? There is little in these venerable dynasties of Manetho, besides names and numbers; and yet in that little we meet with very strange things, that would be thought romantic in another writer: for instance, the Nile overflowing with honey, the moon grown bigger, a speaking lamb, seventy kings who reigned as many days one after another, a king a day.* If you are known, Alciphron, to give credit to these things, I fear you will lose the honour of being thought incredulous. *Alc.* And yet these ridiculous fragments, as you would represent them, have been thought worth the pains and lucubrations of very learned men. How can you account for the work that the great Joseph Scaliger and Sir John Marsham make about them? *Euph.* I do not pretend to account for it. To see Scaliger add another Julian period to make room for such things as Manetho's dynasties, and Sir John Marsham take so much learned pains to piece, patch, and mend those obscure fragments, to range them in synchro-

* Scal. Can. Isag. lib. 2.

nisms, and try to adjust them with sacred chronology, or make them consistent with themselves and other accounts, is to me very strange and unaccountable. Why they, or Eusebius, or yourself, or any other learned man should imagine those things deserve any regard I leave you to explain.

XXII. *Alc.* After all it is not easy to conceive what should move, not only Manetho, but also other Egyptian priests, long before his time, to set up such great pretences to antiquity, all which, however, differing from one another, agree in this, that they overthrow the Mosaic history? How can this be accounted for without some real foundation? What point of pleasure, or profit, or power, could set men on forging successions of ancient names, and periods of time for ages before the world began? *Euph. Pray,* Alciphron, is there any thing so strange or singular in this vain humour of extending the antiquity of nations beyond the truth? Hath it not been observed in most parts of the world? Doth it not, even in our own times, show itself, especially among those dependent and subdued people, who have little else to boast of. To pass over others of our fellow-subjects, who, in proportion as they are below their neighbours in wealth and power, lay claim to a more remote antiquity; are not the pretensions of Irishmen in this way known to be very great? If I may trust my memory, O'Flaherty, in his *Ogygia*, mentions some transactions in Ireland before the flood. The same humour, and from the same cause, appears to have prevailed in Sicily, a country, for some centuries past, subject to the dominion of foreigners: during which time, the Sicilians have published divers fabulous accounts, concerning the original and antiquity of their cities, wherein they vie with each other. It is pretended to be proved by ancient inscriptions, whose existence or authority seems on a level with that of Hermes' pillars, that Palermo was founded in the days of the patriarch Isaac, by a colony of Hebrews, Phœnicians, and Syrians, and that a grandson of Esau had been governor of a tower subsisting within these two hundred years in that city.* The antiquity of Messina hath been carried still higher, by some who would have us think it was enlarged by Nimrod.† The like pretensions are made by Catania, and other towns of that island, who have found authors of as good credit as Manetho to support them. Now I should be glad to know why the Egyptians, a subdued people, may not probably be supposed to have invented fabulous accounts from the same motive, and, like others, valued themselves on extravagant pretensions to antiquity, when, in all other respects, they were so much inferior to their masters? That people had been successively conquered by Ethiopians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Grecians, before it ap-

* Fazelli *Hist. Sicul. decad. i. lib. viii.*

† *Reinta Notizie Istoriche di Messina.*

pears that those wonderful dynasties of Manetho and the pillars of Hermes were ever heard of; as they had been by the two first of those nations before the time of Solon himself, the earliest Greek that is known to have consulted the priests of Egypt: whose accounts were so extravagant, that even the Greek historians, though unacquainted with holy scripture, were far from giving an entire credit to them. Herodotus, making a report upon their authority, saith, those to whom such things seem credible may make the best of them, for himself declaring that it was his purpose to write what he heard.* And both he and Diodorus do, on divers occasions, show the same diffidence in the narratives of those Egyptian priests. And as we observed of the Egyptians, it is no less certain that the Phœnicians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans, were each a conquered and reduced people, before the rest of the world appear to have heard any thing of their pretensions to so remote antiquity.

Cri. But what occasion is there to be at any pains to account for the humour of fabulous writers? Is it not sufficient to see that they relate absurdities; that they are unsupported by any foreign evidence; that they do not appear to have been in credit, even among their own countrymen, and that they are inconsistent one with another? That men should have the vanity to impose on the world by false accounts, is nothing strange; it is much more so, that after what hath been done towards undeceiving the world by so many learned critics, there should be men found capable of being abused by those paltry scraps of Manetho, Berosus, Ctesias, or the like fabulous or counterfeit writers. *Alc.* Give me leave to observe, those learned critics may prove to be ecclesiastics, perhaps some of them papists. *Cri.* What do you think of Sir Isaac Newton, was he either papist or ecclesiastic? Perhaps you may not allow him to have been in sagacity, or force of mind, equal to the great men of the minute philosophy: but it cannot be denied that he had read and thought much upon the subject, and that the result of his inquiry was a perfect contempt of all those celebrated rivals to Moses. *Alc.* It hath been observed by ingenious men, that Sir Isaac Newton, though a layman, was deeply prejudiced, witness his great regard to the bible. *Cri.* And the same may be said of Mr. Locke, Mr. Boyle, Lord Bacon, and other famous laymen, who, however knowing in some points, must nevertheless be allowed not to have attained that keen discernment, which is the peculiar distinction of your sect.

XXIII. But perhaps there may be other reasons beside prejudice, to incline a man to give Moses the preference, on the truth of whose history the government, manners, and religion of

* Herodotus in Euterpe.

his country were founded and framed; of whose history there are manifest traces in the most ancient books and traditions of the gentiles, particularly of the Brahmins and Parsees; whose history is confirmed by the late invention of arts and sciences, the gradual peopling of the world, the very names of ancient nations, and even by the authority and arguments of that renowned philosopher Lucretius, who, on other points, is so much admired and followed by those of your sect. Not to mention that the continual decrease of fluids, the sinking of hills, and the diminution of planetary motions afford so many natural proofs, which show this world had a beginning; as the civil or historical proofs above-mentioned do plainly point out, this beginning to have been about the time assigned in holy scripture. After all which I beg leave to add one observation more. To any one who considers that, on digging into the earth, such quantities of shells, and, in some places, bones and horns of animals are found, sound and entire after having lain there in all probability some thousands of years; it should seem probable, that gems, medals, and implements in metal or stone, might have lasted entire, buried under ground forty or fifty thousand years, if the world had been so old. How comes it then to pass that no remains are found, no antiquities of those numerous ages preceding the scripture accounts of time; no fragments of buildings, no public monuments, no intaglios, cameos, statues, basso relievos, medals, inscriptions, utensils, or artificial works of any kind, are ever discovered, which may bear testimony to the existence of those mighty empires, those successions of monarchs, heroes, and demi-gods, for so many thousand years? Let us look forward and suppose ten or twenty thousand years to come, during which time we will suppose that plagues, famines, wars, and earthquakes shall have made great havoc in the world; is it not highly probable that at the end of such a period, pillars, vases, and statues now in being of granite, or porphyry, or jasper (stones of such hardness, as we know them to have lasted two thousand years above ground, without any considerable alteration), would bear record of these and past ages? or that some of our current coins might then be dug up, or old walls and the foundations of buildings show themselves, as well as the shells and stones of the primeval world are preserved down to our times. To me it seems to follow from these considerations, which common sense and experience make all men judges of, that we may see good reason to conclude, the world was created about the time recorded in holy scripture. And if we admit a thing so extraordinary as the creation of this world, it should seem that we admit something strange, and odd, and new to human apprehension, beyond any other miracle whatsoever.

XXIV. Alciphron sat musing and made no answer; where-

upon Lysicles expressed himself in the following manner. I must own I should rather suppose with Lucretius, that the world was made by chance, and that men grew out of the earth, like pompions, than pin my faith on those wretched fabulous fragments of oriental history. And as for the learned men, who have taken pains to illustrate and piece them together, they appear to me no better than so many musty pedants. An ingenious free-thinker may perhaps now and then make some use of their lucubrations, and play one absurdity against another. But you are not therefore to think, he pays any real regard to the authority of such apocryphal writers, or believes one syllable of the Chinese, Babylonian, or Egyptian traditions. If we seem to give them a preference before the bible, it is only because they are not established by law. This is my plain sense of the matter, and I dare say it is the general sense of our sect; who are too rational to be in earnest on such trifles, though they sometimes give hints of deep erudition, and put on a grave face to divert themselves with bigots. *Alc.* Since Lysicles will have it so, I am content not to build on accounts of time preceding the Mosaic. I must nevertheless beg leave to observe, there is another point of a different nature, against which there do not lie the same exceptions, that deserves to be considered, and may serve our purpose as well. I presume it will be allowed that historians, treating of times within the Mosaic account, ought by impartial men to be placed on the same foot with Moses. It may therefore be expected, that those, who pretend to vindicate his writings, should reconcile them with parallel accounts of other authors, treating of the same times, things, and persons. And, if we are not attached singly to Moses, but take our notions from other writers, and the probability of things, we shall see good cause to believe, the Jews were only a crew of leprous Egyptians, driven from their country on account of that loathsome distemper; and that their religion, pretended to have been delivered from heaven at mount Sinai, was in truth learned in Egypt, and brought from thence. *Cri.* Not to insist on what cannot be denied, that an historian writing of his own times is to be believed, before others who treat of the same subject several ages after, it seems to me that it is absurd to expect we should reconcile Moses with profane historians, till you have first reconciled them one with another. In answer therefore to what you observe, I desire you would consider in the first place, that Manetho, Chæremon, and Lysimachus had published inconsistent accounts of the Jews, and their going forth from Egypt:* in the second place, that their language is a plain proof they were not of Egyptian, but either of Phœnician, of Syrian, or of Chaldean original: and in the third place, that it doth not seem very probable to suppose

* Joseph. contra Apion. lib. i.

their religion, the basis or fundamental principle of which was the worship of one only supreme God, and the principal design of which was to abolish idolatry, could be derived from Egypt, the most idolatrous of all nations. It must be owned, the separate situation and institutions of the Jews occasioned their being treated by some foreigners with great ignorance and contempt of them and their original. But Strabo, who is allowed to have been a judicious and inquisitive writer, though he was not acquainted with their true history, makes more honourable mention of them. He relates that Moses, with many other worshippers of one infinite God, not approving the image worship of the Egyptians and other nations, went out from Egypt and settled in Jerusalem, where they built a temple to one only God without images.*

XXV. *Alc.* We who assert the cause of liberty against religion, in these later ages of the world, lie under great disadvantages, from the loss of ancient books, which cleared up many points to the eyes of those great men, Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian, which at a greater distance and with less help cannot so easily be made out by us: but, had we those records, I doubt not we might demolish the whole system at once. *Cri.* And yet I make some doubt of this; because those great men, as you call them, with all those advantages could not do it. *Alc.* That must needs have been owing to the dulness and stupidity of the world in those days, when the art of reasoning was not so much known and cultivated as of late; but those men of true genius saw through the deceit themselves, and were very clear in their opinion, which convinces me they had good reason on their side. *Cri.* And yet that great man Celsus seems to have had very slight and inconstant notions: one while, he talks like a thorough Epicurean; another, he admits miracles, prophecies, and a future state of rewards and punishments. What think you, Alciphron, is it not something capricious in so great a man, among other advantages which he ascribes to brutes above human kind, to suppose they are magicians and prophets; that they have a nearer commerce and union with the divinity; that they know more than men; and that elephants, in particular, are of all others most religious animals and strict observers of an oath.† *Alc.* A great genius will be sometimes whimsical. But what do you say to the emperor Julian? was he not an extraordinary man? *Cri.* He seems by his writings to have been lively and satirical. Further, I make no difficulty of owning that he was a generous, temperate, gallant, and facetious emperor: but at the same time it must be allowed, because his own heathen panegyrist Ammianus Marcellinus‡ allows it, that he was a prating,

* Strab. lib. xvi.

† Origen, contra Celsum, lib. iv.

‡ Am. Marcellin. lib. xxv.

light, vain, superstitious sort of man. And therefore his judgment or authority can be but of small weight with those who are not prejudiced in his favour. *Alc.* But of all the great men who wrote against revealed religion, the greatest without question was that truly great man Porphyry, the loss of whose invaluable work can never be sufficiently lamented. This profound philosopher went to the bottom and original of things. He most learnedly confuted the scriptures, showed the absurdity of the Mosaic accounts, undermined and exposed the prophecies, and ridiculed allegorical interpretations.* The moderns, it must be owned, have done great things and shown themselves able men; yet I cannot but regret the loss of what was done by a person of such vast abilities, and who lived so much nearer the fountain-head; though his authority survives his writings, and must still have its weight with impartial men, in spite of the enemies of truth. *Cri.* Porphyry, I grant was a thorough infidel, though he appears by no means to have been incredulous. It seems he had a great opinion of wizards and necromancers, and believed the mysteries, miracles, and prophecies of theurgists and Egyptian priests. He was far from being an enemy to obscure jargon; and pretended to extraordinary ecstasies. In a word, this great man appears to have been as unintelligible as a schoolman, as superstitious as a monk, and as fanatical as any Quietist or Quaker; and, to complete his character as a minute philosopher, he was under strong temptations to lay violent hands on himself. We may frame a notion of this patriarch of infidelity, by his judicious way of thinking upon other points as well as the Christian religion. So sagacious was he as to find out, that the souls of insects, when separated from their bodies, become rational: that demons of a thousand shapes assist in making philtums and charms, whose spiritual bodies are nourished and fattened by the steams of libations and sacrifices: that the ghosts of those, who died violent deaths, use to haunt and appear about their sepulchres. The same egregious philosopher adviseth a wise man not to eat flesh, lest the impure soul of the brute that was put to violent death should enter, along with the flesh, into those who eat it. He adds, as a matter of fact confirmed by many experiments, that those who would insinuate into themselves the souls of such animals, as have the gift of foretelling things to come, need only eat a principal part, the heart for instance of a stag or a mole, and so receive the soul of the animal, which will prophesy in them like a god.† No wonder if men whose minds were preoccupied by faith and tenets of such a peculiar kind should be averse from the reception of the gospel. Upon the whole, we desire to be excused if we do not pay the same defer-

* Luc. Holstenius de Vita et Scriptis Porphyrii.

† Vide Porphyrium de Abstinentiâ, de Sacrificiis, de Diis, et Dæmonibus.

ence to the judgment of men, that appear to us whimsical, superstitious, weak, and visionary, which those impartial gentlemen do, who admire their talents, and are proud to tread in their footsteps. *Alc.* Men see things in different views; what one admires, another contemns; it is even possible for a prejudiced mind, whose attention is turned towards the faults and blemishes of things, to fancy some shadow of defect in those great lights which in our own days have enlightened, and still continue to enlighten the world.

XXVI. But pray tell me, Crito, what you think of Josephus? He is allowed to have been a man of learning and judgment. He was himself an asserter of revealed religion. And Christians, when his authority serves their turn, are used to cite him with respect. *Cri.* All this I acknowledge. *Alc.* Must it not then seem very strange, and very suspicious to every impartial inquirer, that this learned Jew, writing the history of his own country, of that very place, and those very times, where and when Jesus Christ made his appearance, should yet say nothing of the character, miracles, and doctrine of that extraordinary person? Some ancient Christians were so sensible of this, that, to make amends they inserted a famous passage in that historian; which imposture hath been sufficiently detected by able critics in the last age. *Cri.* Though there are not wanting able critics on the other side of the question, yet, not to enter upon the discussion of that celebrated passage, I am content to give you all you can desire, and suppose it not genuine, but the pious fraud of some wrong-headed Christian, who could not brook the omission in Josephus: but this will never make such omission a real objection against Christianity. Nor is there, for aught I can see, any thing in it whereon to ground either admiration or suspicion; inasmuch as it should seem very natural, supposing the gospel account exactly true, for Josephus to have said nothing of it; considering that the view of that writer was to give his country some figure in the eye of the world, which had been greatly prejudiced against the Jews, and knew little of their history, to which end the life and death of our Saviour would not in any wise have conduced; considering that Josephus could not have been an eye-witness of our Saviour or his miracles; considering that he was a Pharisee of quality and learning, foreign as well as Jewish, one of great employment in the state, and that the gospel was preached to the poor; that the first instruments of spreading it, and the first converts to it were mean and illiterate, that it might not seem the work of man, or beholding to human interest or power: considering the general prejudice of the Jews, who expected in the Messiah a temporal and conquering prince, which prejudice was so strong, that they chose rather to attribute our Saviour's miracles to the devil, than acknowledge him to be the Christ: considering

also the hellish disorder and confusion of the Jewish state in the days of Josephus, when men's minds were filled and astonished with unparalleled wars, dissensions, massacres, and seditions of that devoted people. Laying all these things together, I do not think it strange, that such a man, writing with such a view, at such a time, and in such circumstances, should omit to describe our blessed Saviour's life and death, or to mention his miracles, or to take notice of the state of the Christian church, which was then as a grain of mustard seed beginning to take root and germinate. And this will seem still less strange, if it be considered that the apostles in a few years after our Saviour's death departed from Jerusalem, setting themselves to convert the gentiles, and were dispersed throughout the world; that the converts in Jerusalem were not only of the meanest of the people, but also few; the three thousand, added to the church in one day upon Peter's preaching in that city, appearing to have been not inhabitants but strangers from all parts assembled to celebrate the feast of Pentecost; and that all the time of Josephus and for several years after, during a succession of fifteen bishops, the Christians at Jerusalem observed the Mosaic law,* and were consequently, in outward appearance, one people with the rest of the Jews, which must have made them less observable. I would fain know what reason we have to suppose, that the gospel, which in its first propagation seemed to overlook the great or considerable men of this world, might not also have been overlooked by them, as a thing not suited to their apprehensions and way of thinking? Besides, in those early times might not other learned Jews, as well as Gamaliel, † suspend their judgment of this new way, as not knowing what to make or say of it, being on one hand unable to quit the notions and traditions in which they were brought up, and, on the other, not daring to resist or speak against the gospel, lest they should be found to fight against God? Surely at all events, it could never be expected, that an unconverted Jew should give the same account of the life, miracles, and doctrine of Jesus Christ, as might become a Christian to have given; nor on the other hand was it at all improbable, that a man of sense should beware to lessen or traduce what, for aught he knew, might have been a heavenly dispensation; between which two courses the middle was to say nothing, but pass it over in a doubtful or a respectful silence. And it is observable, that where this historian occasionally mentions Jesus Christ in his account of St. James's death, he doth it without any reflection, or saying either good or bad, though at the same time he shows a regard for the apostle. It is observable, I say, that speaking of Jesus his expression is, "who was called the Christ," not who pretended

* Sulp. Sever. Sac. Hist. lib. ii., and Euseb. Chron. lib. post.
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† Acts v.
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to be the Christ, or who was falsely called the Christ, but simply τοῦ λεγομένου Χριστοῦ.* It is evident Josephus knew there was such a man as Jesus, and that he was said to be the Christ, and yet he condemns neither him nor his followers; which to me seems an argument in their favour. Certainly if we suppose Josephus to have known or been persuaded that he was an impostor, it will be difficult to account for his not saying so in plain terms. But if we suppose him in Gamaliel's way of thinking, who suspended his judgment, and was afraid of being found to fight against God, it should seem natural for him to behave in that very manner, which according to you makes against our faith, but I verily think makes for it. But what if Josephus had been a bigot, or even a Sadducee, an infidel, an atheist? What then? we readily grant there might have been persons of rank, politicians, generals, and men of letters, then as well as now, Jews as well as Englishmen, who believed no revealed religion: and that some such persons might possibly have heard of a man in low life, who performed miracles by magic, without informing themselves, or perhaps ever inquiring, about his mission and doctrine. Upon the whole, I cannot comprehend, why any man should conclude against the truth of the gospel, from Josephus's omitting to speak of it, any more than from his omitting to embrace it. Had the first Christians been chief priests and rulers, or men of science and learning, like Philo and Josephus, it might perhaps with better colour have been objected, that their religion was of human contrivance, than now that it hath pleased God by weak things to confound the strong. This I think sufficiently accounts, why in the beginning the gospel might overlook or be overlooked by men of a certain rank and character.

XXVII. *Alc.* And yet it seems an odd argument in proof of any doctrine, that it was preached by simple people to simple people. *Cri.* Indeed if there was no other attestation to the truth of the Christian religion, this must be owned a very weak one. But if a doctrine, begun by instruments, mean as to all human advantages, and making its first progress among those who had neither wealth nor art nor power to grace or encourage it, should in a short time by its own innate excellency, the mighty force of miracles, and the demonstration of the Spirit, not only without, but against, all worldly motives, spread through the world, and subdue men of all ranks and conditions of life, would it not be very unreasonable to reject or suspect it, for the want of human means? And might not this, with much better reason, be thought an argument of its coming from God? *Alc.* But still an inquisitive man will want the testimony of men of learning and knowledge. *Cri.* But from the first century on-

* Jos. Ant. lib. xx. c. 8.

wards, there was never wanting the testimony of such men, who wrote learnedly in defence of the Christian religion, who lived, many of them, when the memory of things was fresh, who had abilities to judge and means to know, and who gave the clearest proofs of their conviction and sincerity. *Alc.* But all the while these men were Christians, prejudiced Christians, and therefore their testimony is to be suspected. *Cri.* It seems then you would have Jews or heathens attest the truths of Christianity. *Alc.* That is the very thing I want. *Cri.* But how can this be? or if it could, would not any rational man be apt to suspect such evidence, and ask, how it was possible for a man really to believe such things himself, and not become a Christian? the apostles and first converts were themselves Jews, and brought up in a veneration for the law of Moses, and in all the prejudices of that people: many fathers, Christian philosophers, and learned apologists for the faith, who had been bred gentiles, were without doubt imbued with prejudices of education: and if the finger of God and force of truth converted both the one and the other from Judaism or gentilism, in spite of their prejudices to Christianity, is not their testimony so much the stronger? You have then the suffrages of both Jews and gentiles, attesting to the truth of our religion in the earliest ages. But to expect or desire the attestation of Jews remaining Jews, or of gentiles remaining gentiles, seems unreasonable: nor can it be imagined that the testimony of men who were not converted themselves, should be the likeliest to convert others. We have indeed the testimony of heathen writers to prove, that about the time of our Saviour's birth there was a general expectation in the east of a Messiah or Prince, who should found a new dominion: that there were such people as Christians: that they were cruelly persecuted and put to death: that they were innocent and holy in life and worship: and that there did really exist in that time certain persons and facts mentioned in the New Testament: and for other points we have learned fathers, several of whom had been, as I already observed, bred heathens, to attest their truth. *Alc.* For my part I have no great opinion of the capacity or learning of the fathers, and many learned men, especially of the reformed churches abroad, are of the same mind, which saves me the trouble of looking myself into their voluminous writings. *Cri.* I shall not take upon me to say, with the minute philosopher Pompanatius,* that Origen, Basil, Augustin, and divers other fathers, were equal to Plato, Aristotle, and the greatest of the gentiles in human knowledge. But if I may be allowed to make a judgment from what I have seen of their writings, I should think several of them men of great parts, eloquence, and learning, and much superior to those who seem to undervalue them. Without any affront to

* Lib. de Immortalitate Animæ.

certain modern critics or translators, Erasmus may be allowed a man of fine taste, and a fit judge of sense and good writing, though his judgment in this point was very different from theirs. Some of our reformed brethren, because the Romanists attribute too much, seem to have attributed too little to them, from a very usual, though no very judicious, opposition; which is apt to lead men to remark defects without making proper allowances, and to say things which neither piety, candour, nor good sense, require them to say.

XXVIII. *Alc.* But though I should acknowledge that a concurring testimony of many learned and able men throughout the first ages of Christianity may have its weight, yet when I consider the great number of forgeries and heresies that sprung up in those times, it very much weakens their credit. *Cri.* Pray, Alciphron, would it be allowed a good argument in the mouth of a papist against the reformation, that many absurd sects sprung up at the same time with it? Are we to wonder that when good seed is sowing the enemy should sow tares? But at once to cut off several objections, let us suppose in fact, what you do not deny possible, that there is a God, a devil, and a revelation from heaven committed to writing many centuries ago. Do but take a view of human nature, and consider what would probably follow from such a supposition; and whether it is not very likely there should be half-believers, mistaken bigots, holy frauds, ambitious, interested, disputing, conceited, schismatical, heretical, absurd men among the professors of such revealed religion, as well as after a course of ages, various readings, omissions, transpositions, and obscurities in the text of the sacred oracles? And if so, I leave you to judge whether it be reasonable to make those events an objection against the being of a thing which would probably and naturally follow upon the supposal of its being? *Alc.* After all, say what you will, this variety of opinions must needs shake the faith of a reasonable man. Where there are so many different opinions on the same point it is very certain they cannot all be true, but it is certain they may all be false. And the means to find out the truth! when a man of sense sets about this inquiry he finds himself on a sudden startled and amused with hard words and knotty questions. This makes him abandon the pursuit, thinking the game not worth the chase. *Cri.* But would not this man of sense do well to consider, it must argue want of discernment to reject divine truths for the sake of human follies? Use but the same candour and impartiality in treating of religion, that you would think proper on other subjects. We desire no more, and expect no less. In law, in physic, in politics, wherever men have refined, is it not evident they have been always apt to run into disputes and chicanery? but will that hinder you from admitting there are many good

rules, and just notions, and useful truths in all those professions? Physicians may dispute, perhaps vainly and unintelligibly, about the animal system: they may assign different causes of distempers, some explaining them by the elementary qualities, hot and cold, moist and dry, yet this doth not hinder but the bark may be good for an ague, and rhubarb for a flux. Nor can it others by chemical, others by mechanical principles, be inferred from the different sects which, from time to time, have sprung up in that profession, the dogmatic, for instance, empiric, methodic, Galenic, Paracelsian, or the hard words and knotty questions and idle theories which have grown from them, or been engrafted on them, that therefore we should deny the circulation of the blood, or reject their excellent rules about exercise, air, and diet. *Alc.* It seems you would screen religion by the example of other professions, all which have produced sects and disputes as well as Christianity, which may in itself be true and useful, notwithstanding many false and fruitless notions engrafted on it by the wit of man. Certainly if this had been observed or believed by many acute reasoners, they would never have made the multiplicity of religious opinions and controversies an argument against religion in general. *Cri.* How such an obvious truth should escape men of sense and inquiry I leave you to account: but I can very easily account for gross mistakes in those who pass for free-thinkers without ever thinking; or, if they do think, whose meditations are employed on other points of a very different nature, from a serious and impartial inquiry about religion.

XXIX. But to return: what or where is the profession of men who never split into schisms, or never talk nonsense? Is it not evident, that out of all the kinds of knowledge, on which the human mind is employed, there grow certain excrescences, which may be pared off, like the clippings of hair or nails in the body, and with no worse consequence? Whatever bigots or enthusiasts, whatever notional or scholastic divines may say or think, it is certain the faith derived from Christ and his apostles, was not a piece of empty sophistry; they did not deliver and transmit down to us *κενήν ἀπάτην* but *γυμνήν γνώμην*, to use the expression of a holy confessor.* And, to pretend to demolish their foundation for the sake of human superstructure, be it hay or stubble or what it will, is no argument of just thought or reason; any more than it is of fairness, to suppose a doubtful sense fixed, and argue from one sense of the question in disputed points. Whether, for instance, the beginning of Genesis is to be understood in a literal or allegorical sense? Whether the book of Job be a history or a parable? being points disputed between Christians, an infidel can have no right to argue from one side of the question, in those or the like cases. This or that

* Soc. Histor. Eccles. lib. i.

tenet of a sect, this or that controverted notion, is not what we contend for at present, but the general faith taught by Christ and his apostles, and preserved by universal and perpetual tradition in all the churches down to our own times. To tax or strike at this divine doctrine, on account of things foreign and adventitious, the speculations and disputes of curious men, is in my mind an absurdity of the same kind, as it would be to cut down a fine tree, yielding fruit and shade, because its leaves afforded nourishment to caterpillars, or because spiders may now and then weave cobwebs among the branches. *Alc.* To divide and distinguish would take time. We have several gentlemen very capable of judging in the gross, but that want of attention for irksome and dry studies or minute inquiries. To which as it would be very hard to oblige men against their will, so it must be a great wrong to the world, as well as themselves, to debar them from the right of deciding according to their natural sense of things. *Cri.* It were to be wished those capable men would employ their judgment and attention on the same objects. If theological inquiries are unpalatable, the field of nature is wide. How many discoveries to be made! how many errors to be corrected in arts and sciences! how many vices to be reformed in life and manners! Why do men single out such points as are innocent and useful, when there are so many pernicious mistakes to be amended? Why set themselves to destroy the hopes of human kind and encouragements to virtue? Why delight to judge where they disdain to inquire? Why not employ their noble talents on the longitude or perpetual motion? *Alc.* I wonder you should not see the difference between points of curiosity and religion. Those employ only men of a genius or humour suited to them; but all mankind have a right to censure, and are concerned to judge of these, except they will blindly submit to be governed by the stale wisdom of their ancestors and the established laws of their country. *Cri.* It should seem, if they are concerned to judge, they are not less concerned to examine before they judge. *Alc.* But after all the examination and inquiry that mortal man can make about revealed religion, it is impossible to come at any rational, sure footing.

XXX. There is indeed, a deal of specious talk about faith founded upon miracles; but when I examine this matter thoroughly, and trace Christian faith up to its original, I find it rests upon much darkness, and scruple, and uncertainty. Instead of points evident or agreeable to human reason, I find a wonderful narrative of the Son of God tempted in the wilderness by the devil, a thing utterly unaccountable, without any end, or use, or reason whatsoever. I meet with strange histories of apparitions of angels and voices from heaven, with surprising accounts of demoniacs, things quite out of the road of common sense or

observation, with several incredible feats said to have been done by divine power, but more probably, the inventions of men; nor the less likely to be so, because I cannot pretend to say with what view they were invented. Designs deeply laid are dark, and the less we know the more we suspect: but, admitting them for true, I shall not allow them to be miraculous, until I thoroughly know the power of what are called second causes and the force of magic. *Cri.* You seem, Alciphron, to analyze, not faith, but infidelity, and trace it to its principles; which, from your own account, I collect to be dark and doubtful scruples and surmises, hastiness in judging and narrowness in thinking, grounded on a fanciful notion which over-rates the little scantling of your own experience, and on real ignorance of the views of Providence, and of the qualities, operations, and mutual respects of the several kinds of beings, which are, or may be, for aught you know, in the universe. Thus obscure, uncertain, conceited, and conjectural are the principles of infidelity. Whereas on the other hand, the principles of faith seem to be points plain and clear. It is a clear point, that this faith in Christ was spread abroad throughout the world soon after his death. It is a clear point, that this was not effected by human learning, politics, or power. It is a clear point, that in the early times of the church there were several men of knowledge and integrity, who embraced this faith, not from any, but against all, temporal motives. It is a clear point, that, the nearer they were to the fountain head, the more opportunity they had to satisfy themselves, as to the truth of these facts which they believed. It is a clear point, that the less interest there was to persuade, the more need there was of evidence to convince them. It is a clear point, that they relied on the authority of those who declared themselves eye-witnesses of the miracles and resurrection of Christ. It is a clear point, that those professed eye-witnesses suffered much for this their attestation, and finally sealed it with their blood. It is a clear point, that these witnesses, weak and contemptible as they were, overcame the world, spread more light, preached purer morals, and did more benefit to mankind, than all the philosophers and sages put together. These points appear to me clear and sure, and, being allowed such, they are plain, just, and reasonable motives of assent; they stand upon no fallacious ground, they contain nothing beyond our sphere, neither supposing more knowledge nor other faculties than we are really masters of; and if they should not be admitted for morally certain, as I believe they will by fair and unprejudiced inquirers, yet the allowing them to be only probable is sufficient to stop the mouth of an infidel. These plain points, I say, are the pillars of our faith, and not those obscure ones by you supposed, which are in truth the unsound, uncertain principles of infidelity, to a rash, prejudiced,

and assuming spirit. To raise an argument, or answer an objection, from hidden powers of nature or magic, is groping in the dark; but by the evident light of sense men might be sufficiently certified of sensible effects, and matters of fact, such as the miracles and resurrection of Christ: and the testimony of such men may be transmitted to after-ages, with the same moral certainty as other historical narrations: and those same miraculous facts, compared by reason with the doctrines they were brought to prove, do afford to an unbiassed mind strong indications of their coming from God, or a superior principle, whose goodness retrieved the moral world, whose power commanded the natural, and whose providence extended over both. Give me leave to say, that nothing dark, nothing incomprehensible, or mysterious, or unaccountable, is the ground or motive, the principle or foundation, the proof or reason of our faith, although it may be the object of it. For it must be owned, that, if by clear and sure principles we are rationally led to believe a point less clear, we do not therefore reject such point, because it is mysterious to conceive, or difficult to account for, nor would it be right so to do. As for Jews and gentiles anciently attributing our Saviour's miracles to magic, this is so far from being a proof against them, that to me it seems rather a proof of the facts, without disproving the cause to which we ascribe them. As we do not pretend to know the nature and operation of demons, the history, laws, and system of rational beings, and the schemes or views of Providence, so far as to account for every action and appearance recorded in the gospel; so neither do you know enough of those things, to be able from that knowledge of yours to object against accounts so well attested. It is an easy matter to raise scruples upon many authentic parts of civil history, which, requiring a more perfect knowledge of facts, circumstances, and councils, than we can come at to explain them, must be to us inexplicable. And this is still more easy with respect to the history of nature, in which, if surmises were admitted for proofs against things odd, strange, and unaccountable, if our scanty experience were made the rule and measure of truth, and all those phenomena rejected, that we, through ignorance of the principles, and laws, and system of nature, could not explain, we should indeed make discoveries, but it would be only of our own blindness and presumption. And why men that are so easily and so often gravelled in common points, in things natural and visible, should yet be so sharp-sighted and dogmatical about the invisible world, and its mysteries, is to me a point utterly unaccountable by all the rules of logic and good sense. Upon the whole, therefore, I cannot help thinking there are points sufficiently plain, and clear, and full, whereon a man may ground a reasonable faith in Christ: but that the attacks of minute phi-

losophers against this faith are grounded upon darkness, ignorance, and presumption. *Alc.* I doubt I shall still remain in the dark as to the proofs of the Christian religion, and always presume there is nothing in them.

XXXI. For how is it possible, at this remote distance, to arrive at any knowledge, or frame any demonstration about it? *Cri.* What then? Knowledge, I grant, in a strict sense, cannot be had without evidence or demonstration; but probable arguments are a sufficient ground of faith. Whoever supposed that scientific proofs were necessary to make a Christian? Faith alone is required; and provided that, in the main and upon the whole, men are persuaded, this saving faith may consist with some degrees of obscurity, scruple, and error. For although the light of truth be unchangeable, and the same in its eternal source, the Father of lights: yet, with respect to us, it is variously weakened and obscured, by passing through a long distance or gross medium, where it is intercepted, distorted, or tintured by the prejudices and passions of men. But all this notwithstanding, he that will use his eyes may see enough for the purposes either of nature or of grace; though by a light, dimmer indeed, or clearer, according to the place, or the distance, or the hour, or the medium. And it will be sufficient, if such analogy appears between the dispensations of grace and nature, as may make it probable (although much should be unaccountable in both) to suppose them derived from the same author, and the workmanship of one and the same hand. *Alc.* Those who saw, and touched, and handled, Jesus Christ after his resurrection, if there were any such, may be said to have seen by a clear light: but to us the light is very dim, and yet it is expected we should believe this point as well as they. For my part, I believe with Spinoza, that Christ's death was literal, but his resurrection allegorical.* *Cri.* And for my part, I can see nothing in this celebrated infidel, that should make me desert matters of fact and moral evidence, to adopt his notions. Though I must needs own, I admit an allegorical resurrection that proves the real, to wit, a resurrection of Christ's disciples from weakness to resolution, from fear to courage, from despair to hope, of which, for aught I can see, no rational account can be given, but the sensible evidence that our Lord was truly, really, and literally, risen from the dead: but as it cannot be denied that his disciples, who were eye-witnesses of his miracles and resurrection, had stronger evidence than we can have of those points: so it cannot be denied, that such evidence was then more necessary, to induce men to embrace a new institution, contrary to the whole system of their education, their pre-

* Vide Spinoza: Epist. ad Oldenburgium.

judices, their passions, their interests, and every human motive. Though to me it seems, the moral evidence and probable arguments within our reach, are abundantly sufficient to make prudent, thinking men adhere to the faith handed down to us from our ancestors, established by the laws of our country, requiring submission in points above our knowledge, and for the rest recommending doctrines the most agreeable to our interest and our reason. And, however strong the light might have been at the fountain-head, yet its long continuance and propagation, by such unpromising instruments throughout the world, have been very wonderful. We may now take a more comprehensive view of the connexion, order, and progress of the divine dispensations; and, by a retrospect on a long series of past ages, perceive a unity of design running throughout the whole, a gradual disclosing and fulfilling the purposes of Providence, a regular progress from types to antitypes, from things carnal to things spiritual, from earth to heaven. We may behold Christ crucified, that stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, putting a final period to the temple worship of the one, and the idolatry of the other, and that stone, which was cut out of the mountain without hands, and brake in pieces all other kingdoms, become itself a great mountain.

XXXII. If a due reflection on these things be not sufficient to beget a reverence for the Christian faith in the minds of men, I should rather impute it to any other cause, than a wise and cautious incredulity: when I see their easiness of faith in the common concerns of life, where there is no prejudice or appetite to bias or disturb their natural judgment: when I see those very men, that in religion will not stir a step without evidence, and at every turn expect demonstration, trust their health to a physician and their lives to a sailor with an implicit faith, I cannot think they deserve the honour of being thought more incredulous than other men, or that they are more accustomed to know, and for this reason less inclined to believe. On the contrary, one is tempted to suspect, that ignorance hath a greater share than science in our modern infidelity, and that it proceeds more from a wrong head, or an irregular will, than from deep researches. *Lys.* We do not, it must be owned, think that learning or deep researches are necessary to pass right judgments upon things. I sometimes suspect that learning is apt to produce and justify whims, and sincerely believe we should do better without it. Our sect are divided on this point, but much the greater part think with me. I have heard more than once very observing men remark, that learning was the true human means which preserved religion in the world; and that if we had it in our power to prefer blockheads in the church, all would soon be right. *Cr.* Men must be strangely in love with their

opinions, to put out their eyes rather than part with them. But it has been often remarked by observing men, that there are no greater bigots than infidels. *Lys.* What, a free-thinker and a bigot, impossible! *Cri.* Not so impossible neither, that an infidel should be bigoted to his infidelity. Methinks I see a bigot, wherever I see a man overbearing and positive without knowing why, laying the greatest stress on points of smallest moment, hasty to judge of the conscience, thoughts, and inward views of other men; impatient of reasoning against his own opinions, and choosing them with inclination rather than judgment, an enemy to learning, and attached to mean authorities. How far our modern infidels agree with this description, I leave to be considered by those who really consider and think for themselves. *Lys.* We are no bigots, we are men that discover difficulties in religion, that tie knots and raise scruples; which disturb the repose and interrupt the golden dreams of bigots, who therefore cannot endure us. *Cri.* They who cast about for difficulties, will be sure to find or make them upon every subject: but he that would, upon the foot of reason, erect himself into a judge, in order to make a wise judgment on a subject of that nature, will not only consider the doubtful and difficult parts of it, but take a comprehensive view of the whole, consider it in all its parts and relations, trace it to its original, examine its principles, effects, and tendencies, its proofs internal and external; he will distinguish between the clear points and the obscure, the certain and the uncertain, the essential and circumstantial, between what is genuine and what foreign: he will consider the different sorts of proof that belong to different things, where evidence is to be expected, where probability may suffice, and where it is reasonable to suppose there should be doubts and scruples: he will proportion his pains and exactness to the importance of the inquiry, and check that disposition of his mind to conclude all those notions, groundless prejudices, with which it was imbued before it knew the reason of them.

He will silence his passions, and listen to truth: he will endeavour to untie knots as well as to tie them, and dwell rather on the light parts of things than the obscure: he will balance the force of his understanding with the difficulty of the subject, and to render his judgment impartial, hear evidence on all sides, and so far as he is led by authority, choose to follow that of the honestest and wisest men. Now it is my sincere opinion, the Christian religion may well stand the test of such an inquiry. *Lys.* But such an inquiry would cost too much pains and time. We have thought of another method, the bringing religion to the test of wit and humour: this we find a much shorter, easier, and more effectual way. And as all enemies are at liberty to choose their weapons, we make choice of those we are most expert at:

and we are the better pleased with this choice, having observed that of all things a solid divine hates a jest. To consider the whole of the subject, to read and think on all sides, to object plainly, and answer directly, upon the foot of dry reason and argument, would be a very tedious and troublesome affair. Besides it is attacking pedants at their own weapons. How much more delicate and artful is it, to give a hint, to cover one's self with an enigma, to drop a *double entendre*, to keep it in one's power to recover, and slip aside, and leave his antagonist beating the air? This hath been practised with great success, and I believe it the top method to gain proselytes, and confound pedants. *Cri.* I have seen several things written in this way, which, I suppose, were copied from the behaviour of a sly sort of scorners one may sometimes meet with. Suppose a conceited man that would pass for witty, tipping the wink upon one, thrusting out his tongue at another; one while waggishly smiling, another with a grave mouth and ludicrous eyes; often affecting the countenance of one who smothered a jest, and sometimes bursting out in a horse-laugh: what a figure would this be, I will not say in the senate or council, but in a private visit among well-bred men! And yet this is the figure that certain great authors, who in this age would pass for models, and do pass for models, make in their elaborate writings on the most weighty points. *Alc.* I who profess myself an admirer, an adorer of reason, am obliged to own, that in some cases the sharpness of ridicule can do more than the strength of argument. But if we exert ourselves in the use of mirth and humour, it is not for want of other weapons. It shall never be said, that a free-thinker was afraid of reasoning. No, *Crito*, we have reasons in store, the best are yet to come; and if we can find an hour for another conference before we set out to-morrow morning, I will undertake you shall be plied with reasons, as clear, and home, and close to the point as you could wish.

THE SEVENTH DIALOGUE.

I. Christian faith impossible. II. Words stand for ideas. III. No knowledge or faith without ideas. IV. Grace, no idea of it. V. Abstract ideas what, and how made. VI. Abstract general ideas impossible. VII. In what sense there may be general ideas. VIII. Suggesting ideas not the only use of words. IX. Force as difficult to form an idea of, as grace. X. Notwithstanding which, useful propositions may be formed concerning it. XI. Belief of the Trinity and other mysteries not absurd. XII. Mistakes about faith an occasion of profane raillery. XIII. Faith, its true nature and effects. XIV. Illustrated by science. XV. By arithmetic in particular. XVI. Sciences conversant about signs. XVII. The true end of speech, reason, science, and faith. XVIII. Metaphysical objections as strong against human science as articles of faith. XIX. No religion, because no human liberty. XX. Further proof against human liberty. XXI. Fatalism a consequence of erroneous suppositions. XXII. Man an accountable agent. XXIII. Inconsistency, singularity, and credulity of minute philosophers. XXIV. Untrodden paths and new light of the minute philosophers. XXV. Sophistry of the minute philosophers. XXVI. Minute philosophers ambiguous, enigmatical, unfathomable. XXVII. Scepticism of the minute philosophers. XXVIII. How a sceptic ought to behave. XXIX. Minute philosophers, why difficult to convince. XXX. Thinking, not the epidemical evil of these times. XXXI. Infidelity, not an effect of reason or thought: its true motives assigned. XXXII. Variety of opinions about religion, effects thereof. XXXIII. Method for proceeding with minute philosophers. XXXIV. Want of thought, and want of education, defects of the present age.

I. THE philosophers having resolved to set out for London next morning, we assembled at break of day in the library. Alciphron began with a declaration of his sincerity, assuring us he had very maturely and with a most unbiassed mind considered all that had been said the day before. He added that upon the whole he could not deny several probable reasons were produced for embracing the Christian faith. But, said he, those reasons, being only probable, can never prevail against absolute certainty and demonstration. If therefore I can demonstrate your religion to be a thing altogether absurd and inconsistent, your probable arguments in its defence do from that moment lose their force, and with it all right to be answered or considered. The concurring testimony of sincere and able witnesses hath without question great weight in human affairs. I will even grant that things odd and unaccountable to human judgment or experience, may sometimes claim our assent on that sole motive. And I will also grant it possible, for a tradition to be conveyed with moral evidence through many centuries. But at the same time you will grant to me, that a thing demonstrably and palpably false is not to be admitted on any testimony whatever, which at best can never amount to demonstration. To be plain, no testimony can make nonsense sense; no moral evidence can make contradictions consistent. Know then, that as the strength of our cause doth not depend upon, so neither is it to be decided by any critical points of history, chronology, or languages. You are not to wonder, if the same sort of tradition and moral proof, which

governs our assent with respect to facts in civil or natural history, is not admitted as a sufficient voucher for metaphysical absurdities and absolute impossibilities. Things obscure and unaccountable in human affairs, or the operations of nature, may yet be possible, and, if well attested, may be assented unto: but religious assent or faith can be evidently shown in its own nature to be impracticable, impossible, and absurd. This is the primary motive to infidelity. This is our citadel and fortress, which may, indeed, be graced with outworks of various erudition, but, if those are demolished, remains in itself and of its own proper strength impregnable. *Euph.* This, it must be owned, reduceth our inquiry within a narrow compass: do but make out this, and I shall have nothing more to say. *Alc.* Know then, that the shallow mind of the vulgar, as it dwells only on the outward surface of things, and considers them in the gross, may be easily imposed on. Hence a blind reverence for religious faith and mystery. But when an acute philosopher comes to dissect and analyze these points, the imposture plainly appears: and as he has no blindness, so he hath no reverence for empty notions, or, to speak more properly, for mere forms of speech, which mean nothing, and are of no use to mankind.

II. Words are signs: they do or should stand for ideas; which so far as they suggest they are significant. But words that suggest no ideas are insignificant. He who annexeth a clear idea to every word he makes use of speaks sense; but where such ideas are wanting, the speaker utters nonsense. In order therefore to know whether any man's speech be senseless and insignificant, we have nothing to do but lay aside the words and consider the ideas suggested by them. Men, not being able immediately to communicate their ideas one to another, are obliged to make use of sensible signs or words; the use of which is to raise those ideas in the hearer, which are in the mind of the speaker; and if they fail of this end they serve to no purpose. He who really thinks hath a train of ideas succeeding each other and connected in his mind: and when he expresseth himself by discourse, each word suggests a distinct idea to the hearer or reader; who by that means hath the same train of ideas in his, which was in the mind of the speaker or writer. As far as this effect is produced, so far the discourse is intelligible, hath sense and meaning. Hence it follows, that whoever can be supposed to understand what he reads or hears must have a train of ideas raised in his mind, correspondent to the train of words read or heard. These plain truths, to which men readily assent in theory, are but little attended to in practice, and therefore deserve to be enlarged on and inculcated, however obvious and undeniable. Mankind are generally averse from thinking, though apt enough to entertain discourse either in themselves or others: the effect whereof is, that their

minds are rather stored with names than ideas, the husk of science rather than the thing. And yet these words without meaning do often make distinctions of parties, the subject matter of their disputes, and the object of their zeal. This is the most general cause of error, which doth not influence ordinary minds alone, but even those who pass for acute and learned philosophers are often employed about names instead of things or ideas, and are supposed to know when they only pronounce hard words without a meaning.

III. Though it is evident that as knowledge is the perception of the connexion or disagreement between ideas, he who doth not distinctly perceive the ideas marked by the terms, so as to form a mental proposition answering to the verbal, cannot possibly have knowledge; no more can he be said to have opinion or faith, which imply a weaker assent, but still it must be to a proposition, the terms of which are understood as clearly, although the agreement or disagreement of the ideas may not be so evident, as in the case of knowledge. I say, all degrees of assent, whether founded on reason or authority, more or less cogent, are internal acts of the mind which alike terminate in ideas as their proper object: without which there can be really no such thing as knowledge, faith, or opinion. We may perhaps raise a dust and disputes about tenets purely verbal; but what is this at bottom more than mere trifling? All which will be easily admitted with respect to human learning and science; wherein it is an allowed method to expose any doctrine or tenet by stripping them of the words, and examining what ideas are underneath, or whether any ideas at all? This is often found the shortest way to end disputes which might otherwise grow and multiply without end, the litigants neither understanding one another nor themselves. It were needless to illustrate what shines by its own light, and is admitted by all thinking men. My endeavour shall be only to apply it in the present case. I suppose I need not be at any pains to prove, that the same rules of reason and good sense which obtain in all other subjects ought to take place in religion. As for those who consider faith and reason as two distinct provinces, and would have us think good sense has nothing to do where it is most concerned, I am resolved never to argue with such men, but leave them in quiet possession of their prejudices. And now, for the particular application of what I have said, I shall not single out any nice disputed points of school divinity, or those that relate to the nature and essence of God, which being allowed infinite, you might pretend to screen them under the general notion of difficulties attending the nature of infinity.

IV. Grace is the main point in the Christian dispensation: nothing is oftener mentioned or more considered throughout the New Testament; wherein it is represented as somewhat of a very

particular kind, distinct from any thing revealed to the Jews, or known by the light of nature. This same grace is spoken of as the gift of God, as coming by Jesus Christ, as reigning, as abounding, as operating. Men are said to speak through grace, to believe through grace. Mention is made of the glory of grace, the riches of grace, the stewards of grace. Christians are said to be heirs of grace, to receive grace, grow in grace, be strong in grace, to stand in grace, and to fall from grace. And lastly, grace is said to justify and to save them. Hence Christianity is styled the covenant or dispensation of grace. And it is well known that no point hath created more controversy in the church than this doctrine of grace. What disputes about its nature, extent, and effects, about universal, efficacious, sufficient, preventing, irresistible grace have employed the pens of protestant as well as popish divines, of Jansenists, and Molinists, of Lutherans, Calvinists, and Arminians, as I have not the least curiosity to know, so I need not say. It sufficeth to observe, that there have been and are still subsisting great contests upon these points. Only one thing I should desire to be informed of, to wit, what is the clear and distinct idea marked by the word grace? I presume a man may know the bare meaning of a term, without going into the depth of all those learned inquiries. This surely is an easy matter, provided there is an idea annexed to such term. And if there is not, it can be neither the subject of a rational dispute, nor the object of real faith. Men may indeed impose upon themselves or others, and pretend to argue and believe, when at bottom there is no argument or belief, further than mere verbal trifling. Grace, taken in the vulgar sense, either for beauty or favour, I can easily understand. But when it denotes an active, vital, ruling principle, influencing and operating on the mind of man, distinct from every natural power or motive, I profess myself altogether unable to understand it, or frame any distinct idea of it; and therefore I cannot assent to any proposition concerning it, nor consequently have any faith about it: and it is a self-evident truth, that God obligeth no man to impossibilities. At the request of a philosophical friend, I did cast an eye on the writings he showed me of some divines, and talked with others on this subject, but after all I had read or heard could make nothing of it, having always found, whenever I laid aside the word grace, and looked into my own mind, a perfect vacuity or privation of all ideas. And, as I am apt to think men's minds and faculties are made much alike, I suspect that other men, if they examined what they call grace with the same exactness and indifference, would agree with me that there was nothing in it but an empty name. This is not the only instance, where a word often heard and pronounced is believed intelligible, for no other reason but because it is familiar. Of the same kind are many

other points reputed necessary articles of faith. That which in the present case imposeth upon mankind I take to be partly this. Men speak of this holy principle as of something that acts, moves, and determines, taking their ideas from corporeal things, from motion and the force or momentum of bodies, which being of an obvious and sensible nature they substitute in place of a thing spiritual and incomprehensible, which is a manifest delusion. For though the idea of corporeal force be never so clear and intelligible, it will not therefore follow that the idea of grace, a thing perfectly incorporeal, must be so too. And though we may reason distinctly, perceive, assent, and form opinions about the one, it will by no means follow that we can do so of the other. Thus it comes to pass, that a clear, sensible idea of what is real produceth, or rather is made a pretence for, an imaginary spiritual faith that terminates in no object; a thing impossible! For there can be no assent where there are no ideas: and where there is no assent there can be no faith: and what cannot be, that no man is obliged to. This is as clear as any thing in Euclid.

V. The same method of reasoning may be applied by any man of sense, to confute all other the most essential articles of the Christian faith. You are not therefore to wonder that a man who proceeds on such solid grounds, such clear and evident principles, should be deaf to all you can say from moral evidence, or probable arguments, which are nothing in the balance against demonstration. *Euph.* The more light and force there is in this discourse, the more you are to blame for not having produced it sooner. For my part I should never have said one word against evidence. But let me see whether I understand you rightly. You say, every word in an intelligible discourse must stand for an idea; which ideas, as far as they are clearly and distinctly apprehended, so far the discourse hath meaning, without which it is useless and insignificant. *Alc.* I do. *Euph.* For instance, when I hear the words man, triangle, colour, pronounced, they must excite in my mind distinct ideas of those things whereof they are signs, otherwise I cannot be said to understand them. *Alc.* Right. *Euph.* And this is the only true use of language. *Alc.* That is what I affirm. *Euph.* But every time the word man occurs in reading or conversation, I am not conscious that the particular distinct idea of a man is excited in my mind. For instance, when I read in St. Paul's epistle to the Galatians these words: "If a man thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." Methinks I comprehend the force and meaning of this proposition, although I do not frame to myself the particular distinct idea of a man. *Alc.* It is very true, you do not form in your mind the particular idea of Peter, James, or John, of a fair or a black, a tall or a low, a fat or a lean, a straight or a crooked, a wise or a foolish, a sleeping or

waking man, but the abstract general idea of man, prescinding from, and exclusive of all particular shape, size, complexion, passions, faculties, and every individual circumstance. To explain this matter more fully, you are to understand there is in the human mind a faculty of contemplating the general nature of things separate from all those particularities which distinguish the individuals one from another. For example, in Peter, James, and John, you may observe in each a certain collection of stature, figure, colour, and other peculiar properties by which they are known asunder, distinguished from all other men, and, if I may so say, individuated. Now leaving out of the idea of a man that which is peculiar to the individual, and retaining only that which is common to all men, you form an abstract universal idea of man or human nature, which includes no particular stature, shape, colour, or other quality whether of mind or body. After the same manner you may observe particular triangles to differ one from another, as their sides are equal or unequal, and their angles greater or lesser; whence they are denominated equilateral, equicrural, or scalenum, obtusangular, acutangular, or rectangular. But the mind, excluding out of its idea all these peculiar properties and distinctions, frameth the general abstract idea of a triangle; which is neither equilateral, equicrural, nor scalenum, neither obtusangular, acutangular, nor rectangular, but all and none of these at once.* The same may be said of the general abstract idea of colour, which is something distinct from and exclusive of blue, red, green, yellow, and every other particular colour, including only that general essence in which they all agree. And what has been said of these three general names, and the abstract general ideas they stand for, may be applied to all others. For you must know, that particular things or ideas being infinite, if each were marked or signified by a distinct proper name, words must have been innumerable, and language an endless, impossible thing. Hence it comes to pass, that appellative or general names stand, immediately and properly, not for particular but for abstract general ideas, which they never fail to excite in the mind as oft as they are used to any significant purpose. And without this there could be no communication or enlargement of knowledge, no such thing as universal science or theorems of any kind. Now for understanding any proposition or discourse it is sufficient that distinct ideas are thereby raised in your mind, correspondent to those in the speaker's, whether the ideas so raised are particular or only abstract and general ideas. Forasmuch, nevertheless, as these are not so obvious and familiar to vulgar minds, it happens that some men may think they have no idea at all, when they have not a particular idea; but the truth is, you had the abstract general idea of man, in the

* See Locke on Human Understanding, b. iv. c. 7.

instance assigned, wherein you thought you had none. After the same manner, when it is said that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right ones; or that colour is the object of sight, it is evident the words do not stand for this or that triangle or colour, but for abstract general ideas, excluding every thing peculiar to the individuals, and including only the universal nature common to the whole kind of triangles or of colours.

VI. *Euph.* Tell me, Alciphron, are those abstract general ideas clear and distinct? *Alc.* They are, above all others, clear and distinct, being the only proper object of science, which is altogether conversant about universals. *Euph.* And do you not think it very possible for any man to know, whether he has this or that clear and distinct idea or no? *Alc.* Doubtless. To know this he needs only examine his own thoughts, and look into his own mind. *Euph.* But upon looking into my own mind I do not find that I have or can have these general abstract ideas of a man or a triangle above-mentioned, or of colour prescinded from all particular colours.* Though I shut mine eyes, and use mine utmost efforts, and reflect on all that passeth in my own mind, I find it utterly impossible to form such ideas. *Alc.* To reflect with due attention and turn the mind inward upon itself is a difficult task, and not every one's talent. *Euph.* Not to insist on what you allowed, that every one might easily know for himself whether he has this or that idea or no: I am tempted to think nobody else can form those ideas any more than I can. Pray, Alciphron, which are those things you would call absolutely impossible? *Alc.* Such as include a contradiction. *Euph.* Can you frame an idea of what includes a contradiction? *Alc.* I cannot. *Euph.* Consequently whatever is absolutely impossible you cannot form an idea of. *Alc.* This I grant. *Euph.* But can a colour or triangle, such as you describe their abstract general ideas, really exist? *Alc.* It is absolutely impossible such things should exist in nature. *Euph.* Should it not follow, then, that they cannot exist in your mind, or, in other words, that you cannot conceive or frame an idea of them? *Alc.* You seem, Euphranor, not to distinguish between pure intellect and imagination. Abstract general ideas I take to be the object of pure intellect, which may conceive them although they cannot perhaps be imagined. *Euph.* I do not perceive that I can by any faculty, whether of intellect or imagination, conceive or frame an idea of that which is impossible, and includes a contradiction. And I am very much at a loss to account for your admitting that in common instances which you would make an argument against divine faith and mysteries.

VII. *Alc.* There must be some mistake in this. How is it

* See Introduction to the Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, where the absurdity of abstract ideas is fully considered, p. 75.

possible there should be general knowledge without general propositions, or these without general names, which cannot be without general ideas, by standing for which they become general?

Euph. But may not words become general, by being made to stand indiscriminately for all particular ideas, which from a mutual resemblance belong to the same kind, without the intervention of any abstract general idea? *Alc.* Is there then no such thing as a general idea? *Euph.* May we not admit general ideas, though we should not admit them to be made by abstraction, or though we should not allow of general abstract ideas? To me it seems, a particular idea may become general by being used to stand for or represent other ideas; and that general knowledge is conversant about signs or general ideas made such by their signification; and which are considered rather in their relative capacity, and as substituted for others, than in their own nature, or for their own sake. A black line, for instance, an inch long, though in itself particular, may yet become universal, being used as a sign to stand for any line whatsoever. *Alc.* It is your opinion then, that words become general by representing an indefinite number of particular ideas. *Euph.* It seems so to me. *Alc.* Whenever therefore I hear a general name, it must be supposed to excite some one or other particular idea of that species in my mind. *Euph.* I cannot say so neither. Pray, Alciphron, doth it seem to you necessary, that as often as the word *man* occurs in reading or discourse, you must form in your mind the idea of a particular man? *Alc.* I own, it doth not: and not finding particular ideas always suggested by the words, I was led to think I had abstract general ideas suggested by them. And this is the opinion of all thinking men, who are agreed, the only use of words is to suggest ideas. And indeed what other use can we assign them?

VIII. *Euph.* Be the use of words or names what it will, I can never think it is to do things impossible. Let us then inquire what it is; and see if we can make sense of our daily practice. Words, it is agreed, are signs: it may not therefore be amiss to examine the use of other signs in order to know that of words. Counters, for instance, at a card-table are used, not for their own sake, but only as signs substituted for money as words are for ideas. Say now, Alciphron, is it necessary every time these counters are used throughout the whole progress of a game, to frame an idea of the distinct sum or value that each represents? *Alc.* By no means: it is sufficient the players at first agree on their respective values, and at last substitute those values in their stead. *Euph.* And in casting up a sum, where the figures stand for pounds, shillings, and pence, do you think it necessary, throughout the whole progress of the operation, in each step to form ideas of pounds, shillings, and pence? *Alc.* I do not, it

will suffice if in the conclusion those figures direct our actions with respect to things. *Euph.* From hence it seems to follow that words may not be insignificant, although they should not, every time they are used, excite the ideas they signify in our minds, it being sufficient, that we have it in our power to substitute things or ideas for their signs when there is occasion. It seems also to follow, that there may be another use of words, besides that of marking and suggesting distinct ideas, to wit, the influencing our conduct and actions; which may be done either by forming rules for us to act by, or by raising certain passions, dispositions, and emotions in our minds. A discourse, therefore, that directs how to act or excites to the doing or forbearance of an action may, it seems, be useful and significant, although the words whereof it is composed should not bring each a distinct idea into our minds. *Alc.* It seems so. *Euph.* Pray tell me, Alciphron, is not an idea altogether inactive? *Alc.* It is. *Euph.* An agent therefore, an active mind, or spirit, cannot be an idea or like an idea. Whence it should seem to follow, that those words which denote an active principle, soul, or spirit, do not in a strict and proper sense stand for ideas: and yet they are not insignificant neither: since I understand what is signified by the term I, or myself, or know what it means, although it be no idea, nor like an idea, but that which thinks, and wills, and apprehends ideas and operates about them. *Alc.* What would you infer from this? *Euph.* What hath been inferred already, that words may be significant although they do not stand for ideas.* The contrary whereof having been presumed seems to have produced the doctrine of abstract ideas. *Alc.* Will you not allow then that the mind can abstract? *Euph.* I do not deny it may abstract in a certain sense, inasmuch as those things that can really exist, or be really perceived asunder, may be conceived asunder, or abstracted one from the other; for instance, a man's head from his body, colour from motion, figure from weight. But it will not thence follow, that the mind can frame abstract general ideas, which appear to be impossible. *Alc.* And yet it is a current opinion, that every substantive name marks out and exhibits to the mind one distinct idea separate from all others. *Euph.* Pray, Alciphron, is not the word *number* such a substantive name? *Alc.* It is. *Euph.* Do but try now whether you can frame an idea of number in abstract, exclusive of all signs, words, and things numbered. I profess for my own part I cannot. *Alc.* Can it be so hard a matter to form a simple idea of number, the object of a most evident demonstrable science? Hold, let me see, if I cannot abstract the idea of number from the numeral names and characters, and all particular numerable things. Upon which Alciphron paused a while and then said:

* See the Principles of Human Knowledge, Sect. cxxxv., and the Introduction, Sect. xx.

To confess the truth I do not find that I can. *Euph.* But though it seems, neither you nor I can form distinct simple ideas of number, we can nevertheless make a very proper and significant use of numeral names. They direct us in the disposition and management of our affairs, and are of such necessary use, that we should not know how to do without them. And yet, if other men's faculties may be judged of by mine, to attain a precise, simple, abstract idea of number, is as difficult as to comprehend any mystery in religion.

IX. But to come to your own instance, let us examine what idea we can frame of force abstracted from body, motion, and outward sensible effects. For myself, I do not find that I have or can have any such idea. *Alc.* Surely every one knows what is meant by force. *Euph.* And yet I question whether every one can form a distinct idea of force. Let me entreat you, Alciphron, be not amused by terms, lay aside the word force, and exclude every other thing from your thoughts, and then see what precise idea you have of force. *Alc.* Force is that in bodies which produceth motion and other sensible effects. *Euph.* It is then something distinct from those effects. *Alc.* It is. *Euph.* Be pleased now to exclude the consideration of its subject and effects, and contemplate force itself in its own precise idea. *Alc.* I profess I find it no such easy matter. *Euph.* Take your own advice, and shut your eyes to assist your meditation. Upon this Alciphron having closed his eyes, and mused a few minutes, declared he could make nothing of it. And that, replied Euphranor, which it seems neither you nor I can frame an idea of, by your own remark of men's minds and faculties being made much alike, we may suppose others have no more idea of than we. *Alc.* We may. *Euph.* But notwithstanding all this, it is certain there are many speculations, reasonings, and disputes, refined subtleties and nice distinctions about this same force. And to explain its nature, and distinguish the several notions or kinds of it, the terms gravity, reaction, *vis inertiae*, *vis insita*, *vis impressa*, *vis mortua*, *vis viva*, *impetus*, *momentum*, *solicitatio*, *conatus*, and divers other such like expressions have been used by learned men: and no small controversies have arisen about the notions or definitions of these terms. It had puzzled men to know whether force is spiritual or corporeal, whether it remains after action, how it is transferred from one body to another. Strange paradoxes have been framed about its nature, properties, and proportions: for instance, that contrary forces may at once subsist in the same quiescent body: that the force of percussion in a small particle is infinite: for which and other curiosities of the same sort, you may consult *Borellus de Vi Percussionis*, the *Lezioni Academiche* of Toricelli, the exertations of Hermanus, and other writers. It is well known to the learned world, what a controversy hath been carried on between mathematicians, particularly Monsieur Leibnitz and

Monsieur Papin, in the *Leipsic Acta Eruditorum*, about the proportion of forces, whether they be each to other in a proportion compounded of the simple proportions of the bodies and the celerities, or in one compounded of the simple proportion of the bodies and the duplicate proportion of the celerities? A point, it seems, not yet agreed: as indeed the reality of the thing itself is made a question. Leibnitz distinguisheth between the *nisus elementaris*, and the *impetus*, which is formed by a repetition of the *nisus elementaris*, and seems to think they do not exist in nature, but are made only by an abstraction of the mind. The same author, treating of original, active force, to illustrate his subject hath recourse to the substantial forms and *entelecheia* of Aristotle. And the ingenious Toricelli saith of force and impetus, that they are subtile abstracts and spiritual quintessences; and concerning the *momentum* and the velocity of heavy bodies falling, he saith they are *un certo che*, and *un non so che*, that is in plain English, he knows not what to make of them. Upon the whole therefore, may we not pronounce, that excluding body, time, space, motion, and all its sensible measures and effects, we shall find it as difficult to form an idea of force as of grace? *Alc.* I do not know what to think of it.

X. *Euph.* And yet, I presume, you allow there are very evident propositions or theorems relating to force, which contain useful truths: for instance, that a body with conjunct forces describes the diagonal of a parallelogram, in the same time that it would the sides with separate. Is not this a principle of very extensive use? Doth not the doctrine of the composition and resolution of forces depend upon it, and, in consequence thereof, numberless rules and theorems directing men how to act, and explaining phenomena throughout the mechanics and mathematical philosophy? And if, by considering this doctrine of force, men arrive at the knowledge of many inventions in mechanics, and are taught to frame engines by means of which things difficult and otherwise impossible may be performed, and if the same doctrine, which is so beneficial here below, serveth also as a key to discover the nature of the celestial motions, shall we deny that it is of use, either in practice or speculation, because we have no distinct idea of force? Or that which we admit with regard to force, upon what pretence can we deny concerning grace? If there are queries, disputes, perplexities, diversity of notions and opinions about the one, so there are about the other also: if we can form no precise, distinct idea of the one, so neither can we of the other. Ought we not therefore, by a parity of reason, to conclude, there may be divers true and useful propositions concerning the one as well as the other? And that grace may be an object of our faith, and influence our life and actions, as a principle destructive of evil habits and productive of good ones, although we cannot attain a distinct idea of it, separate or abstracted from

God the author, from man the subject, and from virtue and piety its effects?

XI. Shall we not admit the same method of arguing, the same rules of logic, reason, and good sense, to obtain in things spiritual and things corporeal, in faith and science, and shall we not use the same candour, and make the same allowances, in examining the revelations of God and the inventions of men? For aught I see, that philosopher cannot be free from bias and prejudice, or be said to weigh things in an equal balance who shall maintain the doctrine of force and reject that of grace, who shall admit the abstract idea of a triangle, and at the same time ridicule the holy Trinity. But, however partial or prejudiced other minute philosophers might be, you have laid down for a maxim, that the same logic which obtains in other matters must be admitted in religion. *Lys.* I think, Alciphron, it would be more prudent to abide by the way of wit and humour, than thus to try religion by the dry test of reason and logic. *Alc.* Fear not: by all the rules of right reason it is absolutely impossible that any mystery, and least of all the Trinity, should really be the object of man's faith. *Euph.* I do not wonder you thought so, as long as you maintained that no man could assent to a proposition, without perceiving or framing in his mind distinct ideas marked by the terms of it. But although terms are signs, yet having granted that those signs may be significant, though they should not suggest ideas represented by them, provided they serve to regulate and influence our wills, passions, or conduct, you have consequently granted, that the mind of man may assent to propositions containing such terms, when it is so directed or affected by them, notwithstanding it should not perceive distinct ideas marked by those terms. Whence it seems to follow, that a man may believe the doctrine of the Trinity, if he finds it revealed in holy scripture, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are God, and that there is but one God? Although he doth not frame in his mind any abstract or distinct ideas of Trinity, substance, or personality, provided, that this doctrine of a creator, redeemer, and sanctifier makes proper impressions on his mind, producing therein love, hope, gratitude, and obedience, and thereby becomes a lively, operative principle, influencing his life and actions, agreeably to that notion of saving faith which is required in a Christian. This I say, whether right or wrong, seems to follow from your own principles and concessions. But for further satisfaction it may not be amiss to inquire whether there be any thing parallel to this Christian faith in the minute philosophy. Suppose a fine gentleman or lady of fashion, who are too much employed to think for themselves, and are only free-thinkers at secondhand, have the advantage of being betimes initiated in the principles of your sect, by conversing with men of depth and genius, who have often declared it to be their opinion

the world is governed either by fate or by chance, it matters not which; will you deny it possible for such persons to yield their assent to either of these propositions? *Alc.* I will not. *Euph.* And may not such their assent be properly called faith? *Alc.* It may. *Euph.* And yet it is possible those disciples of the minute philosophy may not dive so deep as to be able to frame any abstract, or precise, or any determinate idea whatsoever, either of fate or of chance. *Alc.* This too I grant. *Euph.* So that, according to you, this same gentleman or lady may be said to believe or have faith where they have not ideas. *Alc.* They may. *Euph.* And may not this faith or persuasion produce real effects, and show itself in the conduct and tenor of their lives, freeing them from the fears of superstition, and giving them a true relish of the world, with a noble indolence or indifference about what comes after. *Alc.* It may. *Euph.* And may not Christians, with equal reason, be allowed to believe the divinity of our Saviour, or that in him God and man make one person, and be verily persuaded thereof, so far as for such faith or belief to become a real principle of life and conduct, inasmuch as by virtue of such persuasion they submit to his government, believe his doctrine, and practise his precepts, although they frame no abstract idea of the union between the divine and human nature; nor may be able to clear up the notion of person to the contentment of a minute philosopher. To me it seems evident, that if none but those who had nicely examined, and could themselves explain, the principle of individuation in man, or untie the knots and answer the objections which may be raised even about human personal identity, would require of us to explain the divine mysteries, we should not be often called upon for a clear and distinct idea of person in relation to the Trinity, nor would the difficulties on that head be often objected to our faith. *Alc.* Methinks there is no such mystery in personal identity. *Euph.* Pray in what do you take it to consist? *Alc.* In consciousness. *Euph.* Whatever is possible may be supposed. *Alc.* It may. *Euph.* We will suppose now (which is possible in the nature of things, and reported to be fact) that a person, through some violent accident or distemper, should fall into such a total oblivion as to lose all consciousness of his past life and former ideas. I ask is he not still the same person? *Alc.* He is the same man, but not the same person. Indeed you ought not to suppose that a person loseth its former consciousness; for this is impossible, though a man perhaps may; but then he becomes another person. In the same person it must be owned some old ideas may be lost, and some new ones got; but a total change is inconsistent with identity of person. *Euph.* Let us then suppose that a person hath ideas, and is conscious during a certain space of time, which we will divide into three equal parts, whereof the later terms are marked by the letters A B C. In

the first part of time, the person gets a certain number of ideas, which are retained in A: during the second part of time he retains one-half of his old ideas, and loseth the other half, in place of which he acquires as many new ones; so that in B his ideas are half old and half new. And in the third part we suppose him to lose the remainder of the ideas acquired in the first, and to get new ones in their stead, which are retained in C, together with those acquired in the second part of time. Is this a possible fair supposition? *Alc.* It is. *Euph.* Upon these premises I am tempted to think, one may demonstrate that personal identity doth not consist in consciousness.* *Alc.* As how? *Euph.* You shall judge; but thus it seems to me. The persons in A and B are the same, being conscious of common ideas by supposition. The person in B is, for the same reason, one and the same with the person in C. Therefore the person in A is the same with the person in C, by that undoubted axiom, *Quæ conveniunt uni tertio conveniunt inter se.* But the person in C hath no idea in common with the person in A. Therefore personal identity doth not consist in consciousness. What do you think, Alciphron, is not this a plain inference? *Alc.* I tell you what I think: you will never assist my faith by puzzling my knowledge.

XII. There is, if I mistake not, a practical faith, or assent, which showeth itself in the will and actions of a man, although his understanding may not be furnished with those abstract, precise, distinct ideas, which, whatever a philosopher may pretend, are acknowledged to be above the talents of common men; among whom, nevertheless, may be found, even according to your own concession, many instances of such practical faith, in other matters which do not concern religion. What should hinder therefore, but that doctrines relating to heavenly mysteries, might be taught in this saving sense to vulgar minds, which you may well think incapable of all teaching and faith in the sense you suppose. Which mistaken sense, said Crito, has given occasion to much profane and misapplied raillery. But all this may very justly be retorted on the minute philosophers themselves, who confound scholasticism with Christianity, and impute to other men those perplexities, chimeras, and inconsistent ideas, which are often the workmanship of their own brains, and proceed from their own wrong way of thinking. Who doth not see that such an ideal, abstracted faith is never thought of by the bulk of Christians, husbandmen, for instance, artisans, or servants? Or what footsteps are there in the holy scripture to make us think, that the wiredrawing of abstract ideas was a task enjoined either Jews or Christians? Is there any thing in the law or the prophets, the evangelists or apostles, that looks like it? Every one whose understanding is not perverted by science

* Vide Reid on the Intellectual Powers, Essay III. chap. iv. and vi. 8vo. edit., London, 1843.

falsely so called, may see, the saving faith of Christians is quite of another kind, a vital, operative principle, productive of charity and obedience. *Alc.* What are we to think then of the disputes and decisions of the famous council of Nice, and so many subsequent councils? What was the intention of those venerable fathers the Homocousians and the Homoiouians? Why did they disturb themselves and the world with hard words and subtle controversies? *Cri.* Whatever their intention was, it could not be to beget nice abstracted ideas of mysteries in the minds of common Christians, this being evidently impossible: nor doth it appear that the bulk of Christian men did in those days think it any part of their duty, to lay aside the words, shut their eyes, and frame those abstract ideas; any more than men now do of force, time, number, or several other things, about which they nevertheless believe, know, argue, and dispute. To me it seems, that, whatever was the source of these controversies, and howsoever they were managed, wherein human infirmity must be supposed to have had its share, the main end was not, on either side, to convey precise positive ideas to the minds of men, by the use of those contested terms, but rather a negative sense, tending to exclude Polytheism on the one hand, and Sabellianism on the other.* *Alc.* But what shall we say of so many learned and ingenious divines, who from time to time have obliged the world with new explications of mysteries, who, having themselves professedly laboured to acquire accurate ideas, would recommend their discoveries and speculations to others for articles of faith? *Cri.* To all such innovators in religion I would say with Jerome, "Why after so many centuries do you pretend to teach us what was untaught before? Why explain what neither Peter nor Paul thought necessary to be explained?"† And it must be owned, that the explication of mysteries in divinity, allowing the attempt as fruitless as the pursuit of the philosopher's stone in chemistry, or the perpetual motion in mechanics, is no more than they, chargeable on the profession itself, but only on the wrong-headed professors of it.

XIII. It seems, that what hath been now said may be applied to other mysteries of our religion. Original sin, for instance, a man may find it impossible to form an idea of in abstract, or of the manner of its transmission, and yet the belief thereof may produce in his mind a salutary sense of his own unworthiness, and the goodness of his Redeemer: from whence may follow good habits, and from them good actions, the genuine effects of faith, which, considered in its true light, is a thing neither repugnant nor incomprehensible, as some men would persuade us, but suited even to vulgar capacities, placed in the will and affections rather than in the understanding, and producing holy lives,

* Sozomen. lib. ii. c. 8.

† Hieronym. ad Pammachium et Oceanum de Erroribus Origenis.

rather than subtle theories. Faith, I say, is not an indolent perception, but an operative persuasion of mind, which ever worketh some suitable action, disposition, or emotion in those who have it; as it were easy to prove and illustrate by innumerable instances, taken from human affairs. And, indeed, while the Christian religion is considered as an institution fitted to ordinary minds, rather than to the nicer talents, whether improved or puzzled, of speculative men; and our notions about faith are accordingly taken from the commerce of the world, and practice of mankind, rather than from the peculiar systems of refiners; it will, I think, be no difficult matter to conceive and justify the meaning and use of our belief of mysteries, against the most confident assertions and objections of the minute philosophers, who are easily to be caught in those very snares, which they have spun and spread for others. And that humour of controversy, the mother and nurse of heresies, would doubtless very much abate, if it was considered that things are to be rated, not by the colour, shape, or stamp, so truly as by the weight. If the moment of opinions had been by some litigious divines made the measure of their zeal, it might have spared much trouble both to themselves and others. Certainly one that takes his notions of faith, opinion, and assent from common sense, and common use, and has maturely weighed the nature of signs and language, will not be so apt to controvert the wording of a mystery, or to break the peace of the church, for the sake of retaining or rejecting a term.

XIV. *Alc.* It seems, Euphranor, and you would persuade me into an opinion, that there is nothing so singularly absurd as we are apt to think, in the belief of mysteries; and that a man need not renounce his reason to maintain his religion. But if this were true, how comes it to pass, that, in proportion as men abound in knowledge, they dwindle in faith? *Euph.* O Alciphron, I have learned from you, that there is nothing like going to the bottom of things, and analyzing them into their first principles. I shall therefore make an essay of this method, for clearing up the nature of faith: with what success, I shall leave you to determine; for I dare not pronounce myself on my own judgment, whether it be right or wrong: but thus it seems to me. The objections made to faith are by no means an effect of knowledge, but proceed rather from an ignorance of what knowledge is; which ignorance may possibly be found even in those who pass for masters of this or that particular branch of knowledge. Science and faith agree in this, that they both imply an assent of the mind: and, as the nature of the first is most clear and evident, it should be first considered in order to cast a light on the other. To trace things from their original, it seems that the human mind, naturally furnished with the ideas of things particular

and concrete, and being designed, not for the bare intuition of ideas, but for action or operation about them, and pursuing her own happiness therein, stands in need of certain general rules or theorems to direct her operations in this pursuit; the supplying which want is the true, original, reasonable end of studying the arts and sciences. Now these rules being general, it follows, that they are not to be obtained by the mere consideration of the original ideas, or particular things, but by the means of marks or signs, which, being so far forth universal, become the immediate instruments and materials of science. It is not therefore by mere contemplation of particular things, and much less of their abstract general ideas, that the mind makes her progress, but by an apposite choice and skilful management of signs: for instance, force and number, taken in concrete with their adjuncts, subjects, and signs, are what every one knows; and considered in abstract, so as making precise ideas of themselves, they are what nobody can comprehend. That their abstract nature, therefore, is not the foundation of science, is plain: and that barely considering their ideas in concrete, is not the method to advance in the respective sciences, is what every one that reflects may see; nothing being more evident, than that one who can neither write nor read, in common use understands the meaning of numeral words, as well as the best philosopher or mathematician.

XV. But here lies the difference: the one, who understands the notation of numbers, by means thereof is able to express briefly and distinctly all the variety and degrees of number, and to perform with ease and despatch several arithmetical operations, by the help of general rules. Of all which operations as the use in human life is very evident, so it is no less evident, that the performing them depends on the aptness of the notation. If we suppose rude mankind without the use of language, it may be presumed, they would be ignorant of arithmetic: but the use of names, by the repetition whereof in a certain order they might express endless degrees of number, would be the first step towards that science. The next step would be, to devise proper marks of a permanent nature, and visible to the eye, the kind and order whereof must be chose with judgment, and accommodated to the names. Which marking, or notation, would, in proportion as it was apt and regular, facilitate the invention and application of general rules, to assist the mind in reasoning, and judging, in extending, recording, and communicating its knowledge about numbers: in which theory and operations, the mind is immediately occupied about the signs or notes, by mediation of which it is directed to act about things, or number in concrete (as the logicians call it), without ever considering the simple, abstract, intellectual, general idea of number. I imagine one need not think much to be convinced that the science of arithmetic, in its rise, operations,

rules, and theorems, is altogether conversant about the artificial use of signs, names, and characters. These names and characters are universal, inasmuch as they are signs. The names are referred to things, and the characters to names, and both to operation. The names being few, and proceeding by a certain analogy, the characters will be more useful, the simpler they are, and the more aptly they express this analogy. Hence the old notation by letters was more useful than words written at length: and the modern notation by figures, expressing the progression or analogy of the names by their simple places, is much preferable to that for ease and expedition, as the invention of algebraical symbols is to this for extensive and general use. As arithmetic and algebra are sciences of great clearness, certainty, and extent, which are immediately conversant about signs, upon the skilful use and management whereof they entirely depend, so a little attention to them may possibly help us to judge of the progress of the mind in other sciences, which, though differing in nature, design, and object, may yet agree in the general methods of proof and inquiry.

XVI. If I mistake not, all sciences, so far as they are universal and demonstrable by human reason, will be found conversant about signs as their immediate object, though these in the application are referred to things: the reason whereof is not difficult to comprehend. For as the mind is better acquainted with some sort of objects, which are earlier suggested to it, strike it more sensibly, or are more easily comprehended than others, it is naturally led to substitute those objects for such as are more subtle, fleeting, or difficult to conceive. Nothing, I say, is more natural, than to make the things we know, a step towards those we do not know; and to explain and represent things less familiar by others which are more so. Now, it is certain we imagine before we reflect, and we perceive by sense before we imagine, and of all our senses the sight is the most clear, distinct, various, agreeable, and comprehensive. Hence it is natural to assist the intellect by the imagination, the imagination by sense, and the other senses by sight. Hence, figures, metaphors, and types. We illustrate spiritual things by corporeal; we substitute sounds for thoughts, and written letters for sounds; emblems, symbols, and hieroglyphics for things too obscure to strike, and too various or too fleeting to be retained. We substitute things imaginable, for things intelligible, sensible things for imaginable, smaller things for those that are too great to be comprehended easily, and greater things for such as are too small to be discerned distinctly, present things for absent, permanent for perishing, and visible for invisible. Hence the use of models and diagrams. Hence right lines are substituted for time, velocity, and other things of very different natures. Hence we speak of spirits in a figurative

style, expressing the operations of the mind by allusions and terms borrowed from sensible things, such as apprehend, conceive, reflect, discourse, and such like : and hence those allegories which illustrate things intellectual by visions exhibited to the fancy. Plato, for instance, represents the mind presiding in her vehicle by the driver of a winged chariot, which sometimes moults and droops : this chariot is drawn by two horses, the one good and of a good race, the other of a contrary kind, symbolically expressing the tendency of the mind towards the divinity, as she soars or is borne aloft by two instincts like wings, the one in the intellect towards truth, the other in the will towards excellence, which instincts moult or are weakened by sensual inclinations, expressing also her alternate elevations and depressions, the struggles between reason and appetite, like horses that go an unequal pace, or draw different ways, embarrassing the soul in her progress to perfection. I am inclined to think the doctrine of signs a point of great importance and general extent, which, if duly considered, would cast no small light upon things, and afford a just and genuine solution of many difficulties.

XVII. Thus much, upon the whole, may be said of all signs : that they do not always suggest ideas signified to the mind : that when they suggest ideas, they are not general abstract ideas : that they have other uses besides barely standing for and exhibiting ideas, such as raising proper emotions, producing certain dispositions or habits of mind, and directing our actions in pursuit of that happiness, which is the ultimate end and design, the primary spring and motive, that sets rational agents at work : that the true end of speech, reason, science, faith, assent in all its different degrees, is not merely, or principally, or always the imparting or acquiring of ideas, but rather something of an active, operative nature, tending to a conceived good, which may sometimes be obtained, not only although the ideas marked are not offered to the mind, but even although there should be no possibility of offering or exhibiting any such idea to the mind : for instance, the algebraic mark, which denotes the root of a negative square, hath its use in logistic operations, although it be impossible to form an idea of any such quantity. And what is true of algebraic signs, is also true of words or language, modern algebra being, in fact, a more short, apposite, and artificial sort of language, and it being possible to express by words at length, though less conveniently, all the steps of an algebraical process. And it must be confessed, that even the mathematical sciences themselves, which, above all others, are reckoned the most clear and certain, if they are considered, not as instruments to direct our practice, but as speculations to employ our curiosity, will be found to fall short, in many instances, of those clear and distinct ideas, which, it seems, the minute philosophers

of this age, whether knowingly or ignorantly, expect and insist upon in the mysteries of religion.

XVIII. Be the science or subject what it will, whensoever men quit particulars for generalities, things concrete for abstractions, when they forsake practical views, and the useful purposes of knowledge, for barren speculation, considering means and instruments as ultimate ends, and labouring to attain precise ideas, which they suppose indiscriminately annexed to all terms, they will be sure to embarrass themselves with difficulties and disputes. Such are those which have sprung up in geometry about the nature of the angle of contact, the doctrine of proportions, of indivisibles, infinitesimals, and divers other points; notwithstanding all which, that science is very rightly esteemed an excellent and useful one, and is really found to be so in many occasions of human life, wherein it governs and directs the actions of men, so that by the aid or influence thereof, those operations become just and accurate, which would otherwise be faulty and uncertain. And from a parity of reason, we should not conclude any other doctrines which govern, influence, or direct the mind of man to be, any more than that, the less true or excellent, because they afford matter of controversy and useless speculation to curious and licentious wits: particularly those articles of our Christian faith, which, in proportion as they are believed, persuade, and, as they persuade, influence the lives and actions of men. As to the perplexity of contradictions and abstracted notions, in all parts, whether of human science or divine faith, cavillers may equally object, and unwary persons incur, while the judicious avoid it. There is no need to depart from the received rules of reasoning to justify the belief of Christians. And if any pious men think otherwise, it may be supposed an effect, not of religion, or of reason, but only of human weakness. If this age be singularly productive of infidels, I shall not therefore conclude it to be more knowing, but only more presuming, than former ages: and their conceit, I doubt, is not the effect of consideration. To me it seems, that the more thoroughly and extensively any man shall consider and scan the principles, objects, and methods of proceeding in arts and sciences, the more he will be convinced, there is no weight in those plausible objections that are made against the mysteries of faith, which it will be no difficult matter for him to maintain or justify in the received method of arguing, on the common principles of logic, and by numberless avowed parallel cases, throughout the several branches of human knowledge, in all which the supposition of abstract ideas creates the same difficulties.

XIX. *Alc.* I will allow, Euphranor, this reasoning of yours to have all the force you meant it should have. I freely own

there may be mysteries : that we may believe where we do not understand : and that faith may be of use although its object is not distinctly apprehended. In a word, I grant there may be faith and mysteries in other things, but not in religion : and that for this plain reason, because it is absurd to suppose, there should be any such thing as religion ; and if there be no religion, it follows there cannot be religious faith or mysteries. Religion, it is evident, implies the worship of a God ; which worship supposeth rewards and punishments ; which suppose merits and demerits, actions good and evil, and these suppose human liberty, a thing impossible ; and, consequently, religion, a thing built thereon must be an unreasonable, absurd thing. There can be no rational hopes or fears where there is no guilt, nor any guilt where there is nothing done but what unavoidably follows from the structure of the world and the laws of motion. Corporeal objects strike on the organs of sense, whence ensues a vibration in the nerves, which being communicated to the soul or animal spirit, in the brain or root of the nerves, produceth therein that motion called volition : and this produceth a new determination in the spirits, causing them to flow into such nerves as must necessarily, by the laws of mechanism, produce such certain actions. This being the case, it follows that those things which vulgarly pass for human actions are to be esteemed mechanical, and that they are falsely ascribed to a free principle. There is, therefore, no foundation for praise or blame, fear or hope, reward or punishment, nor consequently for religion ; which, as I observed before, is built upon and supposeth those things. *Euph.* You imagine, Alciphron, if I rightly understand you, that man is a sort of organ, played on by outward objects, which, according to the different shape and texture of the nerves, produce different motions and effects therein. *Alc.* Man may, indeed, be fitly compared to an organ ; but a puppet is the very thing. You must know, that certain particles issuing forth in right lines from all sensible objects compose so many rays, or filaments, which drive, draw, and actuate every part of the soul and body of man, just as threads or wires do the joints of that little wooden machine, vulgarly called a *puppet* : with this only difference, that the latter are gross and visible to common eyes, whereas the former are too fine and subtle to be discerned by any but a sagacious free-thinker. This admirably accounts for all those operations, which we have been taught to ascribe to a thinking principle within us. *Euph.* This is an ingenious thought, and must be of great use in freeing men from all anxiety about moral notions, as it transfers the principle of action from the human soul to things outward and foreign. But I have my scruples about it. For you suppose the mind, in a literal sense, to be moved, and its volitions to be mere motions.

Now if another should affirm, as it is not impossible some other may, that the soul is incorporeal, and that motion is one thing and volition another, I would fain know how you could make your point clear to such a one. It must be owned very clear to those who admit the soul to be corporeal, and all her acts to be but so many motions. Upon this supposition, indeed, the light wherein you place human nature is no less true, than it is fine and new. But let any one deny this supposition, which is easily done, and the whole superstructure falls to the ground. If we grant the abovementioned points, I will not deny a fatal necessity must ensue. But I see no reason for granting them. On the contrary it seems plain, that motion and thought are two things as really and as manifestly distinct as a triangle and a sound. It seems, therefore, that in order to prove the necessity of human actions, you suppose what wants proof as much as the very point to be proved.

XX. *Alc.* But supposing the mind incorporeal, I shall nevertheless, be able to prove my point. Not to amuse you with far fetched arguments, I shall only desire you to look into your own breast and observe how things pass there, when an object offers itself to the mind. First, the understanding considers it: in the next place the judgment decrees about it, as a thing to be chosen or rejected, to be omitted or done, in this or that manner: and this decree of the judgment doth necessarily determine the will, whose office is merely to execute what is ordained by another faculty: consequently there is no such thing as freedom of the will: for that which is necessary cannot be free. In freedom there should be an indifference to either side of the question, a power to act or not to act, without prescription or control: and without this indifference and this power it is evident the will cannot be free. But it is no less evident, that the will is not indifferent in its actions, being absolutely determined and governed by the judgment. Now whatever moves the judgment, whether the greatest present uneasiness, or the greatest apparent good, or whatever else it be, it is all one to the point in hand. The will being ever concluded and controlled by the judgment is in all cases alike under necessity. There is, indeed, throughout the whole human nature, nothing like a principle of freedom, every faculty being determined in all its acts by something foreign to it. The understanding, for instance, cannot alter its idea, but must necessarily see it such as it presents itself. The appetites by a natural necessity are carried towards their respective objects. Reason cannot infer indifferently any thing from any thing, but is limited by the nature and connexion of things, and the eternal rules of reasoning. And as this is confessedly the case of all other faculties, so it equally holds with respect to the will itself, as hath been already shown. And if we may credit the divine

characterizer of our times, this above all others must be allowed the most slavish faculty. "Appetite," saith that noble writer, "which is elder brother to reason, being the lad of stronger growth, is sure on every contest to take the advantage of drawing all to his own side: and will, so highly boasted, is but at best a foot-ball or top between those youngsters who prove very unfortunately matched, till the youngest, instead of now and then a kick or lash bestowed to little purpose, forsakes the ball or top itself, and begins to lay about his elder brother." *Cri.* This beautiful parable for style and manner might equal those of a known English writer, in low life renowned for allegory, were it not a little incorrect, making the weaker lad find his account in laying about the stronger. *Alc.* This is helped by supposing the stronger lad the greater coward: but, be that as it will, so far as it relates to the point in hand, this is a clear state of the case. The same point may be also proved from the prescience of God. That which is certainly foreknown will certainly be. And what is certain is necessary. And necessary actions cannot be the effect of free-will. Thus you have this fundamental point of our free-thinking philosophy demonstrated different ways. *Euph.* Tell me, Alciphron, do you think it implies a contradiction, that God should make a man free? *Alc.* I do not. *Euph.* It is then possible there may be such a thing. *Alc.* This I do not deny. *Euph.* You can therefore conceive and suppose such a free agent. *Alc.* Admitting that I can; what then? *Euph.* Would not such a one think that he acted? *Alc.* He would. *Euph.* And condemn himself for some actions, and approve himself for others? *Alc.* This too I grant. *Euph.* Would he not think he deserved reward or punishment? *Alc.* He would. *Euph.* And are not all these characters actually found in man? *Alc.* They are. *Euph.* Tell me now, what other character of your supposed free agent may not actually be found in man? for if there is none such, we must conclude that man hath all the marks of a free agent. *Alc.* Let me see! I was certainly overseen in granting it possible, even for almighty power, to make such a thing as a free human agent. I wonder how I came to make such an absurd concession, after what had been, as I observed before, demonstrated so many different ways. *Euph.* O Alciphron, it is vulgarly observed that men judge of others by themselves. But in judging of me by this rule, you may be mistaken. Many things are plain to one of your sagacity, which are not so to me, who am often bewildered rather than enlightened by those very proofs, that with you pass for clear and evident. And, indeed, be the inference never so just, yet so long as the premises are not clear, I cannot be thoroughly convinced. You must give me leave therefore to propose some questions, the solution of which may show what at present I am not able to discern. *Alc.* I shall

leave what hath been said with you, to consider and ruminate upon. It is now time to set out on our journey; there is, therefore, no room for a long string of question and answer.

XXI. *Euph.* I shall then only beg leave in a summary manner, to make a remark or two on what you have advanced. In the first place I observe, you take that for granted which I cannot grant, when you assert whatever is certain the same to be necessary. To me, certain and necessary seem very different; there being nothing in the former notion that implies constraint, nor consequently which may not consist with a man's being accountable for his actions. If it is foreseen that such an action shall be done: may it not also be foreseen that it shall be an effect of human choice and liberty? In the next place I observe, that you very nicely abstract and distinguish the actions of the mind, judgment, and will: that you make use of such terms as power, faculty, act, determination, indifference, freedom, necessity, and the like, as if they stood for distinct abstract ideas: and that this supposition seems to ensnare the mind into the same perplexities and errors, which, in all other instances, are observed to attend the doctrine of abstraction. It is self-evident, that there is such a thing as motion; and yet there have been found philosophers, who, by refined reasoning, would undertake to prove that there was no such thing. Walking before them was thought the proper way to confute those ingenious men. It is no less evident, that man is a free agent: and though by abstracted reasonings you should puzzle me, and seem to prove the contrary, yet so long as I am conscious of my own actions, this inward evidence of plain fact will bear me up against all your reasonings, however subtle and refined. The confuting plain points by obscure ones, may perhaps convince me of the ability of your philosophers, but never of their tenets. I cannot conceive why the acute Cratylus should suppose a power of acting in the appetite and reason, and none at all in the will? Allowing, I say, the distinction of three such beings in the mind, I do not see how this could be true. But if I cannot abstract and distinguish so many beings in the soul of man so accurately as you do, I do not find it necessary, since it is evident to me in the gross and concrete that I am a free agent. Nor will it avail to say, the will is governed by the judgment, or determined by the object, while, in every sudden common case, I cannot discern nor abstract the decree of the judgment from the command of the will: while I know the sensible object to be absolutely inert: and lastly, while I am conscious that I am an active being, who can and do determine myself. If I should suppose things spiritual to be corporeal, or refine things actual and real into general abstracted notions, or by metaphysical skill split things simple and individual into manifold parts, I do not know what may follow: but

if I take things as they are, and ask any plain untutored man, whether he acts or is free in this or that particular action, he readily assents, and I as readily believe him from what I find within. And thus, by an induction of particulars, I may conclude man to be a free agent, although I may be puzzled to define or conceive a notion of freedom in general and abstract. And if man be free he is plainly accountable. But if you shall define, abstract, suppose, and it shall follow that according to your definitions, abstractions, and suppositions, there can be no freedom in man, and you shall thence infer that he is not accountable, I shall make bold to depart from your metaphysical abstracted sense, and appeal to the common sense of mankind.

XXII. If we consider the notions that obtain in the world of guilt and merit, praise and blame, accountable and unaccountable, we shall find the common question in order to applaud or censure, acquit or condemn a man, is, whether he did such an action? and whether he was himself when he did it? which comes to the same thing. It should seem therefore that in the ordinary commerce of mankind, any person is esteemed accountable simply as he is an agent. And though you should tell me that man is inactive, and that the sensible objects act upon him, yet my own experience assures me of the contrary. I know I act, and what I act I am accountable for. And if this be true, the foundation of religion and morality remains unshaken. Religion, I say, is concerned no further than that man should be accountable: and this he is according to my sense, and the common sense of the world, if he acts; and that he doth act is self-evident. The grounds, therefore, and ends of religion are secured; whether your philosophic notion of liberty agrees with man's actions or no, and whether his actions are certain or contingent, the question being not whether he did it with a free will, or what determined his will? not, whether it was certain or foreknown that he would do it? but only whether he did it wilfully? as what must entitle him to the guilt or merit of it. *Alc.* But still, the question recurs, whether man be free? *Euph.* To determine this question, ought we not first to determine what is meant by the word free? *Alc.* We ought. *Euph.* In my opinion, a man is said to be free, so far forth as he can do what he will. Is this so, or is it not? *Alc.* It seems so. *Euph.* Man therefore acting according to his will, is to be accounted free. *Alc.* This I admit to be true in the vulgar sense. But a philosopher goes higher, and inquires whether man be free to will? *Euph.* That is, whether he can will as he wills? I know not how philosophical it may be to ask this question, but it seems very unintelligible. The notions of guilt and merit, justice and reward, are in the minds of men, antecedent to all metaphysical disquisitions: and according to

those received natural notions, it is not doubted that man is accountable, that he acts, and is self determined.

XXIII. But a minute philosopher shall, in virtue of wrong suppositions, confound things most evidently distinct; body, for instance, with spirit, motion with volition, certainty with necessity; and an abstracter or refiner shall so analyze the most simple instantaneous act of the mind, as to distinguish therein divers faculties and tendencies, principles and operations, causes and effects; and having abstracted, supposed, and reasoned upon principles, gratuitous and obscure, such a one he will conclude it is no act all, and man no agent but a puppet, or an organ played on by outward objects, and his will a top or a foot-ball. And this passeth for philosophy and free-thinking. Perhaps this may be what it passeth for, but it by no means seems a natural or just way of thinking. To me it seems, that if we begin from things particular and concrete, and thence proceed to general notions and conclusions, there will be no difficulty in this matter. But if we begin with generalities, and lay our foundation in abstract ideas, we shall find ourselves entangled and lost in a labyrinth of our own making. I need not observe, what every one must see, the ridicule of proving man no agent, and yet pleading for free thought and action, of setting up at once for advocates of liberty and necessity. I have hastily thrown together these hints or remarks, on what you call a fundamental article of the minute philosophy, and your method of proving it, which seems to furnish an admirable specimen of the sophistry of abstract ideas. If in this summary way I have been more dogmatical than became me, you must excuse what you occasioned, by declining a joint and leisurely examination of the truth. *Alc.* I think we have examined matters sufficiently. *Cri.* To all you have said against human liberty, it is a sufficient answer to observe, that your arguments proceed upon an erroneous supposition, either of the soul's being corporeal, or of abstract ideas. And on the other hand, there is not need of much inquiry to be convinced of two points, than which none are more evident, more obvious, and more universally admitted by men of all sorts, learned or unlearned, in all times and places, to wit, that man acts and is accountable for his actions. Whatever abstracters, refiners, or men prejudiced to a false hypothesis may pretend, it is, if I mistake not, evident to every thinking man of common sense, that human minds are so far from being engines or foot-balls, acted upon and bandied about by corporeal objects, without any inward principle of freedom, or action, that the only original true notions that we have of freedom, agent, or action, are obtained by reflecting on ourselves, and the operations of our own minds. The singularity and credulity of minute philosophers, who suffer themselves to be abused by the paralogisms of three or four eminent patriarchs of infidelity in the last age, is, I think, not to

be matched; there being no instance of bigotted superstition, the ringleaders whereof have been able to seduce their followers more openly and more widely from the plain dictates of nature and common sense.

XXIV. *Alc.* It has been always an objection against the discoveries of truth, that they depart from received opinions. The character of singularity is a tax on free-thinking: and as such we most willingly bear it, and glory in it. A genuine philosopher is never modest in a false sense, to the preferring authority before reason, or an old and common opinion before a true one. Which false modesty, as it discourages men from treading in untrodden paths, or striking out new light, is above all other qualities the greatest enemy to free-thinking. *Cri.* Authority in disputable points will have its weight with a judicious mind, which yet will follow evidence wherever it leads. Without preferring we may allow it a good second to reason. Your gentlemen, therefore, of the minute philosophy, may spare a world of common place upon reason, and light, and discoveries. We are not attached to authority against reason, nor afraid of untrodden paths that lead to truth, and are ready to follow a new light when we are sure it is no *ignis fatuus*. Reason may oblige a man to believe against his inclinations; but why should a man quit salutary notions for others not less unreasonable than pernicious? Your schemes and principles, and boasted demonstrations have been at large proposed and examined. You have shifted your notions, successively retreated from one scheme to another, and in the end renounced them all. Your objections have been treated in the same manner, and with the same event. If we except all that relates to the particular errors and faults of private persons, and difficulties which, from the nature of things, we are not obliged to explain, it is surprising to see, after such magnificent threats, how little remains, that can amount to a pertinent objection against the Christian religion. What you have produced has been tried by the fair test of reason; and though you should hope to prevail by ridicule when you cannot by reason, yet in the upshot, I apprehend you will find it impracticable to destroy all sense of religion. Make your countrymen ever so vicious, ignorant, and profane, men will still be disposed to look up to a supreme being. Religion, right or wrong, will subsist in some shape or other, and some worship there will surely be either of God or the creature. As for your ridicule, can anything be more ridiculous, than to see the most unmeaning men of the age set up for free-thinkers, men so strong in assertion, and yet so weak in argument, advocates for freedom introducing a fatality, patriots trampling on the laws of their country, and pretenders to virtue, destroying the motives of it? Let any impartial man but cast an eye on the opinions of the minute philosophers, and

then say if anything can be more ridiculous, than to believe such things, and at the same time laugh at credulity.

XXV. *Lys.* Say what you will we have the laughers on our side: and as for your reasoning I take it to be another name for sophistry. *Cri.* And I suppose by the same rule you take your own sophisms for arguments. To speak plainly, I know no sort of sophism that is not employed by minute philosophers against religion. They are guilty of a *petitio principii*, in taking for granted that we believe contradictions; of *non causa pro causa*, in affirming that uncharitable feuds and discords are the effects of Christianity; of *ignoratio elenchi*, in expecting demonstration where we pretend only to faith. If I was not afraid to offend the delicacy of polite ears, nothing were easier than to assign instances of every kind of sophism, which would show how skilful your own philosophers are in the practice of that sophistry you impute to others. *Euph.* For my own part, if sophistry be the art or faculty of deceiving other men, I must acquit these gentlemen of it. They seem to have led me a progress through atheism, libertinism, enthusiasm, fatalism, not to convince me of the truth of any of them, so much as to confirm me in my own way of thinking. They have exposed their fairy ware not to cheat but divert us. As I know them to be professed masters of ridicule, so in a serious sense I know not what to make of them. *Alc.* You do not know what to make of us! I should be sorry you did. He must be a superficial philosopher that is soon fathomed.

XXVI. *Cri.* The ambiguous character is, it seems, the sure way to fame and esteem in the learned world, as it stands constituted at present. When the ingenious reader is at a loss to determine whether his author be atheist or deist or polytheist, stoic or epicurean, sceptic or dogmatist, infidel or enthusiast, in jest or in earnest, he concludes him without hesitation to be enigmatical and profound. In fact, it is true of the most admired writers of the age, that no man alive can tell what to make of them, or what they would be at. *Alc.* We have among us moles that dig deep under ground, and eagles that soar out of sight. We can act all parts and become all opinions, putting them on or off with great freedom of wit and humour. *Euph.* It seems then you are a pair of inscrutable, unfathomable, fashionable philosophers. *Lys.* It cannot be denied. *Euph.* But, I remember, you set out with an open dogmatical air, and talked of plain principles and evident reasoning, promised to make things as clear as noon-day, to extirpate wrong notions and plant right in their stead. Soon after, you began to recede from your first notions and adopt others: you advanced one while and retreated another, yielded and retracted, said and unsaid: and after having followed you through so many untrodden paths and intricate

mazes I find myself never the nearer. *Alc.* Did we not tell you the gentlemen of our sect are great proficients in raillery? *Euph.* But, methinks, it is a vain attempt for a plain man of any settled belief or principles to engage with such slippery, fugitive, changeable philosophers. It seems as if a man should stand still in the same place, while his adversary chooses and changes his situation, has full range and liberty to traverse the field, and attack him on all sides and in all shapes, from a nearer or further distance, on horseback or on foot, in light or heavy armour, in close fight or with missive weapons. *Alc.* It must be owned a gentleman hath great advantage over a strait-laced pedant or bigot. *Euph.* But after all, what am I the better for the conversation of two such knowing gentlemen; I hoped to have unlearned my errors, and to have learned truths from you, but, to my great disappointment, I do not find that I am either untaught or taught. *Alc.* To unteach men their prejudices is a difficult task: and this must first be done, before we can pretend to teach them the truth. Besides, we have at present no time to prove and argue. *Euph.* But suppose my mind white paper, and without being at any pains to extirpate my opinions, or prove your own, only say what you would write thereon, or what you would teach me in case I were teachable. Be for once in earnest, and let me know some one conclusion of yours before we part; or I shall entreat Crito to violate the laws of hospitality towards those who have violated the laws of philosophy, by hanging out false lights to one benighted in ignorance and error. I appeal to you (said he, turning to Crito) whether these philosophical knight-errants should not be confined in this castle of yours, till they make reparation. Euphranor has reason, said Crito, and my sentence is that you remain here in durance, till you have done something towards satisfying the engagement I am under, having promised, he should know your opinions from yourselves, which you also agreed to.

XXVII. *Alc.* Since it must be so I will now reveal what I take to be the sum and substance, the grand arcanum and ultimate conclusion of our sect, and that in two words, ΠΑΝΤΑ ΥΠΟΑΗΨΙΣ. *Cri.* You are then a downright sceptic. But, sceptic as you are, you own it, probable there is a God, certain that the Christian religion is useful, possible it may be true, certain that if it be the minute philosophers are in a bad way. This being the case, how can it be questioned what course a wise man should take? Whether the principles of Christians or infidels are truest may be made a question, but which are safest can be none. Certainly if you doubt of all opinions you must doubt of your own; and then, for aught you know, the Christian may be true. The more doubt the more room there is for faith, a sceptic of all men having the least right to demand evidence.

But, whatever uncertainty there may be in other points, thus much is certain: either there is or is not a God: there is or is not a revelation: man either is or is not an agent: the soul is or is not immortal. If the negatives are not sure the affirmatives are possible. If the negatives are improbable, the affirmatives are probable. In proportion as any of your ingenious men finds himself unable to prove any one of these negatives, he hath grounds to suspect he may be mistaken. A minute philosopher, therefore, that would act a consistent part, should have the diffidence, the modesty, and the timidity, as well as the doubts, of a sceptic; not pretend to an ocean of light, and then lead us to an abyss of darkness. If I have any notion of ridicule, this is most ridiculous. But your ridiculing what, for aught you know, may be true, I can make no sense of. It is neither acting as a wise man with regard to your own interest, nor as a good man with regard to that of your country.

XXVIII. Tully saith somewhere, *aut undique religionem tolle aut usquequaque conserva*: either let us have no religion at all, or let it be respected. If any single instance can be shown of a people that ever prospered without some religion, or if there be any religion better than the Christian, propose it in the grand assembly of the nation to change our constitution, and either live without religion, or introduce that new religion. A sceptic, as well as other men, is member of a community, and can distinguish between good and evil, natural or political. Be this, then, his guide as a patriot, though he be no Christian. Or, if he doth not pretend even to this discernment, let him not pretend to correct or alter what he knows nothing of: neither let him that only doubts behave as if he could demonstrate. Timagoras is wont to say, I find my country in possession of certain tenets: they appear to have an useful tendency, and, as such, are encouraged by the legislature; they make a main part of our constitution: I do not find these innovators can disprove them, or substitute things more useful and certain in their stead: out of regard, therefore, to the good of mankind, and the laws of my country, I shall acquiesce in them. I do not say Timagoras is a Christian, but I reckon him a patriot. Not to inquire in a point of so great concern is folly, but it is still a higher degree of folly to condemn without inquiring. Lysicles seemed heartily tired of this conversation. It is now late, said he to Alciphron, and all things are ready for our departure. Every one hath his own way of thinking; and it is as impossible for me to adopt another man's, as to make his complexion and features mine. Alciphron pleaded that, having complied with Euphranor's conditions, they were now at liberty: and Euphranor answered that, all he desired having been to know their tenets, he had nothing further to pretend.

XXIX. The philosophers being gone, I observed to Crito, how unaccountable it was, that men so easy to confute should yet be so difficult to convince. This, said Crito, is accounted for by Aristotle, who tells us that arguments have not an effect on all men, but only on them whose minds are prepared by education and custom, as land is for seed.* Make a point never so clear, it is great odds, that a man, whose habits and the bent of whose mind lie a contrary way, shall be unable to comprehend it. So weak a thing is reason in competition with inclination. I replied, this answer might hold with respect to other persons and other times: but when the question was of inquisitive men, in an age wherein reason was so much cultivated, and thinking so much in vogue, it did not seem satisfactory. I have known it remarked, said Crito, by a man of much observation, that in the present age thinking is more talked of but less practised than in ancient times; and that since the revival of learning men have read much and wrote much, but thought little: insomuch that with us to think closely and justly is the least part of a learned man, and none at all of a polite man. The free thinkers, it must be owned, make great pretensions to thinking, and yet they show but little exactness in it. A lively man, said he, and what the world calls a man of sense, are often destitute of this talent, which is not a mere gift of nature, but must be improved and perfected, by much attention and exercise on very different subjects, a thing of more pains and time than the hasty men of parts in our age care to take. Such were the sentiments of a judicious friend of mine; and, if you are not already sufficiently convinced of these truths, you need only cast an eye on the dark and confused, but nevertheless admired, writers of this famous sect: and then you will be able to judge, whether those who are led by men of such wrong heads can have very good ones of their own. Such, for instance, was Spinoza the great leader of our modern infidels, in whom are to be found many schemes and notions much admired and followed of late years; such as undermining religion, under the pretence of vindicating and explaining it: the maintaining it not necessary to believe in Christ according to the flesh: the persuading men that miracles are to be understood only in a spiritual and allegorical sense: that vice is not so bad a thing as we are apt to think: that men are mere machines impelled by fatal necessity. I have heard, said I, Spinoza represented as a man of close argument and demonstration. He did, replied Crito, demonstrate; but it was after such a manner, as any one may demonstrate any thing. Allow a man the privilege to make his own definitions of common words, and it will be no hard matter for him to infer conclusions, which in one sense shall be true and in

* Ethic. ad Nicom. l. x. c. 9.

another false, at once seeming paradoxes and manifest truisms. For example, let but Spinoza define natural right to be natural power, and he will easily demonstrate, that whatever a man can do he hath a right to do.* Nothing can be plainer than the folly of this proceeding: but our pretenders to the *lumen siccum*, are often so passionately prejudiced against religion, as to swallow the grossest nonsense and sophistry of weak and wicked writers for demonstration.

XXX. And so great a noise do these men make with their thinking, reasoning, and demonstrating, as to prejudice some well-meaning persons against all use and improvement of reason. Honest Demea, having seen a neighbour of his ruined by the vices of a free-thinking son, contracted such a prejudice against thinking, that he would not suffer his own to read Euclid, being told it might teach him to think: till a friend convinced him the epidemical distemper was not thinking, but only the want and affectation of it. I know an eminent free-thinker, who never goes to bed, without a gallon of wine in his belly, and is sure to replenish before the fumes are off his brain, by which means he has not had one sober thought these seven years; another that would not for the world lose the privilege and reputation of free thinking, who games all night, and lies in bed all day: and as for the outside or appearance of thought in that meagre minute philosopher Ibycus, it is an effect, not of thinking, but of carking, cheating, and writing in an office. Strange, said he, that such men should set up for free-thinkers! But it is yet more strange that other men should be out of conceit with thinking and reasoning, for the sake of such pretenders. I answered, that some good men conceived an opposition between reason and religion, faith and knowledge, nature and grace; and that, consequently, the way to promote religion was, to quench the light of nature, and discourage all rational inquiry.

XXXI. How right the intentions of these men may be, replied Crito, I shall not say; but surely their notions are very wrong. Can any thing be more dishonourable to religion, than the representing it as an unreasonable, unnatural, ignorant institution? God is the father of all lights, whether natural or revealed. Natural concupiscence is one thing, and the light of nature another. You cannot therefore argue from the former against the latter: neither can you from science falsely so called, against real knowledge. Whatever therefore is said of the one in holy scripture is not to be interpreted of the other. I insisted, that human learning in the hands of divines, had from time to time, created great disputes and divisions in the church. As abstracted metaphysics, replied Crito, have always had a tendency

* Tractat. Politic. c. 2.

to produce disputes among Christians, as well as other men, so it should seem that genuine truth and knowledge would allay this humour, which makes men sacrifice the undisputed duties of peace and charity to disputable notions. After all, said I, whatever may be said for reason, it is plain, the sceptics and infidels of the age are not to be cured by it. I will not dispute this point, said Crito, in order to cure a distemper, you should consider what produced it. Had men reasoned themselves into a wrong opinion, one might hope to reason them out of it. But this is not the case; the infidelity of most minute philosophers seeming an effect of very different motives from thought and reason, little incidents, vanity, disgust, humour, inclination, without the least assistance from reason, are often known to make infidels. Where the general tendency of a doctrine is disagreeable, the mind is prepared to relish and improve every thing that with the least pretence seems to make against it. Hence the coarse manners of a country curate, the polite ones of a chaplain, the wit of a minute philosopher, a jest, a song, a tale can serve instead of a reason for infidelity. Bupalus preferred a rake in the church, and then made use of him as an argument against it. Vice, indolence, faction, and fashion produce minute philosophers, and mere petulance not a few. Who then can expect a thing so irrational and capricious should yield to reason? It may nevertheless, be worth while to argue against such men, and expose their fallacies, if not for their own sake, yet for the sake of others; as it may lessen their credit, and prevent the growth of their sect, by removing a prejudice in their favour, which sometimes inclines others as well as themselves to think they have made a monopoly of human reason.

XXXII. The most general pretext which looks like reason, is taken from the variety of opinions about religion. This is a resting stone to a lazy and superficial mind: but one of more spirit and a juster way of thinking, makes it a step whence he looks about, and proceeds to examine, and compare the differing institutions of religion. He will observe, which of these is the most sublime and rational in its doctrines, most venerable in its mysteries, most useful in its precepts, most decent in its worship? Which createth the noblest hopes, and most worthy views? He will consider their rise and progress; which owest least to human arts or arms? Which flatters the senses and gross inclinations of men? Which adorns and improves the most excellent part of our nature? Which hath been propagated in the most wonderful manner? Which hath surmounted the greatest difficulties, or shown the most disinterested zeal and sincerity in its professors? He will inquire, which best accords with nature and history? He will consider, what savours of the world, and what looks like wisdom from above? He will be careful to

separate human allay from that which is divine; and upon the whole, form his judgment like a reasonable free-thinker. But instead of taking such a rational course, one of these hasty sceptics shall conclude without demurring, there is no wisdom in politics, no honesty in dealings, no knowledge in philosophy, no truth in religion; and all by one and the same sort of inference, from the numerous examples of folly, knavery, ignorance, and error, which are to be met with in the world. But, as those who are unknowing in every thing else, imagine themselves sharp-sighted in religion, this learned sophism is oftenest levelled against Christianity.

XXXIII. In my opinion, he, that would convince an infidel who can be brought to reason, ought in the first place clearly to convince him of the being of a God, it seeming to me, that any man who is really a theist, cannot be an enemy to the Christian religion: and that the ignorance or disbelief of this fundamental point, is that which at bottom constitutes the minute philosopher. I imagine they, who are acquainted with the great authors in the minute philosophy, need not be told of this. The being of a God is capable of clear proof, and a proper object of human reason: whereas the mysteries of his nature, and indeed whatever there is of mystery in religion, to endeavour to explain, and prove by reason, is a vain attempt. It is sufficient if we can show there is nothing absurd or repugnant in our belief of those points, and instead of framing hypotheses to explain them, we use our reason only for answering the objections brought against them. But on all occasions, we ought to distinguish the serious, modest, ingenuous man of sense, who hath scruples about religion, and behaves like a prudent man in doubt, from the minute philosophers, those profane and conceited men, who must needs proselyte others to their own doubts. When one of this stamp presents himself, we should consider what species he is of: whether a first or second-hand philosopher, a libertine, scornee, or sceptic? Each character requiring a peculiar treatment. Some men are too ignorant to be humble, without which there can be no docility: but though a man must in some degree have thought and considered to be capable of being convinced, yet it is possible the most ignorant may be laughed out of his opinions. I knew a woman of sense reduce two minute philosophers, who had long been a nuisance to the neighbourhood, by taking her cue from their predominant affectations. The one set up for being the most incredulous man upon earth, the other for the most unbounded freedom. She observed to the first, that he who had credulity sufficient to trust the most valuable things, his life and fortune, to his apothecary and lawyer, ridiculously affected the character of incredulous, by refusing to trust his soul, a thing in his own account but a mere trifle, to his parish-priest.

The other, being what you call a beau, she made sensible how absolute a slave he was in point of dress, to him the most important thing in the world, while he was earnestly contending for a liberty of thinking, with which he never troubled his head; and how much more it concerned and became him to assert an independency on fashion, and obtain scope for his genius, where it was best qualified to exert itself. The minute philosophers at first hand are very few, and considered in themselves, of small consequence: but their followers, who pin their faith upon them, are numerous, and not less confident than credulous; there being something in the air and manner of these second-hand philosophers, very apt to disconcert a man of gravity and argument, and much more difficult to be borne than the weight of their objections.

XXXIV. Crito having made an end, Euphranor declared it to be his opinion, that it would much conduce to the public benefit, if, instead of discouraging free-thinking, there was erected in the midst of this free country a dianoeitic academy, or seminary for free-thinkers, provided with retired chambers, and galleries, and shady walks and groves, where, after seven years spent in silence and meditation, a man might commence a genuine free-thinker, and from that time forward, have license to think what he pleased, and a badge to distinguish him from counterfeits. In good earnest, said Crito, I imagine that thinking is the great *desideratum* of the present age; and that the real cause of whatever is amiss, may justly be reckoned the general neglect of education, in those who need it most, the people of fashion. What can be expected where those who have the most influence, have the least sense, and those who are sure to be followed set the worst example? Where youth so uneducated are yet so forward? Where modesty is esteemed pusillanimity, and a deference to years, knowledge, religion, laws, want of sense and spirit? Such untimely growth of genius would not have been valued or encouraged by the wise men of antiquity; whose sentiments on this point are so ill suited to the genius of our times, that it is to be feared modern ears could not bear them. But however ridiculous such maxims might seem to our British youth, who are so capable and so forward to try experiments, and mend the constitution of their country, I believe it will be admitted by men of sense, that if the governing part of mankind would in these days, for experiment's sake, consider themselves in that old Homerial light as pastors of the people, whose duty it was to improve their flock, they would soon find that this is to be done by an education very different from the modern, and other-guess maxims than those of the minute philosophy. If our youth were really inured to thought and reflection, and an acquaintance with the excellent writers of antiquity, we should

soon see that licentious humour, vulgarly called *free-thinking*, banished from the presence of gentlemen, together with ignorance and ill-taste; which as they are inseparable from vice, so men follow vice for the sake of pleasure, and fly from virtue through an abhorrence of pain. Their minds therefore betimes should be formed and accustomed to receive pleasure and pain from proper objects, or, which is the same thing, to have their inclinations and aversions rightly placed. Καλῶς χαίρειν ἢ μισεῖν. This according to Plato and Aristotle, was the ὀρθὴ παιδεία, the right education.* And those who, in their own minds, their health, or their fortunes, feel the cursed effects of a wrong one, would do well to consider, they cannot better make amends for what was amiss in themselves, than by preventing the same in their posterity. While Crito was saying this, company came in, which put an end to our conversation.

* Plato in Protag. et Aristot. Ethic. ad Nicom. lib. ii. c. 2, et lib. x. c. 9.

END OF VOL. I.